

TALKING TEXTS WITH TEACHERS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE
EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
TEACHERS AND THEIR TEXT SELECTION PRACTICES

A DISSERTATION IN
Curriculum and Instruction
and
English

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Kansas City, Missouri
2018

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ABSTRACT

The texts that teachers choose to read in the secondary English language arts classroom have been an important part of the curriculum development process for teachers of this subject. Teachers have always been interested in what texts are taught in secondary classrooms and at what grade levels. In a phrase: for many secondary English teachers, the text shapes the course.

Recently a shift has occurred regarding English language arts curriculum and text selection. For decades ELA curriculum has been dedicated to the canon of literature, which includes works written mostly by white males of European descent. While the exact titles in the canon have changed somewhat over time, even going so far as to include multicultural texts, the ELA classroom has been slow to change its views on which texts are worth reading. Additionally, the adoption of and implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) demand that teachers look more critically at the texts they select for their classrooms. However, the rigor the CCSS demand is often at odds with current best practices

regarding text selection, which support a more student-centered approach. Thus, it is of utmost significance to gain insight as to how teachers go about selecting texts for their classrooms, especially within the context of the increased rigor of the CCSS. It is also important to describe both positive and challenging experiences that teachers have had with text selection as a way to perhaps better understand what teachers choose to read and why.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to shed light on the experiences of high school English teachers and their interactions with text selection. Teachers' stories of experience regarding their text selection practices might help to inform educational stakeholders about curriculum reform, pedagogical traditions in ELA classes, and beliefs about best practices in reading and writing instruction.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “Talking Texts with Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Secondary English Language Arts Teachers and Their Text Selection Practices,” presented by Christa C. Wenger, a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the help of my Committee Chair, Dr. Candace Schlein, whose invaluable feedback, kindness, and patience made writing a dissertation a manageable, rewarding, and challenging experience. You have helped me to grow as a scholar, thinker, and writer in more ways than I can express here. You have helped to guide me through the art of careful storytelling so that I might respect the voices of the participants. I am thankful to all those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this project. Each of my Dissertation Committee members has helped to guide me personally and professionally through this process, and your feedback has helped me to think more critically about the type of researcher and teacher I want to be. Thanks to Sara Crump, a fellow Ph.D. student, colleague, and friend, who helped me process ideas and deconstruct the endless steps that are part of obtaining a doctor of philosophy degree. Thanks to the teachers who helped make this dissertation about text selection possible—Georgia, Robert, and Anne. I would also like to acknowledge the senior class of 2018 at Pine Grove School. Your enthusiasm for learning and engagement with me as your teacher have kept me going during this process. I would also like to acknowledge my family, specifically Mom and Dad, who have always supported my education and encouraged me to be the smartest and best possible woman I could be. Special thanks to my husband, Derek. You have been my biggest cheerleader. Thank you for your support, your encouragement, and your ability to stay busy when I was tucked away working on my dissertation for what seemed like every weekend the past several years. I am truly blessed by the support and encouragement I have received.

*For my mom, who encouraged me to read and who gave me my
first lesson in text selection through Scholastic Book orders
and weekend trips to Walden Books...*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The crux of the secondary English language arts classroom is, and perhaps always will be, the text. Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) made this clear when they wrote, “Although literature is only one strand of the English language arts curriculum, it is at the heart of everything English language arts teachers do in the classroom” (p. 478).

Accordingly, throughout the past 50 years, educational researchers have been highly interested in what texts are being taught in secondary English classrooms across the United States and why such texts are being taught. Furthermore, alongside each specific text that a teacher selects to be a part of his or her curriculum lies a series of values, beliefs, and ideas that help to shape the values, beliefs, and ideas of the students who read them. In a phrase: the text shapes the course.

Research involving text selection has been mostly concerned with the *what* involving texts (Applebee, 1974, 1993). The *what* of the texts that are selected usually involves hierarchical lists of texts with little to no explanation about why those texts are on particular lists (Applebee, 1993). Furthermore, fewer studies have included the stories of teachers and their ideas, concerns, and motivations behind text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom (Stallworth et al., 2006). This significant gap in the literature renders it of much importance for more qualitative research studies to focus on text selection, particularly the teacher’s involvement with and motivation behind the selection of texts.

Finally, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have become a reality for many teachers over the past few years (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2018e). This situation demands studies to be conducted about the relationship between the teacher,

the text, and the rigor of the CCSS. Primarily, since many states are aligning their curriculum with the CCSS and since English Language Arts makes up over one half of the standards, this narrative study also looked at text selection in the context of the CCSS. Thus, this narrative inquiry study examined secondary level English teachers' stories of experience regarding text selection. Furthermore, a focus of this inquiry was on local, state, and national curriculum efforts such as the CCSS and how they might be related to teachers' experiences regarding text selection, especially in terms of a broadening definition of texts and the issue of text complexity.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are repeatedly mentioned throughout this dissertation and are, therefore, defined within the context of this study involving text selection. While various definitions of these terms might exist, the following definitions are included to provide clarity to the reader. Defining these terms helped me to examine critically the phenomena of text selection.

Text/s: For the greater part of the 20th century and into the early part of the 21st century, the definition of text has narrowly included print texts, book-length works, and the written word. In this narrative inquiry, I focused mainly on texts that adhere to this definition of texts, especially since print modes and whole novels tend to dominate the English language arts classroom, which served as the context for this study (Applebee, 1993). While much of the research about texts has focused on texts in their traditional forms, a growing body of research redefines texts to include not only contemporary literature but art, music, comics, and digital online/screen-based texts (Alvermann, 2008; CCSSI, 2018e; Kress, 2003; Lee & Wu, 2012; Leu et al., 2011).

While it is not within the scope of this dissertation to examine in depth the definition of text, it was essential that the definition of text be broad enough to include textual forms outside of or apart from traditional print sources or whole novels in case conversations about digital texts or visual texts emerged during the data collection process.

Authentic Texts: Shreve, Danbom, and Hanhan (2002) asserted that language arts curricula should be flexible and encourage student response, needs, and interests rather than be inflexibly prescribed. Therefore, the use of the word authentic text/s is often used to describe this belief about English language arts instruction. However, a divide exists between school texts and curriculum content and the real world in which students live and participate (Seunarinesingh, 2010). The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English glossary of Standards for English Language Arts (1996) provided the following definition of authentic:

Something that is meaningful because it reflects or engages the real world. An *authentic task* asks students to do something they might really have to do in the course of their lives, or to apply certain knowledge or skills to situations they might really encounter. (p. 70)

Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1988) also wrote about the purpose of an authentic text, claiming such a text is “created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced” (p. 347). Thus, an authentic text is a text connected to the lives of people as it might help to “bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and a student’s capacity to participate in real world events” (Guariento & Morley, 2001, p. 347).

Canonical Texts: Bloom (1994) clarified that canonical texts often possess qualities that are authoritative in a culture—they are works which “the world would not willingly let die” (p. 19). Bloom also asserted that the canon is more than just a list of books required for

study. Rather the canon ought to be viewed “as the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written” (p. 17). Thus, a canon shapes and evolves over time as more and more texts are written and, thereby, are included and available for comparison with preexisting works. Essentially, a canon is centered on the idea of “texts struggling with one another for survival” (Bloom, 1994, p. 20).

For the purposes of this study, I focused on canonical texts as they related to the context of high school English language arts instruction. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) asserted that for one reason or another, “certain texts have become staples of the secondary literacy classroom and constitute what [they] refer to as the ‘high school canon’” (p. 123). However, this group of texts does evolve and change shape depending on the context and ideologies of cultures across time and place (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012). Many times canonical texts adhere to dominant ideologies about “Whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, Christianity, and physical and mental ability” (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014, p. 123). Often these dominant ideologies remain unquestioned or unexamined, which, in turn perpetuates the dominance of the white, male, European canon often encountered in high school English language arts curriculum.

Multicultural Texts: Increasingly multicultural texts have been included in the curricula of American educational institutions. Palumbo-Liu (1995) referred to this inclusion as a type of battle that has often been fought and won as long as the inclusion represents various cultures and diversities among minoritized people groups. In education, this is often called the additive approach, which is based on celebrating cultural differences and emphasizing racial harmony through the addition/inclusion of works written by people of color (Banks, 2004). Such an approach, however, simplifies the concept of multiculturalism

and the definition of multicultural texts. In many cases, multicultural texts are included as part of course curricula as long as they are “deemed worthy of representing the ‘ethnic experience’” although such texts “may very well mimic and reproduce the ideological underpinnings of the dominant canon” (Palumbo-Liu, 1995, p. 2). Thus multicultural texts are added to the canon as long as they appear to be neutral or are neutralized by those who support their inclusion. McCarthy (1988) even went so far as to argue that “multicultural education, specifically, must be understood as part of a curricular truce, the fallout of a political project to deluge and neutralize Black rejection of...conformist and assimilationist curriculum” (p. 267). May (2000) echoed this belief, claiming that “multiculturalism has been plagued by an idealistic, naïve preoccupation with culture at the expense of broader material and structural concerns” (p. 200), and this naiveté and idealism might transcend to text selection practices in educational settings.

For the purposes of this qualitative study involving text selection in the secondary English classroom, the term multicultural text/s included Palumbo-Liu’s (1995) concept of critical multiculturalism in order to expand the definition of multicultural texts that may limit itself to inclusion or a focus on celebrating differences:

A critical multiculturalism explores the fissures, tensions, and sometimes contradictory demands of multiple cultures rather than (only) celebrating the plurality of cultures by passing through them appreciatively. It instead maps out the terrain of common interest while being attentive to the different angles of entry into this terrain. (p. 5)

Critical multiculturalism is wary of approaches that might exist simply to explore differences that make issues regarding race, class, and ethnicity more manageable for students. In contrast, critical multiculturalism allows for the development of an ethnic canon that is always being revised and contested (Palumbo-Liu, 1995). Thus, the terms critical

multiculturalism and ethnic canon were part of the language used in this study in order to include a critical discussion not only of race but of gender, class, and various socio-political issues that might be present in the high school texts that students encounter in the English language arts classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to examine high school English teachers' stories of experience regarding text selection in a small suburban high school in the Pacific Northwest. The unit of analysis included teachers' understandings and interactions with texts and text selection in the secondary English classroom. For this study, the definition of text selection went beyond lists of literature and other works that are taught in the secondary classroom and instead focused on how local, state, or national standards such as the CCSS and how these curriculum reforms and standards might be related to teachers' experiences in terms of a broadening definition of texts. Furthermore, the definition of text selection also included information about text complexity and Lexile scores. While I have provided a multi-faceted definition of text selection, it is important to refer to the specific text selection standards found in Appendix B of the CCSS. Specifically, the CCSS have provided educators with a list of exemplar texts that vary in quality, complexity, and range (CCSSI, 2018e). While the definition of text selection that I discussed above went beyond those texts found in Appendix B of the Standards, I used the CCSS's description as a framework from which to define the phenomenon of text selection. Regarding the selection of exemplar texts, the CCSS include the following explanation and rationale:

The following text samples primarily serve to exemplify the level of complexity and quality that the Standards require all students in a given grade band to engage with. Additionally, they are suggestive of the breadth of texts that students should

encounter in the text types required by the Standards. The choices should serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality, and range for their own classrooms. They expressly do not represent a partial or complete reading list. (CCSSI, 2018b, Appendix B, p. 2)

Research involving the English language arts classroom and, specifically text selection, indicates that this environment is slow to change and to adapt to shifting student needs and a rapidly changing world (Applebee, 1974, 1993). Unfortunately, the stagnated and unchanging nature of texts and curriculum choices in the secondary English classroom has had dire consequences on student reading scores and literacy abilities in the United States. In fact, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2016) maintained, “The majority of students are leaving high school without the reading and writing skills needed to succeed in college and a career” (n.p.).

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (2009, as cited in National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) found that secondary school students are reading significantly below expected levels. Specifically, for 12th-graders, the 2009 average reading score was four points lower than the score in 1992. Additionally, more than 60% of 12th grade students scored below the proficient level in reading achievement and 27% scored below the basic level in reading (NAEP, 2009, as cited in National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (2003, as cited in National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013) found that the literacy scores stagnated between 1992 and 2003, with only 13% of adults being proficient in reading, meaning that many adults cannot comprehend texts and documents needed to survive in the world, nor can they complete complex literary tasks (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, as cited in National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013). The Alliance for Excellent Education

(2016) confirmed previously mentioned data about reading scores but also found that only 27% of American Indian and Alaska Native, 24% of Hispanic, and 16% of African American 12th graders scored at or above proficient on the NAEP reading assessment, compared to 44% of white and 48% of Asian American students. Finally, the ACT (2013) found that only 44% of high school graduates met the reading-readiness benchmark, which represents the knowledge students need to succeed in first-year college courses. Clearly, students are leaving school ill-prepared in literacy, as such evidence is revealed not only in secondary school but in adult literacy as well.

The effects of low and declining adolescent reading and adult literacy reach far and wide. First, declining literacy scores, especially at the secondary level, suggest that students are ill-prepared for the literacy demands of college and the work force. Low literacy is tied to many societal factors, such as the drop-out rate and low levels of income. Specifically, of the 700,000 student who leave U.S. high schools each year without a diploma, many have low literacy skills, and one out of five fail to graduate on time (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). Moreover, the possession of advanced literacy skills across content areas is the best available predictor of students' ability to succeed in introductory college courses (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007), so even if students do graduate from secondary schools despite having poor literacy skills, they are unlikely to be successful in college and beyond.

Since the 1960s, there has been a steady decline in the difficulty and sophistication of the content of the texts students have been asked to read (CCSSI, 2018e), which is cause for concern since reading sophisticated texts could help to improve literacy skills and comprehension. Accordingly, Graham and Hebert (2010) found that one third of high school graduates are not ready to succeed in introductory-level college writing courses. The Alliance

for Excellent Education (2006) contended that for those who do earn a diploma, many must enroll in remedial coursework upon admittance to college, and students who take remedial coursework are less likely to earn a degree. Such remediation costs the nation an estimated \$3.6 billion each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2016). Additionally, in an ever-changing world, students need to possess literacy skills to succeed in a global economy, especially since 59% of jobs now require postsecondary education, and many of these jobs require applicants to possess basic literacy skills in order to adequately function (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Unfortunately, success in postsecondary school and life proves to be much more challenging for those students who do not possess the necessary skills in reading and writing, costing the nation \$335 billion each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

Not only are adolescent literacy skills declining, but reading for leisure has become an uncommon pastime for many adolescents and adults in the United States. Gallagher (2009) stated this phenomenon simply when he wrote,

We [teachers of adolescents] must take a hard look at what we are doing to potential readers. After thirteen years of schooling, many graduates are thankful they may never have to open another book again. A generation of readers is being lost. (Gallagher, 2009, "Looking Beyond the Usual Suspects," para. 4)

Gallagher's statement captured just how dire the reading situation is, and data confirm its truth. *Reading at Risk* (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004), a national survey polling 17,000 adults over a 20-year span, found that less than half the adult population now reads literature and that only 16% of adults are "frequent" or "avid" readers of literary texts. Further, the types of texts that are being read in secondary English classrooms has indeed fostered disdain and dislike for reading in general (Gallagher, 2009). Proof of this dislike of

reading has not gone unnoticed by the public. Kellogg (2013) found that on average Americans spend fewer than five hours per week reading and ranked 23rd in the world for reading but sixth for watching television, while Toppo (2007) reported that 27% of adults in the United States did not read a single book within the study year.

Such a significant decline in literacy cannot be blamed solely on the unchanging secondary English curriculum since more current data suggest there has been a slight shift from the white, male-dominated canon to include literary works from a broader, more multicultural perspective (Stotsky, Traffas, & Woodworth, 2010); however, this shift from a more traditional approach to a multicultural or student-centered one has had an adverse effect on a student's ability to read complex grade level texts. In fact, only 51% of ACT-tested high school graduates are ready for college level reading, and many of the nation's students are actually more prepared for college level reading at eighth and ninth grades than they are at the 12th grade (ACT, 2006). The National Assessment for Educational Progress (2013) made similar conclusions in their study of reading scores between 1971 and 2012. NAEP found that while the nation's nine-year-olds made progress in reading, 17-year-old high school readers did not, which suggests that students are not being literarily challenged in their later high school years (as cited in National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). For example, Stotsky, Traffas, and Woodworth (2010) conducted a nation-wide survey and concluded that only four of the top 20 most frequently read texts had a Lexile score that matched the grade level at which they were taught. The discrepancy between Lexile and grade level is one that cannot be ignored.

As the literature canon has been reshaped and reformed over the past several decades to include a diversity of texts, the ability of students to read particular texts, specifically

complex ones, have been reformed as well. Students' lack of ability to read complex texts transcends the walls of the English classroom. Specifically, ACT (2013) found that high school students' ability to read complex texts is strongly predictive of their performance in college math and science courses. However, just one in four ACT-tested high school graduates met or exceeded the college-readiness benchmarks in all four academic areas.

The inability of students to read complex texts has caused great concern for educators, teachers, parents, and employers alike and has not gone unnoticed by the American public. Attention, in fact, has been directed at this very issue through the creation of and pending implementation of the CCSS. Currently, 42 of the nation's 50 states have adopted the standards, and full implementation and assessment was expected by the 2014-2015 school year (CCSSI, 2018e). While 42 states have officially adopted the standards, several states have opted to develop their own standards or only parts of the official Standards as a way to more clearly navigate the complex demands of the Common Core (Shanahan, 2015). This set of standards is, by far, the most rigorous set of objectives to ever be implemented at a national level (Avila & Moore, 2012; Rothman, 2012). Particularly, the English Language Arts Standards (ELA Standards) focus on the complexity of texts taught at each grade level rather than how a text is taught so that students might be college and career ready.

Personal and Professional Research Rationale

Last year I was eating a brief 18-minute lunch, shoveling food in my mouth, and discussing the various books that I enjoyed teaching in my secondary high school curriculum. Melissa¹ a fellow English teacher, mentioned her favorite book, and I exclaimed, "Oh, I love

¹ All names included in this proposal, *Text Selection in the Secondary English Classroom*, are pseudonyms.

that one, too.” Wendy, another colleague, also stated it was her favorite title, to which I echoed, “Wait! I think *that* one’s my favorite.” In between ravenous bites of heated leftovers, three English teacher friends and I began focusing specifically on Orwell’s (1945) classic novella, *Animal Farm*, which I happened to be teaching to advanced sophomores at the time.

Now I am a sucker for this type of literature, and I absolutely love teaching this novella to students. I find it fascinating to introduce 10th graders to what is normally their first exposure to Russian history, as the novella, *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945), is clearly an allegory of this time period. I work hard to make the mostly infamous faces, such as Czar Nicholas II, Vladimir Lenin, and Joseph Stalin come to life. I am not always successful with every single student, yet I do feel as though my excitement for this piece of literature extends to my students. If they do not absolutely love the novel, they at least feel as though they have read a simple yet sophisticated piece of literature. Wendy quickly chimed in regarding the *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945) conversation: “Oh, I love teaching that book, too! The Russian history is fascinating.” A third friend, Morgan, had been sitting mostly quietly eating her lunch and listening to our conversation. Suddenly though she broke in with a puzzled look on her face, stating, “Russian history? I didn’t know the book was about Russia!”

Morgan’s statement shocked me. I thought, “How could a veteran English teacher miss such an important part of teaching this novel? How could she even teach the novel apart from its historical context? Do her students understand it? Does she even understand the text? Her context?” Her comment prompted me to begin thinking about texts in the English classroom. Each teacher is very different, yet many of the texts that are taught in schools are similar, especially between departments and schools within the same district. Therefore, one might conclude that teachers’ and, consequently, students’ interactions with texts in the

secondary English classroom differ greatly. As I thought about my lunch time conversation, it was the differences between teachers' interpretations and ideas about a text that made me want to focus on the stories of teachers and their unique experiences with texts for this study.

Researcher Positioning

Clandinin (2006) wrote, "It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives" (p. 44). My life is an intricate and connected collection of stories. Some of these stories are painful and others full of joy. Some of these stories describe frustrations and failures, while others capture my prouder moments of success. Some of my stories reveal insights about my personal life and others about my professional life as an educator. Regardless of which type of story I am telling about my experiences, I adopt Clandinin's (2006) ideas about storytelling as a way to "create meaning." I also come to this inquiry understanding that as I tell stories from my past, I continue to live out stories of experience in the present.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) also explained that narrative inquirers begin their inquiry by engaging with participants by telling stories or by living out stories alongside participants. In this section, I position myself as a narrative researcher "walking in the midst of stories" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47) by relaying two short stories—one from personal experience and another from professional experience—and how they helped to shape my interest in text selection. I tell these stories as a way to engage with the audience. It is important to note, however, that each story is only a fraction—a snapshot—of the larger story of who I am as a person and educator.

Phillion (2002) asserted the importance of stories and the role of the researcher in telling stories. Phillion clarified these ideas by claiming that stories—narratives—“almost always seem to have strong autobiographical roots” that are often “interconnected, woven together, [and] entangled” with the subject or participants of an inquiry (p. 3). In this sense, it is clear that the participants of the story and the storyteller and subject of inquiry are intricately connected rather than separate from one another. By relating my stories about text selection through both a personal and professional lens, I frame the study as well as reveal how my stories of experience are “interconnected” and “woven together” with the subject of text selection.

A Personal Story about Text Selection

Clandinin et al. (2006) stated, “Teachers’ stories...are the stories teachers live and tell of who they are and what they know” (p. 7). Thus through the telling of these stories, teachers reveal their personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), which is described as “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience...and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (p. 7). Thus, in the following pages, I tell stories from my personal practical knowledge that have helped shape who I am as a teacher as well as helped to shape my experiences with text selection. The first story is a personal story from my childhood that involves my experiences with choosing books to read and describes how this experience helped to shape who I was as a reader and lover of books.

It was in first grade that my mother, who was herself an avid reader, decided that I had had enough of *Frog and Toad* (Lobel & McFadden, 1970-1979), the *Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain & Berenstain, 1962-2016), *Magic School Bus* (Cole, 1986-2010), and *Clifford*

the Big Red Dog (Bridwell, 1963-2016). By her estimation, it was time for me to encounter my very first chapter book. A typical first-born, I was eager to please and, therefore, readily agreed with her. It was then I asked her what a chapter book was. Her response was delivered in adult fashion: chapter books were grown-up; chapter books had lots of pages—sometimes in the hundreds; and chapter books *did not have pictures*. My six-year-old self attempted to absorb this multi-faceted definition, and I decided she was right—after all, my teacher *had* placed me in The Lions reading group (which were much better than the Tiger and Bears). I was up for the challenge. I was at the top of the pack and believed I was ready to read my first chapter book with assistance from my mother.

Mom's plan to turn me into a reading machine was put into action quickly when we headed to a Walden Books, one of the few stores in a sad little mall near our house. Mom said that we should begin with reading a series, as it would give us more options when we finished the first book; we could read forever! Mom and I settled on a book from the *Nancy Drew* (Keene, 1959-1979) series, a series that my mom had read herself in her elementary years. She explained to me that Nancy Drew solved all types of mysteries. This particular book was titled *The Secret of the Old Clock* (Keene, 1959), and I could not wait to get home and begin reading it, with help from Mom, of course.

The book itself had a bright, canary-yellow hardcover with blue writing on the front. Each cover included a different picture of the series' heroine, Nancy Drew, as well as a picture of one of the other words in the title. I studied this Nancy person intently. Published in the 1950s and 1960s, this edition of the Nancy Drew books featured, well, Nancy Drew, who was depicted as a mature, strawberry blond who wore "smart" dresses, sensible shoes, and drove an extremely groovy blue Mustang convertible. She could often be found hanging

with gal pals, Bess and George, or her dreamy boyfriend, Ned Nickerson. I wanted to be just like her when I got older.

It was this experience that marked my first official moment with selecting texts for personal enjoyment. This sense of excitement I get when selecting a new book to read is still a feeling I carry with me when selecting books for other people. Although this story provides only a glimpse of my life as a reader, it positions the personal connection I have to my research interests.

While this story about reading my first chapter book helps to provide insight about my personal experiences with reading and text selection, I also feel it necessary to acknowledge the dominant ideologies that permeated one of my first memorable reading experiences. Looking at reading and text selection through a critical lens, it is important to note how Nancy Drew is smoothly embedded into the dominant culture with her blue eyes and strawberry blond hair, physical features that have been normalized and even objectified as the ideal through a failure to deconstruct whiteness and assume constructions of knowledge and truth are not only the right ways of thinking but natural as well (Howard, 2006). Nancy's friends, George and Bess, were often described by the author as being less attractive and, therefore, best suited as perfect Nancy's sidekicks since they did not represent the American aesthetic ideal—to be white and blonde. My experiences reading *Nancy Drew* (Keene, 1959-1979) illuminate how race and class can shape something even as simple as a person's reading experiences. My mother, a white female, selected a book with which she was familiar and, consequently, helped to perpetuate the normalcy given to a character like Nancy Drew. While such books are enjoyable and can certainly be read for pleasure, my

reading of the Nancy Drew series was a way to engage in critical discourse about race, gender, and class.

A Professional Story of Text Selection

Fast forward many years, to my reading Prose's (2008) essay, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read." At this point, I had been a middle school and high school English teacher for six years. I had taught many beloved works that, to me, verged on being sacred texts: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), and *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932). However, Prose (2008), with her biting and sardonic wit, mocked and ridiculed each and every one of my beloved texts, calling the typical high school English reading lists "grisly" (p. 91), "manipulative" (p. 90), and filled with a "numbing sameness" (p. 91), and those were the nice words she used to describe the works that are read in high school English. As I watched her shred *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) into bits, crucify *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), and massacre Twain's (1885) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, I was offended. How dare this woman—this author—criticize my list of beloved works, referring to many as "regimens of trash and semi-trash" (p. 90)?

I wrote her off as an ill-informed elitist snob who simply did not understand what teenagers enjoyed reading. Then I re-read her essay again last summer after I had a few more years in the classroom under my belt, and I was struck by how much her words rang true. No longer was I offended by Prose's (2008) critique of high school curriculum; rather I found myself readily agreeing with her claims that we have "rushed to sacrifice [literary] complexity for diversity" (p. 90) and that "Great novels can help us master the all-too-rare skill of tolerating...ambiguity and contradiction" (p. 97). Like Prose, my wish is to instill

within my students a love for literature by asking them to read complex and rich literary works.

This story, too, is a small glimpse into the many intricacies that are involved with selecting texts for a classroom; however, the first story helps one to understand a personal rationale for selecting certain texts while the second story allows readers to understand professional reasons. It is through these two stories that one can begin to understand how both the “personal and social are always present” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Theoretical Framework

Within this section I review several central theories that support this research. I explore literature on stories and storying as a central aspect of this narrative inquiry regarding teachers and their experiences with text selection. Next, I examine theories on the relationship between the curriculum, experience, and teachers. Finally, I consider literature that explores diverse and critical layers of curriculum experiences, including diversity studies, multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory.

Stories, Experience, and Storying

Stories and the act of storying are essential components of my research and the first strand of my theoretical framework. Novak (1975) asserted that stories are one of the most important ways by which humans make sense of the world. Dewey (1938) believed that stories are constructed from experience. Specifically, experience is the foundation from which all forms of inquiry emerge, and experience is a “changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Dewey (1981) expanded on this idea when he wrote, “In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social,

are transformed through the human context they enter” (p. 251), and it is through these various contexts and experiences that humans create stories.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) drew attention to stories as they relate to education, claiming that education is the telling and retelling of personal and social stories. Clandinin et al. (2006) focused on the importance of stories, especially those of teachers when they wrote, “Teachers’ stories, their personal practical knowledge, are the stories teachers live and tell of who they are and what they know” (p. 7). It is through storytelling that teachers make sense of who they are and what they do. In this study, I hoped to bring teachers’ experiences to the forefront of the discussion regarding text selection by allowing them to share their stories, and in turn by telling their stories as a way to possibly enlighten other educators about what teachers choose to read in their classrooms and why.

Phillion (2002) also asserted the importance of stories and the role of the researcher in not only capturing the stories of her participants but of storytelling on the part of the researcher. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the relationship between the stories of the researchers and the stories of participants:

As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. (p. 64)

Primarily, stories are rooted in many variables—the lives of the participants and researchers but also where both groups live and work, their classrooms, their schools, and their communities. Thus, one can conclude that stories are constructed, which means that stories do not represent a truth but a perspective to which others might be able to relate. It is stories and the ways by which they help people to make sense of their experiences that was central to this study regarding teachers and their experiences with text selection.

Teaching, Experience, and the Curriculum

Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) explained that the relationship between the teacher and the curriculum has not always been central to understanding education. Connelly and Clandinin (1988), however, were able to lay important groundwork in establishing teachers as knowledgeable persons and curriculum makers. Much of their work was conducted as a response to pre-packaged curriculum that often neglected the experiences and values of the teachers who were charged with implementing that curriculum, a phenomenon to which Giroux (2012) referred as the “deskilling” of teachers.

Westbury (2008) claimed that teachers are the best suited for curriculum development based on their experiences and practical knowledge about teaching and learning. Schlein (2013) further argued that teachers should begin to see themselves in the role of curriculum developer as opposed to curriculum implementer. This belief about teachers as curriculum makers is central to my understandings about text selection. Without the teacher, a text or any tangible piece of curriculum is merely a static document that is void of meaning. Specifically, Holloway and Greig (2011) found that teachers can be agents of change when selecting texts for their classrooms, or they can employ text selection practices that perpetuate systems of power or marginalize particular student groups. These findings help to reiterate the belief that the teacher helps to shape the way a text is chosen and, consequently, implemented into his or her classroom. Thus, the teacher is a necessity in breathing life into the texts that he or she chooses to teach.

Diverse and Critical Layers of Curriculum Experiences

While teachers are central to curriculum development, several other factors might contribute to the ways in which teachers go about developing curriculum. First, there is a

significant racial gap between teachers and the student population. Currently over 80% of the teaching profession is white (Klein, 2014), while over 50% of the student population consists of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Due to this discrepancy, it is more important than ever that teachers understand the importance of implementing multicultural education and employ culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. If teachers are seen as fundamental to developing and creating curriculum and interacting with students according to their knowledge and experiences, there is a need to examine possible tensions in terms of diversity in schools, since a clear racial and economic divide exists between teachers and the students in their classrooms. Many teachers, however, are not well equipped to teach students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Sleeter & Thao, 2007).

Teachers might also benefit from thinking about their race critically and how race affects the curricular decisions they make and, in the case of this study, the texts they select for their classrooms. For diverse students, implementing culturally responsive pedagogy is essential for their educational success (Gay, 2004). Winn (2013) argued that teachers need to create classrooms that focus on justice, relationship-building, and power-sharing so that all students feel that they have a voice.

Thinking about this inquiry into teachers' experiences with text selection, I am interested in the ways in which teachers do or do not think about themselves and their students in regards to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Regarding reading practices, Gangi (2008) clarified that students must be able to see themselves in the literature they are required to read. Au (2011) further asserted that literacy must be personally meaningful and suited to an individual's own purposes in order to foster literacy proficiency and

empowerment, and such empowerment can begin with the types of texts that students encounter at school.

Literature Review

In this section I provide a brief review of the relevant literature related to the study. I first focus on curriculum reform movements as a way to bring curriculum development to the forefront of the study. I then explore the literature regarding teaching traditions within the English language arts classroom as a way to provide context for my interest in text selection. Finally, I describe studies involving text selection so that I may build upon previous research in the inquiry.

Curriculum Reform Movements

The impact curriculum and instruction has had on education is vast. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) described curriculum as being multifaceted and as having different layers and purposes depending on the context. Levin (2008) provided a more specific definition of curriculum, asserting it to be an official statement of what students should know and be able to do. The idea of the curriculum being an official statement often changes over time and throughout contexts. Thus, exploring curriculum reform movements is the main purpose of this strand in the literature review. Describing curriculum reform movements in the 20th and 21st centuries might help to provide context for the study.

Tyler (1949) was influential in explaining the importance of curriculum development by asserting that a major role of schools was to define their educational purposes and then organize activities around those purposes. Ideas about curriculum development continued to change as ideas about education and schooling evolved in the second half of the 20th century. Criticism of schools significantly intensified in the United States during the 1950s, forcing

curriculum development out of the hands of teachers and into the hands of politicians (Pinar, 2008). Life Adjustment Curriculum was another movement that emerged during this time in the United States (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). Advocates of this curriculum movement believed students needed to take classes that were practical in nature. The Life Adjustment Curriculum movement did not last long and was replaced by Discipline Based Curriculum and Basic Skills Instruction (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). Advocates of these curriculum-reform movements believed that a discipline-based curriculum or one focused on basic skills would be best in guaranteeing that American students could compete internationally. However, the United States' educational standing was highly questioned with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a document that claimed American students were falling further and further behind their international peers. While some believed the language of *A Nation at Risk* to be exaggerated and dramatic, the general public and policy makers responded by developing the New Basics, which required students to earn a specific number of credits before graduation (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

Evidence of the reaction to *A Nation at Risk* can still be seen today in the most recent curriculum reform efforts. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is one such example (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). With NCLB, schools would adopt mandatory student testing and be forced to accept penalties for low student performance. Penalties, according to this policy, would help to ensure that good teaching was taking place (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The NCLB movement was eventually replaced by President Obama's *Race to the Top* initiative (Lohman, 2010). While *Race to the Top* is similar to NCLB in that

it uses testing to measure achievement, this policy tends to place more authority in the hands of the state rather than the federal government (Setting the Pace, 2014).

In addition to federal education initiatives like NCLB and *Race to the Top*, the most recent reform movement involves the creation, adoption, and, implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Currently, 42 of the nation's 50 states and five territories have adopted and are in the process of implementing the CCSS (CCSSI, 2018e). Beginning in 2010 across the United States, individual states began to voluntarily adopt the CCSS as a way to establish a national set of rigorous and relevant guidelines that focus on college and career readiness in the subject areas of math and English Language Arts (ELA). While the implementation of the Standards is meant to ensure college and career readiness, many are skeptical of the Standards themselves and especially their connection to standardized testing (Ravitch, 2014; Shanahan, 2015; Toscano, 2013).

Describing curriculum reform movements provides readers with a broad overview and understanding of the American education system and may help to provide context for the current study. The participants and their teaching as well as their roles as former public school students has perhaps been embedded within the aforementioned reform movements, thus understanding these movements is imperative to understanding the experiences of the teachers in this study.

Historical Traditions on the Teaching of ELA

In this strand of the literature review, I explore the various traditions involved in teaching English language arts. While the previous section focused on national curriculum reform movements, I narrow the lens further here by looking specifically at the pedagogy employed most commonly in ELA classes. Historically, teaching English has been embedded

in three different traditions, all of which have competed for dominance and continue to do so: the Cultural Heritage Tradition, the Basic Skills Tradition, and the Student-Centered Tradition (Applebee, 1974, 1993).

The Cultural Heritage Tradition of teaching ELA focuses on preserving traditional values and establishing a national culture (Applebee, 1993). This tradition still pervades ELA classrooms through the reading of classics and other canonical works of literature. Supporters of the Cultural Heritage Tradition in teaching ELA believe that such works can bring about universal literacy, since essential moral and cultural qualities are often present in such works (Adler, 1940). The early to mid-part of the 20th century saw a widespread adoption of the Cultural Heritage Tradition, and this tradition saw a significant resurgence in the 1980s with the publication of materials from Hirsh (1987) and Bloom (1987). The widespread adoption of the CCSS supports some elements of the Cultural Heritage Model by encouraging a national curriculum that might foster universal literacy.

The second major tradition in teaching ELA is known as the Basic Skills Tradition. This tradition emphasized the development of essential language skills (Applebee, 1993). In this tradition, teachers employ pedagogy focused on developing basic skills in both reading and writing. A resurgence of this tradition is evident in the high stakes testing era, which has forced many teachers to teach specifically to the skills assessed on state tests (Ravitch, 2010, 2014). Unlike the Cultural Heritage Model, which focuses on reading “great works,” the Basic Skills Tradition focuses on practical reading and nonfiction. The adoption of the CCSS also implements elements from the Basic Skills Tradition of teaching ELA in that the CCSS draw attention to nonfiction and informational texts as well as emphasize practical literacy preparation for college and career (CCSSI, 2018e).

The Student-Centered Approach is the third tradition in teaching ELA. In this tradition, the student rather than the subject is the focal point of teaching. This tradition emphasizes appreciation and engagement instead of promoting basic skills or great works (Applebee, 1993). Evidence of this tradition can be seen in Rosenblatt's (1995) theory of reader response, in which she advocated that the interaction a reader has with a text is paramount to the work itself. Currently several educators advocate for the Student-Centered Tradition by focusing on choice reading and implementing curriculum that is less teacher-directed (Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013, 2016; Mackey, 2014; D. Miller, 2009, 2012).

Presenting literature about the traditions of teaching ELA might help to situate participants within the context of one of more of these traditions. Exploring the literature involving these models of teaching provided me with important vocabulary used in the field. I have utilized such terms to describe the experiences of teachers and their interactions with text selection.

Text Selection Practices in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

In this section, I explore literature related to past and present studies involving text selection practices in the secondary English classroom. Discussing the findings of major studies involving text selection might help to situate this study as well as provide a rationale for a narrative inquiry involving the phenomenon. Watkins and Ostenson (2015) clarified that teacher decisions about texts can have far-reaching consequences on skill development and even on student attitudes about reading. However, Doubek and Cooper (2007) clarified that little research exists about how teachers go about selecting texts for their classrooms. Instead, what teachers select to be read in their classrooms has been the focal point of

numerous studies (Applebee, 1974; 1993; Shanahan & Duffett, 2013; Stallworth, 1999; Stotsky et al., 2010).

Applebee (1974, 1993) asserted that the English language arts classroom has been slow to change its practices with texts selection and continues to select texts deemed as classics. Stallworth et al. (2006), however, found that teachers possess an evolving definition of the classics and have slowly included more multicultural literature as part of their classroom canons. Bigler and Collins (1995) found that multicultural curriculum has the potential to challenge silences that exist around race and class in schools and, therefore, ought to be considered during the text selection process.

Another important aspect of text selection practices involves the adoption and implementation of the CCSS. Specifically, one of the most controversial aspects of the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects is Appendix B, which contains the Common Core text exemplars (Moss, 2013). Moss (2013) explained that exemplar texts were chosen based on merit, the work's ability to withstand the test of time, and complexity, not on student choice or student engagement, which is counterproductive to what research says about including students in the literary process (D. Miller, 2012). Furthermore, the authors of the Standards and Appendix B clarified that the list of exemplar texts are merely suggestive and do not represent a complete or authoritative list (CCSSI, Appendix B, 2018b). Westbury (2008) posited, however, that whatever their intentions, official curricular documents, in this case Appendix B of the CCSS, do carry an authoritative weight.

A final important aspect of text selection practices includes the issue of text complexity. Typically, text complexity has not been an issue of primary concern for teachers

in the past, as they have focused more on student engagement and interest (Shanahan & Duffett, 2013). As reading scores decline and student interest in literacy appears to be non-existent, many teachers continue to possess limited definitions of what it means to be a reader of texts—mainly extended reading of fictional novels (Mackey, 2014). This limited, often canonically-based reading instruction, does not address the increasing demands on reading a variety of complex texts in the 21st century, including non-fiction texts, scientific texts, and other complex documents (International Reading Association, 2012). An example of the lack of complexity in reading can be seen in the most popular titles students are reading in grades 9-12 (Renaissance Learning, 2012). Out of the top 40 titles read by this student group, 27 are written at a fifth-grade reading level, which is not high enough to ensure college readiness in reading (Coleman, 2014; Stotsky, 2012). While many English teachers would be happy to hear their students are reading anything, the reality is that what students are reading simply leaves them ill-prepared to meet the rigorous demands required by the CCSS (Stotsky, 2012).

In this section, I described research from three strands of literature to provide context and a rationale for this study involving text selection. It was my intention to first present literature from a broad lens by exploring curriculum reform movements and then to narrow the focus of the literature by investigating traditions in teaching English language arts. I then drew my attention to past and current text selection practices within the context of the ELA classroom. Next, I provide an overview of my methodology, which explains the theoretical traditions I used as well as the sampling techniques that enabled me to capture the stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection.

Methodology

Creswell (2013) asserted that qualitative studies must address the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a problem or phenomenon. He further claimed that qualitative researchers study such problems or phenomena through an emerging inquiry approach that focuses on “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” (p. 44). Therefore, the focus of this study on the stories of secondary English teachers and their encounters and experiences with text selection mandates a qualitative approach. It is simply not enough to include lists of texts regarding what teachers require students to read; instead, why teachers select texts encourages the researcher to “study things [text selection] in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, using a qualitative approach not only allowed me to engage with the participants in a natural setting, but it encouraged me to use multiple methods to gather data as well as required the use of complex reasoning and logic in order to see what types of patterns, categories, and themes emerged (Creswell, 2013, p. 45) from the study of secondary English teachers.

While qualitative research enabled me to use thick and rich description as well as focus on the lives of the participants, narrative inquiry specifically encouraged me to tell the stories about “individuals’ lived and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) poignantly described the importance of narrative and story as it relates to the ways by which humans interact and make meaning of their experiences and worlds:

We might say that if we understand the world narratively...then it makes sense to study the world narratively. For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—

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)

Specifically regarding the topic of text selection in the secondary English classroom, story appears to be an important way by which one might understand how teachers navigate the many complexities of choosing texts and developing curriculum. Telling such stories can reveal important information about pedagogical practices to a teacher audience, who can in turn improve curriculum decision-making and practice.

While teachers' narratives of experience about text selection was the phenomenon studied in this investigation, the methodology of narrative inquiry enabled me to tell the stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection. Creswell (2013) wrote, "Narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the *identities* of individuals and how they see themselves" (p. 71). Telling stories through narrative inquiry is a productive way of gaining insight about teachers and their understandings of text selection and how their identities as teachers shape this process. Insight into these understandings helped to explain the stories and meanings behind book lists and curriculum guides found in many public high school English curricula.

Narrative inquiry also demands the researcher focus on turning points and places or situations (Creswell, 2013). Since I conducted this study in one high school that was located in one city, the stories of those teachers and text selection were told with an aim to understand their full complexities and possible differences between teachers and their experiences with texts. Specifically, the study made use of the narrative inquiry research tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Clandinin and Connelly's ideas (1996) about "narratives of experience" served as the foundation on which I built this study. Clandinin and

Connelly's (1996) ideas concerning experiential narratives assisted me in capturing various teachers' stories with different texts. Telling such stories about teachers and texts might give teachers more insight about what texts are being taught and how various texts function for individuals who teach at similar grade levels with a similar curriculum. This study might also provide more insight about how different teachers approach or do not approach complexity in texts.

Research Questions

Clandinin and Connelly's ideas (1996) about "narratives of experience" served as the foundation on which I built this study. I collected and analyzed teachers' individual stories as data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The following overarching research question was used to guide this study: What are teachers' narratives of experience concerning text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom?

Participants

I used purposeful sampling as a way to select the participants. Patton (2002) claimed that purposeful sampling requires that the researcher only select "information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 230) in order for those cases illuminate the research questions that are the focus of the study. Maxwell (2013) further expanded on the definition of purposeful sampling by establishing five goals. His fourth goal is of most importance to the current study. It reads: "A fourth goal in purposeful selection can be to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals" (p. 98). Therefore, the participants were three teachers of grades 9-12 English, who had five or more years of any kind of teaching experience and who taught in a large suburban district in the Pacific Northwest. Selecting teachers who had five or more years of experience and who

exhibited diversity regarding race, gender, and teaching experience enriched the data in the study, since those teachers possibly had more experiences with a variety of different texts. To recruit the three participants, I contacted teachers who met the criteria via email with an information letter about the study. I then followed up with a consent letter for those willing to participate. This helped to ensure anonymity across participants.

Methods

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry data collection as more than telling stories and explained that data collection may often involve “actions, doings, and happening, all of which are narrative expressions” (p. 79). Therefore, in this study, I used several data forms in order to truly capture the stories of the participants. I collected data over the course of one semester. As needed, I returned to the participants for further clarification. This study included interviews, classroom observations, and document collection, with interviewing as the primary data collection method. Regarding the value of interviews, Weiss (1994) remarked, “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived” (p. 1).

Documents were analyzed as I acquired them throughout data collection with the three participants. Documents included but were not limited to teacher-created materials, handouts, emails, assignments, announcements, or any other document that proved to be relevant to the phenomenon of text selection. I also briefly analyzed the list of high school text exemplars listed in Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards as a way to bring a broader curricular context to the study (CCSSI, 2018b).

I conducted three sets of 60-minute interviews with the three participants. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. All interviews took place in the teacher's classroom or a location of the teacher's choice. I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews. The schedule for interviews comprised an initial set of interviews early in the semester before observations took place. The second interview occurred near the midway point of the semester during data collection. The final set of interviews was conducted later in the semester after observations were completed. The first set of interviews contained questions regarding the types of text that teachers teach throughout the school year. I also asked questions about the teacher's history with reading and texts in their own life as well as in their professional life. The second interview included questions about text selection and its possible relationship to national, state, or district standards. The final interview included questions based on my observations of participants' practices and what specific texts a teacher was using at a particular time. This interview involved questions about assignments, approaches, feelings, failures, and successes for the texts that were taught during the semester.

The second data collection method I used was observation. Maxwell (2013) asserted that observations can provide a direct and powerful way of learning about individuals' behaviors (p. 103). I observed classroom practices along with interviews to capture verbal and active stories of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) regarding text selection. Observing how the teacher first processes complex texts before adapting or providing the students with the same text was important to describe as it related to my research question. I observed what texts and how many different texts were used, as well as the language and activities that were used to frame a text. I also observed student and teacher interactions

regarding the text. I compiled detailed field notes during and after all observations and interviews.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, I thoroughly reviewed all data several times to compile a list of common narrative themes. I also made use of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in order to gain insight into the dimension of personal and social interactions; past, present, and future experiences; and context within and among common narrative themes. When conducting this narrative inquiry, I aimed to gain insight into my research by assessing the verisimilitude of the participants' responses, especially in relation to their observed practices. My aim was to draw out investigative interpretations that might lend insight to a larger group of teachers and teacher educators, rather than to achieve generalizability in findings.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Miles and Huberman (1994) wrote the following concerning ethics in qualitative research: "We [researchers] must consider the rightness or wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work" (p. 288). Therefore, as I conducted this study, it was of the utmost importance that I consider the biases I brought with me, the limitations of the study, and how I not only interacted with the participants but how I represented them in my research text. Creswell (2013) asserted, "During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and to plan how these issues need to be addressed" (p. 56).

Essential to addressing ethics in research was to first contemplate the issue of validity. Validity was one of the most important parts of my research design, since one must find conclusions or findings to be both useful, informative, and “sufficiently authentic” upon the completion of one’s study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). Maxwell (2013) claimed that trustworthiness, authenticity, and quality are important components of validity (p. 122). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that a key component in establishing validity in narrative inquiry was to constantly negotiate and work at relationships and to invest adequate time in the narrative inquiry process. Additionally, Maxwell discussed the importance of researchers noting threats to the validity of their studies and then offering viable solutions to dealing with such threats or limitations.

One of the main threats to this study’s validity, and therefore a limitation of the study, was my background and biases I brought with me. As an English language arts teacher, I have beliefs about my classroom and how teachers should go about selecting texts. Since I do things in my classroom a specific way, I believe that what I am doing is the best way. Consequently, at times it proved to be a challenge for me to objectively analyze and describe the ways in which other teachers go about selecting texts for their own classrooms without giving them advice or offering them suggestions from my experiences. In qualitative research, it was not important that I eliminate this bias, although it was imperative to understand how my beliefs may influence my methodology or conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). As a way to account for this bias, I selected participants who taught classes that were different from the classes that I taught when possible. The only class that overlapped with my teaching schedule was one of Anne’s junior writing classes. While selecting participants who

had different teaching schedules from mine did not eliminate bias completely, it did help to distance me from the context.

A second limitation of this study that could affect the validity was the concept of reactivity. Because I used interviews as one of the primary data sources and since I have strong beliefs about text selection based on my experiences as a high school teacher, it was important for me to frame the interview questions in a way that attempted to glean rich information while at the same time allowing participants to be open and honest. Oakley (2003) described this type of interviewing as a feminine form of interviewing. Maxwell (2013) asserted that the researcher “is always a part of the world he or she studies...[and that reflexivity] is a powerful and inescapable influence” (p. 125). Therefore, it was vital to use questions that were general and objective as well as open-ended, but it was equally important for me not to remove myself too much from the study as that was not the purpose of qualitative research.

Coupled closely with the idea of a study’s validity is its reliability. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2006) stated, “Dependability refers to whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data” (p. 275). For this study, I participated in member checking during which I had the participants check for voice and accuracy in data representation and to make sure that I captured the essence of their life stories. I also had a critical friend in the form of my doctoral committee chair, Dr. Candace Schlein, look at my findings to make sure I represented the stories of the participants authentically and honestly.

While using a critical friend helped to support the reliability of this study, the concept of crystallization was the most appropriate since I employed narrative inquiry as the methodology. In this study, I relied heavily on the stories of the participants, and I

constructed these stories based on interviews and observations; however, it was impossible and unnecessary for me to tell the whole story or to tell every story the participants shared. Consequently, this was where the idea of crystallization was beneficial. Ellingson (2014) stated “Crystallization is ideal for constructing portraits of everyday relating because it brings together vivid, intimate details of people’s lives shared via storytelling and art with the broader relational patterns and structures identified through social scientific analyses” (p. 443). Thus, in order to tell the participants’ stories, it was important that I use crystallization as a way to elevate their stories to a poetic or artistic form that enriched their “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and protected the researcher/participant relationship. Specifically, using found poetry was one such method used that helped me to crystallize the participants’ experiences and elevate their voices.

While the study contained several possible limitations, I also attended to the following ethical considerations before, during, and after I conducted my research. Significantly, Creswell (2013) asserted the importance of establishing ethical considerations during all parts of the research process, not just during data collection. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that ethical considerations shift and change as a researcher moves through his or her inquiry and, therefore, they must constantly be attended to and adapted when the situation demands it. Therefore, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Missouri-Kansas City prior to undertaking the study to ensure that this inquiry met ethical guidelines and protected the participants (Patton, 2002). In addition to gaining IRB approval, Creswell (2013) reminded researchers that they need to seek appropriate permission from both their participants and authority figures:

Researchers need to seek permission to conduct research on-site and convey to gatekeepers and individuals in authority how their research will provide the least disruption to the activities at the site. The participants should not be deceived about the nature of the research, and, in the process of providing data... should be appraised on the general nature of the inquiry. (pp. 57, 60)

Therefore, I also sought permission for my research from the targeted school district and the relevant school principal and district stakeholders. I also recruited participants via email and supplied them with a Consent Form (see Appendix A). Participants were notified that they might withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and that they retained the right to review information and make corrections or seek deletions of information about them. Participant names and other identifying information were replaced with pseudonyms. I secured all data on a password-protected computer and password-protected memory sticks and external hard drives.

Educational Significance

The importance of the traditional English canon and its inclusion and dominance in high school English curriculum has been debated for decades by those interested in the secondary English classroom and its curricular practices. Many scholars and teachers are critical of the canon and the Eurocentric focus of canonical texts. Furthermore, the canon has a limited and, therefore, limiting list of titles and works of merit and worth (Fairbrother, 2000; Stallworth, 1999). Canonical critics also fear that a restricted, white male-dominated curriculum does not meet the needs of diverse student populations. Such limitations are especially concerning in a multicultural and globalized world (Colarusso, 2010; Stotsky et al., 2010). This study is significant because it provided insight about what types of texts teachers are teaching as situated within the context of the CCSS and a rapidly changing world. Gaining insight about the types of texts teachers choose to teach is important because

it can inform educational practices as well as give insight to educators and curriculum developers about what teachers teach and why and how they teach a text.

A second reason this study was significant was it provided insight about the complexity of texts or lack of complexity in texts taught in the high school English classroom. Specifically, while many educators have worried about the Eurocentric male dominance of high school texts, others believe that texts used in the classroom will not prepare students with the literacy skills needed in college and beyond (Stallworth et al., 2006). Since complexity can be tied to literacy achievement, understanding how teachers use or do not use complex texts could assist in providing teachers with ways by which they could improve the literacy skills of their students.

Furthermore, the implementation of the CCSS redirect the focus of the secondary English classroom not only on basic literacy skills but by listing specific works that should be read at various grade levels. How teachers will balance the canon, multicultural literature, and the rigorous demands of the CCSS remains to be seen. Thus, more qualitative research that reveals the thoughts and experiences of teachers is needed to make sense of the complexities behind texts and text selection.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

In this chapter, I have described the problem and the purpose of the study as well as an explanation of the study's significance. I have also provided a description of my research questions, theoretical framework, and an overview of my methodology, including data collection and ethical considerations. The remaining chapters of the dissertation engage in more detailed explanations of the theories and literature in which this study is grounded as well as a detailed description of my methodology, findings, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Maxwell (2013) discussed the inherent importance of constructing a conceptual or theoretical framework for one's research. What is important to note is that Maxwell focused on the importance of the researcher and her or his ability to construct—not mimic, copy, or regurgitate—the theories behind an individual's own research. Regarding the idea of constructing theory, Maxwell wrote, “It [the conceptual framework] incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence, is something that you build, not something that exists already-made” (p. 41). Thus, when building one's conceptual framework, it is essential to include information not only about one's lenses and perspectives but also information from existing theories and previous research.

Creswell (2013) described the way by which the nature of qualitative studies is “value-laden” and thus requires researchers to position themselves (p. 20). The idea of positioning suggests that a researcher brings with him or her beliefs and values that are used to make sense of theory and research. Therefore, to say that the theoretical framework of one's study is built carefully by the researcher by employing both preexisting theory and personal experience is at the core of understanding this part of the research process.

