

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING READING

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by
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ABSTRACT

In recent years, educators have been paying attention to reading instruction and reading strategies in English classes at the high school level for several reasons. One of those reasons is the adoption of Common Core Standards and variations of those standards at the state level. As part of those standards, reading and writing benchmarks are not only essential but a primary focus for students in all disciplines. This study is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of high school English teachers to better understand their stories from teaching English grades 9–12 for five years or more. I collected data from three high school English teacher participants through interviews, classroom observations, and journal entries. I also made use of a personal frame not only as researcher but as an impetus for understanding teaching reading at the high school level in today’s English classrooms. There were three distinct themes that responded directly to the study’s research question and sub-question: “Teachers’ Relationships with their Students,” “Teachers’ Beliefs about their Abilities in Teaching Reading,” and “Classroom Structure for Instruction.” An outcome of this study further centers on the teacher participants’ views about CCSS in relation to impacting their instruction. Readers of this study may find it useful as a narrative inquiry

investigation into reading instruction and into literacy skills necessary for success in the 21st century. Reading and writing skills will be increasingly important as the world become smaller due to the increased inventions and usages of different types of technologies. This study might serve as a contribution in this intention because it finds that a person's background with reading and personal experiences with reading allow the individual to understand their relationship with texts and also to help understand self-efficacy. This study might also help to start a professional development training for teachers to learn how to engage in different reading strategies across the disciplines.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “A Narrative Inquiry into Experiences of Teaching Reading,” presented by Sara Lyn Crump, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and to the memory of Alva Glen Crump and Lillian Robb Crump, my paternal grandparents, who believed in a public education for all. They worked to contribute to their community throughout their lifetimes. The education fund they bequeathed and their contribution of the Crump Library in Barry, Illinois, left a legacy of literacy that resonates in my family today. I also dedicate this dissertation to my maternal grandma, Eunice Ashland, who was a model for me not in a formal education sense, but in a hard-working sense. I greatly cherish her stories and the person that she was.

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These dedications reveal a family history and current culture of the importance of telling our own stories. It is through this kinship that we learn and grow to have a better sense of self in understanding our corner of the world.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educators have been paying increased attention to reading initiatives and literacy instruction. This focus on teaching reading has become centralized within contemporary curriculum reform efforts, such as in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) further tightened a perspective on education that positioned reading as a priority, and it included the creation of related enhanced state standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016).

One of the signature aspects of the new Common Core State Standards is their tougher demands on reading: They require students to read texts that are on grade level, even if all the students in a class aren't able to read the works without assistance. (Barkhorn, 2013, n.p.)

While there has been much debate about the adoption of basic standards among individual states, in turn, many states are creating their own state standards based on the CCSS national standards. Common to these national and state-based standards are the need to teach reading in all subject areas and for all teachers to identify themselves as teachers of reading.

Furthermore, reading strategies for classroom instruction are becoming increasingly important in the 21st century, because students are engaging more and more in multiple, new literacies. This has been reflected in a new curricular approach to teaching reading because the reading habits of students have changed. The term *literacies* has been defined within CCSS as including students understanding nonfiction texts including graphs, statistics, and political cartoons, as well as the works of fiction, such as poetry, plays, and novels (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). The English classroom of the past

focused on students learning fiction, especially the classic works, and writing skills, including a focus on the rules of grammar. With the CCSS and related enhanced state-based standards, students will be introduced to different genres of texts so that they may have experience with thinking critically and gaining meaning from any written word in scholarly contexts.

Since literacies are rapidly changing, if teachers know a variety of instructional tools, they might be able to engage their student groups with a variety of reading practices (Sternberg, 2008). The use of a variety of strategies for teaching reading might also prove to be useful for meeting the needs of students in terms of the multiple and new literacies that they are encountering (Gleason & Greenlow, 2012). Educational practices might shift with this broader definition of literacies and the intensification of teaching reading in the curriculum. Attending to such shifts and to different strategies for teaching reading might prove to be essential for contributing to theory and practice in reading instruction.

It is thus of the utmost significance to gain insight into how English teachers identify themselves as teachers of reading and how they see themselves positioned within their school landscapes. It is also important to highlight factors impacting English teachers' interactions with their students while teaching reading, and to identify the reading strategies that they find to be useful. This narrative inquiry intends to shed light on the experiences of high school English teachers with teaching reading. Teachers' stories of experience regarding their reading instruction practices might be critically informative about connections between curriculum reform, standards, and reading. This study might further offer an understanding of experiences with engaging students in learning about and using diverse platforms of literacy. In this way, this investigation is contextualized within this era

on standards and standardization while acknowledging curricular efforts to prepare students with 21st century skills.

Personal Research Rationale

Ten years ago, my perspective of my practices as an English teacher was that I was implementing best practices by using study guides to facilitate student learning during reading such classics as *Huck Finn* (Twain, 1885) and *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925). I then learned that this perception was really false. I had been assigning chapters for the students to read and creating graphic organizers and study guide questions for the students, as well as providing the students with quizzes and tests during these studies. I thought that I was teaching these classic books and that the students were reading the chapters and interacting with me to discuss these literary and challenging texts. One day, though, a student, Megan (pseudonym), taught me a valuable lesson. She posed the question to the class, asking them if they'd really read *Huck Finn* or if they had faked their way through it.

“Megan. Are you telling me, on my 40th birthday, that my life is a literary fake? I've been assigning chapters of *Huck Finn* for years and no one has been reading them? This is a terrible moment, indeed,” I said in response to her question. The class discussion resumed, and the bell rang. Class was dismissed, but that moment will never be dismissed from my memory or from my behaviors now or in the future. Megan taught me that my traditional approaches to teaching literacy were not effectual in the classroom. I thought I was demonstrating effective practices by implementing before-during-after reading methods and asking the students to fill out study guides for comprehension, but really, it was a ruse. I was teaching the students to fill in the blank with a preconceived *right* answer and not allowing them to think for themselves.

I remembered an article by Sternberg (2008) that one of my graduate student peers had shared with the class the week before this incident. The author addressed assessment through rote, traditional modes. He stated that we are teaching our students to be outdated thinkers, who are not ready for the challenges of the 21st century. He offered a model for teaching that was meant to realign teaching with the needs of the students in mind. The Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized model (WICS) for pedagogy, coupled with Megan's lesson, served as the much-needed catalyst for me to reshape my practices.

The following fall I became a worksheet-free teacher. I developed a matrix to deconstruct the text instead. I based the Deconstruct-the-Text note-taking structure on the work of Sternberg (2008). His WICS model inspired me to think of a way to help the students to think analytically and personally as they read various texts. The matrix asked the students to contextualize the work, to analyze the work for rhetorical and literary techniques implemented by the author to craft theme or purpose, and to connect the ideology of the piece to a macrocosmic or overarching theme. I continue to implement this strategy to place the responsibility of the learning on the students so that I do not experience the "literary fake" described previously. In this way, the students are interactively reading and they are implementing their own thoughts to analyze the text in the way that only they can, creating rhetorical reading (Downs, 2010).

To teach the students how to deconstruct the text, I used the visual rhetoric of music videos. I asked the upper classmen to analyze Nine Inch Nails' *Hurt* (Reznor, 1995) and then Johnny Cash's cover of the same song (Romanek, 2003). The sophomores analyzed the text of Death Cab for Cutie's *I Will Follow You into the Dark* (Gibbard, 2005). The rationale

was that if students could analyze the tone, purpose, audience, symbols, and imagery of the music videos, they could apply these skills to any text that they encountered.

The first fall I used the Deconstruct-the-Text Matrix, I observed that more students participated in class. They struggled to know how to pose scholarly questions, since they were used to trying to guess the *right* answers. Although it has not been perfect, more of my students have been engaged in true thinking and not simply the regurgitation of what is in the teacher's mind for an exact answer. For years and years, English teachers (myself included) have been guilty of forcing students to know that the light at the end of Daisy's dock in *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) always means *greed, money, and power*, according to study guide questions that isolate one correct answer regarding symbolism in the novel. Study guides tend to ask for specific answers that exhibit basic comprehension, but what our students may need now and in the future are instructional practices to tap into their higher-order thinking. For example, Strauss (2013) argued that many tried and true practices for studying have recently been deemed ineffectual. As one of the juniors offered one day last winter, "The green light on Daisy's dock means go-for-it,' and to Gatsby, Daisy was his American Dream. So he had no choice but to go-for-it." And why not? It is our perceptions and interpretations that matter. Not what a study guide says it should be.

Much like these changes in my personal viewpoint and instructional methods, my hope is that this study might provide keen insight into the stories of experience of practitioners when teaching reading. After engaging in interviews and observations with these teachers, as well as their reflections on their reading practices, their shared stories might help to facilitate improvement upon their practices or help them to "awaken" (Clandinin, Connelly & Phillion, 2007) to aspects of their practices. Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) posited that narrative is an effective way to understand experience. When teachers begin to reflect on their own experiences, they may decide to change their instructional methods in the classroom. This reflection on practice might offer the teacher participants insight into effective methods for teaching reading or methods that really do not work, as I discovered not too long ago.

Those are the personal and pedagogical reasons why I am interested in learning more about others' experiences in teaching reading. Within this study I focused on the participants' stories of experience regarding their past experiences in teaching reading, their current practices, and their future goals for reading instruction. In this way, I was able to gain insight into how teachers experience and story their experiences of teaching reading. I also learned more about how to teach reading by attending to the practices and experiences of teaching reading of other educators. Moreover, these stories might further serve to contribute to a larger body of knowledge by offering insight into the practice of teaching reading and the notion of literacy. While these participants' stories might inform their practice and my own work with students and teaching reading, they might also inform teachers, administrators, and teacher educators about their future practices beyond reading instruction.

Literature Review

In this section I provide a brief review of literature related to the study. I focus in-depth on the literature underscoring the social and academic rationale for this investigation. In this way I provide a snapshot of some of the most pertinent elements of curriculum and instruction about the study of teachers' experiences with teaching reading.

CCSS and Reading Instruction

CCSS focuses on literacy as one of the main skills of concern in education. Since the majority of states originally adopted these new standards, reading instruction will become more and more important in the lives of all educators. In fact, CCSS focuses on interdisciplinary instructional practices with reading and writing as the two skill strands that all other disciplines must integrate. For these reasons, I studied the experiences of English teachers with teaching reading and literacy strategies and how they understand teaching reading. Reading strategies are instructional approaches to teaching reading, whereas reading is the act of understanding words for comprehension and analysis.

Many English teachers still do not identify themselves as teachers of reading (Gallagher, 2009). Some English teachers profess not to know how to incorporate reading strategies into their instructional methodology. Instead, they rely on traditional practices, such as skill and drill or the study guide method, in which the teacher is doing the thinking and students are trying to get the right answer (Gallagher, 2009). With the adoption of the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) in Missouri (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016), both English teachers and teachers of other disciplines would need to become educated in instructional practices for reading.

States that have adopted CCSS or variations of CCSS will have curriculum benchmarks that are aligned to College Board Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). The College Board governs the national Advanced Placement (AP) program and focuses on college preparedness for high school students by offering AP classes in many disciplines for students to challenge themselves while still in high school. CCSS – or ACS in the study context of Missouri – is thus aligned with College Board

benchmarks (U.S. Academic Benchmarks Common Core Standards Initiative, 2016). Many educators believe that this scope and sequence will help to improve the academic rigor of reading, writing, and math as core disciplines to prepare students for assessments such as ACT and AP exams, as well as for the problem-solving and analytical thinking skills needed for success in the 21st century. One of these strands of focus is reading, which is seen by many to pervade the course of most disciplines.

Reading Strategies

Reading has been in place for years in English classes. However, with the adoption of CCSS, districts are starting to turn their attention to the relationship of reading strategies to most core disciplines. Students will also be asked to interact with reading passages on the ACT at the junior level in science, humanities, and history (Clough & Montgomery, 2015). The state of Missouri has recently joined many other states in using the ACT as the state assessment for juniors in high school. This test is rigorous in its reading passages and is a norm-referenced test. Because the ACT is a high-stakes test for scholarships for college and for state assessments, there is a need for educators to be able to prepare their students for these challenging assessments.

Downs (2010) asserted that teachers need to meet students where they are as readers, because they know students are not going to read carefully, for any length of time, or with patience. CCSS raises the lexiles of texts students will have to comprehend and analyze to meet the CCSS benchmarks (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). The lexile is a measurement in reading assessment that determines the level of readers against their grade level expectations. For example, CCSS finds *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) to be at the sixth-grade level for reading lexile. While this might be right on target with the identified

lexile level, most districts in Missouri teach Lee's (1960) novel at the ninth or tenth grade level due to its subject matter regarding race, social justice, and issues related to coming of age. Therefore, districts will have to consider how to realign their curriculum to meet the demands of CCSS and the levels of difficulty with lexile.

There was a time when best practices for reading instruction indicated selecting texts that were previously accessible (Public Broadcasting Service, 2016). For example, the nonfiction text *The Other Wes Moore* (Moore, 2011) is classified as a high-interest, low lexile text. An accessible text usually meets the reading level of a wide range of readers whose Lexile scores vary from low to high. Struggling readers find the story of *The Other Wes Moore* (Moore, 2011) engaging. It is about two boys who share the same name and who are growing up in an urban neighborhood six blocks away from one another. Both boys get into trouble and gang activity, but one becomes a Rhodes Scholar and an intern for President Obama in the White House, and the other Wes Moore becomes a convicted murderer.

Students of all levels find the story compelling, but with the new assessments in place, students are expected to read more demanding texts to improve their reading abilities and skill levels. For example, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (Alvarez, 1994) is a nonfiction novel that appears on the AP Literature reading list, and it won the National Book Critics Circle Award. This book offers students a challenging lexile and content that is scholarly. The story is about martyred sisters during the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in the 1960s. The Lexile for this novel is challenging, and it would be considered literature that endures the test of time, whereas *The Other Wes Moore* (Moore, 2011) would not.

Since many educators in the United States, and indeed, educators in many countries, are moving toward a time where students need to read all different types of texts for understanding, it is increasingly important for us to concentrate on reading and reading strategies in all disciplines. Schlein and Chan (2012) highlighted how increasing accountability measures and heightened focus on high-stakes testing led Canadian teacher participants to perceive disconnect between creativity and academic growth in reading instruction. Their findings raise an overarching question about academic growth in reading instruction and development in creativity. This relationship and its disconnect seem alarming since the high-stakes testing may not diminish in the future. This component of teaching reading in English classrooms may be significant for the integration of CCSS and related enhanced state standards. With the adoption of this new assessment for a student's reading and writing aptitude, consideration might need to be made for cultural shifts as well as for potential changes in teaching methods. The stories of teachers about their experiences with teaching reading might help in understanding these shifts.

Downs (2010) explained that teachers should teach rhetorical reading rather than focusing on the outmoded term critical thinking when teaching reading so that all these academic goals will be met for our students. He suggested that rhetorical reading is:

constructing a rhetorical frame which includes authors, readers, motives, relationships, and contexts by rhetorically mov[ing] beyond an “autonomous” text and try[ing] to account for a number of situational or rhetorical element— author, authorial intent, reader identity, and historical, cultural, and situational context – to “frame” or support the discourse. (p. 41)

His method focuses on contextualizing reading instruction, which is an essential instructional approach for effective practices in the classroom (Downs, 2010). He suggested that teachers teach students what scholarly texts are and what to look for when reading

scholarly articles. He asserted that this practice alone might help students to move from the lower levels of engagement to the challenging and rigorous ones needed to navigate a text for complexity (Downs, 2010). During the instructional method of rhetorical reading, students are taught to ask “‘What does it do?’ instead of ‘What does it say?’ or ‘What does it mean?’” (Downs, 2010, p. 42). The students try to assert a claim about what the article is meant to accomplish for its targeted audience of readers. This rhetorical reading approach is aligned with CCSS, since the College Board and AP formed the CCSS (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). Essentially, all students can enroll in AP courses where they could experience the rigor of a college English class while they are still enrolled in high school.

As districts matriculate to these standards, evaluations of teachers’ performance will be key. In the state of Missouri, districts are all evaluated based on the criteria of Missouri Schools Improvement Plan 5 (MSIP 5), which calculates the grades students earn in AP classes and their AP scores at the end of the year (Missouri School Improvement Program, 2016). A scoring guide issued by the state of Missouri allows schools to earn points for students who earn a B or above in AP classes and who score a 3 or better on the AP exam (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). School districts shift instructional practices in reading for the demands of CCSS, but also for the MSIP 5 evaluation that encourages this shift for enrollment in AP classes. Although these motivators are for state and local records, academic performance, and evaluation, students may benefit the most from taking AP classes.

AP classes do prepare students to become skilled, rhetorical readers ready to face the challenges of being global citizens. The College Board does not have a cumulative GPA

requirement for AP classes, so all students may choose to take them and potentially benefit from them. Instructional practices in today's classroom will need to align to AP strategies and teaching practices in order to meet the goals of CCSS and to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

While this study focused on the standards for the state of Missouri, the College Board and the AP impact curriculum changes nationwide for the states that have adopted CCSS. With the adoption of CCSS, school districts may consider changing their curriculum standards pertaining to reading instruction. In doing so, reading and teaching reading will become increasingly important with the CCSS standards focus on reading and writing.

Moreover, a consideration of different text types and a focus on texts in terms of lexile levels raises important issues concerning what constitutes literature in contrast with non-literature reading material. Curriculum reforms such as CCSS also bring to the forefront how texts are selected aside from lexile levels. The emphasis on text selection may fluctuate depending on the political landscapes that influence the importance of instructional philosophies about curriculum frameworks as shaped by the cultural milieu of the time period (Smith, 1988). Smith (1988) argued that “we make texts timeless by suppressing their temporality” (p. 50) to ascertain the point that teachers may justify teaching certain texts from generation to generation regardless of the cultural and political views of the time.

Significantly, Smith (1988) further explained that texts are often selected by those who have “cultural power” (p. 51) and are members of “socially, politically, economically established classes” (p. 51) who may not consider the underrepresented populations of a particular school or educational setting. Yet, Smith (1988) called for text selection in accordance with “works that are structurally complex and, in the technical sense,

information-rich” (p. 51) so that such works might transcend curriculum reforms and generations of learners.

The literature reviewed above showcases how the study may help teachers, teacher educators, literacy instructional coaches, curriculum policy makers, and other curriculum stakeholders to understand the experiences of English teachers in secondary schools and their past and present approaches to teaching reading. This inquiry focused on the imperative to improve the teaching and learning of reading strategies as situated within the context of increasing standardization. This study may thus be an informative investigation for practitioners and administrators when specifically considering data related to instructional practices in secondary English classrooms.

In Chapter 3, Literature Review, I outline relevant literature for this inquiry in fuller detail. Namely, I discuss work on literacy as connected to CCSS and research related to reading and reading instruction. I further consider studies related to teachers’ perceptions of positive or negative self-efficacy as central to this investigation of teachers’ experiences with reading instruction. Also, I discuss curriculum reform efforts and curriculum developments in relation to reading instruction to provide a context for this study.

Theoretical Framework

In this section I consider literature that highlights the relationship between curriculum and teaching. Next, I review theories linking the curriculum, teachers, and experience. I discuss theories connoting the curriculum as founded on the experiences of teachers and work that identifies the curriculum as experiences between teachers and students. I then review literature on narratives and storying as seminal components to this narrative inquiry into the experiences of English teachers with reading instruction.

The Relationship between Curriculum and Teaching

A major purpose of curriculum is to create a structure for instruction (Null, 2008). Curriculum is often discussed in relation to instruction and vice versa. Connelly, He, and Phillion (2008) stated that curriculum and instruction together form almost all of educational thought. An understanding of the curriculum is therefore central for any inquiry into teaching and learning.

Apple (1993) further argued that curriculum standardization is used to structure the educational system for teachers with the assumption that this will enable them to be accountable not only to the organization of the school day and within the district, but to state and national educational and civic goals. Yet Westbury (2008) claimed that curriculum reform efforts might not necessarily translate into actual changes to teaching and learning. In fact, he stated that the goal of curriculum reform efforts might not actually be connected to teaching and learning. Instead, such efforts to change the curriculum might stem from the need to appease the voices of curriculum stakeholders within a political platform.

The participants have experienced teaching reading under the umbrella of increased curricular standardization that was put into place with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). They are now facing learning how to become educators within a curriculum reform movement intent on enhancing curricular standards. In particular, with current developments in curriculum in connection with CCSS and the related development of new Missouri standards for learning, all teachers across all disciplines will need to focus on reading instruction and the development of multiple literacies. This means that all teachers will need to enlarge their teacher identities to include the label of reading teachers.

Curriculum, Teachers, and Experience

In one of the earliest significant works on curriculum, Bobbitt (1918) argued that the curriculum was comprised of general experiences from living in a certain community and that the teacher should set a guideline for learning experiences to occur. According to Bobbitt, the teacher was charged with uncovering the tasks from life that would be necessary for students to learn. He thus described the teacher as a “curriculum-discoverer” (p. 20).

Other curriculum theorists also acknowledged the central role of teachers in curriculum building. For example, Dewey (1938) asserted that teachers were to assess the needs and interests of students to shape the curriculum. In fact, he further argued that education is life. Tyler (1949/2004) further asserted that the teacher’s role included assessing the needs of students to shape worthwhile learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments. This intertwined relationship between life, experience, and education is crucial for supporting this investigative perspective on teachers’ experiences for shedding light on the curriculum in the area of English Language Arts in general, and on reading instruction in particular.

Storying and Narratives

Stories and an inquiry into such stories exemplifies a teacher’s experiences when interacting with the curriculum and the students, which further emphasizes the role of the teacher as the curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Thorp and Shacklock (2005) argued that these stories provide structure for teachers to understand their interactions with students in the classroom at a deeper level. They explained that “narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience” (Thorp & Shacklock, 2005, p. 156).

In this way, a life history is told by the person who lived it, which can personify a time period, a sociological context, as well as a political commentary and a personal experience that symbolizes a greater message about the world. In storying experiences, these experiences emerge as layers of context to help to understand the complexities of life as it is “socially constructed” (Thorp & Shacklock, 2005, p. 156) and not random in its occurrences. Lives take on meaning when the stories are told and re-told to be interpreted in developing not only a sense of self but to better understand from a larger lens. This develops a history beyond the personal lens of the original story to a greater, more universal theme (Richardson, 1997).

Furthermore, when stories are told, a person’s unique voice develops by the way they use words to relate a personal experience that can lead to a more universal purpose (Thorp & Shacklock, 2005). Garrigues (2003) described her view of the art of storytelling as, “Tell a good story and all eyes are on you, all faces expectant, all voices hushed” (p. 21). Stories can therefore be an powerful way to learn and to better understand the world. For this reason, attention to narratives and the act of storying is crucial for this study.

Methodology

This qualitative study followed the narrative inquiry research tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). In this study, I concentrated on capturing the teacher participants’ experiences of reading instruction through experiential narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996). Rosiek (2007) found that story functions as a portal through which people enter the world and through which their experiences there are interpreted and made significant. This portal explains the rationale for implementing narrative inquiry for this study. The experiences of the teachers who participated in this study might help to inform future

instruction during this shift to CCSS. These stories may help educators to better understand practices in teaching reading in other disciplines as well. Although reading across the disciplines has been emphasized and practiced among previous generations, in our current discourse, CCSS is designed to be interdisciplinary, also. As a result, the benchmarks focus on reading and writing so that social studies, math, and science may also integrate reading and writing strategies into their instructional methodology.

I chose to conduct a qualitative study of teachers' experiences of teaching reading as a means of addressing the growing concern with standardization and the increasing numerical values placed on teaching and learning, especially in the area of teaching reading. Mead and Bateson (1977) argued that qualitative research allows for different perspectives with a metaphor of a camera on a tripod versus capturing images through a moving camera. Clandinin et al. (2006) further acknowledged that bringing qualitative work to the education table enables educators, educational researchers, and teacher educators to move back and forth between seeing students up close and personal and then seeing them as statistical numbers and figures. They referred to this qualitative stance as moving between seeing students as big and small. This lens provides multiple viewpoints of the world.

The structure of this narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) concentrated on collecting "stories of experience" as data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Story embodies the experiences of our lives and how we live, and stories thereby indicate our understanding of and interaction with things, people, and events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In effect, people, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) found that sometimes people make decisions and there is a conscious awareness of these choices made, whereas, other times these choices are

made without a conscious awareness. Curricular decisions might reveal purposeful or instinctual reasoning, and so the narrative investigation of teachers' experiences might thus lend much insight into research regarding teaching practices. Clandinin referred to this situation as "images in action" (Clandinin, 1986).

Research Questions

Narrative inquiry researchers study experience, essentially, and uncover insights into the stories of the participants to understand the world and to address research questions. In particular, in this study I focus on the experiences and perspectives of English teachers with reading instruction in an environment of increasing standardization, the implementation of enhanced state-based assessments, and a new focus on reading across the curriculum. The primary research question for this study was: What are the experiences of high school English teachers with reading instruction? This question asked the participants to share their personal experiences of reading instruction and how they approach teaching reading in their high school English classrooms. The sub-question for the study was the following: What are English teachers' experiences with reading instruction within a framework of increasing standardization and enhanced state-based standards? This question helped me to access teachers' storied interactions with reading instruction among their students as contextualized in an era of enhanced assessment and accountability measures. The stories of the participants in this study may inform reading practices or ways to think about reading practices that are aligned to increasing curricular movements for standardization.

Participants

This investigation included three participants. I approached prospective participants with a consent form who were currently employed in Alpha school district and who were

known to me for study participation (see Appendix A). In selecting the participants, I chose English teachers at the high school level with a minimum of five years of teaching experience, so that I would gain a variety of rich and detailed stories of practice. Participants were selected from a variety of class levels and grades for teaching English if possible. Since the participants had five years of teaching or more, I anticipated that their stories might span decades of practices that indicate how curricular shifts have happened in the past, what they think of current practices, and how they see CCSS or other state-based enhanced standards forming future practices.

Data Collection

I collected data for the study over the course of one academic semester. The first step in collecting data was to secure the permission of the superintendent of Alpha district's superintendent (see Appendix B). I attended to the teacher participants' stories of experiences with teaching reading via two 60-minute audio-recorded individual informal interviews for a total of 120 minutes of interviewing. The first interview was scheduled at the start of the spring semester, prior to classroom observations. The second interview was scheduled at the end of spring semester, 2017.

Interviews were open-ended in nature, and I was guided by an informal list of questions (see Appendix C Interview #1 Protocol and Appendix D Interview #2 Protocol). During the first set of informal interviews, I asked the participants about their past experiences with teaching reading and their own experiences with reading. The second interview concentrated on the challenges and opportunities that the participants envision in their ongoing teaching with the new Missouri state-based standards. Scenarios stemming

from classroom observations were also discussed. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

I also conducted classroom observations of each of the participants' practices for one classroom period on a twice-monthly basis for the course of one academic semester for a total of 10 observations per participant. The total number of observations across participants equaled 30 by the end of the data collection. The purpose of these observations was to observe how each participant approached reading instruction in different contexts for any text. For example, I observed the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* of the participants' approaches to teaching literature, nonfiction texts, and poetry. I composed field notes following all observations. Field notes were written in a Word file on my computer. The field notes focused on describing the context of the observations, as well as all interactions between teachers and students during reading instruction. The field notes also contained direct observations regarding the levels of engagement on the part of the students (see Appendix E Observation Matrix).

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) recommended that teachers reflect on their practices in journals as part of their curriculum-shaping efforts. These journals often help to shape the practices of practitioners, since the journals revealed first-hand reflections based on classroom experiences. For this reason, all participants completed a journal throughout the course of this study, with a minimum of five separate journal entries. The journal entries were composed on Word files and saved onto a password-protected memory stick that I supplied to all participants. The journal included prompts for writing, such as excerpts from literature dealing with reading instruction and requests for participants' reflections (see Appendix F for Journal Prompts).

Data Analysis

After the data collection period of one academic semester was completed, I reviewed all collected information in depth for common narrative themes. I read all data that I collected a minimum of three times in order to compile a set of narrative themes from among the data. I logged all themes that I interpreted from among the interviews, journal entries, and classroom data. The themes were shaped by the data collected. Each theme was based on issues related to teaching reading.

Once I had compiled a list of common narrative themes, I then analyzed the material within each theme through the use of the “three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This analysis tool for narrative inquiry allowed me to study the data from the perspectives of themes, as well as by attending to the dimensions of past, present, and future temporal periods; social and personal interactions; and context. I was then able to draw out contextual interpretations as findings of the study.

Ethical Considerations

I received approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to undertaking any research activities for this investigation. I ensured that the study met the institutional requirements for conducting ethical research. I further obtained approval to conduct the study from the school principal(s) and from Alpha School District as necessary. Pseudonyms were used for the names of all people, schools, school districts, and other places.

Moreover, I collected journal entries from the participants via password-protected memory sticks. I saved all interview transcriptions and field notes onto a password-protected memory stick and on a password-protected external hard drive, which I accessed only on my own password-protected computer. Any hard files were stored in a locked drawer. My

supervisor, Dr. Candace Schlein, and I were the only people with potential access to the raw data.

Limitations of the Study

A possible limitation of this study was the focus on a limited number of participants with a concentration on collecting oral, written, and physical stories of experience regarding reading instruction. Another potential limitation was related to the question of story and a definition of *fiction* (Barone, 2007). Barone (2007) suggested that narrative inquiry seeks truth through data collection from participants; therefore, these stories were storied experiences that were true based on the participants' experiences in life. The question of potentially fictionalized data was balanced by this search for truth through data collection. Crites (1979) also highlighted the possibility for participants to deceive themselves in telling their narratives of experience. I ensured that the participants told truthful versions of their experiences with teaching reading via the triangulation of data. Specifically, I collected data from the participants through two sets of interviews, teaching observations, and journal entries. This allowed me to analyze the data across different sources as well as across multiple participants. Since I am knowledgeable about the school district context surrounding the experiences of the participants, I also have an understanding of general policies and practices at the school level.

Barone (2007) further agreed that by using multiple participants in a narrative inquiry study, the stories are validated by diverse dimensions of voice. He found that valid data collected through the social sciences often offer predictions, explanations, and a way to control future practices (Barone, 2007). Although I had only a limited number of participants in the study, my focus was to obtain rich data from each participant so that I

could delve into their experiences. The overall goal was to shed light on the participants' experiences, reach inquiry interpretations, and raise possible themes or issues that might be of greater relevance to other teachers. For this reason, the study did not intend to generalize results. Instead, I ensured that the data contained *verisimilitude* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), or the appearance of truth from the participants' vantages.

Educational Significance

Since there is an increasing standardization in U.S. schools today, with 46 states adopting CCSS, U.S. teachers might need to implement changes in their approaches to reading instruction. One of the aspirations for public education in the United States is to increase reading and math scores on the Program for International Students' Assessment (PISA) so the U.S. may score as high as other countries on measures of literacy and mathematics (Program for International Students' Assessment, n.d.). Educators in the United States have not reached the goals for reading that were set in the early days of NCLB, in which every fourth grader in the United States would have been reading at grade level by 2014 (Gallagher, 2009). With CCSS, all teachers are now expected to develop this rigor as well as flexibility to meet the standards of the 21st century.

Policies such as NCLB and CCSS show a priority for all U.S. students to be rhetorical readers who are able to read any informational text, poem, or piece of literature and not only understand its meaning, but analyze, evaluate, and interpret from the experience of reading. Tried and true protocols for reading, such as the traditional study guide, may not meet the needs of these goals, as CCSS seeks for students to increase the lexile of reading texts at grade level as well as asks students to think critically in an interactive, norm-referenced test. During their lifetimes, students will be asked to interact

with multiple literacies from nonfiction texts to instructional manuals to reading graphs and charts to understand myriad levels and genres of texts. If reading teachers reflect on their practices and think critically about how they interact with students during reading instruction, then they might be able to improve their practices and align practices with the needs of their students in relation to preparation for future societal participation. Most teachers have a sense and self-awareness of successful or unsuccessful strategies when teaching (Gallagher, 2009). For students to perform well on the ACT, the Missouri state assessment, it is important to understand the experiences and practices of English teachers regarding teaching reading in the classroom. The focus of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers when they are teaching reading and how CCSS or related state-based enhanced standards might impact their instructional methods. Bennett (2014) found that CCSS could help U.S. students contribute to a global economy and could help them be civically responsible citizens, which begins with “he or she must be able to read and to distill complex sentences” (p. 1). Bennett (2014) explained that the misinformation surrounding CCSS is problematic to its success in each state that has adopted the standards. Since CCSS align with Advanced Placement, the rigor of the academics in the classroom might improve. There are additional facets of this alignment that may reveal school reform building-wide, too.

For CCSS, each building will need to have a literacy team that is responsible for training all teachers in the core areas in reading strategies. English teachers will also need to integrate nonfiction texts in different content areas into their curriculum. For these reasons and more, the stories and practices of English teachers will be important as districts shift

into the new structure of CCSS. Other disciplines will need to integrate reading and reading strategies into their teaching practices, since these new standards revolve around reading.

Connelly and Clandinin (1998) claimed that teachers are important parts of shaping the curriculum, especially in terms of shaping instructional practices. When curriculum makers create the curriculum without teachers, Connelly and Clandinin (1998) liken it to putting the cart before the horse. In addition, Schlein and Schwartz (2015) coined the teacher “as curriculum” in order to underscore the significance of teachers and their experiences to curriculum practices, which would include curriculum reform and the successful implementation of such reform. This narrative inquiry study is significant, since it intends to understand the experiences of teachers regarding reading instruction. In this way, this investigation further sought to understand the curriculum of teaching reading, the context of curriculum reforms surrounding reading instruction, and the implementation of curriculum reform regarding reading instruction from the vantage of teachers’ experiences. In this way, the study is also important, since it addresses the impact of CCSS and other state-based enhanced standards on the teaching of reading. Additionally, this study led to my own professional development as a teacher of reading through the course of interacting with the teacher participants during interviews, classroom observations, and journal entries regarding their experiences with teaching reading.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

In this chapter, I provided an overall discussion of the research focus and the significance of the study from social, educational, and personal vantages. I highlighted the goals, the personal connection, and the social and educational implications of this dissertation. This chapter also included preliminary discussion of the theoretical framework

of the study and a brief review of relevant literature. I further described this research question and sub-question and the methodology used in the study.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation describes the theoretical framework of this study. This chapter provides an understanding of the main theories that framed this investigation. I deliberated over research outlining curriculum reform movements that culminate in the current concentration on shaping and enhancing instructional standards in the area of reading at the secondary level. I additionally reviewed theories that specifically pertain to curriculum reforms in the area of reading instruction. I further discussed theories linking curriculum with experience, and I considered work on aspects of narratives and storying, especially in educational research.

Chapter 3 is the review of literature related to the research area. In this chapter, I discussed work related to strategies for reading and reading instruction. I also highlight studies related to teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy in reading instruction. Additionally, I discuss curriculum reform in reading instruction to provide a context for the study.

Chapter 4, focuses on a discussion of the methodology for the inquiry. I explain in detail the rationale for conducting this research according to narrative inquiry and the use of stories of experiences as data. I further outline the methods used for data collection and analysis and raise ethical considerations.