A theoretical framework is often multi-faceted, comprising different sets of theories and/or theoretical lenses. My theoretical framework consists of three strands. The first strand concerns theories on narratives of lived experiences, especially how story and experience relate to the field of education. With this current high-stakes testing era and a focus on quantifying data for both students and teachers, it might be easy to neglect the stories and experiences that teachers bring with them to the secondary classroom and those that might be

shaped in their classrooms alongside their students. However, focusing on stories in this inquiry might not only empower teachers by giving them voice, but it might also provide insight about the many nuances, understandings, and assumptions that are a common part of English classrooms. The second strand of my theoretical framework reviews the literature on the relationship between teachers and the curriculum. I consider how teachers' personal and professional selves might affect their classrooms, students, and pedagogy. The third theoretical strand of this inquiry relates to possible diverse and critical layers of curriculum experiences. Specifically, I explore diversity studies in curriculum, multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory. I embed each section within the topic of text selection as a way to showcase my researcher positioning throughout the inquiry process.

Stories, Experience, and Storying

We need to listen closely to teachers and other learners and to the stories of their lives in and out of classrooms. We also need to tell our stories as we live our own collaborative researcher/teacher lives.

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12)

Stories and storying is an essential theoretical strand framing this research. In this section, I explore stories and their importance, especially within the context of education. Specifically, I highlight the significance of stories in the lives of people as well as explain why stories are necessary in educational research. Such an exploration is further useful for raising a fuller understanding of my research interests in telling stories about teachers' experiences with text selection. I also reveal insights about different types of stories as a way to provide context as well as vocabulary on which to base this research. In addition to providing a theoretical background about the nature and importance of stories, I include

research about the process of storying and re-storying. I then explore the ways in which this process might be useful into gaining insights about not only people and their experiences but my experiences as well.

An Overview of Stories

Humans have made stories an essential part of living for as long as they could talk. Novak (1975) claimed, “Story is an ancient and altogether human method. The human being alone among the creatures on the earth is a storytelling animal” (p. 175). As is made clear in Novak’s statement, story is what makes humans unique from other species, for it is through stories that one can learn about himself or herself as well as others. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) furthered this idea about the human quality of stories when they claimed, “lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (p. 35). Here Clandinin and Rosiek elaborated on the ways humans use stories to shape the past, make sense of the present, and plan for the future. Essentially, stories are an ancient part of what it means to be human as they assist humans in making meaning and connecting with the world in which they live.

Frazer (2002) further claimed that myths, legends, and stories from a culture represent deep truths about that culture. Stories can also reveal truths about the nature of and the psychology behind human relationships, and they are often responsible for establishing the morals and values of a culture (Campbell, 1972). Moreover, stories and myths may lead to a greater understanding about a person’s inward self as stories demand reflection from the storyteller and his or her participants (Campbell, 1972). Stories can help to divulge understandings about ourselves and who we are in relationship to others and the world in

which we live. Atkinson (2007) summarized that “storytelling is in our blood ...[and can] connect us to our roots, give us direction, [and] validate our own experience” (p. 224).

Atkinson’s statement is quite revealing, since without stories life would have little meaning and people would struggle with making sense of their lives and the lives of others. Stories thus give humans meaning and purpose.

Story and experience. Dewey’s (1938) ideas about the nature of stories are relevant to understanding their source. According to Dewey, stories are constructed from experience. Specifically, experience is the foundation from which all forms of inquiry emerge, and experience is a “changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Dewey (1981) expanded on this idea when he wrote, “In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter” (p. 251), and it is through these various contexts and experiences that humans create stories.

Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) built on Dewey’s idea of experience in stating that humans use their experiences to construct stories. They argued that, “People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are....Story...is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). To further reiterate that stories are shaped by experiences, Clandinin and Connelly (1989) suggested, “One’s personal history, the traditions of which one has been a part and the social and community relations in which one engages, form the plot outlines of day to day life” (pp. 1-2). Thus, it is experience

that constructs the stories humans choose to tell. Stories are experiences and, therefore, connected to life.

Stories in education. While stories are intimately connected to human experience, they are also closely intertwined within the field of education. Dewey (1938) insisted that experiences are the basis for education. He claimed, “One learns about education from thinking about life, and one learns about life from thinking about education” (p. 89).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also adopted Dewey’s notion of experience as they relate to the field of education. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) clarified, “Education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories” (p. 2). Emphasis is on the teacher’s voice—the stories he or she might tell—throughout the research process and throughout different contexts.

Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) reasoned that it is not productive to think about teachers through a theoretical or philosophical lens since teachers often use stories and experiences as a way to make sense of their professions. Instead research must be done directly and personally with the teachers themselves, “outside of classrooms and in their personal lives” (p. 666). Carter and Doyle (1996) also asserted that focusing on the lives of teachers is imperative to conducting educational research, especially since this type of research can inform practice in ways unavailable in more traditional research forms. Hence in order to learn about teachers, it might prove useful to study teachers through the lens of personal experience and through the stories they choose to tell.

Similarly, Goodson (1994) found that an emphasis on the stories of teachers represents the shift from the assumption that teachers are merely instruments or cogs in a bigger wheel or that they learn little from their experiences as practitioners. Instead, Goodson

maintained that teachers are intelligent agents in educating children who use experience to build beliefs about agency and what it means to be a teacher. Research work that is grounded in a biographical perspective involves intense and extended conversations with teachers and is based on the premise that the act of teaching, teachers' experiences and the choices they make, and the process of learning to teach are deeply personal matters unavoidably linked to one's identity and, thus, one's life story (Carter & Doyle, 1996).

Types of stories. Clandinin et al. (2006) stated, "When teachers enter into the professional knowledge landscape they enter into a place of story" (p. 7). Primarily, there are both stories of teachers and teacher stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). The former consists of stories told about teachers by others, including researchers, as a way to describe the experiences of teachers and school. The stories can utilize voices from multiple people situated in various contexts. The latter, teacher stories, includes stories told by teachers as a way to make sense of their professions. Teachers' stories "are both personal—reflecting a person's life history—and social—reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 2).

When describing their stories, teachers may tell different types of stories depending on the context and purpose (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Some teachers' stories are "secret stories," stories told only to others in safe places both on and off the school landscape. Other teachers' stories are "cover stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 25), which are stories told to maintain a sense of continuity with dominant stories of school (Clandinin et al., 2006). Cover stories often allow for teachers to better fit into the plotlines of school as they provide a safer way for teachers to navigate the complexities and politics of education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

In addition to secret and cover stories, there are competing stories and conflicting stories told by teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Competing stories are teachers' stories that "live in dynamic but positive tension with the plotlines of the dominant stories of school" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 8). These stories can allow for change and possibility because they often illuminate various viewpoints that might invite change more readily. In contrast, conflicting stories are more oppositional to the dominant stories of school. Conflicting stories were defined as "teachers' stories that collide with the dominant stories of school," suggesting this type of story is more negative than positive (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 8). These stories do not last long and are often silenced as teachers are unable to compete with the dominance of schools due to the potential consequences of sharing these conflicting stories.

Both teachers' stories and stories of teachers are important in that they provided various perspectives and insights about education and the lives of teachers. Specifically, both are relevant to this inquiry. Teachers' stories helped me make sense of teachers' lives so that I could tell the stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection. Teachers told various types of stories that helped me to describe the complexities of their profession and what it means to be a secondary English language arts teacher. Finally, stories of teachers are the types of stories told in this inquiry as a way to elevate teacher voice and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of text selection.

Tensions among stories. With so many types of stories being told at school by teachers and various stakeholders, it is possible that tensions might occur, although tension is not necessarily negatively connotative within this context. In fact, stories should be messy in that they reveal tensions and multiple threads as opposed to being "too neat" or clinical

(McNiff, 2007, p. 312). As previously mentioned, stories might “compete” or “conflict” depending on not only who tells the story but which story is valued and by whom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Additionally, these tensions, referred to in narrative terms as “bumpings,” mostly occur when multiple stories are told or when a researcher goes from collecting data in the field to making meaning from data (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 35). However, for the researcher, these bumps are extremely important, for it is through these bumps that insight can be gained from the stories teachers tell. Tensions can also help researchers understand their “moral and ethical responsibilities” regarding those who have agreed to tell their stories (Craig & Huber, 2007, p. 257).

Tensions can occur for a variety of reasons. First, Clandinin et al. (2006) explained that there can be multiple themes or threads in a story that cause tensions between stories—meaning that stories are told from many viewpoints, and they can change over space and time. This telling of multiple stories can lead to the “privileging” of some stories and the silencing of others (Clandinin et al., 2006). When a story is privileged, it is believed to have more value than other stories—this is especially true for stories that are part of major school plot lines. McNiff (2007) was concerned with the privileging of such stories and how they might act “as a force of centralized control, shutting out less powerful voices and forming a grand narrative that excludes local narratives” (p. 311). If these stories bump with personal stories, teachers create cover stories to blend in with the dominant narrative. While cover stories are one way by which teachers might respond to the dominant narratives of school, however, students and teachers do have the potential to reshape and rewrite these dominant school stories by adding to the narrative from their own experiences (Clandinin et al., 2006).

Olson and Craig (2005) also commented on the idea of cover stories in more depth. They explained that individual stories and cultural narratives are not separate stories; rather they are often conflicting narratives. As a result of conflict between the individual and her or his place in the larger cultural context, a person might create cover stories, which “are constructed when incommensurable gaps or conflicts between individually and socially constructed narratives emerge” (p. 162). While these gaps may prove to be frustrating for some inquirers, those interested in story find great value in these bumping places for the insights that they might reveal.

Storying

In the previous sub-section, I outlined literature that displayed how stories are an essential part of the human experience. I further discussed the concept that people tell multiple stories for multiple reasons based on their lived experiences. Thus, while the story itself is of importance, the way in which a story is told—the act of storying—must be understood if one is to understand the end product, the story, itself. In this section, I explain the process of storying, provide insight regarding its purpose, and discuss the complexities involved in the act of storying.

The process and purpose of storying. Widdershoven (1993) stated,

Life has an implicit meaning, which is made explicit in stories. Such a process of explication presupposes that there is already something present. What is present is, however, not just there to be uncovered. It is shaped and structured in a process of articulation. (p. 5)

Specifically, this “process of articulation” mentioned by Widdershoven is what I refer to as the act of storying. Ways to tell a story include focusing on autobiography (Grumet, 1988), using narrative techniques and concentrating on personal practical knowledge (Connelly &

Clandinin, 1990), and Butt and Raymond's (1989) use of collaborative biography and personal histories.

Carter and Doyle (1996) outlined how the process of storying takes place. The first step in telling a story is for a person to express his or her story in some type of tangible form, whether through the written word, through art, or through metaphor. The story, in any of its various forms, must be constructed collaboratively. Carter and Doyle stated, "A genuinely and intensely collaborative relationship is needed to provide a context that encourages remembering and a high degree of personal support in coming to understand one's life story" (p. 136). Finally, the story must be contextualized—that is, it must be placed within the proper time and place in order for the story to have value and purpose. Grumet (1988) was interested in the relationship between an individual's story and its place within a larger social context. Specifically, she encouraged teachers to focus on the self—their individual stories—and their relationship to the broader educational world.

Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) asserted that a "story is a construction" in that it moves away from description and toward interpretation. Thus, the story is "neither factual" nor is it "arbitrary and fanciful." Rather someone's story is constructed for a "larger research purpose" (p. 669). Specifically, individuals utilize a variety of methods when storying an experience. Carter and Doyle (1996) clarified that "individuals draw their interpretations from a variety of remembered experiences, bits of information, beliefs, knowledge, dispositions, commitments, and cultural forms, as well as the tasks at hand" (p. 121). Ultimately, the story is a construct of the writer and reflects not only the experiences of an individual but the values, beliefs, and experiences of the storyteller as well.

Storying experiences of teachers and school. Stories are constructed in part by the story teller, the researcher, and in some ways by the context. Individual stories are always embedded within cultural and historical contexts. A person is shaped by the context but also shapes the context by not only living his/her stories but by storying that experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). For my research purposes, I am interested in storying within the context of education. To further clarify the process of storying within the context of school, I turn to the works of Connelly and Clandinin. One of the main goals of storying is to encourage reflection and restorying on the part of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). Specifically, Clandinin et al. (2006) addressed the importance of storying experience as it relates to school:

What happens in schools is an identity shaping process; lives written and rewritten, storied and restoried. The identities, the stories to live by of children, teachers, and administrators, and families are all being expressed, and, in those expressions, become open to being restoried, to being silenced, to being erased, to being shifted in educative and mis-educative ways. (pp. 15-16)

Hence the process of telling stories about school can provide insight about school by having teachers and other stakeholders see their stories, their identities, in new lights—these are the “educative ways” to which Clandinin et al. (2006) referred. In addition, storying the experiences of teachers can end up being a powerful instrument for either maintaining or transforming teachers and the practices they employ (Carter & Doyle, 1996).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explored the concept of restorying, which involves retelling and reliving stories. Restorying might help teachers to see themselves in new ways or encourage them to change their practices (Clandinin et al., 2006). Greene (1978) claimed that people who reflect on experiences—which is what part of restorying is—feel more grounded in their personal histories and are more likely to ask questions and seek change.

Thus the processes of storying and restorying is essential for serious reflection and change to take place.

In contrast, the process of storying can also cause tension, which could result in the silencing of voices, although in the process of storying, tensions are not always defined negatively. These tensions, in fact, are often a struggle for “narrative coherence” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 10). Further, regarding the process of composing stories, Clandinin et al., (2006) stated that such a process “challenge[s] our ideas about what it mean[s] to honour and respect multiple voices and multiple interpretations. It help[s] us attend to tensions and contradictions without smoothing them over” (p. 39). Whether stories are interpreted in educative or mis-educative ways, storying can be a powerful way to gain insight about teachers, their practices, and other important educational issues.

Role of the inquirer in storying experience. Storying is a process that can help to illuminate teachers’ practices and give voices to those whose stories are being told. Greene (1995) described this illuminating of voices as a person’s ability to be able to see things big as opposed to seeing them small. According to Greene, seeing people small is done from the perspective of an impersonal system, whereas seeing big implies seeing people under the lens of a magnifying glass in a way that amplifies their voices and stories. Someone interested in story would be interested in seeing people this way. Clandinin et al. (2006), explained, “While seeing small allows us to see behaviours from the perspective of a system, it does not allow us to see people in their integrity and particularity” (p. 162). The researcher’s role when telling stories requires him or her to see big.

The process of storying is unique when compared to other forms of research in that the inquirer’s role is different from other types of inquiry in which the researcher is

somewhat distanced from the participants. Because of this distancing, Gitlin (1990) argued that most forms of research can be alienating regarding the relationship between the researcher and the teacher. Often this relationship “denigrates the personal knowledge of teachers, silences their voices, and conveys the impression that only researchers produce knowledge for teaching” (Carter & Doyle, 1996, p. 123). In contrast, research that focuses on storying a person’s experiences is a type of research based on relationships because it asserts the idea that teachers and their stories “produce knowledge for teaching.” Clandinin et al. (2006) explained, “Because of the multiple layers of authorship at work in narrative inquiries, in both the living and in the telling, research texts are understood as relationally authored texts” (p. 38). Likewise, Cole and Knowles (1993) argued that all teacher research requires a partnership at every stage of the research process. Essentially, the “Researcher and teacher become engaged as joint theorists/researchers in a mutual...interpretation of meaning” (p. 491).

A major aspect of storying relies on the relationship between the teacher and the researcher; however, because this relationship requires closeness rather than distance, the researcher may often find himself or herself living and telling stories of his or her own. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claimed that the need for telling stories comes from the exchange of ideas between the teacher and the researcher. As the teacher tells his or her stories, the researcher is reminded of his or her own experiences. This multiple telling of stories leads to multiple viewpoints, understandings, and perspectives based on the experiences of individuals. Bateson and Mead (2004, as cited in Clandinin et al., 2006) commented on the importance of accepting multiple viewpoints “for living in a world of high diversity and rapid change” (p. 252). Bateson and Mead were not the only researchers to

mention the importance of multiple viewpoints within the context of storytelling. Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote about the possibility of recognizing multiple identities through the process of storytelling and to “stay wakeful” (p. 26) to the multiple identities and perspectives that may emerge during the storytelling process.

The process of storytelling can help both the teacher participant and researcher to see themselves in a variety of ways, learn about themselves and others in multiple contexts, and foster a mutually respectful and open relationship. It is this last aspect that is most essential to understanding the process of storytelling. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described the final product that is yielded from such a relationship: “The thing finally written on paper, . . . the research paper or book, is a collaborative document; a mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant” (p. 12).

Tensions in engaging in storytelling. In the following section, I describe and explain the various tensions involved in engaging in storytelling. I first explain the critiques from the research world regarding storytelling as a form of inquiry. I then explore the ideas of deception, incompleteness, and silences as they relate to potential problems that arise when storytelling the lives of others.

Critiques from the research world. As mentioned previously, storytelling can create a closeness not seen in other forms of inquiry, yet this closeness has been a major criticism since storytelling relies on the experiences of people, which can be highly subjective. Critics have claimed that such subjectivity makes this narrative form of inquiry inferior (McAninch, 1993). J. L. Miller (1994) claimed the educational research community has difficulty in seeing research that uses personal stories as “less than” when compared to more objective forms of research (p. 507). Teacher knowledge based on stories from individual teachers is

not the same as scientific knowledge and, therefore, is not as valuable (Fenstermacher, 1994). Clandinin and Connelly (1989) also commented on the idea that this form of inquiry is often not deemed to be as valuable as other research forms. They explained that experience, when seen as central to theory and altering practice, “often comes under a kind of suspicious criticism” (p. 4) based on the belief that social and organizational structures are traditionally conceived to be better starting points from which to conduct educational inquiry instead of beginning with people and their experiences. Finally, J.L. Miller (1994) asserted that research based on story and the personal—what she terms as inquiry that uses a “recognizable person” as its participant—is a strength of this research, although many in the field question its validity. Such inquiry is often devalued for its feminine qualities, such as a reliance on using journals and diaries from which to tell a person’s story.

Deception. A second problem that can occur during the process of storying is deception. Whether accidental or intentional on the part of the researcher, stories can be constructed in a way that misleads the audience or summarizes a person’s experiences inaccurately. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) explained that initially a narrative inquirer is concerned with description, but that description might become interpretive as researchers begin to construct stories. It is during this process of interpretation that deception can occur.

Milburn (1989) asserted that teachers’ voices are often muted in research by the researcher’s agenda and their interests to make information fit with commonly accepted forms of education theory. Specifically, many stories do not position themselves within a social, historical, or cultural context, which is problematic (J.L. Miller, 1998). Carter and Doyle (1996) also found that pieces of the story, including contextualizing class and gender, can also be missing either intentionally or accidentally. If a story is removed from its context,

then the researcher has failed to tell the story from multiple perspectives. J.L. Miller (1998) also explained that the tradition has been to force stories to fit into the larger or dominant cultural narrative so that traditional ideologies might remain intact. This forced fitting of stories is another form of deception. However, the dominant stories really must “move through and beyond traditional framings of educational situations and issues” in order to bring about change (p. 151). Indeed, Greene (1995) stressed the importance in revising one’s biography in order to re-think education and society.

Incompleteness. A third major criticism or concern regarding the process of storying is the idea that stories are incomplete or represent only partial truths. However, this criticism stems from a positivist view that the whole truth can be revealed through research in the first place. J.L. Miller (1998) asserted that telling a story does become problematic when that story is represented as being the truth—as being “unitary and transparent” (p. 150). J.L. Miller (1998) also wrote: “Such “teachers’ stories” often offer unproblematized recounting of what is taken to be the transparent and linear “reality” of their experiences from identities that are perceived as unitary, fully conscious, and non-contradictory” (p. 150). The “unproblematized recounting” here is problematic in that this process of storying does not allow for or ignores completely multiple viewpoints, tensions, and bumpings that should be important to those interested in authentic narrative inquiry. Greene (1995) challenged ideas about texts that claim they tell the one true story. She also acknowledged that stories cannot be told without paying attention to or being told apart from ideologies and beliefs concerning relationships, gender, politics, and professional influences.

Instead of using the process of storying to get at the truth or as a way to think about describing the entire self, storying is most effective when viewed as a process that allows

people to gain multiple insights about themselves and others. In her review of Gannett's (1992) work, J.L. Miller (1994) suggested that the self is not an autonomous complete individual; rather the self is partially "socially constructed through language and other forms of organization" (Gannett, 1992, p. 5). Through storying, the whole self is never fully revealed, but this is not the purpose of storying; rather multiple contexts, people, and environments all contribute to the storying of one's selves or another person's selves. Hence there are multiple selves that can be represented through story—all of them incomplete. J.L. Miller (1998) further clarified the idea of the incomplete self and encouraged those interested in telling stories through autobiography or biography to accept their incomplete self as opposed to succumbing to "paralysis around issues of identity and agency" (p. 148). Thus, it is important for the storyteller to acknowledge that stories are indeed incomplete or partial, but that these attributes are acceptable if they still produce insights or help to foster change.

In order to address the incompleteness of stories, it is necessary for the process of storying to be multifaceted and to represent the self from a variety of perspectives and contexts. To use storying to paint a fuller picture, Pinar (1988) and Grumet (1991) advocated for telling multiple versions of one's self and one's experiences in education. Moreover, storying is best understood when it is seen as dynamic and fluid—a process that is always changing. Stories and the ways in which they are "told and retold could [always] be otherwise as indeed can the narrative threads and the intentional future to which they attach" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 10). The incomplete nature of stories is, therefore, an inherent part of the storytelling process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the fluid nature of stories as being always "in the midst" of multiple lives, time, and space: "As

researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave” (p. 64).

Stories can provide rich information and insights about the experiences of people, especially teachers, due to the personal nature of the act of storying and the relationship between the participant and research. However, storying and sharing personal narrative requires teachers to take risks and to “disclose private thoughts and feelings, which in itself can make them vulnerable to censure or derision” (Carter & Doyle, 1996, pp. 137-138). Additionally, “Anonymity, confidentiality, and control of information” are troubling aspects of an inquiry that focuses on the personal (Carter & Doyle, 1996, p. 138). Thus, great care must be taken on the part of the researcher to protect and value participants who choose to make themselves vulnerable by sharing their experiences. Telling stories demands that the researcher writes with “compassion, with empathy, and with love” (Phillion, 2002, p. xxiii). Holman Jones (2003) discussed this type of storytelling as “torch singing,” which is described as an act of love that attempts to represent the subject in a compelling and respectful way—a way that invites emotion from all those involved in the research process. Such emotion in storytelling makes the told experiences believable, possible, and ultimately relatable. As Holman Jones explained, “Readers and audiences are invited to share in the emotional experience of the author” (p. 115). It is this sharing of experience that makes stories memorable and worth telling.

Silences. A final tension to be attended to under the framework of storying is the concept of silence. Silence in the context of storying means that the researcher pays attention to what is *not* said or what is omitted just as much as one pays attention to what is said.

Acheson (2008) noted that, in fact, silence and speech are “inseparable, inescapably intertwined” (p. 535). Thus, the nature of silence implies that silences should be understood rhetorically for the argument they might make (Glenn, 2004). Armstrong (2007) explained, “Invariably, silence connotes meanings which are interpreted not as empty, but full of meaning” (p. 2). Acheson (2008) elaborated on the space that silences can fill, thus giving meaning to the concept of silence and moving its definition beyond that of the absence of speech:

Silence is, after all, inherently spatial and temporal. People metaphorically think of silences as objects that we can “break,” “feel the weight of,” and “cut with a knife.” We often also speak of silence, not as space to be filled, but as a substance filling space itself—a room, a church, or a forest. Silence seems sometimes a palpable force that hangs in the air. Furthermore, when more than an environmental attribute, when humanly produced, silence, like spoken language, seems to emanate from people, moving out through the air around them toward others just as would waves of sound. Human or atmospheric, these meaningful silences occupy space in our lived experiences. (pp. 545-546)

While silences clearly have meaning separate from being merely absence of speech, silences can produce connotative meanings that are positive, negative, or neutral depending on the context (Armstrong, 2007). One type of negative silence that is worth noting is Freire’s (1972) notion of cultures of silence, in which participation is discouraged or voice is not given to marginalized people groups. Under this framework, it can be understood that stories of minoritized peoples are often left untold or ignored, which is problematic when using story in an educational context that is meant to elevate rather than silence the voices of teachers. It is important for the researcher to think about how stories are told and what is absent from the narrative threads that have been shared. It is also important to situate silences as being part of the inquiry process in order to give voice to the under-represented or to groups that are traditionally silenced and whose stories go untold.

In this section, I described the importance of stories and how they play an important role in the lives of humans. I also explained that story is related closely to experience. I then focused on the importance of stories and types of stories within the context of education, specifically revealing insights about the need for illuminating teachers' voices through story. I also described the process of storying and its place in the academic research world, including criticisms of its form. I revealed insights about the relationship between the participants and storyteller as well. In the next section, I investigate the literature surrounding the relationship between the teacher and the curriculum. I focus on the ways in which teachers function as makers of curriculum as opposed to being merely implementers of curriculum planners.

Teaching, Experience, and the Curriculum

Understanding teaching requires that we pay attention to teachers both as individuals and as a group, listening to their voices and the stories they tell about their work and their lives.

(Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 359)

The second strand of my theoretical framework deals with the ways in which teachers function as curriculum-makers, based on the pedagogy they employ and the curricular decisions they make. In this study, I interviewed teachers as a way to gain insight about their experiences with curriculum development with a specific focus on how they go about selecting texts in their English classrooms. In this section, I discuss the theories that have focused on the teacher's role in curriculum planning, development, and enactment in order to situate this study's participants within this context.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) constructed the idea of the teacher as a maker of curriculum. They were skeptical of policies that developed pre-packaged curriculum or

forced teachers to implement that curricula without having any say about its development (Craig & Ross, 2008, p. 282). Clandinin and Connelly (1992) described this common process of curriculum creation as putting the “cart before the horse” (p. 365). They built the framework of the teacher as curriculum-maker based on the theories of several curriculum scholars, including those of Tyler (1949), Schwab (1954/1978), and Jackson (1968). Their framework also included Dewey’s (1938) ideas concerning education and experience. The teacher as curriculum-maker concept strengthened “the view of teachers as knowing and knowledgeable human beings” (Craig & Ross, 2008, p. 283).

The study of this dynamic between teachers and the curriculum has not always been central to understanding education (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) thus laid important groundwork by viewing teachers as knowledgeable professionals who are able to create and define curriculum based on their personal and professional experiences. When describing specifically their ideas about curriculum development and curriculum planning and the role of the teacher, they wrote the following:

What is the central idea of our view? It is simply that all teaching and learning questions—all curriculum matters—be looked at from the point of view of involved persons. We believe that curriculum development and curriculum planning are fundamentally questions of teacher thinking and teacher doing. (p. 4)

While there are many views and differences of opinion about which factors constitute curriculum, here Connelly and Clandinin (1988) clearly established that it is the person involved—the teacher—who matters most in the curriculum development process. They defined this teacher’s knowledge as being the answer to the questions, ““what is curriculum? And ‘how do I do it?’” (p. 4), meaning that curriculum is not only developed but implemented through the personal practical knowledge of the individual teacher. Connelly

and Clandinin (1988) clarified that personal practical knowledge is the notion that teachers create and live out the curriculum in accordance with their professional and personal selves. Such a term helps to “capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons” (1988, p. 25). The teacher is the curriculum planner (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Curriculum is developed based on experiences, and experiences are made up of other people and their surrounding environments. Thus, the teacher, other people, and the environment are all parts that interact to create the curriculum (pp. 6-7).

Westbury (2008) further posited that it is teachers who are the only ones who possess experience and practical knowledge about instruction, which is a criterion for creating curriculum and, therefore, makes teachers best suited for curriculum development. Apple (2008) claimed that when curriculum plans and documents reach the classrooms, the complex lives of teachers and the daily life at schools play a significant role in shaping the way the curriculum is taught. Eisner (2005) argued that teaching is a kind of art form that “requires sensibility, imagination, technique, and the ability to make judgments about the feel and significance of the particular” (p. 201). The teacher is essential to developing curriculum and implementation into the classroom, since it is the teacher who knows the ins and outs of his or her classroom, students, and school environment. Without the teacher, curriculum would be a static, impersonal document that does little to engage students in their educational experiences.

The role of the teacher is especially important considering that various curriculum reform movements have drifted away from focusing on, and in some cases attacked, the role of the teacher. Teacher bashing, accountability, teacher testing, scripted curriculum, and

excessive mandates have contributed to this attack on teachers (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015). Teachers face a constant struggle to be viewed as professionals and to gain recognition for their skills, a struggle which results in the disempowering and deskilling of teachers (Giroux, 2012). This common anti-teacher rhetoric demands that teachers understand their roles and the importance of their roles in planning and implementing—in being—the curriculum.

Clandinin and Connelly (1988) wrote about this very concern:

Teachers who ignore research increase the risks of being overruled in their work by others. Good teachers are expected to make reasoned curriculum decisions and to be able to defend their actions. Without some knowledge of the directions and relative strengths of forces influencing their profession, they cannot expect to achieve professional autonomy. Their lack of specific knowledge creates a vacuum that others—trustees, researchers, administrators, parents, consultants, publishers, and students—eagerly fill, having been promoted by default on the part of the teacher to the rank of experts. (p. 98)

Thus it is essential that teachers realize their importance in the day-to-day happenings of school and curriculum development. As is made evident in the above quotation, if teachers do not know the importance of their role, others will silence their voices.

In contrast to this deskilling, Giroux (1988, 2012) discussed the importance of turning teachers into transformative educators who “are not merely concerned with promoting individual achievement or advancing students along career ladders [but who are] concerned with empowering students so they can read the world critically and change it when necessary” (Giroux, 1988, “Schooling, the Public Sphere,” para. 3). Schlein and Schwarz (2015) built on this idea of teachers and their abilities to empower students through application of their personal practical knowledge:

Teachers...bring to classrooms a wealth of knowledge and experience that might shape positive learning environments for students. Teachers have knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of teaching, and knowledge of their own students and other

contextual features of local curricular situations and interactions. They also bring their desires to contribute to communities. (p. 154)

The authors clarified that teachers can be much more than depositors of knowledge or unskilled laborers who merely implement pre-packaged lesson plans. Instead teachers can create lessons and instruction that meet the needs of diverse populations. They can also use their past experiences to improve learning as well as their knowledge of day-to-day school business to “plan, enact, assess, and revise curriculum” (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015, p. 155), naming the teacher as curriculum itself.

Teachers viewing themselves as agents in planning and developing curriculum might be empowering for educators, who often see themselves as powerless and under attack from policymakers and the general public. In fact, Schlein (2013) suggested that teachers begin to see themselves as having an active role in curriculum planning rather than viewing themselves as only implementers of curriculum. If teachers see themselves as autonomous agents of change, then students will benefit from the curriculum that is developed and the pedagogy that is employed by these empowered individuals. Most importantly, “teachers must trust [their] own personal practical knowledge, understand [their] narratives, and decide what is needed in the particular mix of [their] classrooms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 152). In this study with text selection, viewing the teacher as a curriculum-maker was essential to explaining how teachers went about selecting texts to include or exclude in their daily classroom lives. Without the teachers as curriculum makers, the texts that exist are static objects, and it was my hope that telling the stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection would make these objects come to life and gave teachers the narrative voice they deserve.

In this section, I connected the personal and professional lives of teachers to their role in developing and implementing curriculum. Seeing the teacher as an active rather than passive part of the curriculum experience is essential to this study with text selection. While many forms of curriculum exist, it is the teacher who gives these forms their shape and who breathes life into the curriculum he or she teaches. In the next section, I undertake the task of analyzing diverse and critical layers with curriculum experiences. I focus on literature regarding diversity, multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory in an attempt to position the study within a critical context.

Diverse and Critical Layers of Curriculum Experiences

The problem is educational systems which have not adapted successfully to such diversity, which have not looked into the face of such a child and seen beauty and potential, but function instead in a deficit finding mode. Systems that have not accepted varied ways of talking, knowing, doing, and valuing...nor offered a helping hand to cross the borders life presents to such students, that frequently cannot even offer a safe environment in which to attempt to educate such a child.

(Carger, 1996, p. 7)

Nearly 25 years ago, nine out of 10 public school teachers were white and over 70% of teachers were women. Students in classrooms were also predominantly white. However, the student demographic looks quite different today with almost 50% of students attending America's public schools being ethnically and racially diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This number continues to rise. Unfortunately, the teacher demographic looks very similar to how it did over a quarter century ago: female and white. In fact, over 80% of teachers report as being white in America's public schools (Klein, 2014). This demographic has mostly remained the same despite efforts to recruit more teachers of color, specifically male teachers of color, into the profession (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014).

In my experiences as a teacher, I have noticed this trend. Having taught at four different schools over the past 10 years, I can count on one hand the number of teachers of color with whom I have worked. In fact, over half of the schools in the United States do not have a single teacher of color on staff (Irvine, 2003), while the student population of the district has continued to grow and diversify. Although I did work in a suburban setting, at least three out of 10 learners were students of color, which means that I encountered those students quite often in my classrooms, yet rarely if ever did those students encounter teachers who looked like them. In my experience, the white female demographic is prevalent in English language arts classrooms, which means that it is possible for teachers to experience a disconnect with their students, since all students who attend public high school are, more than likely, required to take English all four years.

The aforementioned statistics, coupled with my experiences as a high school language arts teacher, force me to think more critically about Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) ideas about the teacher as the curriculum. If teachers are seen as fundamental to developing and creating curriculum and interacting with students according to their knowledge and experiences, there might be a need to examine possible tensions in terms of diversity in schools since a clear racial and economic divide exists between teachers and the students in their classrooms. In this final strand of my theoretical framework, I explore the literature surrounding diverse and critical layers with curriculum experiences. I first describe diversity studies in curriculum. In particular, I explore curriculum inequity and pedagogical differences between various diverse student groups. In the second section, I review literature about multicultural education. Next, I discuss culturally responsive pedagogy and its connection to text selection as a way to further explore the layers that make up curriculum

experiences. I end this section with a critical discussion of race, focusing on whiteness, and its connection to teaching and curriculum.

Diversity Studies in Curriculum

In this section, I describe some of the literature concerning diverse student populations, including race, ethnicity, and social class. Flood and Anders (2005) cited numerous reasons for gaps in achievement among students of color and low-income groups, including funding inequity, poverty, high student and teacher mobility, home and school conflicts, and lack of teacher preparation. I explore these issues in more depth by citing research concerning curricular and pedagogical inequities experienced by diverse student populations when compared to their white peers. I also explore the population shift many districts are experiencing in their student populations as a way to uncover another layer of diversity.

Tangible and curricular inequity among diverse student groups. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that curriculum is a property that is differentially available to all students based on their social positions. The notion of curriculum as property includes several ideas, such as the inequity of students who attend college preparatory high schools and those who do not have access to college preparatory classes or the ways in which two students may possess the same grade point average but under extremely different educational experiences, making one's grade point average more valuable than the other. This view of curriculum is a problem of access; however, even when students have access to the same types of materials, the materials may be used to reinforce dominant views about race and privilege, such as continuing the narrative that Columbus discovered an unoccupied America (Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008).

Students who attend schools within the same geographical area may encounter vastly different experiences with curriculum, but this is not the only form of inequity they might experience. Students, particularly those in rural and urban districts, may also experience an absence of tangible educational resources and curriculum artifacts, such as books, furniture, and supplies (Kozol, 1991). Kozol (1991) labeled deteriorating and unsafe school buildings, outdated textbooks, inexperienced teachers, and schools situated in violent settings as examples of the “savage inequalities” that plague many schools in America, although these inequalities are most commonly found in urban schools with high proportions of African American populations. The inequality found in school resources is partly a result of the ways in which funds are distributed to specific districts. Primarily, most local school districts receive a majority of their funding from personal property taxes, so schools that are located in impoverished areas are likely to receive significantly less funding than schools in more affluent communities. Unfortunately, this funding equation perpetuates both class and racial dominance, since students of color are more likely to attend low income schools. In fact, a report done by Education Trust (2005) claimed that the United States spends \$1,000 less per student who attend schools where the majority of students are low income or students of color when compared to the spending per student at schools with more affluent populations. Krebs, Tappert, and Van Iwaarden (2008) claimed that the court systems need to redefine their definitions of equal education opportunity by adjusting funding formulas.

Pedagogical inequity among diverse student groups. A growing body of literature exists concerning the possible influence of teacher experience in contributing to the design and implementation of school curriculum (Chan & Schlein, 2015). Specifically, for teachers who see themselves as developers of curriculum, numerous challenges can occur when

developing curriculum and selecting resources and texts for students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. These challenges can result in teachers employing vastly different pedagogical practices and developing varying types of curriculum to meet the needs—or in many cases fail to meet the needs—of these diverse populations (Au, 2011). Specifically, white teachers are more likely than teachers of color to hold lower expectations for students from diverse racial backgrounds (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

The lower expectations for these student groups, consequently, result in a pedagogical discrepancy between white middle-class students and these students. Allington (1991) found that schools with a high population of low-income students tended to devote less time to actual reading and writing instruction and to rely mostly on testing preparation, which prevented students from engaging in authentic learning opportunities. In addition, Au (2011) attributed this gap to the way in which students of color are disproportionately labeled as poor readers and often placed in the lowest reading groups early in their education, a placement which contributes negatively to their reading abilities. The instruction that students of color receive regarding reading tends to be qualitatively different, which further separates this group from their mostly white, wealthier peers (Au, 2011). This pedagogical differentiation leads to egregious differences in student instruction and the development of activities for students of color or other marginalized students groups (Strickland & Asher, 1992). This is more than likely why students of color lag behind their peers. These deficit ways of instructing students result in students who possess poor literacy skills and a general distaste for the educational environment because of the inferior education they receive. The more accurate name for the achievement gap would be what Nieto, Bode, Kang, and Raible (2008) called the “resource gap or lack of attention gap”: “because the gap is often a result of

widely varying resources and attention provided to students based on where they live and who they are” (p. 184).

Anyon (1980, 1981) provided empirical data concerning the ways in which students from marginalized groups, particularly those from low socioeconomic groups, were taught differently than their peers from racially dominant and wealthier groups. In what she termed working class schools, Anyon (1981) found that teachers viewed the students as tough and lazy. Additionally, curriculum in the working-class schools focused on basic skills, facts, and simple tasks—practical knowledge. Much of the learning was restricted to procedures and following directions; students were conditioned to follow orders and not question authority, suggesting that these students would not find themselves in positions of power once they were out in the real world. In contrast, students from the middle class and wealthier schools were provided with curriculum they would use in their daily lives or that allowed them to express creativity and individuality. Students saw knowledge as a form of discovery that related to their experiences (Anyon, 1981).

While Anyon’s (1980, 1981) studies are not current, the instructional differences that children of color and low economic status are subjected to have been well documented in the current era of standardization, accountability, and high stakes testing. Rampey, Dion, and Donahue (2009) asserted that while the achievement gap has narrowed since 1971, African American and Hispanic American students at all three age levels tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress are not learning to read as well as their European American peers. As previously described, these gaps come from resource inequity (Kozol, 1991), less time devoted to rich reading and writing instruction (Allington, 1991), more time

focused on test preparation (Allington, 1991; Ravitch, 2010, 2014), and tracking students of color into remedial reading and writing classes more often than white students (Au, 2011).

The pedagogical differences are apparent in literacy instruction, which can often be taught in a manner that either empowers or disempowers students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Au & Kaomea, 2009). Therefore, when considering how selection of authentic texts affects achievement for students of color or other marginalized groups, it could be argued that, more than likely, student achievement is not impacted at all by the selection of authentic texts due to their absence in the pedagogical practices of teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. Students in these groups are rarely exposed to authentic texts, which is a disservice to them and to their development as readers and literate citizens. Instead, teachers tend to shape curriculum that relies on test preparation and remediation. Therefore, authentic texts might not even be on the educational radar for teachers who teach these diverse populations. This is problematic, since reading authentic texts and engaging in real reading and writing instruction has proven to be beneficial for all students, especially students of color (Teale & Gambrell, 2007).

Increasingly diverse student populations. Inequity between and within districts can have an impact on the types of education and resources to which students are exposed. However, local public schools are required to serve the students and families that attend them, which can prove to be challenging in a rapidly changing world. Indeed, many districts with typically homogenous student populations are seeing an increase in immigrant students, as well as migrant students of color attending their schools (He, Phillion, Chan, & Xu, 2008). Specifically, from 2004 to 2014, the U.S. white student population decreased from 58% to 49.5% while the Latino/Latina student population increased from 19% to 25% (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The U.S. teaching profession, however, has remained predominantly white and female. Many districts, especially suburban ones, struggle to meet the needs of these changing student populations. Sleeter and Thao (2007) claimed that this struggle results from the demographic gap between teacher and students, and that students of color are more likely than white students to be taught by teachers “who question their academic ability, are uncomfortable around them and their families, and do not know how to teach them well” (p. 4).

Nieto et al. (2008) asserted that identity is not fixed and unchanging; rather it is best understood as being fluid, multiple, and complex. This might be important to think about considering how many schools are experiencing rapid and sometimes dramatic shifts in their student populations to include students from other cultures, diverse populations, and various marginalized groups. In contrast, suburban schools have often valued ideas and curriculum from the dominant culture, assuming that their constructions of knowledge and truth are not only the right ways of thinking but natural as well (Howard, 2006). These beliefs work well in a community whose members are all from the dominant culture, as there is no one around to question the narrative concerning the “assumption of rightness” (Howard, 2006, p. 54). However, many schools rarely serve completely homogenous groups of students and instead must enact an ideology and curriculum that is culturally relevant and competent (Gay, 2004) so that the needs of all students are met regardless of background or skin color.

Multicultural Education

One way to meet the needs of diverse learners is for schools to adopt and put into practice theories of multicultural education. However, as Gay (1994) has observed, “multicultural education means different things to different people” (p. 1), which has made

the implementation of multicultural education in schools unclear and, in some cases, superficial (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Banks and Banks (2001), however, provided a fairly comprehensive definition:

Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. (p.1)

Gay (1995) also stated that multicultural education, as it has been implemented in schools and out of schools, has often been misrepresented and misinterpreted. The transformative and political aspects of multicultural education have gone largely ignored, causing few long-term changes to take place. Instead, schools have implemented a watered-down version of the revolutionary multicultural education called for by theorists such as McLaren and Giroux (1997), the critical pedagogy of Freire (2005), or the multicultural and social reconstructionist views of Sleeter and Grant (2003). Ladson-Billings and Brown (2008) asserted that there has been a major attempt for curriculum to be more inclusive and multicultural, yet in reality little has been transformative in changing the ways that schools are structured to reinforce dominant ideologies. If anything, they noted that token multiculturalism pervades elementary and secondary schools as a way to appease those who challenge the educational status quo. This may mean that school will acknowledge multiple winter holidays or include a unit of study about African Americans during Black History Month. In fact, Banks (2004) acknowledged this reluctance to change, explaining that the multicultural work done in most schools has not gone beyond contributions approaches, which include a focus on heroes and holidays about people of color, and additive approaches, which add content about people of color without changing the structure of the curriculum.

King (2004) further critiqued schools and their attempts to diversify the curriculum. She claimed that schools will attempt to expand knowledge by adding more faces and voices of color to the curriculum; however, these faces and voices of color are not positioned within the context of their race, allowing the narrative of white supremacy to go largely uninterrupted.

While districts may struggle to implement an effective multicultural curriculum, some schools and teachers may choose to ignore race completely by adopting colorblind language (Sleeter, 2001). Often schools or educators will choose to do this because it may be difficult for them to have conversations about the relationship between race and power and how both can have a significant impact on the opportunities with which students are provided (Nieto et al., 2008). Bonilla-Silva (2003) asserted that white people often take on a language of colorblindness, choosing to avoid the topic of race completely for fear of being perceived as racist. Bonilla-Silva argued that this purposeful ignorance is in and of itself a type of racist ideology that preserves racism in the United States. This language can permeate classrooms that are ill equipped to have honest and sophisticated discussions about race, especially in classrooms with diverse student populations.

Critical Multicultural Education

The theory of multicultural education has been critiqued as being highly problematic and overly simplified, where teachers focus on celebrating differences instead of engaging in a critical and often messy deconstructing of systemic racism and power structures (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995; May, 1999; May & Sleeter, 2010). As May (1999) explained, “multicultural education has promised much and delivered little” in the way of encouraging equity by increasing opportunities and access for students of color, challenging racialized attitudes of

white students, and deconstructing the monoculturalism of public school (p. 1). In contrast, critical multicultural education attempts to acknowledge the power structures and systemic racism that continue to keep certain groups in power and other groups from obtaining power. Kanpol and McLaren (1995) elaborated that acknowledgement of these power structures is not enough and instead critical multiculturalists must adopt an emancipatory agenda:

A basic assumption...is that justice is not evenly distributed and cannot be so without a radical and profound change in social structures and in terms of development of historical agency and a praxis of possibility. ...[We also] stress the importance of understanding how language and identities are represented both historically and experientially. (p. 13)

Thus, a critical perspective of multicultural education involves a historical and socio-political challenging of the status quo regarding public schooling and how students of color are often subject to the deeply rooted social inequities and lack of access to opportunities that are embedded within the system.

Several scholars describe how adopting a critical perspective of multicultural education can, in fact, be emancipatory for typically marginalized groups of students. Grant and Sachs (1995) argued that various multicultural discourses should be made available to students so that they are given the opportunity to deconstruct their own cultures and the cultures of others, which is in direct contrast to the readily accepted multicultural curriculum that fosters a celebration of differences. This celebration of differences continues, however, to “otherize” people of color as it focuses on looking at culture from the dominant perspective instead of deconstructing dominant ideologies about culture and race. Grant and Sachs (1995) also encouraged the breaking of academic barriers and instead employing educators to focus on fostering democratic dialogue that critically questions systems of power. Giroux (1995), however, argued that it is not enough to question one’s own culture

and the cultural and racial experiences of others. Giroux insisted that in order for critical multiculturalism to be successful, “white supremacy” must be deconstructed for its role in perpetuating the deficit model of thinking for historically marginalized groups. Schools, in fact, can be useful “border institutions” for critically recognizing and examining how power structures continue to perpetuate the opportunity gap and support white dominant ideologies about thinking and learning.

Another important aspect involving critical multicultural education is the role the teacher plays in getting their students to think critically and engage in critical discourse about issues of race, power, and social justice. The classroom itself can and should be a useful environment in which to engage students in dialogue that will liberate them instead of occupy them (Rose, 2005). Schramm-Pate, Lussier, and Jeffries (2008) extended the following challenge to teachers regarding the use of critical multicultural education in their own classrooms:

Inducing [students] to grapple with serious sociopolitical issues of the day that most adults would consider challenging, if not dangerous, particularly when it is so much easier to go through the banking method of teaching a subject so famously challenged by Paulo Freire a generation ago, can be more daunting still. Teaching students to think critically about the issues of the day and face discomfiting questions of social justice that might challenge their own comfort and worldview requires tact, planning, patience, and a bit of bravery—particularly in schools located in traditional or conservative areas where any challenge to the social status quo can be, and often is, fiercely resisted. (p. 1)

Schramm-Pate et al. (2008) clarified in the above quotation that the teacher is central to employing critical multicultural education that will, in turn, influence and empower future generations of students to deconstruct systems of power and take political action in order to bring about change for disenfranchised people groups.

Narrowing the discussion of critical multicultural education further, I assert the importance of secondary English language arts teachers and their role in fostering critical multicultural education in their classrooms as being a potentially important aspect of this narrative inquiry. Teachers can use texts and make curricular choices in their classrooms that empower students to engage in historical and sociopolitical discourse or they can continue to engage in traditional text selection practices that perpetuate whiteness and dominant ideologies, all under the euphemism of creating a common language and engaging in complex, literary reading and exploration of great works. Unfortunately, many of these great works have what Gangi (2008) described as an “unbearable whiteness” and often fail to represent students of color, their lives, their values, and their cultures. In contrast, teachers can and should purposefully select texts that have the potential to deconstruct silences regarding race and class (Bigler & Collins, 1995), although simply selecting these texts does not ensure a critical dialogue that examines the complexities and messiness of these issues will occur (Sciurba, 2014). Furthermore, while reading the classics is not inherently problematic, reading the classics without analyzing and questioning their historical, racial, or gendered context could contribute to maintaining the status quo in the high school ELA classrooms. Research cited earlier has proven this classroom to be resistant to change and as having a penchant for tradition rooted in Euro-centric, white male ideologies (Applebee 1972, 1993). However, if this adherence to traditional text selection choices continues to permeate reading lists and high school course syllabi, then teachers should expect to see little improvement in student literacy skills or engagement with reading and writing.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (2009) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Theorists interested in multicultural perspectives acknowledge culturally relevant practices as central to shrinking the resource gap between diverse student populations and their white peers. Gay (2004), however, contended that educational equality for children of color, impoverished backgrounds, recent immigrants, and English language learners are “inextricably interwoven.” Pedagogy equality that reflects culturally responsive instructional strategies is a necessity for achieving maximum academic outcomes for this group of students (p. 33).

One way to implement culturally relevant pedagogy is to acknowledge alternate ideologies and ideas from other cultures as equally valid to the dominant narrative. Discussions about race and the cultural other, however, could prove to be useful in exploring what Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, and Peters (1996) referred to as counter-narratives that serve to include information and tell the stories from the perspective of non-dominant cultures. These conversations are essential to practicing critical pedagogy. In addition, Ladson-Billings (2004) stated that examining race as well as its relationship to inequality could help to create a “new citizenship” (p. 117) for people of color who wish to make the world a more equitable one. Whatever types of students enter the school doors, schools have an obligation to serve the members of the school community in a culturally relevant way. Nieto et al. (2008) provided a detailed explanation of this obligation:

Teachers and other educators must daily face the realities of students and must strive to develop curriculum that best meets the needs of their multiple identities and their struggles to be heard and acknowledged. Educators need to listen as students talk

about their lives, their identities, and their communities—topics that are ubiquitous in students’ conversations (although not necessarily in the schools’ curricula). (p. 185)

It is therefore essential for teachers to create curricula that will help students to see themselves and have their voices heard.

The ability for students to see their lives reflected in the curriculum is where the English language arts class and the texts that teachers choose to select can have relevance. Findlay (2010) asserted that the English classroom is different from other subject areas, since teachers often implement lessons and activities as well as select materials that are related to the personal lives of students. Teachers can use literature and writing that relates to the students’ lives, and, in turn, students can express themselves both through the reading and writing that either the teachers or they select to complete. A teacher who practices culturally relevant pedagogy has learned to develop a classroom environment that is “restorative” in nature, a classroom that encourages relationship-building, dialogue, and peace (Winn, 2013). This teacher’s classroom may also encourage “power-sharing” (Winn, 2013, p. 128) instead of traditional views of authority that assume the teacher is in charge. Thus, the English classroom is well-suited to turn into an environment that is transformative and critical. Moreover, the texts that teachers choose to read can serve as springboards from which students can discuss issues about race, gender, and class within the context of a safe environment. While the student population that makes up an English class can prove to be diverse and representative of many student groups, teachers have an obligation to teach the populations they serve. Therefore, when selecting texts, it is imperative that educators make choices that support a variety of student voices, cultures, and perspectives.

Critical Race Theory in Curriculum

In this section, I turn to the literature involving critical race theory (CRT) and how race continues to be a major factor in determining inequity in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). I am especially interested in the tenets of CRT that racism is a normal, everyday occurrence and that white ideologies often take supremacy over ideologies of people of color, thus making whiteness synonymous with ordinary, acceptable, and normal (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Specifically, I summarize the research surrounding whiteness (Marx, 2006) and how the discourses surrounding whiteness have dominated the American education system. I then narrow my discussion to include how race might contribute, either consciously or unconsciously, to curriculum development, implementation, and text selection in the English language arts classroom.

Whiteness is often equaled to “ordinariness” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006, n.p.). Howard (2006) explained, “As whites, we usually don’t even think of ourselves as having culture; we’re simply ‘right’” (p. 54). Bonilla-Silva (2003) asserted that white people often take on a language of color blindness, choosing to avoid the topic of race completely for fear of being perceived as racist. Bonilla-Silva argued that this purposeful ignorance is in and of itself a type of racist ideology that preserves racism in the United States. Many teachers often fail to “see their whiteness” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 2) and how their race might have an effect on the ways in which they conduct themselves in the classroom. The inability for white people to see themselves as racial beings is cited as not uncommon, especially when compared to people of color who might think of themselves in racial terms (Delgado, 1988).

McIntyre (1997), who is herself a white teacher, has made it her life’s work to assist other white female teachers in acknowledging and navigating their whiteness. She asserted

that many white teachers are idealistic, hardworking, and eager to make a difference in the lives of the children they teach. She further stated that at the same time, such teachers are unaware of how their race plays a role in the beliefs they have formed about teaching and learning. She wrote:

they [white teachers] uncritically embrace a discourse about race, racism, and teaching that serves—many times—to reinforce a white, class-based Euro-American perspective on life. Such a perspective marginalizes and oppresses people of color while it continues to privilege them, as white people and the white students they teach. (McIntyre, 1997, pp. 2-3)

It is possible for white teachers to misunderstand students of color or students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds in thinking that they do not care about school, are lazy, or unable to learn the same way that white students do (Sleeter & Thao, 2007).

Furthermore, rather than to address the deeply embedded racial tension that permeates American society, it might be easier for members who know the language and rules of the dominant class to dismiss those who do not know the rules as being less than or “Other” (Frankenberg, 1993). This attitude continues to preserve racist attitudes and beliefs, although it does so in a more muted way that purposefully perpetuates the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). McIntosh (1989) asserted this notion of white privilege in that she “did not see herself as racist because [she] was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of [her group]” (p. 81). Furthermore, Rosaldo (1989) asserted that how people view the world and construct reality is intimately connected to their position within social and historical hierarchies of dominance and subordination.

It can be difficult for white teachers to acknowledge their place of dominance and privilege at the expense of the suffering of people of color. In fact, Lensmire (2010) described this difficulty as a “deeply conflicted, ambivalent white racial self” (p. 162).

According to Lensmire, the ambivalent white racial self is one that may include fear as well as the need to accept and love people of color but also feel shame of this desire because of how the white community might respond. Howard (2006), however, believed that it was important for white people to move past the oppression and shame of being white and instead take steps toward healing and inclusion. It is in these steps toward healing and inclusion that a teacher and the ways she goes about developing her curriculum can play an important role.

Closely intertwined with ideas concerning race and whiteness is the concept of dominance in the form of language. Gee (1989) asserted that a Discourse is more than language and grammar used to communicate to a particular group; rather Discourses are the combination of “doing-being-valuing-believing” (p. 6). He later claimed, “Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, belief, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (pp. 6-7). Thus, one might be able to see how race is a part of someone’s Discourse. Gee further expanded his definition of Discourse into two categories: primary, the Discourse learned at home; and secondary, Discourses that are attached to situations that one might encounter later on in life, such as at school or in the workplace. Gee also argued that Discourses cannot be explicitly taught; rather someone learns the inner workings of how to participate in a Discourse from someone who has mastered that Discourse, which is a source of contention for many who believe otherwise (Delpit, 1992). To extend the impact that a Discourse might have on an individual, there are dominant Discourses, those which provide an individual with social capital, economic power, or prestige, and nondominant Discourses, which might provide access to a specific group but not provide the social capital of the dominant Discourse.

While studies show that students of color are often disenfranchised in the education system (Ladson-Billings, 2009), the dominant discourses of American society often marginalize or exclude completely forms of language from people of color, especially since “dominant groups apply frequent ‘tests’ of fluency in the dominant Discourses...so as to exclude from full participation those who are not born to positions of power” (Delpit, 1992, p. 297). The very act of going to school is often done in the language of the dominant Discourse, which can prove to be complicated for students of color, whose primary discourse may be nondominant and, therefore, fail to give them access to power in the form of social capital—access to effective literacy practices, success on a standardized test, authentic reading and writing tasks, a high school diploma, and so forth. To complicate this issue even further, if and when a person of color is accepted into the dominant Discourse, it is often through the lens of an insider (often white and often middle class) who is part of the dominant culture rather than from the perspective of a person of color. This depiction and acceptance of this person of color can often be incorrect, stereotypical, or blatantly racist, positioning the person of color as the societal Other (Frankenberg, 1993).

With regard to teachers and text selection, I believe Discourses, especially the conflict between dominant and nondominant ones, can play an important role. All texts, particularly authentic works of literature, are constructed using language, and, depending on how language is used, whose story is told, and from whose perspective, can be classified as either a part of a dominant or nondominant Discourse. Specifically, books written by white males of European descent have often been privileged in English classrooms across the United States and have, therefore, helped to reinforce the ideologies of the dominant Discourse. In contrast, multicultural literature—texts written by people of color about people of color and

in the language of those people—have traditionally hovered at the “margins of the literary imagination” (Morrison, 1993, p. 5) in secondary English language arts curriculum. Toni Morrison, in her work *Playing in the Dark* (1993) noted the marginalization that works written by and about people of color have received in American literature by describing the assumption that American literature is assumed to represent the white presence while completely ignoring the influence and contributions of people of color, even if people of color are present in those texts. Morrison asserted that “regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white” (p. xii), which is especially troubling since almost 38% of the American population is labeled as racially and ethnically diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Gangi (2008) provided numerous examples of what she calls an “unbearable whiteness” in literacy instruction, which suggests that literacy and texts are often selected with only the dominant Discourse in mind. This omnipresent whiteness is concerning since racially and ethnically diverse children under the age of five, those who will soon be in school and learning to read, make up over 50% of that population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Many teachers, when selecting texts for classrooms, do so by selecting “quality” or “award-winning” books to be used for instructional purposes. Unfortunately, these quality texts “too often privilege literature by and about [w]hite people” (Gangi, 2008, p. 30). The problem with privileging literature that focuses only on the white experience is that students of color are unable to see themselves in the books selected, which, in turn, inhibits their ability to become better readers. This lack of what Gangi termed “mirror books” is disconcerting since students “must be able to make connections with what they read to become proficient readers” (p. 30). If students cannot “see” themselves in the literature that is

selected, then they may not acquire the literacy skills to be successful with more complex reading tasks. Indeed, many students of color are known to reject literacy since they cannot see themselves in the works they are reading, and they may choose not to learn or engage with a text since it strips them of agency and identity (Kohl, 1991).

In contrast, Au (2011) asserted that literacy must be personally meaningful and suited to an individual's own purposes in order to foster literacy proficiency and empowerment, and such empowerment can begin with the types of texts that students encounter at school. This could mean that teachers need to select texts from nondominant Discourses if they want their students of color to become successful readers and writers. Additionally, selecting multicultural texts from nondominant Discourses is also beneficial for students from a dominant culture as it may help them see into an unfamiliar world—what Gangi (2008) termed a “window book.” Finally, Delpit (1992) asserted that students of color should also learn how to speak and act in the language of the dominant Discourse, since individuals who can participate in this Discourse can do so for emancipatory purposes. This may mean that students of color should also read texts from the dominant culture so they can relate to members of that culture and engage in social justice and culturally responsive dialogue as well as have access to the social capital that is common among dominant Discourses.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have deliberated over stories and storying in relation to teaching and teachers. I have also considered teachers' relationship to the curriculum. I further discussed issues pertaining to text selection as positioned within diverse schools and among diverse students. It is my belief that each of these three strands is an essential part of my research regarding text selection in the secondary English classroom. Stories and storying helped to

give voice to the teachers who participated in this study. Stories can be used to glean insights about areas of interest as well as to elevate the voices of those whose stories are being told. Finally, as an English language arts teacher, I believe that I have been trained to automatically see the world in story form.

I acknowledge in this chapter how viewing teachers as curriculum makers and planners is an essential component of telling stories about text selection. A text—whether it is a book, film, or magazine—without a reader is simply a static document. The value and meaning in a text is found when teachers select texts and breathe life into them based on their values and beliefs, not only from their personal experiences but from their professional experiences as well. Thus, it is imperative to view teachers as essential components in making and developing curriculum. Text selection and its relationship to diversity, multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory is also an important strand of my theoretical framework. Multicultural pedagogies are effective practices for many student populations, and learning about these pedagogies can provide insight as to how teachers can most effectively select texts for classroom use. Positioning teachers within the context of their race might help them to be aware of how race intersects with their classroom and the curriculum they develop and implement. The three strands, I believe, helped to situate my research interests with text selection in the secondary English classroom.

In the next chapter, I review literature pertaining to this inquiry. I will examine research related to curriculum reform, as well as research related to traditions within the English language arts classroom. I also examine works related to text selection and bodies of literature about inquiries into secondary reading practices.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I discuss literature pertinent to this study regarding text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom. However, before diving into the literature, I offer the following story as a way to provide context and to situate my experiences with text selection. By relating these narratives of experience, readers may be able to see the research play out in a personal and relatable way.

Last holiday season my husband and I traveled to spend some time with my parents. In between opening presents, baking goodies, and chatting with family, I found myself preparing materials for the spring semester. Having taught secondary English for the past 12 years, I have learned that my job is rarely done during contract time. Many additional hours are spent reading literary works and grading student essays.

This time, however, I was busy poring over Golding's (1954) dystopian novel, *Lord of the Flies*. As I re-read chapter nine about Simon's tragic death, my dad came downstairs to see what I was doing. Noting the front cover of my sticky-note filled book, my dad took one look at the title and grinned. "You all are *still reading that?*" he exclaimed. "I remember reading that book when I was in high school; that was 40 years ago." He laughed as he said this final comment. The laugh was a mixture of both nostalgia and disbelief—neither of which were negative—but his words hung in the air. "Forty years," I thought to myself, "That is a long time." Personally, I love the book *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), and I believe that Golding's work is an important microcosm of our world today. The themes involving power, the state of nature, and man's evil existence are still extremely relevant; however, the idea that teachers still teach this text 40 years later truly set in.

At this point, I started to think about all of the texts that I have taught during my teaching career. Many of them are decades old and pay little attention to the engagement and interests of students. In fact, many are read simply because they have been deemed “great” by someone long ago or because they were mysteriously purchased by former teachers and their mere existence requires me to have my students read them. This mindless adherence to the canon helps to perpetuate dominant ideologies and fails to critically question a selection such as *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954).

My dad’s comments forced me to consider the following questions regarding texts in the secondary English classroom: Who decides which texts are taught and why certain texts are more valued than others? These questions resurfaced as I read Collins’ (2003) *Toward of Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology*. Collins’ ideas about knowledge and how and why it is constructed resonated with my classroom experiences—specifically those involving not only the texts that districts select to be a part of their curriculum but the texts that specific teachers decide to use for classroom instruction. Her assertions about “specialized thought reflecting the interests of its creators” (p. 47) can easily be applied to the English classroom, and many times those creators have been white. What do these selections by white teachers, who have more than likely experienced English language arts classes through the lens of other white teachers, say about the dominance of whiteness in the ELA classroom and the text selections that are most common? As a teacher, I am responsible for constructing curriculum, and this construction is indeed a reflection of my racial, gendered, and cultural context. It is also a reflection of my interests, experiences, and encounters with the world, but at the same time I must think about the students, the content, and the skills students need to gain from reading a text. Deciding which texts students should read is deceptively complex. Numerous variables

and factors are at play, many of which compete. Is the book sophisticated enough to merit reading? Will the students have the skills to read it? Will they be engaged with the text? Will they understand it? All of these are questions that represent various traditions of teaching English, and I must learn to navigate them all, which is certainly a complex task for even a veteran teacher.

Thus, I include the aforementioned story as a way to reveal my experiences with the tradition of teaching English language arts and my experiences with text selection. My experiences assert that change is slow to come in the tradition of teaching English language arts. Multiple factors exist when teachers think about which texts they want to include or exclude from their classroom. Through this personal story, readers might be able to connect with this phenomenon and see how my experiences are supported by research in this area. Through the real-life experiences of a high school English teacher, readers might come to understand how teachers navigate the conflicts that arise from competing traditions and beliefs around teaching, curriculum development, and text selection.

In the previous chapter I described the theories that comprise the theoretical framework for this study, including storying, the teacher as a curriculum maker, and the diverse and critical layers of curriculum experiences. In this chapter, I take a historical stance by reviewing various curriculum reform movements from the twentieth century to the present day. I offer this section of the literature review as a way to provide a macro perspective about curriculum reform movements. I also review research about the history of teaching in the English language arts (ELA) classroom and the pedagogical traditions that have been and still are common within this setting. The purpose of this section is to reveal insights about past and current research involving curriculum reform and teaching practices within the

context of a specific subject. Focusing on traditions within the ELA classroom is especially important since this study involves the same setting. Finally, I review research about past and current practices in the English language arts classroom involving text selection. The literature in these different strands of research help to contextualize this narrative inquiry and possibly offer insights about the findings involving teachers and their experiences with text selection.

Curriculum Reform Movements

[E]ducation is also a site of conflict about the kind of knowledge that is and should be taught, about whose knowledge is official, and about who has the right to decide what is to be taught, how it is organized, and how teaching and learning are to be evaluated.

(Apple, 2008, p. 25)

The impact and presence of curriculum and instruction within the context of education is wide and far-reaching. Connelly, He, Phillion, and Schlein (2008) even went so far as to claim that curriculum and instruction “encompasses almost the entire range of educational thought” (p. ix). This statement, while broad, is true when one thinks about the multi-faceted and often contradictory definitions of curriculum that exist in society today. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) further explained the many perspectives and ideas about curriculum in more depth:

One of the reasons there are so many different definitions of curriculum is that people focus their definition on one or another of the many different parts of the classroom and its processes. They may emphasize objectives, learning outcomes, materials, students, and so forth....The general idea is that curriculum is something experienced in situations. People have experiences. Situations are made up of people and their surrounding environment. (p. 6)

While the definition of curriculum might vary from person to person, context to context, and experience to experience, an important—and often more official—aspect of

curriculum is reform movements, as such movements often define education within a specific time and place for a large amount of people. Within the context of reform movements, a more specific definition of curriculum is necessary. Levin (2008) defined curriculum as “an official statement of what students are expected to know and be able to do” (p. 8). Tied to many reform movements are the official statements and policies that govern curriculum concerns about what is taught, to whom it is taught, by whom, and how something is taught (Levin, 2008). Thus, in this first section of the literature review, I describe the various reform movements in curriculum that have taken place during the last century. Providing insight about different reform movements might help to shed light on the values and perspectives about what is taught and why something is taught and how these variables change over time. I address both historical and contemporary reform movements and how such movements might be both political and social. For this study, the what, why, and how are important when thinking about text selection. A text is the definition of curriculum in its simplest form, as it is the *what* of the definition of curriculum. However, understanding the text within its context, educational rationale, or social and political agenda might help to shed light on the multifaceted nature of curriculum and curriculum reform.

The Beginnings of Curriculum Reform

Tyler’s (1949) text *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* was an influential part of making the public aware of the importance of curriculum development. According to Tyler, schools had the basic job of defining their educational purposes and then creating and organizing educational experiences that would fulfill their purposes. Finally, schools had to figure out a way to measure whether or not those purposes were attained (Null, 2008). Through Tyler’s work, schools now had a means by which to develop curriculum. Other

theorists then built upon Tyler's work with curriculum development by adding and expanding his definition (Null, 2008).

Ideas about curriculum development continued to change as ideas about education and schooling evolved in the second half of the 20th century. Criticism of schools significantly intensified in the United States during the 1950s. Specifically, the Soviet launching of the satellite *Sputnik* in 1957 "cast doubt on the quality of the United States' educational system" (Pinar, 2008, p. 492). This event, although unrelated to education quality, was significant in that it took curriculum development power out of the hands of school teachers and educators and placed it into the hands of politicians (Pinar, 2008). Not only did curriculum development become highly politicized at this point, but policymakers also began to focus on subjects such as math, science, and technology. This important historical event eventually helped to create the National Curriculum Reform Movement of the early 1960s that attempted to isolate curriculum scholars from the field of curriculum development (Pinar, 2008). The criticism of schools that started in the 1950s has significantly shaped present-day curriculum reform movements and beliefs that rely on public paranoia about the state of education by focusing on standards and quantifying student achievement and teacher performance.

Life Adjustment Curriculum

While the Soviet launching of *Sputnik* made reform movements political during the 1950s, another social curricular conflict was emerging as well. At the core of the conflict were those who believed in integrating various subjects that would cater more to students and their daily lives. This concept, later to be called Life Adjustment Curriculum, was in direct contrast to more traditional views of curriculum that called for organization based on

different academic disciplines (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). Critics, often university academics, did not see life adjustment education as academically rigorous enough. While Life Adjustment Curriculum was most hotly contested in the 1950s and 1960s, its roots can be traced all the way back to the 1930s through curriculum articles that advocated alternatives to organizing the curriculum by traditional academic disciplines in order to give students the “functional” training they needed for life (Franklin & Johnson, 2008, p. 461). As a result of this movement, courses such as home nursing, child care, family living, and refresher mathematics were developed as a way to make education more practical and less collegiate (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

Discipline-based Curriculum

The push for Life Adjustment Curriculum and the development of practical skills did not last long. Instead, more and more people, including businesses, academics, and even the federal government began to advocate for a Discipline-Based Curriculum, claiming that the disciplines “were the best sources for a curriculum that would both prepare articulate and thoughtful citizens and would produce the scientists and engineers who would enable the nation to compete militarily with the Soviet Union” (Franklin & Johnson, 2008, p. 462). According to advocates of Discipline-Based Curriculum, adopting this curriculum would ensure the survival of the United States, its values, and way of life. Thus, discipline-centered curriculum focused on structure, problem-solving skills, subject matter knowledge, and inquiry teaching. Some of these qualities can still be seen in educational practices today, especially problem-solving skills and inquiry-based methods, as these methods are assumed to help prepare students for life outside of public school by providing them with more practical and challenging academic tasks.

Basic Skills Instruction Curriculum

The Discipline-Based Curriculum movement, although never fully disappearing, was short lived and was replaced by the emergence of Basic Skills Instruction, although it was originally thought that education should focus less on producing workers and more on schools and social issues (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). However, education in the 1970s was found to consist mostly of students studying traditional academic subjects through the use of textbooks, seatwork, student recitations, and teacher-centered instruction—Basic Skills Instruction, essentially (Reese, 2005). During the time of Basic Skills Instruction, teachers were the talkers and students the listeners. This instructional method, however, proved to have a negative impact on students’ attitudes toward education, causing students to feel that schools were “failing to address their own personal problems or larger societal dilemmas” (Franklin & Johnson, 2008, p. 467). Thus, the response was to offer students more course selections and elective options in what would become known as the “shopping mall high school” (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985, p. 7). In spite of this increase in course offerings, basic skills continued to have prevalence based on the claim that student achievement was generally declining, and basic skill mastery was easy to assess and observe in measurable ways. Finally, Basic Skills Instruction Curriculum allowed for differentiation among students in the form of academic tracking (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

The focus of Basic Skills Instruction Curriculum rested on the idea that students should be given an education that they need. However, the Basic Skills movement did not provide a rigorous or academically challenging curriculum to its students, resulting in the publication of educational reports that outlined the decline of the American education system. Specifically, the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s report *A Nation*

at Risk (1983) was filled with emotionally loaded language, inciting a sense of crisis that education needed dramatic reform (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). Addressed as “an open letter to the American people” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, para. 1), *A Nation at Risk* claimed the United States’ “once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” and that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, para. 2). The dramatic rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* provided the country with a solution entitled the New Basics (Franklin & Johnson, 2008), which required students to earn a specific number of credits in the core disciplines and provided room for the pursuit of electives—a solution that is still present in high school graduation requirements today. Critics of the report, however, felt its authors had exaggerated the severity of the state of education and distorted the facts of the report, although the general public seemed to be moved by the language of *A Nation at Risk* (Franklin & Johnson, 2008).

No Child Left Behind

Much of the concern from *A Nation at Risk* resulted in schools and districts developing content standards and learning objectives. Each state also had district criteria about the content it should teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). However, in 2001, the U.S. Department of Education passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) under approval of President George W. Bush (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). With NCLB, schools would adopt mandatory student testing and be forced to accept penalties for low student performance. Penalties, according to this policy, would help to ensure that good

teaching was taking place (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Under NCLB legislation, schools were required to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). If schools failed in this regard, then steps were taken toward improving the education provided at that school. Unfortunately, attempted reform of NCLB did little to provide the expected results and instead created a sense of fear and paranoia among educators about their job performance being tied to students' test scores, a feeling which still persists today (Ravitch, 2014).

Race to the Top

Although recognized by its name *Race to the Top* (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), the contemporary national education initiative closely mirrors the tenets of NCLB in that standardized testing and quantifiable data remain at the forefront of measuring student achievement and educational progress. Race to the Top, however, focused more on state achievement requirements and aimed to ensure that each state provided rigorous assessment of its students (Setting the Pace, 2014). To reach this goal, Race to the Top allotted \$4.35 billion to local districts and teachers to improve student achievement and to create better, more rigorous assessments for students (Setting the Pace, 2014, p. 1). Specifically, Race to the Top was and is a call to action for the creation of new approaches that will “better support educators to ensure that students graduate ready for college and careers, enabling students to become productive citizens and out-compete any worker, anywhere in the world” (Setting the Pace, 2014, p. 2). The rhetoric of Race to the Top closely mirrors the conversation about education that resulted from the Soviet launching of Sputnik in that currently it is believed that American schools do not prepare students for the competitive global economy. Race to the Top, unlike NCLB, has aimed to better support traditionally disadvantaged and

underserved students according to supporters of that legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Adoption, Implementation, and Criticism of the Common Core State Standards

Overview of the Standards. While initiatives like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top place most of the control in the hands of federal policymakers, there is currently a state-based focus on curriculum reform. For many states, reform has involved the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Currently 42 of the nation's 50 states and five territories have adopted and are in the process of implementing the CCSS (CCSSI, 2018e). Beginning in 2010 across the United States, individual states began to voluntarily adopt the CCSS as a way to establish a national set of rigorous and relevant guidelines that focus on college and career readiness in the subject areas of math and English language arts. The creators of the standards, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, led the development of CCSS along with parents, teachers, and school administrators from around the country. The adoption of the standards has been controversial. Ravitch (2014) asserted that neither the Obama administration nor the developers of the CCSS have field-tested the standards, making it unclear whether the adoption of the standards will improve education or how they will affect students who are already performing poorly.

The ELA Standards. While the CCSS include specifications regarding reading, writing, listening, and speaking, I was interested in the reading content suggested in the standards, as this aspect most closely connected to my research interests. Specifically, the ELA Standards incorporate both content and skill. The ELA Standards require "certain critical content" (CCSSI, "Frequently Asked Questions," 2018d), including classic myths and

stories from around the world, America's founding documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. While the standards include diversified texts and define the "certain critical content" to be inclusive regarding marginalized groups, those who advocate for cultural competency and multicultural approaches to education fear the CCSS may be another reflection of dominant ideologies (Shanahan & Duffett, 2013).

CCSS pushback and criticism. Initially the adoption of the CCSS included almost all of the nation's states and territories in what has been described as a quiet and hasty action (Toscano, 2013). However, recently there has been significant criticism, resulting in pushback from states about the adoption of the standards. Shanahan (2015) asserted that as the standards face continued criticism and skepticism, "many people have grown suspicious of the Standards and what they might represent" (p. 583). Specifically, approximately 15 states have pushed back against the adoptions of the Standards. Additionally, several states, including Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina, have reversed their original adoption of the Standards while other states selected to opt out from the beginning (Shanahan, 2015).

Part of this pushback against the Standards comes from the misleading language of the Standards themselves and the heavy reliance on standardized testing as a way to measure achievement, the focus on college and career readiness, and data collection involving stakeholders in the Standards (Toscano, 2013). Many fear that the Standards, while meant to serve as guidelines for what students should be able to do at various grade levels, will actually result in further standardization since they are driven by high-stakes tests (Gilbert, 2014). Newkirk (2013) remarked:

The [CCSS] are joined at the hip to standardized tests...The Department of Education has committed 300 million dollars to the creation of these new tests...These tests will

give operational reality to the standards—in effect they will become the standards (p. 4, as cited in Gilbert, 2014).

Since families and communities were not involved in the design or adoption of the Standards, many people do not understand them and, therefore, meet them with criticism and skepticism (Toscano, 2013).

Overall curriculum reform has been vast and far-reaching, yet since the 1930s, it is clear that reformers often do not agree on how to best ensure that students are learning, teachers are teaching, and schools are succeeding in their intended roles. This could be because “curriculum is a text that must be and is, interpreted by its users and even its official interpreters in the light of their situated presuppositions and understandings” (Westbury, 2008, p. 50), thus making the very nature of curriculum subjective and fluid. In addition, curriculum reform movements do not guarantee that actual reform will occur or that student achievement will increase as a result. Reform also does not guarantee that teachers will change their practices (Levin, 2008). Finally, reform movements do not emerge on their own; rather, they often develop as a response to important political, cultural, and social issues of the day. Curriculum “must, can, and should change as the field of political science, economics, and philosophy change” (Null, 2008, p. 478).

I include this section of research in my literature review in order to provide a broad understanding of how beliefs about curriculum have changed over time. I offer this information as a way to examine the relationship between official curriculum development and reform and actual teaching practice as I feel this relationship might be important to examine regarding the participants in this study and their experiences with text selection in their classrooms. Understanding curriculum reform sets a context for this work while

contextualizing teaching and learning that I encountered during schooling, my experiences as a teacher, and my current role as a researcher.

Historical Traditions on the Teaching of ELA

English is set apart from other subject disciplines because teachers have a closer personal relationship with pupils, there is more freedom to develop individual teaching styles and it is uniquely concerned with the individual child and fostering independent learners.

(Findlay, 2010, p. 4)

The second section of the review of the literature comprises the nature of the secondary ELA classroom and how that classroom has either changed or not changed over time. While the previous section focused on national curriculum reform movements, I narrow the lens further here by looking specifically at traditions in the ELA subject area. The various traditions common to ELA subject areas provided context and vocabulary for this narrative inquiry about text selection. Looking at the traditions of the ELA classroom also enabled me to situate the experiences of the participants and their stories. Applebee (1993) argued that the ELA classroom has been slow to change and adapt not only its pedagogy but its curricular materials as well. Thus, in this section, I reveal insights about what has been taught and how materials have been taught in the ELA classroom during the last century.

Historically, teaching English has been embedded in three different traditions, all of which have competed for dominance: the cultural heritage tradition, the basic skills tradition, and the student-centered tradition (Applebee, 1974). In this section, I define and describe each section in more detail as a way to situate the participants' experiences with teaching ELA.

The Cultural Heritage Tradition

The first tradition is one that has emphasized a common cultural heritage in order to encourage “growth of the individual and the preservation of national values and traditions”

(Applebee, 1993, p. 3). Advocates of this tradition believe that the teaching of literature can help to preserve these values and traditions. While the belief that education should encourage a common heritage has been around since the 19th century, this tradition was relevant in the 1950s as a response to those who advocated for the Life Adjustment Curriculum (Franklin & Johnson, 2008), which focused on more practical skills and vocational preparation.

Conversely, proponents of cultural heritage within the context of ELA classes focused on the importance of the classics and other great works as a way to bring about universal literacy. They argued that both important moral and cultural qualities were present in such works and needed to be read by a wide audience (Adler, 1940).

The 1980s saw a resurgence of the focus on adopting a common national heritage in the works of E.D. Hirsch. Hirsch (1987) argued that many students are ill-prepared for the real world because they are culturally illiterate and, therefore, could not compete in the executive or corporate world, and this was especially true for minorities and those students living in poverty. Hirsch advocated for a national curriculum that would provide universal literacy for all. He wrote, “No modern society can hope to become a just society without a high level of universal literacy” (1987, p. 12).

While the cultural heritage model of English education was intended to create democratic citizens and a universal language with which to understand the world, such a model does not support the idea of differentiation or multiculturalism. Advocates of this model of English instruction argued that all students need exposure to the greatest works of literature (Applebee, 1993). Adler (1982) claimed that attempts to make the curriculum more relevant or accessible to students will make the curriculum less rigorous and, therefore, less worthwhile.

Evidence of English teachers' adoption of the cultural heritage model are numerous when looking at the types of texts and "great works" that have been taught and continue to be taught in ELA classrooms across the country. Even now, Eurocentric texts by male authors (e.g., Shakespeare) tend to dominate the curriculum despite the increasing diversity of today's student populations. Applebee's work (1974) served as the foundation for this body of knowledge. Applebee found that teachers in the later part of the 20th century were teaching mostly the same texts that they had been teaching over half a century before. Twenty years later, Applebee (1993) discovered that teachers made little to no changes regarding text selection at the secondary level, nor did the teachers included in the study expect any significant changes regarding English curriculum to take place in the next 20 years. Other more current research has found this belief to be mostly true (Shanahan & Duffett, 2013; Stosky et al., 2010).

Looking at the history of the teaching of English in the secondary classroom through a cultural heritage lens reveals several important facts. First, the text is the cornerstone of the secondary ELA classroom, even if the mode of that text changes to include more contemporary forms (Stallworth et al., 2006). Furthermore, research has clearly established that teachers have been slow to change their views on texts. Many teachers still adhere to a strict canonical list of works and only narrowly use other texts, such as media or visual texts or multicultural literature, to supplement canonical ones (Benson, 2008). While a revolving attitude exists regarding the definition of classic literature, a traditional belief in the canon and classics still holds significant influence in today's classrooms (Hale & Crowe, 2001). Thus, it appears that the cultural heritage model of teaching English and the belief that

students should be exposed to great literature continues to pervade English classrooms across the country.

The Basic Skills Tradition

A second deeply rooted tradition of ELA instruction has emphasized the development of essential language skills (Applebee, 1993). In this tradition, teachers focus on developing basic skills in both reading and writing, which closely mirrors the basic skills curriculum common in the 1970s (Franklin & Johnson, 2008). In contrast to the cultural heritage model, the essential skills model mostly ignores “great” or complex works of literature. Instead, the focus rests on reading practical or nonfiction works. Literature is less likely to be studied or interpreted with this model; rather, the emphasis rests on developing practical reading skills that support functional literacy, such as grammar and comprehension questions (Applebee, 1993). One can see a reappearance of the essential language skills tradition and how it has manifested in the era of high-stakes testing.

The CCSS have helped to reform and expand not only the definition of text but what it means to be literate in today’s society. Indeed, one can see evidence of the essential skills tradition in that the focus for literacy is moving away from the teaching of literature and more toward practical reading that will prepare students for college and career. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2013) provided its own definition of what it means to be literate in the 21st century which closely mirrors the language of the CCSS:

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and

malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups. (p. 1)

NCTE's definition of literacy moves beyond the text to include the use of technology, problem-solving, global networking, and communication skills. This definition is much more cohesive than past definitions of text and reveals evidence of reform and change. Typically, English classrooms have centered on the written and printed word with a focus on literature. However, the organization that is responsible for guiding the practices of English teachers is deliberately expanding its own definition of text to include skills beyond the printed word or works of greatness.

While the CCSS do promote the reading of great works and other pieces of literary fiction to an extent (CCSI, Appendix B, 2018e), a major shift that can be seen in the CCSS is the transition from fiction literature to nonfiction and informational texts. This shift most certainly turns typical ideologies of the secondary English classroom on their heads and directly opposes the cultural heritage model of English language arts instruction, in which the majority of the curriculum at the secondary high school level focuses on fictional works of literature that have been read for many years (Applebee, 1974, 1993). Neuman and Roskos (2012) praised this shift and emphasized that reading quality informational texts can make a person more intelligent. They described the switch to informational texts at the elementary level, which calls for a 50% literary and 50% informational text balance. However, by grades 9-12, a majority of the texts read should include nonfiction informational pieces rather than literary ones. Neuman and Roskos argued that this shift makes sense considering the need for teachers to include more complex texts and technical information that will prepare them for

college and career-related activities, which falls directly in line with the essential skills model of teaching English.

Gewertz (2012) also addressed the shift to informational texts and how such a shift came from the suggestions of employers and college professors who found that students were unable to comprehend scientific journals and technical writing. These suggestions are clearly embedded in the reading standards, which suggest that by grade twelve, students should be reading informational texts 70% of the time (CCSSI, 2018e). Gewertz mentioned the concerns of educators who are afraid the pendulum will swing too much toward nonfiction and, as a result, exclude fiction entirely. Another concern cited from teachers regarding the shift to nonfiction is a lack of training regarding how to teach these types of texts efficiently to students. Consequently, Gewertz found that textbook companies are beginning to include more materials that guide teachers in these practices, and districts are including professional development about informational texts, although the exact nature of a 70/30 genre split at the secondary level remains to be seen.

While traditionally the ELA classroom has focused on reading great works of literature, the Basic Skills Tradition of teaching English does at times draw attention from policymakers and educators. Specifically, the era of standardization has passively encouraged teachers to focus on basic skills that will allow their students to do well on high-stakes tests. This skill and drill method of learning and rote memorization is especially true for traditionally marginalized student groups and students of color. Finally, the CCSS and its focus on information literacy and nonfiction demand that educators focus on practical skills that will encourage college and career readiness, suggesting the Basic Skills Tradition indeed has a place in ELA classrooms today.

The Student-centered Tradition

The third tradition of teaching ELA as a subject emphasizes the student instead of the subject. Teachers in this tradition are more likely to emphasize appreciation and engagement rather than promoting basic skills or great works (Applebee, 1993). This tradition of teaching English is closely rooted in the theories of Dewey (1938), who emphasized the importance of experience as it relates to education (in this case, the experience of the student with literature and language arts). Additionally, Rosenblatt (1995), modeling her thinking after Dewey's beliefs about experience, developed her theory about reader response. Rosenblatt (1995) advocated for multiple and personal readings of a work of literature while at the same time supporting the importance of the work itself. Her student-centered approach to literature interpretation is often defined as a transaction between the reader and the text.

The multicultural movement in education and the teaching of ELA stems from a student-centered approach to teaching and learning as it can provide students with a window to other cultures and a mirror reflecting their own (Galda, 1998). Multicultural literature, along with the concept of critical pedagogy, first began gaining recognition in the 1980s and early 1990s as a response to the works of Bloom (1987), who focused on the failure of universities to serve the needs of their students through the devaluing of the western school of thought and the traditional canon of great works. Advocates of multicultural literature and critical pedagogy were responding to Hirsch (1987) as well, who advocated for schools to adopt a nation-wide curriculum that would make all students, regardless of class or race, culturally literate. In opposition to the cultural heritage movement grew the multicultural movement headed by theorists and their works, including Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1994) and the theory of critical pedagogy, led by Freire (2005) and Giroux (1988).

While the multicultural movement in education can be applied to all of education, the secondary English classroom has, in some cases, slowly moved from a traditional cultural heritage tradition or basic skills tradition, to a tradition that focuses more on the lives of the students and how they experience and connect with reading (D. Miller, 2012). Fairbrother (2000) elaborated on the importance of including multicultural and diverse texts as they help to shape the secondary English classroom experience:

The question of what students should learn is translated into what literature the students should read, how they are allowed to respond to it, and what they learn about forms and uses of literacy. One of the major ways this discourse is framed is in terms of the literary canon versus multicultural literature. This is an ongoing debate, complex and radical, in the sense that it gets to the roots of the question of what cultural discourse will be privileged in our schools, who will benefit from access to that discourse, and who will be excluded. (p. 12)

Stallworth et al. (2006) argued that while many schools are still following cultural heritage traditions where ELA instruction is concerned, schools need not adhere to a strictly traditional canon of literature in order to promote literacy and engagement. Keeping with the true spirit of the student-centered tradition, Stallworth et al. asserted that what is more important is that teachers include texts “that will foster lifelong reading habits and nurture students’ interest in reading” (p. 483).

While the inclusion of multicultural literature is one way in which teachers adopt a student-centered approach, advocates for this approach also encourage moving away from a traditional teacher-driven curriculum or a whole-class novel to one that includes student voice and choice regarding text selection (Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013, D. Miller, 2009, 2012). Fisher and Ivey (2007) cited criticism of the traditional “one-size-fits-all class novels” that persist as the centerpiece of many middle school and high school classrooms (p. 494), claiming that students are not reading more or reading better as a result of this manner of

instruction (p. 495). In fact, Gallo (2001) explained that forcing students to read classics or other required texts does little to encourage reading enjoyment or to establish lifelong reading practices for students once they leave high school.

Thus, to adopt a student-centered approach to teaching ELA, Kittle (2013) suggested that teachers should create a balance of independent reading, text study, and novel study instead of focusing on canonical works as the primary mode of establishing a reading life. She also encouraged teachers to build classrooms libraries that focus on choice and consist of books with themes that matter to students in the 21st century. D. Miller (2012) also advocated for choice, claiming, “No single practice inspires my students to read as much as the opportunity to choose their own book does” (p. 90). While choice is a way for teachers to engage students in reading, traditionally teachers have been reluctant to change their practices (Applebee, 1974; 1993; Shanahan & Duffett, 2013; Stotsky et al., 2010). Kittle (P. Kittle, personal communication, August 2016) acknowledged this reluctance to change by explaining that there is a grieving process that teachers go through when giving up favorite literary works or deeply personal units of study that are replaced by more student-driven text selection practices.

The three traditions of ELA instruction that have been reviewed above still persist in classrooms today and are often at odds with one another. The ELA classroom has had a difficult time deciding if the student, the content, or the skills should be the focus of pedagogical practices and curriculum materials. This inability to agree on an area of focus is what makes the ELA classroom slow to change with the times. This section of the literature review is important as it might provide insight as to how various traditions in teaching ELA are evident in the pedagogical practices of the participants in the current study. Each of the

three traditions encourages different perspectives regarding text selection practices, which is a phenomenon explored in more depth within this narrative inquiry. An exploration of these three traditions helped to contextualize the teaching practices of the participants and how they view themselves as educators.

Text Selection Practices in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

Books do not simply happen to people. People also happen to books. A story or poem or play is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols.

(Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 66)

In this section, I explore literature related to past and present studies involving text selection practices in the secondary English classroom. I first describe pertinent studies regarding this phenomenon as a way to situate this narrative inquiry about teachers and their experiences with text selection. Specifically, I address research focused on canonical works and their relationship to the teaching of ELA. I then explore literature that captures the gradual shift to expand the canon to include more authors of color. I also describe the literature related to the CCSS and its possible relationship to text selection. I am interested in the ramifications involved with the creation of the CCSS: Appendix B List of Exemplar Texts and how teachers might navigate those titles and expectations for reading and text selection in their own classrooms. Finally, I explore the concept of complexity and its connection or lack of connection to teachers and their choices of texts for their classrooms. With previously mentioned statistics regarding college readiness in reading and the state of reading in our nation, complexity might be an important concept to examine more critically.

Past and Present Traditions of Text Selection in the Secondary English Classroom

In this section of the literature review, I explore past and present practices involving text selection in the secondary ELA classroom. Watkins and Ostenson (2015) clarified that teacher decisions about texts can have far-reaching consequences on skill development and even on student attitudes about reading. This section of the literature review is most relevant to this study as it examines previous research that mainly focuses on which works students have been asked to read in their English classrooms and which factors teachers should take into account when selecting texts. However, little research exists regarding how teachers actually make important decisions regarding text selection (Doubek & Cooper, 2007). Therefore, this study went beyond what students are reading and attempted to capture teachers' experiences with text selection in order to gain more thorough insight about what teachers choose to read and why. While Scieurba (2014) asserted that "we do not know how students connect with texts unless they tell us" (p. 309), the same could be said for teachers. Essentially, we will not know why teachers include or exclude particular texts unless we ask them and tell their stories regarding this phenomenon.

For decades, research has focused on what texts teachers select in the secondary English classroom and, consequently, what knowledge and whose knowledge are of most importance in these classrooms. Applebee's work (1974) served as the foundation for this body of knowledge. Applebee found that teachers in the later part of the 20th century were teaching mostly the same texts that they had been teaching over half a century before. Twenty years later, Applebee (1993) conducted a mixed methods study that included surveys, interviews, school visits, case studies of secondary schools, and content analysis of texts and literature anthologies. His study included 322 public schools, grades 7-12, that were

thought to be exemplary models of educational practices. Applebee found that teachers had made little to no changes regarding text selection at the secondary level, nor did the teachers included in the study expect any significant changes regarding English curriculum to take place in the next 20 years. Furthermore, this 1993 study reaffirmed the results from the 1974 study: the majority of texts in English classrooms were written by white males. This was true in spite of the inclusion of more contemporary texts.

A second important piece of knowledge to be gleaned from Applebee's (1993) study is the list of specific texts most frequently taught in English classes at the secondary level. Applebee found *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003), *Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885), *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1981), *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 2003), *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), and *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) to be among the top 10 texts that are used in classrooms across the United States (1993). With the exclusion of Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, all of the aforementioned texts were written by white males, and they do not reflect the diverse cultures that are found in schools across the United States.

Applebee's (1974, 1993) findings, although somewhat dated, are concerning for educators considering the rapidly changing nature of American culture to include a wide array of ethnic, racial, educational, socioeconomic, and gender diversities. It is also important to note that this study was done on a national level. Based on this fact, Applebee (1993) was truly able to capture the static quality of the secondary English curriculum and its failure to change with the times. However, it is also important to note that while Applebee (1993)

made it clear that schools do not include a broad range of relevant, interesting texts in their school curriculum, he did not provide an alternative list of texts to consider.

Applebee's (1993) research is often referenced by individuals studying the nature of the secondary English classroom, especially by those interested in which texts are most commonly read. The date of his study is important to note, and one might assume that since the study took place over 20 years ago, one would see significant change in secondary English curriculum; however, this is simply not the case. For example, Stotsky et al. (2010) conducted a nation-wide survey using a representative sample of over 400 ninth, 10th, and 11th grade English teachers to determine what students are being asked to read. Stotsky et al. found a list similar to Applebee's, although it did include a wider variety to some extent. *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953), *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004), *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), *Night* (Wiesel, 2006), *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885), and *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1981) were among the top 10 titles assigned by secondary high school English teachers. From their findings, Stotsky et al. (2010) concluded that only four of the top 20 most frequently read texts had a Lexile score that matched the grade level at which they were taught. The authors voiced concern about the increasing number of students reading below grade level and the increasing demands for teachers to assign students to read complex texts.

In the context of the pending CCSS, Shanahan and Duffett (2013) conducted a nation-wide quantitative study mostly through the surveying of 1,154 public school teachers of English, language arts, or reading, 484 of whom were high school teachers. All participants taught in states that were set to adopt the CCSS. They concluded that teachers were using a

wider variety of texts at the secondary level; however, several of the most popular texts—*Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004), *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1885), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960)—from this study were also found on Applebee’s list in 1993. While it may appear that high school teachers are using a larger variety of texts, these texts are not necessarily complex, nor do they possess the literary merit that current state and national standards demand.

While several major studies have been conducted concerning *what* students read in the high school English classroom, smaller, more local studies have been completed as well using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze the types of texts students are required to read. Stallworth (1999) conducted a smaller replication study similar to Applebee’s (1993) at the local level using a random sample of 72 high schools of varying size in the state of Alabama. Of the 360 surveys mailed to English department chairs and teachers at the various schools, 240 were returned. Stallworth’s hope was to encourage a canon that was more inclusive and one that helped “all students to see their realities reflected in the texts used in English classes” (1999, p. 19). However, the most popular texts read in the state of Alabama were very similar to findings from previous studies: *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 2002), *The Pearl* (Steinbeck, 2000), *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004), *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1982), *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1981), *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), and *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925). Stallworth, however, went beyond the inclusion of a list of texts to examine why teachers were not including a wider variety of texts from authors from diverse backgrounds. Many teachers polled cited skepticism, wariness of the text’s applicability to standardized curriculum, controversy, and a

mistrust of multicultural literature's literary merit. Stallworth's study is over 15 years old. More research would be beneficial about why teachers of secondary English are slow to make changes to the curriculum and their text selection practices.

While studies suggest that teachers in the secondary English classroom focus on reading works from a traditional Westernized canon, an increasing body of research has focused on the importance of including multicultural texts as part of the curriculum. Colby and Lyon (2004) explained that multicultural literature is often deemed a worthy tool that "helps children to identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity" (p. 24). Bigler and Collins (1995) found that multicultural curriculum has the potential to challenge silences that exist regarding race and class in schools. However, simply adding multicultural literature to ELA classrooms does not in and of itself create respect for differences or challenge silences (Glazier & Seo, 2005). Rather, multicultural literature should be included in a way that can provide students with a window to other cultures and a mirror reflecting their own (Galda, 1998). However, Scieurba (2014) asserted that it may not be enough for students of color to simply see themselves in the literature they are reading. Instead, she argued that such assumptions about texts that mirror students' lives do "not sufficiently honor the complexities of racial/ethnic or gender identities, nor does it consider the complexities in the very act of reading and responding to texts" (p. 309).

Thus, in the past 30 years numerous studies have explored the inclusion and exclusion of multicultural works within the ELA classroom. Stallworth et al. (2006) conducted a study of 142 English language arts teachers employed at 72 public secondary schools in Alabama that was an extension of an earlier study completed in 1999. Two research questions guided

this study: What are the book-length works most frequently taught in the state's public schools? And what are English teachers' reasons for including or excluding multicultural literature in their curricula? (p. 481). Both quantitative and qualitative survey items were created to answer the questions. Results of the study indicated that teachers taught over 320 different book titles, yet the most frequently mentioned titles included items mostly traditional and western in nature. However, Stallworth et al. (2006) found an important theme in their study: Teachers possess an evolving definition of "the classics" or what texts can be considered quality literature. In fact, many of the works mentioned by teachers appear to be moving in a more contemporary direction and included some authors of color, such as Hansberry's (1997) *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hurston's (1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Achebe's (1994) *Things Fall Apart*. The inclusion of such authors revealed promise for a new, more modern canon; however, the influence that inclusion of such works might have on students and their relationship to reading remains to be seen.

Another area of interest for Stallworth et al. (2006) were the reasons why a specific multicultural text was included or omitted from a school's or teacher's curriculum. Adding to the body of literature, Stallworth et al. found that a lack of knowledge and a desire to teach familiar texts were at the top of the list. Other factors impeding a teacher's use of multicultural texts included lack of resources, lack of expertise, time constraints, and an overall degree of confusion among teachers about including multicultural texts in the course curriculum. Therefore, it appears that while many schools no longer mandate that only canonical works be taught in public schools, many teachers choose to teach works with which they are already familiar.

Colarusso (2010) shifted the focus on the traditional versus multicultural debate by arguing that teachers now have a wide variety of texts from which to choose that includes an ever-expanding group of authors from different cultural backgrounds. She asserted that while some educators may still question the quality of multicultural literature and its place in the English classroom, “there is an abundant variety of fine English literature from diverse perspectives appropriate for secondary education and very possibly more apt to encourage student engagement” (p. 436). Therefore, Colarusso claimed that while multiculturalism is still an important part of educational reform, globalization will, more than likely, be a more dominant force in the not-too-distant future. To describe the importance of such changes in school curriculum and how individual teachers cope with such changes, Colarusso conducted a qualitative study consisting of personal and professional reflection on practices, including information about texts used, through open interviews with 15 teachers from six secondary schools in Ontario, Canada. After collecting and coding her data, Colarusso found several common themes concerning curricular change. One theme, adaptation and coping, focused on the ways in which teachers have autonomy over curriculum in their own classrooms and how they handle curricular change. While the participants of this study agreed that autonomy was important in the English classroom, they also had many philosophical differences concerning text selection, the canon, and the authority of Shakespeare. It is important to note that the teachers included in this study taught in a predominantly African American school and readily expressed concern about the curriculum and desired to put an end “to a largely ‘dead [w]hite male’ book list and its alienating effects on a mainly non-white school community” (Colarusso, 2010, p. 446). While the teachers from this sample did not agree completely on the specific texts to be taught or how to best adapt to changes in curriculum

and practice, they all advocated for an approach to curriculum that considered not only the learner's needs and interests but ethnic identity as well. Colarusso (2010) mentioned that each participant in her study had taken unusual strides to make the school curriculum more culturally responsive. Although her study was small, it might be important for English teachers to consider. No longer is the United States a mostly white culture that adheres solely to westernized ideals; rather, culture is rapidly changing to include not only a variety of people and ideas but to include ideas about culture on a global scale. Therefore, it makes sense that the types of texts teachers select should reflect these changes as well.

Saunders's (2012) case study involving a pre-service teacher and her experiences teaching a traditional canonical text while trying to make sense of her students' worlds adds to the qualitative body of research concerning multiculturalism. This study came from observations concerning the increasingly diverse demographic makeup of many student populations contrasted with the pool of prospective teachers, which is largely made up of white, middle class women. With this cultural divide, it might be important for teachers to receive training that helps them access their students' worlds while meeting curriculum standards and teaching traditional texts. Concerning this complex relationship between standards, the text and students' worlds, Saunders wrote:

In an historical moment that seems to reflect a reverence for the canon and the standardization of the curriculum, critical literacy offers a workable compromise: teach the expected text, but help students bridge the messages conveyed in the literature with their own experiences, interests, and the messages present around them in a whole host of media. (p. 19)

Saunders's (2012) case study focused on one pre-service teacher's experiences with using critical literacy to engage students in a variety of activities. The sample of the study was one teacher's classroom comprised of students from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds

who were placed on the regular educational track normally associated with rote memorization and standardized test preparation. Using Arthur Miller's (1953) play, *The Crucible*, as the traditional canonical work, Ms. Morgan, the teacher of interest in this case study, also incorporated poems, artwork, and music with similar themes as a way for students to engage with their own worlds—a key component in multicultural pedagogy. By including multi-modal texts in addition to the canonical one, Morgan opened up a dialogue about power, justice, and authority, a dialogue with which she was clearly uncomfortable as it caused her students to begin arguing. What Morgan failed to do regarding her multicultural stance in the classroom was to honor and consider all perspectives in the classroom. It is important to keep in mind here that Morgan was a pre-service teacher with little experience in engaging students in controversial topics. Had Morgan been given more practice, it is possible she would have been able to guide her students in more empowering discourse. Overall this study helped to reinforce the importance of teachers including a wide variety of texts in order to empower students to develop their own meaningful literacy practices.

This section of the literature reaffirms that the text is the cornerstone of the secondary English language arts classroom, even if the mode of that text changes to include more contemporary forms. Furthermore, research has clearly established that teachers have been slow to change their views on texts; in fact, many teachers still adhere to a strict canonical list of works and only narrowly use other texts to supplement canonical ones.

Text Selection and Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards

As mentioned in the first strand of the literature review, 42 states have decided to adopt the CCSS as a way to promote rigor and college readiness for all (CCSSI, 2018e). While many states have adopted the Standards and are making strides toward their

implementation, the Standards have been met with controversy since they were first presented publicly in 2010. Specifically, one of the most controversial aspects of the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects is Appendix B, which contains the Common Core text exemplars (Moss, 2013). Springen (2012) went so far as to say that since its development, Appendix B has been a “magnet for criticism” (p. 14).

The ELA standards explicitly mention in Appendix B the various genres that students are expected to read in grades 6-12: stories, dramas, poetry, and literary nonfiction. The standards mention specific sub-genres of texts as well under each main category (CCSSI, “English Language Arts Standards, Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity,” 2018c). This list, at first glance, seems to be inclusive and diverse, and it includes genres that appear to contradict the notion of a traditional literary canon. Specifically, the authors of the standards remark that the titles on these lists are merely “suggestive” and should “serve as useful guideposts” for the types of texts teachers should include in their classrooms (CCSSI, Appendix B, 2018b, p. 2). However, whether or not teachers will include works from all of the categories remains to be seen. As previous research has found, secondary English teachers tend to rely more on traditional print forms of text, specifically fiction in the form of the novel (Applebee 1974, 1993; Shanahan & Duffett, 2013; Stotsky et al., 2010). In contrast, the CCSS require teachers to branch out from these norms to include a wider variety of reading materials in their classrooms. Finally, although the text exemplars might result in teachers selecting new and different texts at various grade levels, the authors claim that the specific titles “do not represent a partial or complete reading list” (CCSSI, Appendix B, 2018b, p. 2). Moss (2013) asserted that while the authors of Appendix B are clear the works

listed on Appendix B are not a recommended reading list, many teachers, librarians, and literacy experts fear the text exemplars will become a new canon for instruction, a new national reading list.

Appendix B on the Common Core State Standards Initiative website (2018e) is completely devoted to a list of exemplar texts from various genres including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama that increase in complexity with each grade. Appendix B includes works from a variety of authors, some part of the traditional canon and others reflecting authors of color of young adult literature. As previously mentioned, the language that is used in the standards aims to clarify that these lists are merely suggestions of the type of texts that should be reading at each grade level and are not necessarily the actual texts that must be taught. However, including such a list, even as a suggestion, tends to reinforce the notion that some works are worth reading while others are not. Westbury (2008) explained the effect of the creation of official curriculum when he posited, “Whatever their format or intention, state-mandated programs of study present authoritative statements about the social distribution of knowledge, attitudes, and competencies seen as appropriate to populations of students” (p. 47).

Therefore, while it may not be the intent of the authors of the CCSS to mandate particular texts for teachers, the explicit listing of titles might function as an authoritative document for many districts and teachers, which could result in a further narrowing of the curriculum (Gilbert, 2014). Cody (2014) described this narrowing of curriculum as a homogenizing of educational materials. For example, some of the works included on the list for ninth and 10th grades under the fiction subheading are representative of a mainly white, traditional canon: *The Odyssey* (Homer, trans. 1999), *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 2012), *The*

Tragedy of Macbeth (Shakespeare, 2002), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 2006) (CCSSI, Appendix B, 2018b). While there are more current texts from multicultural or young adult perspectives, such as Alvarez's (1994) *In the Time of the Butterflies* and Zusak's (2007) *The Book Thief*, the exemplar lists tend to be dominated by traditional canonical forms. Thus, if teachers select texts based on this list, their ability to select materials that are culturally competent could be hindered, leaving certain student groups further behind in literary achievement. As Apple (2008) remarked, "What counts as core knowledge has all too often been someone's core, not everyone's core" (p. 35). Furthermore, Moss (2013) explained that exemplar texts were chosen based on merit, the work's ability to withstand the test of time, and complexity, not on student choice or student engagement, which is counterproductive to what research says about including students in the literary process (D. Miller, 2012).

Text Complexity

With the pending implementation of the CCSS, another important component of the debate concerning what type of texts teachers should include in the secondary ELA classroom is the matter concerning text complexity. Typically text complexity has not been an issue of primary concern for teachers in the past, as they have focused more on student engagement and interest (Shanahan & Duffett, 2013). As reading scores decline and student interest in literacy seems non-existent, many teachers continue to hold limited definitions of what it means to be a reader of texts (Mackey, 2014). This limited, often canonically-based reading instruction neglects to address the increasing demands on reading a variety of complex texts in the 21st century (International Reading Association, 2012). Students, if they are reading at all, are reluctant to read works that challenge them, and teachers might be

reluctant to assign them. An example of this can be seen in the most popular titles students are reading in grades 9-12 (Renaissance Learning, 2012). Out of the top 40 titles read by this student group, 27 are written at a fifth-grade reading level, which is not high enough to ensure college readiness in reading (Coleman, 2014; Stotsky, 2012). While many English teachers would be happy to hear their students are reading anything, the reality is that what students are reading simply leaves them ill-prepared to meet the rigorous demands required from the CCSS (Stotsky, 2012).

The CCSS offer a different approach to literacy in that they bring the focus back to the actual text rather than to the ways in which the reader responds to text. Rosenblatt (1995) is often cited as the first literary theorist to focus primarily on the reader and how the reader interacts and responds to the text based on his or her experiences and ability to make sense of the world. Consequently, Rosenblatt's theory of reader response has been used often in ELA classrooms over the past several decades as a way for teachers to help students engage with required reading. In contrast, the CCSS, while still maintaining the importance of the reader and his/her relationship with the text, shifted the focus of reading and literacy back to the actual texts that are most often used in the classrooms. The CCSSI (2018e) justified such a shift since many students are ill-prepared not only to read college-level texts, but they are also ill-prepared to read such texts independently.