Chapter 5, focuses on a discussion of the data analysis for data collection by relying on the "three dimensional framework"(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this chapter, I explain the three common themes derived from the data collection.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings of the study and its educational significance and provide a discussion of the ethical considerations of the study as well as its limitations. In

this chapter, I also discuss the luxury afforded me as a researcher to be myself unabashedly within the context of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I describe the theoretical framework for this study. In particular, I highlight three main strands of theories that framed this investigation. I begin with a discussion of the relationship between the curriculum and teaching. I specifically consider literature that highlights the current concentration on shaping and enhancing instructional standards and testing, and particularly in the area of reading at the secondary level. Next, I review theories linking the curriculum, teachers, and experience. I deliberate over connected notions of experience as linked to the curriculum and teaching. I discuss theories connoting the curriculum as founded on experiences of teachers and work that identifies the curriculum as experiences between teachers and students. I then review literature on narratives and storying as seminal components to this narrative inquiry into the experiences of English teachers with reading instruction.

Phillion (2002) discussed how a narrative inquirer needs to become embedded in a research study and solidly positioned within the narrative inquiry landscape. In her work, she provided an example of how a narrative inquirer might become positioned as an active member of an inquiry in terms of data collection and interpretation, as well as during a literature review for an inquiry. She exemplified how a narrative inquirer might engage with research literature supporting a study as though taking part in a dialogue. In this review of the theoretical framework for this investigation, I similarly hoped to position myself as a narrative inquirer in interaction with literature. Following discussion of several theoretical strands for this inquiry, I respond to the literature from my own perspectives and experiences with the relation of my narratives of teaching and learning. In this way, I

planned to be upfront about this interpretive work, and I sought to lay bare possible subjective approaches as one additional means of attending to issues of ethics and objectivity in this research.

The Relationship between Curriculum and Teaching

A major purpose of curriculum is to create a structure for instruction (Null, 2008). Curriculum is often discussed in relationship to instruction and vice versa. In fact, Connelly, He, and Phillion(2007) stated that curriculum and instruction together form almost all of educational thought. Schubert (2008) further reminded readers that the curriculum can be considered with respect to the intended, taught, experienced, hidden, and null curricula, among others. An understanding of the curriculum is therefore central for any inquiry into teaching and learning.

At the same time, a consideration of curriculum reform efforts is significant, since such reforms signify statements about what is deemed worthwhile in terms of teaching and learning at different points in time. For example, Ladson-Billings and Brown (2008) stated that the cause of curriculum reform might be related to perceived civic or international threats that are interpreted as national panics to stimulate curricular change. A common example of such a national panic is the 1960s space race between the United States and the Soviet Union, which caused curriculum reform to enhance the teaching of math and science.

In this chapter section, I shed light on varying educational values over time and statements shaping what has been taught, ignored, or experienced during different points in time. This focus thus outlines shifting approaches to curriculum as positioned within efforts for curriculum reform. Such an overview of the shifting relationship between curriculum and instruction was significant for this study, as I hoped to gain insight into the experiences of

English teachers with reading instruction. These participants experienced teaching reading under the umbrella of increased curricular standardization that was put into place with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). They are now facing learning how to become educators within a curriculum reform movement focused on enhancing curricular standards. In particular, with current developments in curriculum in connection with the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the related development of new Missouri standards for learning, all teachers across all disciplines will be focusing on reading instruction and the development of multiple literacies. This means that all teachers will need to enlarge their teacher identities to include the label of reading teachers.

Teachers of English are placed directly up front in this shifting landscape of standards and standardization. The participants' knowledge and experience may become important beyond their interactions with students in their own classrooms. They might further become significant resources in their schools and leaders of professional development opportunities.

For this reason, an understanding of the relationship between curriculum and teaching through the lens of this era of standards and standardization is critical for shaping this inquiry into the experiences of English teachers with reading instruction. This lens is necessary for contextualizing teaching and learning as experienced by the participants. In this way, I plan to contextualize curriculum (Null, 2008). Attending to the literature that underscores the path toward this era of standards and standardization is thus key for highlighting the relationship between teaching and the curriculum. It further serves to outline seminal concepts that shape the scope and methods of this investigation.

The Path toward Standards and Standardization

Apple (1993) argued that standardization is used to structure the educational system for teachers under the assumption that this will enable them to be accountable not only to the organization of the school day and within the district, but to state and national educational and civic goals. At the same time, Westbury (2008) claimed that curriculum reform efforts might not necessarily translate into actual changes to teaching and learning. In fact, he stated that the purpose of curriculum reform efforts might not actually be connected to teaching and learning. Instead, such efforts to change the curriculum might stem from the need to appease the voices of curriculum stakeholders within a political platform.

Contemporary efforts to enhance curricular standards and standardization are further nested in a series of historical curriculum reform movements. Such curriculum reforms are layered with social and political themes. It is essential to deconstruct these curricular inheritances in order to understand the cause and shape of recent curriculum reforms that approach the curriculum as standards and standardization.

In the 1940s and 1950s there was the push for a Life Adjustment Curriculum (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). This reform movement focused on integrating disciplines, such as social studies and science or English and social studies, to create an engagement with students about the personal and social problems of youth. The educational intent of this curriculum reform was to prepare students for life and work, rather than to prepare students to pursue higher levels of education. As a result, critics of the Life Adjustment Curriculum did not find this method to be sufficiently academically rigorous (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

During the 1950s there continued to be an increasing criticism of schools in the United States. When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, the criticism intensified, blaming the schools for a lesser educational standard than that of the Soviet Union (Pinar, 2008). Pinar (2008) argued that this concern led to the Woods Hole conference in 1959, which was comprised of mathematicians, scientists, and psychologists, but did not include educators or curriculum specialists. The result of this conference was a compendium to shape the National Curriculum Reform Movement of the 1960s as shaped by professionals other than educators and curriculum specialists (Pinar, 2008).

The Discipline Centered Curriculum of the 1960s resulted. This curriculum reform focused on structure, inquiry learning processes and problem-solving skills. It was intended to provide a rigorous and intensive education with very high standards in math and science that tried to shape students into future professionals in the areas of math, science, and technology. The new concentration on these academic disciplines were a drastic contrast from the previous curriculum reform movement that dealt with supporting students' social and personal needs. Scholars that advocated for this reform said that "their goal was intellectual development and not social adjustment" (Franklin & Johnson, 2008, p. 464).

Although the Discipline Centered Curriculum intended to raise the academic bar, its consideration of disciplines above pedagogy and the holistic needs of students was unsuccessful at reaching a majority of students who attended schools in diverse and urban settings. Critics cited the focus on disciplinary knowledge rather than pedagogy, effectively placed standards above student learning needs. Consequently, Basic Skills Instruction emerged at the beginning of the 1970s as the next large-scale curriculum reform movement (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). The Discipline-Centered Curriculum of the 1960s entailed

structure and studying traditional texts in classrooms that were designed around seatwork, recitations, and teacher directions. In turn, student needs pertaining to the social contexts that framed the 1970s, such as an interest in addressing problems about poverty and racial segregation, rose to the forefront. Therefore, a curriculum was structured that attempted to provide students with a basic education in the disciplines, coupled with a higher number of elective courses and more courses dealing with multicultural content (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

The “return-to-basics” tenets of the 1970s intended to dispel the problems they saw with the Discipline-Centered Curriculum of the 1960s, but in turn, this shift caused the focus to fall to the complete opposite in its student-centered interests. In so doing, the New Basics became the next curriculum reform to develop in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

The New Basics curriculum reform removed what was seen as an overabundance in student choice in schools and a variety of courses on diversity to a renewed academic curriculum that was meant to return education to the realm of the traditional disciplines. However, this curriculum resulted in a watered-down structure and organization of learning that “relied heavily on lecture and discussion” (Franklin & Johnson, 2008, p. 469). The back-to-basics approach did not evoke a challenging course of study with high academic standards.

The response to this curricular deficit was to look toward the National Commission on Excellence in Education and its report, entitled *A Nation at Risk* (1983). This report outlined the weakened curriculum and argued for the need to create written curriculum standards (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). Many faculties of Schools of Education dissented

with this result and instead felt that the Commission had distorted the facts to create a sub-textual agenda to benefit American industrial goals (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). The language of the actual report displayed an argument that the United States was a nation that was at risk as framed within the threat of nuclear war and the need for more professionals in roles dealing with science, math, and technology. This national panic also echoed the earlier national panic pertaining to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and its push to create the Discipline-Centered Curriculum (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

Following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and the related growing national panic about the state of education, the seeds were sown for an enhanced focus on curricular standards and assessment through a program of high-stakes testing. This need for a focus on curricular standards and testing was bolstered by the National Reading Panel's (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 1999) findings regarding the low rates of reading skills in the United States. Subsequently, the U.S. Congress passed The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, which has come to be known as the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001) . This legislation required each school to show Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in every category and sub-category. If one school had a subgroup that did not show progress for AYP, the school was considered to be a failing school under the NCLB benchmarks. NCLB included standardized testing to ensure that teaching took place (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). The parameters of NCLB created a fear among many U.S. educators, because their job performance become equated with successful teaching of curricular standards as measured in students' test scores. NCLB further increased the pressure to produce results from standardized state tests to show proficiency and progress to meet AYP. This culture bred an

undertone of fear and inadequacy, rather than strengthening the organization of the curriculum or the curriculum (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

The overhauling of NCLB was connected with a sense of possibilities for change in the curriculum and a great potential for teaching and learning (Barrett, 2015). Yet the drive for increased standards and standardization as the curriculum, with a focus on testing as the culmination of teaching and learning, did not dissipate with the waning structures of NCLB in the mid-2000s. The next national initiative, called *A Race to the Top* (Obama, 2009), offered a \$4.3 billion dollar incentive for school districts to increase the rigor of study, provide tools for teachers to improve student achievement, and produce clearer data for teachers so they might create better assessments for their students (Obama, 2015). *A Race to the Top* led to the initial adoption of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS). CCSS are aligned to the College Board benchmarks for all Advanced Placement classes. The idea behind their inspiration was to increase rigorous standards for student learning, especially in reading and writing (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). In terms of teaching reading, CCSS allowed for a rigorous lexile at each grade level and also included teaching nonfiction texts in primarily fiction curricula.

Nevertheless, there has been some controversy surrounding the CCSS, with many states recently deciding against using those standards. In fact, in the state of Missouri, CCSS have been rejected with an eye toward developing more stringent state-based standards. Missouri had previously adopted the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS), which are basically the same benchmarks as CCSS's original goals (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). It is thus important to note that many of the states that have not adopted CCSS standards have used those national standards to write

their own benchmarks. There are currently four states that have implemented partial adaptations of CCSS and 42 states that have adopted the standards, or, like Missouri, have collapsed one or two strands to create their own standards while maintaining the integrity of CCSS and using those standards as a model (U.S. Academic Benchmarks Common Core Standards Initiative, 2016).

The current Missouri Learning Standards have followed suit with this pattern. They were recently adopted, and the vocabulary and grammar strands were embedded into other strands to create the MLS from CCSS (M. E. Carter, personal communication, August 15, 2015). These differences were mainly crafted to collapse a few of the learning strands to combine them, not to lessen their challenging goals for students. With the initial adoption of these standards for Missouri students, the MLS may also help student readers on the state reading test at the junior level, which is the American College Testing (ACT). ACT reading and English tests rely heavily on reading skills (Clough & Montgomery, 2015; M. E. Carter, personal communication, August 15, 2015). Since Missouri has adopted ACT as the state assessment for juniors, teachers have been asked to develop reading activities to help students improve their reading abilities not only for the test but for their own benefit, as literacy is an integral skill for the 21st century (M. E. Carter, personal communication, August 15, 2015).

This recent activity regarding standards and reform in the curriculum highlight very well how efforts to modify and coordinate the relationship between curriculum and teaching through standards and standardization are not based on neutral decisions. In fact, curriculum reform and standardization have been described as efforts to placate the public by politicians and methods of manipulating teaching and learning in cycles to mark the appearance of

making real curricular changes (Welner & Oakes, 2008). That is, curriculum reform efforts and changing teaching and assessments, and efforts to shape standardization across states, might be seen as connected to societal concerns beyond the realm of schooling (Apple, 2008) and to indicate areas of “national panic” (Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008).

From the Life Adjustment Curricula to the present reforms in education, it is possible to envision how each of these reform movements carry a thread throughout decades of research, practices, and understandings of how curriculum functions. I have indicated how the literature on curriculum shifts toward standards and standardization have shaped a relationship between curriculum and teaching that is dependent on standards and testing. Such a perspective is indicative of our current take on curriculum development as “a highly symbolic concept now” (Pinar, 2008, p. 493), since the curriculum is associated with learning standards that are not created by actual classroom teachers. Moreover, this vantage does not account for interactions between teachers and students as curricular engagement. This evolving viewpoint on the relationship between curriculum and teaching is essential to understand the shifting professional role of educators and the changes in their duties as keepers of standards and testing data, which might be very different from understanding educators as professionals, who are “curriculum planners” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) or seeing the “teacher as curriculum” (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015).

While an understanding of this evolving relationship between curriculum and teaching through the lens of standards and standardization is required as a means of understanding how the teacher participants interact in schools and their professional expectations, it is also important for providing a context for their experiential stories, as context is all-important in narrative research. The historical curriculum reform movements

that have been outlined reveal patterns that emphasize certain theories and practices contextualized by the culture from which they derived. These historical reform movements correlate to the growth and change in thinking from decade to decade or from generation to generation. Since the participants varied in age and in experiences, their stories regarding their experiences in teaching reading were also reflective of different historical curriculum reform movements that have occurred throughout their careers.

Personal Experiences of Curriculum and Teaching

While I have not experienced teaching according to all of the curriculum reform movements that I highlighted in the previous section of this chapter, I have had the opportunity to be a student during some of these movements, and I have experienced teaching in accordance with more recent curriculum movements. Most notably, during my tenure as a teacher, I have witnessed a vigorous concentration on increasing curriculum standards and on testing. There are multiple ways in which I am expected to be accountable to the students in this era of increased accountability and enhanced standardization.

As we move toward adopting newer, more rigorous standards for the curriculum, that are possibly modeled after CCSS, there is increased focus on my work as an English teacher with the students in the area of reading and writing instruction. I have become involved in helping my school to shift their focus toward English instruction throughout all subject matters, and I have previously been included in writing the state curriculum under CCSS. In my department, I have attended workshops for curriculum revision to meet the standards of CCSS in an interdisciplinary team including English, math, and social studies teachers, as well as special education teachers. The activities created during these summer workshops are shared district-wide for grades 9–12. This work, along with the curriculum units I

designed for the state, have inspired me to dig deeper into this particular reform movement. I am interested to understand how CCSS might impact the instructional experiences of English teachers, especially in reading instruction, which relates to my inquiry goals.

In addition, there are also added expectations to incorporate technology into today's lessons whenever an educator is able to do so. However, engaging with students in a one-size-fits-all fashion might sometimes prove to be challenging. From my experiences, technology works best when the students are asked to an inquiry-based activity. For example, in a recent class, I engaged with the students on an assignment that asked the students to brainstorm current television shows that reveal a message about socioeconomic status. We brainstormed a list of television shows from network shows today that revealed socioeconomic status, and then we started a list about features and qualities for the students to analyze regarding socioeconomic indicators for their respective television shows.

I had asked the principal to come into the classroom to evaluate this lesson this past fall. We made it through the brainstorming and a list of tenets to identify for analyzing socioeconomic status together, and then I had the students move into their groups. They moved from their whole-class discussion of about 28 students to their smaller, previously established writing groups of three or four students. The students were to get a Lenovo tablet to research television shows that were not from their generation to analyze for a presentation later in the week. Before the students even picked up the tablets, they were shouting out shows they had seen on *Nick at Night*, "We have *The Brady Bunch!*" "We have *The Addams Family!*" in a chorus of already-known shows from the 1960s and the 1970s. The principal and I exchanged a look of understanding that we both could see that the students did not

even research shows from different decades to learn about what the television shows indicated about socioeconomic status within that particular decade.

When the principal and I talked about the lesson and what worked and what did not, we both discussed eliminating the brainstorming part of the lesson and giving the students the tablets first to do research. Then I was to initiate a conversation about what they learned in their research before explaining the rest of the project. I will try the lesson again next year with these adjustments.

Dewey (1929) and Bobbitt (1918, 1924) underscored the value of a high level of engagement and making learning meaningful. While the lesson using technology to analyze socioeconomic status was not perfect, many of the students recalled that activity as one that was meaningful for them in their end-of-semester metacognitive letters to me about their growth as critical thinkers and as writers. Students remember activities like this one where they are asked to engage in inquiry-based learning queries by engaging in group work.

The goal of this lesson was to integrate technology into a college composition class by asking the students to brainstorm, research, and work in groups to present their analysis of a television show's socioeconomic themes from a decade that was not current. As a direct shift in curriculum to integrate technology into our classrooms, I considered it a challenge to implement it effectively and with purpose. Although the lesson needed to be tweaked, the students were authentically engaged in technology as a means of grasping material and conducting research. Such a task that makes use of technology integrated technology into the curricular goals rather than tacking on technology as a necessary and perhaps unrelated curriculum step. In this way, my experiential narrative regarding curriculum reform highlights how English and technology integration are perhaps central features of the current

era of curriculum reform, and they are associated with particular challenges and approaches to learning that might require shifts across disciplines. While my example showcased how technology might need to be woven seamlessly into a curriculum, as suggested with CCSS, teachers in other subject matters might need to overcome similar obstacles in contributing reading lessons to their classes in other subject areas.

As many states shift toward adopting new curriculum standards that might be modeled after CCSS as benchmarks for learning, and the state of Missouri has committed to the ACT as an end-of-course exam as the state assessment, writing and process writing may become the focus of many districts' objectives (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). Wilhelm, Dube and Baker (2003) discovered that the best models of teaching writing focus on a teacher-centered structure as well as a student-centered one in order to create the best understanding of writing. Although the model was not initiated recently, Flash (2011) explained the benefits of this duality in a writing class that is structured around peer response groups.

In my own practices, the use of the peer response group has been a helpful way to organize classes for small group discussion and for peer collaboration in many settings, as well as to read and to give and receive feedback on essays that are written for class. In these groups, students take turns reading their drafts to their peers, and the peers provide feedback on a sheet that has about 10 prompts to discuss the essay, including traits the writer has accomplished successfully and areas of improvement for the final copy. When I read the feedback from the peer response group and they offer the writer, "You need to place the reader in the moment more and tell less," or "You need to develop your conclusion more completely so that the reader is satisfied," or "You have great details in the beginning, but

you need to work on transitions in the body to move from one idea to the next,” I know that the peer response groups are succeeding.

In order to build camaraderie in these groups of three to four peers, I ask the students to create a writing group poster that has a literary name with a slogan. Each person’s name in the group has to be represented on the front of the poster for full credit. The result is a little astonishing, since these students create their group posters out of colored butcher paper from the library, markers, crayons, and tempera paint. Yet the ownership that happens in these collaborative groups simply amazes me each year. I always worry that high school students who are seniors in a top academic class might scoff at such an activity. The phenomenon that I have noticed over the years is that they always want to create the most creative, best posters year after year. This year, the group names varied from the “Hyperbolic Hobbits” with a slogan written in Elvish, to “The Quintessential Questers: We seek to eliminate all errors from drafts” to “The Acrid Antagonists” to which another class added “The Prosaic Protagonists.” The students’ group names and slogans were effective this year, and even on the last day for the seniors, I heard the students say, “Okay. Hobbits outside for our last group picture!”

The writing classroom does work when the model is student-centered so that the students feel safe and confident in sharing their work with others for feedback. The areas that I need to think about for improvement center on the idea of teacher-student conferencing about the draft, as well as more thorough training before starting the first peer response experience so the students are able to give more thoughtful feedback to their peers for draft two. In this way, the writing groups function as not only a learning activity in interpersonal relationships but this team mentality and structure may help the students in

their future work as undergrad students or even later in life in their respective professions. These writing groups align to MLS and CCSS because they are focused on revision and process writing (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). These peer response groups also lend themselves to serve as curriculum, much like the role of a teacher does.

In the study, I am interested in uncovering any similar experiential stories from the teacher participants that might indicate how they see the relationship between the curriculum and teaching and how they might teach in relation to the current perception of the curriculum as standards and benchmarks. These reflections here illustrate how my own practices might be shaped by such an understanding of the relationship between teaching and the curriculum, as positioned within the current curriculum reform inheritance of CCSS and the Missouri Learning Standards. The literature on curriculum theories and on curriculum reform movements reviewed above, alongside my own reflective commentary that is based on my own practices, provide a meaningful construct for gaining insight into the teacher participants' professional stories of teaching reading and for positioning those stories within the greater curriculum setting. Experiences of curriculum are therefore central to this study, and so a more detailed review of the literature outlining links between the curriculum and experience is discussed in the next section.

Curriculum, Teachers, and Experience

In order to fully understand the narratives of experience of the teacher participants, it is imperative to consider the relationship between curriculum and experience in connection with teachers. I discuss in this section the theories that position the curriculum within experience and literature on teachers in association with an experiential curriculum. In

particular, I examine literature that delineates the ways in which teachers serve as the primary curriculum workers. This theoretical concept was central for the investigation, as I hoped to shed light on the curriculum by examining the specific experiences of teachers.

In one of the earliest significant works on the curriculum, Bobbitt (1918) argued that the curriculum was comprised of general experiences from living in a certain community and that the teacher should set a guideline for learning experiences to occur. According to Bobbitt, the teacher was charged with uncovering the tasks from life that would be necessary for students to learn. He thus described the teacher as a “curriculum-discoverer” (p. 20).

Other curriculum theorists also acknowledged the central role of teachers in curriculum building. For example, Dewey (1938) asserted that teachers were to assess the needs and interests of students to shape the curriculum. In fact, he further argued that education is life. This intertwined relationship between life, experience, and education is crucial for supporting this investigative perspective on teachers’ experiences for shedding light on the curriculum in the area of English Language Arts in general, and on reading instruction in particular. Similarly, Tyler (1949/2004) asserted that the teacher’s role included assessing the needs of students to shape worthwhile learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments. This firmly positioned teachers in an active stance in the classroom, creating a curriculum that was based on interactions with students.

Additionally, Schwab (1969) demanded that the curriculum be shaped in accordance with the practical realities of teaching and learning. He further delineated the four pillars of the curriculum as the teacher, the learner, the subject matter, and the setting. Teachers were considered to be imperative for both shaping and understanding the curriculum. Moreover, a focus on the practical realities of classrooms included an acknowledgement that the specific

interactions and experiences of individual teachers with particular students or groups of students were essential for uncovering curriculum understanding from a grassroots level.

As discussed, during the 1980s there was a curriculum reform in U.S. schools that saw an increased focus on standards, which stood as a precursor to the current U.S. national trend toward standards and standardization in education. In contrast to the current curriculum reform movement, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) argued for envisioning the curriculum in tandem with experience and for the recognition of the idea of the teacher's role in planning the curriculum. This call renewed a sense of urgency for positioning the curriculum within classroom and school landscapes. It further acknowledged the need to recognize the agency of teachers as professionals and to envision the actual curriculum work that teachers accomplish. Jackson (1990) further enhanced this view by turning the lens onto what happens in the classroom as the curriculum. His theory is essential to gaining insight into the curriculum, with an understanding that teachers drive the curriculum that is lived out between them and their students.

Schlein and Schwarz (2015) additionally shared that the relationship between teachers and the curriculum has been seen historically as connected. They described the history of Quintilian, who was the first paid teacher in first-century Rome, explaining that "The teacher was the wise, able person from whom one could learn philosophy, one's trade, and much else. The teacher was and remains a model, the exemplar of the *curriculum in action*" (p. 6). The authors further argued for an understanding of "teachers as curriculum" (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015, p. 2). The role of teacher as curriculum examines the functionality of curriculum in the classroom and the how and the why of instruction.

Teachers have a certain rapport developed with a group of learners that only happens in a dynamic and personal way.

Moreover, Schlein and Schwarz (2015) said, “If teachers are seen as possessing knowledge, then they are the professionals responsible for professional decisions and actions” (p. 7). Thus teachers as curriculum incorporates a perspective on the increased professionalization of educators due to the critical positioning of teachers and their knowledge and experience to drive the curriculum. Teachers’ work when creating curriculum, delivering instruction, and interacting with their student audience generates a phenomenal experience that is larger than the classroom. Schlein and Schwarz (2015) argued that accepting the notion of teachers as the curriculum includes acknowledging that teachers bring their own knowledge of the discipline being taught, an understanding of how to teach effectively, and an understanding of their audience as well as “other contextual features of local curricular situations and interactions. They also bring their desires to contribute to communities” (p. 3). This perspective intends to overturn recent associations between teachers, curriculum, and experience in this era of curriculum as enhanced standards, in alignment with Apple’s (1986) assertions that increased curriculum standards serve to weaken teachers’ ability to be curriculum professionals.

Handler (2010) further discussed the notion that universities need to better prepare future teachers to be curriculum leaders in order to be most effective in the classroom. She found that Tyler’s (1949/2004) theory to center the curriculum on the classroom teacher was something for consideration in today’s educational context. Importantly, Craig and Ross (2008) described the teacher as curriculum-maker in terms of a blending of theory and

practice. They explained that this combination of theory and the knowledge teachers have personally and intellectually serve to create the curriculum.

However, in the current era of increased accountability, and with the U.S. curriculum reform underway to increase standards, curriculum decisions might be planned in places other than classrooms by curriculum workers who are not necessarily classroom teachers. In fact, Schlein (2013) explained, “Increasing curriculum standards and standardization, such as the structures placed upon curriculum with No Child Left Behind and the Common Core State Standards Initiative, might be cultivating a new relationship between theory and practice” (Schlein, 2013, p. 17). Schlein (2013) argued that some teachers might not feel that they are provided with the needed tools or the professional freedom to see themselves as the curriculum or as curriculum-makers. Teachers might feel disempowered by the politicians, stakeholders, and administrators who may feel as though they are in a position of power over teachers. For this reason, Schlein (2013) acknowledged that teachers might not tend to see themselves as empowered to be the curriculum nor to see themselves as the curriculum-makers, but as curriculum-dispensers.

This possible shifting in relationship between curriculum, experience, and teachers is important, because teachers who see themselves as the curriculum might be increasingly advantageous in today’s classrooms. Most states utilize the ACT as a state assessment, which is a test that includes reading, English, science, and math to assess a student’s skills and knowledge. Interdisciplinary approaches to learning have become a point of discussion, as well as reading across the disciplines. It is how teachers understand themselves in relation to the curriculum that these reforms are implemented in the classroom.

Thus, a consideration of the curriculum that is made daily in classrooms by teachers, by students, by school administrators, and by parents or other community members (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015) is an integral part of this study. Teachers today are continually scrutinized for their practices and evaluated based on how their students score on norm-referenced tests, Teachers might become pigeonholed as ineffectual based on several of these criteria, when in fact, teachers might be able to enhance classroom interactions by being counted as curriculum-makers. Schlein and Schwarz (2015) explained this relationship best when they said, “the teacher is a key part of not just how but what is taught, often even indivisible from the school curriculum” (p. 2).

In addition, in the area of literacy curriculum and instruction, Gallagher (2009) theorized that the school system kills a student’s love of reading within its bureaucratic walls. He said, “schools develop test takers not readers” (p. 30). Gallagher (2009) further posited that the institution of education is the barrier for students to advance as readers. With this possible mindset, teachers might not be compelled to see themselves as the curriculum, nor might they feel like curriculum-makers. Overall, the points discussed here that highlight an understanding of the role of the teacher not only as the curriculum, but as curriculum-makers, is essential to this investigation into the experiences of teachers with reading and writing instruction. Although the goal of the study was to understand the experiences of teachers in teaching reading, I also sought to gain insight into the way that the teacher participants positioned themselves with respect to making curriculum decisions and taking curriculum actions. This was crucial in terms of highlighting how teachers interact with students when teaching reading. This focus also enabled me to gain insight into how

standards and the possible standardization of the curriculum might impact teachers in their work with students regarding the instruction of reading and writing.

Personal Experiences of the Relationship between the Teacher, Experience, and the Curriculum

When considering the role of the teacher as curriculum, there are multi-faceted connections to life in the classroom. In this section, I position myself as a narrative researcher in the study. In particular, I highlight my own experiential interaction with theories regarding the relationship between the teacher, experience, and the curriculum. In this way, I add a new dimension to this sense-making of the theories guiding this research. The following narrative displays how I have lived out a relationship as a teacher with the curriculum. It further outlines potential lenses I might have in drawing together interpretive analyses from among this experiential and narrative data.

Primarily, in this school district, each teacher has an approved list for novels and plays to choose from when deciding what to teach. From my experience, gone are the days where every teacher at the 10th grade level is required to teach a certain text. I have thought a lot about the reasons I have for teaching the texts and novels from the list for each grade level. When I make these decisions throughout the year about how a particular novel or play could best help the students on AP exams, or to become college ready for a humanities course, it is a daunting task that I do not take lightly.

In the AP Literature and Composition course, I teach Joseph Conrad's (1899) novella, *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad (1899) explored the darkness of the human heart in the farthest reaches of the Congo in this story-within-a-story that is both psychological and historical. Conrad's (1899) protagonist, Marlow, goes on a physical journey into the Congo

to find a corrupt imperialist who has become the most successful ivory tradesman at the risk of unscrupulous means and violent treatment of the natives. This novella is dense, and it is a difficult text for the students. In fact, many teachers who teach AP Literature would probably choose not to teach the novella, because the students complain that it is difficult and dry. However, the novella has appeared on Question three, the open-ended question on the state assessment, more than 15 times.

This past year, the students took a poll on the board one day when I had a substitute teacher. The poll question was, “How many people *really* read *Heart of Darkness*?” The answers were varied and interesting. I had three classes of AP Literature. One class had nine students in it. All of those students had read the whole novella. Another class had 25 students, and only 14 students had read the entire novella. In my last class, there were 12 students, and all but one had read it in its entirety. While I was disheartened to know about their poll, the results evoked an interesting observation. I was the same teacher in all classes in my role as the curriculum; however, the smaller classes demonstrated a stronger ownership of a difficult novella. I asked the students to help me analyze the results of their data collection.

“What do you notice about the poll regarding the novella?” I asked.

A hand rose.

“Yes?”

“Well, in our class we know we can’t hide behind our peers like in the larger hour. You actually ask each of us discussion questions each day, so there’s an accountability in our class because it’s small.”

They further analyzed the results by telling me they wanted to know more about what happened to Marlow in the novella and what he learned along the way. There is a clever structure to Conrad's (1899) novella in that there's an unnamed narrator and there's Marlow narrating the story-within-the-story. The students were motivated by an after-school study of the film *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979). It is set in the context of the Vietnam War, but it serves as an allegorical and psychological journey into the corruption of the human heart, just like Conrad's (1899) novella. The film is loosely based on the novel, and the students wanted to see how this parallel would manifest.

Although there are many reasons why certain students tackled the difficult text and certain others did not have the reading endurance they needed nor the interest in reading this challenging text, this experience gave me pause regarding role as the curriculum each day in each of the classes. In May, the students took the AP Literature exam, and they came back to tell me all about the test. Question three asked the students to think of a work where cruelty was a major part of the theme and what the work said about human cruelty. *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1899) was listed, and several of those who had read the whole work said they used the text to respond to the question with ease. There were other, more accessible texts listed on the approved curriculum, such as Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). After the novella was listed and is a seminal work taught in all of literature, I am assured to make the same decision in teaching it again. This narrative exhibits how one important idea related to the teacher as curriculum is that it is up to the teacher to choose the best texts for her particular group of students.

However, in my teacher as curriculum role, I also believe that it is my responsibility to think of different activities to help the students who struggle with their reading endurance

throughout the study of Conrad's (1899) novella. This experience related above highlighted the dynamic nature of curriculum. It, too, fluctuates based on the needs of the teacher, the students, the administration, and even the politicians who create initiatives and objectives at the state and the national levels. Teachers might then be able to come equipped with the knowledge, the experience, and the personal relationships established in a classroom as a possible means of becoming truly accountable to students.

Storying and Narratives

In the preceding story regarding my role as curriculum-maker in choosing to teach Conrad's (1899) novella, the students and I shared an experience that was later formed into a narrative, a story with a purpose conveyed about theories in curriculum standards and reform. Stories and an inquiry into such stories exemplifies a teacher's experiences when interacting with the curriculum and the students, which emphasizes the role of the teacher as the curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Thorp and Shacklock (2005) argued that these stories provide structure for teachers to understand their interactions with students in the classroom at a deeper level. They explained that "narrative inquiry is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience" (Thorp & Shacklock, 2005, p. 156).

In this way, a life history is told by the person who lived it, which can personify a time period, a sociological context, as well as a political commentary and a personal experience that symbolizes a greater message about the world. In storying experiences, the stories emerge as layers of context to help explain the complexities of life that it is "socially constructed" (Thorp & Shacklock, 2005, p. 156) and not random in its occurrences. Lives take on meaning when the stories are told, retold, and interpreted to develop a sense of self.

The stories help the listeners to understand from a larger perspective beyond the personal lens of the original story (Richardson, 1997). When stories are told, a person's voice develops into a pedagogy that is unique only to that person's way of using words and relating a personal experience that can emerge for greater purpose (Thorp & Shacklock, 2005).

This voice emerges as a dialogic between the storyteller who experienced the story firsthand and those who engage with the narrative. Rosenblatt (1988) believed that there is a transaction that takes place between the reader and the text. She argued that when the recipient of a story [reader or listener] is engaging in a social context, they will long remember the story and will make personal connections to its ideology. Therefore, the transaction between the storytelling and the engagement of the audience will create a deeper connection to the world (Rosenblatt, 1988). Narrative experiences are multi-modal in that they help to determine a place in the world not only for the storyteller but for the audience too (Davies, 1999).

Davies (1999) explained in her narrative about her experiences with teaching that questions arose after her school building changed the rules so that any personalized decorations in the classroom were eliminated. She asked, "And what about the children who come to our classrooms? Do they want to have a sense of place? We tell ourselves they do" (Davies, 1999, p. 72). In our classrooms many educators try to develop a sense of place and to help their students develop a sense of self through curriculum interactions. Narratives accomplish those goals by unleashing a person's voice to share with others through a transaction of words and images into a story. Garrigues (2003) described her view of the art of storytelling: "Tell a good story and all eyes are on you, all faces expectant, all voices

hushed” (p. 21). Stories can therefore be an powerful way to learn and to better understand the world.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further argued that narratives develop relationships between the storyteller and the ideology of the experience. They discussed that in their own research “we found ourselves continually trying to explain ourselves” (p. 73). The discourse involved in stories is that the primary source may need to understand self before retelling an experience to another person. In this way, a critical part of the narratives is the process in which a person chooses to tell their own experiences in storytelling. The word choices, imagery, use of figurative language, and the storyteller’s ability to place the listener or reader in the moment enhance the quality and memorability of a story. In doing so, the effects of storytelling are long-lasting and “seem to offer intrinsic benefits in each of the four main steps of processing information: motivation and interest, allocating cognitive resources, elaboration, and transfer into long-term memory” (Dahlstrom, 2014, p. 2). Dahlstrom (2014) also argued that the nature of narratives allows the storyteller the experience of understanding self to a greater depth.

These narratives become a way for understanding experiences contextualized by the microcosmic lens of the classroom to lend itself to a macrocosmic statement about the state of education at the local level, then at the state level, to the national level (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This story-structure impacts the study because the teacher-participants shared their experiences in teaching reading, and to understand these experiences, narratives in the form of interpretive research texts were formed to help me understand this research question based on their stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that “life...is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon

and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (p. 17). In this way, stories help to clarify experiences and assist in making sense out of the world. When conducting narrative inquiry, often the story of the researcher becomes an intertwined element of the research itself. In the study, the participants, teachers who are the curriculum, were a part of the stories, too. McNiff (2007) discussed that telling stories and “getting them listened to are...complex processes that involve several considerations” (p. 308). Her viewpoint is accurate in that stories are complex, especially our own stories, because we have to be cognizant of our own truths, biases, and experiences that might change the way we retell a story.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the three interwoven strands of the theoretical framework of this investigation. I examined the literature pertaining to the relationship between the curriculum and teaching, with a particular focus on standards, standardization, and the curriculum. I then considered theories that outlined the curriculum in connection to experience. I indicated how the literature underscores linkages between shaping the curriculum and life experiences while indicating that teachers’ experiences are crucial for curriculum development and interaction. I examined how such theories underscore teachers as primary curriculum-workers, such as with the notion of the teacher as a curriculum-maker. The role of teachers as curriculum-makers as well as the idea of teachers as curriculum-workers helps to support this research focus on the role of the teacher in the classroom when teaching reading to discover data in response to the research question. The lives of teachers, their lived interactions and curricular experiences proved to be an important component of the investigation.

Another significant element of this investigation is about the art of storytelling and how narratives shape our understanding of experience. I thus discussed literature dealing with narratives and storying. This study deals with teachers' experiences as storied and as understood through narrative inquiry. Thus, attention to the purpose, scope, and meaning of telling stories and understanding stories was a necessary component of this investigation. The relationship between a person's experience and how they narrate this experience is a complex process that allows the listener to gain a deeper understanding about the experience itself through an authentic voice. These stories facilitate the discovery of truths told through the lens of the primary source, namely, the teacher-participants. It is through their stories and experiences that I uncovered truths about their experiences, beliefs, and views regarding teaching reading in the secondary school English class.

These various theories were foundational to this research question and to investigating the research area of interest. They supported the focus on teachers for gaining sense about reading instruction. These theories further structured the research orientation to curriculum reform and standardization through the lens of particular classrooms and teachers as a means of understanding more broadly about teaching and learning. As well, the theories highlighted here underscored the need to attend to stories of experience as central to understanding experience, and thus, to understanding elements of the curriculum.

In the next chapter, I review literature that is relevant to this study. I highlight research on literacy instruction and literature on reading strategies. I also concentrate on a discussion of teachers' self-perception in connection with their work with students.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review of literature is to highlight studies about reading instruction in English classes. I consider studies on current practices on literacy instruction and current strategies for teaching reading in this era of accountability. I additionally highlight research on curriculum reforms in relation to reading instruction. I then discuss literature related to teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy in reading instruction. The literature in these connected areas of research provide a contextualization for my own inquiry and offer insight into my own research directions and investigative findings.

Current Practices in Literacy Instruction

In this study, I was concerned with researching the experiences of teachers with reading instruction. Although the focus of the study was on reading instruction, it is relevant to define the term literacy as well to distinguish between literacy and reading instruction to develop literate students. The definition utilized here regarding literacy is influenced by the work of Cronin (2014). He defined literacy as the “ability to decode text and produce text to make meaning” (Cronin, 2014, p. 46). Cronin (2014) further noted that literacy involves a person’s way of understanding the text that they have read, as well as the written response to the text. It provides structure and patterns that allow literature to endure, and it is the “foundation for all word communication” (Cronin, 2014, p. 46). Literacy involves a person’s interactions with the text and how they perceive its meaning. This definition of literacy does emerge as related to reading instruction, because it is the foundation for the process that students work through as they interact with text.

Without literacy skills, English teachers would not be able to teach literature and its complexities. Cronin (2014) explained that literature “thrives on ambiguity and nuance” so that we can interpret a work based on our understanding, perceptions, and experiences. Literacy skills help students understand the complexities of these ambiguities and to analyze literature for deeper levels of understanding during and after they have read a text. In this way, skills of literacy are involved in the process of reading and reading instruction.

Literacy and CCSS

Cronin (2014) believed that the adoption of CCSS required all teachers to become teachers of literacy. She explained that “finally, the standard gods have realized that *every* teacher is, to some degree, responsible for literacy instruction” (p. 46). CCSS is structured in an interdisciplinary way so that students are challenged to read and comprehend in science, in math, in English, and in social studies. While this study is focused on reading instruction in secondary English classrooms, CCSS is relevant because the state of Missouri adopted the Missouri Learning Standards, which is a revised version of CCSS (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016).

With these adoptions of CCSS goals, many states have changed their modes of instruction to meet the new standards. For example, Butti (2015) described a plan he implemented in New York in his role as English Department Chair at a moderately sized high school. The discussion started with his question to high school English teachers about their level of understanding and their comfort level with teaching literacy. Butti (2015) explained, “many of the teachers looked at me as though I had sprouted three heads” (p. 14) when he posed this notion to the group of teachers. They identified as teachers of literature but not as teachers of reading. In this way, teachers who teach reading often do not see the

connection between these acts: Teaching literature is connected to teaching reading which, in turn, builds literacy skills among the students. This relationship forms the basis of teaching reading in English secondary classrooms today.

Butti's (2015) idea was to hire literacy coaches to help the teachers to team-teach and learn to be teachers of literacy when teaching literature. His pairing was successful, as the teachers gained confidence as well as instructional skills in the classroom when teaching reading. He advocated for a truly interdisciplinary model for reading instruction in alignment with CCSS. He also explained that the structure for current practice needs to change from the teacher as the person who imparts knowledge to the teacher as the "facilitator of an inquiry-based model of instruction" (2015, p. 16). This model of instruction is a current practice in teaching reading.

Butti (2015) discussed that reading practices should be driven by the passions of the students and their need to collaborate with their peers toward a common goal. Teachers assert problems and pose essential questions to tap into these passions and interests. Their approach to teaching reading skills in today's classroom requires students to use myriad texts including informational, literary, and graphic texts. Some of these texts are provided by the teacher, but he argued that some texts should be self-selected by students. In this way, Butti (2015) asserted that teachers become facilitators of learning to inspire their students to become life-long learners, not retainers of facts. This shift in current practices is aligned with CCSS, and it represents a more engaging approach to teaching reading. Sternberg (2008) found that we might consider preparing our students to be thinkers ready to interact with any text to navigate the demands of the 21st century. The approach described by Butti (2015) is a model for the way that many English teachers implement reading instruction. For

example, if a teacher teaches a text like Orwell's (1945) *Animal Farm*, they would need to provide an historical overview of Russian history as well as to make critical connections to today's political landscape in order for the students to interpret and analyze the text effectively. In this way, reading instruction is directly aligned to interdisciplinary structures.

While teachers adjust to the idea of being learning facilitators instead of "gate-keepers" of knowledge, there are support systems in school buildings to help this shift to occur. One of those ways to support teachers is to implement an instructional coach or a literacy coach. With the shift to CCSS, states who have adopted the standards advocate for coaches to help teachers in their role as facilitator for reading activities for their students (*Common Core State Standards Initiatives*, 2016). In past generations, teachers have instructed reading by relying on comprehension skills and basic understandings of texts without the frame of ambiguity for interpretation and analysis. One way to assess accountability for this method of instruction is to implement worksheets or study guides.

Afflerbach (2011) found that protocols and verbal reports are necessary for cognition and responsiveness during the reading process. Yet the literature indicates that all teachers do not necessarily know how to implement them proficiently so that students engage in analytical thinking. For example, Gallagher (2009) stated that many teachers might overstep in approaches to reading instruction. It is a fine line in a classroom where a teacher should allow a student to be independent in their reading and reading responses but maintain guidance for the student for critical thinking purposes (Gallagher, 2009).

In order for this process to take place, teachers need to think of themselves as facilitators to interact with students as they learn to deconstruct text for deeper levels of meaning. Bryant, Ugel, Thompson, and Hamff (1999) concluded that "reading

comprehension refers to the act of thinking and constructing meaning before, during and after reading by integrating information from the author with the reader's background knowledge" (p. 296). Students might start with schematic approaches to reading and to make applications to the text not only from their personal experiences but to other texts and to their world. When teachers tap into these modes of thinking, reading comprehension may be greater and the reading experience more effective. In today's classrooms, teachers should teach analytical skills, critical thinking skills, and ways for students to "chunk" (Gallagher, 2009) or to break down a text for deeper levels of meaning. For best practices in teaching reading today, teachers function as facilitators of learning to help students to read, to understand, and to analyze to build skills in literacy (Robb, 2008).

Such a shift might also fit the goals of CCSS and the ACT, as states use it for testing to improve students' reading acuity and abilities not only to comprehend the text they are reading but also to ascertain inferences, sub-textual themes and their own interpretations of the text. To work with the teachers to reach these goals, Butti (2015) advocated for a literacy coach and interdisciplinary teams of teachers to co-teach English with other subjects, such as social studies. Klingenberger (D. Klingenberger, personal communication, January 13, 2016) additionally argued for a pairing of Advanced Placement (AP) Language classes with AP U.S. History classes. If these personnel changes cannot be implemented, Cronin (2015) suggested that all educators can be teachers of reading with the proper professional development. She noted that by implementing questioning, note-taking strategies, graphic organizers, and asking students to "develop their own templates for unpacking the variety of ways writers... shuffle around ideas" (p. 50), they might develop into capable readers. In other words, Cronin argued that best practices for reading instruction involves teachers

working as facilitators of learners, with a focus on students becoming independent learners who understand how to deconstruct text in modes that best fit their learning needs.

Current Best Practices in Literacy Instruction

Research into best practices in literacy highlights that students need to interact individually with text and break it down with strategies that best fit the way they learn. Consequently, it is suggested that teachers might need to discern the cultural aspect of literacy to help facilitate the learning process. For example, Kiili, Coiro, & Mäkinén (2013) stated that current practices in today's classrooms are based on "a set of practices in which cognitive, social, and cultural aspects of literacy are tightly nested" (p. 224). This assertion reminds educators that there are values and beliefs at stake in classrooms today regarding reading instruction. Contexts might create the framework of current practices for reading instruction and offer students a foundation for thinking critically. They also might provide students with a lens for personal interaction with concepts that they are learning. This lens helps students connect to texts through personal experiences and relationships which, in turn, enhances their cognitive processes (Gallagher, 2009).

Newkirk (2012) further considered that English teachers in today's classrooms might account for the modes of text that they implement to best help their students prepare for college and future professions. This strategy emphasizes skills over content, so teachers may meet these goals with different texts to teach certain thinking skills. Furthermore, Kiili, and associates (2013) explained that there are many diverse types of literacies; however, one of the most significant forms of texts for students to understand is the argumentative text, stating, "argumentative literacies are one of the most essential skill sets that students need to succeed in college" (p. 225). The rationale supporting Kiili, Coiro, and Mäkinén's (2013)

notion is that students should be able to consider alternative perspectives to an arguable topic to broaden and deepen their understanding about the world. They further noted that digital literacies, collaborative literacies, and disciplinary literacies should be included in the forms of literacy focused on in classrooms. They also asserted the need for integrating these literacies to build knowledge and engaged citizenship among students. Steinberg (2008) noted that in learning these multi-modal literacies, reading skills are required for students to discern the functionality of these tools in society. Thus, the more keenly the students understand and navigate these texts, the better readers they become.

Moreover, Newkirk (2012) expressed that in a world with these multi-modal literacies, the importance of “slow reading” is emphasized so that students think, interact, and analyze what they are reading while they read (p. 197). This process is integral to the machinations of the actual process of interaction with text, as students learn to think about what they are reading, how the author implements syntax, and what the meaning of the message is on a macrocosmic scale, as well as what the text means to the student personally based on their life experiences (Sternberg, 2008). In developing these reading instruction practices from the vantage of multiple literacies. Carneiro and Gordon (2013) explained that educators might also help students to become discerning citizens, stating, “literacy is not just a crucial skill for the individual, but is a vital component of economic prosperity and social well-being” (p. 476).

Contemporary Strategies in Teaching Reading

In this investigation, I used Blanton’s (2002) definition of reading, which stated that it involves phonemic awareness, syntactical awareness, decoding skills, comprehension, and contextualization awareness. Reading is a critical process in a person’s education (Ediger,

2004). Ediger (2004) claimed that there needs to be a starting point in reading for each student, where the student is developing at their best rate and in a sequential sense of progression. In this section, I explain how contemporary strategies in teaching reading relate to literacy skills that develop as a result of the reading strategies implemented and the importance of these methods in today's secondary English classrooms. This section connects to this research because it provides a scholarly foundation for strategies currently suggested for today's secondary English classroom teachers.

Contemporary strategies in teaching reading are generally considered to be solely focused on strategies that are known to improve students' reading development (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). Roskos and Neuman (2014) found that strategies in teaching reading involve effective pacing, classroom organization, and implementation with deliberate practice. They also noted that one component of best practices in teaching reading is explicit instruction in vocabulary development: "teaching words in meaningful semantic clusters enhances children's reading development" (p. 508). They additionally highlighted that when students gain knowledge through vocabulary comprehension, their understanding of syntax, sentence structure, and comprehension develops. They found that educators might share the viewpoint that "I don't care what the child reads, as long as he or she reads" (Roskos & Neuman, 2014, p. 508). However, they argued that in today's classrooms, it is important to value text selection. What students are reading really is a significant part of their reading development by today's standards.

Recommended Reading Strategies

While each curriculum reform movement had a new focus, recent efforts have further concentrated on enhancing the English Language Arts instruction and increasing

literacy instruction across students' educational experiences. In this inquiry, I considered the experiences of English teachers with reading instruction. As such, it was especially important to specifically examine major trends in reading instruction that have influenced curriculum reform and standardization in this area. Therefore, I review here some of the major perspectives shaping reading instruction, and thus, the curriculum for English Language Arts.

During the formative years, there have been different philosophies about how to approach teaching reading at the elementary levels. The two theories are oppositional in their instructional pedagogies: whole language promotes a language rich environment for students to learn to understand language and word meaning as a whole, which rejects the notion of phonics (Reyhner, 2008). The other viewpoint about how best to teach language to young students involves phonics, where students are taught how to sound out words to learn language (Reyhner, 2008). Phonics was first taught in the eighteenth century when rote memorization was used for teaching practices (Reyhner, 2008).

Also, Newkirk (2012) argued that there is a place for memorization when considering reading instruction in today's schools. He understood that we need "information to be internalized" in order for it to be a part of our long-term memory if it is to be useful (Newkirk, 2012, p. 75). Arguably, Newkirk (2012) tapped into the theories of memorization when learning to read by sounding out and memorizing phonics of words. To prove his point about the importance of memorization when learning to read, Newkirk (2012) cited his mother, who, as she approached the age of 100, could recall poems from her primary schooling and details about growing up on the farm as a little girl.

The opposite view about how to teach reading is steeped in a whole language approach, where teachers create a language-rich environment in their classrooms to teach students how to read by understanding a whole word and its meaning rather than sounding out the word in phonics. Whole language can be considered a bit of a controversial approach to teaching reading, because it is based on a Constructivist teaching approach. In this approach, teachers are expected to create a language-saturated environment to combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Reyhner, 2008). Whole language teachers focus on the meaning of texts over the sounds of letters and phonics instruction, which is just one part of the whole language classroom.

Whole language allows for a top-down approach, where the reader constructs a personal meaning for a text using their schema to interpret the meaning of what they are reading. Some view whole language as problematic because there is typically a lack of structure in the scope and sequence, lessons and activities, and extensive graded literature found in basal readers. Whole language places an importance on teachers to develop their own curriculum and to meet the students with the backgrounds they express initially (Reyhner, 2008). Since there are clear differences between these approaches to teaching reading at young grades, both phonics and whole language have been emphasized throughout the decades, depending on the cultural emphasis of the time.

These variations in approaches to teaching reading are questioned constantly and are set up for potential criticism from legislators, educators, and researchers to discern which methods are the most effective to help NAEP scores improve in reading (National Assessment Education Progress, 2016). Significantly, Allington (2002) questioned a “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching reading and claimed that a prefabricated reading series for

teachers is not the solution to the issue at hand about the best approaches in the classroom. There are a diverse collection of viewpoints regarding which approach is best for teaching reading to young students just learning to read. It is important to consider such perspectives on teaching reading as I explore in this study how they might affect the experiences of teachers with reading instruction.

Furthermore, Robertson, Dougherty, Ford-Connors and Paratore (2014) argued that in more recent years it is believed that teachers need to consider new approaches for teaching reading to meet the needs of all learners. When selecting text for students, Robertson and associates (2014) explained that teachers should focus on three key elements: “motivation and engagement, instructional intensity, and cognitive challenge” (p. 549). They related how many factors impact and influence a student’s progression as a reader. One of those factors is the teacher’s perceptions and understanding of the level of complexity that the students can handle. Teachers should believe that they can help a student to deconstruct or to “mediate complex text so that it is *not* too difficult for... students to read” (Robertson et al., 2014, p. 551). Robertson et al. (2014) further outlined specific strategies to help facilitate this process.

Teachers using these reading strategies are conveying to their students a skill set that will enable them to read complex texts in college and in their adult lives (Robertson et al., 2014). For example, teaching students to “preview and establish their purpose for reading...to visualize, infer and connect with the text...deepens their understanding of the concepts presented” (Robertson et al., 2014, p. 555). This will provide them with the skills to advance their reading acuity. These strategies help to define an *active reader*. An active reader interacts with the text by clarifying meaning, summarizing, visualizing, connecting,

inferring or predicting by focusing on important information and by decoding vocabulary (Robertson et al., 2014). The authors noted that with these reading strategies integrated into instructional methodology, students should be able to understand and analyze complex text.

Fisher and Frey (2014) claimed that it is beneficial for students to interact with text complexity that is challenging for them. Morgan, Wilcox, and Eldredge (2000) further explained that students learn more when they are taught with texts that are above their instructional levels. Another strategy that helps students to comprehend and analyze difficult text is called *close reading*. Close reading is an analytical reading approach to encourage careful reading where the reader discerns not only the details of the text and how the work is crafted, but also to “extract meaning, build knowledge, draw conclusions, and formulate arguments that are supported by textual evidence” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 349). According to Fisher and Frey (2014), the more teachers emulate instructional models that are based on deconstructing the text for various traits, the better their students will be able to read and to interact with complex texts.

These instructional practices rely on specific strategies for reading in order to build knowledge. This process is described by Fisher and Frey (2014) as scaffolding “through the use of repeated readings, text-dependent questions, annotation, and extended discussion” (Fisher & Frey, 2012, p.180). Fisher and Frey (2014) stated that using this model frequently will enable students to become independent learners who possess the skills that they will need to navigate any text that they encounter. They related, “the teacher will serve as a primary scaffold, assisting students up the staircase of informational text complexity” (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 351).

Downs (2010) postulated that teachers should teach rhetorical reading when teaching reading so that students' academic goals such as becoming independent readers will be met.

Downs (2010) suggested that rhetorical reading is

“constructing a rhetorical frame which includes authors, readers, motives, relationships, and contexts” by rhetorically “mov[ing] beyond an autonomous” text and try[ing] to account for a number of situational or rhetorical elements — author, authorial intent, reader identity, and historical, cultural, and situational context — to “frame” or support the discourse. (p. 41)

In implementing this instructional model when teaching reading, teachers might be helping students to understand texts more deeply.

Downs' (2010) method focuses on contextualizing reading instruction, which is an essential instructional approach for effective practices in the classroom. He argued that teachers teach students what scholarly texts are and what to look for when reading scholarly texts. Rhetorical reading asks students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from texts read. Therefore, this practice might then help students to move from the lower levels of engagement to the challenging and rigorous ones needed to navigate a complex text.

At the same time, Gallagher (2009) asserted that schools do not allow students to have authentic reading experiences, but instead “students are so busy covering a vast and wide curriculum that little if any, deeper thinking is occurring” (p. 14). Sternberg (2008) concurred that it does not do students any service to teach reading in outdated modes by teaching isolated facts. Instead, Gallagher (2009) encouraged the curriculum to include time to read during the school day and time for the students to process their personal connections, their understanding of the text, and their abilities to analyze for sub-textual elements.

Gallagher (2009) deduced that students who read daily and write in response to their readings will learn to meet texts of any level of difficulty with confidence. He further argued

that reluctant readers today suffer from “word poverty” (2009, p. 32) because they do not get exposed to reading at a young age. Gallagher (2009) asserted that the political structure of schools does not incorporate time for reading, thinking, and writing during the school day, and so teachers need to integrate a reading and writing curriculum across the disciplines.

Reading Instruction Strategies and CCSS

CCSS guidelines and ACT practices suggest that informational texts, as well as fictional works, should be a part of a person’s development as readers in high school (Clough & Montgomery, 2015). In fact, the CCSS calls for the reading of complex texts at every grade level (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). The standards include an expectation that students who struggle as readers will be given the needed support to enable them to “read at grade-appropriate level of complexity” (National Governors Association, 2010, p. 9). In times past, there was a focus on teaching high-interest articles to accompany a study; however, the complexity of texts is currently more highly valued (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016).

Robb (2013) asserted that teachers today should focus on differentiation, which she defined as “a method of teaching that asks teachers to know their students so well that they can respond to individual needs and provide tasks and learning experiences that move each student forward” (p. 14). This practice can be highly effective, because it meets the needs of diverse levels of learners to meet the current goals of the CCSS. She advocated for teachers to focus on differentiation that is based on five best practices to meet the goals of CCSS and to help ensure that students develop their reading skills to the maximum level. Robb (2013) described these five instructional practices to include using anchor texts to teach reading, using formative assessments to inform teaching decisions, amplifying writing about reading,

recognizing that independent reading is the big accelerator, and acquiring and selecting books for instructional reading. Robb (2013) called for “tiered” instruction that focuses on students’ levels of reading. She stated that “this means that the books students read and the assignments they complete match their learning needs and levels of expertise” (p. 15).

It is also pertinent to consider the role of the teacher in relation to the reading curriculum. Significantly, Schlein and Schwarz (2015) argued for a conceptualization of the “teacher as curriculum.” It is the teacher’s decision in their approaches to instruction in reading to meet students at their reading level and then to help them to grow their skill-set so that they can be independent readers of all genres of text. With the CCSS, students will need to understand how to deconstruct complex text not only for understanding, but for deeper levels of meaning. In order to accomplish this level of thinking, teachers can scaffold instruction so that students are able to build knowledge, decode vocabulary, and analyze for syntactical significance of any work.

In essence, both literacy instruction and reading instruction are vital components of learning for students in today’s classrooms, but these aspects of education are microcosmic parts to a macrocosmic whole. That whole relates to some of the overarching themes of reform in reading education. It is critical to understand what methods the teachers are implementing in their classrooms, but it is equally impactful to fathom the larger picture of curriculum reform in the area of reading.

Curriculum Reform and Reading

Often teachers perceive that their daily instruction and work with students does not fit with educational policymaking (Shanahan, 2014). When teachers hear about the proverbial instructional benchmarks or changes “new instructional standards,” these shifts

seem improbable to them (Shanahan, 2014, p. 10). This might be due to the fact that policymakers are the ones who impact the changes that they hope to see teachers implement in classrooms (Shanahan, 2014). History indicates that educational policymaking has been left up to the state and local level with little federal involvement. However, over the past 50 years, educational policy has taken more of a “national slant” (Shanahan, 2014, p. 7). This idea implies that teachers have conversations about what they perceive to be the shifts in practice, but they are often not informed directly by the policymakers. Instead, this “national slant” (Shanahan, 2014, p. 7) becomes the reforms that are discussed in teachers’ lounges, but sometimes the empirical data is not researched by practitioners. This evolution of information becomes muddled with incongruities and misinformation rather than well-researched theory and then practice. There are, however, valid reforms initiated that teachers are educated about and in turn, this research can shape methods in the classroom to meet the needs of the students.

As well, when policymakers create educational policies, they may have one philosophical or ideology in mind, but the world of educational practice might include a different set of challenges. Coburn, Hill and Spillane (2016) described this grinding of political gears as “power dynamics” (p. 245). They explained that these dynamics argue that “accountability policy interacts with institutionalized power relations in ways that maintain structure of inequality in schools” (p. 245). Coburn, Hill, and Spillane (2016) expressed concern for the power struggles within the system that might undermine instructional progress when teachers become compliant without questioning systemic changes. Also, Westbury (2008) claimed that curriculum reforms actually intend to appease the concerns of

taxpayers and steer education around such concerns rather than to directly impact teaching and learning.

CCSS and Curriculum Reform in Reading

In recent years, the United States has focused discussion on education around new instructional benchmarks called the Common Core State Standards. Some states have adopted similar standards, or they have used CCSS as a basis for newly adopted standards. This is the case for Missouri's adoption of the Missouri Learning Standards, which are very similar to CCSS (M. E. Carter, personal communication, August 15, 2015).

McDonnell and Weatherford (2016) argued that with the adoption of CCSS in the majority of states (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016), there exists a disparity between the "politics of policy implementation" (p. 233) and "that education researchers need to pay as much attention to the political sustainability of reforms as to their implementation into school-level practice" (p. 233). They stated that there exists in policy-making a paradox regarding the planning process for good implementation of policy reform that may result in bad politics (p. 235). For example, the official launch date of CCSS was 2009 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016), and the Missouri Learning Standards were approved in 2016 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). This left a seven-year gap of uncertainty between the work of educational policymakers and the work of teachers in the classrooms. Coburn, Hill, and Spillane (2016) argued that the objectives of CCSS are the same for the policymakers as they are for the teachers, namely to "seek to raise student achievement by influencing how teachers teach and how students learn" (p. 243). Yet such planning and implementation gaps might cause unexpected responses.

CCSS therefore did not evolve without controversy, as described by Coburn, Hill, and Spillane (2016), when, with a sardonic tone, they argued that “Policymakers are at it again, attempting to improve the quality of instruction in America’s classrooms” (p. 243). These curriculum reform initiatives directly connect to the study because reading benchmarks are a main focus of CCSS. My sub-question asks how CCSS might shape secondary English teachers’ views about teaching reading. The focus of this study is teachers’ practices, strategies, and observations about how and why they do what they do when teaching reading. In consideration of the politics that shape the practices and instructional strategies, it is important to understand the literature about specific curriculum reforms that impact teaching, such as in the area of reading.

Although several federal programs were started in the 1950s, the one that is the most relevant for this study is when the federal government required the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, to “provide ongoing monitoring of educational achievement starting in 1969” (Shanahan, 2014, p. 8). This monitoring system provided standards against which to measure literacy achievement. Curriculum reform in the area of reading was put in motion at the national level following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Significantly, this report communicated that the United States students were behind their international peers and that this gap had economic fallout (Shanahan, 2014).

According to Shanahan (2014), educators are still feeling the ramifications of this report, but they have since experienced the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, which established Reading First and Early Reading First. NCLB also established performance standards for all schools and measured school districts based on test scores as well as their sub-categories. After 2002, there was a shift to standards-based instructional models in

reading (Shanahan, 2014). As the new millennium progressed, states struggled to meet the Annual Yearly Progress that NCLB required, and there was a shift to CCSS, which were adopted by 46 states in 2010 and 2011 (Shanahan, 2014). Thus, CCSS functions as a common ground for state policymakers to establish benchmarks for teachers to use as educational standards on the same level as the teachers who are teaching to those standards in the classroom. Shanahan (2014) asserted, “The CCSS represents the greatest change in literacy education policy in a generation” (p. 11). This shifts many important decisions back to classroom teachers to function as the curriculum themselves, such as via the notion of “teachers as curriculum planners” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). CCSS standards impose outcomes rather than dealing with the how and what teachers will need to teach them; that is up to the teachers (Shanahan, 2014). These new policies create a place for teachers to be the curriculum-makers, which blends together the larger picture of the standards and the microcosm of the instructional choices made in classrooms today.

One important focus for teaching the reading benchmarks for CCSS is the integration of informational texts for the K–11 levels. Many teachers met this news with much resistance at first because English teachers typically see themselves as teachers of literature as opposed to informational texts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). Pennington, Obenchain, and Brock (2014) credited CCSS goals to bringing back a “renewed interest in the teaching the disciplines” (p. 532). They also found that CCSS renew an emphasis on teachers in the classroom and on instruction as a shift away from the high-stakes testing of NCLB. These instructional methods move away from the climate of high-stakes testing that NCLB encouraged and allows teachers to concentrate on reading across the disciplines. At the junior level, for example, teachers are encouraged to work with

historical texts to allow students to learn from primary texts and to understand how they contextually have shaped the United States historically as well as rhetorically

(D. Klingenberg, personal communication, January 13, 2016).

Pennington, Obenchain, and Brock (2014) believed that teachers will help to instill civic responsibility among their students: “civic responsibility encompasses acts related to the common good that are knowledgeable, committed and productive” (p. 539). Pennington and associates (2014) claimed that CCSS is bringing social studies back into the dialogue as a discipline and revealing how teaching primary texts in English classes and in social studies helps students to learn about civic responsibility. They also advocated for text-dependent questions for analysis and for an instructional tool upon which to rely to meet the goals of CCSS. Social studies and science are drawn into the discourse for CCSS benchmarks. When English teachers integrate interdisciplinary approaches when selecting texts for their students to read that are both primary sources and content-driven in science, they will prepare their students as critical thinkers. Their students will become readers who can read a wide variety of passages, which will help them to also prepare for the skills required on the ACT.

CCSS and the Reading-Writing Connection

However, a conversation about curriculum reforms pertaining to reading also includes a consideration of curriculum reforms focused on writing instruction. Reading and writing are instructional modes that are interwoven, and within the CCSS teachers are encouraged to also integrate a “reading-writing” connection. For example, a student could take notes to deconstruct the text while reading, or they could reflect on the text after reading to better understand the text as well as to contextualize it. Fisher and Frey (2015)

offered advice for teachers to integrate text-dependent questions as well as the following three questions into their strategies for reading instruction: “1) What does the text say? 2) How does the text work? And 3) What does the text mean?” (2015, p. 58). These questions help the students to understand the text they have read and to internalize the concepts gained. Students need to engage in a dialogue before, during, and after reading (Gallagher, 2009). They may assimilate their thoughts through a verbal form of communication or through a reading-and-writing connection.

Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, and Olinghouse (2013) explained that writing is a critical skill for students to learn while they are in public high school so that they are equipped for communication skills in life. Freedman and Sperling (2001) further considered the focus on writing in reading instruction because it helps students to increase their knowledge of themselves, their relationships, and their world (Freedman & Sperling, 2001). Nevertheless, Mo and associates (2013) argued that CCSS expectations for writing might not delve deeply enough in order to support students in developing strong writing skills or for drawing links between their learning and their lives. However, Applebee and Langer (2006) asserted that in our current time of high stakes testing, perhaps the teachers have emphasized retaining content rather than implementing instruction on how to get students to “think with and write about that content, despite the fact that studies have shown that certain types of writing can aid students’ understanding and retention of content” (p. 15). Instead, the English classroom should intend to achieve a culture saturated in reading and writing to create a fluency in literacy among the students (Newkirk, 2012). If students are constantly reading and writing, they are thinking and developing their skills so that they can best understand their own worldview (Gallagher, 2009).

Mo et al. (2014) also stated that if content standards influence instruction, the shift of many states to CCSS will provide an opportunity to improve student writing achievement. They found that teachers who understand CCSS will instruct the writing process in a way that engages students in a scaffolding approach, where the students are taught specifically to process write by pre-writing, drafting, working in groups, and re-drafting (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012). As a strategy, many previous generations of English teachers have taught grammar as a way to improve writing; however, “grammar instruction was ineffective in improving writing” (Graham et al., 2012, p. 880).

Instructionally, this scaffolding strategy for reading and writing reform might help teachers to meet the standards set by CCSS. Bridges-Rhoads and van Cleave (2014) argued, “We remind ourselves that the CCSS are not a curriculum and, in fact, the text of the standard emphasizes the importance of ‘professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject’ (Bridges-Rhoads & van Cleave, 2014, p. 41). They highlighted that teachers need to make their own decisions regarding the texts they select to teach for their own students. It is not required by any means for teachers to use and to implement only the exemplar texts provided by CCSS. Bridges-Rhoads and van Cleave (2014) advised teachers: “to position the CCSS as a living document that can be read again and again with an eye toward all sorts of literacy teaching and learning in classrooms” (p. 42). They stated that this consideration is critical for teachers, school districts, and stakeholders who encourage the use of the CCSS in today’s classrooms.

Bridges-Rhoads and van Cleave (2014) further highlighted that CCSS will result in teachers approaching the curriculum as a “living document” (p. 46). They argued that teachers will need to read the standards repeatedly to inform decisions made when

considering reading instruction and writing instruction. One of the most important ways to honor the benchmarks for today's reform in teaching is how teachers scaffold instruction and how teachers ask students essential questions to evoke deep textual analysis (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In doing so, teachers will shape students who can think critically about information texts as well as plays written by Shakespeare (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Self-efficacy and Reading Instruction

It is pertinent to discuss the teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy when they approach teaching texts in the classroom. The position of the teacher in a classroom is relevant to this study and this research since the participants were three secondary English teachers. To further explore their perceptions and beliefs about how they approach teaching reading, we might better understand the question of this research about the experiences of teachers who teach reading in the English secondary classroom.

Teachers' Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction

In attempting to understand teachers' self-efficacy in reading instruction, it is useful to consider the role of the teacher in the classroom, specifically, the secondary English classroom. With the increasing demands of secondary English teachers to meet the benchmarks of CCSS, there is a need to comprehend how these teachers have learned to understand reading instruction. Day (2012) acknowledged that experienced teachers "are constantly aware of and responsive to the learning possibilities inherent in each teaching episode" (p. 14). In other words, teachers who are continuously trying to meet the needs of their students and are reflective in their instructional practices become lifelong learners who are able to grow and evolve throughout their careers. Teaching is not a static experience; it is a dynamic one. Ball and Goodson's (1985) research revealed that personal experiences of

teachers are closely related to their professional roles. Because the lives of the teachers and the job they do in the classroom is so closely connected, teachers' demeanor and mental health might factor into our outward interactions with our students.

Lovett (2013) found that “the role of reading instruction in secondary content classrooms is significantly less well defined than at the elementary level, with fewer, if any, requirements for reading coursework” (p. 194). Since many higher education institutions are not certain how to define reading instruction for secondary English teachers, there may be a deficit in teachers' understanding about how to instruct their students to meet the needs of the changing landscape of literacy and reading instruction in contemporary U.S. classrooms (Lovett, 2013).