In addition to the reader's interactions with the text, many other factors could be considered regarding text selection, yet complexity has consistently emerged as the focal point of the CCSS. As defined by the CCSS (2018), text complexity is the "inherent difficulty of reading and comprehending a text combined with consideration of reader variables" (CCSSI, Appendix A, 2018a, p. 43). Thus, the CCSS Initiative created a three-part

model by which to measure text complexity (CCSSI, Appendix A, 2018a, pp. 2-4). One key element of measuring complexity are quantitative factors, such as Lexile ranges, which measure word length and sentence fluency. A second element is qualitative factors, which rely on the teacher's ability to make informed decisions about text difficulty, language, and structure. The final element used to measure complexity is reader and task factors, which take into account the skills, prior knowledge, motivation, and complexity of the content. The creators of the standards believed these three elements provide a framework for teachers who need assistance with selecting appropriate texts for students in their classrooms (CCSSI, 2018e).

As mentioned in an earlier section of this literature review involving canonical texts, Stotsky et al. (2010) conducted a national quantitative study to determine which texts secondary English teachers are most likely to include and found that the most common texts used in 9-11 grade classrooms did not, in any way increase in complexity, nor did teachers focus on a close reading of such texts. Rather, many teachers focused on a reader response approach rather than deconstructing the language, style, or sophistication of the author's ideas. While this study has been mentioned previously, it is also included here because of its relevance to this section of the literature. It appears the authors' original intent of the study was to simply see which texts were most often used at the elementary and secondary levels, but the authors noticed a significant lack of texts that were complex, although they never described why there was a lack of these types of texts.

It is also important to recognize Stotsky et al. (2010) defined complex texts solely based on the Lexile score and did not consider thematic or content difficulty. For example, Lee's (1960) classic novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* was cited as the sixth most often read text

in classrooms, yet it only has a reading level of 5.6 (fifth grade, sixth month). Currently this text is most often taught in grade nine or 10, but according to the interpretations of results in this study, it would not qualify as a complex enough text. However, complexity here is based only on the Lexile score and not on other qualitative features, such as theme and language. This book, well known for its controversial topics involving race and civil rights in the South as well as the use of the n-word, would, more than likely, not be deemed appropriate for students in fifth or sixth grade. While it is true that students may not be reading sophisticated texts, much more is involved regarding complexity than simple vocabulary and sentence structure. This quantitative data opens up discussion as well as paves a path for more qualitative research studies to be done about why teachers may or may not choose to include difficult texts as well as how they choose not only the texts but the methods for teaching them to students. Stotsky et al.'s (2010) study also requires that more attention be given to the term complexity and how it is defined and measured.

Wilkins, Hartman, Howland, and Sharma (2010) used the Lexile Framework for Reading to analyze the college reading readiness for students in grade 11 in Texas public schools. Researchers compared the reading levels of all 265,895 students with the reading difficulty levels of 74 textbooks used in entry-level college English courses in the University of Texas system. The researchers first determined the reading difficulty of the textbooks and then calculated the percentage of students who could read at those levels. Results of the study revealed that about half of public school students in grade 11 in Texas are prepared to read at the university level. At the 75% comprehension level, 51% were able to read and comprehend 95% of the college level textbooks, while nine percent were able to read no more than five percent of the textbooks. The Lexile scores of the textbooks used in this study

were actually lower than Lexile scores from previous studies, which could suggest that even fewer students are ready for college level reading. Results from this study are limited, though, since researchers looked only for correlations and students did not actually have to apply their knowledge of reading skills to the actual textbooks. Also, the study did not take into account the possibility for improvement in reading during the senior year of high school. Although this study focused on one state, Texas, the fact that only 50% of grade 11 students were prepared for college level reading should be of concern for secondary teachers, particularly English teachers who bear most of the burden for reading comprehension instruction. Not only are students ill-prepared to read complex texts, many of them are not prepared to meet the demands of college-level reading.

Shifting the focus from college readiness to Common Core, Shanahan and Duffett (2013) conducted a nation-wide survey of high school English teachers from states adopting the CCSS and found teachers often do not assign students to read complex texts at all, or, if they do, the text is not selected because of its complexity but because of some other external factor such as availability, curriculum requirements, or student interest. In fact, many teachers assign only texts that students can read easily on their own rather than helping students to scaffold a text that might be at that student's frustration level. These findings are problematic considering that the CCSS require teachers to use complex texts in both fiction and nonfiction (Coleman, 2014). Furthermore, popular thinking about teaching reading has focused on students selecting and reading books that are at their own reading levels (Kittle, 2013; Mackey, 2014; D. Miller, 2012). In contrast, the CCSS turn this notion around and demand that teachers consistently make sure their students are reading grade level texts. The

Common Core State Standards require teachers to differentiate literacy instructional practices rather than differentiating text selection.

Shanahan, Fisher, and Frey (2012) addressed the challenge of complex texts through a descriptive analysis of text complexity and its relationship to the CCSS. Typically, complex texts were thought to impede student learning and, therefore, texts were analyzed and either accepted or discarded for their readability levels. The standards, by contrast, “propose that teachers move students purposefully through increasingly complex text to build skill and stamina” (Shanahan et al., 2012, p. 58). Instead of bypassing complex texts, teachers should help students navigate the dense vocabulary and lengthy sentence structure often found in such works. Shanahan et al. also recommended that teachers focus on the coherence and organization of complex works as well as assist students in building background knowledge.

Hiebert (2011) acknowledged the importance of text complexity in the CCSS but criticized the limited way by which complexity is measured quantitatively—Lexile scores. Therefore, his research was more a critique of the CCSS and their forms of measuring text complexity rather than an empirical study. Few studies involving the CCSS have been completed at all, and much of the research is based on content analysis of the standards as well as application of previous research studies and how they are hypothesized to support the standards. The CCSS require that students must constantly be exposed to texts of steadily increasing complexity, and this is best illustrated by a comparison of past and present Lexile ranges. For example, the old Lexile range for students in grades nine and 10 is between 960 and 1115. With the new standards, the range increases to a score between 1080 and 1335 (CCSSI, 2018e). While Hiebert did not state that measuring complexity in a quantitative way through the use of Lexiles is a poor choice, he opposed the idea of Lexiles being the only

way to determine complexity and believed “relying on a single data point can lead to unintended consequences” (2011, p. 2). For example, using only Lexiles as a way to quantitatively measure text complexity, teachers may choose texts that are too difficult for their students in theme and content, even if the sentence structure and vocabulary is quite simplistic. Through content analysis of the CCSS’s quantitative measurement of text complexity, Hiebert first critiqued current ideas about readability formulas and then proposed alternative means for measuring the complexity of specific texts. Overall, he cautioned teachers not to select texts based on quantitative data alone but to consider other tools and procedures that ensure the best possible support for student literacy.

A final study worth including in this section of the literature review is a qualitative study that focuses on student responses to complex canonical literature. This study is important because it reveals that students actually enjoyed learning from complex texts as long as learning was scaffolded and they were given time to process each work (Pike, 2002). Pike (2002) conducted a three-year longitudinal case study of 13- to 16-year-olds and their reading of canonical texts through the use of interviews, journals, questionnaires, and recordings. The aim of his research was to “examine how to foster motivated and intellectually acute readers and ameliorate negative attitudes toward poetry” (p. 361). Pike also wanted to shed light on the experiences of adolescents regarding pre-20th-century poetry and how they fit such works into their 21st century worlds. Pike found, in both the teaching of older and more modern texts, that students must bring with them their own experiences—no matter how small—if they are to understand and appreciate older, complex literature. While there is an abundance of literature on the importance of reader response when encountering a text, Pike’s study used challenging, complex texts that, at first, seem

completely removed from the students' worlds. However, the students were able to read and appreciate these difficult texts by bringing their own story to the table; in fact, Pike found that as his six participants progressed through the study, five of the six actually preferred the complex texts over the more accessible and relevant contemporary texts. His findings might be encouraging to teachers who are fearful of presenting students with complex and challenging works.

I chose to include research about text complexity in this literature review, since it is an often ignored factor when teachers choose to select texts for their classrooms. Considering complexity within the context of this study might position student reading scores and achievement at the forefront of my research. The literature discussed above highlights how students are leaving public school ill-prepared to meet the literacy demands placed on them in college and in their careers. In this study, focused on teachers and their decisions to engage students in the reading of complex texts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented literature from three strands involving curriculum development, reform, and practice. The first strand describing curriculum reform movements began from a broad perspective and provided readers with an overview of various beliefs and practices regarding curriculum and teaching throughout the past century in U.S. public schools. In the second strand of this literature review I narrowed my focus by examining teaching traditions in ELA. I offered three different ways in which ELA teachers employ pedagogy in their classrooms. I situated the participants within these different teaching traditions as a way to further the conversation about ELA teaching and curriculum development. In the final section of the literature review, I further narrowed the lens as I

described studies regarding text selection in the secondary English classrooms. This literature showed that ELA curriculum has remained fairly static in spite of the various reform movements that have occurred and continue to occur.

In the next chapter I offer a detailed explanation of the methodology and enlighten readers regarding the specifics of the narrative inquiry involving teachers and their experiences with text selection in their classrooms. I also explain the rationale for conducting qualitative research. I then describe the relevance of conducting a narrative inquiry into the text selection practices of teachers.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the details of the methods I used for the investigation. Specifically, I emphasize the research design and the rationale behind the study. I also provide insights about the assumptions I brought with me to this study as well as describe my role as a researcher. I explain the data collection and analysis procedures, limitations, and ethical considerations as well.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to examine high school English teachers' stories of experience regarding text selection in a small suburban high school in the Pacific Northwest in order to gain insight about what teachers choose to read, why they choose to read certain texts, and how their selection processes may work to improve or hinder student literacy and foster a life-long interest in reading. The unit of analysis included teachers' understandings and interactions with texts and text selection in the secondary English classroom. The following overarching research question guided this qualitative study: What are teachers' narratives of experience concerning text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom?

The goal of the study was to capture the stories of teachers in order to gain insight about text selection and its place in the secondary English classroom. Learning about this phenomenon may give teachers important information about how to improve practice and ultimately improve student literacy. In the next section, I outline specifically why qualitative research was necessary for successful completion of my unique research interests.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is defined as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals and groups attribute to a social or human problem. The qualitative research process includes an inductive approach to the research process during which research questions may emerge and from which the researcher makes interpretations about the meaning of the data through thick and rich description (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2013) further described the qualitative process by comparing it to the quantitative one, claiming that qualitative research demands that the researcher “constructs and reconstructs [her] research design” and that the process is much more “do-it-yourself” than it is “off-the-shelf” like quantitative inquiry is often defined to be (p. 3). Qualitative research does not begin with a predetermined starting point; meaning emerges throughout the process and can shift and change as the research design morphs based on the interactions, experiences, and biases of the researcher and participants.

Creswell (2013) asserted that qualitative studies must address the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a problem or phenomenon. He further claimed that qualitative researchers study such problems or phenomena through an emerging inquiry approach that focuses on “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study” (p. 44). As a qualitative researcher who was interested in how people engage in their natural settings, I was also interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and attribute meaning to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) wrote, “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Thus, qualitative research captures the

complex relationship between the researcher, the problem to be studied, the lives of the participants, and how each of these components is situated in the world.

The secondary English classroom is a complex environment in which the curriculum, teacher, and student interact on a daily basis to form a unique setting different from other secondary disciplines (Findlay, 2010). However, current educational practices often do not capture the complexities and unique nature of this relationship since education is presently driven by numbers and data in the form of standardized test scores (Ravitch, 2010, 2014). These data sets, while useful in some contexts, do not tell the stories behind the numbers, which means the human aspect of education might be neglected by policymakers and stakeholders who have decision-making power. Therefore, an in-depth examination of the secondary English classroom was necessary in order to describe instead of label or categorize the relationship between the text, the teacher, and the student. It was simply not enough to include lists of texts regarding what teachers require students to read; instead, why teachers select texts encouraged the researcher to “study things [text selection] in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). That is why studying the phenomena of text selection in the secondary English classroom demanded a qualitative approach that captured the stories of teachers and their experiences with that phenomenon. Most importantly, I believed that as a researcher and English teacher, I owed it to the profession to tell the stories of teachers through the adoption of the qualitative research process so that teachers might have their voices heard.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry was a major theoretical tradition used in this qualitative study.

While one conclusive definition of narrative does not exist, this form of inquiry involves the collection of stories from individuals and how those stories reflect experiences and shape identities (Creswell, 2013). Phillion (2002) explained that narrative is about “how people experience their lives, how they interact, how they shape, and are shaped by, the contexts in which they live and work” (p. 20). Life is understood narratively—by the stories that are lived and told—so it makes sense to understand the actions of others in this way as well (Kim, 2016). Huber, Cain, Huber, and Steeves (2013) elaborated on the importance of stories and experience and the power they hold within the lives of individuals and cultures over time:

Throughout the ages and across cultures story continues to express the fundamental nature of humanity. Stories are not to be treated lightly as they both carry, and inspire, significant obligations and responsibilities: stories must be cared for as they are at the heart of how we make meaning of our experiences of the world. (p. 214)

While stories have helped to shape the world in which we live, since the 1990s stories have been a primary way for researchers to understand the meaning behind human experience (Merriam, 2009). While many use the terms stories and narratives interchangeably, one understanding of these terms is that narratives might represent partial moments of experiences while story pays more attention to form and often has a beginning, middle, and end (Kim, 2016). More concretely, narratology includes several features, such as in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction. Narrative inquiry is also influenced by phenomenology and its emphasis on understanding lived and perceived experiences (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) further suggested that

individuals interested in narrative inquiry pose the following foundational questions: “What does this narrative or story reveal about the person and world from which it came? How can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?” (p. 115). Story is at the heart of this theoretical tradition, yet stories are always partial, incomplete, and situated (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Indeed, researchers “do not find stories; [they] make stories” (Mishler, 1995, p. 117). Haraway (2003) clarified the subjective nature of stories, claiming that if stories are always incomplete, partial, and situated, then there can be no god’s-eye view. Writing always reflects a particular viewpoint—that of the inquirer—and those texts are shaped purposefully or implicitly “by the social, cultural, class and gendered location of the author” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 17). All stories are incomplete as they are told from a particular perspective, yet stories are powerful because they are memorable and help people make sense of their lived experiences—a way to “express what we know and who we are” (Kim, 2016, p. 9).

Specifically, narrative inquiry enabled me to tell the stories about “individuals’ lived and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) poignantly described the importance of narrative and story as it relates to the ways in which humans interact and make meaning of their experiences and worlds:

We might say that if we understand the world narratively...then it makes sense to study the world narratively. For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—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)

Regarding the topic of text selection in the secondary English classroom, story appears to be an important way by which one might understand how teachers navigate the many complexities of choosing texts and developing curriculum. Telling such stories

revealed important information about pedagogical practices to a teacher audience who can in turn improve curriculum decision-making and practice.

Narrative inquiry also demands that the researcher focus on turning points and places or situations (Creswell, 2013, p. 72). Specifically, this study made use of the narrative inquiry research tradition of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) notion of narratives of experience served as the foundation on which I built this study. Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) concepts concerning experiential narratives assisted me in capturing various teachers' stories with different texts. Telling such stories about teachers and texts gave teachers more insight about what texts are being taught and how various texts function for individuals who teach at similar grade levels with a similar curriculum. To tell these stories, I adopted Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) theory of personal practical knowledge—knowledge that connects professional knowledge and professional experience with personal knowledge and experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) further elaborated about this type of knowledge when they wrote, "Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions" (p. 25). This type of knowledge encompasses experience, action, and intention (Phillion, 2002). Narrative inquiry was a valuable lens through which to gain insight about the relationship between the text, the teacher, and the student as well as give participants voice about their experiences as people and professionals.

In the next section, I outline more specifically how I designed the study. I begin by including a description of the research site and participants. I then provide an explanation of how I specifically engaged in narrative inquiry through various types of data collection and analysis.

Design of Study

In this section, I describe how I designed this narrative inquiry involving text selection. I first explain the context—the time and place—in which I conducted the study. I then clarify how I acquired the participants as well as elaborate on the qualifications I desired the participants to have if they were to participate in this study.

Context

The site of interest in this study was one public suburban high school in the Pacific Northwest. The high school of interest was located within the third largest district in the state and enrolled over 40,000 students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. Almost 52% of the students enrolled in the district were students of color. The largest student group of color was Hispanic/Latino(a) followed by Asian American. Within the student population, over 100 different languages are spoken, and 14% of students were classified as English Language Learners. The district housed over 50 different schools, including five options schools. The high school of interest for this study included one of these options schools. Specifically, the school of interest educates approximately 800 students in grades 6-12. Almost 400 of these students attend the high school. Students who attend this school are selected through an application process. At this school, 50% of the students are labeled as economically disadvantaged. Thirty-two percent of the students are Latino/Latina, 12% are Asian American, three percent are African American, and 46% are white. Almost 40% of the students are English Language Learners. Additionally, the school purposefully recruits students from typically underserved populations in order to provide a more personal, one-on-one educational experience. The identities of specific schools and participants were eliminated and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure anonymity. Pacific Coast School

District was the pseudonym used when describing the district in which I conducted this study. In addition, Pine Grove School was the site of interest during this narrative inquiry.

Participants

When conducting this narrative inquiry, I used purposeful sampling as a way to select the participants. Patton (2002) claimed that purposeful sampling requires that the researcher only select “information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 230) so that those cases will illuminate the research questions that are the focus of the study. Maxwell (2013) further expanded on the definition of purposeful sampling by establishing five goals. Specifically, his fourth goal was of most importance to the present study. It reads: “A fourth goal in purposeful selection can be to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals” (p. 98). Therefore, the participants were three teachers of grades 9-12 English, who had five or more years of total teaching experience and who taught in the suburban Pacific Coast School District. Selecting teachers who had at least five or more years of experience possibly enriched the data from the study since those teachers had more experiences with a variety of different texts, students, and educational contexts.

I selected participants that came from a variety of backgrounds, including but not limited to differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and teaching experiences. Selecting diverse participants who all shared the experience of teaching English language arts might provide rich, diverse, and complex data sets. Weiss (1994) commented on the importance of carefully selecting one’s participants in a qualitative study by clarifying that such studies do not use samples but panels—“people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are

expert in an area” (p. 17). Thus, employing purposive sampling enabled me to include a point of view that might not have otherwise been represented.

In the next section, I briefly introduce each participant as a way to provide context for the study. I introduce them here based on their years of teaching experience in the Pacific Coast School District. However, participants are also described in more depth in chapter five, where I examine more fully the lives of Georgia, Robert, and Anne within the context of the common narratives themes and the lived and told experiences of the participants.

Georgia. One of the participants in the study was Georgia, who has taught English language arts for over 25 years, making her the veteran teacher of the group. Georgia is a 50-year-old black female and Nigerian immigrant. Georgia moved to the United States when she was a teenager to finish high school and attend college. Georgia, in fact, graduated from one of Pacific Coast School District’s local high schools in the 1980s. Georgia has been a teacher in the Pacific Coast School District for over 20 years and taught at one of the larger, comprehensive high schools before being transferred to Pine Grove School since she was certified to teach dual credit composition courses. During data collection, Georgia taught all sophomore language arts classes.

Robert. Robert was another participant in this narrative inquiry about text selection. Robert is a white male in his late thirties. Robert has taught language arts for 15 or 16 years. His teaching experience had been at mostly the middle school level until he requested to transfer to Pine Grove School, where he began teaching freshman language arts. During data collection, Robert taught all of the ninth-grade language arts class and a class called Psychology of Achievement, a course meant to help struggling students learn to persevere and be successful in high school.

Anne. Anne was also a participant in this narrative inquiry. Anne is a 50-year-old white female who graduated from the same high school as Georgia, although neither Georgia nor Anne remembered each other from their high school years. Anne came to teach public school later in life after completing a Master's in Teaching degree at a local university. Before obtaining a Master's, Anne lived and taught for several years in Japan. At the time of data collection, Anne was in her fourth year of teaching public school and taught three classes: a junior level writing class, multiple sections of dual credit composition, and one section of a remedial language arts class called Read/Write Lab.

Recruitment

This qualitative study followed the protocol of the Social Science Institutional Review Board (SSIRB). This protocol was followed as a way to protect the research participants. The school district in which I conducted the study had clearly outlined guidelines to follow for those wishing to conduct research. I adhered to all guidelines as outlined by the district research coordinator. I first emailed administrators at the central office level, including the district research coordinator, in order to outline the plan for the study and ask permission to conduct the study at my high school of interest (see Appendix B). If needed, I considered recruiting participants from one of the district's five traditional high schools but was able to recruit all three participants at the site of interest, Pine Grove School. Once permission was obtained at the district level, I worked with the district research coordinator to contact building principals and gained consent. Gaining access proved to be a tedious process that involved paperwork and waiting several months before being granted approval from the district research coordinator. Because I was an employee of the district and of Pine Grove School, the school principal readily agreed to allow me to conduct the study

since my presence as an employee helped me to establish trust with gatekeepers and participants.

Upon obtaining permission from building principals, I contacted English teachers who met the following criteria: (a) have five or more years of teaching experience of any kind or grade level; (b) teach ninth, 10th, 11th, or 12th grades; and (c) show interest in participating in the research study. From this pool of teachers, I then asked for volunteers to be a part of the study. Priority was given to those volunteers who exhibited diverse traits, including diversity regarding race, gender, ethnicity, and teaching experiences.

To select the final three participants, I contacted those teachers who met the criteria at the site of interest or the other five district high schools via email with a Consent Form. The contents of the form helped to explain my role in the study as well as the purpose of my research (see Appendix A).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that an essential part of the narrative inquiry process is to negotiate consent and access as well as to establish trusting relationships with participants and others who may be involved in the inquiry process. They suggested that such negotiations are not fixed; they are ongoing throughout the entire study. For this reason, I focused on building research participant rapport by attending to their stated needs during the participation recruitment phase of the study, as well as throughout the investigation. In this way, I ensured that their participation was negotiated on an ongoing basis.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) suggested that qualitative data collection is diverse and can include multiple forms of data such as “interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely[ing] on a single data source” (p. 176). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to these

multiple forms of data collection as field texts, which can involve some or all of the following: teacher stories, autobiographical writing, journals, field notes, letters, conversation, research interviews, family stories, documents, photographs, memory boxes, artifacts, and life experiences (p. 93). I used several different field texts in order to truly capture the stories of the participants. I collected data between March and June of 2017. As needed, I returned to the participants between September and December of 2017 for further clarification. This study included interviews, classroom observations, and documents, although I relied on interviewing as my primary data collection method. The following sections briefly summarize the data sources I used: documents, interviews, and observations.

Documents

Documents refer to a wide range of “written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (Merriam, 2009, p. 139). Specifically, documents can include artifacts, photographs, letters, schoolwork, notes, graffiti, public records, private records, brochures, minutes, annual reports, and files (Patton, 2002). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that for many narrative inquirers, it is easy to forget or ignore the existence and relevance of documents since often narrative inquirers spend a bulk of the inquiry process on the relationship with the research site and participants. For the purposes of this study, however, document analysis provided rich insight into the phenomenon or culture in a way that neither interviews nor observations could. Since there are a wide range of documents involved in any inquiry field, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encouraged researchers to select documents most relevant to one’s narrative inquiry in order to help contextualize the work.

Patton (2002) explained the value of analyzing documents in a research study. He wrote, “Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observations and interviewing” (p. 294). It is also important to note that documents, while relying on the printed word, can be reinterpreted and subject to individual, group, or system changes over time. Hodder (2000) explained:

Material culture [including documents] is durable and can be given new meaning as it is separated from its primary producer. This temporal variation in meaning is often related to changes in meaning across space and culture...Material items are continually being reinterpreted in new contexts. Also, material culture can be added to or removed from, leaving the traces of reuses and reinterpretations. (p. 179)

Hodder’s explanation of material culture can be directly related to the documents I analyzed in this study. Since I was interested in text selection, I analyzed unofficial documents as needed related to my phenomenon of interest, including teacher-generated curriculum materials and course syllabi. I collected and analyzed any documents that emerged during the inquiry that helped me to contextualize my work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114).

The other official document I analyzed briefly was the list of Exemplar Texts for grades 9-12 under Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards. Access to Appendix B was gained through the Common Core State Standards website, although I did analyze the document in its entirety since some of it was unrelated to my research question. Appendix B is a document of more than 70 pages that provides a list of text exemplars and performance tasks for grades K-12 in the areas of fiction, poetry, drama, and informational texts. While this list is not exhaustive, it is still authoritative and gives importance to some texts over others. The first five pages of the document provide a rationale for the titles included on the list:

The following text samples primarily serve to exemplify the level of complexity and quality that the Standards require all students in a given grade band to engage with. Additionally, they are suggestive of the breadth of texts that students should encounter in the text types required by the Standards. The choices should serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality, and range for their own classrooms. They expressly do not represent a partial or complete reading list. (CCSSI, Appendix B, 2018b, p. 2)

Here the authors of the CCSS made it clear that the text choices are suggestions and not mandates. For my document analysis of Appendix B, only lists of texts at grades 9 and 10 and 11 and College/Career Readiness were analyzed. While all grades K-12 are included in Appendix B, I did not think it was necessary to look at texts that were outside of the high school curriculum since all of the participants were high school teachers. The Standards also provide possible activities and instructional ideas for teachers. However, these were not analyzed either, since they, too, were unrelated to my research question.

Interviews

Interviews are an essential part of the qualitative research process. DeMarrais (2004) defined an interview as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55). Interviews, unlike documents, which are many times static, and observations, which can yield enormous amounts of data, allow the researcher to enter another person’s world (Patton, 2002). Since I desired to tell the stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection in this study, interviews proved to be extremely useful. Patton concurred with this concept when he wrote, “We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (p. 341). Hence interviews are not so much about what people do; they are about what people say and how they go about expressing themselves. Weiss (1994) clarified, “Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places

we have not been and could not go” (p. 1). Thus, while I have been a secondary high school English teacher myself for over 12 years, the stories and lived experiences of the participants are not exactly like mine, which is why conducting interviews was so essential to the study.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that the way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview might shape the relationship and the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experiences. For this study, I used both an interview guide and conversational interview (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) strategy in order to have the “most flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate” (Patton, 2002, p. 342). I conducted three sets of 60-minute interviews with the three participants. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions (see Appendices C, D, and E). With this type of interview structure, guiding questions and issues drive the interview, yet the exact wording or order is not predetermined (Merriam, 2009). Patton explained that open-ended interview questions help the researcher to gather and understand the perspectives of people without influencing their responses. However, research interviews often have “an inequality about them” since the direction of the interview as well as the specific questions are often guided by the interviewer and can easily turn from interview to conversation if a prior relationship has been established (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Each 60-minute interview took place in the teacher’s classroom or a location of the teacher’s choice. I audio-recorded all interviews and compiled interview field notes and transcriptions using the AudioNote app. This app was accessed via my password-protected cell phone and allowed the user to record sound, organize recordings into files, and take notes during the recording process. The schedule for interviews comprised an initial set of interviews in early March of 2017. The second set of interviews occurred at or near the

midway point during data collection. The final set of interviews was conducted in late May or early June. The first set of interviews contained questions regarding the types of texts that teachers teach throughout the school year. I also asked questions about the teacher's history with reading and texts in his/her own life as well as in his/her professional life (see Appendix C). The second interview included questions about national and district curriculum policies and how those policies might relate to teachers and their experiences with text selection (see Appendix D). The final interview included questions based on my observations of participants' practices and what specific texts a teacher was using at a particular time. The interview included questions about assignments, approaches, feelings, and perceived failures and successes for the texts that were taught during the semester (see Appendix E). If needed, I asked for further clarification through the use of question probes (deMarrais, 2004).

Once interviews were completed with each of the participants, I transcribed the interviews verbatim by listening to the audio recording and typing what I heard into a Word document. I recorded everything I heard, including filler words, pauses, and restarts. I then provided the participants with a transcript for review and clarification. Through interviews, I was able to capture the stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection over time and space.

Observations

Creswell (2013) asserted that observation is a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research. Furthermore, observations can provide a direct and powerful way of learning about individuals' behaviors (Maxwell, 2013). A well-trained observer may watch physical settings, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and her own behaviors during the observation (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). Additionally, Merriam (2009) provided

researchers with two distinguishing qualities of observations: observations take place in a setting where the phenomenon of interest occurs naturally; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to these observations as participant observations, in which the observer also engages in content and takes field notes. Field notes are the most important method of recording what happens on any given day during any inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, I observed how teachers' choices regarding texts realistically played out in their own classrooms as a participant observer and document reflections through the use of field notes (see Appendix F).

Observations were used to gain further insights about text selection that the documents and interviews were unable to provide. Through observations, I recorded the "actions, doings, and happenings" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 79) that were central to understanding teachers and their experiences with text selection. Maxwell (2013) helped to explain the ways in which observations can provide the researcher with insight in a way that documents and interviews cannot:

Although interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's perspective, observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data. This is particularly important for getting at tacit understandings and "theory-in-use," as well as aspects of the participants' perspectives that they are reluctant to directly state in interviews. (p. 103)

For example, watching how a teacher navigated a text provided more insight or new insight about the process of text selection than the interview process was able to uncover, which directly relates to the theory-in-use aspect in the above quotation.

During my observations, I took on the role of participant observer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). While I was not actively engaged in the activities during the observation, my role as an employee of Pacific Coast School District at Pine Grove School provided me with insight to which an outsider may not be privy. For example, if a teacher discussed a text during the lesson, I was often familiar with the text, since I had access to the same curriculum as the participants.

I observed classroom practices and interviews to capture verbal and active stories of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) regarding text selection. Participants were observed three times over the course of the semester for the duration of one class period. Observations were planned strategically in order to best capture data related to my research question regarding text selection. A total of nine observations took place among participants. Observing how the teacher first processed a text before adapting or providing the students with the same text was important to describe as it related to my research question. I observed what texts and how many different texts were used as well as the language and activities that were used to frame various texts. I observed student and teacher interactions regarding the text. I compiled detailed field notes during and after all observations as well as memo-ed my thoughts during the observation process (see Appendix F). Field notes included descriptions of the environment, direct quotations, and observer comments (Merriam, 2009). I then created observation transcripts from field notes and memos as a way to capture the experiences of participants and sequences of events. Mostly, I used data collected from observations as a way to fill in potential gaps in stories of teachers and their experiences with text selection.

During my observations, it was important for me to navigate the various roles as a district employee, friend of the participant, and keen observer. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) described this complex navigation using the metaphor of wearing different hats. There is a different hat for each role as teacher, friend, and researcher, and it was up to me to make it clear which hat I was wearing so that I could adopt a position that was neither completely insider nor completely outsider (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996). Thus, it was the middle ground on which I attempted to stand as I observed from a distance (objective stance) yet was privy to insider information (subjective stance) about the ways in which the school and classroom environment functioned within the context of the observation site. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the importance of the inquirer and his or her ability in being able to move back and forth between objectivity and subjectivity. They further clarified that field texts, such as those described in this study, can help the inquirer move back and forth “between full involvement with participants and distance from them” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80).

Documents, interviews, and observations were used as primary data sources—field texts—in this study. I was most interested in how the three types of field texts worked together to form the stories of teachers. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this working together as a way by which to “fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape” and to return “the reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone” (p. 83). In the next section, I describe and summarize the data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis Procedures

A major challenge of qualitative research rests in making sense of massive amounts of data (Patton, 2002). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, “You [the researcher] must discipline yourself not to pursue everything...or else you are likely to wind up with data too diffuse and inappropriate” (p. 161). The major technique used in this study by which to make sense of my data was narrative inquiry, since this research method focuses on capturing experiences while concentrating on story as both phenomenon of study and method. Narrative inquiry was used in order to capture the stories of the participants and their experiences with text selection in the secondary English classroom. After conducting my interviews and observations and analyzing my documents, I turned my notes and transcripts from these data forms into my findings. Patton (2002) described the ambiguous nature of this process: “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe. Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer” (p. 432). Therefore, as the researcher, it was my responsibility to synthesize the relationship between the different data sets in the study so that some sense could be made from the massive quantities of data I collected.

The first set of field texts to be reviewed was information from my documents. To analyze the district approved book list and the Common Core List of Exemplar Texts for Grades 9 and 10 in Appendix B, I looked at the following components: authorship, including the race, gender, and ethnicity of the authors listed; genre, including poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and dramas; when the work was published; and whether or not the text might be considered traditional and canonical or nontraditional and multicultural. I compared these official curriculum documents to the extent to which they were used by participants in the

study as a way to frame their text selection practices. Since both lists merely list titles and authors, I made spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel where I organized my data from the documents by author, genre, and form. While Appendix B was originally a central component of document analysis, it did not manifest as being imperative to the participants and their experiences with text selection. Therefore, this document functioned as a way to give me national context about curriculum reform efforts as the researcher. However, it had little if any relevance to teachers and their daily practices, and, therefore, is not mentioned in detail in subsequent chapters.

The primary documents that proved to be most useful during this narrative inquiry were teacher-generated documents as they related to the unit of analysis. During the 2016-2017 academic school year, I compiled a folder of all documents gleaned from data collection, including emails, memos, and teacher assignments. These teacher-generated documents, however, were not analyzed individually; instead, they were incorporated into the stories of the participants based on the extent to which they helped to develop the plot of the story or answer my research question. Analyzing both official and unofficial documents helped to provide rich insight about text selection as well as provided context about how or why a text was taught.

The second set of field texts analyzed were interviews. Each interview was recorded and then listened to several times. All interviewees were given a pseudonym of their choosing before the beginning of the study, and that name was used on all interview transcriptions. Only Georgia had a preference regarding which name I used, while Anne and Robert asked me to choose and then verbally approved my choice. Each interview was

carefully transcribed and included all pauses, misspeaks, and notes about body language and gestures (see Appendices C, D, and E for Interview Protocols).

The final set of field texts to be narratively uncovered was information gleaned from my observations. During observations, detailed field notes were taken using an observation guide (see Appendix F). Using the observation guide, I described in detail what was observed and heard from the teacher as well as from students in the class. Students, however, were only observed from a distance, and student observations were based on students' interactions with the teacher, as the purpose of this study was to capture the stories of teachers. When typing up my observation field notes, I included descriptive field notes and reflective notes in the form of memos as a way to capture what I was thinking, feeling, wondering, and analyzing during the observation process.

Following this organization of data gleaned from my documents, interviews, and observations, I thoroughly reviewed all field texts several times to compile a list of common narrative themes. Four themes emerged and are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. All themes were generated from the field texts I collected and were centered on teachers and their experiences with texts and texts selection. After compiling and describing a list of common narrative themes from each participant, I reviewed common narrative themes across participants by using the “three dimensional narrative inquiry framework” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). More specifically, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative framework allows researchers to travel inward and outward, backward and forward, and situated within place. Using the framework enabled me to gain insight into the dimension of personal and social interactions, past, present, and future experiences, and context within and among common narrative themes. Using the three-dimensional narrative

inquiry framework required me to understand the meaning of storied experiences for each participant and for all participants. I examined what stories might mean for each participant when considering facets of those experiences across the dimensions of time (past, present, future); context (place and/or culture); and interaction (personal or inward as well as social or outward). It was not enough to capture what teachers' experiences were through labeling elements of story, such as setting, plot, and characters; rather I needed to inquire as to what those experiences might mean to individual participants, what they might mean when considering all participants, and why teachers chose to tell such stories. In other words, I considered how these stories related back to participants' personal practical knowledge involving text selection.

In this study, it was equally relevant to understand how there might be discrepancies between the stories teachers tell in interviews and those that they tell through their practice as teachers. Clandinin (1986) explored this concept of teachers' "images in action," in which she described how teachers' perceptions of their practices—their personal practical knowledge—either matched up with or strayed away from their actual classroom practices. In this study, it was also important for me to understand how the stories of the participants supported not only their stated beliefs and perceptions about text selection but whether and/or to what extent those beliefs and perceptions were acted out within the contexts of their own classrooms.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Miles and Huberman (1994) wrote the following concerning ethics in qualitative research: "We [researchers] must consider the rightness or wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our

colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work” (p. 288). Therefore, it was of utmost importance that I considered the biases I brought with me, the limitations of the study, and not only the ways in which I used the participants and their stories, but how I represented them at the end of the study. Creswell (2013) asserted these ideas when he claimed, “During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and to plan how these issues need to be addressed” (p. 56). Consequently, many researchers attempt to address questions of ethics through the language of reliability, validity, and generalizability. However, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) cautioned, “It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research. The language and criteria for the conduct of narrative inquiry are under development in the research community” (p. 7).

Wakefulness, Verisimilitude, and Transferability

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that narrative inquiry requires ongoing reflection and “wakefulness” due to its fluid nature (p. 184). That is—narrative inquirers must be aware of what they are doing so they can continue to define and clarify what it means to do narrative inquiry. For those who find comfort in more stable forms of inquiry, the fluid nature of narrative is often cited as one of its limitations. However, being wakeful to narrative’s limitations can help narrative inquirers to question the “living and telling of stories from the field” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 184). It is this wakefulness that enables narrative inquirers to adhere to ethical principles and consider limitations when conducting research.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) outlined several criteria to consider regarding what it is that narrative inquirers do, including adopting ideas that include verisimilitude and

transferability. Verisimilitude focuses on whether stories told and embodied seem to be real, and it emphasizes the importance of place and the field in the research text (Van Maanen, 1988) while transferability takes the focus off of generalizability in one's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this narrative inquiry, I aimed to gain insight into the research by assessing the verisimilitude of the participants' responses, especially in relation to their observed practices as well as in relation to my stories as a researcher. Regarding transferability, I aimed to draw out investigative interpretations that might lend insight to a larger group of teachers and teacher educators, rather than generalizability in findings. This narrative investigation did not label or attempt to categorize teacher behavior and practices involving text selection; rather I intended that the narratives would be read and lived vicariously by others (Connelly, 1978). These narratives about text selection functioned not as truth or Truth but as "positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit [other's] sensibilit[ies] and shape their thinking about their own inquiries" (Peshkin, 1985, p. 280). My findings did not need to represent factual accounts but they did need to be useful, informative, and "sufficiently authentic" upon the completion of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205).

Researcher Biases

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the position of the researcher when working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. They explained that in this space researchers learn "to see [themselves] as always *in the midst*—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social" (p. 63). In narrative inquiry the research space does not exist within a specified time or space, nor does the narrative end simply because the researcher officially concludes his or her study. The idea of always being

in the midst in narrative inquiry also means that the inquiry process has no clear set of rules, no marked beginning or end. Instead, the fluidity of this inquiry process suggests that relationships, purposes, transitions, and usefulness must constantly be negotiated and then renegotiated during the inquiry process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Significantly, being “in the midst” involves not only the dimensions of time and space but also that the inquirer situates his or her own stories within the context of the inquiry and the stories of the participants. Regarding the researcher’s own stories, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remarked on the importance “of acknowledging the centrality of the researcher’s own livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings” (p. 70)—essentially, acknowledging researcher biases. Thus, within this study I acknowledged the potential of my biases as a researcher to affect the study. I made use of reflective field notes to document actively my perception of my influence on the study in this respect.

As an English teacher, I have a set of specific beliefs about my classroom and how teachers should go about selecting texts. I do things in my classroom a specific way, and I believe that what I am doing is the best way. Consequently, it was at times difficult for me to objectively analyze and describe the ways in which other teachers go about selecting texts for their own classrooms without giving them advice or offering them suggestions from my experiences.

Fortunately, in qualitative research it was not important that I eliminate this perspective; rather, it was important to acknowledge possible biases in order to understand how my beliefs may influence my methodology or conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). However, as a way to account for this bias, I selected participants who taught classes that were different from the classes that I was teaching in the spring of 2017. Since I was using interviews as

one of my primary data sources and since I have strong beliefs about text selection based on my experiences as a high school teacher, it was also important for me to frame my interview questions in a way that attempted to glean rich information while at the same time allowing for participants to be open and honest. Maxwell (2013) asserted that the researcher “is always a part of the world he or she studies...[and that reflexivity] is a powerful and inescapable influence” (p. 125). Therefore, it was vital that I used questions that were general and objective as well as open-ended—questions that guided rather than controlled the interview process.

Additionally, detailed field notes helped me to move between subjectivity and objectivity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also employed the use of a critical friend in the form of my Doctoral Dissertation Supervisory Committee Chair, Dr. Candace Schlein. Through multiple writings and revisions, Dr. Schlein attended to biases in my writing and offered suggestions and ideas when I struggled to describe the participants in an appropriate manner. While careful participant selection, detailed field notes, and use of a critical friend did not eliminate biases completely, they did help me to concentrate on the impact of researcher positioning in the study while attending to the participants and their stories about teaching and text selection.

Reliability

Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006) asserted the following about reliability: “Dependability refers to whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data” (p. 275). For this study, I participated in member checking during which I had the participants check for voice and accuracy in data representation and to make sure that I captured the essence of their life stories. While members thanked me for sharing

my field texts and transcriptions, none of them asked for corrections or requested revisions or deletions. I adhered to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) ideas concerning relational responsibility as I attempted to tell stories that respected and elevated the voices of the participants and others involved in the storying process. Clandinin et al. (2006) also described the importance of co-composing field texts with participants as a way to attend to "both lived and told moments of experiences" (p. 32). Thus, through member-checking, being wakeful to issues of relational responsibility, and co-composing field texts, I attended to the multiple "I"s that were present in this narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also suggested that narrative inquirers take part in response communities during which the inquirer shares his or her writing on a work-in-progress basis. Through the process of sharing, others read my work and responded in a way that could help me retell the story in a different way. Clandinin et al. (2006) elaborated on the importance of response communities by describing how they read and reread field texts, composed notes, engaged in conversations and transcribed those conversations, wrote in pairs and trios, read work aloud to receive feedback, and rewrote and edited pieces of writing. While I did not work in a large research group like Clandinin et al. (2006), I participated in a smaller response community that employed some of the aforementioned elements with my Doctoral Committee Chair, Dr. Candace Schlein, by having her read my work and provide feedback. Since Dr. Schlein was the only other individual besides myself to have knowledge of the participants' true identities, their anonymity was guaranteed during participation in a response community.

Crystallization

The concept of crystallization was also relevant to this narrative inquiry. Ellingson (2009) explained that crystallization offers a framework for conducting qualitative research that allows researchers to examine their phenomenon of interest using multiple lenses and a variety of genres. These multiple forms and multiple genres can qualitatively change how a phenomenon is understood (Eisner, 1991).

In the study involving teachers and their experiences with text selection, I relied heavily on the stories of participants, and I constructed these stories based on interviews and observations; however, it was impossible and unnecessary for me to tell the whole story or to use every single detail gleaned from my field texts. By employing a crystallization framework, I was able to present the truth of the participants' stories not as a "single, unequivocal statement but as nuanced and complex" in order to engage "audiences with its validity, relevance, and aesthetic merit" (Ellingson, 2014, p. 442). Robinson and Hawpe (1986) referred to this notion as selectivity, which involves selecting appropriate details that helped to illuminate the argument of the main narrative thread. This is where the idea of crystallization can be beneficial, since it "depends upon segmenting, weaving, blending, or otherwise drawing upon two or more genres or ways of expressing findings" (Ellingson, 2014, p. 445). Ellingson (2014) supported the notion of using this method in narrative inquiry when she wrote, "Crystallization is ideal for constructing portraits of everyday relating because it brings together vivid, intimate details of people's lives shared via storytelling and art with the broader relational patterns and structures identified through social scientific analyses" (p. 443). Thus, as I told the participants' stories, it was important I used crystallization as a way to elevate their stories to a poetic or artistic form that enriched their

“stories to live by” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) and protected the researcher/participant relationship.

Data was crystallized through the use of found poetry as a way to elevate the voices of the participants, a primary goal of crystallization (Ellingson, 2014), or as a way to provide insight into the researcher participant relationship. Found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Richardson, 1994) is one such way I crystallized my research findings by using only the words of the participants in order to create “a poetic rendition of a story or phenomenon” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 232) and to “re-create lived experience and evoke emotional response” (Richardson, 1994, p. 521). Found poetry can also help to holistically represent what might go unnoticed in one’s research texts (Butler-Kisber, 2002).

Clandinin et al. (2006) described the increasing relevance of using found poems as a kind of interim research text. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elaborated that found poems, when functioning as interim research texts, might be “situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts” (p. 133). Butler-Kisber (2002) clarified that composing found poetry is not a linear process; rather, it is done as a way to capture the essence of a participant’s story. This means that the researcher will carefully choose the words, syntax, line breaks, and pauses that are necessary components of all poetry in order to showcase or illuminate a narrative thread.

Another type of crystallization method that helped to illuminate the complex relationship between the researcher and participants was to construct dream-like, reflective, imaginative writing that helped to reveal my feelings toward the research participants. Phillion (2002) referred to this type of composing through her own example of imaginative writing entitled “Koto to pan” in which she attempted to grasp the transition that took place

regarding her feelings toward her participant, Pam. Phillion explained that in composing this piece she might uncover subjectivity masked as objectivity—the piece was composed as a way to add transparency, not only to her inquiry regarding multicultural narrative inquiry, but to herself as a researcher with her own biases and unstated agendas and perceptions about her phenomenon. Similarly, Schlein (2018) made use of a dream story to underscore her findings in connection to her researcher-participant relationship, and the dream story was then manipulated for use as metaphors to drive the study forward. Thinking about Phillion’s (2002) and Schlein’s (2018) dream stories within the context of this study encouraged me to listen more carefully to the participants as they shared their stories. Dream stories and imaginative writing demanded that I allow the participants to express themselves even if those expressions did not match completely with my preconceived ideas about text selection. Composing imaginative texts that showed my growth and change as a researcher before, during, and after the inquiry process helped to crystallize the fluid nature of my position as a researcher as well as influence the ways in which I understand teachers and their experiences with text selection.

Ethical Considerations

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that ethical matters need to be addressed throughout the entire narrative inquiry process. Ethics are not dealt with “once and for all” simply because forms are filled out and university approval is gained (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170). Ethical matters can change and shift over time as one moves through his or her narrative inquiry. While it is impossible to consider every possible ethical matter that may arise in a study, it is important to clarify matters concerning participants and their privacy,

gaining access and establishing trust, and protecting and securing collected data throughout the inquiry process.

Protecting participants. While this study had several limitations, I attended to the following ethical considerations before, during, and after I conducted the research. First, The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) was published in the United States as a way to provide specific mandates regarding research involving human participants. The Belmont Report mandated that researchers show respect for persons, including that participants have an understanding of the research conducted and the goals of the study. The Belmont Report also demands beneficence, which refers to the researcher's responsibility to consider the risks of his or her study, and justice, which mandates fair procedures instead of those done out of convenience (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Thus, first following the criteria established by The Belmont Report ensured that the study followed protocol and ethical procedures. I next describe specifically how this study adhered to The Belmont Report.

Gaining access. Creswell (2013) asserted the importance of establishing ethical considerations during all parts of the research process, not just during data collection (p. 56). Therefore, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri-Kansas City prior to undertaking the study to ensure that this inquiry met ethical guidelines and protected the participants (Patton, 2002). In addition to gaining SSIRB approval, Creswell (2013) reminded researchers that they need to seek appropriate permission from both their participants and authority figures:

Researchers need to seek permission to conduct research on-site and convey to gatekeepers and individuals in authority how their research will provide the least disruption to the activities at the site. The participants should not be deceived about the nature of the research, and, in the process of providing data... should be appraised on the general nature of the inquiry. (pp. 57, 60)

Therefore, I also sought permission for my research from the targeted school district and the relevant school principals in addition to Pacific Coast School District's Research Coordinator (see Appendix B). I recruited participants via email and supplied them with a Consent Form (see Appendix A). Participants were notified that they might withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were also made aware they retained the right to review information and make corrections or seek deletions of information about them.

Securing the data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that anonymity of participants is a concern during the entire narrative inquiry process and must sometimes be redefined and negotiated. Kawulich (2005) asserted that a researcher must ensure anonymity of participants to make certain their identities are not revealed. Thus, participants' identities need to be constructed in a way that readers or those from the community will not be able to recognize. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, I allowed them to choose their own pseudonyms before beginning my official inquiry and immediately after they had signed their consent forms agreeing to be a part of this study. Only Georgia cared to have an active role in her name selection process, while Anne and Robert asked me to choose a name and then verbally approved that choice. Anne did not approve the first choice but did approve the second. I did my best to respect the anonymity and privacy of the participants by listening to their suggestions and voices before, during, and after the study.

I saved all document analysis, interview transcriptions, and field notes onto a password-protected flash drive. All files were backed up using an additional password-protected flash drive. I accessed files from this flash drive from a personal password-protected computer. Any hard files were stored in a locked drawer at my home office. All files, both hard and electronic, will be saved for five years. After that time, electronic files will be deleted from the flash drives and hard files will be shredded. All names were changed to pseudonyms throughout my raw data. My supervisor, Dr. Candace Schlein, and I were the only people with potential access to my raw data.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the need for this narrative inquiry involving text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom. I explained in detail my rationale for both qualitative research and specifically, for conducting a narrative inquiry. I proposed that narrative inquiry enabled me to focus on the experiences of the participants and to attend to their stories of experience so that I might respect the unique voices of the teacher participants as they explained their interactions with the phenomenon in the study. Additionally, I carefully outlined the context of the study, participant selection and recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. I highlighted possible limitations of my investigation and indicated measures I used to protect the participants and secure my data.

In the next chapter, I include the data analysis from this narrative inquiry and describe the four narrative themes that emerged from the analysis. Then I explore the narrative themes as they emerged for the three participants: Anne, Robert, and Georgia. I describe how each participant's experiences helped to define each of the four common narrative themes. I then explain how themes developed across participants.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS: COMMON NARRATIVE THEMES

In this chapter, I explore the themes that emerged during the data analysis of the three participants and their experiences involving teaching and text selection. I begin by explaining how my common narrative themes developed during data analysis as well as provide the language by which to describe each theme. Next, I describe the participants' stories of experience in relation to four common narrative themes that I uncovered from among the data. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of each theme and its development among participants.

Common Narrative Themes

During the course of data analysis, four common narrative themes were uncovered across the participants' narratives of experience. In reviewing interview transcriptions and detailed notes from observations, I looked for patterns as repeated stories of experiences within and across participants to identify common narrative themes. Four different narrative themes were uncovered in this manner. Theme one included books that teachers use to make connections, either with other texts, other students, or the world in which they live. I describe this theme as "Texts that Connect." Another theme led me to texts that function as tools for learning and developing student literacy skills. This theme I describe as "The Text as a Tool." A third theme that developed was "Texts that Engage." This theme included books that were all about student interest and engagement. A fourth theme categorized texts that teachers see as important or authoritative. I describe this theme as "Texts with Authority." Every theme developed differently for each of the participants, Anne, Robert, and Georgia. The themes proved to be multifaceted and complex as I began to explore the unique

experiences of the teacher participants. In the following pages, I first explore each participant by highlighting in more detail than presented in chapter four some of their experiences with life and teaching. Later, I explore each theme and the various complexities and stories that helped to develop these themes so that this narrative inquiry about text selection will not only elevate the voices of the participants but prove to be relatable for teachers of English language arts.

Anne

In this section, I describe and explore the experiences of one of the participants, Anne. Anne is an English language arts teacher at Pine Grove School, where she teaches juniors and seniors. Anne is a 50-year-old white female. Throughout her teaching career, Anne has taught overseas in Japan, and she has also taught art in addition to the upper-level writing courses at the small high school situated in the third largest district in the state. Her public school teaching experience has taken place at Pine Grove School with the exclusion of student teaching.

During each of our interviews, Anne carefully and thoughtfully considered each question. She answered slowly, stopping often to ask for clarification. Regarding her answers to my questions, it was evident that she wanted to be right (although I told her there is no such thing in narrative inquiry); she wanted to be precise, and she also wanted to help me with the study (field notes, March 16, 2017). Anne teaches the upper classmen at a tiny high school in a district with 40,000 students. We chat nearly every day about teaching and about our lives, but when I turned on the microphone to record her, her tone often changed to that of someone aware she is being recorded. I told her to relax and she laughed, but throughout our interviews she remained aware. Often after I stopped recording during our interviews or

after I left her room during an observation, she later would ask, “Did I do okay? Did you get what you needed?” (informal conversation, March 15, 2017).

Anne has been in the high school English language arts classroom for a little over four years. Anne’s total teaching experience, however, includes over 10 years of teaching a variety of subjects, such as middle school art and conversational English. She also served as an instructional assistant at Pine Grove School before moving into her own classroom. She has been at her current school in some capacity for over six years. Her life before becoming a certified teacher is filled with a range and diversity of experiences—both in life and in teaching.

Anne related to me that she had graduated from college with an undergraduate degree in literature, and she had wanted to pursue creative writing or teach literature at a university. Anne explained that she has always loved literature, especially British literature, and that she has a fondness for *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, 1847). Anne described her creative writing as sentimental, something that a person might encounter while “watching a *Lifetime* movie” (personal communication, May 12, 2017). However, after graduating from college, Anne soon got married and moved to Japan with her husband, where she began teaching in a language conversation school with classes of five or fewer students. During this time, she also taught private lessons in English conversation, where her students’ ages ranged from three years to 94. While in Japan, she started working at a junior college, teaching students how to speak English and incorporating literature as well. This teaching experience was more like a traditional English language arts class in the United States. In between her two stints in Japan, Anne acquired her first Master’s degree in literature.