Lovett (2013) explained, “research has suggested that secondary teachers are often unprepared, or even disinclined, to address the developmental reading differences present in their classrooms” (p. 195). Most often, reading is not viewed as a separate discipline, but rather as integrated into other disciplines (Leader-Janssen & Rankin-Erickson, 2013). Due to this construct with preservice teachers and their self-efficacy in teaching reading, Leader-Janssen and Rankin-Erickson (2013) argued that teachers do not always understand what they do and do not know about reading. Furthermore, Lovett (2013) highlighted that there is an increasing number of preservice teaching programs across the nation that require reading in content area courses for all secondary teachers. They indicated that teachers' knowledge about teaching reading in the classroom and their own perceptions of that knowledge was a significant contributor to their understanding and implementation of reading strategies in their secondary English classrooms.

Rahmany, Hassani, and Fattahi (2014) argued, “when we’re talking about knowledge, it is mostly about the teachers’ knowledge of their own professional identity, i.e., how they perceive themselves as teachers” (p. 452). Their self-efficacy has much to do with the comfort level, knowledge level, and level of reading instruction in today’s classrooms. In fact, Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, and Benson (2010) stated that teacher efficacy has been “positively correlated to higher academic achievement, effective teacher practices, increased family involvement...and higher levels of teacher job commitment (p. 226). They indicated that teachers’ efficacy can impact their performance in the classroom depending on their outlook and tone of voice.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Self-efficacy in Reading Instruction

In addition to teachers’ self-efficacy in their abilities to teach reading, an exploration of the research regarding teachers’ perceptions of positive or negative self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) was relevant to the study. The study focused on three teacher participants whose voices were heard regarding their experiences, beliefs, and views about teaching reading in secondary school English classes. Their beliefs about their abilities were factored into their stories, which in turn shaped the data collection.

When teachers believe in their abilities to teach, these beliefs impact the work of students positively in their classrooms (Haverback & Parault, 2008). Thus, having a teacher with high self-efficacy beliefs can impact the achievement of students positively so that the students achieve at higher levels of success (Haverback & Parault, 2008). This relationship between the teacher’s self-efficacy and their ability to motivate students to become interested and engaged readers was an important one for the study’s objectives. Research

links the self-efficacy of the teacher to student efficacy and to student motivation (Barkley, 2006).

Barkley (2006) found significant correlations between teacher self-efficacy and student reading achievement which might even function as an indicator of overall academic success. Barkley's (2006) findings suggested the importance of teacher self-efficacy and student achievement and motivation when it comes to reading instruction. One possible example of this relationship in the classroom is Carger's (1996) work. Carger (1996) made use of her own biography to understand and to connect with Alejandro, her participant. Her study dealt with her experiences with Alejandro, a struggling reader with multiple learning disabilities, who was also an English Language Learner. Carger's (1996) emotional strength and intellectual acuity added to her story of Alejandro's obstacles in life and how she helped him navigate a cultural system that was foreign to his own experiences. This research thus reinforces the ideology that who we are in the classroom can impact the lives of our students positively. This knowledge can help teachers understand their perceptions of self to strengthen their approaches in interacting with students. Carger's (1996) self-actuated demeanor in her personal life extended to her life as a researcher and as an educator. Because she understood her own perceptions of self-efficacy, her work with Alejandro was strengthened.

The positive or negative self-efficacy of teachers who teach reading reveals a sense of their understanding of themselves as teachers. This understanding and teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy further related to the goals of this study, because I was interested in attending to the lived experiences of the teacher participants regarding reading instruction. I focused on their teaching practices and strategies as embedded in layered and

inherited curriculum reforms. I also concentrated on the connections that the participants made between their professional knowledge, their professional expertise, and their personal experiences with student interactions and student learning.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed relevant literature that showcases research that is thematically connected to this investigative objectives. Included in this discussion are definitions of literacy and reading. The literature reviewed in this chapter connects the threads of the research questions regarding teachers' experiences in teaching reading in secondary English classrooms and how these stories helped to clarify what decisions are made, what practices are effective, and how these strategies might strengthen students' reading skills to develop their literacy skills that can be extended to other disciplines and areas of study. These threads include understanding the current practices in literacy instruction and teaching strategies in teaching reading. Curriculum reforms about reading instruction, and those related to CCSS, are especially relevant to the study of the experiences of reading teachers. It is further essential to deliberate over research outlining teachers' self-efficacy as a significant factor bridging curriculum policy and implementation in teaching reading and to a study of related experiences. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology of the research and the rationale for using narrative inquiry.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I discuss the methodology of this research. I begin by providing an argument for conducting a qualitative study, with a honed focus on narrative inquiry. I illustrate how this foundation of qualitative and narrative research provided a structure for the study. I further explain the purposes of narrative inquiry and how it best fits the intentions of the research. Following this, I describe participation criteria and recruitment methods, including a depiction of the demographics of the intended research school district. Also, I highlight the data collection and data analysis methods for this study. In addition, I outline potential ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

The Merits of Qualitative Research in Education

Lincoln and Denzin (2003) famously argued that previously, positivist forms of research underscored a sanitary version of investigation that did not address the moral and ethical dimensions of research. In contrast, Lincoln and Denzin (2003) offered that qualitative traditions of investigation might offer a more strategic means for considering the ethical and moral dimensions of engaging in research. Moreover, although Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) have been put into place to ensure that all research is conducted in an ethical manner, Lincoln and Denzin (2003) pointed to the interpretive potential of such ethical standards. In fact, they argued that much might get left to the “individual moral boiling points” (p. 221) of researchers.

Lincoln and Denzin (2003) admitted that ethical considerations might also be a part of qualitative work, and other issues might arise in qualitative research that are not a part of quantitative work. However, they stated that such risks are more minor in terms of research

engagement and research outcomes. Such ethical and moral lenses on investigations might be especially pertinent when considering research into schools and schooling.

It is further pertinent to consider how ethics and research might coexist and how the marriage between the two might propel research in education that might contribute to knowledge and practice. Freire (2009) argued that “men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (p. 147). Freire felt that the curriculum is shaped by two dimensions: that of reflection and that of action. In engaging in reflection and action, educators’ instruction would inspire students to critically think about their world lenses. His understanding of how knowledge is gained impacts social change because of the way those who are educated in this instructional practice are able to affect society in a positive way, critically discerning change politically, personally, and socially.

Significantly, Freire (2009) espoused that it is important to create dialogue in the world to best understand the world and ultimately, to name it. Although Freire (2009) deliberated over dialogue and world-naming as the path toward equitable curriculum and instruction, it might be argued that this is also a potential path toward equitable research. In essence, educational research that is qualitative in orientation might be seen as a dialogue. The findings of this form of research might then be considered to be a naming of educational experiences.

This perspective on reflection and action was embedded in my own study, as I planned to consider the experiences of actual teachers as a potential means for uncovering the meaning of such experiences. Ultimately, such insights gained might further be turned toward improved practice. An application of Freire’s (2009) theory to qualitative research also brings to light the imperative for conducting research that is moral. This morality

comprises attending to the perspectives of participants and then drawing interpretations of such qualitative data rather than examining information before or beyond participants' words.

Narrative Inquiry, Education, and Life

Narrative research began in the disciplines of literature, history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education, and different fields have adopted their own approaches (Chase, 2005 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Narrative inquiry is defined as “a specific type of qualitative design in which ‘narrative is understood as spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected’” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Most often, the procedures for implementing this research consist of concentrating on studying one or two individuals, “gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences” (p. 54). In this study, I hope to order the stories of the participants thematically to analyze the data thoroughly. The meaning of these stories emerges as the truth of the participants' experiences. Stories excavate truths that sometimes not even the storyteller is aware of to reveal better understandings about any discipline. It is a dynamic process.

Creswell (2007) further asserted that narrative inquiry is steeped in different social and humanities disciplines and that this form of qualitative research has many varied forms (p. 53). The term “narrative” could be applied to any text or course of study, or it could be used within the context of inquiry in qualitative research (p. 54). This method of research starts with experiences “as they are expressed and lived and told stories of individuals”

(p. 54). Since the experiences of participants are first-hand stories, this research seeks truths through primary sources.

Clandinin (2006) explained the process of developing and making use of narrative inquiry as a method for conducting research in education:

We wanted to understand more about how teachers come to live lives which make them attentive to children whose life story lines are different than their own. We were interested to see how teachers' experience with diversity in their own lives shaped their work with children's experiences of curriculum in schools. (p. 113)

Their description thus exemplifies the main purposes and potential of narrative inquiry in terms of education and life.

Kim (2016) explained that the way to collect stories is by becoming a "narrative thinker," which is a method of shaping a story out of experience (p. 156). How a person chooses to tell a story of experience also reveals their individual signature on using language, syntax, and rhetorical devices. Kim (2016) asserted that narrative thinking is developed in three ways: "the narrative schema, the storyteller's prior knowledge and experiences and a diverse array of cognitive strategies" (p. 156). This is seen as the structure and purpose for storytelling in narrative inquiry.

This perspective on narrative inquiry attends to stories in terms of the structures of stories, since it is understood that the structure of stories gives meaning within narrative inquiry. This viewpoint on the importance of story structure for understanding stories and their relation to experience is connected to the German theory of *bildungsroman*, which is defined as a "life story/life history, or oral history" that connects common experiences among people (Kim, 2016, p. 125). Trabasso and Van Den Broek (1985) explained that "events that have organizational functions are more memorable than others" (p. 612).

Trabasso and Van Den Broek (1985) argued that causal thinking is embedded in narrative events which makes memory and cognitive recall an essential part of storytelling. They found that “causal-chain identification” was the way that the protagonist of a story introduces the action of it to make it more memorable (p. 618). This story structure allows the power of language, syntax, and story grammar to reveal through imagery, metaphor, and other literary and rhetorical devices the meaning of a person’s experience through the way only that individual can tell the story.

Story grammar is the structure of the story, and it can impact the way listeners or readers understand the story and connect with it (Nampaktai, Kaewsombut, Akwaree, Wongwayrote, & Sameepet, 2013). Nampaktai et al. (2013) argued that there are two important components of story grammar: “setting and episode” (p. 36). They found that episode has six different sub-categories, including the following: “initiating events, internal responses, plans, actions, consequences, and reactions” (p. 36). These sub-categories help the listener or reader break down the structure of a story for deeper levels of understanding. Story structure and story grammar might therefore be seen as essential elements of narrative inquiry for data analysis.

In contrast, Atkinson (2007) argued that humans are intrinsically wired for stories. He says that “storytelling is in our blood” (p. 224), and he explained how he perceives the place of storytelling amidst narrative inquiry. Atkinson (2007) stated that the life story interview in narrative inquiry can be seen as “a natural bridge” (p. 230) that might connect different sets of ideologies to create a deeper understanding of human experience. He claimed that stories, or bridges, can connect disciplines, they can connect the whole and the smaller sections of the stories being narrated, and they can connect the narrator or the telling

of the story itself to the actual lived experience for which it is a basis. Furthermore, the storyteller may create an experience through story that might be interpreted as a result of an understanding from the “imaginative reconstruction” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 230). In essence, the research implications of storytelling and narrative are varied and broad. Atkinson (2007) argued primarily that it is in stories’ reconstruction that meaning is created.

Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed that the development of narrative inquiry is steeped in a viewpoint of “human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 2). Therefore, they posited that narrative inquiry is the most appropriate form of research to use when engaging in inquiry “undertaken within a pragmatic framework” (Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). In doing so, the methodology of narrative inquiry allows us to consider experience from different viewpoints in order to ascertain knowledge through empirical data. Narrative inquirers study a person’s experiences in their corner of the world and then “seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others” (Rosiek, 2007, p. 42).

When conducting narrative inquiry, often the story of the researcher becomes an intertwined element of the research itself. In seeking out the stories of others, it is possible that a narrative inquirer may come to discover truths about self, too. In this study, the participants, teachers who are the curriculum, are a part of the stories, too. McNiff (2007) stated that telling stories and “getting them listened to are...complex processes that involve several considerations” (p. 308). According to McNiff (2007), these considerations include the decision about what kind of story to tell and how to tell it, as well as the issues regarding getting people to read the stories narrated in narrative inquiry. McNiff (2007) cited Apple (1993) when she posited that “practitioners’ stories about the generation of their living

theories of practice tend to step outside the orthodox canon” (p. 309). This notion also might be a consideration of storytelling. Stories are complex, and storytellers have to be cognizant of truths, biases, and experiences that might change the way a story is retold or interpreted.

Significantly, Clandinin (2006) raised a pertinent aspect of narrative inquiry in that stories and the truths of stories constantly shift through encounters with new people, ideas, and places. Clandinin (2006) argued that relationships continue to expand the field of knowledge so that teachers can better understand the “secret stories” of their own classrooms and better understand the truths of their existence and their roles in the classroom. In addition, Kim (2016) explained the nature of “interdisciplinarity” in narrative inquiry and warned that “narrative inquiry becomes the confluence where unlikely fields meet, creating a synergy of interdisciplinarity” (p. 22).

Kim (2016) further described that narrative inquiry is deeply embedded in the way that humans behave, think, and live because storytelling and narrative threads are a basic way we make meaning of our lives. In this way, narrative inquiry starts with stories and in my case, stories from teachers about their beliefs and experiences in teaching reading at the secondary level to high school English students that by nature will evolve to include interdisciplinarity. In narrative inquiry it is these stories that function as a beginning of a home discipline that will grow through story to connect with a web of additional disciplines to contribute deeper understandings about the complexities involved in teaching reading to high school students.

Rationale for Research Approach

This qualitative study follows the narrative inquiry research tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). In this study, I concentrated on capturing the teacher participants’

experiences of reading instruction through experiential narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996). Rosiek (2007) argued that story functions as a portal through which people enter the world and through which their experiences are interpreted and made significant. This portal explains the rationale for implementing narrative inquiry for this study. The experiences of the teachers who participated in this study might help to inform future instruction during this curriculum reform shift to CCSS. These participants' stories may help educators to better understand practices in teaching reading in other disciplines as well. Since CCSS is designed to be interdisciplinary, the benchmarks focus on reading and writing so that social studies, math, and science may also integrate reading and writing strategies into their instructional methodology.

I chose to conduct a qualitative study of teachers' experiences of teaching reading as a means of addressing the growing concern with standardization and the increasing numerical values placed on teaching and learning, especially in the area of teaching reading. Bateson, Mead and Gajdusek (1942) argued that qualitative research allows for different perspectives with the creation of a metaphor of a camera on a tripod versus a moving camera. Clandinin (2006) further acknowledged that bringing qualitative work to the education table enables educators, educational researchers, and teacher educators to move back and forth between seeing students up close and then seeing them as statistical numbers and figures. They referred to this qualitative stance as moving between seeing students as big and small. This lens provides multiple viewpoints of the world through story and allows qualitative data to endure.

In particular, the structure of this qualitative study was shaped by the methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study further concentrated on

collecting “stories of experience” as data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Story embodies the experiences of our lives and how we live, and stories thereby indicate our understanding of and interaction with things, people, and events (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In effect, the authors noted that people, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) found that sometimes people make decisions and there is a conscious awareness of these choices made, whereas, other times these choices are made without a conscious awareness. Since curricular decisions might reveal purposeful or instinctual reasoning, the narrative investigation of teachers’ experience might lend much insight into research regarding teaching practices.

Research Questions

Narrative inquiry researchers study experience, essentially, and uncover insights into the stories of the participants to understand the world and to address research questions. In particular, in this study I focused on the experiences and perspectives of English teachers with reading instruction in an environment of increasing standardization, the implementation of a Common Core curriculum, and a focus on reading across the curriculum. The primary research question for this study was: What are the experiences of English teachers with reading instruction? This question asks the participants to share their personal experiences and viewpoints about reading instruction and how they approach teaching reading in their high school English classrooms. The sub-question for the study was the following: What are English teachers’ experiences with reading instruction within a framework of increasing standardization and the Missouri Learning Standards? This question helped me to access teachers’ storied interactions with reading instruction among their students as contextualized in an era of enhanced assessment and accountability measures. The stories of the

participants in this study may inform reading practices or ways to think about reading practices that are aligned to increasing curricular movements for standardization.

Research and Participant Context

This study took place in a large, suburban high school in the Midwest that is located east of a large metropolitan area. This suburb comprises approximately 53,000 residents and has supported the school district on all bonds and levies in recent history, the most recent in 2008 and in 2012. The school district has two high schools (grades 10–12), a freshman center for all freshmen in the district, one alternative school, four middle schools, 13 elementary schools, and one early childhood center. This study took place at the older of the two high schools, built in 1958. The newer school opened during the 1991–1992 school year. The school district is a central focus in the community, which is described as an “upper, middle class and moderately educated” city (U.S. News & World Report, 2018). The school district has approximately 2,000 certified teachers with over 88% holding masters’ degrees, specialist degrees, and doctoral degrees. The district enrolls approximately 14,500 students (Research School District, 2016).

The high school where the study took place enrolls 2,300 students, including the freshmen. Without the freshmen included, for grades 10–12, the school enrolls 1,860 students (Research School District, 2016). The district’s students are 13.9% Black, 6.0% Latino/Latina, and 73.4% White. Students who qualify for free and reduced lunch comprise 27.9% of enrolled learners (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). This high school earned an ACT average of 22.6 for the 2014–2015 school year.

The English department of the high school where the study took place has 14 teachers: one male and 13 females. Eleven teachers hold Master’s degrees, and two have

earned Education Specialist degrees. The ages of the teachers are approximately between 25 and 68, and they have varied experiences in teaching in the suburbs and in urban schools. Most teachers stay at this high school for the duration of their careers. Some have left over the past 10 years due to retirement or by attaining librarian credentials and then getting jobs as librarians/media specialists in other districts. The department chair holds a Master's degree and has taught for seven years.

For professional development, the department works in smaller, grade level groups and in those grade levels, courses taught for weekly collaboration time is built into the schedule. Department members also participate in a book club with other faculty members and a summer workshop to serve on the leadership cadre during the school year, and they demonstrate a collaborative spirit when working on curriculum and instruction throughout the year. Department members also tutor after school for the state test as well as for the ACT and work one-on-one with students. In recent years, a few social events have taken place outside of school for team-building, but mostly, the department is work-focused.

Recent collaboration themes have focused on CCSS goals, on ACT, on preparing students to read non-fiction texts, and on critical approaches to teaching students literary theory. Another recent collaboration theme was preparing students for the rigor of college writing. The district instructional coach leads both high schools and the freshmen center throughout the year, but relies on department chairs to help facilitate weekly collaboration in each building.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The participants for this study were three teachers from the English department who have taught for five years or more. All teachers in the department who had five years of

experience or more were emailed to invite them to participate in this study with a consent form attached. That number included all teachers with the exception of three teachers who did not have five years' experience teaching high school English. The participants had varied experiences, ages, and cultural backgrounds to provide a rich collection of data for the research. The participants, all English teachers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience, allowed me to gain a variety of rich and detailed stories of practice. I recruited English teachers as participants across grades and levels of English classes. I emailed a consent form to potential participants who work in Alpha school district and who were known to me (see Appendix B for Consent Form). Since the participants had five years of teaching or more, I anticipated that their stories spanned decades of practices that indicated how cultural shifts had happened in the past, what they thought of current practices, and how they see CCSS informing future practices. I also sought out participants from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and those who have had experiences in teaching at either urban or rural schools in addition to their current suburban school. The three participants comprised one male, aged 31 and two females, one aged 33 and the other female aged 37. The male teacher had previous teaching experience in a town nearly one and one half hours away from Alpha school prior to taking the position at Alpha school. One female had experience teaching 10 years in a rural area east of Alpha school, and the second female has taught her whole career, 15 years, at Alpha school.

As a narrative inquiry, I attended to the needs of the participants not only during the negotiation of consent, but also as carefully, I attended to their needs throughout the “negotiation of participation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Nevertheless, since there were only three participants, I needed to attend carefully to ensure that participants did not wish to

leave the study. However, if a participant had decided to leave the study, I would have inquired as to whether collected data from that participant might remain in the study. If the participant did not wish for data collected about him or her to remain a part of the study, that data would not have been analyzed. If a participant had left the study early and allowed me to retain information collected about him or her, I would have utilized only that data from that participant. No participants left the study during the data collection. Using narrative inquiry, I burrowed into the provided data in-depth to search for meaning and noted absent materials as a possibility for any potential enduring research puzzles.

Data Collection

The timeline for data collection began when school resumed for second semester, January 2, 2017, when I sent the email and consent form to the department members who had taught for five years or more. Once the three teachers had agreed to participate in the study during the second week of January and consent forms had been returned from each of them, from the building principal, and from the superintendent, data collection began.

I attended to the teacher participants' stories of experiences with teaching reading via two 60-minute audio-recorded individual informal interviews for a total of 120 minutes of interviewing. The first 60-minute interview took place during the third week of January. Teacher participants scheduled time 60 minutes after school to complete the second interview.

The first interview for each teacher took place in a collaboration lab after school in the Alpha school library. The teachers met me there, and the interviews were recorded. The door to the lab was shut, and there were no disturbances during any of the interviews. The second interview took place there too for two of the three teachers, but the third teacher

preferred the interview take place in her classroom after school. The setting of the interviews did not interfere with the interview process.

In general, during the first set of informal interviews, I asked the participants about their experiences with teaching reading. During the second interview, I focused on participants' current practices in relation to curriculum reform. Scenarios stemming from classroom observations were also discussed. I concentrated on some questions regarding potential challenges and opportunities that the participants envisioned in their ongoing teaching with CCSS. Interviews were open-ended in nature, and I was guided by an informal list of questions (see Appendix C and Appendix D for Interview #1 Protocol and Interview #2 Protocol).

The interviews were transcribed and printed for data analysis at the end of the semester. From the interviews, the teachers explained and shared stories from their personal experiences about books and learning while growing up, their positive and negative experiences teaching English, their motivations for becoming English teachers, their beliefs about their abilities as teachers of reading, and their views and beliefs about the CCSS standards and how they might influence or not influence their decisions to teach reading in their classrooms.

I hired a professional with CITI training to transcribe all interviews. I followed up with participants after each interview for needed clarification. I also emailed participants a copy of interview transcriptions so that they might correct any information that might be wrong. Participants had three weeks to reply with any changes to interview transcriptions. I notified the participants that if I did not hear from them during that timeframe, I considered

that they were in agreement with the transcriptions and that they did not have any requests for modifications to the documents.

An effective method for collecting data is to take field notes when conducting an on-site observation. Kim (2016) explained that this mode of collecting data “is a way of living the inquiry” (p. 171). While a researcher is observing a classroom in action, they will live the experience as well. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) argued that thinking narratively was centered on living in the research field. They believed that interacting with the participants in a narrative inquiry study in a natural setting helped to develop a meaningful relationship with the participants.

I also conducted classroom observations of each of the participants’ practices for one classroom period on a twice-monthly basis for the course of one academic semester. Each teacher sent me a calendar of planned teaching units, and I established specific dates and days to observe each teacher. I communicated that if the teacher were absent or needed to change dates, they should email me any notifications so that I could make adjustments. My observations were completed by May 1, 2017 with a total of 30 observations, with 10 observations for each participant. The observations took place during my plan period which was from 8:15–9:02. I observed teachers each Tuesday, but added days according to their requests for my presence in their room that particular day or based on their teaching calendar. For example, a few scheduled visits were rescheduled because students in their classes were word processing. On those days, some observations did take place as scheduled, but on others, they were rescheduled so that I could see reading instruction.

The purpose of these observations was to observe how each participant approached reading instruction in different contexts for any text. For example, I observed the *who*, *what*,

when, where, why and *how* of the participants' approaches to teaching literature, nonfiction texts, and poetry. I composed field notes following all observations.

For each observation, I drew a physical representation of the classroom configuration: how the desks were set up, where the teacher was in proximity to the students, and the details of the room decorations (e.g., posters, colors, student work, pictures). I wrote start times and what was happening within the hour with time notations. I observed each teacher during my plan time. These observations occurred mostly on Tuesdays, but also other days of the week, depending on the teachers' schedules. I used direct quotations around exact dialogue spoken by the teacher, and I did the same for questions and interactions with the students. I wrote direct observations from these experiences in each teacher's classroom interactions such as the attentiveness and engagement of the students with the lesson's objectives, how the students interacted with one another, the tone of the room, the way the teacher responded to questions posed from the students, as well as the visibility of cell phones for learning or if students were distracted by their phones.

These notes were printed, and I drew the physical representation of the desks and the way the room was designed after the notes were printed. I drew the physical design of the room because one teacher participant changed the desk configurations depending on the day's lesson. As an observer, I felt that these details were relevant for my collection of data. I perceived this position as researcher to report information that I witnessed during each observation of each class period during the data collection of this study. Field notes were later copied into a Word file on my computer. I identified students by gender and by positioning in the room (see Appendix E for Observation Matrix).

In order to distinguish between my field notes taken and the voices of the teacher participants, I used quotations around direct dialogue spoken by the teachers and made notes to myself about the instructional strategies, the relationships established, and the physicality of the classroom observed during each class period. These quotations were helpful to me during data analysis so that I could remember my own viewpoint through these observation notes in an objective voice distinct from that of the teacher participants' voices. During my role as researcher, I did not find any contradictions between the field notes and the participant voices. While taking field notes for data collection, I perceived my position to be a recorder of the experiences that teacher participants shared with their students.

Clandinin and Connelly (1988) recommended that teachers reflect on their practices in journals as part of their curriculum-shaping efforts. These journals often help to shape the practices of practitioners, since the journals reveal first-hand reflections based on classroom experiences. For this reason, all participants were also expected to complete a journal throughout the course of this study, with a minimum of five separate journal entries during the Spring semester.

Each participant completed the journal entries while at Alpha school on their own time. The journal entries were submitted to me by the participants toward the end of the semester in May of 2017. The journal entries were composed on Word files. These journal entries included prompts for writing and requests for participants' reflections and required the participants to reflect on their beliefs and views about teaching and also about their personal experiences with reading during their younger years (see Appendix F for Journal Prompts). These journal entries explained the participants' stories related to their experiences and views about teaching reading, how they have changed as teachers during

their careers, and what their views are about CCSS and how those standards might shift their practices. The journals reflected the diverse personalities of the participants, and the tones of their stories in the journal entries provided rich data for this study.

These three methods of data collection provided a deep framework for me to understand the stories and lived experiences of the teachers in this study. From each of the ways that I collected data — the observations, the journals, and the interviews — I was able to see common themes develop in the writing, the stories, and the information that I reported from the observations to corroborate with one another to inform the research goals fully.

Crystallization of Data

As part of the data analysis, I implemented a framework called crystallization of the data, defined by Ellingson (2009) as a post-modern, aesthetic way to work through the discovery of data analysis in the social sciences. Ellingson (2009) explained that the framework of data crystallization for qualitative researchers does not embody a specific structure. It comes from the creative thinking of each researcher to create poetry, found poetry, or creative writing as an interim way to help the researcher understand the deeper levels of analysis from the data collected. Janesick (1998) further described the crystallization of data framework as “still life” (p. 35), a way to creatively paint the picture of an observation personally and creatively before developing an objective form of data analysis in discourse. Janesick (1998) added that data crystallization helps the researcher to synthesize data and to be personally reflective throughout the process to lead the researcher to tangible understandings.

This creative outlet can manifest in different forms, but it most often can be discovered in the found poetry or in other forms of poetry. This artistic expression does not

interrupt the science of research, but helps to explain the science of research by allowing the researcher to interact with the data collection in a creative way. Crystallization allows the researcher to develop a text in writing that “desires the reader...that invites the reader to play with our narrative writing” (Kim, 2016, p. 222). For the data analysis, I wanted to have the opportunity to shape my ideas in this creative framework to help me discern the important themes that emerged and to help me synthesize deeper levels of understanding from the data collected for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Kim (2016) argued that qualitative data analysis requires interpretation. This interpretation of collected data impacts the choices researchers make of “representations of stories” (p. 189). Analysis and interpretation work together, because data collected need to be analyzed to develop a meaning the participants give to time and place and to their lived experiences through storytelling (Kim, 2016). In narrative analysis, the findings are arranged around the description of themes that the researcher sees emerge from the data collected (Kim, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that this method of analyzing data helps to clarify any ambiguities and facilitates the researcher in looking for “patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes” (p. 132). In doing so, researchers might need to consider a tendency to focus too narrowly on the descriptions of the themes and ideologies developed as they interpret and analyze the data.

Mishler (1995) suggested a typology “to pursue alternative, more inclusive strategies that would provide a more comprehensive and deeper understanding” of how the narratives function and the actual functions they serve (p. 117). Mishler’s (1995) typology starts with the “telling” and the “told” and then moves to “textual coherence and structure” that include

narrative strategies and “narrative functions” which explain the contexts and consequences of the storytelling that is inspired by experience (p. 90).

The first order of analysis is to find a balance between the telling and the told. In other words, the telling part is the researcher’s narrating, and the told part indicates that data are told by the participant (Kim, 2016, p. 200). In narrative analysis, a balance between these two kinds of order is important when beginning to analyze and interpret data (Kim, 2016). Mishler (1996) implemented Waletzky and Labov’s (1967) matrix that is structured with six parts for the researcher to consider. Those six parts are: “an abstract (summary), orientation (context, place and time), complicating action (skeleton plot), evaluation (justification of its telling), resolution (the resolution of conflict) and coda (bringing the narrator and listener back to the present)” (as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 201).

Although this structure helps qualitative researchers to analyze and interpret stories, Hyvärinen (2008) argued that it might be counter-productive to find a common consensus when analyzing narratives because “no definition will fit all narratives” (p. 448). Since the nature of storytelling is one of discovery (Bakhtin, 1981), the way a narrative inquiry researcher interprets and analyzes data is an essential part of the research process. The methods implemented to uncover the layers of truth through story to reach synthesized conclusions are critical to developing the actual analysis of data collected. Although Hyvärinen (2008) argued that there was no one specific way to analyze and interpret each narrative, there are frameworks to do so that need consideration.

Once the data are interpreted and analyzed, there may be connections to macrocosmic themes that lead to a greater body of knowledge to make an empirical commentary for a wider audience. Kim (2016) described this relationship to a greater body

of knowledge that “narrative inquirers have a firm foothold within social and human science research and our job is to continue gaining in depth and significance of the narrative work” (p. 222) to discover deeper levels of understanding from the data. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) also described the need to consider multiple audiences including the participants, imagined readers, and inquirers. In addition to their intent regarding audiences, Barone and Eisner (2012) argued that the larger audience reached the better, and the more significant the research conducted, the greater the impact on a school of thought.

After the data collection period of one academic semester was completed, I reviewed all collected information in depth for common narrative themes. I read all data that I had collected a minimum of three times in order to compile a set of narrative themes from the data. To organize data analysis, I created three computer files. One file was for transcribed interviews, one for field notes from participant classroom observations that were organized according to participant, and one file for journal entries. I created a highlighted legend to track themes I noticed as I read and reread the data. This coding method helped me to see the common narrative themes emerge from the data to help me understand the research question. I logged all themes that I interpreted from among the interviews, journal entries, and classroom data. The themes were shaped by the data collected. Each theme was based on issues related to teaching reading.

Once I compiled a list of common narrative themes, I then analyzed the material within each theme through the use of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This analysis tool for narrative inquiry allowed me to study the data from the perspectives of themes that were common across all participants, as well as by attending to the dimensions of past, present, and future temporal periods, social and

personal interactions, and context. I was then able to draw out contextual interpretations and possible contradictions and puzzles as findings of the study.

Data Security

This study began following the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri-Kansas City in December of 2016. I ensured that the study met the institutional requirements for conducting ethical research. I obtained approval to conduct the study from the principal and from the school district.

A key aspect of this study was to ensure the confidentiality of participants. I approached potential participants through emails to minimize the chance that colleagues might overhear my request for their participation in this study. I provided all participants with consent forms outlining how participation was voluntary and that all participants might leave the study at any time without negative consequence.

Primarily, the participants were protected through the use of pseudonyms and by removing any personally identifying information from the data as it was collected. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, I allowed them to select their pseudonyms privately, I interacted with them in a professional and unobtrusive manner, and I respected their privacy. Although I could be viewed by others in the school observing the participants while they taught, their activities and lessons were not discussed. I protected the participants' stories, was respectful of their views, and acknowledged and minimized any potential risks taken in agreeing to be participants in this study. All interviews took place in private locations.

I also secured all interview transcriptions on my password-protected computer. The journal entries were saved onto a password-protected memory stick that I supplied to all participants. All data from interviews, field notes, and journal entries were also backed up

on a password-protected memory stick and on a password-protected external hard drive. Any hard files were stored in a locked drawer. My supervisor, Dr. Candace Schlein, and I were the only people with potential access to the raw data.

Research Considerations

There are several considerations in conducting narrative research. In this section I consider how observations might impact teaching and learning, as well as affect the data collected. I also discuss researcher-participant rapport. Issues of trust in research are further explored.

Kim (2016) argued that in collecting data for narrative inquiry research, “the most important aspect of the interview method is trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 162). Just as a trusting rapport is important in evoking rich stories from the participants, Kim (2016) also warned of an “over-rapport” (p. 162). When the researcher and the participant are too close, there may be a higher risk for bias that could develop when collecting data. Therefore, Kim (2016) advised that a balance is needed to develop a trust and rapport that is comfortable for both the interviewer and the interviewee. In collecting data interpersonally in an interview situation, the researcher’s “genuine caring, interest and respect for the participant’s human dignity and integrity” are helpful characteristics for the researcher (Kim, 2016, p. 163).

A concern in conducting observation or field work is that the environment might be compromised when a researcher is present. If the students in a classroom or the teacher views the observation as obtrusive or artificial in any way, the Observer Effect could manifest. This phenomenon occurs when the environment is disrupted by the researcher and the people who are naturally there daily interact differently because they know they are

being observed (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) emphasized the importance of observing in a natural setting because the observer's presence might be deemed artificial since the observer is not a daily part of this natural environment. The observer's presence in the natural setting might influence how participants behave and how they act in the research setting which creates the "Observer Effect" (Kim, 2016, p. 175).

In order to minimize the Observer Effect, Kim (2016) suggested that it is important to spend as much time as possible at a research site so the researcher is a somewhat natural part of the daily flow. Also, she found that the trust and rapport element of the relationship developed between the researcher or observer and the participants is important to steer clear of the Observer Effect. The last part of her advice is to embrace the Observer Effect instead of ignoring it. Kim (2016) advised to "pay greater attention to the interconnections among methods, context and data" (p. 176) to facilitate the observer/researcher role when in the field. Also, Kim (2016) advised that the observer should engage in conversational moments with the participants at the beginning of the observation to create a natural flow of discourse and to blend in with the natural setting as much as possible. These suggestions help to focus on the research being conducted to gather data and not to intrude on the natural setting of the observation (Kim, 2016).

Additionally, narrative inquirers might need to specifically consider the ethics of their research because of their unique role in the relationship developed between themselves as researchers and their participants. Clandinin (2006) cautioned that the voice of the researcher might be involved in the interpretation and analysis of the data after it is collected. As well, Josselson (2009) noted the need for the researcher's views to be transparent or as transparent as humanly possible so that the stories of the participants are

empirical. To defend against overlaying my own lens on events, I conducted member checking as outlined above. I used the field notes to record my own developing thoughts of the inquiry as a means of making my perspectives transparent. I further allowed participants to review interview transcriptions after the last interview. They each were allowed three weeks to make any changes and approve transcriptions.

When researchers contextualize stories of experiences for greater implications, narratives can perpetuate our knowledge to build bridges to our scholarly fields (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) argued that most of the research conducted is steeped in a search for knowledge to make the world a better place. As such, through the use of narratives, “personal plights become metaphors writ large to shed light on public plights” (Kim, 2016, p. 238). Moreover, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that ethical issues will fluctuate and shift as the researchers experience the inquiry itself, but that ethical concerns are never “far from the heart of our inquiries” (p. 170).

While the focus of the research is to gain knowledge, I had to be honest about this position as researcher in this study as well as a colleague to the participants who chose to be a part of this study. There were beneficial aspects of being a known researcher and having a relationship with the participants in the study as well as potential negative aspects of having already established a relationship. One aspect that might be considered positive could be that the participants may have felt more at ease in responding to the interview questions, the journal entries, and the observation components of the study to gather data. Since I was someone with whom they had worked over several years, that meant the participants and I might share lunch each day, or we might share stories about our personal lives that would make my position as researcher less threatening.

Again, this relationship might be seen as negative if the participants have had negative experiences with me, the researcher. There is research that revealed the personal lives of teachers are connected to their roles as professionals (Ball & Goodson, 1985). Because the lives of the teachers and the job they do in the classroom are so closely connected, teachers' demeanor and relationships can factor into the outward interactions they have with the students as well as with colleagues in the department and within the building.

This idea could also be transferred to the participants in the study and the relationship I had with them prior to the study's start. Each person in a department offers a different approach and pedagogy when interacting with colleagues as well as students. Because of these pre-conceived notions about me or about these practices, the participants may not have felt that they could be completely forthright. A participant might have chosen to commit to the study but midway through the data collection become overwhelmed or felt uncomfortable with me.

As an ethical consideration, my role as a colleague and English teacher was much more established over time as opposed to my new role as researcher from the viewpoint of the participants. This relationship was a key factor in the level of comfort the participants felt when they chose to participate in this study.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 4, I focused on a discussion of the methodology for this inquiry. I explained in detail the methods I used for data collection and analysis. I began by giving a brief overview of the purposes and history of narrative inquiry and the reasons this framework best fit the study's goals. In this discussion, I included a definition of

interdisciplinarity as well as story structure and story grammar. These terms were used as key concepts in helping me to understand the narratives of the participants.

The demographics of the school district where the study took place was described in this chapter to help to contextualize the study and these goals as a researcher. Data collection methods were explained in this chapter as well as the data analysis processes. In addition, ethical considerations and limitations were discussed. In the next chapter, I discuss the results of the data analysis in terms of common narrative themes that were found from the collected data regarding teachers' experiences in teaching reading in secondary English classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS: COMMON NARRATIVE THEMES

In this chapter, I interpret and analyze data collected from January 2017 to May 2017 involving three teacher participants. I highlight the common narrative themes that were uncovered in this study. While several possible preliminary themes became apparent to me through the data analysis process, the themes that were most impactful in regard to the research question were the themes of: “Teachers’ Beliefs about their Abilities in Teaching Reading,” “Teachers’ Relationships with their Students,” and “Classroom Structure for Instruction.”

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) found people live “storied lives” in that sometimes the decisions they make are purposeful and aware, but other times, these choices are made without a conscious awareness (p. 93). Through my experiences observing, interviewing, and reading journal entries as a triangulation of data and a deep level of engagement with the participants, I found their background experiences, family, teachers and current ways of life impacted their instructional approaches in teaching reading to their secondary high school students.

In this chapter, I highlight the data analysis measures in relation to the narrative interpretations that I drew from the data. I made use of the narrative inquiry framework in a three-dimensional structure that focused on each participant’s data in connection with various dimensions: the temporal, the story grammar and storytelling (social), and the passion and experiences (spatial) to explain the personal and professional lenses of this study. This framework helped me to understand connections between themes and stories as they related to the participants’ experiences and perspectives as a whole or their

backgrounds. The purpose of using the framework was therefore to understand the “so what” of stories and related narrative themes from the vantage of the participants and their curricular engagements.

The narrative inquiry framework is especially useful to structure the stories of participants so that detailed insights might be gleaned from among the storied data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained, “as we worked within our three-dimensional spaces as narrative inquirers, what became clear to us was that as inquirers we meet ourselves in the past, the present, and the future” (p. 60). Furthermore, they asserted the stories that we tell are reminiscent of our remembered past selves as well as our current selves. They stated, “all these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). Consequently, this study considered the past experiences of participants and those that might lie ahead in the future. This frame provided me with the tools to cultivate an in-depth understanding of the participants’ stories and helped me to better understand the research question. This is important, since in education the past, present, and future reveal extreme interplay as teachers function in their role as curriculum-makers to make instructional decisions for their students.

A further data analysis measure that I used in this study was crystallization. Data crystallization is an important part of the process to gain insight into the participants’ experiences. Janesick (1998) claimed that data crystallization does not embody a particular structure but functions more like a “still-life” (Janesick, 1998, p. 35) to help the researcher to process as deeply as possible the stories of the participants. Crystallization enabled me to draw together a layered understanding of the participants’ stories of experience. In particular, as I moved from data collection to data analysis and the discussion of inquiry

interpretations, I made use of found poems to express findings regarding the participants. These found poems are further reflective of my ongoing and developing relational stance to this investigation.

Common Narrative Themes and Storied Life Meanings

In this section, I answer this research question, ‘What are the experiences of high school English teachers in reading instruction?’ by fluidly intertwining a discussion of each of the common narrative themes that I uncovered in the study: “Teachers’ Beliefs About Their Abilities in Teaching Reading,” “Teachers’ Relationships With Their Students,” and “Classroom Structure for Instruction.” Significantly, I consider each theme primarily from the perspective of each of the participants to showcase how the themes are embedded in their life experiences and life meanings as a means of answering this research question. Drawing on the tools of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework and the use of data crystallization, I later underscore how the themes might be common to all participants while they might be experienced, understood, and lived in unique ways in relation to each participant.

Alison

Alison is a 2002 graduate of the high school where this study took place and is 34 years old. She grew up in the community where she teaches and is raising her three small children there, too. Alison’s husband travels during the week, so she is busy taking care of her children, all under the age of six. Alison’s parents are retired middle school science teachers, so they are available to help her and provide a strong support system when her husband is out of town. Alison played soccer for Alpha school and spent ten years coaching

in a nearby bedroom community. Alison has taught for a total of 13 years, the last two at her alma mater, the high school where the study took place.

Alison taught juniors and advanced sophomores during the data collection of the study; next year she will teach AP Language and Composition (advanced juniors) and World Literature (advanced sophomores). Alison took a graduate class at a local university to complete her master's plus 40 hours, and she is interested in earning the credentials to be a dual-credit composition teacher in the future. Alison holds a Master's degree in Education and also has her library media specialist certificate. Alison serves on the social committee for the school, and she is a leader in the department through her work in the English Department cadre each summer. Her background while teaching in her previous district includes teaching creative writing and pre-AP Literature courses. Alison's experiences make her as well-rounded teacher.

Alison's parents influenced her to love reading and instilled in her a passion for ideas. Alison said that "growing up, my parents were both readers. My mom still reads each night before bed. My dad travels and reads academic articles that he shares with me all the time." She commented that she learned to love reading and books early in life and even took notes about her reading as a young person. She related, "I even carried around a pen and notebook with me while I read." Alison's relationship with her parents is a close one. Since they are both educators, they helped to inspire their daughter to become an educator, too. Alison's parents come to Alpha school to see her and their former students. They are an important part of her background and helped to shape the teacher that she is today. They have influenced the decisions and actions she makes in her classroom regarding reading.

Alison also explained that she has a competitive nature. She reinforced the notion of competition in reading by saying,

I always played soccer competitively, but I did everything with goals in mind. As a young child, I wanted to meet all the goals to read as many books as I could to get the top stickers and accolades from the teachers in elementary school.

It was this joy of reading and competing that led Alison to pursue a degree in teaching high school English. She thought to herself, “It’d be amazing to be able to read and write and teach others the joy of learning as I’ve experienced my whole life.”

Teachers’ relationships with their students. Alison is a daughter, a wife, a teacher, and a mother. She fluidly captures all these roles and makes it appear easy. Alison works diligently with her students. Her relationships with her parents and with books was firmly established in her early years. To capture her philosophy about student relationships, Alison told me, “I like to show students the importance of reading through modeling skills for them. This helps to show my own journey as a reader and that there is a reason for what we are doing in class each day.” Alison models her own position as a reader when she interacts with her students. These background experiences propelled Alison to pursue an English education degree in college while she also competed on her school’s soccer team. I could see relationships develop that stem from Alison’s connectedness to her parents, the two science teachers who shaped her viewpoints from birth.

Alison’s class that I observed is called English III. It is a regular junior class and the content for the curriculum is American Literature. One day, Alison was engaging the students in an activity following a study of Fitzgerald’s (1925) *The Great Gatsby* connecting the roots of jazz to the contemporary rap music of the most recent version of the film. Alison’s idea was to connect the music of the 1920s to current day rap that the students

know as part of their culture so very well. In the observation notes, I wrote, “The teacher enjoys a great rapport with the students, acknowledges the students individually in a friendly way.” This note exemplifies the relationships I saw all semester in Alison’s class. During this same lesson, she further showcased the importance of building relationships between and among students, saying, “Scott (pseudonym) has something really good to say. Everyone listen to him!” during the class discussion about the different impressions of the rap lyrics that the students analyzed.

As the class interacted with the teacher that day, I also wrote in the notes, “Yes! No phones. Students are engaged and interactive with the teacher.” From my vantage point toward the back of the classroom, students had few to no side conversations and showed genuine interest in thinking about the rap lyrics and make observations about what the song said about socioeconomic class. A female student noted differences between Alpha school and a neighboring state as well as the cross-town rival school. Her observations included the types of cars, houses, clothes, and possessions the people had compared to students in Alpha school. She easily connected her place in the world to the characters in Fitzgerald’s (1925) novel, which developed themes of wealth, old money versus new money, and the status endowed by such money. This discussion was layered and rich because more than one-third of the students participated in the discussion to show a deep connection between the American decades, knowledge of the novel, and an understanding of self.

The class is a regular junior class, so all students need to pass it for graduation. There are diverse learners. One student, Jacob (pseudonym), raised Alison’s concern and mine as well. Jacob had his head down for many of the classes I observed, but he was smart. Jacob said to me at the beginning of the class about Steinbeck’s (1937) classic *Of Mice and Men*,

“I’ve read this before at my other school. It’s so sad. It almost made me cry, but I do want to read it again because it tells a lot about the human heart.” That moment taught me that students who may not appear engaged during a particular class really are. I observed Alison interacting with Jacob and encouraging him, but she did not draw unnecessary attention to him from the class. To me, her actions reveal a deep level of understanding of his situation. Maybe he has to work late or something along those lines, but she knew he was a capable learner. She gave him the space so that he felt comfortable in the classroom. I observed many occasions like this one.

In another lesson to introduce Steinbeck’s novel (1937) *Of Mice and Men*, Alison had a brief instruction for the students and explained why she liked to start the novel with a read-aloud. “I like to read chapter 1 aloud because there is a lot of character development with George and Lennie,” she said. “There is also a lot of descriptive language so you can just see where the characters are. Then we’ll do a Webquest so you can independently research where they are and the time period and see how well the description matches.” The students were receptive to this strategy and started asking questions: “Are George and Lennie both protagonists? Can you have two?” and another student asked, “What does the word ‘tramp’ mean again?” I could tell that they were engaged with the text and with their teacher from the beginning of the study.

I thus uncovered how Alison’s relationship with her students was professional and amiable. She established a positive rapport with her students so they felt comfortable asking questions, reading dense texts, and even joking around with her. Her demeanor was professional, but she demonstrated that she understood her audience well, which allowed her to teach any text level to “regular” junior readers. These observations of her

relationships relates to the question directly because an established, positive relationship is key for helping students to read and interact with texts. Had Alison not established these relationships, her students would not have met the challenges of reading tasks in her classroom.

Classroom structure for instruction. Alison's classroom was set up physically with vertical rows. Her teacher desk was in the back of the room, but she was in the front of the room from bell to bell. The room was small, and she created an intimate feeling with lamps, a candle, posters and student art work from previous projects. The structure of the class was a traditional model, but when tablets were brought in on a cart, the students worked well at their desks researching different aspects of Steinbeck's life, the time period, California, and migrant workers. The students used the information that they learned from the Webquest throughout the study of the novel.

This structure worked well for Alison because she was rather soft spoken, but she was also assertive. The students respected her personally and professionally. She joked with them casually before class and knew her students well. On one occasion teachers at lunch were discussing Jacob's behavior during the state assessment, the ACT. Students had complained of him taking the test quickly so he could draw on his arm with a sharpie. Alison defended Jacob and said he was a good kid and he was smart. She developed a relational approach to learning and the structure of her lessons were teacher-driven and were also independent. This structure definitely worked for her students and for her to achieve a comfortable learning environment. Alison also taught regular sophomores and academically gifted sophomores last year. In many ways, I could see Alison changing her students into new versions of themselves without their even knowing they were growing as readers.

While I observed Alison's junior class this semester, I noticed that she carefully embedded high-interest approaches for the students. When the students analyzed Robert Frost's (1914) poem, "The Mending Wall," Alison asked the students questions about their neighbors and the symbolism of a wall based on their experiences. Alison also paired this poem with a current article about President Trump's planned wall separating the United States with Mexico. These pairings offered a deep, rich experience for the students to consider as they read a poem from 1914 and made critical connections to present day politics. When I read her journal responses and her interview transcriptions about her views regarding standards, I thought of her lesson about Frost's (1914) poem since she paired an older poem with a current article to build an experience for her students. This decision might support Alison's background in reading and how that informs her decisions and actions in the classroom to build relationships with her students so they perceive the relevancy of texts she teaches.

When asked about state standards and her beliefs about their impact on her instruction, Alison said:

Honestly, I know the standards and know what the state wants, but I also know my students best...I think if a teacher does his or her best to improve reading and writing ability, then they are on the right track.

This means that if teachers focus too much on test preparation or state standards, they may miss the importance of actually teaching reading. In her interview, Alison explained, "I feel like we do so much test preparation in English III and even in AP Language to do well on these high stakes tests that English teachers are working harder than other disciplines." My interpretation of Alison's comments is that teachers do understand state standards, but they may need an even better understanding of their students, their

relationships with their students, and why they structure their classes the way they do in order to work effectively with their students.

Alison's classroom structure was essential in the achievements of her students. There was order. It was calm. The students had her focus the entire hour and felt comfortable being in her room. Her lessons always started with a greeting and a little conversation about what was going on at school, and then the lesson's objectives were stated and the purpose clearly explained to the students. The students were focused and not distracted by cell phones or each other. The respect they had for their teacher and that relationship, coupled with the organization and structure of the classroom, made this environment welcoming for discourse.

Teachers' beliefs about their abilities in teaching reading. Part of the effectiveness of her interactions with her students might be embodied in how Alison sees herself and her skill level as a teacher of reading. Alison said to me in her last interview, "I feel like I am fairly confident in teaching reading, and I think that having experience helps." Her use of the words "feel" and "fairly" resonated with me because sometimes teachers can be harsher in their critiques of their abilities and skills. It is human nature to err on the side of caution when analyzing our own skills, but these two particular diction choices captured the essence of Alison's viewpoint. The other important part of her view is that she said experience helps. It does. In fact, throughout the semester of collecting data, I started to think deeply about experiences of teachers and a teacher's background that are so important in the classroom. Alison's views about teaching reading and about her understanding of the state standards related directly to those of the other two participants in this study.

Seth

Seth (pseudonym) is 30 years old. He moved from a small, university town to the metro area to be closer to his then girlfriend and current fiancée, who is also a secondary English teacher at an urban district. Seth grew up on the opposite side of the state in a suburb of a major metro area in the Midwest. He was the quarterback of his high school football team and homecoming king. Seth enjoys sports and music. Seth taught in the small university town for two years while earning his master's degree. The high school where he taught has a diverse student body and many university professors' children in attendance.

Seth and his fiancée recently bought a house in an urban neighborhood in the metro area. They enjoy walking places to shop and to eat at eclectic restaurants. In fact, he related how they had to write a letter to the sellers of their 1909 bungalow house to convince the sellers that they were the right buyers for it. Seth related how their combined rhetorical skills in persuasion won them the house. Currently, Seth serves as department chairperson. He has written test questions for the state test, the End-of-Course (EOC) course, has tutored, and has been trained in ACT strategies and AP Language strategies. Seth serves on the Building Leadership Team committee for the building representing the English department. His responsibilities as department chairperson include weekly professional development collaboration, ordering books, scheduling for the teachers, and acting as a support for new teachers coming into the department. Seth currently teaches AP Language and Composition for juniors, and he teaches Classroom-Within-a-Classroom classes for sophomores. A special education teacher co-teaches in these classes to offer instructional strategies for each student's IEP (Individual Educational Plan) for accommodations. Seth's CWC classes are comprised of special education students and regular education students. The ratio for these

students is about 50%, but it can vary depending on the class and the year. Seth has taught for six years total, the past four years at the high school where this study took place. Seth's background growing up on the eastern side of the state, his experiences teaching in the high school in the university town, and the classes he teaches make him an interesting participant in this study.

Seth explained to me that his mom was a significant influence in his love of reading and in his desire for scholarly work. He said of her, "My mom was always encouraging me to be intellectual. I received books as gifts for each occasion growing up, a crystal growing kit, and a telescope. She taught me to question and to have an inquisitive nature about things." Seth's mom encouraged him as a child to be curious and to read, which impacted his work as he grew up. He said, "I have always had positive experiences with school whether I took regular classes with my friends or I took the advanced classes to make it to the top of my graduating class, it was all fun to me." These varied experiences I can see in Seth's approaches in his own classes. He approaches learning with the same passion and positivity for both advanced students and students who are in a CWC structure,

Teachers' relationships with their students. Seth explained that his mom's love of reading impacted him greatly as a youngster. Seth's mom is a nurse, who is compassionate of others. She helps people to get well physically while Seth helps his students to understand texts that are read in class. Like Alison, who played soccer and coached, Seth played football as a high school student and then coached his first two years of teaching. When I first met him at Alpha school four years ago, he told me that he enjoyed coaching, but wanted to focus on being an English teacher. Through the lens of his childhood, Seth's gifts from his mom impact the instructional decisions and actions he makes in his classroom.

Seth's class that I observed is called English II CWC. The students are comprised of half regular education students and half students who have Individual Education Plans or IEPs. There is a special education teacher in the room with Seth who can provide accommodations for the students as they work. Her name is Stephanie (pseudonym) and she is in her early fifties. The class typically did a vocabulary worksheet the first fifteen minutes of each Tuesday that I observed unless they were engaged in research for their research papers. Seth constantly developed relationships with students and worked well with this small class. Students had completed the vocabulary word bank, but Seth went over each one with a little anecdote or way to help the students remember the words: "Charisma. Who in this class has enough charisma to run for public office?" The students got animated as they speculated on which classmate might make a good president.

Seth had an explanation for each word and offered mnemonic devices for each one. Seth said, "Would you say the speech we read yesterday was poignant?" to connect a vocabulary word to the previous day's lesson, a speech by Elie Wiesel (1999) called "The Perils of Indifference." He led the students to an in-depth discussion of the speech and its theme as well as how it related to current political situations. He moved fluidly from the vocabulary to the discussion of the speech and held the students accountable by including them by name in the discussion. Students were on task for this discussion and contributed comments about Bosnia, and about President Trump's ban on immigrants. One female student asked Seth to explain the word "indifference" for her again during the discussion.

Another student said, "Trump is saving jobs for Americans by shutting out immigrants." Although I know Seth well enough to know that he does not support such ideology, he was calm and let the students express themselves in response to the speech with

a natural discourse. He interjected only a question or two to keep the students focused on the themes of the speech. While the discussion took place, Stephanie walked around the room and made sure the students were looking at the speech and had their work on the desks. She asked a few questions to particular students to draw them into the discussion. Seth's background and familial culture was manifest in these classroom dynamics as he taught his classes. As I watched on that particular day in January, I could see that the students trusted Seth as their teacher and that they had confidence they could read a complex and literary speech like the one they analyzed by Wiesel (1999). The students had been studying Wiesel's (Wiesel & Rodway, 1978) Holocaust memoir *Night*, so Seth paired this speech to add depth and context to the study.

Seth's relationships developed with diverse learners in his CWC English II class allowed him to teach sophisticated texts such as *Night* (1978) or *Othello* (Shakespeare, n.d.) to a blended group of students, a number of whom had IEPs. Other students in the class probably did not qualify for an IEP, but because Seth's attitudes about learning encourage enthusiasm to grow their knowledge, he found success in his interactions and instruction methods. Students know Seth has their success as a primary focus from the beginning of the class with the vocabulary lesson of the day to the texts and objectives taught. His inclusive and humorous sentences including different students in the class to teach vocabulary demonstrated his philosophy about positive relationships in the classroom. These observations directly answered the research question because Seth revealed that if a teacher develops positive relationships with their students, the students will trust the teacher and will engage with texts in a more meaningful way.

Classroom structure for instruction. During classroom observations, Seth commonly added similar non-fiction texts to lessons, which is also a direct goal of the CCSS in the integration of more non-fiction texts in typical curricula that are usually more concentrated with different forms of literature. In both Alison's and Seth's classes, they added ancillary texts while teaching an anchor text to make the reading experiences rich for the students. I observed this strategy throughout the semester, and it seemed that both teachers found a level of engagement from their students in response to it.

In observing Seth's classes, I was able to see read-alouds, a kinesthetic portrayal of Shakespeare's *Othello* (n.d.) that included props, nametags, and half the class up on their feet reading the play while the others followed along. Also, a student clicked the Teamboard from Seth's desk to change the scenery depending on the act of the play they were reading. These visual representations of character helped the students understand a complex text. The students genuinely enjoyed their learning experiences during the reading of Shakespeare, and Seth helped them to see contemporary themes from the text to their lives today.

The structure of Seth's class was the teacher desk in the front of the room. On either sides, there were two rows of student desks facing each other. Seth used a traditional model mixed with workshop model. Workshop model focuses on about ten minutes of instruction and then small group work back to large group work. I saw Seth's sophomores work in groups on peer reviews of their essays in a small group configuration where he asked them to look for certain traits and techniques in a peer's essay, and he put the students on a 12-minute timer on the Teamboard. They switched papers after that so several peers in small groups of four could give feedback before the essay was due to the teacher. The blend of traditional model, to kinesthetic learning, to small group seemed to work for Seth and for his

students. I observed his strong personal and professional rapport with the students worked well in this structure for learning.

Seth explained to me that he believes his students can learn and he trusts them to learn. He sees his job as helping students to think beyond the surface, from the obvious to the deeper levels of understanding, in texts as varied as a speech to a Shakespearean play. In each of these different lessons, plus many days in which the students worked independently on research essays, Seth modeled for the students how to do the academic tasks he was asking, and he guided them to help each other. In the notes from my observations of Seth's classroom, I wrote, "Teacher scaffolds questions comprehension-analysis-evaluation, constantly. He moves fluidly and clearly models expected learning outcomes." In these observations, the themes of building relationships with students as well as the structured way a classroom was set up each led to an engaging and rich experience for the students who were asked to read, think, and analyze.

The physical room was set up with the student desks facing one another. This set-up symbolized the focus of the room which was the students, looking at one another. Seth stood in front of the students, but they could readily see him and see one another, too. The physicality of this set up demonstrated Seth's focus of each day, each lesson which was the students themselves. He trusted the students to learn and relied on their interactions with him to generate a chemistry in the classroom for reading and thinking about reading.

This structure and organization answered the research question directly, because Seth's classroom set up paralleled his theories that all students can learn and he was the facilitator to assist in each student's academic and personal growth. Seth started the class right when the bell rang, and students put away phones and got out their vocabulary to go

over it at the beginning of the hour. The goals were written on the whiteboard in the front of the room and were clearly stated. There was a question from the lesson the day before to connect ideologies and move forward. All of these structural threads answered my question directly and led Seth to success with his students when engaging with reading instruction.

Teachers' beliefs about their abilities in teaching reading. Overall, Seth showcased his belief that teachers of reading need to make reading purposeful. He said, "I absolutely consider myself a teacher of reading as a high school English teacher." In this strong and assertive statement, Seth's beliefs were apparent. I especially focused on his use of the word "absolutely," which is a vivid, definitive word choice. As he does organically, Seth focused on a class he taught his first year of teaching for struggling readers. Seth said, "Teaching that class allowed me to recognize the lower-level readers don't have the visual strategies they need to be good readers...it is important to me to teach those students to engage and to understand." Seth's anecdote about teaching struggling readers his first year of teaching shaped his viewpoint and philosophy as a teacher.

This story reminded me of an earlier observation of Seth's classroom in which he was doing pre-research activities in the library. He used a scaffold to his lesson by starting out with something the students all understood and had experienced. "Why is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich the best sandwich?" Seth asked. Students furiously scribbled on papers their support for or against the superiority of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Before they knew it, students were thinking in argumentative modes to support or refute the superiority of the sandwich. Seth moved their thinking rapidly to more sophisticated research questions so the students could develop topics of their own for their essays. It would thus seem that in his teaching practices, Seth has a keen understanding of his students and their needs.

I had this moment in mind when I read Seth's journal entry about his beliefs regarding curriculum standards, because I could witness his understanding of his students and ways of instruction that were impactful. Seth said, "The standards never really change my methods. English standards whether they are CCSS or Missouri Learning Standards are pretty similar in what I have seen during my short time as a high school English teacher." In my interpretation of Seth's statement, that first sentence grabbed my attention because he was saying that the standards never change his methods in working with his students. I think this viewpoint is profound because often in education, teachers feel they need to completely change based on the trend that is coming down from the top (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988). I learned from Alison, Seth, and Natalie, who share similar views about standards and methods of instruction, that the standards may shift but that does not mean that they should change their approaches to learning, and especially to teaching reading in the secondary classroom. Seth revealed a deeper understanding of teachers' viewpoints of the standards placement and their relationship to the viewpoints of teachers in approaching instruction. When Seth used his peanut butter and jelly analogy to teach sophomores how to support their argument, I witnessed a teacher who understood the standards and the needs of his students.

Seth's beliefs about his abilities to teach students of multiple reading levels and diverse backgrounds strengthens his interactions and successes with his students each day. Seth allows for individuality in his classroom and helps students to grow from where they are and not into a cookie-cutter version of what Seth wants them to be, but into the individuals that they are. Seth's beliefs that each student has potential not only to learn but to help our world to be a good place is evident in his instructional methodology. His beliefs

about his skills and abilities to teach students any text to analyze and to discuss answered the research question about high school English teachers' experiences with reading instruction. A teacher's self-efficacy is important for their success in the classroom when teaching reading.

Natalie

Natalie is 37 years old and has taught only at the high school where the study took place. She is mother to three young sons aged six and younger. Natalie lives in a rural area and drives 45 minutes to the high school each day from where she lives with her family on the farm. Her eldest child attended first grade this past year in a rural school district near the farm. Natalie was raised in the metro area; in fact, she is from the community where she teaches high school English. Natalie just finished her 15th year teaching at this school, where she has taught a variety of classes including advanced sophomores (world literature), dual credit senior composition and fiction courses, and Classroom-within-a-Classroom (CWC) classes for juniors (American Literature). She has also taught British Literature for seniors.

Natalie holds a Master's degree in English from a nearby university. She has earned her plus 40 hours, too. Natalie has coached cheerleading, and she has led a spirit group for leadership where high school leaders go to the elementary schools that feed into the high school to promote involvement and success. Natalie served as the English department chairperson for the past five years. This past year, Natalie gave up department chair duties when she had her last son. Natalie's diverse background in life experiences and in teaching made her an interesting participant for this study.

One afternoon this winter, Natalie and I sat in a conference room in the school library for her interview. When I asked her about her background experiences with reading, Natalie's smile became animated. She said, "Well, I've read for as long as I can remember. My mom would ask me if I wanted to 'go on a field trip' when I was little, which always meant to the library to select books." Natalie's fond childhood memories also included, "my mom and I were at the library all the time," and "to me, the library is a place that exemplifies the 'sweetness' of life."

Natalie continued to tell me that she would use her library books as models for writing her own creative stories. Particularly, Natalie mentioned enjoying the *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder, 1932) series. I have that experience in common with her, even though we are 12 years apart in age. Natalie mentioned her love of reading different books as she grew up and also explained to me that her first love was to teach history. She wanted to be a history teacher, but a counselor told her that usually history teachers are coaches, so Natalie switched her goal to teach English.

Teachers' relationships with their students. Natalie said she'd always loved reading and writing, so changing her mind did not bother her at all. In fact, she gets to teach quite a bit of history to contextualize the literature she teaches. For Natalie, her experiences come with her each day as she drives in from the farm to teach in her classroom.

Natalie also represents the "teacher as curriculum" (Schlein & Schwartz, 2015, p. 2), because she naturally shares these passions with her students in the choices she makes in text selection and in style while she is teaching. An important part of a teacher's style is how they develop relationships with the students in the classroom. These relationships emerged as a prominent theme throughout the data collection for this study. Their significance is far-

reaching because personal experiences and background can shape a person's viewpoint and approaches to teaching reading in secondary classrooms.

I watched Natalie build understanding with her students continuously. One day while I observed Natalie teach Huxley's (1932) *Brave New World*, she asked a few essential questions to guide discussion that started with this question: "How old do you think John is?" and ended with this question, "How does John feel about sex?" "The students handled this discussion with maturity," I wrote in my notes, "and readily made connections to our culture." One student connected the symbolism of the "feelies" in the novel, where all their senses are heightened, to her experience going to Disneyworld and feeling the same way. Natalie's methods to elicit these in-depth discussions about a seminal dystopian, British novel indicate that she seems to understand her student audience and knows how to integrate effective reading strategies.

Natalie has developed a mature relationship with her students of mutual respect and understanding. Her students are college-ready and show her that they can handle sophisticated discussions and subject matter. While Natalie started discussion with questions that were text-dependent, her students responded with maturity and grace to connect on a scholarly level but on a personal level, too. Natalie trusts her students to be ready for these interactions and discussions and they do not disappoint. She treats the students with a level of respect that causes the students to respect her and one another. There wasn't one day I was in her class that a student didn't share a critical connection that was personal or risky, and I applaud her for building relationships with her students this way.

Natalie's relationships with her students propel her to advance these discussions so students are ready to handle the rigor of college reading and writing. Her connectedness to

the students answered the research question because she is able to push her students into the college reading and writing so they may thrive in her dual credit course, but also in their future college classes. These relationships are essential for their success. In fact, they remember her for many years to come after they graduate with wedding invitations, invitations for coffee, and graduation invitations.

Classroom structure for instruction. While Seth and Alison taught regular education students and Seth even had a CWC structure, Natalie taught a dual-credit course for seniors who have achieved a 3.0 or higher GPA. This class is called English 124, “Writing about Literature,” and is taught on campus at a local university. The students pay nearly \$300 in tuition per semester to take this class that affords them high school and college credit simultaneously. Natalie’s students are enrolled in one of the top academic courses offered in Alpha school district. Her demeanor with the students is scholarly yet approachable. Her instructional methods vary in nature, but she is a traditionalist and understands why she structures her class the way she does. She said to me, “As a student, I always enjoyed discussion and doing independent work so that’s how I structure my classes.” This structure was effective for Natalie, because I noticed that she held students accountable for the previous night’s reading assignment by giving a quick five- or six-question quiz at the beginning of the hour and then engaging the students in discussion.

She crafted a couple of essential questions and the students would show ownership of their learning by contributing to the discussion. I also noticed Natalie had an organic way of scaffolding discussion questions for the students to consider based on the chemistry among the students on any given day. For example, one morning Natalie started the class by saying, “I’m curious: how do you feel about Amir now? Amy (pseudonym), tell me! You

are laughing. I know you have something insightful to say.” After that question, Amy did respond to Natalie about what she was feeling regarding the protagonist of the novel, and then several hands were in the air to indicate her peers had something to say, too.

The conversation was an easy, free-flowing dialogue about the layers of complexity regarding the coming-of-age novel *The Kite Runner* by Hosseini (2003). The conversation moved to discuss the word “sacrifice” and what it meant to the students, including examples as well as the literal definition of the word. The discussion focused on the students explaining the significance of that word to plot, to character, and to theme. In fact, even one student, Dylan (pseudonym) said, “People can be mad at me, but I completely understand why Amir is acting the way he is.” Peers nodded their heads, and another student asked the class a question: “Maybe I’ve watched too much TV, but do you think Amir has socio-pathological tendencies?” There was a clear shift in the class dynamic, and students turned toward each other from their rows to analyze and to debate this question about the character.

Students contributed knowledge of literary archetypes and structures as well as symbolism, but they also connected on personal levels connecting to pop culture and to their own personal experiences. This particular discussion covered many critical lens theories where the students analyzed the text from multiple lenses. My observation on this day and all the others exemplified the deep, textual discussions Natalie inspired. I saw her do this with Huxley’s (1932) *Brave New World*, Salinger’s (1951) *Catcher in the Rye*, and Guest’s (1976) *Ordinary People*. I learned that the structure of a class impacts the way the students interact with the teacher to develop relationships and also how they receive and perceive the texts being taught. Natalie’s style seems to align with social constructivism, and based on this observations, she uses that theoretical frame in her approaches consistently. With her

college-high school audience, she was able to have sophisticated literary discussions with the students to enrich their reading experiences. As a teacher of this class myself, the class still has diverse leveled readers but with the requirement of a 3.0 GPA to take the class, most students worked diligently to achieve success as readers and as writers.

Natalie's classroom structure revealed that students can be trusted to read and to interact with college-level texts while in high school. Her room was set up in rows that faced the front of the room while her desk and work station was in the back left-hand corner of the room. Natalie taught from the front of the room behind a podium that had a wise saying or adage on it from a famous author. She has art on her walls, photos of her family, and plants that welcome students to an environment that feels comfortable. Natalie's essential questions to start discussion offered a structure for students to take ownership of their interpretations of text and their natural discussion that moved fluidly from the starting point.

She, too, trusted her student learners to engage with the texts and to develop a high level of engagement throughout the hour. This structure answered the research question aptly, because it showcased the way a teacher structures their classes impacts the level of involvement from the students. These students were prepared and they understood that their responsibility in a college course was serious. After all, they or their parents were paying tuition while they were in high school.

Teachers' beliefs about their abilities in teaching reading. Natalie concurred that some teachers based on their backgrounds may not consider themselves teachers of reading. She told me in her second interview:

I do feel confident in teaching reading and think about how to teach reading often in my classes. As English teachers, reading and understanding structure in texts comes naturally, so it can be difficult when trying to help a student who struggles.