A divorce brought Anne back stateside permanently and forced her to decide if teaching was a career she actually wanted to pursue. In Japan, she had been teaching out of necessity while her husband pursued his career goals. In our first interview, she claimed, “I still wasn’t even sure I wanted to be a teacher as a career” (interview, March 14, 2017) but with the promise of being able to teach literature and writing instead of ESL classes, she enrolled in a Master’s in Teaching program at one of the local universities. While Anne taught in Japan for about five or six years—she cannot remember the exact number—(interview, March 14, 2017) her teaching stateside has been solely in the Pacific Coast School District. With the exclusion of her student teaching, Anne has spent her teaching career at her current school, where she has served as an instructional assistant, art teacher, and writing teacher. When describing her current feelings about teaching, Anne stated, “I realized once I started teaching more what I loved that I would be happier” (interview, March 14, 2017). Regarding her enjoyment of teaching her juniors and seniors, Anne revealed that she loves being “able to help them” and enjoys seeing “the growth that they show over a year” (interview, March 14, 2017).

In our interviews and during my classroom observations and even during my personal conversations with Anne, it was clear that living and teaching in Japan is an experience that has shaped her personally and professionally. She talked about her time there often and how it helped to shape her love for teaching and working with a variety of students (interview, March 14, 2017). She often mentioned living in Japan during informal conversations we had as well. She is well aware of cultural differences and often speaks about the sense of community she felt while living overseas. This sense of community is something that Anne often referenced when comparing the values of her American students, who often focus on

individual achievement and success. In contrast, Anne fosters this sense of community in her classroom by engaging her students in purposeful conversation and work (field notes, April 12, 2017).

“Texts that Connect.” The first theme that includes texts that helps students make connections either to their lives, other works, other people, or the world in which they live. However, the specifics of how the text is a connector differed among Anne, Robert, and Georgia based on their personal experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning. In Anne’s case, I explore how the theme of “Texts that Connect” emerged based on her experiences with teaching and text selection.

Anne’s experiences teaching in Japan might be related to her beliefs about how a text should connect to the lives of her students. Several times Anne spoke about students and their cultures and how she tries to select texts that will connect to those cultures. Anne’s time in Japan has given her a heightened awareness regarding the importance of respecting cultural differences. In many of our conversations when Anne spoke of Japan, she dropped her American accent and pronounces a word where she stresses the syllables similarly to a native Japanese speaker (observation, May 15, 2017). Anne’s student population is quite diverse, as is the population of the entire high school, whose mission is to recruit underrepresented populations. The school population includes a significant number of students of color as well as students who are navigating poverty. Anne described a recent memory where she took her senior classes to visit a local university for a field trip. After the field trip, Anne recalled she was sharing about her day with her two young sons by showing them pictures of the field trip and of her students. As she scrolled through the pictures, Anne said she was struck by how

amazingly diverse the student population was and later shared these observations with me (personal communication, May 15, 2017).

Anne's awareness of her students' cultures to an extent shaped how she used texts in her classroom. Anne developed a book club lesson for her Writing 121 students, a year-long dual-credit course through one of the local universities. The course required students to read nonfiction and to write in several rhetorical modes. When thinking about which texts she would select for this book club, Anne considered a variety of criteria. Specifically, she related that a selection priority was whether or not her students would be able to connect to the text. Two titles Anne included were *Spare Parts* (Davis, 2014), the story of four undocumented teenagers who enter a robotics competition, as well as *We Are Americans* (Perez, 2009), another work that tells the stories of 16 young, undocumented immigrants and their pursuit of the American dream. Anne explained that "they both deal with Hispanic communities... Well, with immigrant communities. And since we have a high population of Hispanic students..." (personal communication, interview, May 23, 2017). She did not finish her thought here, but she implied that her immigrant students were drawn to a text because it connected to them culturally. Another text on the book club list was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Skloot, 2011), which tells the story of an African American woman whose body is used for scientific research without her knowledge. This text tells the story of a woman who was underrepresented and taken advantage of because of her race, and Anne selected it because she thought students might be able to connect to certain aspects of the text because of their own experiences with underrepresentation.

Anne recalled one female student who talked about how much she related to the text because of the immigration aspect in the book during a book club discussion over the text

Spare Parts (Davis, 2014). The student, Monica (pseudonym), kept saying how similar she was “to this one character in the book” (interview, June 20, 2017). In fact, Monica described feeling connected to all of the characters, but one character really made her relate to what she was reading. Anne stated that this is what she loves to hear, which is why she spends time “making sure it [her book choice] reflects our population” (interview, March 14, 2017).

Another way Anne used the text as a connector was by making sure that the text connected to student interests. The school at which Anne teaches strives to provide opportunities for students to take STEM classes. Students choose to pursue a health or engineering track by the end of their freshman year. Knowing this, Anne carefully chose books that would reflect the interests of her student population. She did, however, find it difficult to find a multi-modal text about engineering that would engage students. She met these criteria through the texts *Spare Parts* (Davis, 2014), *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Skloot, 2011), and *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (Roach, 2004), which also had connections to the health care and science fields. Anne explained her desire to select works that would connect not only to students and cultures but their individual interests as well.

For Anne, finding texts that connect was an important theme that developed during my data collection. Anne’s experiences with teaching and text selection revealed that she thinks carefully about how she might bring in texts that connect to students’ cultures and interests. The way in which this theme developed for Anne revealed that she often thinks about her students first.

“The Text as a Tool.” Another theme that developed during data analysis was “The Text as a Tool.” For Anne, viewing “The Text as a Tool” to enhance instruction was a

strength. “The Text as a Tool” theme was made explicit during Anne’s observations and interviews as well as during my daily interactions with her. Specifically, Anne did not start with the text when she planned lessons for her junior and senior writing classes. Instead, she began with the overarching idea or skill that she believed students needed and then built her lessons, selected texts, and collected or created materials from there. Anne’s belief that “The Text is a Tool” was further supported by the goals that she had for her students, as well as the ways she viewed her role as a teacher. Anne explained that she wanted her students to be “critical thinkers” and to become “stronger writers” (interview, March 14, 2017). She also claimed that she wanted to “challenge the students in order to get them to figure things out on their own” (interview, March 14, 2017). Thus, the text functions as a tool so students can “see for themselves what different narrative techniques or argumentative techniques are and then get them to try applying them to their own work [since]...it’s more valuable if they are discovering it [the skill] for themselves” (interview, March 14, 2017).

Believing the text to be a tool was not something Anne originally envisioned for her classroom. She explained that when she first visualized teaching, she understood text selection as a way of:

bringing in texts that were important to [her] and having them...having the students talking about them [the texts] and writing about them...But, I’ve never taught that way since I’ve been here [at Pine Grove]. It’s just not the reality of what these students need. (interview, March 14, 2017)

Anne’s statement suggested that she viewed text selection as a process that would primarily reflect her own interests or her love of specific pieces of classical literature. Anne’s comment also indicated that she was well aware that her student population, many of whom were immigrants or will be first generation high school graduates, did not need to read texts based

on a teacher's agenda and interests. Instead, students needed to know how to master certain literacy skills in high school and beyond, which was why Anne's beliefs were so dominant regarding "The Text as a Tool" theme.

When thinking about selecting texts that could be used as tools, Anne often implemented backwards planning. She would usually "choose a text that will fit the purposes [she has] for it" (interview, March 14, 2017). She clarified that she asks herself "What skills do I want them to come out with? What's the best approach to it?" (interview, March 14, 2017). Consequently, numerous times throughout each interview, Anne's answers to almost all of my questions tied back to her beliefs that the text first and foremost should be selected because of the purpose it fulfills. The other functions of a text were often secondary for Anne. Therefore, when Anne started thinking about what she wanted to teach, she first thought about the skills that she wanted her students to acquire, and she then found texts in a variety of modalities to fit those skills. I observed Anne teach argument writing and facilitate coming of age book clubs during my data collection. Both units of study were rooted in the skills she wanted students to gain. The text was simply a tool that students might use to help them acquire those skills. For example, during the argument writing unit, Anne developed various text sets that were used to teach students how to structure arguments, use sources, develop nuanced claims, and write compelling argument essays of their own. Anne had students read from a variety of texts about teens and technology, teens and sleep, and automation as a way to help them acquire the skills needed to develop sound, reasonable arguments (observation, April 11, 2017).

Anne also developed her book club unit around the skills that she wanted her students to acquire, thus further solidifying her beliefs that "The Text is a Tool." First, Anne decided

that she would thematically select books under the topic of Coming of Age. Anne then selected the text *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) as her mentor text as a way to teach students about author's craft, language use, symbolism, and theme. *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) is a short young adult novel about Brent, a high school student who abuses alcohol and drives recklessly in an attempt to end his life after a dramatic, public break-up. However, his irresponsible behavior ends with him killing a stranger, forcing Brent to claim responsibility for his actions. In our first interview, Anne explained why she chose *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) as her anchor text for student book clubs:

Well the anchor text for the 120 book club is *Whirligig*. And so they're [*Whirligig* and the other book club books] both Coming of Age novels. So I wanted to tie directly to it [the Coming of Age theme], so when I'm discussing...well, when I give them something to do with book club and I want them to approach it in some way, I can refer back to *Whirligig*. So remember in *Whirligig* where Brent, in the beginning of the book that his character was this way and then at the end it was this way...Do you see that happening in your book? So maybe in your journals be focusing on that and be having that one of the areas you focus on. (interview, March 14, 2017)

Ideally, students would anchor their thinking by using the text *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) as a tool, which, according to Anne, would be "accessible to them" and allow them "to wrap their heads around the concepts" (interview, March 14, 2017). Students then used *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) to analyze these same features in the works they had selected for book clubs. Anne structured her book club unit in this way since "the main purpose [was] to build those skills. The critical thinking skills around those. Their writing about them as well. And, of course, the reading skills that are attached to all those things [author's craft, language, symbolism, theme]" (interview, June 20, 2017). Anne used *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) as a tool that was not only an approachable text, but a text that enabled students to become

stronger, more analytical readers and writers and then apply those literacy skills to other works in other contexts.

For Anne, the texts that she selected for her classroom were tools that students could put in their tool box to become stronger readers, more careful writers, and better critical thinkers. While what students read in Anne's class was important, it did not seem to be as important as the skills they needed to master concepts and succeed in high school writing class and beyond. Thus, "The Text as a Tool" theme appeared to carry more weight in Anne's class than the other reasons a teacher might decide to select a text for his or her classroom.

"Texts that Engage." Another prominent theme that emerged from the data collection was the way in which teachers select texts or alter their selection practices in order to engage students. All three participants spoke about the importance of viewing the text as an engager. For Anne, a text's ability to engage her students was the second most prevalent theme among her narratives out of the four that developed during the narrative inquiry.

After thinking foremost about purpose regarding text selection, Anne spoke often about the importance of engaging her students with the texts she selects. For Anne, engagement meant that students should be interested in what they are reading so they have a desire to master the reading and writing skills that Anne believed were important. One way Anne helped to engage students with the text was by offering "a lot of differentiation for students in terms of text choice. Also, using some young adult literature and not focusing on the canon" (interview, May 23, 2017). Anne often had her students select their own texts from the classroom library that both the district and her own finances helped her to create. Anne also fostered choice via text selection by having students participate in book clubs,

where they chose from a list of 10 to 15 texts that shared a common theme. Both choice reading and book clubs were the primary ways by which Anne attempted to engage her students.

Anne hoped that the texts she selected would engage students, but she also explained that selecting texts to engage her classes was a trial and error process. Therefore, Anne paid careful attention to her students and the ways in which they responded both verbally and nonverbally to reading different works. Seeing and hearing her students enjoy and engage with texts was a source of satisfaction for Anne. Anne recalled a time when her seniors provided her with unsolicited feedback about how much they enjoyed their nonfiction book club books. A group of senior boys enthusiastically discussed one of the book club choices, *The Boys Who Challenged Hitler* (Hoose, 2015). This text is about a group of young boys who were living in Denmark under German occupation during World War II. Angry and frustrated that their country did not resist German occupation, this young group of boys formed the Churchill Club, which set in motion the beginning of a national resistance. Anne explained that while the book is not extremely complex, she knew it would be engaging and many of her students expressed interest in reading war books. In fact, the group of young men reading *The Boys Who Challenged Hitler* (Hoose, 2015) were so engaged with this text that they sang one of the songs from the book spontaneously at first, and then later during their presentations. This anecdote is just one of several that Anne described as she talked passionately about student engagement and text selection (interview, May 23, 2017).

Regarding the theme of “Texts that Engage,” Anne also explained that sometimes it was difficult to motivate students when they were not engaged and that at times it took a while to match a text to a student. In fact, many times the success of a unit of study was

dependent on whether or not the students found the text to be engaging. Anne explained that many of her students were unable to select texts on their own that engaged them. Often, they selected a text because of its length or because of their perception that the text was an easy read. Therefore, Anne frequently found herself visiting with students and checking in with them to make sure that they were reading books that engaged rather than bored them.

Anne's experiences with "Texts that Engage" was a prominent theme that emerged during data collection with Anne. However, a student's engagement with a text seemed to function more as a byproduct or end result of a lesson or unit. Anne did think about engagement before a lesson started, but for Anne the success of a lesson or unit rested on whether or not students visibly and audibly were engaged with what they were reading.

"Texts with Authority." An additional theme that was uncovered during my data analysis with Anne was the way in which she articulated her feelings about the authority of texts. In Anne's view, a text was important or worthy of being used in her class not because it was part of the canon or because it had been a part of traditional ELA curriculum; rather Anne gave authority to a text when it was suggested by an expert or recommended by a published author or district level employee whose job was to guide teachers through the district's ELA curriculum adoption. Numerous times throughout all three interviews, Anne mentioned trainings or workshops to which she had gone. She often talked about reading and writing experts, such as Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher, and Mary Ehrenworth, in a way that revealed that she admired these people and trusted them to provide her with materials and texts that she might be able to use in her classroom (interviews, March 14, 2017; May 23, 2017; June 20, 2017).

During two of my observations, I observed Anne implement a book club with her students (observations, May 15, 2017; June 6, 2017). This class is called Writing 120 and is the junior level English class at the high school. Anne taught only one section of juniors and spent most of her time with the seniors. I found out later that this was her first time using a book club in her classroom. As I sat in her room, I listened to her describe 13 different Coming of Age novels to her small class of 11th grade students, mostly boys. Some of the titles she spoke about were *Girl in Translation* (Kwok, 2010), *Paper Towns* (Green, 2008), *Winger* (Smith, 2013), *The Glass Castle* (Walls, 2005), and *Fallen Angels* (Myers, 1988). As I observed her introduce book club books, I jotted down field notes, which are summarized in the remainder of this paragraph. Before she began describing each book, she told students, “I will need you to list your preferences to at least seven because the smallest book club I want is three people” (observation field notes, May 15, 2017). As she said this, the students stared blankly at her, waiting for Anne to begin describing each book. As a book lover, I was excited to hear about each title, but I could not tell if her students felt the same way based on the looks on their faces (field notes, May 16, 2017). I asked her about the personality of the class later on. Anne laughed and said the class has a “funky dynamic” that does not translate into the sense of community that Anne feels she has established with her senior classes (interview, June 20, 2017). Anne described the first five books on the list before a student chimed in to reveal that she, too, had read *Paper Towns* (Green, 2008) and that she had really enjoyed it. Her comment encouraged another boy, who had also read the book, to briefly describe the importance of the book’s title. With each book talk, Anne was sure to point out “the pretty little silver [or] gold circles” on each book, which indicated the book had won some type of award, making the book, in Anne’s opinion, “well-written” (observation, May

15, 2017). She did this for several of the titles, including *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005), *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003), and *Speak* (Anderson, 2011). For Anne, one way a book functioned as an authority was if it had received an award or some type of outside distinction.

As I listened to Anne describe each book, it was clear that she had read only a couple on her list, and she was obviously more connected to those books. She spoke with fondness about *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, 1847) and *The Namesake* (Lahiri, 2003). Her passionate description caused one or two students to write down these titles on their lists, but not enough students wrote them down to form a book club. Describing these two titles was one of the rare instances in which Anne viewed herself as the authority regarding texts and text selection. Specifically, she included these two titles because she herself had read them and thought they might provide a complex and sophisticated choice for some of her students who might want to challenge themselves. Later, during our final interview, I asked Anne explicitly about how she arrived at the final version of her book club list. She explained:

I just started finding what novels would work [for *Coming of Age*]. What ones did I already know about? And then I was just looking online for others. Talking to the librarian. I talked to you about it as well....I wanted to give them a lot of choice. (interview, June 20, 2017).

Anne's statement suggested that she does not consider herself to be the sole expert when it comes to choosing texts for her classroom, as she referenced other people and resources she consulted before deciding on a final list. For Anne, being an authority on texts is a shared experience. In fact, Anne's desire to have her students participate in a book club in the first place stemmed partly from her desire to adhere to district curriculum expectations. Regarding her decision to use book clubs in her classroom, Anne revealed during an interview that they are "something the district is wanting us to incorporate into our reading

programs.” In a different interview, Anne again talked about the influence that district-level authority had on her text selection practices:

You know, I’ve been using the district recommendations for book clubs and for the [classroom] libraries they provided to guide a lot of the choice books. But that hasn’t been because I feel that I need to. It’s more because they [the district] have spent time getting specialists to make those choices. And so I know that [the books] are geared more towards what my students will enjoy reading. (interview, May 23, 2017)

From this statement, Anne further revealed the faith that she puts into the “specialists” hired by the district to help her with her text selection. The importance of authorities outside one’s self is an idea that manifested multiple times throughout my interactions with Anne. Anne’s views of “Texts with Authority” developed primarily from her personal experiences with in-district trainings and professional development. While Anne does in some ways have the final say over which text she decides to include or exclude in her classroom, it certainly appears as though she values opinions from experts—such as Kelly Gallagher and Penny Kittle—who have published educational works about reading and writing instruction. Anne’s experiential stories displayed that the district’s curriculum adoption and text selection practices will also work for her own students, and she appears to trust those outside of her classroom context sometimes more than she trusts her own teacher gut (summarized from field notes, May 24, 2017).

In this section, I described how the theme of “Texts with Authority” emerged for Anne regarding her text selection practices. Anne often selected text based on her attendance at district training or from expert recommendations. In the next section, I introduce another participant, Robert, and capture some of his experiences with teaching and text selection.

Robert

In this section, I begin with a biography for Robert. I describe some of his experiences and beliefs about teaching and then explore how Robert's experiences helped to define the themes of this narrative inquiry.

Robert is a white middle-aged male and the only male in the four-person English department at Pine Grove School. He teaches freshman English language arts down the hall and around the corner from me, so my daily interactions with him are minimal. We teach different grade levels, meaning our paths rarely cross. When I asked him if he would be interested in being a part of this study, he agreed as long as I promised I wasn't going to "tell him how to teach" (informal conversation, March 6, 2017).

Robert's narratives showcased that he is a confident educator who truly cares about his students. These students are at the center of Robert's life both inside and outside of the classroom. During my interviews, he often took notes and spoke enthusiastically about his role as an ELA teacher and his experiences and expertise surrounding text selection in his classroom. My observations of his eighth period class revealed him to be an engaging and dynamic educator who made teaching look easy as he effortlessly moved his 35 ninth graders from one literacy-based task to the next.

Robert is a veteran teacher, and he has spent most of his 15- or 16-year teaching career (he cannot remember exactly how long it has been) in the Pacific Coast School District. Most of Robert's teaching experience has been at the middle school level in seventh and eighth grades. Robert spent the first half of his career at a local middle school that he described as a "pretty typical Pacific Coast school" (interview, April 7, 2017). I asked him what he meant by this, and he explained that the majority of the student population was full

of “middle class, upper middle class. Lots of home owners...and by and large, not very high needs kids” (interview, April 7, 2017). While he was teaching there, Robert taught an intervention class of about 15 students who were not being successful in mainstream classes. The next year he was hired as a seventh-grade humanities teacher, a position that blends English language arts curriculum and social studies. Robert related to me that after nine years, he had grown tired of the school and he had heard about a science-based options school that would be opening during the next academic year. However, in its first year as a school, only sixth, ninth, and 10th grades were offered. Sixth grade, according to Robert, was too young, so he opted to teach ninth grade humanities. After a year, he moved back down to teach seventh grade until two years ago, when he moved back to teaching freshman English. During our first interview, Robert explained his rationale for moving back up to the high school level: “there was a massive failure rate of...kids in freshman year, particularly in freshman English. And so, I just wanted to do something about that so that’s why I moved to the ninth grade. And I adore it” (interview, April 7, 2017).

Currently, Robert teaches four sections of freshman language arts, and he also teaches a class called Psychology of Achievement. This is an intervention class for freshmen who are identified during their eighth-grade year as students who might struggle to pass their classes in high school and who do not have additional support in the form of an IEP or ELL class. Robert described this class as “part organization, part catch-up, and part believing in yourself” (interview, April 7, 2017). From my interactions with Robert during both interviews and observations, it seems that Robert loves his job and he believes he is a highly proficient educator who can help to empower his students. He enjoys teaching freshmen. Robert explained his enthusiasm and love for his students during our first interview:

I find that some freshmen are at this...amazing place where they realize that it [school] counts now. They just think they're a lot older than they are. But they're not jaded yet, right? At the same time they, like, can handle...you can give them sex and drugs and those types of [topics]...I really felt my passion for teaching has been reinvigorated by teaching freshman language arts. (interview, April 7, 2017)

Robert's love for his students and passion for his job was evident throughout data collection. His enthusiasm manifested throughout all four of the common narrative themes. In the next sections, I explain Robert's experiences and how those experiences developed each theme.

“Texts that Connect.” One of the themes that manifested during Robert's data analysis concerned how he selected “Texts that Connect.” Robert's experiences were somewhat different than Anne's regarding this theme, although they did have similar beliefs about the importance of a text and its connection to individual students. In addition, Robert explained the importance of a text's relevance extending beyond the language arts classroom and into other subject areas and classes. Possibly his experiences co-teaching and working as a humanities teacher helped to foster this thread. Robert also selected and used texts in his classroom as a way to connect to different types of students and their various skill levels.

One of the main ways the “Texts that Connect” theme developed for Robert was the importance of individual students connecting to the texts they read. Maybe this is why I observed an emphasis on choice reading and book clubs during my time in Robert's classroom in addition to the traditional whole-class text study. Robert seemed to be very dedicated to finding books that connected with all of his students, and it is possible that is why he often had students write down books they would like for him to purchase for his classroom library. In addition, he sometimes had students get up in front of the class and talk about a book they were currently reading so that his students were exposed to more and more

books of all kinds. Robert also used book clubs as a way for students to connect to a variety of different texts. During two of my observations, students were working in book clubs (observations, April 11, 2017; May 25, 2017). I asked Robert how he had gone about selecting texts for this unit of study, and he stated he tried to include a variety of different genres and authors so that all students might be able to connect with at least one book on the list. While Robert explained that he is personally drawn to the bildungsroman genre, he wanted to include a wider variety to match the needs and interest of his students: “I wanted to make sure I had some fantasy. I wanted to make sure I had some SciFi. I wanted to make sure, you know, girl gets cancer” (interview, April 7, 2017). Robert stated that he wants students to select from a variety of texts in order to connect to their book club selections. *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006), *The Things They Carried* (O’Brien, 1990), *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Saenz, 2012), *I’ll Give You the Sun* (Nelson, 2014), *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Asher, 2007), *The Martian* (Weir, 2011), *Station 11* (Mandel, 2014), *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (Ness, 2008), *Winger* (Smith, 2013), *Ready Player One* (Cline, 2011), *Wintergirls* (Anderson, 2009), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999), and *Everything, Everything* (Yoon, 2015) were just some of the titles Robert offered to students. Even when Robert used a novel that the whole class had read, he still thought about how students might connect to the work. For example, Robert specified that he began the school year with some type of work by Sherman Alexie because

“he’s super accessible. I typically start the year with *Flight* (Alexie, 2007a) or [*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007b)]. With *Part-Time Indian*, I like to start the year because he swears, he talks about sex, he’s funny, and so, it’s just a good entry point” (interview, May 19, 2017)

Whether it is through individual recommendations, book club lists, or whole class book studies, Robert carefully selected texts that connected to each and every student.

Another way that Robert used the text as a connector was by selecting texts that connect to other classes and subject areas. For much of his career, Robert has taught humanities classes that blend social studies and ELA curriculum. Although he prefers to teach ELA as a subject by itself, he spends a lot of time collaborating with the social studies teacher to make sure his curriculum and texts are aligned with what his students are studying in social studies. While engagement was the most important factor Robert looked at, he also selected a text based on whether or not he could use it in some other capacity:

Leverage it in some other way. Like, for example, when we were reading [*A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2007)] and I was doing a lot of co-teaching with the history class, like, it's a good book but also we could use it to illustrate the point that you don't just leave this class, and uh, you're leaving the subject. (interview, April 7, 2017)

From this statement, Robert revealed that he selects texts that students might be able to connect to in other subject areas or classes, thus further emphasizing the relevance of the texts he chooses.

Robert also used texts to connect to different students' skill levels. Robert described these types of texts as "flexible books" (interview, April 7, 2017). According to Robert, flexible books are those that will be accessible to his low kids even if he has to scaffold the text. A flexible book will also challenge his high kids. Robert further defined what he meant by flexible texts:

So, I'm thinking of a book ...to me, the book *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers (1999). It's pretty basic, and a lot of my low kids like it, but it's just not really going to challenge a lot of my higher kids. And I think, especially in young adult literature, especially because of the content, that it is so applicable to life, that there's a lot of books out there that are...that the low kids are going to kind of be able to get, just because they identify with what's going on, and yet the high kids are going to get just

because it's either well-written or there's just so many layers to it. And I'm okay if a lower kid doesn't get all of the layers that I'm talking about with a higher kid. And in a perfect world, that would be great. But, um, so it needs to be a flexible book in that way yet a complicated book in that way. (interview, April 7, 2017)

Robert's ideas about flexible texts meant that a book needs to connect to a variety of audiences in a variety of contexts. Both low and high students should be able to gain something by reading a flexible text.

Robert clearly tried to select texts that could connect in multiple ways. Robert often selected works that would first connect to individual student interests. He also often thought about how texts might connect in a cross-curricular fashion, as well as how texts might connect to different student groups and skill levels. In the next section, I describe how a second theme, "The Text as a Tool," emerged during Robert's data collection.

"The Text as a Tool." Another narrative theme to be explored was the way in which Robert used "The Text as a Tool." For Robert, this theme emerged in three different ways. First, Robert expressed his ideas about how he used texts as a tool for access, empowerment, and social justice. He also described how he selected texts as a tool to improve student writing. Finally, in Robert's classroom, the texts he selected were used as tools that might connect back to standards involving what skills students need to know. For Robert, it was not so much an issue of what he decided to read but why and how he decided to use a text. During our second interview, Robert clarified this idea about how almost any text can work as a tool: "if we're focusing on the standards [the ways by which student learning is measured], almost any good book you could do those standards with. I can't think of a book that you couldn't" (interview, May 19, 2017).

The first way the text was used as a tool in Robert's classroom was as a tool for access, empowerment, and social justice. Robert understood the importance of English language arts and how his students need to have strong reading and writing skills to succeed in school and in life. In fact, Robert described how many of his former students have returned to visit him and shared that they did not feel prepared to analyze literature and poetry in college. Robert clarified how he wanted to make sure this no longer happens and that his students are equipped with the necessary tools for success. Early during our first interview Robert explained how he believed language arts is a social justice subject area:

I think that language arts and math are two social justices, just in general, content areas. That if kids can't read and write and do math, there are all these doors that are going to close for them. Like they're not going to be able to succeed in a lot of other classes. They're going to struggle in college. There are certain jobs they just can't do. I think that I—that I get a lot of kids that come to me that are behind in reading and writing. Um, and a lot of kids that I think that come to me that are...they read and write for an assignment but they don't read and write for just the...because that's just what they do. (interview, April 7, 2017)

In Robert's statement, he felt a sense of responsibility to turn his students into strong readers and writers by equipping them with the literacy skills they needed for high school, college, and beyond. Robert said that many of his students enter his class a couple of grade levels behind in reading and writing or they come into his class hating reading and anything associated with the task. Robert, however, understood just how important it was for his students to acquire strong literacy skills, which is why he spent so much time encouraging kids to read. Encouraging reading reminded Robert "that kids like to read and they want to read. Sometimes they've just learned not to read or to write" (interview, April 7, 2017). For Robert, providing students with the tools they need to be successful, including the texts they read, was an essential part of how he thinks about his subject area.

Robert further explained that to him social justice is more than reading a text about a social justice issue or studying marginalized people groups; rather Robert clarified, “teaching social justice is skill based” in that he is trying to give his students “the skills [they need] to make the decisions they want” (interview, April 7, 2017). For Robert, social justice was about empowerment and access instead of studying child soldiers in Africa, an example he used when making this point. He worried that such texts are not inherently interesting to his students and that forcing them to care about a topic such as child soldiers does not, in fact, “get them to actually care about child soldiers in Africa” (interview, June 14, 2017).

A second way “The Text as a Tool” theme emerged for Robert involved his desire to select texts that he feels are examples of strong or interesting writing or as think pieces that students can use to generate ideas for their writing. He then uses those texts as models from which students improve their own work. For example, during first semester, Robert selected Alexie’s (2007b) young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* for his ninth graders to read as a class. While he chose this text because he believed it would engage students, he also selected it because it would serve as a mentor text for quality narrative writing, which his ninth graders happened to be working on simultaneously. Thus, while Robert wanted his students to engage with Junior’s (the main character’s) story, he might also have them look at how Alexie used dialogue or how he varied sentence length or how he used repetition to emphasize a plot point. Then he tells students to get out their own essays and try some of what Alexie does with narrative writing in their own work. Robert explained that selecting a book means he wants to select a text that has writing his students can emulate. He clarified:

And so even though like I love Jane Austen, I'm not going to probably read that with them because they're probably not going to write like that, right? So I want to find...a book that can serve as an expert text for whatever type of writing we are doing. (interview, May 19, 2017)

The final way "The Text as a Tool" theme developed for Robert was the way in which he selected texts that connected back to standards of what students need to know about reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Here Robert is similar to Anne in that he first thought about the goal he had for his students and then centered his text selection practices around that goal. Robert explained:

When I'm thinking about an all-class text we're reading together that everybody's...that we're going to examine. We're going to do certain skills that I know they need to be able to transfer. Right? So we can use this common thing [text] so we can learn how to evaluate author's craft, right? (interview, April 7, 2017)

Robert's statement revealed that he selects texts so that students can strengthen reading and writing skills through the use of a common text. For example, during one of my observations, students were reading *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (Beah, 2007) as a whole-class study (observation, March 14, 2017). For this text, Robert clarified that he had three main goals for his students in helping them to develop their reading and writing skills: figurative language, main ideas, and author's craft (interview, May 19, 2017). Keeping these three goals in his mind, Robert developed activities, lessons, and a final assessment as a way to measure student success with each of his goals.

"Texts that Engage." "Texts that Engage" was the most prolific theme that developed from Robert's experiences with teaching and text selection. Throughout both interviews and observations, Robert consistently mentioned the importance of making sure his students learned to enjoy language arts and read for the sake of reading. For Robert, the

text was clearly a way for him to engage his freshman students by turning them into readers who are passionate about books and ready to participate in their English language arts class.

One of the ways Robert used texts to engage his students was to foster in them a love for reading that would, in turn, encourage his students to be authentic readers and writers. In his past experiences with teaching middle school, Robert explained that many times he felt that students were reading or writing in their language arts class because they felt they had to do so for a grade instead of reading and writing because that is what intelligent people do. Robert described this phenomenon as a lack of “authentic language arts.” Robert explained what he meant by a lack of authentic language arts in our first interview:

I think kids learn that reading is for tasks only. Those tasks are what the teacher gives them, and oftentimes those tasks are not inherently enjoyable to them. So they associate, like okay, I’m going to read...reading is reading *Moby Dick* and doing the chapter questions and then, you know, like, I think they get a lot of that. (interview, April 7, 2017)

In contrast, Robert stated that he wanted his students to read because it is enjoyable.

He also wanted them to analyze, connect with, and argue about texts because that is what real readers do. Robert further clarified that the lack of authentic language arts experiences for his students also comes from an unspoken expectation to read from the canon or to read texts that are traditionally deemed important by the community in which he teaches. While Robert said that he feels that he does have access a variety of materials and texts, he did mention that “it’s a lot of extra work to keep kids engaged with new curriculum that’s fresh....Some of the best books I’ve read have come out in the last couple of years, but they’re not [available]” (interview, May 19, 2017). For example, Robert explained that if he wanted to teach *The Things They Carried* (O’Brien, 1990), a modern classic fiction work about the Vietnam War, he would have no problem accessing copies since the district has thousands. In contrast,

when Robert wanted to use the modern young adult coming of age novel with a gay protagonist, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Saenz, 2012), he found it difficult to track down enough copies, and he said that he might have “to write a grant or [use] Teacher Fund Me” (interview, May 19, 2017). While Robert goes to great lengths to track down engaging works for his students, he said it is more difficult because such works are not readily available in the same way the classics might be.

Robert consistently tried to access engaging texts for his students and did so in order to help foster a love for reading in his classroom. Robert clarified, “What’s more important is that if a kid...just...likes to read and is reading constantly” (interview, April 7, 2017). Robert described this notion about developing a love for reading a number of times throughout our interviews, such as: “I want to pick books that are going to push kids but are also usually some fresh, new exciting books!” (interview, May 19, 2017). Several key statements showcase how dominant this theme was for Robert:

I think that my role or my goal as a language arts teacher is to make them into or encourage them to read, just to read. To read for the sake of reading. If they do that, and if they’re readers, that’s half the battle. Again, I don’t care what they’re reading....I think a lot of times kids in high school—they learn to not like language arts (laughs). And so I guess my role is to reinvigorate them or to make sure that they still like to read....I’m looking for something [a text] that is wildly engaging....Is it [the book] engaging?...Will it get a kid to read another book? [I want to find] a book that’s going to surprise them or energize them in some way....Sometimes...I’m just looking for an engaging book that I know kids will really like and will get kids to read a lot. (interview, April 7, 2017)

Robert further explained his views about including engaging texts in a later interview:

The first thing I guess I’m considering about is I want something that’s going to get the kids excited about reading. I had a college professor say to me once, um, if you can do anything as a language arts teacher, just don’t kill their love for reading. Like, kids come to me, and they’re just like, they think that reading is this thing they have to do. Worksheets, right? I think part of it is I want to expose them to things that are engaging to them. (interview, June 14, 2017)

I include these quotations from my interviews with Robert in order to elevate his voice and his experiences regarding language arts, reading, and the importance of engagement. I also think Robert's words speak for themselves and showcase this theme more accurately than if I paraphrased or summarized his ideas about texts and engagement. Through Robert's own words, the importance of using texts to engage students so they love reading is evident. Robert consistently articulated his feelings regarding the importance of selecting texts that were exciting for all students.

“Texts with Authority.” Another theme that developed from the data collection with Robert was “Texts with Authority.” For Robert, the text by itself might not have authority in his classroom. Rather Robert's belief in his proficiency and skill as a teacher and in his ability to select texts to meet a variety of goals were how this theme emerged. In his classroom, Robert was the authority where language arts instruction and text selection were concerned. Schlein and Schwartz (2015) highlighted the teacher as curriculum, which might also be reflected in Robert's stance as a teacher, which contrasts with him being only an implementer of curriculum. Thus, if Robert chose to use a text or recommended a text to a student, that text held more weight since Robert carefully thought about its use. Robert used this knowledge and expertise to instill within his students a sense of authority as well so that they become independent, life-long readers. In addition to Robert himself and his students being the foremost authorities on reading and text selection in his classroom, Robert described various factors that he believes do not have as much influence over his pedagogical decisions.

Robert clearly believed in his ability as a teacher to develop literacy skills in his students, to find engaging texts for them to read, and to develop strong relationships. Robert was the authority in his classroom, and he believed himself to be an effective and caring teacher. During one of our interviews he described himself as a “highly proficient educator” (interview, April 7, 2017). While district policies and curriculum expectations were important to Robert, he discussed how it is ultimately he who felt empowered to select texts, develop curriculum, and engage students. Therefore, in Robert’s case the text did not have authority on its own; rather the text carried weight in Robert’s classroom because it was Robert who had chosen to use it. Robert said that it was his job to “reinvigorate” his students’ love for reading, and he did this by thinking carefully about the texts he selects. Robert understood that his authority in the classroom can greatly impact how a student might feel about books and reading, and he said that he is careful to select books that students like rather than ones he would choose to read for himself. Robert explained more concerning his awareness about his authoritative role as a teacher regarding text selection and how it might affect his students:

I don’t want to bore my kids...by forcing them through a book that they’re only gonna like because they know I like it, and they want to impress me. But realistically, if they picked it up on their own, there’s a low chance that they would like it. I’d exclude a book because of that...If it’s inaccessible to kids. I wouldn’t want to choose a book that’s so hard that it makes people feel stupid. Or the only reason why they’re getting into it is because of me. Right? Cause I think that dependency is unhealthy. If a kid comes to me and thinks the only reason why they’re good at reading is because of me, I’ve just defeated myself. (interview, April 7, 2017)

From Robert’s statement, one can see that he was not only aware of his authority in his classroom and how it might influence his students’ reading lives, but he wanted students to

learn to make their own decisions and find texts that interested them independently rather than dependently.

Robert was not the only authority in his classroom. Many times Robert described the importance of his students becoming independent learners and authorities about which books might engage them or, in some cases, challenge them to step outside their reading comfort zone. Since Robert has focused more on choice reading and skill-building as opposed to the canon in his classroom, he has had to work with students to develop their text selection skills. In his own experiences at school and during his first few years teaching, text selection was often left up to the teacher and students had little say regarding which books they were allowed to read and study. Instead, texts were selected mainly based on tradition and the canon. As Robert explained, “You teach what’s been taught. You teach what’s in the library. And...you kind of fall in line” (interview, May 19, 2017). However, since Robert encouraged choice and independent reading and he placed importance on engagement, he has learned that students must be taught how to select books and think about themselves as readers, as these skills do not come naturally. For Robert, it was important that his students become the experts about their reading lives. Specifically, for his gifted students, Robert explained that he wants to stretch them and, therefore, has to teach them how to select books that they normally would not select. Likewise, Robert must teach his struggling readers about the importance of reading in the first place. Once his students understood that, he asked them, “How can you find books that are okay for you? How can you access books?” (interview, June 14, 2017). He then went on to explain:

I’m okay with being, like, a kid’s librarian. [But] part of the conversation eventually needs to be like—and [a student] can still come back to me and ask me for

references—how do you find books on your own? How do you do that? How do you access [different books]? (interview, June 14, 2017)

What Robert described here is teaching kids explicitly how to select their own texts so that they, rather than the teacher, can become the authorities of their reading lives.

Robert's experiences all seemed to be focused on his love for teaching and his passion for students. Thus, the theme "Texts that Engage" was most prevalent in all of Robert's experiences. In the next section, I describe how Georgia's experiences with teaching and text selection added additional complex layers to the common narrative themes that emerged during this study.

Georgia

Georgia has taught the longest out of the three participants, and her experiences vary greatly from those of Anne and Robert. I begin by providing a brief biography of Georgia as a way to capture her personality and provide insight into who she is personally and professionally. I then explore each of the four narrative themes as they relate to Georgia and her experiences with teaching and text selection.

Georgia teaches sophomores, and I can often hear her singing what sounds like church hymns or laughing with her students or a nearby teacher. Sometimes Georgia teaches in a tiara if the mood strikes her. On one of the days when I was in her classroom, she was wearing a ruffled skirt and a black baby doll t-shirt with bright red lips on the front made completely out of shiny red rhinestones (observation, March 20, 2017). Georgia is someone who stands out. She is warm and nurturing, and people—students and coworkers alike—are drawn to this warmth. Georgia's teaching style is a stark contrast to her outgoing and creative personality. Georgia is a self-proclaimed traditionalist, who loves Shakespeare and British

literature and who reads mostly from the high school canon (interview, March 6, 2017). She loves the literature component of teaching English language arts, and she stated that she has a no-nonsense approach to teaching classic works. *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953), and *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004) are listed among her favorites. Students in her class are often required to read these teacher-selected texts on their own outside of class, while class time is used for discussion or some type of related activity. Georgia sticks to what she knows and even went so far as to claim, “I think it’s hard to teach an old dog new tricks” when thinking about herself as a teacher (interview, March 6, 2017).

Georgia is a black female in her late 40s. She is from Nigeria, and she lived in Africa until she moved to the United States to finish high school and attend university. Since her move over 30 years ago, she has not been back to her homeland. Her parents and many of her extended family still live there, although several of her siblings have immigrated to the United States. While in Nigeria, she went to boarding schools, which is perhaps why she relates to Knowles’ (1982) classic, *A Separate Peace*, which is set in a boarding school (interview, April 27, 2017).

Georgia stated that she is well aware of her race and how it has forced her to teach in particular settings or to serve as a representative for the marginalized. When describing her teaching experiences, Georgia mentioned several times that she was asked to teach a class simply because of her race, such as multicultural literature with an emphasis on African American literature. Georgia, however, noted quickly that she does not identify with African American history and culture since she grew up in Nigeria. She claimed that often her

African heritage has been overlooked and instead she has been given teaching assignments or moved to various schools because of her blackness (interview, March 6, 2017).

Georgia has taught English language arts for over 25 years. Her first teaching job was in an inner city urban environment in the Pacific Northwest, where she spent only one year teaching ELA classes in a school that she described as very racially divided. She often recalled her students talking about gangs during class. After teaching there for one year, Georgia was cut from her teaching position due to budget constraints. However, she was able to find another teaching job in a neighboring district that was demographically similar to her previous one. After four years, the racially charged environment proved to be stressful for Georgia as she found herself unable to relate to the racial tension despite being black herself. She explained:

They're [her student's] behavior [was] very violent and very aggressive, and I wasn't that way, so I was exhausted by breaking up fights...All I'm doing is focusing on their behavior, and it was really taking a toll on my heart...So a friend of mine goes, "Why don't you go teach in Pacific Coast? They need more black teachers..." And I go, "Where's Pacific Coast?" [But I] found Pacific Coast, and I've been here 15...16 years. (interview, March 6, 2017)

Having been an employee for over 16 years, Georgia is well-known in the Pacific Coast School District. She first taught at a comprehensive high school with one of the largest Latino/Latina populations in the 40,000-student district. While teaching there, Georgia taught a variety of classes and grade levels. She remained at the high school for over 10 years until she was transferred to her current school "five years ago because [she] had a degree with a local university, and they [the administration] wanted [her]to teach the writing classes, which [she] did for a few years" (interview, March 6, 2017). Now, however, Georgia is the sole sophomore literature and composition teacher at the tiny science option high school. From

my interviews, daily interactions, and observations of Georgia, consistently viewed herself as a literature teacher from another time and place. She often recalled feeling frustrated with her current teaching schedule and the school environment, as she feels it does not adhere to a traditional model of teaching English language arts.

Georgia's experiences and beliefs about text selection differed greatly from Anne's and Robert's experiences. For Georgia, the importance of tradition and the canon—"Texts with Authority"—carried the heaviest weight for her when thinking about text selection. In fact, during all of our interviews and my observations, Georgia did not mention a single young adult text or a text outside of the traditional canon. Therefore, narrative themes developed quite differently for Georgia in that all four themes were influenced by her penchant for the canon and traditional methods of teaching English language arts.

"Texts that Connect." One theme that emerged from my analysis of Georgia's experiential stories was "Texts that Connect." Georgia did not describe this theme in the same way as Anne and Robert did, who focused more on a text's ability to connect to an individual student. In contrast, the "Texts that Connect" theme for Georgia unfolded based on how her students were able to connect to universal themes that were found in canonical literature. Georgia also described how she selected texts that might connect across the curriculum, an aspect Robert mentioned as well. Finally, Georgia explained that she uses texts as a type of universal language so her students can connect to other students in the district as well as across the nation based on their shared experiences with literature.

When thinking about how the text is a connector, Georgia said that she desires for her students to be able to connect with universal themes that are found in literature from the

canon. This is one of the primary reasons why she prefers to teach literature over writing or grammar. Georgia explained that for her, it is the stories from the canon that she loves:

I love the stories that are being told, and I love kids having an Aha! Moment when they realize that their lives...they make a connection with something...someone in the canon who is a prolific writer with a poignant message. They go wait a minute and they can break [the work] down and realize it's not that difficult to understand it. When they can relate and connect with the pieces...when they have good discussions. I love the discussions and to hear them discuss. That's what I enjoy the most about teaching. (interview, March 6, 2017)

In Georgia's own words, it was evident that she selects works from the canon as a way for her students to connect to a variety of themes related to the human experience: love, family, death and dying, coming of age, good versus evil. As students read the words of famous authors they, too, might see how the themes in that work, no matter how old, also are relevant to their teenage lives in the 21st century.

Georgia also commented on the importance of selecting texts that might connect to other content or subject areas. Several times Georgia spoke about collaborating with Tony (pseudonym), a sophomore social studies teacher, over thematic units about migrant workers, modern-day witch hunts, or marginalized peoples. Sticking to canonical texts, Georgia would select a work that she felt best connected to what students might be studying in their social studies class. For example, when her students studied migrant workers, she read *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) as a way to support the social studies curriculum. During another unit about McCarthyism, Georgia had her students read *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953) as a way for them to make connections across the curriculum, although she also said that she wanted to read the text in the fall near the Halloween holiday. When students were studying the presidential election of 2016, Georgia's students read Shakespeare's (2004) *Julius Caesar* as a way to explore power, corruption, and the darker side of politics. Tony had also created a

unit of study around the Black Lives Matter movement, so Georgia had her students read the poetry of Langston Hughes or speeches from Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr. Georgia also explained that she and Tony would collaborate to have a guiding question for the year in order to make sure that their curriculums were connected and explored similar themes. For sophomores, the question was, “How have the marginalized challenged authority in America and what are the outcomes of it?” (interview, May 31, 2017). Here Georgia briefly mentioned that she had students select their own books that would showcase this theme; however, she never spoke specifically about titles or how she went about selecting texts that would support this unit of study.

Another way that Georgia selected texts was by choosing works that connect her students with what other students are reading district-wide or nation-wide. Georgia expressed concern several times that her students are not being exposed to classic works or popular works from the canon due to the structure of the school at which she teaches, a structure that Georgia described as lacking direction and consistency where curriculum and content expectations are concerned. Georgia has even gone to her administrators to argue that her students are not exposed to enough literature from the canon during their four years in high school—a complaint that has gone largely ignored. In contrast, Georgia mirrored some of her text selection practices after what the five comprehensive high schools in the district are selecting. Based on her experiences teaching at one of these schools and the fact that her son is a junior at another district high school, Georgia felt that she has her finger on the pulse of what other schools are doing. In fact, she recently recalled seeing her son’s copy of *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) on the floor of his bedroom, which provided validation for her text selection since she, too, teaches this classic text to her sophomores. She explained:

Well, if my kids are playing football with kids at [two of the other district high schools], and they're discussing their test over *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), I want my kids to feel normal and go, "oh, yeah, we're reading that next semester." There's some empowering piece to that for them to think, "Oh, we're doing the same thing." (interview, March 6, 2017)

Georgia went on to lament that former students have returned to her and complained that they felt like they were "in the dark" regarding their knowledge of the canon and other classic works. She described, "My kids were disappointed and discouraged as they felt like they were missing [the canonical] piece" (interview, April 27, 2017). Overall, Georgia is well aware that she is using older, more traditional works; however, she justified these choices based on her belief that the kids might "see [the works] again, or read again, or hear again" (interview, March 6, 2017). In a later interview, Georgia again justified her penchant for the classics because she believed they would connect her students with other students:

I always tell the kids, I'm making you read this piece because I want you to go to college and be able to know what your counterparts...if something is being taught nationwide, I like them to be as smart as the kid in a different state and be able to pass exams that are required and to have some kind of knowledge about Shakespeare or some of these classic writers. (interview, May 31, 2017)

From this section, Georgia wanted to select texts that connect. However, she often defined connecting in a way that is different from her colleagues. Georgia continued to choose texts that she believed had some type of social or cultural significance. She also wanted students at her current school to feel like they were a part of what other students were reading district-wide.

"The Text as a Tool." "The Text as a Tool" was another important theme that I uncovered when rereading Georgia's interview transcripts and my observation notes, although she did not talk about backwards planning or goal setting in the same way as the other two participants. Instead, Georgia used mostly traditional teaching methods as a tool to

instill independence in her students when they encounter classic literary works. Georgia also used the “Text as a Tool” in that she requires students to read on their own independently instead of sharing the reading experience together in class. Finally, the text was a tool that would, in Georgia’s opinion, help to prepare students for state standardized tests.

The majority of Georgia’s text selections were made from the canon or from the class textbook that Pacific Coast School District adopted several years ago, which is an old edition of a popular literature anthology used across high schools in the United States. To teach students these works, Georgia relied heavily on comprehension-based activities that require students to showcase their understanding of the text. For example, when her sophomore literature students read *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004) together, she had them work on a study guide that included related questions for each act and each scene (observation, May 9, 2017). The study guide was lengthy—96 questions—and students were expected to complete the questions as they read the play. Thus, the text *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004), when read in Georgia’s class, was a tool for comprehending the Shakespearean language as well as a way for students to understand basic facts about plot and character. Georgia described this assignment as something that kids “don’t love” and that it is more of a “busy handout” (interview, April 27, 2017). In a different interview, Georgia explained that she got the questions from the “green book” (the district adopted text book) and that the purpose of the packet was for students to follow “along to comprehend; this is really comprehension” (interview, May 31, 2017). Georgia provided students with similar study guide packets over *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) and *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953) as a way for students to work on their own to comprehend these classic works. When Georgia assigned reading,

she might have students complete a reading comprehension quiz over the material during the next class period as a way to check that they are reading and understanding the text.

Georgia's methods for teaching these canonical works were traditional and focused mostly on recalling facts about the work. Her assessments over each text followed a similar comprehension-focused pattern in which students might identify characters or match quotations to characters or complete test items over figurative language terms. Overall, though, Georgia's methods are traditional, and she even referred to herself as "old school" more than once throughout our conversations, a term which indicated she employs pedagogy and selects texts with which she is familiar (interviews, March 6, 2017; April 27, 2017; May 31, 2017).

A second way that Georgia used "The Text as a Tool" was to build independent reading skills. In her classroom, the majority of reading students did was supposed to be done outside of class as homework. She did this as a way to help build students' independence and to make them take responsibility for their own education. She elaborated:

I like the kids to do more reading at home and discussion in class. I like to see the kids put more effort into their academics and think of themselves as the educator. I am here to guide you through the curriculum but you are your [own] best teacher. (interview, March 6, 2017)

I asked her later whether or not she thought her students did the reading, to which she responded, "I expect that a third of the class will read it" (interview, May 31, 2017). I then asked her what she does when she realizes students are not reading. Her response: "I pretend" (interview, May 31, 2017). For Georgia, it seems that she was trying to make her students responsible for their own educations and to prepare them for college; therefore, she was unapologetic when in her mind her students refused to read and join the class. Furthermore,

Georgia felt that students and their reading the text independently is a college level skill as it teaches independence and self-motivation. She explained, “Because in college, you are given a book to read, and you come back with the book read” (interview, March 6, 2017). Georgia recognized that some students do not get on board and continue not to do the reading, but she refused to let this bother her:

Those who read do well [in my class.]. If you read, you do well. It’s hard. How do you teach kids how to read? You assign reading. You expect them to read it. You test them on it. And you just keep going. But you can’t carry them if they don’t read. (interview, May 31, 2017)

Georgia also used “The Text as a Tool” to help prepare students for standardized tests, which is why she selected difficult works from the canon, such as Shakespeare or highly anthologized short stories. Georgia recalled having her students read the supernatural story, “The Monkey’s Paw” (Jacobs, 1902), and much to her delight found that an excerpt from this story was used on one of the state assessments. She also explained her belief that Shakespeare’s works are important to teach, since she perceived that his works might be on tests connected to the Common Core. When I asked her how she describes her role in teaching ELA classes, she mentioned that she believes it is important to prepare students for state and national tests. Georgia even identified herself as a “test-prep lady” (interview, March 6, 2017).

“Texts that Engage.” For Georgia, the theme of “Texts that Engage” was least prevalent, especially when comparing its prevalence to those of Robert and Anne, who talked frequently about student engagement. Georgia rarely used the word engagement or a synonym throughout any of her interviews. Instead, engagement for Georgia seemed to be limited to which works from the canon would be most engaging for students to read.

During her interviews, Georgia said that she wants her students to like what they are reading; however, most of her text selection practices appeared to be teacher-driven, meaning that Georgia selected what books and curriculum are read and studied as opposed to her students having choice in the selection process. In fact, Georgia's text selection practices were often driven by factors outside of her personal preferences in that she adhered strictly to the district's old model of selection practices, in which texts were clearly outlined by school and by grade level. To stray from the canon would mean she was "not teaching real curriculum" (interview, April 27, 2017).

Therefore, Georgia's text selections were mostly limited to works from the canon, although she did try to select texts from the canon that she believed students would relate to most or works that they might find more accessible. For example, Georgia explained that she loved teaching *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) because students often enjoyed it and "they love the idea of looking at mankind and what would happen if" (interview, March 6, 2017). Later Georgia stated, "I love *Lord of the Flies*. It's great...it always works well [because] the students love having to talk and discuss about the Freudian idea of evil...and the story is so violent. They love violence" (interview, April 27, 2017). From this statement, Georgia perceived her students to be engaged with this classic text. In contrast, Georgia explained that over time she stopped teaching certain canonical works that she felt no longer engaged students. For example, although she loved *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1982) because she attended boarding schools as a child, Georgia believed that many teachers no longer enjoy teaching the work. *The Red Badge of Courage* (Crane, 1990) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway, 2016) are other American literature texts that she no longer teaches because students are not engaged. Georgia also forgoes reading a text if she feels that students have

encountered it before or if too many teachers were reading it. This has happened with texts such as *Night* (Wiesel, 2006), *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003), *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1991), and *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 1997). Thus, while Georgia tried to select texts that engage students, she limited herself to only works from the canon, which she claimed students often think are boring or hard to understand.

While student engagement might not be the focus of text selection for Georgia, she often spoke about how students seemed to enjoy the classics when they were forced to read them. For example, Georgia explained how her students came to class one day excited because they had discovered a video game version of A. Miller's (1953) classic play, *The Crucible*, in which they got to go on their own witch hunts (interview, May 31, 2017). Georgia recalled another memory, in which her students enjoyed discussing and arguing about the character of Lenny in Steinbeck's (1993) *Of Mice and Men* (observation, March 20, 2017). Regarding her unit on Shakespeare's (2004) *Julius Caesar*, Georgia described how she has her students act out different scenes: "They love to act it out. They love it! And we dress up. We, oh, they go crazy about that" (interview, May 31, 2017).

Overall engagement was not at the center of Georgia's text selection practices. For Georgia, in fact, engagement seemed to be a byproduct of what she makes her students read. While students sometimes expressed enjoyment with reading, they were limited due to Georgia's love only for those works that have withstood the test of time.

"Texts with Authority." The theme of "Texts with Authority" emerged as the most significant theme during my data analysis of Georgia. In fact, this theme seeped into the other themes as well, since Georgia only discussed canonical works. For Georgia, the first way in which the text is an authority was based on district-approved book lists that clarify

which texts teachers should use at which grade levels. In fact, the authority of the district's expectations seemed to influence Georgia's text selection as well. Another way the text was an authority for Georgia was based on whether or not the text is part of the canon. Georgia's discussion of text selection, in fact, was limited only to canonical works that are often a traditional part of the English language arts classroom.

For Georgia, one of the most important factors involving text selection is whether or not the texts she selects have been typically read across the district by students in the grade level she is teaching. Often during data collection, Georgia referenced a list that she knew the district had created, although she did not have a hard copy of this list. To her, the list was the ultimate authority in whether or not she had her students read a text. She even went so far as to call it a "magic list" (interview, April 27, 2017), implying that it had some type of power over teachers and their text selection practices. In fact, in past years, Georgia recalled going to meetings to discuss the district text list. Many of the meetings resulted in arguments and fighting between schools and grade levels, since many teachers felt they had a claim to text ownership because they had taught it before. Georgia elaborated several times on the importance of the list:

I think it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks, and for as long as I've been teaching every department says, "here's your list that you may use, and here's the list you may not use." So I've just been embedded with this belief that you do not cross text lines. In the articulation meeting that I went to five years ago, we had middle school and high school teachers there, and we went into a yelling match. It was like *Real Housewives: Pacific Coast Teachers*...The middle school teachers were crossing lines of the high school teachers and teaching novels. But they were [the high school teachers] saying, "you're reading our textbooks; you can't!" so there were lists that were sent and resent and changed. So, I have a respect for this list, but I don't really see a list here [at Pine Grove School], which is kind of hard for me. (interview, March 6, 2017)

Georgia's experiences at district meetings explained why she has a "respect" for the list and viewed this list, tangible or not, as an authority regarding the texts she chooses for her students. In fact, Georgia explained that using another teacher's list of approved texts was like "declaring war" on that teacher and his or her classroom (interview, April 27, 2017). Although no official list exists at her current school, Georgia still goes by a mental list of what students should have read at certain grade levels.

While the list functions as an authority for Georgia's text selection practices, whether or not the text is in the canon was an important factor as well. Georgia adheres strictly to the canon when she selects texts for her classes and even when she spoke about texts. *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953), *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992), *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004), *The Catcher and the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), and more modern works such as *The Things They Carried* (O'Brien, 1990) and *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003) are all texts that many would consider to be a part of the high school English language arts classroom and were all mentioned by Georgia more than once during data collection. Georgia justified her use of such works because they are "books that have influenced writing. And they're in the canon. They're a mainstay in the district. A lot of schools [teach them]" (interview, March 6, 2017), suggesting that there is some type of tradition with teaching such texts in high school ELA classes. During my observations in Georgia's class, I watched her teach poetry, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), and *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004). When I asked Georgia why she chose these texts to study, her answers shared a commonality: the canon, the district approved list, and tradition. She said, regarding her poetry unit: "I want them to appreciate pieces that have been well received over time" (interview, May 31, 2017). Regarding *Of*

Mice and Men (Steinbeck, 1993), she explained that she chose it “because it’s in the canon...in Sophomore Lit[erature] and Comp[osition], a lot of high schools have it. And the district requires it. Well, it isn’t required, but it’s on the list of books they want us to teach...it’s very popular” (interview, May 31, 2017). Her rationale for including *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare, 2004) followed a similar pattern: “Every year...until recently, every school has taught...has required the department to teach one Shakespearean piece per age, and that [*Julius Caesar*] is the sophomore one” (interview, May 31, 2017). The canon appears to be the foundation upon which Georgia builds her text selection practices.

Georgia’s respect for the canon is a stark contrast to that of Robert and Anne, who mostly mentioned the canon as one important part of text selection—not the most important part of text selection. In fact, Georgia’s dedication to the canon permeated the other three themes found in this study and was something she used to make sense of what she is teaching. She explained, “As long as there’s a canon...we follow the curriculum of the canon...then we’re okay” (interview, May 31, 2017). Georgia made several statements like this that indicated she was wary of selecting texts that might be outside the canon. At her current high school, she is continually frustrated by the lack of guidance regarding what to teach:

Everywhere I’ve taught they’ve given us a list of here’s the book you may choose to read from, and you need to cover one from this list. Every school. Except this one. This one, the principal does nothing. There’s nothing. There’s absolutely no hint of where to go. What to do at all. No book closet. No list. No canon. No comprehension or acceptance of what the district does. (interview, April 27, 2017)

Thus, Georgia’s frustration about the lack of canon illuminated her dedication to it. When I asked her how she had changed her text selection practices over the years, Georgia’s first response was, “I think I’m still afraid of breaking the canon” (interview, May 31, 2017).

Georgia's stories of experience revealed that she is someone whose teaching is influenced by tradition. She often said that she selects texts based on her familiarity and tends to stick with classics from the high school English canon. Georgia's stories and interviews discussed these elements numerous times, and often her love for the canon leaked onto other narrative themes about texts that connect and engage or texts that are used as tools to build skills.

Cross-participant Analysis of Themes

In this section, I reflect on how the themes developed across participants. Discussing how the themes developed collectively for the participants might help to illuminate the complexities of a phenomenon such as text selection. A reflection concerning the themes in this narrative inquiry help to explore the multifaceted nature of each participant, his or her experiences with teaching, and how the themes emerged based on their experiences and stories about text selection.

“Texts that Connect”

“Texts that Connect” emerged as one of the four themes during the analysis of the data collected. All three participants shared a desire to make sure that the texts they selected for their classrooms connected to their students. For Anne, the theme of connection was defined based on Anne's desire to connect texts to students and their cultures. Specifically, Anne often described her attempts to find books that are written about underrepresented populations or about Latino/Latina culture. She also explained that she thought about student interest when selecting texts. For Anne, her students are interested in the fields of health, engineering, and science, so she often found herself looking for texts that might connect to

these interests. Anne's interpretation of "Texts that Connect" seemed to capture the collective rather than individual nature of her student population.

Robert's interpretation of "Texts that Connect" overlapped somewhat with Anne's in that they both kept students and their interests as the primary focus of all of their selection practices. However, Robert explained that when he selects texts, he thinks mostly about whether or not these selections motivate students to read. His desire to motivate students to read is related to his desire for students to view themselves as real readers and writers. Robert spends most of his time helping students connect individually with texts. He described meeting with students multiple times to find a book that was the right fit. He also described how his desire to find the right fit for a student is his way of building a foundation for his students so they begin to view themselves as capable readers and writers. Thus, Robert's desire to connect to the individual interests and desires of his students is what helped to develop this theme.

The "Texts that Connect" theme developed quite differently for Georgia. While both Robert and Anne often put the student at the center of this theme, Georgia placed the text as the primary focus and the student as the secondary one. Georgia consistently selected texts that were from the canon or from a curricular tradition to which she had adhered for the majority of her career as a high school language arts teacher. This was the foundation for all of her selection practices. Therefore, Georgia did not think first of her students' cultures and career interests like Anne did, nor did she think about their individual lives or about how she might help them participate in authentic literacy tasks, as Robert did. For Georgia, this theme developed based on her beliefs that reading classics or canonical texts helps her students connect with other students in the district or across the nation. For Georgia, reading from the

canon is a shared experience, and she desired that her students study these texts as a way to be part of a local, state, or national conversation about classic books. Georgia stated that she believed that reading from the canon would connect her students with other students who have read the same works of literature. Thus, Georgia's selection practices with regard to this theme were not driven by individual student interest; instead they were driven as a way to foster a common language and to further perpetuate the validity of the canon.

"Texts that Connect" is a complex theme that manifested differently in all three participants. Furthermore, while this theme was prevalent for all participants, it was not the dominant theme for Anne, Robert, or Georgia. From my data analysis, I learned that teachers might view connecting texts more collectively by thinking about whole classes of students or individually by focusing on individual student interests. The participants revealed that texts can be used to connect to a student's culture or to a student's career interests. Texts can also be used as a way for a teacher to connect with his or her students individually or as a way to encourage students to feel empowered as readers and writers. Texts might also be used to connect to other people who have read the same pieces of literature. Regardless of how one might define the theme of "Texts that Connect," it is clear that teachers value the ways in which texts can connect to one's self, to others, or the world in which a person lives.

"The Text as a Tool"

A second prevalent theme that emerged for all of the participants was the way in which each participant viewed "The Text as a Tool." Essentially, the text is not simply a work of literature to be read only for pleasure. Rather, within the context of the high school ELA classroom, the text has a very clear function and purpose, and it is up to the individual teacher to decide exactly what that purpose is. Regarding this theme, two of the participants,

Anne and Robert, described the importance of first having a purpose or skill in mind for their students to master. The text comes second as it is a consequence of that purpose or skill. The text, for both Anne and Robert, did not drive what happened in their individual classrooms. Instead, the purposes or skills or learning objectives drove most if not all of their curricular decisions.

For example, Robert mentioned teaching *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (Alexie, 2007b) to his freshmen during first semester. He did not select this text simply because it was something he had always read or because he himself thought the text was engaging. Rather, Robert selected this work because he believed it would be engaging but also because he wanted students to study narrative writing and author's craft. This young adult text proved to be a text that would enable him to successfully teach these skills to his students. The text might also serve as a model that students would be able to emulate and apply to their own writing. Similarly, Anne described experiences with selecting texts only after she clarified the skill and purpose she had for her students. This was made evident especially in her unit of study developed around argument writing. Thus, Anne and Robert were driven by the purpose a text might fulfill instead of their individual love or connection to a text.

In contrast, the text, once again, seemed to drive Georgia's text selection practices instead of the skill or purpose. Once Georgia selected her texts, only then would she develop activities or lessons to go with the text, making the skills and expectations for student learning secondary to the text itself. During interviews and informal conversations, Georgia often expressed frustration about her students, their refusal to read, and their lack of motivation in completing assignments. It is possible that Georgia's desire to put the text first

made her students feel disconnected from the curriculum, even if that was not her intention when selecting classic literature. These frustrations Georgia described were neither shared nor discussed by Anne or Robert, who often focused first on their purpose and then used the text as a tool that would support that purpose. This type of backwards planning placed the student and his or her needs as central instead of making the text the focal point. Conversely, Georgia's text-centric focus often resulted in her creating tools that would assist students with comprehension or basic understandings of classic texts; the text itself was not a tool in Georgia's sophomore literature class. Georgia's text-centric classroom focused more on plot or basic facts about a specific text, and these types of comprehension-focused activities made it difficult for students to apply what they learned to other texts and across contexts.

"The Text as a Tool" theme helped to clarify the importance of teachers setting forth clear expectations and purposes for learning. Viewing "The Text as a Tool" to assist in ELA instruction, however, varied between the participants. The variances suggest that different teachers have multiple purposes for including texts as part of their curriculums.

"Texts that Engage"

The third theme that developed during data analysis was "Texts that Engage." Once again, Anne and Robert revealed similar beliefs about this theme. For Anne, this theme was second only to "The Text as Tool" theme while "Texts that Engage" was the most dominant theme that emerged during data analysis of Robert. For Georgia, however, this theme was the weakest of the four in its development. Many of Georgia's references to engagement were implied or indirect, while both Anne and Robert explicitly discussed the importance of engaging their students through the purposeful selection of texts.

Anne and Robert both stated multiple times that they tried to think about student engagement when selecting texts to include in their high school classes. Both of these participants articulated that finding engaging texts for a student is a trial and error process. It is difficult to select texts for individual students that encourage them to read in the first place or verbally express their enjoyment during the reading or after they finish reading a text. Specifically, Anne spoke several times about missteps in the selection process, where students were choosing texts with which they were bored or disconnected. Anne also described how students sometimes chose texts based on length or their perception that once they selected a text, they had to read it to completion. Robert described similar experiences under different contexts. He talked about how he met individually with students to learn about their interests and then centered his suggestions on the individual student. Robert also mentioned how finding the right fit for a student could be challenging but rewarding once a student was finally engaged with a book or once a student discovered a new author or began exploring a new genre. Despite their differences regarding how they might approach students or get to know them as readers, both Anne and Robert placed engagement at the forefront of their text selection processes.

Additionally, “Texts that Engage” was a theme that was woven through each of the other themes for both Anne and Robert. However, the exact way in which this theme manifested differed based on their individual experiences. Anne’s desire to engage students was important, but the purpose for selecting a text often dominated the engagement factor. Anne consistently explained that she carefully thinks about why she wants to include a text in her class whether it be to teach author’s craft or to teach characterization or serve as a model for students when they write argument essays. Once she established her purpose, Anne tried

to pick engaging texts that supported that purpose. Robert, too, explained that his purpose for selecting a text is important as discussed in the previous section, yet engagement appeared to trump all other aspects of the selection process for Robert. Engagement for Robert meant more than finding an interesting or enjoyable text for a student to read. Instead, Robert defined his ideas about engagement based on whether or not students were able to enjoy the act of reading in and of itself instead of simply enjoying a text that was selected because it supported the teacher's purpose. Engagement with literacy—both reading and writing—appeared to be the end goals for Robert as he revealed that engagement with reading and writing would empower students to “make the decisions that they want” regarding their success in school and in life (interview, April 7, 2017).

For Georgia, selecting “Texts that Engage” did not seem to be a priority. This theme developed passively during my data analysis of this participant. Georgia did not discuss explicitly her desire to engage students, but she did mention that she had excluded certain works because she believed that students no longer connected with them or because they found them to be boring. Georgia's ideas about engaging texts were limited to works from the canon or from the traditions she has established for herself over her career as a high school ELA teacher. Limiting herself to these works might be why she does not discuss engagement directly since she selected texts based primarily on teacher-driven initiatives and traditional ELA practices regarding text selection. In Georgia's class, it appeared that a text was read because that is what she had always read or because she carried with her a perception that the district has strict expectations for grade-level text selection procedures. For Georgia, a text had value if it has been read before or if it was being read by other teachers across the district or state. Throughout my interviews and observations, engagement

seemed to be a secondary criterion for Georgia. Engagement might have instead been defined as one possible side effect of selecting texts from the canon or from curricular traditions.

Based on my analysis of the participants and their stories of experience, selecting “Texts that Engage” is a complicated and often unsuccessful process that takes time and effort to make successful. At face value, it might seem simple to match students to texts that engage them. However, all three of the participants indicated that this is a complex process that takes time and intentional effort. Even if Anne, Robert, or Georgia were thinking explicitly about how to engage students, they highlighted that many times it is difficult to engage all students or to find a text that has mass appeal. Robert and Anne embraced this challenging aspect of text selection by focusing on student choice and young adult texts, while Georgia preferred to teach familiar works or texts with which she was engaged as a way to get her students excited about reading. Finding engaging texts, whether from the canon, from best-seller lists, or from a young adult library, was an essential thread in the selection process as engagement might help students to develop their skills as readers and writers.

“Texts with Authority”

Out of the four themes that developed during data collection, “Texts with Authority” was the most diverse and complex among the three participants. Texts with authority manifested quite differently for Anne, Robert, and Georgia. In fact, the idea of texts with authority turned out to be multi-faceted and deeply layered, as all participants mentioned various stakeholders, mandates, or outside forces that might influence their text selection decisions.

Upon analyzing the data, I noticed that Anne's stories highlighted that the authority of texts mostly comes from somewhere outside herself. Often Anne referenced district-level trainings, protocols, and curriculum adoptions, suggesting that these entities had significant influence over how she might select texts in her junior and senior classes. Anne also seemed to value ideas about text selection and teaching reading and writing from well-known literacy coaches, such as Kelly Gallagher, Penny Kittle, Mary Ehrenworth, and Kate Roberts. She often referenced these individuals when talking about how she developed lessons plans or curriculum for her classes. Reviewing the field texts collected sheds light on the extent to which Anne described to me how she valued the work of these people, and, in turn, attempted to mirror her own practices after these experts.

Anne did, to some extent, view herself as an expert regarding text selection through her role as literacy leader. Anne explained that each school in the district selected a person who would be responsible for helping to implement district-wide curriculum initiatives, adopt and implement the district ELA curriculum in his/her own classroom, and provide guidance to colleagues when needed. The role of the literacy leader, however, was not created to develop new curriculum or to collaborate with other teachers across the district. Instead, the literacy leader role was a way for the district to ensure that its curriculum adoption was being implemented in all classrooms across the district. Anne mentioned this role several times throughout the data collection process, which suggests that she might perceive that her leadership role makes her an authority regarding district level ELA curriculum expectations.

While Anne and Robert often overlapped to some extent, they did not on this theme. In fact, Robert did not mention outside experts as having authority over his text selection

practices, although he did acknowledge their existence. Instead, Robert spoke often about his own role as an authority in his classroom. Throughout all interviews, observations, and daily interactions, it was clear that Robert perceived himself to be the most qualified to select texts for his classes and his individual students, suggesting he viewed himself as having an essential role in his own classroom. Robert often spoke with confidence about the activities he had his students complete or about the texts he selected. However, he was also introspective and often reflected on his pedagogy and made changes to his practices if he felt that changes would most benefit his students. Robert acknowledged that he had in the past faced conflicts regarding his text selection choices from outside stakeholders, such as parents or administrators, yet his confidence in himself as a maker of curriculum helped him to justify all of his pedagogical and curricular decisions, thus reinforcing his views about himself as the authority.

The “Texts with Authority” theme manifested completely differently for Georgia when comparing her experiences to the other two participants. Like Anne, Georgia described how the authority to select texts often rested outside herself. However, Georgia did not mention experts or current district curriculum expectations as having an influence over her text choices. Instead, Georgia’s ideas on authority were embedded mainly in her beliefs that the canon and curricular traditions carry the most weight when she thought about which texts to teach. This is why Georgia’s text selection practices were the least changed over her tenure as a high school ELA teacher. Georgia even described feelings of fear and anxiety about breaking from the canon, and she mentioned that she was often frustrated about the lack of guidance concerning which texts to teach within the context of her current teaching position.

“Texts with Authority” proved to be a highly complex theme that emerged differently for each participant, suggesting that both internal and external factors might influence which texts a teacher chooses to read and why. For some participants, the authority to select texts and develop curriculum might rest within the teacher, as was suggested from Robert’s experiences. However, other participants seemed to adhere more to district mandates and expectations for text selection, as was the case with Anne. Georgia perceived the canon and the traditions of the ELA class to guide her decisions the most.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the three participants: Anne, Robert, and Georgia. I first explored the experiences of Anne. Anne revealed that her teaching and text selection practices are often influenced by her sense of purpose as well as her desire to make sure that students are connected to what they are reading. Robert’s passion and enthusiasm influenced the development of all four narrative themes. He often spoke about purpose and the importance of student engagement and did so in a way that focused on establishing positive relationships with his students. Georgia often spoke about her love for the canon. She also described her concern about teaching traditional works as well as works with which she is familiar. All three participants work in the same district and at the same school, yet their experiences with teaching and text selection could not be more different. These differences suggest that text selection and ELA pedagogy are rich and complex, and they often depend on the experiences of the teacher and what that teacher believes to be most important for his or her students.

In the next chapter, I continue to examine the experiences of the participants and analyze the data collected during this narrative inquiry. I explore the experiences of the

participants through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to contextualize the narrative themes discussed in this chapter. Using the three-dimensional framework, I explore specific stories from the participants through a temporal, relational, and contextual lens to uncover personal and professional rationales and meaning related to the common narrative themes discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6

SHEDDING LIGHT ON EXPERIENTIAL NARRATIVES THROUGH THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter, I analyzed and interpreted the data I collected between March 2017 and June 2017 by looking for common narrative themes. During my analysis and interpretation of the data, I uncovered four common themes among participants that helped to answer the research question: What are teachers' narratives of experience regarding text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom? These four themes focused on the ways in which teachers use texts for a variety of purposes and motivations, including how they use texts that connect and how they use texts that engage. The other two themes concerned how teachers use texts as tools and how they think about the relationship between a text and its authority. In this chapter, I describe the experiences and stories of each participant as a way to bring context to the narrative themes by using the "three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Specifically, I analyze the experiential stories of Anne, Robert, and Georgia in more depth in order to uncover the meaning of such narratives for these participants, their practices, and the phenomenon of text selection.

Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Framework

Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (2000) allows researchers to travel inward and outward, backward and forward, and to be situated within place (p. 49). This narrative framework might be helpful in attempting to explain the stories of the participants and provide context for the narrative themes discussed in chapter five. Using this framework might offer insight about the social and personal interactions of the

participants, their past, present, and future experiences, and context for the four narrative themes: “The Text as a Tool,” “Texts that Connect,” “Texts that Engage,” and “Texts with Authority.” Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further elaborated on their ideas of a space that focuses on the experiences of participants:

Any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p. 50)

Thus, the three-dimensional space allows researchers to explore a variety of avenues concerning the experiences of the research participants. More specifically, this inquiry space can help researchers hone in and focus on social, personal, and temporal facets of experience. This space also invites the researcher to explore his or her own stories as well as “the larger landscape on which they all live” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). In chapter five, I defined and analyzed the common narrative themes that emerged during the data analysis of the three participants. Each theme manifested differently for Anne, Robert, and Georgia. In the following sections, I provide context for these narrative themes by relating several experiential narratives of the participants. I also share some of their stories regarding their experiences with text selection within the framework of the three-dimensional space as well as describe how the narrative themes developed for the participants.

Significantly, I begin by capturing facets of the participants’ experiences through attending to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space via the venue of found poems. After repeatedly reviewing my interview transcripts and observation notes, I wrote the following found poem as a way to briefly capture who Anne might be as a teacher and selector of texts. This found poem functioned as a type of data crystallization that could help

to illuminate the main narrative thread—teachers’ experiences with text selection—an idea referred to as selectivity (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). Ellingson (2014) explained that using data crystallization is a careful and structured way to “construct portraits of everyday living” (p. 445). Using found poetry for each of the participants was also a way to engage readers with the work as well as a way to think through aspects of their stories in ways that connect readers with participants. Using found poetry was also a way for me, the researcher, to connect with the participants as I explored their stories of experience related to teaching English language arts and text selection. Thus, using found poetry might help to construct a portrait of the participants and, consequently, elevate their stories to an artistic form that “evoke[s] an emotional response” (Richardson, 1994, p. 521).

When thinking about how I might construct found poems for each participant, I pored over interview transcripts and field notes, highlighting vivid words and phrases from the participants themselves. I also looked for patterns, such as word or phrase repetitions that might help to illuminate specific aspects of the participants and their experiences.

Highlighted words and phrases were then separated from the original text and pasted into a separate document. Using this separate document, the highlighted words and phrases were then grouped into stanzas. In each stanza, I attempted to capture a different aspect of each participant and who he or she might be as a teacher. After arranging my poem into thematic stanzas, I focused on how I might go about arranging lines. Line breaks were chosen based on one of two criteria: either the word or phrase from each participant was included as part of the entire line of the poem, or I broke a longer highlighted sentence into two or more lines in order to showcase the complexity of each idea presented. Sometimes words were isolated on a single line if they were repeated by the participant or if I was personally struck by what a

participant had said. The same was true for phrases and sentences from each participant. Punctuation was added to clarify ideas and force readers to pause in various spots as they traveled through each participant's journey via poetry. After completing my found poem, participants were sent a copy for review so they could negotiate my poetic representation of their experiences if needed. When titling each poem, I used what I believed to be a poignant phrase that captured the feelings of each participant and his or her views on text selection. I followed a similar procedure when creating each participant's found poem.

It is my perception that each found poem helped to showcase the participants and their unique views on teaching and text selection. Furthermore, attempting to capture the stories of experience from each participant can be a challenging and daunting task as there is so much data and information through which a researcher must sift. Found poetry helped to illuminate and showcase some of the complexities that emerged during data collection. It also helped to articulate themes by evoking emotion.

Anne

I begin by describing Anne's experiences with teaching and text selection by using the three-dimensional framework. Exploring Anne's stories through this framework might help to better illuminate the narrative themes and Anne's own voice. Anne's stories might also contextualize each of the four themes I wrote about in chapter five. I used Anne's own words to title the poem. Specifically, "The Voice that Connects" was powerful as Anne used this phrase to describe how she felt about her role in teaching and guiding her colleagues in some of their text selection choices.

"The Voice that Connects"

Started teaching in language conversation school—

Very different kind of environment,
Sapporo.
Miyazaki.
Rural Japan.
Student teaching in the United States,
Blue collar kind of student body.
Wasn't even sure I wanted to be a teacher,
But I started teaching more what I loved.
Happier.

Juniors and seniors—teach them at a higher level.
A fantastic group of kids.
Want them to be critical thinkers,
Stronger writers.
Challenge Them.

Use backward planning.
What serves the purpose best?
What skills do I want them to come out with?
What's the best approach?
What will engage them?
I want to educate them, challenge them.
Think about who they are as individuals.
Author's Craft.
Narrative Writing.
Discussing the language, symbolism, theme
To build those skills.
I choose a text that will fit the purposes I have for it.

Did not use *Great Expectations*:
Harder for them to understand—language, old, no time.
I decided on *Whirligig*:
Accessible, able to wrap their heads around the concepts, shorter.
I want to engage them as readers.
I want it to reflect the classroom,
Hispanic.
Immigrant.
Health.
Science.
Matt de la Pena—
Picking up his books and reading them,
Not just Hispanic students, other students, too.
Engagement.

The district has been telling us

Students are being turned off by reading.
Do not use the classics.
Classroom libraries and free choice.
Hired specialists to make those choices
I've used a lot of training that's been
Provided by the district.
Experts in their field—
Columbia Teacher's College.
Carol Jago.
Kelly Gallagher.
Penny Kittle.
Mary Ehrenworth.
Taking from their approaches.
They have been successful,
So I try to incorporate that into the classroom,
Picking and choosing
What I think works.
Using district recommendations.

Literacy Leader.
Required Meetings and Trainings.
Bringing Information back to the school,
Checking in on classroom libraries,
Making sure everyone is on track,
Helping out if there is any problem,
Making sure books are getting out of boxes,
Getting on shelves—
The Voice that's connecting everyone together.

Anne's found poem explored a variety of different ideas related to her teaching experiences and text selection practices. "The Voice that Connects" explored her first teaching experience overseas in Japan and showcased her desire to challenge her students and turn them into capable readers and writers. Anne's found poem also illuminated some of her beliefs about teaching and text selection. Specifically, her poem described her interactions with district professional development and her role as the high school's literacy leader.

The following stories elaborate on some of these experiences that were the focus of Anne's found poem. Telling some of Anne's "stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) could elevate her experiences as well as highlight some of the themes found in this narrative inquiry. I offer three stories from Anne as a way to contextualize the themes defined in chapter five. However, all stories included are only a partial representation—a snapshot—of the larger narrative regarding Anne and her experiences with text selection. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the fluid nature of stories as being always "in the midst" of multiple lives, time, and space, and I acknowledge that I found myself in the midst of Anne's experiences with teaching and text selection. One of Anne's stories I titled, "I Want to Engage Them as Readers." After sharing this story from my field notes, I explore how Anne's story worked within the three-dimensional space, as well as how it related to the narrative themes "The Text as a Tool," "Texts that Engage," and "Texts with Authority." A second story, "Think About Who They Are as Individuals," explores how Anne's experiences helped to define the themes "Texts that Connect" and "Texts that Engage." A third story from Anne I titled "The Voice that's Connecting Everyone Together." For this story, I uncover how Anne's leadership role illuminates and helps to clarify the nuances within the "Texts with Authority" theme.

"I Want to Engage Them as Readers."

The following story of Anne's I took from field notes dated April 5, 2017. This excerpt provides unique insights about three of the four narrative themes discussed in chapter five:

Both Anne and I are getting ready to begin informative writing with our junior classes in the late spring during the middle of my data collection. In the Pacific Coast School District, informative writing is essentially studying author's craft and technique and

writing literary analysis about a variety of fictional works in poetic, short story, or novel form. Anne stops by my room briefly one day after school and hands me a packet of materials she acquired from the Teacher's College at Columbia University. The packet is thick and includes rubrics for grading literary analysis, handouts that might help teachers to teach author's craft, sample essays from students, and copies of mentor texts that could be read as a class, studied, and later written about. I tell Anne thank you, and she stops to flip through her own copy of the materials, drawing attention to the mentor texts that were included. "These stories worked really well last year," she says. "They were short and covered a variety of topics. Students seemed pretty engaged, especially when we read 'Ponies.' Have you read it?" Anne asks smiling. "Nope. Never heard of it," I say. "It's weird, disturbing—an allegory kind of... The students... well, most of them were very engaged." "I'll have to check it out," I say.

Later when I am looking for texts to read during the informative writing unit, I remember my interaction with Anne, and I flip through the packet until I find it: "Ponies" by Kij Johnson (2010). I have never read anything by this author, so I do a quick Google search and find that this story won the Nebula award for science fiction in 2010, although critics have said the story is more fantasy than science fiction. I begin reading. The story starts out innocently enough. A young girl named Barbara is invited to a "cutting out party" for her pony, but things go terribly wrong when Barbara is forced to sacrifice her pony in order to fit in with *TheOtherGirls*. The story is twisted and dark, and I can see why it might appeal to high school students. (excerpt from field notes, April 5, 2017)

During one of our interviews, Anne brought up the story "Ponies" (Johnson, 2010) again (interview, March 14, 2017). She described her experience with a former student, Emily, who had not been engaged by any of the readings or writing assignments in her class the entire year. However, during a unit on short stories, Anne allowed students to select from three or four short stories for their writing assignment about theme or author's craft. Emily happened to pick up a copy of "Ponies" when she was allowed to choose from the four stories Anne had selected. Anne commented with a small smile, "She probably had no idea what it was going to be when she picked it up" (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne explained that the story starts out innocently, describing the "pretty little ponies... kind of like My Little Pony... but the story turns nasty very quickly" (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne then

remembered that Emily came running into her class after she had read the story and explained how much she enjoyed it and how excited she was by the piece. Emily's new-found excitement encouraged her to write what Anne described as "one of the better works in class for her author's craft piece" (interview, March 14, 2017). This student engagement and, consequently, quality production of student work made Anne "really happy that [she] had provided that choice for them" (interview, March 14, 2017).

Anne's experience with Emily and the short story "Ponies" (Johnson, 2010) provides insight about Anne's interactions with district trainings, colleagues, and students. Anne's story also helps to illuminate the three narrative themes: "The Text as a Tool," "Texts that Engage," and "Texts with Authority." This story of Anne's was about the social dimension a teacher might have when selecting texts for his or her classroom. In Anne's case, the social dimension captures the "Texts with Authority" theme. These social interactions, however, are layered. At the first layer are Anne's interactions and experiences with professional development and district trainings—outside authorities that are meant to help teachers improve pedagogy and develop curriculum. Initially Anne heard about the story "Ponies" (Johnson, 2010) from Mary Ehrenworth, a national literacy consultant and developer at the Teachers College at Columbia University. Ehrenworth is hired to consult with the Pacific Coast School District teachers about teaching reading and writing. Anne has often talked about how she values learning from these specialists and understands that they have been successful in what they do. Thus, Anne's choice to share "Ponies" (Johnson, 2010) with her students in the first place stemmed mainly from her belief that Mary Ehrenworth is a trustworthy, authoritative source when it came to teaching literary analysis and selecting texts. Anne's social interactions through district-provided professional development are what

encouraged her to select this text in the first place. This social interaction helped to define the “Texts with Authority” theme for Anne by clarifying that Anne often relied on and trusted specialists and experts when deciding which texts to read in her classroom.

The second layer of the social dimension related to the way in which Anne interacted with her fellow teachers. Anne’s success in teaching and sharing this short story encouraged her to recommend the text to other teachers so that they, too, might have similar positive experiences with teaching literary analysis. Here this social interaction with colleagues (me) might illuminate how the “Text as a Tool” theme developed for Anne. Initially, Anne selected “Ponies” (Johnson, 2010) because a person whom she perceived to be an expert had recommended the text, suggesting that the theme “Texts with Authority” carried the most weight for Anne in this text selection experience. However, Anne recommended the text to me, a teaching colleague, because of a past successful experience she had in teaching the work, implying that “Ponies” (Johnson, 2010) was a successful tool for Anne when attempting to use the text to teach her students author’s craft and literary analysis.

Anne’s experiences with selecting and teaching this story were also rooted in the temporal dimension (her past experiences) as well as the social (sharing and collaborating with colleagues), meaning that “Texts with Authority” might influence “The Text as a Tool” theme. When Anne experienced success with this text selection, she felt confident in suggesting the text to another colleague, thus making text selection a shared and social experience. Anne’s sharing of this story with colleagues also implied that she saw herself as an authority because she perceived that students experienced success when reading “Ponies” (Johnson, 2010). However, it might be safe to assume that had Anne found the story “Ponies” to be boring or disengaging for her students—an ineffective tool—she more than likely

would not have given me a copy of that text since she personally had not experienced success with it. Anne's recommendation of the story "Ponies," (Johnson, 2010) in turn, encouraged me to read the text for myself and, consequently, use it in my classroom. Like Anne's student Emily, my students were shocked and horrified by the story's plot, which made the story memorable. I did not use the text in exactly the same as Anne did, but the student engagement was still there. Thus, my past experiences with this text might have made it more likely that I would recommend it to a different teaching colleague, trust Anne when she suggests another text, or use the text with a different group of students or in future teaching experiences.

The third layer of the social dimension is the way in which Anne's text selection encouraged engagement among her students, thus helping to define how the "Texts that Engage" theme developed from Anne's experiences. The engagement Anne's student Emily experienced seemed to result in Emily being able to produce higher quality work than she had before, and Anne perceived this was because Emily felt ownership in selecting this text (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne also provided choice for her students in the form of including three or four short stories from which they could choose, further illuminating the idea that choice is related to the extent to which students are engaged with a text. Had she only provided one story and required every student to write about it, Emily might not have experienced the same level of engagement and, therefore, may have produced inferior work. Thus, through Anne's text selection practice in this experience, not only were students excited and shocked about what they were reading, but Anne was able to use the text to connect to her students, build trust, and engage them in curriculum.

This story helped to define what three of the four narrative themes meant for Anne. Anne's use of a story that she had acquired from district professional development captured how Anne believed texts recommended by specialists and experts were, more than likely, going to be successful when she used them in her own classroom. This trust in experts is one way the "Texts with Authority" theme developed for Anne. This theme, however, became more nuanced when Anne began to view herself as an authority after she recommended the text to me. However, Anne only viewed herself as an authority after she had experienced success with using the short story with her junior writing class. Anne's success here helped to define "The Text as a Tool" theme for her. Specifically, Anne used this text to teach author's craft and to help teach students how to write literary analysis essays (interview, March 14, 2017). "Ponies" (Johnson, 2010) was simply one story in her tool bag for teaching these skills—albeit a successful one. Finally, the theme of "Texts that Engage" developed as Anne noticed some students, even reluctant readers, appeared to be intrigued by the story's dark plot. Anne also offered her students choice when selecting short stories to read, which proved to be another way to engage them in the curriculum.

Anne often talked about selecting texts that would connect to individual students and their reading levels and interests as a way to engage them in class. In the following story, I introduce readers to two of Anne's students of whom Anne spoke during her interviews: Javier and Kaylee. The following stories of experience helped to provide context for the themes "Texts that Connect" and "Texts that Engage."

"Think about Who They Are as Individuals"

During our third interview, Anne recalled an experience with a junior boy named Javier who during a book club unit showed interest in reading the coming of age text, *Girl in*

Translation (Kwok, 2010). This text is about a young Chinese American girl named Kimberly Chang who goes to school by day but works in a sweat shop by night in order to help her family survive. She is forced to balance the demands of two cultures while paving out a future that is her own. While Javier's book choice puzzled her, Anne paired him with two other enthusiastic students to form one of the five book club groups in her junior writing class (interview, June 20, 2017). However, from the beginning, Javier did not participate fully in the book club experience because he was never fully engaged with the text. I remember observing Javier interact with his book club group and noted that his two peers spoke animatedly about the text while Javier scribbled in a notebook and later read part of the book because he was behind in his reading (observation, June 6, 2017). Anne noted this behavior and later asked Javier why he chose to read *Girl in Translation* (Kwok, 2010), as his choice simply did not make sense to Anne.

She explained this scenario in the following story.

He [Javier] really didn't put as much thought into what he chose. I talked to him today. Why did you choose that book? Was it the dual culture aspect of it? And he was like, no, it was because it had the word translation in it is what he said... And I talked to him a little bit about that. Because I thought if it was the culture part, maybe I could recommend some other books. He's like, no, it's just the word translation. And so he didn't keep up with the book. That engagement wasn't there. (interview, June 20, 2017)

Javier's rationale for his book club choice puzzled Anne and made her think carefully about how she might help students think more critically about themselves as readers. Anne's experience with Javier also provided insight about the importance of fitting students with books that engage them and teaching students how to select their own texts, which was one way in which the "Texts that Connect" theme emerged for Anne. Anne carefully planned how the text would be used and which skills she wanted her students to master through their

book clubs, indicating that she was thinking about how the text might be a tool to enhance certain literacy skills. However, for Javier the engagement was not there, so he was unable to fully benefit from his book club group. Anne noted this and explained that in the future she would like to “maybe add more variety” and help students think more carefully about their text selection practices (interview, June 20, 2017). Again, Anne’s reflection regarding her experience with Javier showcased the importance of choice and how it is an essential component of the theme of “Texts that Engage.” Overall Anne felt the book club unit with both grades to be a success mostly due to the engagement she observed. She concluded, “Overall I think it [the book club] went well. And they had a good time with it. They were excited about reading” (interview, June 20, 2017). Here Anne’s observations add a second layer to the “Texts that Engage” theme in that engagement was a quality that Anne could observe in her students. Engagement, according to Anne, was observable based on what students did and said during class and if they showed visible excitement toward reading. For Anne, engagement was also measured based on the extent to which students willingly participated in doing the reading and speaking during class discussions (interview, June 20, 2017).

Anne’s experience with Javier is one of many experiences in which she tried to fit a specific book to an individual student. Sometimes these were successful pairings and other times it took a bit more work to finally match a book to a student. The time spent fitting individual students with texts was one way the “Texts that Connect” theme developed for Anne. Anne recalled another experience involving students and their ability to select appropriate, engaging texts for themselves. In this story, Anne recalled an experience with a student named Kaylee, who was struggling to find something to read during choice reading

time, which occurred most days during the first 10 minutes of class. She described Kaylee as being “very bright, but...avoiding reading” (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne spent several weeks trying to engage Kaylee in the choice reading, but every book she suggested was a poor fit for the reluctant reader. Anne also explained that when she was trying to fit a reader to a book, she asked a lot of questions: “What kind of things do you like? What have you read before? What books are your favorites?” (interview, March 14, 2017). Kaylee kept saying she never read and when she did, she lost interest quickly. Anne refused to give up, however, and kept interacting with Kaylee during choice reading time. Eventually Kaylee revealed that she owned several books from the young adult fantasy series *The Lunar Chronicles* (Meyer, 2012-2015) but that she was bored—the books were too easy—and she wanted something funny.

Anne quickly went to the book shelves at the back wall of her classroom and looked for two texts: *Running with Scissors* (Burroughs, 2002) and *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (Sedaris, 2000), both humorous nonfiction memoirs by reputable authors. *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (Sedaris, 2000), however, was checked out by another student and Anne could not find her second copy. Anne recalled, “So I grab [*Running with Scissors*], and she took it and she went and sat down for a while” (interview, March 14, 2017). While Anne was not sure if Kaylee would continue to read the book, Kaylee looked engaged as she went off into a corner to read. Anne was hopeful that she matched a book to her student, but also noted that she would continue to work with Kaylee until she found the perfect fit.

Anne’s experiences with helping students select texts with which they connect and are engaged intersect at the personal and temporal dimensions. The dimension that is most present regarding this experience is the personal dimension. Both Javier and Kaylee

struggled to select texts that were interesting to them, and their struggle caused Anne to pause and consider how she might help them find more engaging books to read. Anne felt responsible for the poor book selections or reluctant approach to reading that her students exhibited. This sense of responsibility forced Anne to reflect and engage in conversations with Javier and Kaylee as to how they might better select books. Thus, for Anne, meeting with students individually and working until she fit them with a book was another way the theme “Texts that Connect” developed in this experience. Furthermore, in Anne’s experiences with Javier and Kaylee, it appeared that “Texts that Connect” and “Texts that Engage” were two themes tied closely to one another. Both Javier and Kaylee said that they were unable to connect with their reading material, which disengaged them from class and often resulted in poor participation (interview, March 14, 2017; interview, June 20, 2017). Thus, Anne worked hard to help students connect with what they were reading so they might be engaged not only with their texts but in the class as well.

The implications from the story “Who They Are as Individuals” suggest that for many students in Anne’s classroom, connecting to a text personally was a necessary criterion for engagement. Based on Anne’s experiences, engagement might mean that students showed visible signs they are enjoying a text whether the visible sign be a comment, action, or increased participation in class. A second implication of this experience is that Anne felt responsible for guiding her students toward texts to which they might connect by interacting with them multiple times as unique individuals with particular interests and needs. Anne’s guidance was revealed in both her interactions with Javier and Kaylee. However, these experiences imply that helping students to connect and engage is difficult and sometimes unsuccessful work, especially if the student has been disengaged from reading for an

extended period of time, as was the case with Kaylee. Based on Anne’s experiences, matching students to texts that connect and engage them in reading might also be challenging since it appeared to be a highly individualized and fluid process that required Anne to interact consistently with students one-on-one.

“The Voice that’s Connecting Everyone Together”

In the next story, “The Voice that’s Connecting Everyone Together,” I describe another of Anne’s experiences involving her role as a teacher and literacy leader, a leadership position created by the department of Teaching and Learning in the Pacific Coast School District. I then explain how the theme “Texts with Authority” emerged as the dominant theme of this experience. This experience of Anne’s helped to explore the multi-faceted nature of how one might better understand this theme.

For the 2016-2017 school year, the Pacific Coast School District officially rolled out classroom libraries for all sixth grade through 12th grade English language arts teachers. Referencing research that claimed students do not like to read (Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013; Lehman & Roberts, 2014; D. Miller, 2009), Pacific Coast also hired specialists, such as Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher, and Kate Roberts to train Pacific Coast teachers about curriculum—specifically, about how to use classroom libraries, choice reading, and book clubs in order to encourage reading and promote literacy. All secondary ELA teachers were given 200-300 books from a variety of genres and authors as a way to begin building their classroom libraries. This district-wide curriculum adoption was meant to replace any type of anthology text book adoption as well as encourage teachers to move away from reading only canonical works.

Like any program implemented on a district level, some teachers readily welcomed the new change while others dug in their heels and continued to do what they had always done—which was to read mostly from the canon and continue to approach English language arts instruction from the Cultural Heritage Tradition (Applebee, 1993). Levin (2008) explained that curriculum reform efforts, such as the reform efforts to transition from a traditional ELA curriculum to a student-centered one, do not guarantee that teachers change their practices. Moreover, sometimes curriculum adoptions fail to include teachers in the process of curriculum adoption and creation. The importance of including teachers in such a process has been referred to as teachers as curriculum planners (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and later as teachers as the curriculum (Schlein & Schwarz, 2015), arguing that teachers ought to have an active role in curriculum development and creation. Instead many district-level curriculum adoptions tend to narrow the role of teachers as mere implementers of curriculum, which is a passive rather than active role. Clandinin et al. (2006) suggested that such a moment of curricular transition can create personal and professional tensions (bumps) that need to be acknowledged or resolved.

Based on statements gleaned from interviews and informal conversations, Anne was in the former category, and she readily accepted the district's choice reading curriculum adoption. Anne's story aligned closely with the sacred story of the school district and its desire to implement new English language arts curriculum. In fact, she even acquired the literacy leader role at Pine Grove School. The literacy leader role, Anne explained, was created to make sure "people were on track" regarding implementing their classroom libraries in addition to other district-level curriculum mandates (interview, March 14, 2017). The purpose of this role, as it was described by Anne, helped to reinforce the sacred story of

the school district. Anne applied for this position at the end of the previous school year, feeling that she would be a good fit since she was “rolling out all of the [district] trainings, including classroom libraries” (interview, March 14, 2017). Here it appeared that the literacy leader role was one that encouraged teachers to be implementers of pre-determined curricula instead of curriculum planners (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) since, according to Anne, the purpose was to make sure fellow department members were clear regarding curriculum expectations instead of being responsible for developing curriculum themselves. In a way, Anne’s role as literacy leader created a cover story that allowed her experiences to fit within the larger, more dominant story about district curriculum adoption (Clandinin et al., 2006).

Anne appeared to enjoy her role as literacy leader for the small four-member department at Pine Grove School and talked about it often during interviews and informal conversations. Based on my interactions with her, she is someone who appreciated going to district trainings while many other teachers might express frustration with this type of added responsibility (interview, March 14, 2017; May 23, 2017; June 20, 2017). Both Robert and Georgia, for example, chose not to apply for the leadership position, although they had seniority. Both Georgia and Robert only went to required district curriculum trainings while Anne took advantage and went to all the trainings related to the ELA adoption (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne saw herself as having something to learn from whomever was leading the training, whether that person was Penny Kittle discussing book clubs or Kelly Gallagher leading a workshop on narrative writing or Mary Ehrenworth providing tips for how to best teach argument writing (interview, March 14, 2017). After these trainings, Anne often went back to her own classroom to implement something she learned, since those “experts and specialists,” as Anne called them, have been successful. Using these same

materials, she could have a taste of that success in her own classroom (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne also viewed her literacy leader role as someone who was there as an example for other teachers concerning how to organize and maintain their classroom libraries and to make sure “books are getting out of boxes and getting on shelves and guiding [other teachers] in terms of what that could look like” (interview, March 14, 2017). Anne felt confident that most Pine Grove School teachers were doing their best to implement the district curriculum adoption. However, she indicated that fellow literacy leaders from other schools had explained that some staff still had not unpacked their books or had placed the books in a position that did not encourage students to access them. Some teachers, Anne heard, would not even allow the books to leave their classrooms so that students could read at home (interview, May 23, 2017). It is unknown whether or not Anne’s colleagues saw her in the same way as she envisioned her literacy leader role to be—a person “who is kind of checking in and helping out if necessary” and someone who was “being that voice that’s connecting everyone together” (interview, March 14, 2017). However, Anne’s descriptions of her experiences as literacy leader suggested that this role empowers her and validates the pedagogy she chooses to employ in her classroom.

The three dimensions of time, context, and interaction intersected within Anne’s experiences with implementing Pacific Coast’s new curriculum and her role as literacy leader and helped to describe the theme, “Texts with Authority.” The importance of context was the focal point of this story since Anne’s role as literacy leader was directly connected to the district’s decision to implement new English language arts curriculum in the form of classroom libraries and choice reading. Anne’s story rested in the middle of a larger narrative—the narrative of Pacific Coast’s curriculum adoption. Here the personal and larger

cultural dimensions collided. Anne's personal experiences with teaching and her belief in the relevance of district professional development meant that she chose to implement choice reading and classroom libraries based on her experiences and knowledge. Anne's cover story smoothly overlapped with the dominant narrative of school (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

Anne's personal experiences played a role regarding to what extent she adopted the new ELA curriculum. Pinar's (1975) notion of *carrere*, which describes the intermingling of biography and teaching, and Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) notion of personal practical knowledge, which reinforces that teachers shape the curriculum based on their knowledge base and experiences from personal and professional realms, are at work here regarding Anne's role in curriculum adoption. Specifically, Anne drew from her own biography as well as her personal practical knowledge as she decided whether or not her own beliefs about teaching might fit into the larger cultural context of Pacific Coast School District, which was wanting all of its teachers to shift from reading canonical works to reading that focused on choice. This amicable relationship between Anne and the district helped to illuminate the theme "Texts with Authority." On one level, Anne was responding to the district's authority of mandating curriculum changes in high school ELA classes. On another level, Anne used her own authority as a professional educator to determine whether or not her personal beliefs about teaching reading and writing would align with the district's dominant narrative about curriculum and text selection. Anne's personal goals as a teacher and the district's goals for ELA curriculum seemed to align perfectly, which is possibly why Anne was selected to be literacy leader for Pine Grove School. Essentially, few tensions or bumps emerged between Anne and the district. Clandinin et al.'s (2006) ideas about conflicting stories were mostly absent from Anne's experience.

Place is also an important dimension with regard to Pine Grove School, which is where the majority of Anne's official teaching experiences have occurred. Therefore, the contextual dimension of place intersects with the temporal dimension of the past. Apart from her time teaching in Japan and her student teaching, Anne's past teaching experiences have all been at Pine Grove. Pine Grove School itself is unique in that it is a nontraditional school that does not officially have subject area departments. Employing around 40 teachers, it is also a small school when compared to other district high schools. Teachers appear to have more freedom, especially in English language arts, where only one teacher teaches per grade level, making text selection entirely up to the individual. Within the microcosm that is Pine Grove School, there does not seem to be a dominant or sacred story regarding text selection. Therefore, when Anne began teaching, her past experiences with text selection were a blank slate, which is why she so readily adopted the district-approved curriculum, merging her cover story with the dominant story of school. Here again *carrere* (Pinar, 1975) and personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) are at work since Anne had very few past teaching experiences on which to reflect. For Anne, selecting texts was not rooted in years of reading from the canon, nor did her experiences rest heavily on the inner-department politics that plague so many high school English departments. Instead, Anne brought with her what she perceived she might do when thinking about text selection, but her lack of actual past experiences coupled with the context of a non-traditional school setting are maybe why she was open to trying a new approach to teaching English language arts. The dimension of place adds yet another layer to the "Texts with Authority" theme in that Pine Grove School is a place that reflects an absence of authority. This, coupled with Anne's limited experiences

teaching in a traditional ELA classroom, are why she adopted the district's sacred narrative about text selection and curriculum as her own.

A final intersection in Anne's story included the way in which Anne's personal beliefs about her role as literacy leader relate to her social interactions with the other ELA teachers at Pine Grove School: Robert, Georgia, and myself. Readers can begin to understand a final layer in the "Texts with Authority" theme. In this layer, Anne's belief in her role as an official authority through her leadership position bumped up against colleagues who might question her authoritative role and its purpose. Anne had applied for the literacy leader position based on her personal belief that she would be a good fit since she was willing to go to district trainings and implement the new curriculum adoption (interview, March 23, 2017). Anne's role established her as an official authority about reading and text selection. Anne saw herself as a role model for her teaching colleagues because of her personal beliefs in her ability to adhere to district curricular policies and expectations. Anne even described herself as "the voice that connects everyone together," a statement that suggested Anne saw herself as a leader at Pine Grove School (interview, May 23, 2017). Whether or not Anne's colleagues saw her as a leader is where the personal and social dimensions bump into one another. According to statements made in interviews from all three participants, traditionally the teachers at Pine Grove School have academic freedom and pedagogical autonomy in their classrooms. The structure of the school is a lateral rather than hierarchical one; however, Anne's role as literacy leader implied that she might be more knowledgeable and best suited to implement the district curriculum, which might cause tensions with other staff members if they did not view Anne's literacy leader role in the same way that she did. Another possibility is that work colleagues were simply indifferent to Anne's position of authority

while Anne saw her literacy leader role as essential and important. This is a tension-filled place where Anne's experiences as an authority bump with her colleagues' perceptions of her authority.

In this section, I explored several of Anne's experiences related to teaching and text selection. Anne's experiences suggested that she is a conscientious teacher who thinks about individual students and their engagement levels. Anne's experiences, however, also revealed that fitting texts to students can be a difficult and, at times, unsuccessful process. Anne also described herself as having a leadership role with regard to the district's new focus on classroom libraries and choice reading, a role which suggests she is confident in her abilities to implement curriculum and select texts. All of Anne's stories intersect in various ways throughout the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, making her experiences unique but relatable. Anne's stories help to define all four common narrative themes.

Robert

In this section, I describe several of Robert's narratives of experience involving teaching and text selection. Telling Robert's stories might elevate the importance of his personal and professional voice and make his experiences with the phenomena memorable. Similar to how I began describing Anne's experiences, I begin with a found poem that captures some of Robert's beliefs and values regarding teaching and text selection. Like Anne's, I titled Robert's poem by selecting a phrase that he had used to describe himself during one of our interviews. Robert's found poem is called "A Highly Proficient Educator," as I felt that this phrase helped to best capture Robert's beliefs about his teaching. This found poem is especially illuminating for crystallizing Robert's experiences in an artistic and memorable way.

“A Highly Proficient Educator”

Teaching for fifteen or sixteen years.
First experience, working class neighborhood, lots of minorities.
Pacific Coast offered me a job.
I took it.
Middle class, lots of home owners—not very high needs kids.
Typical.
Teaching middle school was getting too easy.
Pine Grove was set to open.
New,
Small,
Not your typical school.
Massive failure rate during freshman year.
I wanted to do something about it.

Never had a class I didn't like.
People tend to say I'm energetic.
Likes doing job.
A highly proficient educator,
I check in with kids a lot.
Reinvigorated by teaching freshmen
I enjoy growing with the kids,
Establishing relationships with kids.

Lots of work to provide best materials,
To keep kids engaged,
To find new curriculum that's fresh.