Natalie's viewpoint that there might be some English teachers who might not consider themselves teachers of reading intrigued me greatly. I did not think deeply about a teacher's identity, level of confidence, and skill until this study. The themes that emerged, this one particularly about teachers' viewpoints regarding their abilities to teach reading in addition to their viewpoints about standards, revealed to me that a successful reading teacher for high school students would need a confident demeanor and should be able to explain how to think while reading to students to improve their ability levels.

I was curious to learn from her journal responses about her beliefs regarding CCSS and standards. Natalie wrote, "I don't see CCSS standards having a major impact on the way I implement reading practices because I feel the strategies I'm already using are the best methods for teaching any state or national standards." Her response echoes those of Alison and Seth in their beliefs about curriculum standards. These results from this study might be relevant because whenever changes from the state or from the nation start to trickle to the teachers, there is a sense of panic for the changes that might have to happen in their classrooms (Richmond & Zinshteyn, 2014).

In answer to the research sub-question, "What are English teachers experiences with reading instruction within a framework of increasing standardization and enhanced state-based standards?" Natalie did not believe that CCSS will impact her instructional practices. She revealed that she believed the strategies she is implementing currently meet the needs of any state standards, national standards, and district standards. Natalie's viewpoint about CCSS was echoed by Seth and also by Alison to demonstrate that all three teacher participants will not alter their practices in the age of CCSS.

Natalie, in answer to this sub-question, revealed the insight that in all of her teaching career, the objectives of teaching reading in high school English classes shifted only in diction choices mainly, but did not radically change in focus. She, along with Seth and Alison, believed that they understand their students' needs for reading instruction better than to change just because state standards have changed. These insights answered the sub-question directly and provided key data about the current landscape in education of state standards shifts to the CCSS.

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space Interpretations

In the previous section, I illustrated the common narrative themes that were found across the participants. While I grounded the discussion in the experiences of each participant and drew together connections between the themed findings of the study and the research questions, I also engaged in a deepening of the data analysis and the development of interpretive findings in association with participants' lived narratives. In other words, I hoped to gain a sense of what the themes actually meant to each participant.

I made use of the arts-based form of found poetry to crystallize the data toward the construction of this meaning-making account. Prendergast (2006) explained that found poetry takes words and texts already created and re-organizes the words to form new poetry. Clandinin et al. (2000) further argued that narrative inquiry creates a web of relationships and does not have to rely on traditional modes to analyze data. They espoused that the poetic representation of data analysis and interpretation could take many creative forms. In the analysis illustrated below, I wrote several poems to convey my interpretations of the data as clearly as possible.

The Temporal Dimension

In this sub-section, I consider the ways in which the temporal dimension played a role in participants' experiences. I consider some of their stories of teaching and of teaching reading in relation to the past, the present, and future intentions.

Alison: “Trial and error.” Alison has taught for 10 years in a bedroom community and has taught at Alpha school for the past two years. She has definitely seen a shift in the way that students interact with texts in her classroom. Alison said, “I have seen a change in the way students interact with texts. If I had to pinpoint the shift, I’d say with the growing popularity of social media, students don’t interact with the text like they should.” She told me a story about how she read with a pen and notebook poised at all times to write down questions, words she didn’t know, to interact with the text as she read.

During her interviews, Alison explained her views about her teaching experiences. She had to do more background work when introducing a novel so that students would have previous knowledge of the time period, the culture, and the cultural milieu to make the study meaningful. Alison discussed the trouble of teaching complex texts like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Twain (1885) to her regular juniors. She explained that the dialect in the novel is difficult for some students, but she then said that it is more important to teach the text because its themes that are still relevant today focus on discrimination and racial inequality. I wrote a found poem through a reconstruction of meaning from Alison’s interview responses as a way to tell and retell her stories of experiences in ways that highlight how those experiences might be significant to her personally and professionally. This found poem was based on statements by Alison to explain her reasoning for teaching Twain’s (1885) novel in her junior classes:

In Anticipation of the Journey

They connect personally on the level with an anticipation guide.

Later, they connect back to the anticipation guide to see themes developed from the beginning—you have to be very blunt with them like “Hey—this is relevant and here’s why”

Sometimes I think I’m not teaching *Huck Finn* because it’s too hard, but then I think about the themes of discrimination and racial equality.

We need that today so I teach the novel knowing it’ll be a challenge.

I tell the students, “This book is like going on a journey, just like you will be when you leave high school and the real journey of life begins...”

In this found poem, Alison’s words, “Hey—this is relevant and here’s why,” reveal her position as the English teacher to teach a text that is complex and to help her students understand why it is important to read that particular one. She supports her viewpoint by explaining the significance of the novel published in 1885 and why it is still important in our society today. She also has crafted a simile comparing the journey that is essential to the plot of Twain’s (1885) novel to their own personal journeys after high school is completed.

In this poem, Alison described starting a study with an anticipation guide, so she explained the different levels of teaching a complex novel here from the basic themes in the anticipation guide to the complexity of discussing discrimination and racial equality. Basically, the novel serves as a way to teach social justice in context with Twain’s (1885) post-Civil War American satire to the current fabric of our society which as of late has seen an escalation of hate crimes and discrimination. It is difficult to teach such sophisticated texts from hundreds of years ago, but it can be done. As Alison said, “When I first started teaching it was basically trial and error until I started to figure myself out.” This statement is so true when understanding the temporal experiences of teachers as they grow and mature throughout their careers.

Alison further explained that although she has taught for 13 years now, teenagers still challenge. She said:

I used to get flustered and stumble over how to explain why something was important for the students to learn...now I like to show students the importance of reading through modeling skills for them. This helps to show my own journey as a reader and that there is a reason for what we are doing.

Alison captures the passage of time in being a new teacher and experiencing a lot of “flustered” moments to understanding her position as teacher and knowing what she is all about to explain fully the ‘why’ part of learning to her teenage audience. Time helps teachers to develop their teacher personae and feel more confident in their understanding of purpose, philosophy and instructional methodology.

Seth: “In real time.” Seth described teaching a reading class called Literacy Seminar for struggling readers his first year of teaching. He said in his journal response, “I can remember more of the students in that class than in any other class. And it was definitely the most difficult to teach.” Often, first year teachers are assigned the struggling students. I share this experience with Seth, because I taught a remedial reading class for the first three years of my career called “Essentials of English I.” It seems there is always a moniker for those classes to make the class not seem as if it is remedial, but a whole class of struggling readers often impacts the instruction. Seth remembered one student, Tom (pseudonym), who would come into class chewing tobacco and who would curse frequently. Seth wrote, “...he ended up loving some vampire/magic/zombie books. He just wanted a book with some sex and violence because that is what he was interested in.” Seth’s memories of this class and these particular students came up during our discussions this semester. He said that is what makes teaching remedial students fun. When a teacher can tap into the interests of the

students and allow the students the power of choice to read what they are interested in, that can make a significant difference in the student's education and learning experiences.

These temporal experiences build a foundation for being able to successfully work with diverse students. Seth explained that recently, he took a graduate class so he could earn the credentials to teach the dual-credit students at a local university. The class was taught online and focused on *Ulysses* by Joyce (1922). Seth said the professor "posted videos and required an annotated book that explained the text which helped me as I learned Joyce's (1922) novel. As teachers, we are those videos and annotations, but in real time." Seth connected his own experiences as a graduate student to the position he fills in his classroom as a reading teacher to *be* the annotations, the visual aids, and the strategies that are most effective to help students of all levels.

Seth's experiences from teaching the Literacy Seminar to his experiences as a graduate student, and even teaching upper level students, reveal that the role of the teacher to help students to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate texts is significant. Seth explained a strategy he implements with his AP Language and Composition students in which he asks them to post a discussion question from the reading on Google Drive so that the students have ownership of their learning. Seth said of this practice, "When students look at another deeper level question and realize their question is not up to par, they will adjust...it's pretty amazing how most of what I hope to address is already posted as a question. I think students can bring a lot of energy for reading when you give them ownership." Seth's experiences, with time, have shifted based on his practices, growth in age, and in his own education. Temporal experiences help teachers look back and reflect and improve their skills as reading teachers.

Clearly, the activities I implemented in 1992 would most likely be ineffectual today because the students are not the same, culture shifts, and the 2017 audience might crinkle up their noses and question my credentials if they saw how I approached teaching reading with a lot of teacher-driven “tasks” instead of deep thinking activities such as the one Seth described. It is this “real time” teaching that is relevant in today’s classrooms for teaching reading. As Seth said, the teachers are the annotations, the videos, and the reading strategies to help their students think about texts read in class and outside of class.

Natalie: “Creative ways.” The temporal journey Natalie described in her journal and in her interviews is one that shows a definite progression over time. Natalie wrote, “When I first began teaching, I was excited to teach reading....In 15 years of teaching this hasn’t changed, but I have a more realistic view now.” I interpret Natalie’s viewpoint as the idealism that most new teachers experience at the very start of their careers. The reality of working day to day and year to year sets in for most teachers as they continue to practice in the profession. Natalie said, “Now I understand that many students do not enjoy reading, which has made me more creative in the ways I approach literature units.” Natalie’s insightful comment about learning how to be more creative in her approaches to teaching literature is an important aspect of teaching reading in English classrooms today. Students are inquisitive and want to understand the intricacies of a time period, of an author’s life, of how and why texts are written the way they are. When I was a high school student in the 1980s, I remember just accepting whatever the teacher said was true, to be true. In fact, later at the university I learned an American author I admired greatly as a high school student had misogynistic threads in his work; overtly, in fact, which was not “told” to me by my high school teacher. While it is a bit sad I did not pick up on this trait myself, I am reminded of

Seth's comment that "teachers are the videos, the annotations, and the reading strategies"; so much so that we can help students to find truth in their own experiences and their own research interests as they grow.

Natalie went on to explain that that assertion was a key difference from her experiences as a first-year teacher to now. She also mentioned that she realized she needed to work hard to "sell" books to students. These realizations help teachers to become more self-actualized as practitioners and better equipped to help students. It is a natural progression to "live and learn" in teaching practices, and the evolution of teaching philosophies can shift as trends in education change the landscape of our day-to-day work.

Time matters because it is the structure against which teachers measure their daily activities, referred to as the teaching rhythm (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). In fact, in most high schools across the nation, some sort of bell system is in place to signal the beginning of the hour and the end of the hour. Schools are organized around temporal experiences that help us to maneuver to the next destination and the next challenge. The past teaches so that teachers can understand their present selves and matriculate to their future selves.

Social: Storytelling and Story-Grammar

The way a person shares a story is essential to understanding the data collection for this study. The syntax and language choices in a person's speech make their storytelling abilities unique only to that person. Social interactions often are centered on sharing stories, and this practice goes way back to our country's origins with the oral traditions of the Native Americans. Atkinson (2007) argued primarily that it is in stories' reconstruction that meaning is created. This framework through the lens of the social or storytelling and the participants' implementation of story-grammar is essential to analyze and interpret the

themes that emerged as significant from the collection of data. It was not only the way the participants chose to tell and retell their stories, but it was the content of what they chose to tell me in the interviews, in the journals, and even in the conversations that took place during data collection. Social interactions occurred as side conversations about this study about particular lessons, classes, students and reasons for the teacher doing what they did during observations. These nuances were welcomed and often provided provocative discussions that were not formally a part of the data collection, but contributed to the findings and results, nonetheless.

Alison: “It can’t be the same.” Part of Alison’s story that contextualized her beliefs and views about a shifting dynamic in teaching reading was the rampant use of social media, phones, and technology in general as a part of American culture. During our last interview, which took place in a more personal space than the first interview – her classroom – Alison revealed her views about why she thought teaching reading had changed so much.

Animatedly, she said,

When I first started teaching 13 years ago, it was rare for a student to have their own cell phone or a device in the classroom, but now it’s uncommon to have it the other way. Just this last week we listened to a presentation from the public library about books for the summer. Students were talking about how they wanted audiobooks, ebooks or just to get an app on their phone to check out books instead of hold a book and read it.

Alison’s implementation of the words “rare” and “uncommon” and “hold” reveal to me her viewpoint in a way that I can imagine and visualize her point about the shift during her career, the past 12 years to now. She went on to narrate that students are so attached to their phones they’d rather have everything they need on the one device rather than be inconvenienced to carry around an actual book.

Her story explains that the students and their cultural tenets as well as the social nature of the students. They are constantly on social media, commenting, posting, interacting, communicating in ways that were not possible in my generation or really even in Alison's generation. Alison's observation brings a relevant ideology to the classroom regarding electronic devices. Some school districts check out laptops for the students to be used, but Alpha school district's policy is a "bring your own device" policy, and the district has enough tablet labs for each student to have one if needed.

Alison's story is timely, but these devices will evolve in the future to become something else entirely. Many teachers implement devices as part of learning in their classrooms, and it is an effective way to look up information for inquiry-based learning and interactions. Alison continued her story: "It's like a really hard battle to fight. Like if there's a student who questions me, 'Why can't I listen to the book on audiotape?' It can work, but it is not the same as actually reading the words to develop vocabulary, understanding of structure, and tapping into the students' imagination to visualize the story or message. It can't be the same." Alison's story of experience discloses that students do not often live in the same space as that of their teachers.

While this may be true for many generations, technology adds a dimension that will not dissipate but will instead evolve to create even more advanced cultural and social differences between teachers and their students. I interpret Alison's observation to mean that while she will acknowledge that listening to a book in audio form is valid, she feels that the physical act of reading words is lost for those who already may not want to read for pleasure or for school. Her hesitation might also be embraced by many English teachers today because reading and text engagement has been understood for a long time in education, but

simply listening does not necessarily engage the same skill set for the student. To me, the most important language choices Alison implemented were captured in the phrase, “It can’t be the same,” because she shared her fear that reading is changing due to the widespread use of technology, and she knows that listening is not the same skill as actually reading the written word. Social interactions and the spaces that students live in today are much different than when Alison graduated from Alpha school in 2002.

Seth: “Give them ownership.” In sharing a space with students, Seth disclosed several stories that focus on the stories that his students bring to the interactive discourse. Seth explained, “I think students can bring a lot of the energy for reading when you give them ownership.” In this observation, Seth divulged that teachers and students should share energy and share space in a social interaction as they discuss texts. In this way, the students have ownership just like the teacher does in gaining meaning from what they have read. I retell Seth’s story through the following found poem to draw out his emphasis on social interaction as providing students with ownership of their learning.

Black Grandmother Voice

I had one student, Isaac (pseudonym) who read Mama’s part aloud with such emphasis and enthusiasm, and honestly, “black grandmother voice.”

This is what made the text memorable for the students in the class. But

Without the students who bring their individuality to the reading, whether it is through posing questions they hope to talk about or reading aloud with enthusiasm, the class would just be me.

So, reading requires an active audience, and my reading instruction relies on student participation and guidance – this also is what seems to work best.

The syntax of Seth’s description of Isaac reading the part of Mama in Hansberry’s (1959) *A Raisin in the Sun* exuded a passion to engage with students in the same space and in the social context of a lived and shared experience such as reading a classic play. Seth’s

word “energy” resonated with me because I think that teachers bring an enthusiasm and energy to their studies in the secondary classroom, but it is the students and their energy that really make an experience for learning a text as Seth describes. Seth explained that students should be allowed ownership in the classroom for their learning. When that happens, they will interact with texts in energetic and passionate ways like Isaac did when reading the part of Mama in his English II class this past spring.

The way Seth told this story revealed his student-centered focus on social interactions in the classroom. My interpretation of this story is that Seth places emphasis on student ownership as a philosophical practice, and he finds this approach to be successful. His descriptive phrases such as “black grandmother voice” and “reading requires,” “active audience,” and “student participation and guidance” are key phrases for developing Seth’s theme in his story. This story and its story-grammar particularly carve a lasting message for secondary English teachers who teach reading.

Since it can be difficult for some teachers to let go of their position in the classroom as the most knowledgeable one in the room, giving the students ownership of their learning, and consequently the learning in the classroom, can be a challenge for some teachers. Seth’s approaches and understanding of teaching reading capture an important element for this study when teaching reading. As Alison additionally noted, there are a lot of competing technologies in the lives of the students, so when they can be empowered and trusted to own their own learning in the classroom, the students might learn in a more meaningful way.

Natalie: “I was dumbfounded.” Natalie’s classes are centered on a dialogic. During observations, I saw the way her social approaches to learning impact the learner was that the students feel comfortable in sharing extremely academic ideas but also feel comfortable

sharing personally. Students handled discussions about mature topics in a sophisticated way throughout the semester. During one observation in early February, the discussion was about Amir's character in Hosseini's (2003) *The Kite Runner*. A male student in the back row, in the far corner of the room said, "I have a friend who was sexually assaulted and he goes to counseling but we have no idea what it's like. We shouldn't judge what Amir did when he saw the sexual assault in the alley." Students shared personally and connected with the texts professionally and academically because the environment was welcoming and open. Sharing a learning environment where the teacher is a social constructivist is a productive environment for students to think, feel, and learn from their discussions during class.

Natalie explained to me an experience she had learning how to understand what some of the students think as they read. Natalie shared:

Several years ago I was having a discussion with students about what they visualized when they read. I do not remember what novel we were reading at the time, but I do remember that I was talking to them as if visualizing the action of a novel was a given. I was struck when a student raised her hand and told me she didn't picture anything when she read. This prompted several other students to admit they could not visualize when they read either. I was dumbfounded. I had always assumed that "seeing" happened naturally when one read. Although I doubt I addressed the problem well that day, this teaching moment encouraged me to develop methods for teaching visualization while reading. I now encourage students to focus on setting and characterization details, to relate settings and characters to places/scenes they may have experienced or films/shows they have seen and to draw or to write about particular scenes/moments.

As Natalie shared this experience. I can interpret her story-grammar to be raw and honest. She also retold a story in which the students taught her that they could not all "see" or imagine what was happening as they read. This insightful moment in Natalie's career helped her to grow as a reading teacher to think of creative methods that might help her students "see" as they read. This story might explain how Natalie gained an understanding to meet

the needs of her students more effectively. She implemented words to tell her story that are strong choices, such as “I was struck,” and “I was dumbfounded” to evoke the feeling she experienced in the moment. Natalie also admitted, “Although I doubt I addressed the problem well that day.” In the moment it might be difficult to discern the exact way to handle any given situation in the classroom because the social component of the work of a teacher is dynamic.

Natalie’s social discourse with her students who told her that they did not know how to visualize the action of the text, was revelatory on several levels. Primarily, Natalie grew in her understanding of how some students experience reading. Natalie had expressed that she loved reading and this had propelled her into the profession. Yet she came to see in telling stories of her teaching that not all students share this experience, because they do not know what to think while reading and have trouble “seeing” in their minds what is happening as described in the text.

Through her discussion with the students, this social interaction served as a learning moment for Natalie so she could learn from her students how to create innovative ways to teach so they can better visualize the texts they are reading. Her open environment invites students to share their views and feelings with her often. Another facet of the social component of Natalie’s experiences is that she listens to her students and she includes them in the learning process. These social interactions might then make learning engaging for the students and for the teachers where a mutual and natural synergy occurs in the classroom.

Space: Experiences

Space is often not considered as an important factor in experiences of teaching and learning. Yet experiences happen somewhere, and teaching and learning is contextualized

within the confines of specific classrooms and schools. They are further embedded in specific contexts and cultures. In this sub-section, I consider the element of space in relation to the participants' experiences.

Alison: "50/50." The physical space of Alison's room is student-focused. There were drawings of visual imagery from Edwards' (1741) "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" on the wall near my place in the back of the room toward the door. Her screen is in the front of the room and her desk is in the back of the room. There are supplies and handouts in the front of the room on a trapezoid table. Alison sat on a stool in front of the room, which is common practice for Alpha school. Alison's room is small, and she has fought bugs and the heat in there the past two years, but the environment is inviting for the students. This description defines Alison's physical space, but what I learned is how she created space for her students from the first day of school.

Alison created space for her students to understand the importance of reading and writing from the moment she met them this year. She said:

I tell students the first week of school that reading and writing are life skills that they have to have to be successful. Reading and writing reflect a person's communication skills. I tell the students that they will need communication skills beyond the day they earn their high school diplomas. Those skills are for life so I set the tone by letting them know this class is serious and it is beneficial for them. I think I spend 50/50 of our time working on reading or working on writing. I see the two skills as necessary for the other.

Alison explains to her students how their space will feel and how it will be used during their English hour with her for the school year. This approach is forthright and it demonstrates Alison's philosophy about teaching reading in the English secondary classroom. As I observed her classes, I saw her implement these views in her practices by creating enrichment activities for poetry, non-fiction texts, novels, and academic articles. She taught

a variety of texts with the same, solid practices that developed the theme she outlined the first week of school. I observed students learning in a whole group setting and independently with tablets to do research. They talked appropriately with their neighbors and had focused discussions that related to the day's lesson. I did not often see students with phones out on desks. When a question arose, though, and a student did have a phone nearby, Alison did not hesitate to say, "Why don't you look it up so we can all learn about that?" which used the device as a learning tool and pulled the student into the class dynamic.

In this way, Alison shares space with her students to focus on the 50/50 model of reading and writing to develop their skills. I found that in my time sharing space in her room, I had conversations with Jacob, who frequently wore spiked chokers to class, had tattoo-sleeved arms, and often put his head down to sleep during the hour. Alison did not waiver in her belief in Jacob, and she let him have his space. I do not know his backstory, but we had conversations about how we hoped he would make it because he was a very capable and intelligent person.

There are many ways to share space in a classroom. I usually think of it as a physical place – the room itself – but throughout this experience, I learned that spaces can have many different definitions and roles in a secondary English classroom. Alison expressed concern for her students and worried about their welfare and their academic progress. This relationship was beneficial to me as a researcher because most all of our conversations focused on the teaching of reading, the instructional modes she implemented, and how she sees teaching reading.

In one particular story, Alison shared a strategy with me that I find intriguing because this activity asks students to carefully read a text. Alison said:

One strategy that I have used in the last two years is one where students track words they do not know within a text. This can be used within any text, any length. Students simply record the words or phrases they do not know or find interesting and they record the meanings then record why they would include it on their list of running vocabulary words. I think it puts ownership on them to constantly be aware of new/interesting words and they have control of them.

In sharing this strategy with me, Alison explained a reading strategy that places ownership with the students to interact with texts by tracking words they do not know. This strategy personalizes the reading experience and gives the students space to learn in the way that best fits each student in the classroom.

Seth: “It’s about a larger purpose.” In Seth’s classroom, his personality is everywhere on every wall and on his desk. The posters from folk music festivals, quirky sayings, and ironic visual images catch students’ attention and draw them in. From time to time throughout the year, Seth asks his students to work on some visual art projects. One of them requires students to draw the body of a character from Fitzgerald’s (1925) *The Great Gatsby*. These bodies contain quintessential quotes from the novel to represent the character’s personality and motivations. They also draw symbols related to the character within the lines of the drawn body. These character bodies offer an activity that pushes students to deeply analyze the characters from the novel in a hands-on, creative way.

Seth has a teacher webpage that communicates his personal background for the students, his calendar for the class, his handouts and links to GoogleDocs that he uses as a teaching tool. Music is extremely important to Seth so in his room, he plays playlists from Spotify, but he also plays a local non-commercial radio station. While the students may favor different artists than Seth, music is a common ground for teachers and students to

develop relationships. Seth creates a vibe in his physical classroom space that invites learners to feel relaxed and comfortable while learning challenging texts.

The desks are arranged in rows of three facing one another to invite a community of learners who can see each other for discussion and interactions. Seth stands at the edge of his desk which is catty-corner in the front of the room. This physical space allows learners to be in a natural position for an open discourse. Since Seth teaches CWC, his special education teacher is usually in a student desk near the door of his classroom. Seth's room used to be an office, so it is unique. He has a front door, a side door, and an ancillary room for storage, his refrigerator, and so forth that used to serve as a place for students to calm down if they became agitated.

This environment serves as one that is transparent, for the students to engage in discourse. Seth related many stories about how he shares space with his students. One written in a journal entry captures the essence of Seth's mutual space in his room. Seth wrote,

Just a couple of weeks ago a student named Ahmed (pseudonym) in my 3rd hour asked why were reading a section of *A Raisin in the Sun* aloud when it seemed to have no relevance to the rest of the play – it was during a discussion between Asagai and Beneatha about Nigeria and colonialism and rebellion. He asked what does this have to do with Walter making a mistake and giving away the money from the family. Usually this is the type of challenge I get from students. The “why are we reading this?” Or “what does this have to do with anything?” Or “why are we recording these excerpts related to...?” I am pretty organized and because I have my final assessments in mind when determining formative activities in the classroom, I always have an answer for the students and I feel pretty confident in my methods as they apply to what my students should be “getting” from the lesson.

In this story, Seth explained the process of students sharing space in a transparent way because Ahmed felt completely comfortable asking his teacher the purpose of the scene

in a play that seemed disjointed from the plot from the student's point of view. Seth continued with his story:

So when I responded to Ahmed, I said that Asagai is talking about taking control of his own country and making mistakes as an independent Nigeria, who may even die trying to achieve his cause. I then asked Ahmed how that related to Walter's failure. He said something like, oh yeah, I see. Asagai gaining independence and authority in Nigeria may be parallel to Walter gaining independence in the family, from Mama and from white oppressive and restrictive covenants. He saw the connection. It feels good to see a student see those things. And this is more important than English/Reading comprehension. It's about a larger purpose which is bigger than a list of standards. Failure alone allows for real growth as opposed to under the coddling or sometimes oppressive hand of some authority figure. I guess that relates a lot to how we teach too.

I interpreted Seth's story of experience to be essential to analyze the research question, because he tapped into the essence of *why* and *how* English teachers teach reading in the secondary classroom. His student Ahmed did not see the purpose of that particular scene in the play, and Seth was able to make this relevant to Ahmed. This moment in his physical space turned into a memorable story, because Ahmed's question served as a deep textual discussion motivator. Seth found that many times when the learning is transparent in the physical space, students will feel comfortable to ask, to connect, and to generate these questions to spark learning. In this way, the objectivity of learning in his classroom moved closer to a personal experience as the students have ownership of their thinking and interaction with a text. Seth stated that the text serves as an impetus to teach macrocosmic ideas through the smaller lens to help students think about social justice, politics, the human condition, or history in a way that might be lasting.

Natalie: "Did not take the bait." In Natalie's corner room with two windows near her desk (windows are coveted by teachers at Alpha school since only three rooms in the English wing have them), there are healthy plants, framed artwork from galleries, and

photos of Natalie's three little blonde boys. The room is situated so the desks face the front of the room, where her screen is located. They are arranged in traditional rows. The walls are painted a deep, chocolate brown, which adds an element of warmth to her room in contrast to the otherwise "institutional gray" that the district used when the rooms were repainted several years before. Often, Natalie lights a fragrant candle and has accent lamps to light the room when the lights are dimmed to see the screen. This touch adds not only an appeal to the olfactory sense, but to a sense of coziness that invites students to feel comfortable in her room.

She writes a vocabulary word of the day on her whiteboard with the part of speech and a sentence in addition to the definition. On her lecturn is a quotation from a famous author about life and the wisdom embodied in the quote. The room itself is organized and kept fastidiously. It is also a room that is temperate, although many of the rooms in the area only have one air duct and tend to get muggy and hot depending on the season. Natalie has three large cabinets in which she stores the English department's novels for juniors.

The physical space of Natalie's room is comfortable, which I think lends to the results that she is able to achieve with her students. For years, Natalie has had the best End-of-Course scores in the building, and she has always had outstanding ACT and AP Language scores too. However, from her viewpoint, in implementing effective teaching strategies, it is not about the scores. For Natalie, the important aspect of teaching reading in secondary English classrooms is how the students perceive the texts. She related to me how she makes informed decisions about what to teach and how to teach it largely based on how receptive the students are to the texts. Even if the experience is uncomfortable, Natalie noted that she will adjust and learn from it, thereby making her space productive.

In one particular journal entry, Natalie shared a story about a strategy that did not work. Natalie wrote:

Recently, I used a handout of analytical questions to help students understand two difficult chapters of *Brave New World* [1932]. The handout was intended to facilitate a philosophical discussion, but my students did not take the bait. I think they reacted this way because *Brave New World* [1932] was difficult for them, causing many to profess their “hatred” of the novel. I will not abandon the assignment in the future because it is a good activity to force students’ reading of a challenging text; however, I will plan ahead next time and bring in more current examples and connections into the discussion both before and after students read. This always helps students understand and relate better.

Natalie explained an activity that did not work out as planned, which does happen from time to time. This highlighted well how teachers can have what they think is a solid activity for the students, but how the students perceive the activity and interact with it might mean everything in the classroom. When Natalie wrote, “my students did not take the bait,” she captured the essence of a reflective practitioner who values how the teaching aspect needs to be shared space between the students and how they interact with the teachers’ instructional methods and delivery of the material. Natalie also acknowledged that she will adjust for next year, but she will keep the assignment because she knows it will be helpful for her students.

Natalie also discussed another barrier English teachers encounter when she said, “*Brave New World* [1932] was difficult for them, causing many to profess their ‘hatred of the novel,’ which can be an immediate emotion students feel about a text when they struggle for comprehension, deeper understandings, and thinking about symbolism regarding such a complex work as Huxley’s (1932) dystopian novel. Natalie is committed to teaching this work because she feels that the novel is valuable for her students to read and understand.

Natalie’s use of language inspired the following found poem:

Did Not Take The Bait

The handout was intended to facilitate
a philosophical discussion, but
my students

Did...Not...Take...The...Bait.

I think they reacted this way because

Brave New World was difficult

for them—

causing many to profess their ‘hatred’ for the novel.

I WILL NOT ABANDON the assignment in the future because

It is a good activity to focus students’ reading of a challenging text.

The way that Natalie’s syntax flowed in this journal entry evoked a poetic sense of imagery and a poignant message. The title of the poem, “Did Not Take the Bait” underlines how Natalie could not attempt to lure her students into learning, sometimes in spite of themselves. Even though this story explains a time when the activity did not go as planned, Natalie explained that she knows how she will revise the activity for the next group of students to see if her results are improved. The ability to be reflective and willing to shift her practices to meet the needs of the students is the important part about sharing space in this moment.

As I observed in Natalie’s class, a couple of the students were former students of mine as juniors, and so it was gratifying to see the students during her discussions and activities participate with insightful comments. The students naturally accepted me in her class and wanted to draw me into their discussions from time to time. When they asked me direct questions about the reading or the lesson, I complied, but mostly, I took field notes and tried to remain as anonymous as I could. Natalie’s physical room and also her approaches to teaching reading in her dual credit English classes were welcoming and energizing to me. Since I have known her for 12 years, together we have seen shifts in

instructional practices and a move away from more content-based curriculum to skills-based instruction that embodies current practices in the era of CCSS and the ACT.

Discussion of Common Narrative Themes

I felt privileged to be able to observe each teacher participant during my plan period this semester. Each teacher participant welcomed me to their classes and the classroom dynamic with ease, which made my presence comfortable for the students. I was able to talk to a few of the students and develop somewhat of a rapport with some of them who sat near me in each room.

Teachers' relationship with their students is important in how they approach instruction. Viel-Ruma et al. (2010) indicated that teachers' efficacy can impact their performance in the classroom, depending on their outlook or even tone of voice. I witnessed these relationships and the teacher participants' self-efficacy in the classroom observations, the interviews, and the journal entries. I noted that the teachers' beliefs about their skills and abilities was manifest in their lessons when teaching reading and interacting with their students. All three teacher participants expressed confidence in teaching reading in the secondary English classroom, and they also expressed interest in learning additional strategies about teaching reading.

Recently Natalie and I attended a workshop sponsored by the local university that Alpha school district uses for dual credit courses to enhance understanding about college instruction so we can relate to the students as college-level learners. One of the speakers, Dr. Tia McNair (personal communication, June 6, 2017), gave a workshop lecture about the standards that most universities have to attain accreditation and for student learning outcomes. McNair (personal communication, June 6, 2017) cited the statistic that "85% of

universities have learning standards but only 9% of students know what they are.” I connected these statistics to the teacher participants’ views in this study about CCSS in that they understand the standards, but they do not focus on teaching to the standards daily. When asked about the impact of the CCSS on her instructional practices, Natalie said, “I don’t see the CCSS standards having a major impact on the way I implement reading practices because I feel the strategies I’m already using are the best methods for teaching any state or national standards.” Alison said,

Honestly, I know the standards and know what the state wants but I also know my students best. I do try to stick to what the state would like for my students to know by the time they leave me, but I see how daunting standards can be to a teacher in the classroom. I think if a teacher does his or her best to improve reading and writing ability, then they are on the right track.

Seth stated, “Standards never really change my methods.” The teacher participants held the belief that their understanding of reading strategies that are effective help their students more than focusing on state standards. These findings during data collection directly addressed the sub-question of this study, which was, “How do you think CCSS might change reading instruction?”

As a part of teaching, teachers may need to be mindful of understanding curriculum standards, but the findings of this study indicate that while the teacher participants are aware of state and national standards, they all felt the best way to benefit the learning of the students was to understand student need. These standards have been named and renamed throughout my 25 years in the secondary English classroom. Although these standards change in syntax and word choice, their intentions remain basically the same. In teaching reading, curriculum standards focus on broad goals such as comprehending and interpreting text (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016). This goal appears under the

overarching goal that states students can read and understand a variety of texts in print and non-print formats appropriate for their age (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016).

In some school districts, teachers are expected to write these standards on the board each day they are taught, or they are required to display state standards in their classrooms each day. As a part of this study, data collection included an exploration of the teachers' beliefs about their abilities to teach reading, their experiences in teaching reading, and their beliefs about the CCSS and how these standards might impact teaching reading in the future. Seth summed up the findings regarding the teacher participants' beliefs about how the CCSS might change reading instruction when he said, "I think future lessons should inherently address standards, but it's the needs of the students that should take precedence."

When I started the data collection in January, I was interested in the teacher participants' instructional methods and reasons for them, but what I learned is that teaching reading is a much more complex act than I once understood it to be. Alison's, Seth's and Natalie's stories of experience taught me that personal background and culture influence a teacher's relationships and classroom structure. I also learned that the three teacher participants did not consider the shift to CCSS to impact their instruction choices greatly because they regarded their understanding of their students' needs to be more important. This last theme reveals their insightfulness about their own self-efficacy.

From these interpretive findings, perhaps the political aspects of curriculum reform and the practical elements of the actual teaching in the classroom might not be as closely tied as previously ascertained. It seems to me that Seth's, Alison's, and Natalie's beliefs center around the notion that the teacher really is "the curriculum" (Schlein & Schwartz,

2015, p. 2) and that the secondary English teachers should be responsible for their understanding, philosophies, and practices in teaching reading.

Data Analysis and Research Question Deliberation

I specifically discuss in this section how the study findings answer the research question, which was: “What are the experiences of teachers in teaching reading in high school English classes?” Each of the three teacher participants answered this question under the three themes that developed from the data collection: “Teachers’ Beliefs about their Abilities in Teaching Reading,” “Teachers’ Relationships with their Students,” and “Classroom Structure for Instruction.” To answer these questions, I explain how each participant responded to the question for each theme.