Kids need to be reading and writing—
I don't care what they read, but I do care that
They like to read.
Reading constantly—
That's half the battle.
Too often kids read and write for an assignment;
Kids learn that reading is for tasks only.
They learn to not like language arts.
My role is to reinvigorate them,
Make sure they like to read.

Language arts is a social justice.
If kids can't read, doors are going to close for them.
Not successful in other classes,
Struggle in college,
Certain jobs they just can't do.
Kids need to be able to transfer certain skills
So they can make the decisions they want.

I don't do a lot of classics.
You don't just have to read in the canon,
Although I need to sometimes.
No need to read all of Shakespeare's plays.
You read those to be smart,
Because they're part of the canon.
I would teach these books because
That was the way it had always happened.
They were in the library.
These types of books were okay;
Others were not okay.
Fall in line.

If a book didn't work, it's because
I haven't thought about the kids first.

A book that's super accessible..
Is it engaging?
Will it get a kid to read another book?
Will it Surprise them?
Energize them in some way?
Like *A Part-Time Indian*.
A good entry point.
Swearing,
Sex,
Funny...
It needs to be a flexible book...
Accessible to low kids,
Challenges my high kids.
Give them a book in their wheel house.
Engage Them
Push their thinking.
Push their skill level.
I love getting kids that aren't readers
To Read.

Robert's found poem, "A Highly Proficient Educator" provides insight about his teaching experiences, beliefs about learning, educational and personal values, and text selection practices. In his found poem, he spoke often about the importance of his students and how he tries to make them the focal point of everything he does in his classroom. The following stories are taken from some of the lines in this found poem—all of which are Robert's own words—and elaborated upon. One of Robert's experiences is called "I Love Getting Kids that Aren't Readers to Read." This story is about Robert's attempt to engage students with reading. After describing this experience, I use the three-dimensional space in which I explore how this experience helped to illuminate the themes "Texts that Connect" and "Texts that Engage." I titled another story that Robert told, "Kids Need to Be Able to Transfer Certain Skills." In this story, I describe how Robert interacted with his eighth period ninth grade language arts class to teach theme using a whole class novel. This experience helped to showcase how the "The Text as a Tool" theme emerged for this participant. A third story, "That Was How It Had Always Happened," was about Robert's experiences working at a school that encouraged him to teach and select texts based on tradition and past experiences. I then describe how Robert's present teaching experiences include more freedom and autonomy to create curriculum and select texts. I use these experiences to clarify how the theme "Texts with Authority" developed. Elaborating on Robert's experiences through story might provide additional insight about teaching and text selection.

"I Love Getting Kids that Aren't Readers to Read"

In this story, I explore Robert's interaction with a reluctant reader, Aleena, and how he worked with her to find texts that would fit her needs as a reader. This story illuminated two themes for Robert: "Texts that Connect" and "Text that Engage." I explore how these

themes developed and intersected within the context of the three-dimensional narrative framework.

During one of our interviews, Robert told me about Aleena, a ninth grade female student who immigrated with her family to the Pacific Northwest from Iraq. Aleena was an English Language Learner and struggled in Robert's class. Aleena was also a very hard worker and constantly took time to make sure she asked questions and met with Robert if she was unsure about the vocabulary in an assignment or confused by the directions. Aleena's parents did not speak English, and so many times Aleena found herself translating for them, helping them to navigate the complex American public education system. Robert loved students like Aleena because of the growth he can help them experience over the course of a school year (interview, April 7, 2017).

Robert recalled that at the beginning of the school year, Aleena was a timid reader. During independent choice reading time, Aleena would quietly peruse the book shelves that were crammed against one side of Robert's tiny and very full classroom. Aleena would scan the shelves, never looking for a particular title but instead looking for the shortest possible book she could find. As Robert explained regarding Aleena's mindset, "If I get a short book, it's less painful" (interview, April 7, 2017). Robert noticed Aleena's reluctance but continued to encourage her to keep reading. After watching Aleena read small but disengaging books, Robert began to more actively ask her questions about her interests. What types of stories did she like? Adventure? Fantasy? Romance? (interview, April 7, 2017).

One day as Aleena was slowly looking for another thin book to read, Robert walked up beside her and looked at the shelves as well. He pulled a copy of the dystopian young adult text, *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009) from his shelf. "I think you might like this," he said. "It sounds like it's your type of book."

Aleena stared at him and then at the book. It was almost 400 pages and way longer than anything she had ever attempted to read.

“Thank you,” she whispered as she timidly took the book from Robert’s hands.

The next day Robert was getting ready to start class. He was looking at his computer answering an email when he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder. It was Aleena, and she was clutching the book he gave her yesterday to her chest, *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009). For a brief moment, Robert thought that she tried to read it but was too intimidated by the length. Instead Aleena shyly handed the book back to him.

“I’m done. Is there another one?” she asked. Aleena consumed the rest of the books in *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009) series with rapid speed, transforming herself from reluctant reader to engaged reader. (above story was constructed from interview, April 7, 2017).

Robert explained that Aleena was a reluctant reader—not because she was lazy or because reading was an inherently boring activity—but because she struggled with reading and had not found the right book that would spark her interest (interview, April 7, 2017). For Robert, getting to know Aleena helped him find a book that fit her interests, even if *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009) was out of her comfort zone. His experiences with this young immigrant girl reminded him that “kids like to read and want to read...you just have to find the right button to push” (interview, April 7, 2017).

Robert’s experience with Aleena helped define how the themes “Texts that Connect” and “Texts that Engage” developed. These themes are better understood within the context of the dimension of space. The dimension most evident in Robert’s experience with Aleena is the dimension related to interactions. On a personal level, one can see that Robert believed it was partly his responsibility to help a struggling student. Robert noticed that Aleena was picking only small, short books and felt personally invested in her as a student to help her find more appropriate and engaging reading material. Helping Aleena find more engaging books to read aligned with the personal beliefs Robert described concerning his desire for

students to read and to enjoy reading (interviews, April 7, 2017; May 19, 2017; June 14, 2017). Therefore, Robert helped Aleena connect personally with reading as a way to make her continually engaged. Once he helped Aleena connect with a book, there was no stopping her in developing her engagement with reading. Thus, the narrative themes “Texts that Connect” and “Texts that Engage” are closely intertwined within the interaction dimension. Robert helped Aleena connect so that she might be not only an engaged reader but an engaged student when she came to her English language arts class each day.

Regarding this experience, the personal dimension also intersected with the social one and helped to further explore the “Texts and Connect” and “Texts that Engage” themes. Robert’s beliefs about reading and text selection are manifested through his interactions with Aleena. Before being in his class, Aleena would more than likely not have described herself as a reader, but with Robert’s guidance she was able to read not only thicker books but engaging books as well, thus seeing herself as a reader when she had not before (interview, April 7, 2017). The temporal dimension is at work here as well. Aleena’s past experiences had determined she was not a reader, especially if she was reading books in English. However, Robert’s assistance in helping Aleena find the right book in the present might influence the way in which Aleena views herself in the future—as a capable reader who reads because she enjoys it and understands the importance of developing those skills. In future classes Aleena might be more confident when selecting books on her own to read. Likewise, Robert might recall his experience with Aleena when interacting with students who have similar needs in the future. For Robert, connecting with students personally was a way of getting them to connect with books and reading. Robert’s work to help connect

students to reading consequently engaged them in his class as well as built a healthy rapport where students felt empowered to read.

Overall, “I Love Getting Kids that Aren’t Readers to Read” is a story about connection and engagement. Robert explained that he must first connect with his students before he can get them to connect with reading. This is why he consistently invested time interacting with students individually in order to help build a relational capacity with them. By means of this relationship, Robert was able to use his knowledge about students and their lives and connect them with books that would engage them. Once students were engaged with independent choice reading and had connected personally to specific books, Robert found that they became more engaged in class overall and were able to strengthen their literacy skills. Thus, for Robert, “Texts that Connect” and “Texts that Engaged” did not develop exclusively from one another.

“Kids Need to be Able to Transfer Certain Skills”

I describe below a second experience of Robert’s using data from field notes taken during a March 14, 2017, observation. Field notes were edited for clarity and grammatical correctness and were written immediately after I completed my classroom observation. I left the field notes in present tense in order to place readers in the moment so they may experience some of what I observed more clearly. After using field notes by which to describe Robert’s experience, I explore the three-dimensional space as a way to clarify the narrative theme dominant to this story: “The Text as a Tool.”

Robert’s room is alive with friendly chatter before his eighth period class begins at 1:15. Music plays loudly as students enter the room and find their seats. Robert stands at his door, greeting each student and giving high fives to some. The students seem energetic and excited to be here. The desks are arranged in a circle shape that outlines the perimeter of the room, suggesting that some type of class discussion might take

place. The room is small, and Robert's eighth period class is by far his largest at 35 freshman students. Every desk is filled. One student even sits at the back of the room on a stool since he cannot find an empty desk. With that many ninth graders, the room could feel chaotic, but it does not. Something tells me that students are ready to work when they enter Mr. Davis's room even if the physical space is somewhat small. The bell rings, signaling the start of class. Robert enters, shuts the door, and immediately he and his students get to work analyzing the nonfiction memoir *A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2007), a first-person account of the author's experiences growing up as a child soldier in war-torn Sierra Leone. Robert sandwiches a chair in between two students since all the desks are filled, indicating that he is a part of the day's activities but is not going to lecture. Two questions—the focus of the day—are written on the board. Robert also provides a handout to each student that he has handwritten and made copies of in addition to the copied chapter 11 from the anchor text so that students can take margin notes and annotate.

Robert holds up his teacher-generated handout, which breaks down the story into chunks and includes the following two questions that will be used to facilitate a Socratic Seminar discussion: Why does Ishmael Beah tell this story? And Why does he tell it at this point in his narrative? Students are given 10 minutes to write responses to both questions, but they are asked to work independently. Robert roams the room. "I see a lot of annotating, which is really cool," he says, praising them for showing their skills as readers. Several students have questions and Robert crouches down to work with them one on one. "I've never done these questions before," he tells the class. "Not sure how it'll go, but you guys are smart."

At the end of eight minutes, Robert explains that students will be discussing their responses. The only rule he has for discussion is that four people must speak before a student can speak a second time. Tom, a blond male student sitting in the corner of the room, begins the discussion which is quickly taken over by Angela, another student who references page 92 of the text. Robert interjects: "Hey, let's go there." Students turn to that page via their own copies of chapter eleven. Several students reference the text during this discussion, and each time Robert stops and suggests that students turn to that page and reread the various excerpts that support student thinking. Students not only use the text during this discussion, but they also use academic vocabulary that shows off their reading skills. One student talks about symbolism, another the story's turning point, another theme, while another states the main character is going through the five stages of grief. One student, Phillip, is even brave enough to disagree with a comment made by Garon, another classmate, but does so in a scholarly way and by using evidence from the text to support his claims. Robert praises both for their insight.

With 10 minutes left in the class period, Robert directs the students to the concept of theme. "A theme might be what the author is trying to teach us about ourselves and the people around us. I want you to root your theme statement in the story and use Ishmael's story as evidence. Don't be cliché; be original," Robert explains. He then

gives students three minutes to write their statements and to begin thinking about evidence from the text that they might use for support. Students are encouraged to call out their theme statements:

“The choices we make can greatly affect our future,” says one boy from the back of the room.

“We are stronger than we give ourselves credit for,” states another tiny freshman boy.

“The best situation for you might be the worst for someone else,” a female student suggests.

Robert is encouraging as students share. He is impressed by the quality and naturalness of their discussion. “You guys are simply amazing, and I am honored to spend the day with you,” he tells the class. (story compiled from observation field notes, March 14, 2017)

In this story, the “Text as a Tool” theme proves to be layered and complex, making it necessary to examine this experience within the context of the three-dimensional space. Within one class period, Robert used the text, *A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2007), as a tool in a variety of ways. Specifically, Robert’s social interactions were dominant in his experience teaching *A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2007) to his ninth grade eighth period class. These social interactions, however, are heightened by a second dimension of place: Robert’s classroom. From the moment students entered Robert’s space, it was clear they felt safe and comfortable. Even Robert transformed. He was no longer just Robert; rather he was Mr. Davis, a cool, smart, and respected teacher. Many students were willing to share their thinking, and it was clear that Robert’s space was also their space. Robert’s teaching space was not all that physically comfortable. The room was warm, small, and crowded. Papers, books, and other materials littered many shelves and even the floor (field notes, March 14, 2017). However, the students understood that when they were in Mr. Davis’s room, they were there to learn; they were there to become better reader, writers, and thinkers.

The importance of students feeling comfortable in their educational space was one way the “Text as a Tool” theme developed for Robert in this story. Robert established clear expectations for learning but also focused on creating a healthy and positive learning environment, which, in turn, encouraged students to participate. His desire to create a warm and inviting environment also required students to take his class seriously and grow as readers, writers, and thinkers, which were central aspects of “The Text as a Tool” theme.

The importance of this physical space as it related to “The Text as a Tool” theme was supported by both the body language and verbal language Robert used when interacting with his students. Robert used many non-verbal cues to suggest that he wanted students to feel comfortable in his room. He played music as they entered, he arranged the desks in a way that allowed students to face each other, and he gave high fives to several students as they entered his class. When students had questions, he crouched down to speak with them instead of standing over them in a position of authority (observations, March 14, 2017; April 11, 2017; May 25, 2017). These verbal and nonverbal behaviors helped to establish a welcoming environment that enabled students to access their work and grow as readers and writers.

Robert’s use of language was an important part of the social dimension as well and further supported how establishing a safe, warm, and inviting environment was a prerequisite for using texts or employing pedagogy that might make students better readers and writers. Robert’s language toward his students was almost always positive. He praised students individually and collectively when they exhibited a reading skill. He thanked them at the end of the class period for being smart. He used words like “honored” and “amazing” when telling his students how he felt about them (observation, March 14, 2017). Robert’s use of positive language fostered in his students a desire to become better readers and writers, a

desire which was imperative to the theme “The Text as a Tool.” Perhaps this was because the students inherently enjoyed the activities but also because they liked Robert as a person and as a teacher, which, in turn, encouraged them to try their hardest when they entered Mr. Davis’s room.

A second theme that surfaced from Robert’s experience teaching a whole class novel was the theme “Texts that Engage.” While a warm and safe environment was central to helping Robert develop the reading and writing skills of his students, Robert’s experiences teaching a whole class text to his ninth graders suggested that student engagement lies partly outside of the text itself. In fact, despite his students’ ability to understand the text and develop skills around theme and figurative language, Robert did not plan on using *A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2007) with future classes because the text was not inherently engaging for students (interview, June 14, 2017). Instead, students were engaged with Robert’s class because of who he was as a person and because of how he respected them as individuals and empowered them to become better students. Therefore, engagement emerged because Robert viewed himself as having a central role in creating a classroom environment and atmosphere focused on improving reading and writing skills—a view clarified in educational research as the teacher as the curriculum (Schlein & Schwartz, 2015).

For Robert, this story helped to clarify how the themes “The Text as a Tool” and “Texts that Engage” developed. Like the experiences described in his first story, “Texts that Engage” was a dominant part of this experience as well, revealing some of Robert’s views about the importance of establishing relationships and positive classroom interactions. Furthermore, Robert’s use of language, non-verbal actions, and attempt to establish a comfortable classroom engaged students more readily with a text so that they might use that

text to develop their literacy skills. Such skill development helped to clarify “The Text as a Tool” theme for Robert.

“That Was How It had Always Happened”

In this story, I describe how the theme “Texts with Authority” emerged for participant Robert based on his past teaching experiences at High Mountain Middle School and his present teaching experiences at Pine Grove School. I begin by relating the experiences to readers. I then untangle this theme within the context of the three-dimensional space.

“I was getting bored,” Robert declared during our first interview in reference to why he left his familiar job teaching humanities at High Mountain Middle School in the Pacific Coast School District. “I was teaching the same thing every year because it’s what the community expected. I was in a traditional neighborhood middle school where there was kind of a culture that some books were okay and others were not okay” (interview, April 7, 2017).

Robert’s text selection practices while teaching at High Mountain Middle School were traditional and based on what had always been read. When Robert thought of his time there, he remembered he always taught the same works year after year. I asked him if he remembered some of the titles that he taught, and the only thing he could recall is that he taught some book about a Samurai because it was a text that had always been taught in seventh grade at that school (interview, April 7, 2017). Robert explained that teaching what was expected was a way for him to fall in line and not make waves, especially since he was new to the teaching profession and was “just surviving” during those first few years (interview, April 7, 2017). At High Mountain Middle School Robert felt there was an unwritten expectation that some books were acceptable to read while other were not. At that

school, parents and administrators wanted kids to read the classics because that is what they had read in school. Robert explained, “But if I would have read *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Asher, 2007), parents...would have flipped out” (interview, May 19, 2017).

As a reaction to these community expectations, Robert described himself as a maverick who purposefully chooses books “that would go against the traditional” so that kids might be exposed to a variety of ideas and ways of thinking (interview, May 19, 2017). “If you’re teaching and are intelligent, you can justify anything that you do,” he explained (interview, May 19, 2017). Robert’s statement could be compared to Craig’s (1999) work with a school principal who viewed rebellion as a significant quality for an educator. During his second interview, Robert began to relate an experience he had teaching Morrison’s (1970) work, *The Bluest Eye*. Robert was teaching a group of sophomores at the time, and they had expressed interest in reading a college-level text. *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970), however, is often thought to be a controversial text within the context of high school ELA class because of its discussion of racism, molestation, rape, and incest. However, Robert chose to read it anyway. He revealed that one person, a person observing his teaching, questioned his selection choice. “Do the parents know their child is reading a book about rape?” they asked him. “Well, they might or they might not. I haven’t been contacted, but if they do complain, I can explain my choice,” Robert replied (interview, May 19, 2017). Robert then clarified that he continued to read the book without incident. Robert was sure to explain that what he chose to read or expose his students to was anything but arbitrary. He clarified:

Anything that we’re doing, we’re doing for a very mindful reason, and I can articulate that mindful reason to that parent or to an administrator. You can disagree with the content, but it’s hard to disagree with why we’re doing it. (interview, May 19, 2017)

Other experiences Robert has had with text selection supported his belief that he thinks outside the box—the box, in this case, being the tradition of the canon. In one interview, Robert described an experience with teaching the book *Caucasia* (Senna, 1998). Instead of having students read a traditional piece, such as an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr. or one of Malcolm X’s speeches, Robert selected *Caucasia* (Senna, 1998) because it told the story of two multiracial sisters who have a white mother and black father. The text is a coming of age piece set in the racially turbulent 1970s. Through the study of this text, Robert explained, students are exposed to issues surrounding discrimination, violence, and racial identity all within the context of a coming of age genre (interview, May 19, 2017).

Robert’s experiences that were just described all helped to illuminate the theme “Texts with Authority.” Robert’s teaching context was an important aspect regarding how this theme developed within the confines of the experiences described in the narrative thread, “That Was How It Had Always Happened.” The narrative dimensions intersected on many levels regarding Robert’s past experiences with teaching middle school in a more traditional environment and his present experiences teaching English language arts at Pine Grove School, consequently making cultural context an important aspect of these experiences. Within each cultural context, the role that authority played in Robert’s text selection practices varied greatly. Robert revealed that his past experiences were rooted in tradition and his social interactions with the school and the community who had clear expectations concerning acceptable texts to read. Based on these past experiences, Robert’s story of rebelliousness bumped with the story of community expectations and traditions. In this instance, Robert acquiesced to the community, which suggested that authority regarding text selection sometimes rests outside of the teachers and extends to other educational stakeholders. In

contrast, Robert's present teaching situation at Pine Grove School appeared to provide him with more freedom as long as he is able to justify what he is reading and why. At Pine Grove School it appears that Robert is trusted to be an authority regarding which texts he chooses to read in his classroom, and he does not feel the pressures of the outside community like he did when he taught in a larger neighborhood school.

Robert's experiences also intersected at the personal dimension and the dimension of place, an intersection that suggested Robert was an authority in choosing texts for his specific classroom context. Therefore, Robert's belief in his own teaching choices as an authority was another way the "Texts with Authority" theme developed. Robert saw himself as a competent teacher who could justify the use of almost any good book—a teacher as a curriculum planner (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988). However, his belief in his competency as a teacher conflicted with his past experiences teaching at a more traditional school. High Mountain Middle School was situated within a community that had clear expectations for its teachers regarding curriculum and text selection choices. Specifically, Robert felt that the community desired a more traditional curriculum, which went against Robert's personal and professional beliefs about what is best for his students (interview, May 19, 2017). Thus, Robert changed his teaching context and culture when he chose to transfer to Pine Grove School so that authority could be placed back in his hands instead of other less-informed stakeholders. This school context aligned more with Robert's personal beliefs about teaching and text selection, which made this teaching context a better fit for Robert, since he felt free to do what he wanted as long as he continued to be viewed as a trusted and highly proficient educator. The intersection of the personal with place uncovers an additional layer of the "Texts with Authority" theme. Authority for Robert involved his competency as a teacher and the

importance of feeling trusted to make curricular decisions in his own classroom with his own students. When Robert did not feel trusted, he was forced to change his educational context to a place that aligned more with his personal beliefs about teaching and text selection.

In this section, I explored Robert's experiences with reading, teaching, and text selection. Many of his stories revealed that Robert is an able, confident teacher who desired to help students become better readers, writers, and thinkers. Robert's experiences showcased the importance of the teacher and his role as a curriculum maker.

Georgia

In this section, I navigate the personal experiences of another participant, Georgia. Georgia's experiences differed greatly from both Anne's and Robert's, and many of her experiences were influenced by her past experiences with teaching traditional works and selecting texts mostly out of the canon. The following found poem captures some of Georgia's beliefs about teaching and text selection, although these beliefs were firmly grounded in her desire to teach the familiar and traditional. When constructing Georgia's found poem, I followed the same process as I did for Anne and Robert. Like my other participants, I titled the poem based on what line best captured the participant's experiences collectively. Georgia spoke often about tradition and her love for reading classic literature, hence the title "I Think I'm Still Afraid of Breaking the Canon..."

"I Think I'm Still Afraid of Breaking the Canon..."

British literature—that's my first love.
I love American literature, a junior year must-have nationwide—
Someone from the canon...
A prolific writer with a poignant message...
I love for the students to be competent,
Know as much as what other kids do nationwide,
I want my kids to feel normal...

Romeo and Juliet.
Julius Caesar.
A Raisin in the Sun.
Lord of the Flies.
The Crucible.
Of Mice and Men.
A Separate Peace.

It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks...

My curriculum.
My novel.
"Here's the list," they say.
"Here's what you may use," they say.
"Here's what you may not use," they say.
"You're reading our textbooks; You can't!" they say.
"You took my curriculum!" they say.

You Do. Not. Cross. Text lines.
If you crossed over, it was war.
The list exists.
A physical list,
Use the list,
Go by the list,
A magic list,
Use the textbook, too!

My current school,
There is no list.
No official list.
It's "teach what you love."
A young adult literature take over.
A loosey-goosey school.

Creative Writing, Science Fiction—those aren't classes.
To me, they're a fun recess.
We've walked away from the canon.

And kids aren't reading.
My kids are not readers.
They hate to read.
They don't care.
It's a real problem.
I pretend like they read.
I lie to them; I lie to myself.

If I could go back, I'd probably teach
Something that's lit heavy.
I think I'm still afraid of
Breaking
the
canon...

I wrote this found poem as a way to capture a dominant theme of Georgia's experiences with the theme "Texts with Authority" that emerged during each of my interviews and observations, as well as many of my daily interactions with her. The stories that I share in the following pages expose this pattern regarding Georgia's love for tradition and the canon—two factors that dominated her text selection practices. Within each stanza of this found poem there are stories that exist involving Georgia's experiences that provide insight about her views on teaching and beliefs about selecting texts. One of Georgia's stories I called "I Want My Kids to Feel Normal." After describing this experience, I explain how the narrative themes "Texts that Connect" and "Texts with Authority" intersect with one another. In a second narrative, I describe Georgia's interaction with her past experiences in creating district book lists and selecting texts to read at various grade levels. I then enter into Georgia's classroom for my third story and explore how "Texts that Engage" and "The Text as a Tool" themes developed from this experience within the context of the three-dimensional space.

"I Want My Kids to Feel Normal"

In this story, I describe how Georgia selected texts from the canon so her students were exposed to works that other students at other schools or in other districts might read. After describing this experience, I explore the theme of "Texts that Connect" and "Texts with Authority." I also clarify how the "Texts with Authority" theme dominated this experience

for Georgia. The following story was composed using multiple field notes and journal entries taken between January and April of 2017. It is written in present tense as a way to put the reader in the moment with me, participant Georgia, and her experiences with teaching and text selection.

It is late January and Georgia, Anne, and I have returned from a four-day professional development experience at Columbia University's Teacher College Argument Writing Institute in New York City. All three of us enjoyed exploring the city and taking in the various tourist sites—the Statue of Liberty, Wall Street, Harlem, a Broadway musical, and, of course, Times Square. The workshop, too, proved to be helpful and useful in getting the three of us to think about how to best teach argument writing to our students. Georgia, the teaching veteran of the group, is the most wary, however, of implementing what we have learned during our time in New York. It is not that she found Mary Ehrenworth's ideas silly or irrelevant; rather, Georgia explains, "Oh, it's always something new with Pacific Coast. They adopt one idea one year and another the next. I just stick with what I know because it's always gonna change" (field notes, February 2017).

Georgia's comment here can be examined from a curricular reform standpoint. Here Georgia told a secret story that indicated she did not seem willing to change her practices simply because the district expected her to do so. In fact, curriculum reform in any context—national, state, or local—does not guarantee that teachers change their practices (Levin, 2008), and Georgia's skepticism toward attending another professional development experience or adopting another language arts curriculum appeared to align with this research.

A week after we return from New York, Georgia sends Anne, myself, and one of our administrators, Mrs. Cooper, the following email (document, February 2017):

selects works strictly from the district list of approved texts, works mostly included because of their connection to ELA curricular traditions or because of their literary merit or status as a great work. (field notes, March 2017)

Georgia was frustrated by the lack of book lists at Pine Grove School, often referring to the school as “loosey-goosey” (interview, March 6, 2017). Georgia described the school as a place where teachers are free to teach what they love, but this freedom troubles her. What about tradition? What about the canon? Isn't it irresponsible to teach whatever you want? What about the other high schools? What are they teaching? (interview, March 6, 2017). She told me that she knew her son, who goes to a large Pacific Coast High School, was reading from the canon. “Just the other day I saw his copy of *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) on the bedroom floor, so I at least know the book's been assigned,” she explained. “But no one wants to read the old stuff here at this school” (interview, April 27, 2017).

The theme “Texts with Authority” is a dominant theme of this narrative. Many of Georgia's experiences were influenced by the temporal dimension of the narrative inquiry framework, suggesting that past experiences teaching ELA for Georgia were an authority as they determined what she taught from year to year. She often spoke in the collective first person and used mainly past tense verbs when describing all of her teaching experiences, a use of language that suggests her past teaching was more memorable or practical for her since she was able to follow the curricular trajectory of a more traditional high school. This story, although it occurred during Georgia's most current year teaching, was no exception. In Georgia's narrative, she had just returned from professional development in New York City. However, instead of thinking primarily about how she might use the development in her present teaching situation, Georgia used the opportunity to think about how she might convince her fellow department members to implement book lists and text selection practices

based on her past teaching experiences and knowledge about text selection practices of other district high schools.

From this experience, there is a tension between the present/future dimensions and Georgia's past and own teaching agenda. The district who was responsible for sending Georgia to New York for professional development represented that dominant story of school as well as the future of education for Pacific Coast School District. The district adopted a new ELA curriculum that focused on choice reading and classroom libraries. As Pacific Coast looked toward the future through the implementation of new curriculum, it encouraged its teachers to move away from their canonically driven practices. In contrast, Georgia planted her feet and continue to teach in a traditional way by using familiar canonical works. This tension between temporal dimensions helped to illuminate how Georgia's past experiences functioned as an authority in her present teaching situation.

Georgia also expressed skepticism in this experience regarding the implementation of new curriculum adoption based on her past experiences that the curriculum focus is always changing and shifting in the Pacific Coast School District. According to statements made during interviews and informal conversations, Georgia has seen different curriculum come and go during her 25 years in education, so she was reluctant to welcome change with open arms (interviews, March 6, 2017; April 27, 2017; May 31, 2017). Thus, if the new curriculum professional development and adoption influenced Georgia at all, it was mostly to reaffirm her belief in the tradition of the canon and her perception of community expectations involving text selection. Thus, the theme of "Texts with Authority" as it related to Georgia's past experiences permeated this narrative.

Another theme that emerged from this narrative was “Texts that Connect.” For Georgia, a connecting text was often one selected from the canon in addition to a text she knew other students might be reading at other district schools. Therefore, intersecting with Georgia’s temporal dimension of the past is the importance of place. Georgia’s past experiences at more traditional high schools where texts were selected mostly from the canon seemed to carry more weight than the current district ELA curriculum adoption, which focused on choice reading and classroom libraries. As evidenced in her narrative, Georgia sought out text selection advice from other schools that she believed were known for helping prepare their students by giving them college-like reading lists (documents, February 2017). In fact, Georgia mentioned at least three other district schools in her email about creating summer book lists. Georgia’s contact with other district schools suggested she is wary of the text selection practices that her colleagues employ at Pine Grove School and instead looked outside her own teaching context toward other schools in order to make sure she selected texts that would connect her students to the curriculum of other district schools. Here “Texts that Connect” intersects with the “Texts with Authority” theme. To Georgia, the authority of certain texts instead rested somewhat on the idea that other district schools were reading the same works, and it was clear that Georgia wanted her students at Pine Grove School to feel that they were receiving similar ELA experiences.

“If You Crossed Over, It Was War”

In this story, I describe some of Georgia’s interactions across the Pacific Coast School District and its attempt to vertically align its text selection practices by grade level. While these types of curriculum meetings are no longer the focus of the district, Georgia spoke often about these past experiences with “crossing text lines” (interview, March 6,

2017). This story helped to further illuminate the theme “Texts with Authority,” a dominant theme throughout all interviews and observations conducted with this participant.

During interviews and informal conversations, Georgia often spoke about text selection in the past tense when the district used to adopt literature anthologies and read mostly classic literature from the high school canon. She recalled several tension-filled experiences during her career in the Pacific Coast School District where district teachers met to discuss which texts should be taught at which grade level. Georgia remembered that both middle school and high school ELA teachers were present at these meetings to discuss grade level text selection expectations. As Georgia recollects, middle school teachers were “crossing lines” and reading from the high school curriculum (interview, March 6, 2017; April 27, 2017). One such text at the center of this curriculum battle was Shakespeare’s (1992) classic tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. Typically, a text read in the ninth grade, *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992) had been hijacked by many of the district’s eighth grade teachers. Ninth grade teachers, however, did not make this discovery until they began to introduce their *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1992) unit only to be met with the cry, “We’ve read that already!” (interview, April 27, 2017).

Georgia explained that “crossing text lines” was like “declaring war” on your fellow teacher (interview, March 6, 2017). Georgia was adamant when she used this language and explained that out of respect for colleagues, a teacher should read the texts that correspond with the grade levels he or she teaches. Georgia remembered that reading another teacher’s text created conflict within schools and departments and between district schools, resulting in curriculum hoarding or refusing to share copies of books, texts, or other resources related to a text (interview, April 27, 2017). This “crossing of text lines,” as Georgia called it, resulted in

the district creating lists with specific titles for each of the grade levels as a way to clarify what and when teachers should be teaching certain works. Georgia explained that the lists were sent, changed, resent, and changed again. Teachers were given copies of the list both in print and via email of “what you do and do not teach” (interview, April 27, 2017). These tensions between grade levels regarding what to teach were why Georgia passionately and repeatedly reiterated her “respect for this list” (interview, April 27, 2017).

Georgia herself had experienced frustration when she encountered a student who transferred into her class from another district school and had already read one of the works she planned on teaching. She recalled that one of her transfer students explained that he had already read *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) during his freshman year at another high school. Georgia was frustrated by this rule breaking and was upset since *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) was supposed to be a sophomore text, and because Georgia teaches sophomores, she felt as though Steinbeck’s classic was, in fact, *her* text (interview, April 27, 2017).

The temporal dimension of the past is, once again, an important part of Georgia’s narratives of experience involving text selection and helped to illuminate the theme “Texts with Authority.” Georgia experienced tension when it came to choosing texts for various grade levels, tensions to which she refers to as “declaring war” (interview, March 6, 2017). These tensions solidified for Georgia the importance of choosing only from the official text lists so that she remained compliant with district curricular expectations. Georgia’s desire to match her text selection practices to old district curriculum continued to permeate her text choices in the present, suggesting that these lists, whether official or unofficial, carried great authority for Georgia. The Pacific Coast School District, however, no longer abided by such

a list, yet Georgia insisted that the list still existed even if it was only a mental list she carried when thinking about what her students at Pine Grove School should read during their 10th grade year (interview, April 27, 2017).

The social interactions Georgia described having with her colleagues both at her school and with other schools and grade level teachers was also an important dimension in this experience. The interactions further revealed the nuances that were a part of developing the “Texts with Authority” theme for Georgia. Georgia’s social interactions involving district-wide text selection were remembered as being filled with tension. Teachers fought and argued and even went so far as to hoard materials from other educators teaching the same texts. Such tensions among teachers and even among schools resulted in district instructional coaches creating an official list as a way to set textual boundaries and prevent further problematic curriculum meetings. These tension-filled social interactions were a manifestation of individual teachers and their belief in their ownership of particular texts. For example, during multiple interviews and informal conversations, Georgia’s personal beliefs indicated that because she taught at a certain grade level, she had ownership of the official grade level list more so than teachers who did not teach 10th grade. She often referred to texts as *hers* as she did when discussing her disappointment that a student had already read *her* text, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). Georgia did not elaborate where this sense of curricular ownership came from, but Georgia certainly indicated that she understood the importance of not “crossing text lines,” (interview, March 6, 2017), which is maybe why she was loyal not only to her past experiences but also why she was loyal to teaching the same titles year after year.

“I Pretend Like They Read”

I titled Georgia’s third experience, “I Pretend Like They Read.” This experience was taken from field notes that I composed immediately after I spent time observing in Georgia’s classroom and from field notes composed in March of 2017 regarding her teaching *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). After sharing this story, I explore how the “Texts that Engage” theme and “The Text as a Tool” theme emerged in a unique way for this participant.

The students enter into the room like a hurricane. I have been sitting with Georgia the five minutes prior in comfortable silence. Seventh period is her planning period, and she has spent most of it grading student work. However, the second the bell rings, the room is flooded with countless, noisy bodies—bodies that are surprisingly energetic considering this is the last class period of the day. However, their energy is consumed by things unrelated to reading Steinbeck’s classic novel about migrant workers, *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). Instead students waste precious energy looking at their cell phones, chatting with neighbors, or surfing the web on their district-provided Chromebooks. There are nonstop distractions, and even I find myself unable to concentrate the first few minutes of this observation. The room itself seems to be alive and pulses with activity. After several minutes of “quiet, quiet” and “listen, listen”—phrases Georgia often finds herself uttering to this group—students seem to settle in for the remainder of the lesson. “Okay, get out your journals and your books,” Georgia manages to instruct in between redirecting student behavior. “I want you to imagine you are George...” The class is beginning to settle down, and many students have out the necessary materials for the focus of the day. “Imagine you are George,” repeats Georgia, “and that you have a Lenny. What do you do with him?”

“What do you mean?” a voice hollers out. “How do you take care of him? How do you protect him?” Georgia clarifies. “I want you to write in your journals a response to this question. Then we’re going to share.” “Can we bullet point?” asks a student. “No, I want you to write full sentences, a complete paragraph.”

At first, students do everything but write. However, after three or four minutes the classroom is finally silent. The majority are writing in their journals. As students write, Georgia paces around the room, stopping to pause and read student responses, give suggestions, or filter questions. Many students are done before the writing time is over. They sit staring blankly into space, since she has forbidden cell phone use while others are reading from their copy of Steinbeck’s classic novel. (field notes, March 20, 2017)

This experience of Georgia's could be compared to Phillion's (2002) "Seven Minutes of Silence," in which Phillion described her experiences with a teacher whose pedagogical practices she had trouble accepting and understanding. In Phillion's view, the teacher whom she was observing puzzled her, causing tension for Phillion as a researcher, since her participant Pam did not match her preconceived ideas of what she might observe or discover. Similarly, I, too, was puzzled by Georgia's practices here, and spent time trying to comprehend her teaching of this text. I yearned to understand why she was teaching the way she was and found it difficult to get past the fact that I would have taught this text in a completely different way. Later I wrote the following in a journal entry regarding my wonderings about Georgia and the way she was teaching *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993):

As I wrote this opening anecdote about my second observation with Georgia, I wondered about the context. How was the novel introduced to students? Were they provided with background information about the author? The time period? I am curious as to whether or not the students are engaged with the novel so far, but I cannot tell from any of my observation whether or not students actually enjoy the text. In fact, I am uncertain as to whether or not students have even read any of the novel so far as this particular writing prompt did not require students to pull evidence from the text but instead from their own lives and experiences. (field notes, March 21, 2017)

"Do you think most of your eighth period is reading?" I ask Georgia after class that day. She pauses. "Maybe a third," she replies, "I'll pretend they're reading because it's easier that way."

After students are done writing, Georgia encourages the class to have a discussion about their responses. The students are easily able to make connections between their own lives and the text, and they do so in unique and interesting ways. One student mentions having a cousin with autism. Another mentions a brother who cannot live on his own. One boy admits he would not be able to care for someone like Lenny—that it would be too hard, and he would resort to placing his Lenny in an institution for people with special needs. As students recited stories and made connections, I could not help but wonder if students were actually connecting with the text or if they were connecting with their perceived ideas of the text based on the synopsis Georgia

had provided. I kept returning to the question: Had students actually done the reading? Did it even matter if they had done the reading if they perceived they had read? (story composed from field notes, March 20, 2017; March 21, 2017)

Georgia's personal interactions played an important role in her experience teaching *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993), and these personal interactions explained a lack of presence regarding the theme of "Texts that Engage." Georgia clearly believed that her students, or at least most of them, were not reading the texts that she assigned. Georgia, in fact, explained that the majority of her students "are not readers" and that she "pretends they read" by "lying to herself" (interview, May 31, 2017). She was often frustrated by what she perceived to be a problem with student motivation and lack of engagement. These statements from Georgia made me pause and think about how her beliefs about her students might affect the way in which she interacts with them during class. If she believed they were not reading but continued to conduct the class as usual, then students might not participate in the related activities, as I noted during my observations, because they were not being held accountable to do so. I also wondered if they were not engaged with what they were reading and, therefore, disconnected from the curriculum because they did not see how it connected to their lives. Clearly, Georgia believed that the reason her students were not reading works such as *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) or *Lord of Flies* (Golding, 1954) is because they "are not readers," (interview, March 6, 2017). Yet I wonder if her personal beliefs prevented her from considering that her own text selection practices focused on classic works from the canon might be the reason that kids are not reading. Perhaps they are not reading because they are not engaged. Thus, Georgia's personal beliefs about what her students do or do not do within the context of reading related to the ways in which they behaved and participated

in her class on a daily basis, meaning that “Texts that Engage” manifested based on the fact that students were not engaged instead of how they were with a text.

The theme of “The Text as a Tool” also subtly emerged during this experience of Georgia’s based on the interactions between her and her students. Georgia had her sophomores participate in both writing and discussion tasks so they might enjoy and explore the text she had selected for them. However, my observations did not reveal if students had read the book or if they were simply mimicking what they thought Ms. Evans might want to hear about her beloved classic text. Regardless of whether or not students were completing the reading, Georgia still put forth effort to make sure students could make connections to a canonical work and build their critical thinking and discussion skills.

In this section, I described Georgia’s experiences with teaching and text selection. Many of Georgia’s experiences were rooted in tradition and the importance of teaching familiar works from the canon. Her experiences were often situated within the past as well, suggesting that she selected texts based on familiarity and what she has done before.

Thematic Analysis across Participants

Each narrative theme developed uniquely and to different extents across the experiences of Anne, Robert, and Georgia. As themes emerged from the participants’ experiences, I discovered that the themes were nuanced and complex and did not fit tightly into categories. In some circumstances, specific narrative themes dominated a participant’s experiences while other themes barely emerged. In addition, certain themes proved to be dominant for multiple participants, but the themes manifested in very different ways based on the personal experiences each participant had with teaching and text selection. Finally, many of the themes as they related to each participant overlapped with other themes, suggesting

that the lived experiences of the participants are dynamic and fluid and cannot be forced to fit into one interpretation.

Dominant Themes

Each participant who was part of this narrative inquiry related experiences with teaching and text selection. From these experiences, four different themes emerged, yet certain themes proved to be stronger for each participant.

For participant Anne, the theme of “The Text as a Tool” dominated many of her interviews and observations, although based on the experiences described in this chapter, this theme was present but not dominant. The dominance of this theme was addressed in more detail in chapter five where she spoke often about how she thought about which reading and writing skills she wanted to impart to her students through her text choices. In this chapter, the theme of “Texts with Authority” was most dominant across Anne’s stories of experience described earlier as she talked about the trust she placed in curriculum specialists and the confidence she has in her role as literacy leader. However, for Anne, all four themes emerged to some extent as she described her various experiences with text selection. None of the four themes were absent from her stories, and Anne seemed to be the most balanced of the three participants, meaning each theme was represented proportionally.

For Robert, the theme, “Texts that Engage” was the most prominent. Robert spoke often about his work with individual students and how he desired to turn them into confident readers and writers. In order to build these skills as readers and writers (which would relate to the “Text as a Tool” theme), however, Robert worked to establish personal relationships with his students and met with them often in order to find a book with which they might connect and, consequently, engage with him in developing their literacy skills. “Texts that

Engage” was a foundation for how all of the other themes developed from Robert’s lived and told experiences.

Georgia’s experiences, more than Robert’s and Anne’s, produced the most data concerning the theme “Texts with Authority.” In nearly every interview and observation Georgia spoke about tradition and the canon. Georgia possessed a strong sense of what it meant to be an ELA teacher by relying heavily on traditional curriculum and mostly classical text choices for her students. The other three themes, while present, did not manifest as strongly. If a theme did emerge, it was heavily influenced by views about text selection that are rooted in her past experiences and relationship with the high school canon.

Shared Themes

While participants shared experiences that illuminated all four narrative themes to some extent, the theme “Texts with Authority” proved to be the most complex and nuanced across participants. Because of these complexities, this theme is worth discussing in more depth in this section. All three participants viewed this theme very differently from one another, making it one of the most multifaceted themes across the four.

Anne’s experiences helped to define authority to mean primarily top down text selection practices. Anne spoke often about the district expectations and district curriculum adoption, and she indicated that her own beliefs about teaching aligned with the district’s. She also described curriculum specialists as having influenced her teaching practices. Anne described her role as literacy leader and how that role made her an authority about implementing district curriculum and “doing what the district wants” (interview, March 14, 2017). Primarily for Anne, “Texts with Authority” was defined as she described her

experiences with experts and leadership roles, suggesting that authority must be given to teachers regarding curriculum and text selection processes.

This theme, “Texts with Authority,” manifested differently for Robert in that he saw himself as the primary authority in his classroom. Robert made clear his belief that he is a “highly proficient educator” (interview, April 7, 2017), and this belief influenced many of his text selection practices as well as the way he interacted with students. Robert spoke often about his role in helping his students become strong readers, better writers, and more critical thinkers, which differed from Anne’s experiences with curriculum specialists and district curriculum initiatives. In contrast, Robert enjoyed carving his own path and often talked about how he would be able to justify any curricular choice he might make for his students. Robert also challenged the authority of district level curriculum specialists, building administrators, and community expectations if he felt they conflicted with his own beliefs about what was best for his students. This challenging of outside authorities also supported the way in which he believed in his own expertise as an educator.

“Texts with Authority” emerged completely differently for Georgia as well. For this participant, authority clearly came from her connections with past teaching experiences. Georgia also appeared to be devoted to the canon and teaching a traditional ELA curriculum. Proof of how this theme developed rested in the fact that Georgia continued to read and study the same works from the canon year after year of teaching, regardless of what type of student she might encounter in her classroom. Georgia described her experiences of how she felt “afraid of breaking the canon” (interview, April 27, 2017) and how she continues to make text choices “from the list” (interview, April 27, 2017), indicating that her text selection

practices were primarily driven by her belief that students need to read from a list of pre-selected texts that she is comfortable teaching and that have withstood the test of time.

Overlapping and Intersecting Themes

Themes did not always emerge clearly and nicely as participants shared their experiences with me. Sometimes two or more themes would intersect as the participants described their experiences with text selection. Often when themes intersected with one another, tensions or bumps emerged. An example of themes intersecting occurred during Georgia's description and experience teaching *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) to her sophomore eighth period class. As previously stated, the theme "Texts with Authority" dominated Georgia's experiences, and this experience was no exception. Georgia's appreciation for the canon and tradition were at odds, however, with the "Texts that Engage" theme as Georgia explained she did not believe her students were doing the reading and were not invested in the curriculum. In this case, it is possible that Georgia's beliefs about authority and texts were so strong that other themes were overshadowed and therefore rarely guided her text selection practices.

When themes overlapped, the themes worked to complement one another instead of bumping, as was the case for intersecting themes. For example, in one of Robert's experiences, the themes "Texts that Engage" and "Texts that Connect" and "The Text as a Tool" overlapped. These three themes as they related to Robert's work with reluctant readers could not be separated from one another and emerged together as Robert told his story. As the researcher, it was impossible for me to explore them separately as they related to this experience of Robert's. Specifically, Robert first worked with students individually, hoping to connect them with books so they might be engaged readers and writers. Once the

engagement was there for these students, Robert could focus on building their skills, which was an important element of “The Text as a Tool” theme. Thus, many times themes worked together in harmony instead of showcasing tensions between various narrative threads.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I explained and examined the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework as it relates to the participants and the common narrative themes involving their experiences with teaching and text selection. I also used found poetry as a way to crystallize the findings of this study. Each participant shared a number of experiences that helped to tell part of their stories about selecting texts. Some stories were stories of engagement, while others were about challenges faced in the classroom. Each story, however, was an important part of helping to develop the main narrative thread as each story uniquely captured an aspect of teaching English language arts that was both deeply personal and deeply relatable. Even though all three participants worked within the same district and at the same school, their experiential narratives revealed multiple layers and perspectives about both teaching and text selection that might prove to be relevant for teachers of high school language arts. It is quite possible that other educators might see their own beliefs and practices reflected in the stories and experiences of Anne, Robert, and Georgia. Anne’s, Robert’s, and Georgia’s narratives of experience help to uncover some of the complexities of a phenomenon such as text selection.

In chapter seven, I provide a conclusion regarding my findings about teachers and their experiences with text selection. I begin by defining and elaborating on the ethical considerations and limitations that are a part of this study. I then discuss the educational significance and areas for future research that might be gleaned from the unique teaching experiences of the three participants.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I offer a partial conclusion of this narrative inquiry. I say partial since it is important to understand that narrative inquiry is always conducted “in the midst” of the lives of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a researcher, I entered into the lives of the participants in the middle of their personal and professional stories. When I concluded data collection, the stories of Anne, Robert, and Georgia did not end simply because I no longer observed their teaching or formally interviewed them about their text selection practices; rather, their stories are ongoing and continue to be written as each participant teaches in their classroom and makes choices about texts.

There are several main purposes of this final chapter. One purpose is to explain the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. I also position myself as a researcher both personally and professionally and explore what I learned during my journey with Anne, Robert, and Georgia. In addition to reflecting on this study, I look toward the future by exploring both the educational and societal significance of the study as a way to contextualize it within a larger body of work. My final purpose in this chapter is to offer suggestions for future research based on what I uncovered during this narrative inquiry about teaching, text selection, and the stories of teachers. This narrative inquiry yielded an abundance of rich data about a variety of aspects concerning teaching, curriculum, stories and voice, and text selection, suggesting further research could be useful in several areas that were not the primary focus of this inquiry.

One future area of research involves the theme discussed in chapters five and six, “Texts with Authority.” Out of the four themes uncovered during this narrative inquiry,

“Texts with Authority” proved to be the most diverse and layered within each participant and among participants. Therefore, it might be useful to examine this theme in more depth including how authority is defined for teachers on a district level, school level, and personal level. Learning more about the role authority plays or does not play in the lives of teachers might help stakeholders to better understand the relationship between teachers and the curriculum. Another area for future research involves diversity and culturally responsive text selection practices. While I hoped to explore this in the narrative inquiry, it did not become a theme because it was not discussed explicitly by any of the participants in depth. Conducting a more focused narrative inquiry about culturally responsive text selection, however, would be relevant to teachers who teach increasingly diverse populations in the 21st century. A final area of research would be to examine the phenomenon of text selection from a student’s point of view. Not only would this type of research help to further describe the phenomenon, it would also help to capture student voice, a voice often ignored or underrepresented in educational research (Schlein & Chan, 2006).

Overall this narrative inquiry about teachers, their stories, and text selection is highly relevant during a time of increased teacher silencing and increased pressure from federal and state policies and district curriculum initiatives that require teachers and students to perform on standardized tests and to meet the expectations of the Common Core State Standards. Unlike many trends in educational research that focus on hard numbers and reducing people to data sets, this narrative inquiry helps to elevate the voices of teachers by relating their experiences with curriculum and navigating text selection in their ELA classes. This narrative inquiry helps to capture the daily lives and contexts of some ELA classrooms as opposed to focusing on what might be seen as required curriculum or what is expected from

local, state, or national authorities with regard to legislative policies and curriculum adoptions. A focus on teacher voice could help to paint a more realistic picture of day-to-day happenings in the ELA classroom and how and why teachers make some of the curricular decisions that they do.

Ethical Considerations

In this section, I describe the various ethical considerations that arose as I prepared for and later collected data during this narrative inquiry. Creswell (2013) asserted that this part of the research process is highly important in that researchers must think about which issues arose during the study and how those issues were addressed. More specifically, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that addressing ethical issues in narrative inquiry is complex and needs to be attended to before, during, and after the inquiry process.

One of the first ethical considerations to discuss involves the setting at which the study was conducted. Gaining access and permission to conduct this study proved to take time, and the Pacific Coast School District had a rigorous application process for conducting research. Although I applied in early December 2016 to conduct my research, I was not given permission to do the study until early March of 2017 from the District Research Coordinator, who advised me to carefully select participants. However, because I was given permission to conduct the study so late into the second semester, I had to move quickly to find willing and eligible participants. This proved to be somewhat difficult since I was new to teaching in the Pacific Coast School District and was unfamiliar with many of the schools and English language arts teachers. In fact, I barely was on a first-name basis with many of the teachers at Pine Grove School. Therefore, asking people mostly unknown to me proved to be a daunting task that I had to approach carefully. After two weeks of looking for participants, three ELA

teachers at Pine Grove School—Anne, Robert, and Georgia—all agreed to be part of the study. Georgia agreed first and was a ready and willing participant while Robert agreed and even expressed excitement about his being observed. Anne was the most reserved but thought it would be beneficial to participate in order to reflect more on her own teaching experiences and text selection choices. She also mentioned that teachers at Pine Grove School are encouraged to observe one another, an idea that finalized her decision to participate in this study.

Conducting this study at the school at which I worked produced one ethical consideration that I had to think about carefully. In many studies, it is possible for a researcher to be too close to his or her participants or to form biases about those participants and their teaching practices (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). In fact, closeness in narrative inquiry is not a new concept as it relates to the interaction between researcher and participant. Phillion (2002) encountered this closeness as she worked with her participant Pam at Bay Street School and began to question Pam's teaching practices and how they ran counter to what she had learned in her research about multiculturalism and culturally responsive pedagogy. Similarly, Clandinin et al. (2006) were required to navigate closeness when one of the researchers and a teacher participant crossed lines by suggesting a student who was a study participant stay at their house. Carger (1996) encountered ethical dilemmas with closeness as she followed Alejandro, a Mexican-American fifth-grader, through his experiences at school and in the education system. Carger often found herself balancing the role of researcher, teacher, and advocate as she experienced school with Alejandro and interacted with his family.

While I do acknowledge that I might possess bias or “closeness” because I am a teacher of the same subject—language arts—working in the same school—Pine Grove School—I do think my working with these three participants for only six months prior was enough time to establish a professional working relationship with each as opposed to an intimate friendship. Establishing relationships and then continuing to negotiate participant/researcher relationships, in fact, is central to negotiating the consent process in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, the participants and their teaching practices and pedagogical beliefs were mostly unknown to me until I collected data in the form of interviews and observations. In addition, with the exclusion of Anne who taught one eleventh grade class, the same grade level I taught, Anne’s, Robert’s, and Georgia’s teaching schedules involved completely different grade levels, which helped to prevent me from being too intimately connected to the participants but allowed me to be connected enough to establish trust and respect.

If anything, conducting this study within my educational context helped me to not only more critically understand the environment at Pine Grove School; it also provided relevant information about district-wide curriculum adoption and the history of text selection practices within the larger context of the Pacific Coast School District. I found myself connecting more with each participant after each interview and observation. Conducting the study at Pine Grove School helped to establish my teaching practices and beliefs about text selection within a new educational landscape that had recently dramatically shifted its own thinking about ELA curriculum. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that a key component in establishing validity in narrative inquiry is to constantly negotiate and work at relationships and to invest adequate time into the narrative inquiry process. Therefore,

although I was close to home when conducting this narrative inquiry, I was able to foster healthy researcher/participant and work colleague relationships with Anne, Robert, and Georgia that have continued to develop even after I stopped officially collecting data. Like Phillion (2002), Carger (1996), and Clandinin et al. (2006), I remained aware of the closeness to the participants and setting as I continued the data collection process and attempted to remain “wakeful” to my interactions with each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and how I was balancing my various roles as researcher, teacher, and colleague.