Seth

Seth shared that he is confident in his teaching practices regarding reading and reading strategies; however, he explained that he felt this confidence grew with experience. Seth’s experiences teaching struggling readers gave him time as a young teacher to learn how to reach students who were below grade level. He learned what the students were interested in as readers and gave them the personal choice to select books they cared about. Seth also explained that this particular class taught him how to interact with students who sometimes have behavior problems or who resist learning. Seth’s confidence answered the research question about how these experiences shaped the teacher that he is today. Seth revealed that for him, experience with teaching all levels of learners built confidence and a skill set that matter in the classroom.

Seth also shared stories in his interviews, journal entries, as well as the observations of his lessons throughout the semester that address the theme “Teachers’ Relationships with

their Students.” Seth’s interactive nature and inclusive work with all learners in his classroom strengthen his teaching strategies because the students readily trust him. He introduces challenging literary texts with his CWC sophomore students, and they meet him in their willingness to engage and learn. Since this relationship is positive and fluid, I did not witness any behavior issues during the many observations of his teaching practices. Seth taught me that a teacher’s rapport with their students might help to build a trust and a level of understanding that helps the teacher to teach reading effectively. This relationship answered the research question because if a teacher did not establish a relationship as Seth does, they might not build the level of engagement that Seth does in his classroom.

In order to build positive relationships with his students, Seth has a structure in his classroom that encourages students to feel comfortable, respected, and respectful. The physical way Seth arranges his room and the way he positions himself in the room answered the research question, “What are your experiences in teaching reading in the secondary classroom?” because the students knew the traditions and the expectations of the classroom. They adhered to the way that Seth expected them to be ready to learn each day. In fact, Seth’s room decorations include music festivals he’s attended, quirky magnets on his whiteboard, student art work, and photographs to create a welcoming environment. The physical structure of Seth’s classroom encourages his interactions with the students, which allows him to teach reading effectively to myriad leveled learners.

Alison

Alison explained that she is confident in her practices to teach reading, and she enjoys learning new strategies and ideas to expand and develop her repertoire. In this way, she directly addressed the research question within the theme “Teachers’ Beliefs about their

Abilities in Teaching Reading.” Alison layers her activities with poetry, music, and nonfiction articles to make her lessons relevant and accessible for her students. These strategies indicate that she trusts her students to learn, and she connects with outside ideology to make sure the students have provocative subject matter in a classic, American literature curriculum.

Alison’s confidence helps her to be assertive, yet approachable for her students in the classroom. She is knowledgeable and friendly. Her beliefs about her abilities embody the traits she exudes each day to demonstrate her understanding of her student audience and their needs as readers. These traits show that a teacher’s beliefs about their abilities might enhance their tools to teach reading in today’s secondary English classrooms. This notion addresses the research question because Alison related her experiences and confidence in teaching reading, indicating that teachers’ beliefs about their abilities in successfully teaching reading matters.

In this same way, Alison’s relationships that she develops with her students allow her to teach complex texts with her junior students. Alison’s caring yet assertive demeanor make her a favorite among the students, and this tone set in the classroom also supports her successes in teaching reading. Alison’s relationships developed with her students are positive because she gives students space to be themselves. There was one student whom she worried about because he slept in class and was not rested. Her support and consideration of his situation in life helped him to make it through the year. He was a capable and smart person, but he did not especially apply himself. Alison’s concern and optimistic belief that he would succeed and do well was evident to both the student and to me.

Alison's relationships with her students is positive each day. Although she juggles a complicated home life with her three young children and her family, she is always bright and ready to engage her student learners. This attitude of learning and caring helps Alison to teach any text with her students. They readily ask questions about vocabulary, plot, and characterization to derive deeper meaning from what they are reading. In this way, Alison's relationships reveal an answer to the research question about the experiences of secondary teachers when teaching reading. Teachers might need to establish a relationship that is trusting and caring so that students will know that the teacher is knowledgeable and will guide them through a text so that they can understand and connect with it.

In her drive to create lasting, positive relationship with her student learners, Alison also has her classroom structured so that the students feel comfortable and able to interact with one another and the teacher readily. Alison's classroom is physically organized so the student desks are in rows that face the whiteboard and her. The focus of the room is the whiteboard so that students can see instructional methods on the board, watch a video clip, listen to music, and so forth. This model helps students to be attentive and not easily distracted, which is what I observed each time I was in Alison's classroom. I did not see cell phones out on tables, nor did I hear side conversations except to interact with the lesson. This structure in Alison's classroom indicates that the way a teacher sets up his or their classroom reflects the way the students learn, which clearly relates to the research question.

Natalie

Natalie's candid discussion of activities that were successful and some that were not successful reveals her confidence in her beliefs about her abilities in teaching reading in her dual credit courses taught at Alpha school. Natalie has taught a variety of levels of classes

during her 15 years in the secondary English classroom. She shared that she is confident in her abilities to teach reading and readily adjusts her practices when she feels the methods are not working with the students. Her off-handed comment that teaching a certain text was “like second skin” has resonated with me now and will always.

This comment demonstrates Natalie’s confidence in her teaching practices; if a text feels “like second skin,” she is so familiar with it that it is almost one with her physical being or maybe even her emotional being. Natalie shared that she feels confident in her teaching of reading but she enjoys sharing activities with colleagues for improvement. Natalie’s beliefs about her abilities in teaching reading answers the research question, “What are your experiences in teaching reading at the secondary level?” because this confidence allows Natalie to engage in extremely sophisticated and provocative discussions with her students.

The way that she can craft these in-depth discussions is a result of her positive rapport with her student learners. While I observed Natalie’s classes during data collection, I witnessed students sharing personal connections to literature that might have been uncomfortable for a teen to share had Natalie not created such a trusting environment. It is this relationship that lets Natalie tap into the students’ personal interactions with the texts as well as how they share with her. Students are willing to learn in her class and come into the room often discussing the previous night’s reading.

Since she exudes curiosity and scholarship, Natalie gets a high level of engagement from her students. In this light, she addresses the research question because she denotes that a teacher’s rapport or relationship offers the leverage to push the students they teach to learn about themselves. Natalie’s relationships answer the question to indicate that a positive

relationship with the teacher might allow students to read college-level texts and to connect with them both academically as well as personally.

To get to this relationship, the students need to feel comfortable in the environment established by Natalie. She has her classroom arranged with the desks facing the focal point of the room, the whiteboard. Natalie sits in front of the whiteboard on a stool and near her podium that displays a famous quote by an author. Also, Natalie has family photos displayed creatively behind her desk and has placed artwork and posters of Paris around the room and on her walls. The room is orderly yet inviting, because it is a perfect blend of the personal and the professional tone that is needed in today's classrooms. The physical environment and the structure of the room reveal Natalie's expectations of her students. Her room is a quiet yet deeply engaging place to be. This notion connects to the research question directly because the theme "Classroom Structure for Instruction" allows teachers to develop relationships, displaying their confidence in teaching reading by engaging in instructional methodology that is student-focused, which is what happens in Natalie's room.

The three teacher participants all responded in agreement to the sub-question: "How will the CCSS impact the teaching of reading at the secondary level?" Seth responded by saying, "I think future lessons should inherently address standards, but it's the needs of the students that should take precedence." Seth answered the sub-question of this research inquiry in his belief that the lessons teachers craft should inherently address standards. Teachers should also make decisions for their student learners above the state or national benchmarks. This belief was also shared by Alison and Natalie. When asked about the impact of the CCSS on her instructional practices, Natalie said, "I don't see the CCSS standards having a major impact on the way I implement reading practices because I feel the

strategies I'm already using are the best methods for teaching any state or national standards." Alison said:

Honestly, I know the standards and know what the state wants but I also know my students best. I do try to stick to what the state would like for my students to know by the time they leave me, but I see how daunting standards can be to a teacher in the classroom. I think if a teacher does his or her best to improve reading and writing ability, then they are on the right track.

In these separate responses to the sub-question, the teacher participants concurred that while they understand the CCSS standards and feel that the standards matter, the teacher's viewpoint about being the "curriculum-maker" (Schlein & Schwartz, 2015, p. 12) takes precedence over the state or national standards. Each participant explained their belief that teachers should be empowered to make those decisions based on the needs of their particular students to best help the students as readers and as writers. They concurred in their views regarding how the Common Core standards might impact reading instruction, indicating that the standards will not change teachers' instructional methods greatly.

Each of the teacher participants aptly answered the research question, "What are your experiences in teaching reading in the secondary level?" The responses to that question fell under the three themes developed throughout data collection and data analysis: "Teachers' Beliefs about their Abilities in Teaching Reading," "Teachers' Relationships with their Students," and "Classroom Structure for Instruction." The participants' stories answered the research question in ways unimaginable to me before I started collecting data in January 2017. As I analyzed the data to answer the research question and sub-question, another aspect of this study emerged regarding my position as researcher.

Researcher Positioning

In this section, I explain my position as researcher to contextualize my experiences in Alpha school as data were collected from January 2017 to May 2017. Since I have worked as a classroom teacher at Alpha school since 2005, I have worked with the teacher participants from two to 12 years. While I was performing this investigation, I found myself connecting with the stories of the participants as researcher, as colleague, and on a personal level. For this narrative inquiry study, data collection and data analysis must be analyzed from the lens of the researcher, but because of the location of the study, a personal connection also emerged from the data.

My Resonating Experiences

Since data were collected from three participants in this study in the form of two interviews, 10 classroom observations, and journal entries, the collected data revealed a strong connection between personal experiences while growing up and mentors and parents who deeply cared about reading. In my own experience, I share these commonalities with the teacher participants, and their stories resonated with me. I relate in this section my own experiences as they relate to participating in this study as a researcher and the impact of my interactions with my teacher participants.

I grew up in a small town in northeastern Iowa, and I lived to read. My mom, Dixie, would take me to the public library where I participated in reading programs, hauled home stacks of books, and built a foundation of a love of books as an elementary-aged child. One particular day, I remember being bored and whining. My mom said, “Get my copy of *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1847) and you won’t be lonely anymore. When you are in the company of a good book, you always have friends.” Dixie was a legal secretary for a lawyer during my

growing-up years. She explained cases and legal issues to me from her experiences at work. She used an elevated vocabulary, telling me one day that the cat was “obstreperous.” Of course, I had to know what that word meant and rushed to the dictionary to find out.

My dad, too, is a passionate reader. Dick reads books about politics, the economy, and history. Even as an 89-year-old today, he keeps lists of words and definitions as a bookmark to expand his vocabulary. He challenges the local newspaper with his research about the economy and tax laws, especially regarding the state of Kansas, where my parents live.

Although both of my parents encouraged me to read and to respect and love all different kinds of books, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge how my brothers influenced my love of reading. My eldest brother, Eric, introduced me to *Catch-22* (Heller, 1961) and *Slaughterhouse Five* (Vonnegut, 1969) while I was in high school. Ironically, my senior English teacher took a Vonnegut book from me one day during class and told me not to read “that trash.” That incident became a humorous footnote at my 20th class reunion, as others in the class remembered my public shaming from her.

My second eldest brother, Paul, shares with me a love of the absurd in literature. He introduced me to contemporary writer Christopher Moore’s (2011) works to expand my reaches as a reader even further in my adult life. These familial influences have each contributed to my desire to teach reading in my secondary English classes at the high school level. Without this culture of readers, mentors, and family members who talk about books at each holiday, share books back and forth and give them as gifts, my moving van box would not be as full as it is today. I take the wisdom of Dixie, Dick, Eric and Paul with me each time I step into a classroom. My love of reading, my family dynamic, and how I developed a

sense of humor shaped the life paths I selected. Experiences growing up became a clear theme among the participants of this study and how these experiences still impact the teacher participants.

While I consider all three teacher participants valued colleagues, I also have developed friendly relationships with them outside of our work at the high school. Natalie and I have worked together for 13 years, and we both have worked on the curriculum for the same dual-credit English composition and fiction courses taught through the university. While she lives on the farm and I live in the city, we still can make time once or twice a year to meet for a social event. Natalie and I recently attended a workshop for the courses we teach through the university and spent time planning the year together. We share similar viewpoints about the skills and instructional approaches for these courses so we enjoy a positive rapport with each other.

Although I have known Alison for the only past two years, our classrooms were situated next to one another. When you share a geographical space with someone while teaching in a school, you develop an understanding of the person's day-to-day routines and interactions with the students. It is an enjoyable experience in my viewpoint to see a new colleague interact with the students and to become a part of the school culture. Alison has offered this experience to me as well as a friendly rapport outside of class. She is a part of a teacher book club that Seth, his fiancée, and I attend as well.

Seth, too, has worked in the department for only five years, but he and his fiancée share a love of the city with me. We have house-sat for each other throughout the five years and have shared many experiences during book club, at restaurants, and at cultural events. He and I also share a passion for music, so we share music from time to time. Although Seth

has taught for the least amount of time, it is evident from his experiences professionally and personally that he is also a well-rounded participant for this study.

Temporal Experiences

Because I have taught for 25 years, I have a four-drawer file cabinet stuffed full of practices and ideas from 1992 to about 2006, when I started using electronic files for my practices. The first thing I am going to do this fall is go through that file cabinet and throw away most of it. Honestly, I'm dreading the process, because I know that while I will see a shift in my thinking and practices for the better over the course of 25 years, seeing what I used to value when teaching reading from many, many years gone by will cause me some regret and maybe even embarrassment. This file cabinet symbolizes me and my growth, the way that I evolved, and the way I existed in those different time periods as an English teacher.

The participants have shown me how temporal experiences might help teachers to “live and learn,” as my mom used to say to me when I would make mistakes while I was growing up. As teachers learn to grow their practices, it is evident that in the time and space of my own classroom there has definitely been a growth in my viewpoint and in my philosophies. I previously related how in 2008 a student named Megan taught me that the students were really not reading the chapters of novels as I assigned them. Most of the time, the way teachers gain new ideologies and practices evolves with their personal experience, and they add another box to their moving vans. Time and experiences in instruction is a hugely significant aspect that came through in the data collection for this study.

Furthermore, as I observed Seth, Natalie, and Alison throughout the semester, each participant said something in conversation either in the classroom or in the interviews that

gave me pause. These comments helped me to understand the research question by contributing to my reservoirs of memory over my teaching career to connect to their experiences in teaching reading in the high school English classroom. On one such occasion, I asked Natalie why she taught Khaled Hosseini's (2003) *The Kite Runner* in her English 124 class during second semester each year. Both of us taught that text each year starting in 2007, but I stopped teaching it two years ago. Natalie said to me, "I teach it because it's like second skin." Her response inspired the following poem to function as "still-life" (Janesick, 1998, p. 35) in that moment which helped me to think about the importance of Natalie's viewpoint. This poem helped me to understand the theme of self-efficacy, which impacts the way teachers approach teaching a particular text based on their beliefs about their abilities.

Second Skin

A chorus of cicadas hummed and buzzed, nature's surround sound as I sat on our porch
"They are mating," I thought, nebulous, naïve:
"Or they are molting," I mused.
The chorus chanted, "Free! At last Free!"
Shedding exoskeleton, wings grew to take flight
A chorus of cicadas comfort me, the context to my life: I remember them in Iowa as
I raced home on my bicycle in the velvet night;
I remember them in Missouri during my college days, sitting on the stoop to
hear sorority sisters' sonorous speech;
I remember them, the music of the night to the backdrop of the 4th of July at
the Truman Library, splashes of color firing into the night sky.
But most of all, this second skin shed seems like teaching texts we hold dear to our
hearts, hoping to share that passion with our students daily.
So that we are both free: teacher and students,
free to soar where ever our wings can carry us.

This poem helped me to visualize Natalie's metaphor that she shared one day during the observation of her *Kite Runner* (2003) discussion with her students. When Natalie described teaching that particular text "like second skin," I thought about why teachers

select the texts they do and how the personal relationship that teachers might have with a text impacts the experiences that students have engaging with the same work. I perceive Natalie's simile to possibly represent a teacher's true passion for teaching reading and the closeness she feels with a text that will help students to connect with reading. This poem reveals Natalie's comfort in teaching this particular text, which uncovers her views about her abilities in the classroom.

Similarly, when answering a question in the first interview, Seth's response to a question about successful strategies for reading instruction also gave me pause. His comment that while he liked to incorporate graphic organizers to help the students think critically and found the strategy to be successful, he said, "Often, I think some of these strategies serve as a Band-Aid for deeper problems with some of our students' ability levels." The metaphor Seth used to describe some reading strategies as a Band-Aid made me think about what teachers do each day. Are teachers really just offering a "second skin" to heal metaphorical wounds in our classrooms?

There may be systemic problems with reading and reading at grade level. In a recent conversation with the building principal, he said, "We have one third of our sophomores coming into the high school reading below grade level" (R. Jerome, personal communication, May 2017). During this conversation with Dr. Jerome, Seth's metaphor about certain reading strategies as Band-Aids distracting teachers from healing the real wounds that might be systemic came to mind. Seth's metaphor shaped my thinking about the data and the experience to answer the question in the form of a poem. This poem developed a deeper understanding of approaches to teaching reading and the placement of strategies in the classroom to help students to become stronger readers. His comment about graphic

organizers serving as a “Band-Aid” speaks to the theme that a teacher’s background and experiences form their actions and decisions in the classroom when it comes to approaches to teaching reading.

The Wound

First week of school: her file from the middle school was so thick, the principal’s hands wildly waved, telling tales, shock. Worrisome.

November: she asked me about the rules at school and if drugs were allowed. She didn’t want to snitch....

I trusted her intuition in spite of the fact, she’s the only student I’ve ever had to be voted out of the room by her peers. Hands shot in the air to express frustration. They stretched up, up. “Out! Out!”

She was right. Her colleague had a backpack full of contraband. She did the right thing.

By April she had digressed; disappeared. Vanished. Gone.

Her behavior made it impossible for her to stay in 6th hour with the others. Empty chair. Just air. No voice. Nothing. *Gone*.

But she was smart.

She was savvy.

She could write.

System failure: No Band-Aid could heal.

Although Seth’s metaphor explained his concern for reading strategies not being able to help every student he has during the school day, the imagery of a Band-Aid helping to heal wounds reminded me of a former student whom I had failed. Diana (pseudonym) was intelligent, but she could not behave in a traditional learning environment at all. Although she was in a

sophomore, regular English class in 2010, I still wonder where she is and how she is doing. Band-Aids can help heal wounds, but they cannot save everyone.

There are not enough teaching strategies to save everyone in the public education system. However, an evident aspect of this data collection that occurred to me through both of these poems as data crystallization is that the humanness of education might be a strength,

a power even of the work teachers do in their classrooms each day, year after year. When Natalie told me that teaching the particular text was “like second skin,” I knew the feeling she described exactly. It felt natural for her because she understood the text so well herself that she wanted to share that wonder and story with her students so that an extra skin was shed to reveal new understandings about the world through a fictional novel. Although she off-handedly referred to the text as “second skin,” the imagery and the literary device sticks with me still today because Natalie implemented story-grammar to convey her experiences and feelings about how it feels to teach Hosseini’s (2003) novel. Her teaching experience was so organic that it was a part of her, like “second skin,” a part of her very being.

In the same vein, Seth explained a reading strategy that he relied on and found success teaching, but he philosophized a greater, urgent question about how some teaching strategies justify our behavior and instructional methods as a healing, “second skin” or “Band-Aid” that covers up real wounds in the system. Woolf (2007) called it “word poverty” (p. 102) when she claimed that “by kindergarten, a gap of 32 million words already separates some children in linguistically impoverished homes from their more stimulated peers” (p. 20). Woolf’s (2007) conclusion reminds me of Seth’s comment and imagery about graphic organizers providing a Band-Aid to mask or to cover the real problems with the levels at which our students read. This concern was also explained to me by the building principal when he told me that additional training in reading would be available for some English teachers in the department for this coming school year to help those students reading below grade level, namely one-third of the incoming sophomore class at Alpha school.

Seth’s metaphor and Natalie’s simile evoke images that created lasting ideologies with me this semester. Each of these teacher participants did not think deeply about what

they said to me in the moment, but their use of figurative language to describe the feeling of teaching a text or to describe a philosophical and practical concern about reading issues below the surface in the classroom taps into the rationale of the research question. When I wrote “Second Skin” and “The Wound,” it was helpful to focus on one in-depth concept based on the imagery and story grammar Seth and Natalie used in their interactions with me. These poems helped me to understand the freeing feeling of teaching a text for which a teacher feels great joy and passion as well as the less-than-perfect solutions to problems in the system when teaching reading.

Seth asserted that these reading strategies might very well be a Band-Aid to cover up a deeper cut that the students and teachers might have in class in high school who struggle for basic understanding and comprehension when reading. Although “The Wound” was inspired by a personal experience with my former student, Diana, who could read, to me, she exemplifies the troubles that can happen in a school system. In that traditional environment, she could not learn.

Analysis of the Poems

The process of writing found poems helped me to understand themes developed from the research. These themes included the teachers’ experiences that helped them take action in the classroom; for example, Natalie’s comment about teaching a text as “second skin” and Seth’s comment about graphic organizers as the “Band-Aid” for reading strategies and students who struggle as readers. For some reason, his comment inspired my memory of a former student, Diana, who did not fit in the traditional learning environment of the public school system. This poem helped me to understand the theme about the relationships that

teachers build with their students because of their own personal experiences and background stories inspired by a parent or a mentor early in life.

In addition to Seth's comment, Natalie's gave me great pause about the *why* part of teaching a text and a teacher's background and experiences in making those decisions. Decisions about text selection might not come easily for secondary English teachers, possibly due to protected reading lists, book availability, and viewpoints about the text and its meaning for the students. Natalie's visual image about "second skin" took on a life of its own in the poem because it made me think of renewal, of summer, and of cicadas shedding their exoskeletons. This imagery and ideology surprised me because I am not a huge fan of physical biology and ecosystems, but Natalie's imagery inspired me to think along a unique and new path.

Spatial, Social, and Temporal Connections

Most of the time, the senses are heightened when memories form around certain events in my life. I can vividly remember how I felt, or what I smelled, or the color of a particular wall when asked to do so. In narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that we live "storied lives" (p. 93), where some actions are conscious and some are unconscious, to reveal truth about lived experiences. In the time that I spent in each of the participant's classrooms and with them personally, we shared space. These shared spaces created a new persona for me as researcher in addition to colleague and friend, which caused me to think about the power behind shared spaces and the stories learned in them.

For example, I will never forget the smells of my grandma's kitchen or the taste of her homemade dill pickles. But what I remember about her as a person and the stories she shared about her life are deeply embedded in the essence of how I interact in the world. My

grandma was known for her stories about her life, which I cherish and appreciate now that she is gone. She used to tell me the same story with variations about how two men were pursuing her for relationships at the same time.

Her hazel-brown eyes shone and her body leaned forward across her kitchen table when she'd say, "Sara? Have you ever had two men chase you at the same time?" My lines were always, "No, Grandma. Have you?" And then she would launch into her story, sharing it with great enthusiasm and passion. Stories last, too. We share grandma stories in my family from time to time to this day to keep her memory and presence alive in our hearts. In this same vein, the stories of the teacher participants also last but in doing so, create a body of knowledge about what it is like to teach reading in secondary English classrooms today.

I needed to create space so that the teacher participants felt I was a distant observer. In these relationships, I had to create a professional distancing. At the same time, a personal closeness occurred naturally since I was able to be in three teachers' spaces regularly. I developed concern for some of the students in their classrooms, and these interactions caused an increase in conversations about instruction and methods that were much more frequent than in first semester, before data collection started.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained how the data collection process led me to see strong themes develop regarding the teacher participants' personal stories, their mentors, and especially their parents, who read to them and always provided them with intellectual opportunities and support as they came of age. The next theme that I discussed focused on how the teacher participants structured their classrooms and in doing so, how they established positive working relationships with their students. The last theme I explained

relates to the teacher participants' beliefs about their abilities to teach reading as well as their beliefs about the CCSS.

Also in this chapter, I explained and interpreted the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework to analyze the themes further for their implications regarding the temporal experience, the significance of storytelling and story-grammar to analyze the social experience, and finally the spatial experience in both the physical aspects of the teacher participants' classrooms and also the intellectual space they share with their students. This framework helped me to analyze the data deeply for a keen understanding about experiences in teaching reading in the secondary English classroom.

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework addressed the notions of the temporal, story-grammar and story-telling, and self-efficacy as framed by the three participants' experiences in teaching reading in various secondary settings, all in English classrooms. I analyzed and interpreted the data collected for this study that became significant in understanding the research question. Those themes are the personal experiences and background of the participants, the relationships with the students, and the structure of the classroom and the teachers' beliefs in their identity as teachers of reading as well as their views about curriculum standards.

In Chapter 6, I conclude this dissertation by creating an argument for the educational and societal significance of this study. I also discuss the limitations of this study including ethical considerations and verisimilitude that is a part of the fabric of narrative inquiry. In addition to these sections, I explain my future research goals that developed due to this study as well as possibilities for others in terms of research and practice as an outgrowth of this study.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I briefly review the findings and argue for the educational significance of this study. In this discussion, I include an explanation of overarching themes. I discuss the possible limitations of the study including ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness and verisimilitude. I close this chapter with my future research goals, as well as possible research contributions stemming from this study.

Review of the Findings

When I determined the topic for this study, my thinking was myopic in that I did not understand what a complex experience teaching reading in English secondary classrooms is. I set out to learn about the actual instruction and methods the teachers implemented in their respective classrooms, which is a highly simplistic approach. As I experienced gathering data from January 2017 to May 2017, I began to understand teaching reading differently. Primarily, I learned that the background and personal experiences of the teacher participants shapes the teachers' identity, their philosophies, and their approaches when teaching reading. I did not consider how very personal teaching reading is until I learned about the teachers' backgrounds and personal stories, why they became teachers, and how they view their craft. This experience is even more profound for me since I have worked with the teacher participants from two to 13 years. I did not know their personal backgrounds, nor did I know how mentors and parents emphasized intellectual curiosity and a love of reading from young ages for each of these teacher participants.

Uncovering these stories helped me to consider how a teacher's background and interaction with their subject matter – in my case, reading – might impact the work of the

adult version of a person immeasurably. These relationships inspired me to think of life as a trip in a moving van. We drive our boxes of experiences, memories, skills, accomplishments, failures – everything around with us from age to age and from experience to experience to culminate in the people we are in the present. Our backgrounds and the present shape the future people we grow to be. While this process is not as neat and tidy as packing boxes and driving from one place to another, the moment a teacher steps into their classroom, it is all these experiences embodied in invisible boxes that add up to the depth of the person in front of a group of young people.

It is these experiences from a teacher's background that impact and inform the learning that happens. Background experiences influence how and why teachers approach a text in the secondary English classroom. I learned about these approaches, but in addition, I gained a deep understanding in this study about how incredibly personal teaching really is, especially when teaching texts that share themes about the human condition like poetry, literature, and nonfiction texts do. That theme emerged clearly to me as I read and reread the field notes, the interviews, and the journal entries from the teacher participants as directly impactful to instruction.

Additionally, the teacher's relationship with their parents and mentors, as well as other family members and teachers, influences the way that they develop relationships with students in the classroom, which also emerged as a finding from this study. Frequent observations in the teacher participants' classrooms, stories from the interviews, and stories from the journal entries helped me to understand the passion each teacher felt as a teacher of reading but also the importance of developing relationships with students. These relationships are foundational for effective teaching, and they may help the teacher in

shaping the structure of their learning environment. In the findings, I was able to witness each teacher carefully craft lessons to diverse grade levels of learners in unique ways that fit their specific personalities and teaching philosophies. For example, Natalie said to me, “I always liked teacher-directed discussion as a student and independent learning, so that’s how I structure my classes.” The personal background of each teacher helped them to establish positive working relationships and structured environments for the students to contribute each day. Relationships with students quickly became an evident theme as I studied the data collected for this study. These relationships were caring and professional. Students felt comfortable sharing opinions, experiences, and observations about the daily lessons in each classroom.

One lesson day I observed Seth’s lesson about *Othello* (Shakespeare, n.d.) and the conversation about sex started by a student who questioned Desdemona’s relationship with Othello. The discussion moved from a question posed by Seth to the students to a deeply personal discussion about relationships and what they saw in their parents’ relationships, as well as what they hoped to have in a future relationship. In this sophomore CWC class, the discussion was honest and open. Students were sharing observations about the relationships in Shakespeare’s play and making personal and academic contributions about characterization and plot.

In the field notes that day, I wrote, “There is a comfortable rapport the students enjoy with one another and with the teacher.” In establishing relationships that are trusting and based on mutual respect, a teacher can present complex and sophisticated subject matter to the students successfully. This relationship is an essential theme that developed in the study, because these relationships allow the teachers and the students to trust each other so that a

true, authentic dialog can happen. The relationships that were established in the classroom also seemed to impact the structure of the class, which was further designed based on the teacher's background, philosophies, and viewpoint about effectively teaching reading. This study thus highlights how it might prove to be significant for teachers to create a physical environment to develop these relationships so that they effectively share space with their students.

The third evident theme that emerged from the data collected for this study focuses on teacher beliefs about standards and about their own ability to teach – their self-efficacy. If a teacher believes that they can teach something or engage students in a certain instructional methodology, they can likely find success. If a teacher does not hold this belief in their ability level, it is less likely the teacher will feel successful teaching reading in the English secondary classroom. Throughout the interviews and journal entries with the teacher participants, each person explained what they think they do best and areas they think they can improve on. All three teacher participants expressed confidence in teaching reading; however, all three participants expressed a desire to become better in certain facets of teaching reading.

Alison wrote in a journal entry that she feels confident in teaching reading, but “I am always looking to improve. I enjoy hearing from other teachers to see what their best strategies are.” Alison is not alone in her belief about her ability to succeed but also seeking to find improvement as she continues to work in the secondary English classroom with her students. In one of his interviews, Seth expressed confidence in teaching reading as well. He said:

Some of our English teachers say they don't know how to teach reading. I'm not surprised because often times the methods courses don't teach us how to teach reading. We learn instruction methods how to teach students that we assume already know how to read at the high school level. That isn't always the case, though. Teaching remedial reading is extremely difficult.

The beliefs that Seth and Alison express reveal to me that the way a teacher views their own efficacy might be essential to teaching reading in the English secondary classroom.

Another belief system that emerged from this study relates to the sub-question, which is how CCSS and related state-based standards and testing might change how teachers teach reading in the secondary English classroom. It was surprisingly unanimous among the teacher participants that the CCSS will not change how they choose to teach reading. Seth said in his interview:

It's more important for the teacher to know what the students need than it is to write particular standards on the board each day. For example if 12 students don't understand "simile" and what it is, then I need to teach or even re-teach that idea before moving on to more complex standards or benchmarks.

Seth's comment embraces the standards but places emphasis on the teacher's understanding about what the students need in order to be successful.

In Natalie's journal, she wrote, "I don't see the CCSS standards having a major impact on the way I implement reading practices because I feel the strategies I'm already using are the best methods for teaching any state or national standards." Her beliefs about CCSS might ring true for most English teachers, because the standards can change in that they are reworded from time to time, but ever since I started teaching, the benchmarks were to teach critical thinking, reading strategies, analysis, argumentation, and evaluation in secondary English classrooms. The syntax does shift and of course a cultural shift occurs

since teaching is dynamic, but the overarching goals remain basically the same, no matter the jargon that is implemented.

The teacher participants concluded that the teachers should be trusted to know how to help their particular students, which indicates that they are not concerned with the CCSS or the MLS changing the way that they approach teaching reading in their secondary English classrooms. There seems to be a “change coming down the pike” that could impact instructional practices. The teacher participants of this study concluded that they know their students best to make informed decisions about what instruction is the most effective teaching reading in the secondary English classroom. Schlein and Schwartz (2015) highlighted the “teacher as curriculum” (p. 2), and the three teacher participants emphasized this very notion. The findings from this study all fall under the overarching theme of “teacher as curriculum,” since the themes that emerged from the study focus on the experiences, beliefs, and actions of the teacher in the classroom.

Although the study findings include information about a teacher’s background and experiences, the results show that the teacher participants of this study hold firm beliefs that they do not need state-driven standards to make decisions about teaching reading in their secondary English classrooms. The three teacher participants’ experiences revealed a common viewpoint that the CCSS shift will not impact their reading instruction. This finding might be reflective of the culture of Alpha school, which is a high-performing suburban school that has earned a nearly perfect score of 100% or 99.6% from 2005 to 2016 (Alpha School, 2016). At the same time, participants might simply lack concern for state standards, or Seth, Alison, and Natalie might simply be demonstrating their construction of strong self-identities in the secondary English classroom as reading teachers that are not

influenced by outside expectations. Moreover, it is significant to recognize that these findings are interpretations that I drew, and they may be reflective of my own lens on teaching and learning at the school that may be understood in different ways by other researchers.

The participants in this study did not explain the CCSS benchmarks to integrate more nonfiction texts into their teaching. I did, however, observe both Seth and Alison pair nonfiction articles and even famous speeches with fictional works taught in the curriculum. The three participants concluded that CCSS had not impacted their decisions for teaching reading, but in consideration of the pairings of nonfiction texts with fictional curriculum texts, it appears that they might be considering aligning some practices to the objectives of CCSS after all. Upon reflection, Alpha school's curriculum does have a few nonfictional texts as a part of the curriculum; however, it is still saturated with literature, poetry, and plays. This distinction might account for at least some of the reasons that the participants in this study concluded that CCSS might not shift their practices.

Educational Significance

While this study acknowledges the importance of a teacher's background and personal experience to explain how a teacher feels about reading, there were three distinct themes that directly address the research question and sub-question. The results of this investigation revealed three themes, as follows. "Teachers' Relationships with their Students." relates to the way the students feel and how they interact with the teacher and the text. The second theme uncovered from this study is "Teachers' Beliefs about their Abilities in Teaching Reading" and how these beliefs affected their choice of texts and their confidence in teaching reading. The last theme highlighted in this work is "Classroom

Structure for Instruction,” which refers to the physicality of the classroom and how it affects the student learners

In education, sometimes the voices of the teachers might become overpowered by administrators, outside stakeholders, or politicians impacting curriculum decisions at higher levels in the political strata of the public school system (Richmond & Zinshteyn, 2014). Therefore, it is important in the educational institution to ensure that the positions and experiences of teachers are integrated into the dialogue. The first theme that was discovered from this study, “Teachers’ Beliefs about their Abilities in Teaching Reading,” addresses the impact of self-efficacy in a classroom. One potentially effective practice for teachers to develop their self-efficacy is to engage in reflective practice. Clandinin and Connelly (1988) recommended that teachers reflect on their practices in journals as part of their curriculum-shaping efforts. In doing so, teachers can develop meta-cognitive understandings of their instruction and practices in reading. Barkley (2006) found significant correlations between teacher self-efficacy and student reading achievement which might even function as an indicator of overall academic success. Barkley’s (2006) findings suggested the importance of teacher self-efficacy and student achievement and motivation when it comes to reading instruction.

An aspect of teaching reading that is an overarching conclusion of this study is the concept of the “teacher as curriculum” (Schlein & Schwartz, 2015, p. 4) might need to be considered when ascertaining methodology for best practices in teaching reading. Teachers know and understand themselves and their own philosophies and beliefs, which impacts the way they choose to teach subject matter. I was overwhelmed at times when thinking about the data collected and my analysis of these themes, because I had not previously thought

about the deep, personal connection teachers have to their content or the potential significance of the teacher's background experiences and personal stories that impact their work with their students. In particular, this inquiry showcases how relationships might drive powerful work in the classroom.

The second theme developed from this study, "Teachers' Relationships with their Students," indicates that positive relationships with students will strengthen the learning environment for them. Sears (2017) described this relationship, saying, "understanding how the child operates allows the teacher to further individualize their curriculum and find creative ways to help the student successfully grasp the material" (n.p.). These relationships developed between a teacher and the students impacts the way students learn, interact, and feel about their experiences in the classroom. Denton (2008) further asserted, "Teacher language – what we say to students and how we say it – is one of our most powerful teaching tools. It permeates every aspect of teaching" (p. 28). The findings of the study were thus consistent with the literature regarding how important relationships are for teaching reading in the secondary classroom.

Another important element of teaching reading that I uncovered in this study is the third theme, which is "Classroom Structure for Instruction." This theme became evident to me as I analyzed how each teacher set up the classroom and how they utilized space. Seth's classroom was set up with four desks in clusters so students could easily share and work in teams on peer evaluations or participate in collaborative discussions in smaller groups within the larger classroom community. Natalie's classroom was set up in traditional rows with the student desks facing the front of the room and the place where the teacher was instructing. Alison's classroom was also set up in traditional rows, with the students' desks

facing the front of the room where the teacher was instructing. Glatter, Deruy and Wong (2016) argued,

Each classroom will be set up based on what is necessary to meet learning objectives. But schools will prioritize configuring classes to inspire learning first and foremost, and, where appropriate, reflect the diversity of environments that students are exposed to outside a school setting. (n.p.)

The physicality of the learning environment does affect a student's feelings about learning in that space. Each of the participants in this study used their spaces to enhance the comfort of their students by personalizing the space and by being a constant, positive presence within their space to interact with their students when teaching reading.

Alison's, Seth's, and Natalie's storied experiences shed light on how the subtext of each of their lives, the contents of the moving boxes on their respective moving vans, that might matter the most. When I started this study, I anticipated finding out the significance of the actual reading instruction and activities the teacher participants chose to create for their students. The intellectual part of teaching, from my narrow viewpoint at the time, was the focus. While this investigation suggests that this aspect of teaching reading is important and valid, the findings underscore the layered complexities of this process.

What came bubbling to the surface unexpectedly throughout this inquiry was the unique quality of each teacher participant's true lived stories and how those experiences impacted their philosophies, beliefs, and relationships *before* they decided to craft an activity a certain way. These personal connections must therefore not be overlooked in education, because the human part of teaching is the most valuable part of a learning experience. The teacher participants in this study revealed a strong connection to their students in a social way, which led to and sustain positive impacts in the teaching and

learning context for reading. It is possible to conclude then that teachers' past experiences shape the present and therefore, the future of our education, and more broadly, society. This perspective is consistent with the notion of the "teacher as curriculum maker" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

The teacher participants further highlighted that they believed that they had the skills and understanding to implement effective practices in their classrooms. Their curricular decisions originated from their mentors and childhood influences to love reading and to engage in intellectually curious play. In this way, this study found that teachers who teach reading might find value in reflecting on their own childhood influences and those who inspired them to read and to be intellectually inquisitive during their formative years. It is this background that might impact the educational objectives and the social relationships formed in the classroom.

In addition to the backgrounds of the participants in this study, each person used the classroom space or the physicality of the classroom to develop lasting and caring relationships with their students. Throughout data collection, each participant shared meaningful stories about particular teaching moments that were successful or sometimes not successful, always remembering particular students who taught them those lessons throughout their careers. The participants suggested through their stories that these relationships are essential for building knowledge in the classroom and for students to trust their teachers to show them how to read challenging texts about any subject matter in the secondary English classroom. The social aspect of learning was evident in this study as each teacher shared stories but also as they naturally built relationships in their own environment.

However, the teachers did not always seem to be cognizant of the interactions that served to build these relationships.

Dewey (1938) asserted that teachers were to assess the needs and interests of students to shape the curriculum. In fact, he further argued that education is life. This intertwined relationship between life, experience, and education supports my investigative perspective on teachers' experiences with the curriculum of English Language Arts in general, and on reading instruction in particular. When Natalie made the off-handed comment to me that teaching a certain text was "like second skin," she made an impact on these findings because that comment alone helped me to understand teachers' viewpoints about how they felt when teaching reading. Natalie said to me recently, "I'm nervous to teach a new text to branch out of my comfort zone, but I need to do it to benefit the students I have this year." She is a reflective practitioner who considers the need to build a curriculum that utilizes life experiences not as a comfortable end point, but as a strong start to a learning journey.

Furthermore, the findings of this inquiry indicate that the way a teacher uses their physical space in the classroom might enhance a sense of trust and comfort for students. Ultimately, this might connect to students' willingness to read required texts and texts on their own at the suggestion of the classroom teacher. This finding is supported by the literature. Gattery, Deruy and Wong (2016) argued, "If you are forced to go to a place you hate going every day, any sentence on the wall can become an irritant" (n.p.). In this investigation, I noted how the participants worked to create comfortable and inviting spaces, both for themselves and for their students. For example, Natalie's classroom was professionally painted a chocolate brown. She had plants near her window of varied heights

and types. She had her husband help her level and hang framed art posters, a Paris street scene, and some inspirational quotes. Photos of her three young sons and her family were framed on and behind her desk. There was a sense of familiarity, comfort, and family that welcomed each student as they entered her room. She had placed a literary quote by a famous author on her podium at the front of the room, and she had set candles and small lamps on her desk and on the bookshelf at the front of the room. This room was thus a welcoming environment for students to think, interact, and learn.

Alison's classroom also has lamps, candles, and photos of her wedding and her family. Her young son's artwork is on a bulletin board to the side of her room, where she posts classroom procedures, exit plans for drills, and where she has hand lotion and Kleenex for the students. She also has a bistro table in the front of the room for students to conference with her or with each other. Four chairs surround the table. Alison is a runner, so she has some photos of her and her brother's most recent half-marathon placed in her classroom. The focus of her room is the front, where she has a table for her instructional materials and where she can interact with her students. This room, too, is welcoming for students, and she invited students to get to know her and to share the classroom with her through these intentional spatial settings. Her students show that they are comfortable in the room, as they are there before and after school to talk with Alison.

Seth's room is smaller than Alison's or Natalie's, but the fact that student desks are arranged in groups of four shows students that they will work together. On Seth's desk is a small box called "Conversation Starters" that his mom gave to him when he started teaching nearly eight years ago. He explained that when there is down time, he asks the students questions from the conversation starters and awards them with candy when they reveal

thoughtful responses. In this way, his room becomes a place for comfort, familiarity, and expression. He has quirky magnets on his whiteboard and posters of visual rhetoric around the room. Each of the participants in this study decorated their rooms to suit their personalities and the way they want to help their students to feel as they learn. Gattery et al. (2016) stated, “Teachers enjoy decorating their classes” (n.p.). Likewise, before the recession in 2008, Alpha district used to give each teacher \$100 to spend on their own classrooms. Teachers loved this practice and planned carefully to purchase decorations and supplies for the students each time the money was allocated. This study discovered that the physicality of a classroom is important to the way a student feels while learning and interacting with texts, the teacher, and peers (Gattery et al., 2016). Overall, the themes developed in this investigation indicated that the teaching of reading is complex in nature and involves relationships, the structure of the classroom, and the teachers’ beliefs about their abilities in the classroom.

A remarkable component of this dissertation is the use of arts-based methods through strong researcher positioning. The scholarly freedom that I found within this narrative inquiry as I analyzed the data helped me learn not only about my research goals, but also about myself. During the data crystallization, which relies on “intuition and creativity” (Janesick, 1996), the researcher can open up an original conversation in a unique way. The deepest, most personal connections to my research goals transpired while undertaking data crystallization. Exploring different forms of literary arts-based methods, such as poetry writing, enabled me to think in multiple layers of pedagogical ordering. Without such creative forms of expression, significant connections might not have been made in study findings. The findings were further developed by data crystallization and researcher

positioning through multiple lenses. These lenses included my own personal experiences and relationships, my role as a teacher, my role as a researcher, and my role as a writer. These experiences throughout this study were personally and professionally profound, and they will resonate for a lifetime. It is because of these perspectives that I was able to be completely free to find my own voice contextualized by the voices of Seth, Alison, and Natalie.

Potential Limitations of the Study

Since there were three participants in this study who varied by gender, age, and years of teaching experience, as well as by places each participant has taught, there was a diversity in not only habitude and philosophy, but in background experiences too. Since the sample size of this study was limited to three teacher participants, there is a lack of generalizability with this study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed the need to attend to verisimilitude of participants in narrative inquiry telling their stories from the vantage point of the truth as they remembered it best. These truths are accepted as truth to each participant as they gave interviews and wrote journal entries and taught their classes for observation. This relationship developed between researcher and participant must rely on the likelihood of the truth to develop trustworthiness.

While the stories were written and spoken by those who lived them, there is still a possibility that the person telling the story did not remember the event exactly as it happened. Even so, the teacher participants of this study willingly contributed their experiences in the interviews and journals as well as in the observations. There was thus a trust that developed to create veracity of the data collected.

Barone (2007) suggested that narrative inquiry seeks truth through data collection from participants such that their stories are storied experiences that are true based on the participants' experiences in life. The question of potentially fictionalized data is balanced by this search for truth through data collection. Crites (1979) also highlighted the possibility for participants to deceive themselves in telling their narratives of experience. I believe the participants told truthful versions of their experiences with teaching reading via the triangulation of data across interviews, journals, and observations.

As with other qualitative research, the findings of this study are not generalizable. Yet this is not a limitation to this study, since the findings of the investigation may have an impact beyond the specific context of the participants and their classrooms. In this study I acknowledge the potential for the teacher participants' experiences to be "recognizable" (Miller & Gannett, 1994) to other teachers of English, and perhaps across subject areas. In this way, teachers may attend to the narratives discussed above, connect with the narrative themes that were uncovered, and then uncover similar or related experiences guiding their own curricular interactions. As such, this study can inform other practitioners, and it can further inform teacher educators about life in classrooms.

Guba and Lincoln (1982) found that human activity is determined by context and time, so we should ascertain the data collected during this study's context and time, not to generalize about all secondary English and their experiences. Therefore, "we should rather talk about 'fittingness,' which is to say that the data attempt to establish the extent to which the studied situation matches other situations or problems which we want to study" (Delmar, 2010, p. 117). This notion of "fittingness" (Delmar, 2010, p. 117) accounts for the context and time of the study to explain that generalizability is not needed for narrative inquiry.

Atkinson (2007) stated that interviewing in narrative inquiry can be seen as “a natural bridge” (p. 230) that might connect different sets of ideologies to create a deeper understanding of human experience. He claimed that stories, or bridges, can connect disciplines, they can connect the whole and the smaller sections of the stories being narrated, and they can connect the narrator or the telling of the story itself to the actual lived experience for which it is a basis. Furthermore, the storyteller may create an experience through story that might be interpreted as a result of an understanding from the “imaginative reconstruction” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 230). In essence, the research implications of story and narrative inquiry are varied and broad. Atkinson (2007) argued primarily that it is in stories’ reconstruction that meaning is created.

Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed that the development of narrative inquiry is steeped in a viewpoint of “human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 2). Therefore, they posited that narrative inquiry is the most appropriate form of research to use when engaging in inquiry “undertaken within a pragmatic framework” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). In doing so, the methodology of narrative inquiry allowed me to consider the participants’ experiences from different viewpoints in order to ascertain knowledge through empirical data.

Barone (2007) further agreed that by using multiple participants in a narrative inquiry study, the stories are validated by diverse dimensions of voice. He found that valid data collected through the social sciences often offer predictions, explanations, and a way to control future practices (Barone, 2007). Although I had a limited number of participants in the study, the focus was to attain rich data from each participant so I could deeply analyze

their experiences. At the same time, I considered the voiced experiences of all of the participants individually and as a group.

In addition, as in all narrative inquiries, in the study the findings are interpretive constructions. Interpretation of the data offers a framework for explicit truths to be uncovered and examined. While it might be perceived that the interpretive stance of inquiry findings is a limitation of the study, Kim (2016) argued that the interpretation of data enables researchers to build “representations of stories” (p. 189). I acknowledge my own researcher positioning throughout the study to minimize reactivity and researcher bias and to render transparent how I interacted in the investigation and how I uncovered these findings so that they stand as solid interpretations. Additionally, Clandinin (2007) cautioned that the interpretation and analysis of the data happens only after it is collected. I followed this guide and to defend against overlaying my own lens on events, I conducted member checking.

Hyvärinen (2008) further argued that it might be counter-productive to find a common consensus when analyzing narratives because “no definition will fit all narratives” (p. 448). Since the nature of storytelling is one of discovery (Bakhtin, 1981), the way a narrative inquiry researcher interprets and analyzes data is an essential part of the research process. The methods implemented to uncover the layers of truth through story to reach synthesized conclusions are critical to developing the actual analysis of data collected. Attending to my own researcher positioning and maintaining detailed field notes helped me to avoid the temptation of wrapping up a discussion of this investigative findings with a cohesive Hollywood ending (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Ethical Considerations

In this section I outline some possible ethical considerations related to this investigation. In this study, one potential ethical consideration was the dual role as both researcher and colleague and friend. Kim (2016) argued that in collecting data for narrative inquiry research, “the most important aspect of the interview method is trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 162). Just as a trusting rapport is important in evoking rich stories from the participants, Kim (2016) also warned of an “over- rapport” (p. 162). This might happen when the researcher and the participant are too close, as there may be a higher risk for bias to develop when collecting data.

Therefore, Kim (2016) advised that a balance is needed to develop a trust and rapport that is comfortable for both the interviewer and the interviewee. In collecting data interpersonally in an interview situation, the researcher’s “genuine caring, interest and respect for the participant’s human dignity and integrity” are helpful characteristics for the researcher (Kim, 2016, p. 163).

While I am older than all three participants in this study, I continue to work with each of them at Alpha school as a colleague and as a friend. When I explained to each of the participants that their work with their students would not be judged, but recorded and then analyzed, each of the participants expressed their comfort with my presence in their rooms. Due to my dual position as researcher and colleague, securing complete anonymity was impossible. Since I had existing relationships with the teacher participants spanning from two to 12 years, my position with each participant had already been well established, which I believe strengthened the data collection process.

However, to account for the concern that I had previously established working relationships with the three teacher participants, I did not socialize with them outside of school during the data collection period. I did not communicate with them other than by email for professional needs. I was friendly during lunch and during meetings, but I did not discuss any aspect of the work regarding the study. In fact, I did not discuss the study with anyone except the Supervisor, Dr. Candace Schlein, when I had questions. I told myself, “You are a researcher now,” before I observed each class period, conducted each interview, or read each journal entry. Significantly, I made use of field notes to shift between subjectivity and objectivity, which helped me to maintain perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Josselson (2009) noted the need for the researcher’s views to be transparent or as transparent as humanly possible so that the stories of the participants are empirical. I used the field notes to record my own developing thoughts of the inquiry as a means of making my perspectives transparent.

Narrative Puzzles and Wonderings

The common narrative themes discussed above exemplify the focus on commonality within narrative inquiry research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that when common themes are apparent, the narrative researcher can “imagine our field texts and our puzzles and fitting them into a form” (p. 162). However, sometimes in narrative inquiry puzzles remain either as new lines of inquiry or as discrepancies between interview statements and observed teaching, which is referred to as “images in action” (Clandinin, 1986).

The findings of this study have uncovered some wonderings regarding the participants’ specific lenses on teaching and their classroom interactions. For example, I

witnessed during these observations that all three teachers developed positive rapport with their students so they could introduce the students to a variety of complex texts. I still wonder how these teachers approached this trust in the classroom. Did they approach the school year in similar ways the first few days of school? I also wonder about the teachers' own experiences as learners. While they did touch upon being successful in school, having access to books as children and parents that encouraged them to be curious, I wonder how deeply these experiences shaped the way each teacher approaches their practices in the classroom with their own students. I wonder too how the teachers can maintain such unwavering enthusiasm for their role as an English teacher.

In addition, while the participants in this study shared many commonalities in stories explained and in discussions of their viewpoints, their personalities were revealed during the interviews, journal entries, and in the classroom observations. It seems that the two participants who I have known the longest, Seth and Natalie, shared more in-depth data with me. This speaks to the possible strength of building strong rapport over a period of time to collect rich data. Differences in personality might have also contributed to this unequal depth of data collected from among the various participants.

In addition to this, Seth has taught in two school districts in two different areas of the Midwest, and Natalie has taught only at Alpha school, and has taught for 13 years. Seth's experiences in another place give him additional experiences in a different educational system. Natalie's experiences only at Alpha school for the past 13 years, starting when she was just 22 years old, give her a history with Alpha school that the other participants did not have and perhaps a deeper connection to the school culture and curriculum. Both Seth and Natalie have been teaching at Alpha school much longer than

Alison, who has been at Alpha school for only two years of her 12-year career. Since Alison is a newcomer to the system and to the English department, one reason that her journal entries were not as detailed as Seth's and Natalie's might be that her comfort level is not as developed due to her recent arrival at Alpha school.

Moreover, this variance might be partly explained by the fact that participants were instructed to complete journal entries on their own time. Given the different amounts of time the participants allocated to journal entry completion, some journals contained more details and more depth of information than others. The variance of the depth of storytelling was not greatly noted throughout the study, but there was a difference in the art of expression and the details given by each participant in this study.

This study has also led to my enthusiasm for shedding light on related narrative puzzles. It also sparked further interest in research regarding the complexities of teaching reading in the secondary English classrooms. Not only am I interested in pursuing future studies regarding reading instruction and how to help students improve their skills so they can read any text and think critically about it, but I have developed an intense interest in the role of the teacher as curriculum. This would include further research in several areas.

The first area of research I would like to pursue further is the concept of the teacher as the curriculum. I had not considered this notion before I read the work of Schlein and Schwartz (2015). Schlein and Schwartz (2015) argued that the relationship between teachers and the curriculum has been seen historically as connected. They described the history of Quintilian, who was the first paid teacher in first-century Rome, explaining, "The teacher was the wise, able person from whom one could learn philosophy, one's trade, and much else. The teacher was and remains a model, the exemplar of the *curriculum in action*" (p. 6).

The authors further argued for an understanding of “teacher as curriculum” (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015). The role of teacher as curriculum examines the functionality of curriculum in the classroom and the *how* and the *why* of instruction. The study findings suggests that teachers might have a certain rapport developed with a group of learners that only happens in a dynamic and personal way. This possibility that arose from this investigation sparked a need to learn more about this idea not only for further research but also for mindful practice.

Another aspect of this study for additional research is the notion of the teacher’s viewpoint about their abilities in the classroom. The teacher’s self-efficacy became increasingly interesting to me as I collected data for this study. The participants highlighted well how teaching is not a static experience but a dynamic one. Since the lives of the teachers and the job they do in the classroom is so closely connected, teachers’ demeanor and mental health might factor into our outward interactions with our students.

The viewpoint of the teacher about their abilities and understanding of texts might prove to be especially important in the secondary English classroom. Most often, reading is not viewed as a separate discipline, but rather as integrated into other disciplines (Leader-Janssen & Rankin-Erickson, 2013). Furthermore, Lovett (2013) highlighted that there is an increasing number of pre-service teaching programs across the nation that require reading in content area courses for all secondary teachers. These researchers indicated that teachers’ knowledge about teaching reading in the classroom and their own perceptions of that knowledge was a significant contributor to their understanding and implementation of reading strategies in their secondary English classrooms (Leader-Janssen & Rankin-Erickson, 2013; Lovett, 2013). These discoveries through the stories and experiences and observations shared during data collection have propelled me to want to research self-

efficacy in the secondary English classroom. Viel-Ruma et al. (2010) stated that teacher efficacy has been “positively correlated to higher academic achievement, effective teacher practices, increased family involvement...and higher levels of teacher job commitment” (p. 226). The participants indicated that a teacher’s efficacy can impact their performance in the classroom depending on their outlook and tone of voice. In particular, Seth and I discussed observing one another and journaling about how each lesson goes from the teacher’s perspective versus the observer’s perspective to gain knowledge about self-efficacy for a future study.

After I observed Seth for the first time in January and compiled the field notes, he caught me in the hall and said, “Would you like for me to write a response to my feelings about how the lesson went yesterday that you observed?” That question has stuck with me, because I think a reciprocal-teaching study might reveal an even deeper ideology about how teachers feel they are doing when teaching reading and why they feel this way about their instructional methodology. I wonder how research about the teacher’s personal background experiences would also contribute to this study to better explain the deeper levels of a teacher’s personal experiences that specifically factor into their decisions when teaching reading in secondary English classrooms.

In addition to this understanding, I would like to learn more about how an English teacher identifies himself or herself in the English classroom when it comes to reading. In years past, I have heard English teachers in department meetings say, “I don’t know how to teach reading. I’m not a reading teacher.” In one of his interviews, Seth said, “Oftentimes, English teachers don’t know how to teach reading like how to develop fluency, or understand phonics, those types of skills.” This contribution from Seth, coupled with the

comment from a colleague several years ago, makes me think future research might be conducted to better understand teacher self-efficacy about teaching reading in secondary English classrooms on several different levels.

The results of this study underscore how a teacher's background and personal experiences might have a connection to his or her self-efficacy, which is a facet of teaching that may be increasingly important in public schools today. Personal stories from the past impact and shape who teachers are in the present, as this study uncovered. This research could possibly expand to a greater body of investigation to encompass reading across the disciplines at the secondary level to better clarify how teaching reading in history, science, and math might impact instruction.

In the era of CCSS, reading across the disciplines is a prominent feature for each building to build essential reading skills among its students. Even as recently as this fall, Alpha school's English department plans to facilitate such training for the building due to the statistics shared that one-third of the sophomore class came to Alpha school this fall reading below grade level (R. Jerome, personal communication, May 2017). Since Alpha school does not have a reading intervention course for students who are current struggling readers, the English department has committed to training for all disciplines in reading strategies and reading instructional tools.

This study might therefore inform such professional development and practice. For example, my own English department might ask each teacher to share a memory of their interactions with reading to start the discussion. Since the findings from this study highlight the importance of personal background in shaping a teacher's interactions with reading in the classroom, a social relationship established with the students in the classroom, and self-

efficacy regarding reading instruction, this study could serve as foundational for this professional development training.

The implications of reading across the disciplines might be to help improve the reading levels of one-third of the sophomore class at Alpha school and to increase the students' understanding and interactions with various texts among all the disciplines represented in their schedules throughout the school day. Should the students receive reading instruction in all their courses, especially the cores but in elective courses too, the benefits for such instruction might help the students perform better academically in high school, in their future studies in higher education, in vocational training, or in the workforce. It is particularly important to be able to read texts and to write clearly in response to the texts for success in a global economy of the 21st century. Reading across the disciplines might be the first step to help students understand how to think about reading in any discourse they encounter.

Should this form of research expand to include additional disciplines, it would be relevant to learn how a teacher's experiences with reading at a young age affects their instruction in a history classroom, a science classroom, or a math classroom. These stories might better shape the instruction in each discipline to include interdisciplinary studies or approaches to instruction which is aligned to the current CCSS or other state-based standards, as well as the ACT.

In turn, this research might help all educators to understand their own personal backgrounds, the stories of childhood and early adulthood that connect to the discipline they chose to teach. While everyone has memories of these different times throughout life, it is rare that teachers thoughtfully consider how their experiences with their family culture,

mentors, and teachers influence the way they approach teaching their specific discipline and why. These understandings might impact public education positively in the current era where personal relationships matter.

This future research may strengthen and bring to the front of the discourse the importance of reading, no matter the discipline, to better prepare students for the globally competitive culture of the 21st century. Blake (2014) argued:

Finally, to be considered literate in the 21st century, someone must possess knowledge of current events, cultural phenomena, music, books, movies and television shows that are popular within his or her social and professional groups. This skill has been called both “social literacy” and “cultural literacy.” (n.p.)

This assertion captures the importance of students’ knowledge of multiple literacies to be ready for their adult lives. Blake (2014) also stated, “information literacy and critical thinking, technology literacy, cultural and social literacy...to create cross-cultural awareness” (n.p.). These literacies start with reading and consuming visual rhetoric that students will either read or see through a screen on a gadget.

In preparation for global communication and positions of entrepreneurship, students who can read any complex texts adeptly and with a deep understanding might become more successful in the 21st century (Sternberg, 2008). Reading and writing skills will be increasingly important as the world become smaller due to the increased inventions and uses of different types of technologies. This study might serve as a contribution in this goal because it finds that a person’s background and personal experiences with reading allow the individual to understand their relationship with texts as well as self-efficacy. This metacognitive notion could serve as a thread for students, English teachers, or teachers of other disciplines regarding text complexity, deconstructing texts, and how to analyze texts

for future skills in the workforce. There is a stated need for developing critical thinking skills and literacy skills in the future that balances the over-consumption of technology (Blair, 2012).

This study might help to start a professional development training for teachers to learn how to engage in different reading strategies across the disciplines. Downs (2010) asserted that teachers need to meet students where they are as readers, because they know students are not going to read carefully, for any length of time, or with patience. Reading skills and understanding literacies will be key to success in myriad professions now and in the future. This study revealed several themes that might serve as a contribution to help understand and facilitate teaching reading in secondary schools to best equip students for the challenges of literacy skills in the 21st century.

APPENDIX A

SUPERINTENDENT LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Dr. ABC,

With recent changes in the landscape of public education in the United States, reading instruction has become a significant topic of interest for most English educators. We discuss reading instruction as an area of importance due to the Common Core State Standards and the main benchmarks of [CCSS] of reading and writing. Therefore, I am interested in learning about the experiences of three high school English teachers who have a minimum of five years in the classroom. I would like the prospective teacher participants to participate in two 60-minute interviews, which will take place during their free time for a total of five interviews. I would also like the participants to complete journal entries following writing prompts. In addition, I would like to observe each participant for one class period on a bi-monthly basis over the course of one school semester for a total of 30 observations.

This study will be approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. In this way, I will ensure that the study meets the institutional requirements for conducting ethical and confidential research. If you have any questions about this study, I would be glad to discuss further details. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Candace Schlein (schleinc@umkc.edu) for any additional information.

I would like to seek your approval to for this investigation. In signing below, you show that you are aware of this study and you approve of these investigative activities.

Thank you for your support in this research goals during the time of the study.

My signature below displays that I acknowledge this study and I have provided my approval for the study activities.

Name in print: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sincerely,

Sara Crump
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education
University of Missouri-Kansas City

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Request to Participate

You are being asked to take part in a research study that I, Sara Crump, am conducting in your school district as a part of my doctoral degree at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. I would like you to take part in this research study because you have taught secondary English for five years or longer. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. I would be happy to go over this consent form with you and explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background

In recent years, educators have been paying increased attention to reading initiatives and literacy instruction. This focus on teaching reading has become centralized within contemporary curriculum reform efforts, such as within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) further tightened a perspective on education that positioned reading as a priority, and it included the creation of related enhanced state standards. While there has been much debate about the adoption of basic standards among individual states, in turn, many states are creating their own state standards based on the CCSS national standards. Common to these national and state-based standards are the need to teach reading in all subject areas and for all teachers to identify

themselves as teachers of reading. It is thus of the utmost significance to gain insight into how English teachers identify themselves as teachers of reading and how they see themselves positioned within their school landscapes. It is also important to highlight factors impacting English teachers' interactions with their students while teaching reading, and to identify the reading strategies that they find to be useful.

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to shed light on the experiences of high school English teachers with teaching reading. Teachers' stories of experience regarding their reading instruction practices might be critically informative about connections between curriculum reform, standards, and reading. The primary research question for this study is: What are the experiences of high school English teachers with reading instruction? The sub-question for this investigation is: What are English teachers' experiences with reading instruction within a framework of increasing standardization and enhanced state-based standards?

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct two 60-minute, tape-recorded interviews with you to be scheduled at your convenience. The interviews will include questions about your approaches to teaching reading, practices you find successful, practices you find ineffectual, as well as your beliefs about best practices for teaching reading in secondary English classrooms. I will also ask you to complete written journal entries on a Word file in response to questions on a monthly basis over the course of one academic semester. In addition, I will observe you teach reading strategies in your high school classrooms on a bi-monthly basis

over one semester for a total of 30 times collectively. All data will be collected between January and May in 2017.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in certain activities or to answer certain questions. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please email me, Sara Crump, to request withdrawal from it.

Risks and Inconveniences

There is a possible slight risk that you may find sharing some of your experiences in teaching reading to be sensitive as you relate lessons that did not work out well. In sharing these stories there is a risk for personal and professional vulnerability. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in life. Although I will use pseudonyms to replace all names of people and places, there is a possibility that others might identify you based on your stories. I will take every possible measure to safeguard your confidentiality. Only the Doctoral Committee Supervisory Chair, Dr. Candace Schlein, and I will have access to any raw data.

Benefits

By participating in this study you may reveal a better understanding of your own beliefs and practices in teaching reading in the classroom. Another benefit of your study participation is it will allow you to be a part of a larger discourse in understanding curriculum and instruction as well as theory and practice.

Fees and Expenses

There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study. There is also no monetary cost for your participation in this study.

In Case of Injury

The University of Missouri–Kansas City appreciates people who help it gain knowledge by being in research studies. It is not the University’s policy to pay or provide medical treatment for persons who are in studies. If you think you have been harmed because you were in this study, please call the researcher, Sara Crump at 816-739-0674.

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the Office of UMKC’s Institutional review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher, Sara Crump at 816-739-0674 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call her if any problems come up.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. I might also take you out of this study at any time if I decide that it is in your best interest to do so.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Sara Crump at 816-739-0674. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. Study staff will give you a copy of this consent form.

Signature (Volunteer Participant)

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW #1 PROTOCOL

1. Why did you choose to become a teacher of English? How long have you taught English?
2. Describe your own background with reading. Did your parents read to you as a child? What memories do you have regarding reading as you were growing up and even when you were in college? Explain.
3. How might you describe your role as an English teacher to secondary students?
4. Do you think that there are differences between English teachers and other teachers? If so, what are some of these differences?
5. In what ways might English classrooms be different from or similar to other classrooms?
6. Do you consider yourself to be a teacher of reading? If yes, why? If not, why not?
7. What might be some of the essential characteristics of a teacher of reading?
8. In what ways do you shape teaching reading around students' needs?
9. In what ways do you shape teaching reading around students' interests?
10. Tell me about your experiences with teaching reading.
11. What are some of your memorable positive and challenging experiences with teaching reading? Why do you think you remember them? What did you learn from these positive and challenging experiences?
12. What have been some of your less successful strategies for teaching reading? Why do you think that they were less successful?

13. Do you think there is a difference in student levels of engagement regarding the types of text you teach (e.g. plays, poetry, fiction, nonfiction)? If so, explain. If not, explain why not.
14. What have been some of your most successful strategies for teaching reading? Why do you think that they were successful?
15. What were some surprising experiences that you have had when teaching reading?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW #2 PROTOCOL

1. In what ways is your teaching guided by curriculum standards?
2. How important do you think state-based standards are for your work and for student learning?
3. What role do you think state-based standards play in student achievement in reading?
4. What role do you think state-based tests might have on student motivation for reading?
5. Do you think that every high school English teacher identifies with the role of reading teacher, too? Why or why not? Explain.
6. Do you think that teachers in all subject areas should be responsible for teaching reading? Why? Why not?
7. In what ways has teaching reading changed over your career?
8. Do you think the role of reading instruction has changed throughout your years as a classroom teacher?
9. Explain your level of confidence when teaching reading. Do you think your confidence impacts the effectiveness of your instructional practices? If yes, explain why. If no, explain why not.

APPENDIX E
OBSERVATION MATRIX

Teacher/Participant's Pseudonym _____

Grade level _____

Date and Time: _____

Lesson's Objectives:

What reading strategies does the teacher implement during the lesson? Explain.

How is this strategy relevant to the lesson of the day? Explain.

Are the students receptive to the teacher? If yes, how so? If not, explain. Are the students receptive to each other? If yes, how so? If not, explain.

How do the students interact with these strategies?

Do the students understand what the protocols of the classroom are? If yes, how so? If not, explain.

What is the configuration of the classroom (draw a diagram here)

Questions for the participant/teacher:

How does this lesson help me to understand this research question?

APPENDIX F

JOURNAL ENTRY PROMPTS

1. Explain how you felt about teaching reading when you first began teaching. If there are differences, explain why you feel these differences might exist.
2. Describe a specific, recent lesson where you implemented reading strategies that really worked. Why were the students so responsive? Do you continue with this strategy?
3. Describe a specific reading lesson where the lesson was well-planned, but it did not go as expected. Why do you think that the students did not react as expected? Did you modify the lesson or did you abandon the practice? Why?
4. Currently, do you believe you are confident in implementing reading strategies often? If so, why are you confident in implementing reading strategies often? If not, what might improve your confidence in implementing reading strategies often in your English classroom?
5. Do you think CCSS or the enhanced state-based standards will change the way you implement reading practices in your classroom? Why or why not? How do you see reading instruction in the secondary English classroom fitting into current curriculum as well as how do you feel it might fit into future practices?
6. Recall a time where a specific incident happened in your classroom when a student challenged you regarding reading and reading strategies. (e.g. “How do I think while I read?”) etc. How did you react?

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VITA

Sara Lyn Crump was born on May 9, 1968 in Oelwein, Iowa. She was educated in the Oelwein Public Schools until her family moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1980. Sara graduated from Central High School in 1986. She attended the University of Missouri-Columbia after high school graduation where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in musicology. After graduation in 1990, Ms. Crump moved to Kansas City and she began her work to get a teaching certificate and a master's degree in the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She graduated with a Master of Arts degree from UMKC in 1993.

In 1998 she started to teach dual credit English Composition, English 214 Introduction to Fiction, and English 124 Writing about Literature through the HSCP at UMKC. Also in 1998, she started doing adjunct work for the School of Education at UMKC. In 1999, Sara earned her Education Specialist degree from UMKC with a subject matter specialty in reading and in literacy instruction.

In 2007, Ms. Crump was surprised to learn that she won the Milken Award at an all-school assembly with the Milken representatives and the Missouri State Education Commissioner. It was this opportunity that gave Ms. Crump the means to start work on the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program at UMKC. Ms. Crump's keen interest in reading and in curriculum theory inspired her to learn more about them.

Upon completion of her degree requirements, Ms. Crump plans to continue her career teaching high school English and doing adjunct work at UMKC. She is a member of the National Council Teachers of English and the American Educational Research Association as well as the National Educator's Association.