Another ethical consideration that emerged during this study included the concept of reactivity. Because I used interviews as one of my primary data sources and since I have strong beliefs about text selection based on my experiences as a high school teacher, I had to carefully frame my interview questions in a way that attempted to glean rich information while at the same time allowed participants to be open and honest. In addition, I am naturally a very expressive person and I had to explain to the participants that during interviews and observations I would maintain neutral facial expressions and react minimally to their responses. This was told to participants so they would be prepared for me as I wore my researcher rather than work colleague hat (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Maxwell (2013) asserted that the researcher is inevitably a part of the world he or she studies and that my reactions and interactions with participants is inescapable. Therefore, it was imperative that I used questions that were general and objective as well as open-ended in order to capture each participant’s stories of experience with teaching and text selection, yet I did not try to remove myself too much from the study as that was not the purpose of this narrative inquiry. As I interviewed and interacted with the participants, I employed more feminine forms of interviewing (Oakley, 2003) that focused on friendly, warm conversations that encouraged

openness, trust, and sharing among researcher and participant. While my interviews were still clearly focused on the phenomenon of text selection, my interview questions guided the interactions between me, Anne, Robert, and Georgia. Thus, through my interviews I attempted to strike a balance between “warmth [in order to] generate ‘rapport’” while maintaining the “detachment necessary to see the interview as an object of surveillance” (Oakley, 2003, p. 245).

A final ethical consideration involved the extent to which I accurately and fairly told the stories of the participants and their experiences with teaching and text selection. During my data collection, I explained to Anne, Robert, and Georgia that they could look at my field notes, interview transcripts, or observation records anytime during or after data was collected. I also explained that they could come talk to me informally about their participation if they thought of something else they might want to add or explain regarding one of the interview questions or observations. Only Anne wanted to clarify some of what I observed during my data collection and provide context about the lesson I watched her teach. Thus, Anne’s concerns about being represented accurately were important for me to consider as I continued to enter her classroom and compose stories about her experiences. Providing positive verbal feedback to Anne was one way I established trust between myself and this participant.

Another way I attempted to represent the participants fairly and accurately was through data crystallization and member checking. Ellingson (2014) stated, “Crystallization is ideal for constructing portraits of everyday relating because it brings together vivid, intimate details of people’s lives shared via storytelling and art” (p. 443). Crystallizing data is a central method by which I was able to capture the stories of participants fairly and accurately.

After collecting data and capturing narrative themes, I turned the data into both found poetry and narrative story in an attempt to capture the essence of Georgia's, Anne's, and Robert's lived and told experiences. Both poetry and story, being artistic forms of expression, allowed the participants, their voices, and their experiences to be elevated in a unique and engaging manner that described in detail how Georgia, Robert, and Anne navigated the phenomenon of text selection. All poetry and stories were approved by the three participants in order to ensure participants were able to negotiate the ways in which I chose to represent them and their stories. I also engaged in the use of a critical friend in the form of my committee chair who helped me to eliminate biased phrasing and language that might paint the participants in an unfair or negative light. Therefore, engaging in dialogue, negotiation of language choices, and multiple revisions within the context of response communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with both the participants and my committee chair was a central way I considered participant representation as well as a way for me to be aware of personal and professional biases.

Study Limitations

In this section, I discuss some of the limitations of this narrative inquiry about teaching and text selection. I consider these limitations as a way to be transparent about the ongoing nature that is an inherent part of narrative inquiry. Describing a study's limitations is also a way for a narrative inquirer to remain "wakeful" to the criticisms that might be associated with this form of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 184).

One limitation of this study is the small number of participants involved. However, narrative inquiry does not require the researcher to tell stories from multiple participants but instead requires the researcher to go in depth about each participant and their experiences

with a phenomenon. I explored the stories of the participants in depth and from multiple angles by using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework. Careful attention was given to the types of participants that were selected in order to encompass a rich and diverse range of personalities and teaching experiences, yet anonymity remained a constant concern throughout the entire research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Pseudonyms were negotiated and changed several times for both participants and the name of the school and school district setting. Each participant's role in the narrative inquiry was discussed only with that participant and not among participants.

Participants were selected based on their unique backgrounds with teaching, cultural and ethnic identifications, and for their willingness to be a part of the study. Anne had taught the least amount of time in the United States public school system, yet she had experiences living abroad and teaching overseas. She had also taught art, and her public school teaching experience was limited to the context of Pine Grove School. Robert was selected as the only male participant. Robert also had a diverse range of teaching experiences, including several years teaching middle school. Georgia as a participant helped to racially diversify this narrative inquiry. Georgia is an African immigrant and one of only a handful of teachers of color at Pine Grove School. Georgia's teaching experiences were mostly traditional in that she had taught high school English language arts in some capacity for the past 25 years. These three participants, while all teaching within the same educational landscape, helped to bring nuance and diversity to this study as they shared their stories and experiences with teaching and selecting texts. However, special care was given to make sure all participants and their identities were protected throughout the process. Since I already worked at Pine Grove School, it was natural for me to interact with these colleagues, so my presence at Pine

Grove School was an expected part of the landscape and, therefore, conducting research went undiscussed outside of my interactions with Robert, Georgia, and Anne.

Another possible limitation of this study was the fact that it was conducted within the same educational landscape for each participant—Pine Grove School. Robert, Anne, and Georgia all taught at Pine Grove School in the Pacific Coast School District. I acknowledge that the landscape of the study was limited and it might have been interesting to select participants from multiple schools within the Pacific Coast School District or even from multiple school districts. However, this did not happen because of time constraints and my inability to negotiate appropriate relationships with participants in other landscapes. Being a new teacher not only in the Pacific Coast School District but at Pine Grove School allowed me to gain access to an appropriate educational landscape as well as establish trust with each participant before starting the study. I was also able to continue negotiating each participant/researcher relationship during the course of my data collection since I worked near but not directly with each participant. Furthermore, conducting this study entirely within one educational landscape proved to yield rich and diverse results about a microcosm within the Pacific Coast School District. While Anne, Robert, and Georgia all taught at the same school, neither their stories nor their experiences were the same.

A final limitation of this study involves the way in which final stories of Anne, Robert, and Georgia and their experiences with text selection were presented to readers in the form of this dissertation. I collected numerous stories and anecdotes during my four months of data collection, yet not all stories were relevant to the phenomenon of text selection, and not all of these stories were included in the final version of this narrative inquiry. Thus, while

I did my best to represent the participants fairly and accurately, I did not attempt to relate every aspect of every story as it was shared with me or observed in the classroom.

Selecting which stories to include in this narrative inquiry was done purposefully as a way to be representative of the themes found among the data. At the same time, attention was paid to the presentation of findings, with a concentration on considerations of stories as art. I constructed discussions of stories from Anne, Robert, and Georgia that might artistically and memorably paint a picture about text selection and English language arts curriculum. Mead and Bateson (2003) explored gaze, representation, and presentation by debating whether a moving camera or a still tripod might help to shape more accurate research and stronger research findings. Significantly, they considered what happens in front of the camera might be altered by outside factors, such as a camera man looking for different angles or adjusting the lighting. They argued that a camera that is held by the photographer has the ability to capture what the photographer wants, although there is a greater chance of “influencing the material” (Mead & Bateson, 2003, p. 269). Removed from the tripod, the camera might miss something occurring in one place as it “leaps around” to “get what is happening” somewhere else (Mead & Bateson, 2003, p. 266). The camera removed from its tripod has control over the narrative—the story—being told. In a similar way, by retelling the participants’ stories, I attended to the ways that I might have influenced the data collection and related interpretations while remaining attentive to the applications and implications of inquiry interpretations.

Researcher Positioning and Examining Biases

In this section, I review what I have learned personally and professionally. I explore how my experiences with each participant shaped me as a researcher, teacher, and human. I

begin by exploring the context and how my experiences overall as a researcher and teacher at Pine Grove School worked together to create this narrative inquiry. I then reflect on my interactions with each participant and how their stories helped me make connections with my teaching stories or how their stories challenged or bumped with my role as a researcher. I also examine potential biases I had as I navigated through the inquiry process.

Working and Researching in the Pacific Grove District at Pine Grove School

In this section, I position myself as both a district employee in the Pacific Coast School district, a high school ELA teacher at Pine Grove School, and a researcher and doctoral student interested in capturing the experiences of teachers and learning more about the phenomenon of text selection. Conducting the study at the same place at which I worked proved to be a rewarding and challenging task. As a teacher, I had a responsibility to teach my classes and interact with my colleagues. As a researcher, I had to probe into the lives and beliefs of these same people. However, not having a deeply rooted history within the Pacific Coast School District and being new to my position at Pine Grove School helped me to balance my various roles. My role as a teacher and employee helped to establish relationships with the participants as well as have insider information to the inner workings of both Pine Grove School and the district to which I may not have had access had I been only a researcher. My role as a researcher helped me to understand my phenomenon of text selection more clearly, not only in a general sense; it forced me to reflect on my changing role as a teacher in a new educational landscape that had recently made an enormous shift in its ELA curriculum. My roles, thus, worked in harmony and helped me to understand the context, my colleagues, and beliefs more clearly.

It should also be noted that I did have to acknowledge my biases upon entering a new educational landscape that had adopted new ELA curriculum with which I was unfamiliar and pedagogy to which I was unaccustomed. Thinking about Applebee's (1993) ideas concerning traditions in the ELA classroom, I determined that my past teaching experiences had been mostly canonically driven where I selected most of the texts and led groups of students through whole class studies of works such as *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), and *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953), text choices reminiscent of the cultural heritage model of teaching ELA (Applebee, 1993). Now in a landscape focused on choice and individualization—a student-centered approach (Applebee, 1993), I often found myself comparing and contrasting these two ELA pedagogical traditions. Throughout data collection and my first year teaching in a new landscape, I remained constantly aware and at times frustrated that I was no longer teaching in the same place. I found myself sometimes resisting such a drastic change and wanting to find comfort in what I had always done pedagogically.

My previous educational landscape had consisted of a mostly white, middle class student population where expectations about what should be read were deeply rooted within the community and traditions of the district. In contrast, my new landscape was more diverse, and Pine Grove School purposefully recruited students from under-represented populations. At my school alone, over 30% of the student population was Latino, over 50% of students were navigating poverty, and more than 40 different languages were spoken on a daily basis. So, should not my teaching change as well if my landscape and population had shifted this dramatically? Yes. Thus, I found myself forced—yet willing—to make curricular changes that would be more focused on students, their cultures, and their individual needs. The

cultural heritage model (Applebee, 1993) simply would not work at Pine Grove School, although I found myself mourning the loss of not only how I was used to teaching but what texts I was able to teach. This new educational landscape also forced me to confront my whiteness and how my expectations for what should or should not be read in a classroom might be rooted in Euro-centric traditions that would not be appreciated by a more diverse and marginalized student population. In fact, I had to acknowledge that my whiteness might be clouding how I select texts and teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. While this awareness is an important first step toward employing teaching that is culturally responsive, I am still learning how to navigate this new landscape and serve the students who are there.

Anne

Anne's experiences with teaching and text selection helped me to reflect more carefully on the way the theme the "Text as a Tool" might manifest in my experiences with text selection. My interactions with Anne also helped me to think more critically about the relationship between my autonomy in teaching and selecting texts and adhering to district curriculum expectations. Since Anne is the teacher with whom I work the most closely, I found myself relating to some of her experiences but also thinking about how some of her practices might manifest in my ELA classroom setting.

In an earlier chapter, I described Anne's experiences with two individual students, Kaylee and Javier, for whom she helped to select texts. Anne's personal interactions with Kaylee and Javier forced me to think about the interactions I have with students who are selecting texts for themselves. Like Anne, I, too, encourage choice reading in the classroom, mostly because I think it is truly engaging for students but also in small part because it is

what the district wants us to do. I begin each day with a book talk (Kittle, 2013) that is no longer than five minutes in length. During the book talk, I discuss the title, author, genre, and provide a brief synopsis. I might read a short passage or talk about my experiences if I had read the text before. Books talks might help to encourage conversation about books, and promoting choice reading will encourage students to become life-long readers. However, I often encounter students who, even after months of free reading, are unable to select books for themselves and always need my guidance. While I am always there to help them, I also wonder how I can better help them to become independent when making these choices and learn who they are as readers.

For me, helping students to make decisions independently as they relate to their education can help to empower students. However, even after individual conferences with students and investing in them personally, many students often struggle to work and make decisions for themselves regarding their education. However, if I think about their past experiences or the traditional practices of the English language arts classroom, often teachers are the ones responsible for text selection and students are simply there to read whatever the teacher feels is important. I consider how it might be that students are unable to independently select texts because of their past experiences in which they were not given the opportunity. Thus, the past experiences of both students and teachers involving a mostly teacher-driven text selection often bumped with my present desire to have students choose what they believe is a good fit. This colliding of past traditions with new text selection practices means that both Anne and I need to think critically about how to explicitly teach our students how to know who they are as readers. Anne's description of her difficulties to

sometimes match a student to a text were very relatable to me and forced me to think about why students might struggle to become independent readers, thinkers, and learners.

While I could relate to Anne's experiences using a trial and error approach to match students to texts and appreciated her careful attention to planning curriculum, I also found that our communication styles involving teaching and personal interactions were often at odds with one another. Thus, I sometimes found it difficult to communicate with Anne during the data collection process as well on a daily basis. As a person and teacher, I tend to have a direct communication style where I can be blunt and at times too honest. In contrast, Anne meticulously words her sentences and has an ability to tactfully and carefully explain herself. Rarely does she speak before thinking, and she is a good listener. She has even pointed out these differences and attributes her indirect communication style to her time spent living and teaching in Japan for several years.

These different styles of communication, while not problematic, did prove to make interviewing more challenging with Anne than with the other participants. Anne often would begin speaking about one idea and then self-correct and re-explain her thinking. She often would ask during interviews if she was doing okay and, therefore, appeared more aware that she was being recorded and that these recordings would later be used to construct stories about her teaching and text selection practices. Anne's awareness and concern about how she was being represented at times frustrated me as a researcher, and I found myself wanting her to be more direct and less concerned about the recording. Aware of my feelings about our communication styles when I composed the participants' stories, I always wrote about Anne first as I found her to be the most challenging participant to write about. I knew that the more I wrote, the wearier I would become, so it was important to acknowledge this feeling about

Anne and make sure I wrote about her first so that I could do her story justice and not allow our different communication styles to cloud the way she was represented.

Robert

Robert's stories of experience about teaching and text selection forced me to think more critically about how I invest in students personally and how I engage them in reading and writing. Although I interact with Robert the least on a daily basis, I found myself relating to his teaching style and his beliefs about students, teaching, and text selection the most out of all the participants. I found myself surprised that I was relating to him in interviews and during classroom observations as I did not expect my beliefs to be as aligned with his as they were.

Specifically, Robert spoke often about his beliefs in his authority as an educator and curriculum maker (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Whenever he described his beliefs about teaching and learning, I saw a reflection of my beliefs about teaching and learning. Robert often talked about the importance of establishing personal relationships with his students as well as how he worked to empower them to become independent readers, writers, and thinkers. As he described how he works with each student, I reflected on my personal interactions with students. In Robert's classroom, he is the authority—not outside curriculum or hired experts. Robert's perception of authority within an educational context closely mirrored mine. While I have respect for mandated curriculum, I do not let it dictate my professional choices and neither did Robert.

I related to Robert's story about Aleena, a reluctant reader for whom Robert helped to spark passion and interest in reading. As Robert described his experience with giving her books that might help her connect to reading and her growing engagement as a reader, I

reflected on my experiences with students whom I have helped to become better readers. Robert's experience with Aleena reminded me of a male student, Ryan, who upon entering my class as a junior, had never officially read a book in high school. Ryan came to me not only as a reluctant reader, but as a cynical and unskilled reader. However, like Robert's working with Aleena, I found myself working to foster a relationship with Ryan, to find out who he was as a person and, consequently, as a reader. It took Ryan three months to finish his first book, but after I praised him for completing a book from beginning to end, he managed to read seven more before the end of the school year. While he first read books well below his reading level, he finished off the year with the nonfiction best seller *Concussion* (Laskas, 2015), a book that he would not have even considered the previous school year. Would Ryan have become a reader had I not invested in him individually? I am not sure. However, the fact that he had gone through most of his formal schooling without ever having picked up a book suggests he would have continued to fake his way through reading. Like Robert, I, too, think often about my interactions with students and how I have the authority to encourage or even discourage them. Robert's individual interactions with his students forced me to reflect on the power that educators can hold over students and their ability to grow and flourish within a subject area. My interactions with Robert left me wanting to invest more time individually with students to ensure their needs are being met and they are continuing to grow as readers, writers, and thinkers.

I also feel it is necessary to describe some of my biases regarding Robert in this section on researcher positioning. Robert was the participant I knew the least before data collection and is still the participant with whom I have the least interaction. Before our first interview, I was quite nervous and did not expect my time with Robert to produce rich data in

the form of stories. I had no idea what type of person or teacher he was, but my brief interactions with him made me think he would be unwilling to answer questions in depth. I was wrong. Robert's interviews and my observations proved to yield the richest data out of the three participants, meaning I had shifted from one bias to another. The person whom I thought would be most difficult to interview ended up being the most natural. During interviews, I also found myself connecting to Robert's beliefs about teaching and his role in developing and being the curriculum. Therefore, I had to possess a heightened awareness concerning my interactions with Robert as I found myself wanting to agree with him or I found myself wanting to drift from my interview questions and explore some of his thinking in more depth. In two of the interviews, I acknowledged this bias verbally so it could be recorded as proof that I attempted to remain cognizant of how my interactions with Robert could influence the ways in which I constructed his stories about teaching and text selection.

Georgia

Much like I saw some of my teaching practices and beliefs about text selection reflected in the stories of Anne and Robert, I also saw myself in some of Georgia's experiences. Mostly I was able to connect with her based on her apprehension to change as well as her love for classic literature. However, while Anne and Robert made me think about my current practices as an educator, Georgia's adherence and respect for the canon made me think about my past self as an ELA teacher.

Before moving across the country to teach in the Pacific Coast School District at Pine Grove School with Anne, Robert, and Georgia, I taught high school and middle school for ten years in a suburban district outside of a large Midwestern city. Like Georgia, my teaching experiences and thinking about text selection were rooted in a canonical and traditional

approach. Like Georgia, I loved reading *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) or *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) with 10th graders. Like Georgia, I loved exposing students to great works and seeing them make connections with timeless classics.

While teaching in the Midwest, I taught mostly classics to my students and adhered to a mostly teacher-driven model of text selection. Thus, when I moved across the country to a district that was moving away from the traditional ELA model of whole class texts, I felt nervous. What would happen if students did not read the classics in high school? Could they survive without *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954)? *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925)? Shakespeare? More importantly, if they were left to choose their own books, would they read only simplistic works, or would they challenge themselves? Would they even read? What would my role be in the ELA classroom if I was no longer guiding my students in a shared text? All of these questions flooded my mind as I set out to navigate a new educational landscape. Interviewing and observing Georgia reminded me of these feelings that I had when I first started teaching at Pine Grove School. I felt a sense of loss when I realized I might be giving up some of my beloved books in order to make room for more choice reading and student-centered curriculum, a feeling that still floods over me from time to time.

Georgia's love for the canon and experiences with teaching the classics reminded me of who I used to be as a teacher. As Georgia described her fear of breaking the canon, I could relate to her on a personal and professional level as I, too, had felt similar feelings. However, unlike Georgia, I have shifted my practices to focus on more choice reading, but there are times when I feel like I have given something up or that something is missing from my transformed role as a teacher. I could truly relate to Georgia's apprehension and concern, her desire for the familiar. Georgia's love for the canon also made me think about my love for

literature. Georgia often spoke about how she felt students needed to read the classics, and I found myself to some extent agreeing with her. Yet, I also found myself conflicted with her reasoning as I could not find an adequate answer as to why high school students needed to read this type of literature apart from my personal inclinations toward the classics or traditional high school canon.

Georgia's love for the canon and tradition permeated her experiences with teaching and text selection and slid into every interview and observation. Her personal love for the canon made me think about the relationship between a teacher's personal interests and beliefs about curriculum and his or her professional responsibilities to adhere to district expectations and policies. Georgia's fear of "breaking the canon," as she called it, reminded me of my internal wrestling with entering a different educational landscape and drifting into uncharted curricular territory.

When exploring these biases regarding Georgia, I experience a personal and professional conflict. Georgia is the participant with whom I have the most interactions and the most personal connections. Our friendship started in the fall of 2016 when she wandered into my room to ask a question and left an hour later, both of us having formed a new relationship as friend and trusted colleague. On a personal level, she and I connected based on our upbringings and some of our personal beliefs and shared hobbies, including a love for specific television shows and shopping. Georgia and I communicate most days and have gone to dinner and other social events together.

While Georgia and I connect on a personal level, I was often puzzled by her professional choices and had to remain aware of my different hats as I interacted with this participant (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). While socially Georgia and I shared many of the

same beliefs and experiences, professionally I often wondered about her text selection choices and her apparent unwillingness to adapt her pedagogy and dive into the district's adoption of choice reading and classroom libraries. Her resistance to change confused me and at times frustrated me since during observations I often encountered a classroom that was borderline chaotic or disengaged from the lesson. However, I could also sympathize with Georgia's reluctance to change since I had recently moved to a new landscape and was wary of changing my practices simply for the sake of change. Thus, while I composed Georgia's stories about teaching and text selection, I often felt conflicted and had to work with my doctoral chair to ensure I did not paint Georgia in a negative light that would disrespect her stories and her voice.

In this section, I positioned myself as a researcher, a teacher, and a person and described how my interactions with each participant forced me to reflect on my experiences with teaching and text selection. Some participants helped me to think more carefully about the practices I employ with my students and whether or not they are effective. Other participants encouraged me to celebrate some of my successes I have had helping students with text selection. Other experiences of the participants made me ask hard questions about my responsibilities as an educator, or they helped me to analyze conflicts between various stakeholders in education. I also described more explicitly some of my biases regarding the site at which I conducted the study as well as my biases that developed as I interacted with each participant personally, professionally, and academically. Positioning myself as a researcher, teacher, and person made this narrative inquiry honest and transparent as well as provided additional insight and perspective about the phenomena of teaching and text selection and the human aspect that is central to narrative inquiry.

Enduring Narrative Puzzles and Wonderings

In this section I discuss enduring questions that were left unanswered regarding this narrative inquiry concerning English language arts teachers and their experiences with text selection. While the four narrative themes discussed earlier can help to illuminate commonalities among participants, there are still questions left unanswered or bits of information that did not fit under a common narrative theme yet still need acknowledgement. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that when common themes are apparent, narrative researchers imagine their field texts and puzzles within and outside of these forms. Sometimes in narrative inquiry puzzles offer new lines of thinking or can serve as discrepancies between interview statements and observed teaching practices, something Clandinin (1986) referred to as “images in action.” In the following sections, I discuss these narrative puzzles and wonderings for each of the four narrative themes in order to capture the incomplete nature of stories and of narrative methodology as well as to explore potential discrepancies between interview statements and observed practices.

“Texts that Connect”

In earlier pages, I described how the theme “Texts that Connect” manifested for the three participants. Participants spoke about connecting texts to the lives of students and their interests, and they spoke of using texts to connect students to other schools and districts locally and across the nation. However, this theme did not explicitly involve using texts to connect to students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds. This might represent Robert’s, Georgia’s, and Anne’s possibly unintentional silence (Acheson, 2008) on this critical topic. Anne did briefly describe an experience involving selecting texts, such as *Spare Parts* (Davis, 2014) and *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (Skloot, 2011), both texts that explore the

experiences of people of color. However, critical discussion of how teachers select texts for a population of culturally and linguistically diverse students was largely absent across all participants and even largely absent during classroom observations. This absence could be problematic since over 54% of Pine Grove School's population define themselves as people of color. As I note this absence, I wonder if it was due to how I constructed my interview questions. I also wonder if teachers simply compartmentalized their thinking about the race and ethnicity of students and instead focused on a more individualized approach to text selection. All teachers at Pine Grove School have received professional development about social justice and equity, and they are aware of the school's mission to serve under-represented populations. However, this training is done in a general sense and does not specifically cater to language arts teachers and their text choices.

The district's recent ELA adoption focuses more on the individual student and the importance of choice. Choice, as it relates to ethnicity and race, is implicit at best. I wondered whether or not white teachers like Anne, Robert, or myself critically thought about their text selection choices within this context or if they focused more on engagement and less on making critical cultural connections for all students. If indeed teachers do not think explicitly about race and ethnicity, how do their text selection choices continue to perpetuate whiteness in the ELA classroom? And if whiteness in literacy instruction and text selection continues to permeate classrooms, I wonder what effect that might have on students of color and the ways they see themselves reflected or silenced in the curriculum.

Another wondering involving this theme emerged from some of Georgia's stories about text selection and her desire to select texts that other students might read at other district schools or across the nation. Georgia's statements about using texts to create a

common heritage appeared to be in direct contrast with district curriculum practices that encouraged teachers to break away from the canon and move toward a focus on choice and engagement. This shift made me wonder whether people need to experience a common heritage or shared literary experience. What happens if students leave high school and do not read Shakespeare? Or Hemingway? Or Fitzgerald? Asking these questions also made me recognize the extent to which I am thinking about texts and classical literature through a predominantly white, Euro-centric lens and to reflect upon whether I might have a mistrust of choice reading because it is uncomfortable pedagogical territory for me.

Connecting through shared texts also made me think about the enduring nature of the literary canon. Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) explained that canonical texts adhere to dominant ideologies about race, gender, sexuality, and religion, and they often go unquestioned or unexamined. The authors also asserted that the canon does change but slowly (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Even though the high school canon has been revised to include multicultural texts that might serve as shared texts for students (e.g., *A Raisin in the Sun* [Hansberry, 1997]; *Song of Solomon* [Morrison, 2004]; or *The Joy Luck Club* [Tan, 2006]), many times these texts might focus on an additive approach rather than a critical approach to the inclusion of multicultural texts. A critical approach to multicultural texts would allow for the development of a canon that is always being revised, contested, and critically deconstructed (Palumbo-Liu, 1995), which means that any desire to use texts as a shared experience or to give students some type of universal language is inherently contradictory to the tenets of critical multicultural education.

In fact, the shift to choice reading, where connection focuses on the individual, might be a better way of getting both students and teachers to question the authority of the canon

and its “unbearable whiteness” and instead select texts that reflect individual interests and cultures and help students to examine historical and socio-political issues regarding race, class, and gender. Selecting texts as a way to share a common language, even if those texts have been labeled as multicultural or representative of people of color, have often been neutralized or deemed palatable for a wide-reaching audience (Palumbo-Liu, 1995). Thus, the safety in reading these types of books and labeling them as acceptable for the masses (think high school classrooms) is that little is done to question the authority of the canon. This means that the same books tend to be read and studied in ELA classes year after year in classroom after classroom and are rarely examined for their inclusion, authorship, or muting of historical or political contradictions.

I wonder if more high schools and districts shifting away from the canon and re-centering their focus on choice reading and a personal exploration of literature might help to loosen the grip that Western culture has on the language arts classroom. Lowe (1995), although speaking from the context of the university, wrote, “Through concerted pedagogical and curricular changes taking place in different institutional sites, we can locate and displace the powerful ideological narratives that traditionally structure the current university” (p. 66). While the high school classroom is obviously a different landscape, the same “concerted” effort might be needed from high school ELA teachers to change their practices one classroom at a time if all students are going to connect to the texts they read.

“The Text as a Tool”

In this sub-section, I discuss some of the wonderings I had regarding the theme “The Text as a Tool.” For the participants, this theme mainly included how teachers used texts to teach skills in reading and writing. For me, this theme often contradicted traditional notions

of the ELA classroom that focus first on the text to be read and then later on what activities should be used to accompany that text. In fact, the first page of chapter one in this dissertation asserted that the text shapes the course, but after speaking with teachers and describing their experiences, now I am not so sure. In contrast, learning to see texts as tools turns the ELA classroom structure on its head by requiring teachers to first think about skills and later about texts that will work to enhance these skills. I wondered if approaching the ELA classroom in this way eliminates some of the enjoyment teachers get from selecting texts to teach their students; after all, many of us, myself included, got into the profession because we, more than likely, enjoyed the required reading that consisted mainly of the high school classics.

A text-centered as opposed to skill-centered approach to teaching ELA made me wonder specifically about Georgia, who continued to use teacher-focused text selection methods in a district that is moving away from this practice. Georgia's focus on selecting from the canon instead of thinking about which skills she wants to teach made me wonder if students learn the skills needed to become better readers and writers. I also wondered about Georgia's activities that are paired with her text selection choices. Many of her activities and assignments are often comprehension-based and require students to recall instead of analyze or synthesize information from the text. If a teacher uses a text primarily for comprehension, how will students develop more complex reading and writing skills? Thinking about the text first instead of the skills to teach also reminded me of Georgia's story about kids who were fake reading the text *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993). I wondered if this fake reading came from the "swamp of negative expectations, lowered motivation, and limited practice"

(Morgan & Fuchs, 2007, p. 178) that many students experience when trying to read texts over which they had no choice.

Another aspect of “The Text as Tool” theme that puzzled me involved ways by which teachers select these tools in order to foster reading and improve writing. What happens if the tool is appropriate to teaching a skill but not engaging for students? What if a teacher selects an inappropriate tool for the job required—meaning the text is either too easy or too hard? This question arose when Anne described her experience with teaching the young adult text *Whirligig* (Fleischman, 1998) to her junior level writing class. This text is typically taught in middle school, yet Anne selected it to be used in an upper-level high school class, causing me to wonder if it was too simple for this student population or if students were bored. The opposite could hold true as well, where a teacher selects a text that is too complex for students, preventing them from improving their skills since they are unable to move past the comprehension stage. Allington (2009) commented on texts that are too complex: “In order to read fluently, all readers need texts that they can read with a high degree of accuracy and automaticity. When readers are provided with texts that are too difficult, fluent reading is impossible” (p. 26). I witnessed this through some of the book club choices Robert offered to students. *The Things They Carried* (O’Brien, 1990) and *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006) were both offered as choices to ninth grade students, and I could not help but wonder if that was an appropriate choice for students who often struggle with reading and writing at grade level. I juxtaposed his choices with my experiences teaching these same works to seniors, who despite being three years older than Robert’s students, struggled to read the text and understand its complexities.

“Texts that Engage”

In this sub-section, I explore some of the puzzles and wonderings that emerged from participants about the theme “Texts that Engage.” In chapters five and six, I described how participants worked to select texts that would get students excited about reading and language arts. Thinking about reading excitement and engagement is difficult for many ELA teachers to consider, since teachers often might not equate engagement with complexity and are wary of allowing students to choose their own texts for fear those texts will be simplistic or too easy. Kittle (2013) recalled an anecdote from a male teacher attending one of her workshops who shouted out, “They can’t be reading those easy books as seniors!” (p. 51).

As I listened to Anne and Robert, who spoke more directly about engagement than Georgia, I wondered if engagement was indeed the most important part of text selection. Without engagement would kids ever read in the first place? I also wondered if teachers like Anne and Robert focused mostly on individual choice reading, would students be able to improve their reading skills and increase their complexity, or would they continue to read for fun and fail to push themselves? Kittle (2013) argued that, in fact, there is little evidence that mandating what students read leads to engagement or to establishing a reading life at all. She lamented, “Controlling what students read stifles readers” (2013, p. 52). Thus, I understand the skepticism toward focusing on engagement, but research indicates that choice and establishing a reading life for students is an imperative first step toward improving themselves as readers. After a reading life has been established, then teachers can coach students toward consuming a diverse reading diet that both engages and challenges them.

Thinking about “Texts that Engage” made me wonder if teachers in the Pacific Coast School District will move past the entry point of engagement with students and push them

toward more critical and complex tasks. Statistics cited earlier about this district claimed that students are not able to read at grade level and that only 44% of students meet the college reading readiness benchmark (ACT, 2013). Reading at grade level is an even more significant concern for students of color. Rampey et al. (2009) asserted that while the achievement gap has narrowed since 1971, African American and Hispanic American students at all three age levels tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress are not learning to read as well as their European American peers. When thinking about these reading statistics, I specifically wondered about the ways in which choice reading was directly related to helping students of color, a concern that should be especially important in a district where over 50% of its students are culturally and linguistically diverse. Will the needs of these specific students be met? Or will teachers in Pacific Coast simplify the curriculum adoption through an engagement lens and stop short of truly empowering all students to read complex texts and prepare themselves for literacy tasks in college and beyond? Since all middle school and high school teachers are expected to adopt choice reading and classroom libraries, how will the district ensure that students receive a diverse ELA experience and improve their skills as readers, writers, and thinkers? Since I collected data during the pilot year of this curriculum roll out, I do not yet have answers to these questions, nor do I see the district attempting to differentiate the curriculum adoption between grade levels, which makes me wonder if students will repeat the same assignments year after year and read the same books over and over. From my data collection, it was clear that many teachers were simply incorporating activities gleaned from professional development and not creating their own tools or diversifying their strategies.

Kittle (2013), who is one of the consultants the district hired to help implement this new curriculum, does explicitly advocate that students must work on skills that go beyond engagement to include studying whole literary works, reading shorter mentor texts in all genres to understand author's craft, and to develop an independent reading life. Yet, my interactions with this theme made me wonder if teachers in the Pacific Coast School District will interpret Kittle's (2013) and Gallagher's (2009) ideas as they were meant to be, or if their ideas about choice and text selection will be adapted to meet the whims and beliefs of individuals teachers and simplify the curriculum rollout to be concerned only with whether or not students like what they are reading. Levin (2008) indicated that curriculum reform does not necessarily mean that teachers will incorporate the curriculum into their classrooms, and how teachers in the district will continue to grow and develop within the context of choice reading and classroom libraries remains to be seen.

“Texts with Authority”

The theme “Texts with Authority” produced several puzzles and wonderings during and after data collection as I began to write about the experiences of the participants. This theme made me wonder about what counts as authority. Is it the teacher? National curriculum standards like the Common Core? School administrators? District curriculum adoptions? Personal and professional experiences of teachers? Text book companies? Parents? Paid literacy professionals and consultants? Librarians? The authority of the canon? Text availability? Pedagogical tradition? As I navigated this theme with Georgia, Robert, and Anne, I found the answer to be different depending on the individual participant and depending on the context. At times the answer was all of the above. Other times only one or

two of the criteria carried authority for teachers. The theme of authority proved to be fickle, often changing with the day, context, or individuals involved.

Another wondering I had involved the authority of gender as it related to teaching and the participants' beliefs about their roles as high school ELA teachers. Both Anne and Georgia, the female participants, described viewing authority as resting outside themselves. Anne often described the role of the district in helping her make text selections as well as the influence that trainings and professional development had on her choices. She did see herself as an authority through her role as Literacy Leader, but that, too, had been given to her by an external factor. Authority for Georgia rested outside her individual autonomy and personal practical knowledge but in a way that was different from Anne. For Georgia, curricular traditions and the canon carried the most weight. In contrast, Robert mostly found authority from his own experiences as a teacher, even referring to himself as “a highly proficient educator.” His initial agreement to be a part of this study—“as long as you don’t tell me how to teach”—suggested his authority is from himself. I wondered if these internal and external experiences with authority could somehow be related to gender roles of the participants. Was Robert more confident because he identified as male? Or was his confidence a result of his belief in himself as a teacher? The same types of questions could be asked of Anne and Georgia as well within the context of their female genders, although answers to these wonderings rested outside of this narrative inquiry but could certainly be explored in more depth.

A final wondering I had regarding “Texts with Authority” involved the authority of race and ethnicity. While race did not emerge as a central thread of any of the narratives presented, I wonder if it could be more deeply embedded and connected to the idea of

silences that have a presence or power, although they go unmentioned because they are so deeply embedded in cultural norms. Instead silence within the context of the absence of discussion regarding race and whiteness could be viewed as gesture (Acheson, 2008) or as having rhetorical meaning (Glenn, 2004). The authority of whiteness and its relationship to curriculum, text selection, and the ELA classroom could certainly be examined in more depth, although it did not emerge as a dominant thread in this study. While the whiteness of Anne and Robert went largely unexplored and neither participant mentioned their race explicitly, race is certainly an authority when over 80% of the teaching population is white (Klein, 2014) while the student demographic continues to become increasingly diverse. Specifically, from 2004 to 2014, the U.S. white student population decreased from 58% to 49.5% while the Latino/Latina student population increased from 19 to 25% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Thus, the authority that race plays in the ELA classroom and specifically with regard to text selection would be important to examine more fully. What happens when white teachers select texts for students of color? Will students see themselves in the books they read? I wondered why neither Robert nor Anne discussed their own race or the race of their students and how that might influence text selection practices, especially since over 54% of the students at Pine Grove School are students of color and the mission of the school is to serve under-represented populations of students. Georgia, who is a person of color, rarely discussed race as she described her experiences with teaching and text selection and had even said to me in personal conversations that she does not filter her narrative through her race and is often puzzled when people ask her to do so (personal communication, March 16, 2018).

In this section, I explored puzzles and wonderings that went unanswered as I compiled my common narrative themes. Examining these puzzles and wonderings was a way for me to critically analyze some of the unresolved issues involving text selection and teaching in the high school ELA classroom. Deconstructing my puzzles and wonderings under the context of each theme also helped me to explore the narrative themes in more depth for what was *not* revealed through interviews and observations and to attend to the silences or absences from participants.

Educational Significance

In this section, I explore the possible ways that this narrative inquiry about text selection could be educationally significant. This study might be significant first within the broad context of education and curriculum development. The study might also be educationally significant due to its connection to teachers, their stories, and their personal experiences. Finally, this narrative inquiry might prove to be important to teachers and stakeholders associated with the English language arts classroom and all of its related parts.

One way this study is educationally significant is its relationship to national and local curriculum standards and curriculum reform efforts, such as the Common Core State Standards. When I entered the educational landscape of the Pacific Coast School District, the district had recently adopted a new English Language Arts curriculum that focused on classroom libraries and choice reading. This curriculum was adopted as a response to research related to students and their lack of engagement and related difficulties with reading and reading related tasks (Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013; Lehman & Roberts, 2014; D. Miller, 2009). The district wanted to shift traditional, canonically dominated curriculum practices to a more student-centered approach. Coincidentally, I started the study during the first year of

this new curriculum implementation and was able to capture the stories and experiences of three district teachers as they navigated or chose not to navigate district curriculum expectations and pedagogy related to text selection. Out of the three participants, Anne's curricular choices and pedagogy were possibly the most influenced by district mandates and expectations, perhaps because she holds a literacy leadership role. Robert at times mentioned district practices but also described his own involvement in selecting texts. Georgia appeared to be least affected by this new curricular shift and even said that she has seen numerous curriculum adoptions come and go during her tenure at Pacific Coast School District. The different ways in which each participant accepted or rejected curriculum reform suggested that teaching is a deeply personal act and that adoption on a district level does not guarantee implementation on an individual level.

The three participants and their vastly different interpretations of district curriculum suggested that teachers and their "personal practical knowledge" might have more influence over curricular adoption and implementation than national or state mandates (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). All three participants and their experiences varied greatly, but one thread connected them: their past experiences and their personal beliefs about teaching. While participants mentioned the district curricular mandates and state or national standards like the CCSS, they did so in passing and often gave priority to their daily classroom lives instead of curricular expectations that were maybe irrelevant or far removed from day-to-day life. This study suggested that local curriculum reform efforts have more of an influence on teachers and their daily practices than national or federal educational reform movements. For example, while the state in which this study was conducted is a Common Core state that requires students to take the related Smart Balanced Assessment (SBAC), discussion of the

importance and/or impact of the CCSS on individual teachers was mainly absent from this study about teachers and text selection. Anne briefly mentioned the Standards when discussing her pre-service education, and Georgia mentioned them when discussing a past district-wide meeting about curriculum articulation. However, none of the three participants discussed the Standards as they might relate to current teaching practices or text selection. This absence of CCSS-related discussion suggested that teachers are only mildly influenced by national curriculum reform efforts if they are influenced at all. In contrast, local curriculum reform efforts did play somewhat of a role in each of the experiences of Anne, Robert, and Georgia. However, all three participants were guided mostly by their past experiences with teaching as well as their personal beliefs about teaching and learning instead of mandated curriculum reform efforts from any level. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) described a similar concern about curriculum development and implementation and were skeptical of policies that forced teachers to adopt curricula without having a say in the adoption. Instead they argued that curriculum development was and should be mostly a matter of “teacher thinking and teacher doing” (p. 4).

The role of the teacher in selecting, creating, and implementing curriculum was also an important part of this study. Apple (2008) claimed that when curriculum plans and documents reach individual classrooms, the complex lives of teachers and their daily contexts play a significant role in shaping the way the curriculum is taught. While Anne, Robert, and Georgia all worked within the same educational context, their personal experiences developed their thinking about education, teaching, and text selection the most. The Pacific Coast School District made great efforts to put libraries in each teacher’s classroom and provide numerous professional development opportunities about choice

reading. However, ultimately the way in which an individual teacher interpreted, accepted, or rejected the curriculum adoption was most significant. This individualization of district-wide curriculum adoption, once again reiterates the importance of teachers and their role as curriculum planners (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). As stated in chapter one, the role of the teacher is essential to developing curriculum and its implementation in the classroom, since it is the teacher who knows the ins and outs of his or her classroom, students, and school environment. Without the teacher, curriculum would be a static, impersonal document that did little to engage students in their educational experiences.

As education has become more standardized, regulated, and quantitatively driven, it is easy to neglect the role of the teacher and the impact he or she might have on students and learning outcomes. This narrative inquiry, however, reiterated the importance of the role an individual teacher plays in developing curriculum and its implementation in his or her classroom. This study also suggested that the teacher is central to education and a greater focus should be placed on teachers, their experiences, and their personal practical knowledge. Schlein and Schwarz (2015) elaborated on the role of teachers and their abilities to empower students through application of their personal practical knowledge:

Teachers...bring to classrooms a wealth of knowledge and experience that might shape positive learning environments for students. Teachers have knowledge of subject matter, knowledge of teaching, and knowledge of their own students and other contextual features of local curricular situations and interactions. They also bring their desires to contribute to communities. (p. 154)

Overall this narrative inquiry implied that teachers ought to see themselves as active rather than passive participants in education and curriculum development. Despite local efforts to standardize curriculum within a district or school, all curricula are filtered through the individual lens of teachers, rendering true standardization impossible.

A third possible way this study has educational significance is for teachers and other stakeholders related to the subject of English language arts and this specific subject area and classroom context. For years, ELA curriculum has remained roughly the same and has focused on reading from classic literature (Applebee 1974; 1993). In fact, the importance of the traditional canon and its inclusion and dominance in high school English curriculum has been quantitatively researched for decades by those interested in the secondary English classroom and its curricular practices. Many of these same studies are critical of traditional ELA text selection practices that continue to remain preoccupied with the same list of works year after year, even if the list varies slightly or changes minimally over time (Applebee, 1974, 1993; Shanahan & Duffett, 2013; Stallworth, 1999; Stotsky et al., 2010). Furthermore, the canon has a limited and therefore limiting list of titles and works of merit and worth that might not connect with or be engaging to all students (Fairbrother, 2000; Stallworth, 1999). Canonical critics also fear that a restricted, white male-dominated curriculum does not meet the needs of diverse student populations. Such limitations are especially concerning in a multicultural and globalized world (Colarusso, 2010; Stotsky et al., 2010). Kittle (2013), in fact, suggested that in today's world students need a vast and far-reaching knowledge of various types of texts, "far more than [teachers] teach in the traditional English curriculum" (p. xv).

Therefore, this study was significant because it provided possible insight about what types of texts teachers are teaching as situated within the context of the CCSS, a rapidly changing world, and a diverse educational setting. The participants in this study all described various reasons for selecting texts and shared stories related to specific students and their interactions with texts, suggesting that text selection ought to be a highly individualized and

customized process that meets the needs of all learners. The themes that emerged from this study helped to provide insight about what teachers teach and why and how they teach a text.

This study also indicates that the ELA classroom might be slowly changing in order to meet the needs of students in the 21st century, a group of students who are becoming more ethnically and racially diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Two of the participants, Anne and Robert, focused their text selection practices on meeting individual student needs and helping students select texts that were culturally relevant, engaging, and appropriate. In earlier chapters, I defined these types of selection practices under the themes “Texts that Engage” and “Texts that Connect.” Both Robert and Anne focused on fitting individual students with individual texts as well as engaged them in authentic reading and writing tasks that would empower their students to become better readers and writers. Reading authentic texts and engaging in real reading and writing instruction has proven to be beneficial for all students, particularly students of color (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). In addition, neither of their practices were dominated by tradition or the canon. The experiences of these two participants could serve as examples of a larger shift that is occurring in ELA curriculum adoption and text selection, a shift that attempts to customize reading and writing to specific students in order to engage them in literacy (Beers & Probst, 2017; Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013).

The ability for students to see their lives reflected in the curriculum is where the English language arts class and the texts that teachers choose to select might be educationally significant. Findlay (2010) asserted that the English language arts classroom is different from other subject areas, since teachers often implement lessons and activities and select materials that are related to the personal lives of students. All three participants attempted to relate to the lives of their students by making purposeful curricular decisions or text selections,

although the frequency and extent to which this occurred varied among Anne, Robert, and Georgia. Anne and Robert attempted to select literature and writing that related to the students' lives, and, in turn, both Anne and Robert described how students were more engaged and connected to literacy tasks. Through their focus was on the individual student rather than the text, both Anne and Robert attempted to develop a classroom that was "restorative" in nature, a classroom that encouraged relationship-building, dialogue, and peace (Winn, 2013). Their classrooms also encouraged "power-sharing" (Winn, 2013, p. 128) by allowing students to make their own text selection choices or by giving students some voice when making curricular decisions.

Future Areas of Research

In this section, I explore potential areas for future research. This narrative inquiry about text selection proved to yield rich and multifaceted data, suggesting there could be numerous avenues for further research. However, three areas emerged as strong possibilities for further exploration. In the following sections, I elaborate on these future areas of research.

Texts with Authority

One of the dominant themes that emerged during data analysis was the theme "Texts with Authority." This theme was the most nuanced of the four themes that emerged from the experiences of Anne, Robert, and Georgia. Another area of possible research would be to explore and analyze this theme in more depth.

For Anne, this theme manifested based on her experiences with leadership roles as well as her adherence and respect for district and local curriculum adoption. In contrast, Georgia expressed skepticism toward district curriculum policies and practices and decided

to select texts based on past experiences that were already familiar to her. It might be of interest to educators for more qualitative research to be done regarding the extent to which teachers accept or reject district curriculum initiatives and why they might accept or reject those adoptions, particularly within the context of English language arts.

For Robert, the theme “Texts with Authority” developed out of his experiences with viewing himself as an authority and, in turn, attempting to instill within his students a sense of ownership over their reading and writing. His views about his own role in developing and implementing curriculum are closely related to Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) concept of the teacher as a curriculum maker and well as Schlein and Schwartz’s (2015) notion of the teacher as curriculum. It might be useful for further studies that are qualitative in nature to explore the concept of the teacher as a curriculum maker as it relates to teaching in general within a 21st century context or as it relates to teaching specific subject areas.

Diversity and Culturally Relevant Text Selection Practices

While diverse and critical layers of text selection and curriculum were carefully described in chapter two of this dissertation, racial and ethnic diversity did not emerge as a prevalent theme in this narrative inquiry as much as I expected it might. This absence is what Acheson (2008) referred to as a gesture of silence. While perhaps not intentional, the silences from Georgia, Robert, and Anne regarding race, class, or diversity loomed large, especially when all three participants taught at a school whose mission was to serve historically underserved populations of students. Participants did talk about meeting the needs of students through text selection, but instead teacher participants talked more about differentiation and customizing curriculum for all students and rarely explicitly talked about race or ethnicity. This lack of information about race and ethnicity as it related to this narrative inquiry about

text selection would be another possible important area to research more in depth. While both Anne and Robert spoke about engaging students in reading and making reading and texts relevant to their students' lives, they did so mostly outside of the context of race and ethnicity. Narrative inquiries that interviewed participants more explicitly about racial and ethnic diversity related to the English language arts classroom and text selection practices might prove to be an enlightening avenue for future research. As the high school classroom becomes increasingly diverse, the teaching profession remains predominantly white (Klein, 2014). This was also true of Pine Grove School, which described itself as a majority minority educational setting. Exploring issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity as they relate to text selection in the secondary ELA classroom might be a timely and relevant area for more research.

Students and Their Experiences with Text Selection

While this narrative inquiry focused on the voices and experiences of teachers and text selection, it might be both interesting and useful to engage in narrative inquiry that involves students and their experiences learning in different environments that employ a variety of pedagogical and text selection practices. Like teachers, students are often a silenced or under-represented voice in educational research (Chan & Schlein, 2010, 2015; Schlein & Chan, 2012). Therefore, conducting more narrative inquiries that capture the voices and experiences of students might be of use for educators as they reflect more critically on their teaching practices. Furthermore, capturing the experiences of students as they interact in different educational contexts with teachers who use their personal practical knowledge to make text selection choices would help to more fully explain the phenomenon of text selection.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I explored the ethical considerations and limitations of this study about teaching and text selection. I also positioned myself as a researcher, teacher, and person as a way to make this narrative inquiry more transparent, accurate, and honest for readers as well as to further describe some of the nuances and complexities that arose during the study. I then explored the educational significance as it related to curriculum reform, the role and significance of the teacher, and the context of the English language arts classroom. While the study ends in this final chapter, the phenomenon of text selection deserves to be investigated through further qualitative research and narrative inquiry. Although the study might end, the stories of the participants live on as they continue to teach, engage students, and select texts within their individual educational contexts.

This narrative inquiry about teachers and text selection proved to be challenging yet rewarding experience for me as a person, researcher, and educator. As a person, I grew in that I learned that stories and experiences are what shape who we are and how we view the world. Through the inquiry process, I also learned that stories and experiences shape education as well and should not be ignored or dismissed as merely anecdotal. Stories have the power to bring about change because they are memorable and engaging. As a researcher, I learned how to interact with a variety of participants—each of whom brought their unique backgrounds to this study about teaching and text selection. Through the research process, I learned how to interview participants and engage them alongside me in the process of narrative inquiry. Through data collection, the participants and I learned how to reflect. Anne, Robert, and Georgia all stated that the interviews and observations encouraged them to think more deeply about what they chose to read in their classrooms and why.

The data collection process forced me to think about the researcher/participant relationship and how it is of the utmost importance to establish trust and cultivate feelings of understanding and appreciation with each participant throughout the entirety of the study. As a teacher, this narrative inquiry taught me how to navigate a new professional landscape. In addition, this inquiry forced me to think about my stories about teaching and text selection and further solidified my beliefs about teachers and their central role in implementing, creating, and becoming the curriculum.

Educational stakeholders and practitioners might learn something about their own stories and who they are as educators in the same way I learned about myself through this rich, rigorous, and eye-opening experience. Secondary ELA teachers might see their own experiences reflected in the experiences of Anne, or of Robert, or of Georgia. In this way, they might then make sense of themselves not only personally but professionally as well.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Request to Participate

You are being asked to take part in a research study that I, Christa Wenger, am conducting in your school district as part of my doctoral degree at the University of Missouri—Kansas City. I would appreciate your taking part in this research study because you have taught for five years or longer. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read the 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. Please think about it and talk it over with your friends and family 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 this study.

Background

The texts that teachers choose to read in the secondary English language arts classroom have been an important part of the curriculum development process for teachers of this subject. Teachers have always been interested in what texts are taught in secondary classrooms and at what grade levels. In a phrase: for many secondary English teachers, the text shapes the course.

Recently a shift has occurred regarding English language arts curriculum and text selection. For decades ELA curriculum has been dedicated to the canon of literature, which includes works written mostly by white males of European descent. While the exact titles in the canon have changed somewhat over time, even going so far as to include multicultural texts, the ELA classroom has been slow to change its views on which texts are worth reading. Additionally, the adoption of and implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative demand that teachers look more critically at the texts they select for their classrooms. However, the rigor the CCSS demand is often at odds with current best practices regarding text selection, which support a more student-centered approach. Thus, it is of utmost significance to gain insight as to how teachers go about selecting texts for their classrooms, especially within the context of the increased rigor of the CCSS. It is also important to describe both positive and challenging experiences that teachers have had with text selection as a way to perhaps better understand what teachers choose to read and why.

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to shed light on the experiences of high school English teachers and their interactions with text selection. Teachers' stories of experience regarding their text selection practices might help to inform educational stakeholders about curriculum reform, pedagogical traditions in ELA classes, and beliefs about best practice in reading and writing instruction. The primary research question for my study is: What are teachers' narratives of experience concerning text selection in the secondary English language arts classroom? I hope to at least partially answer this question within the context of

increased standardization as well as the adoption of and implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Procedures

If you agree to be a part of this study, I will observe you teach particular texts to your high school classrooms on a bi-monthly basis over one semester. I will observe you during the same time and during the same class period for each observation. Observations will occur every two weeks on either Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays or per your schedule during the months of March, April, and May of 2017. I will observe you approximately three times for the amount of time allotted to the particular class period. If necessary, observations will extend into June. In addition, I will conduct three 60-minute interviews to be scheduled with you at your convenience. The interviews will be tape-recorded and later transcribed. Interviews will include questions about your approaches to selecting texts for your English classrooms, rationales for including or excluding particular texts, your successes and challenges when presenting texts to students, as well your beliefs about best practice for teaching English language arts. I will also ask question about national, state, and local text selection policies and your experiences with these policies. During the final interview, I will ask questions regarding my observations of your teaching. All data will be collected between February and June 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, Christa Wenger, to request withdrawal from it.

Risks and Inconveniences

There is a possible slight risk that you may find sharing some of your experiences involving text selection to be sensitive as you describe challenging texts or lessons that did not work out as well as you had hoped. There is also a slight risk that describing your experiences with text selection may not align exactly with district standards and expectations involving the teaching of English language arts. In sharing your stories there is a risk for personal and professional vulnerability. However, I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in daily 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 my 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 regarding text selecting in the secondary English classroom. Another benefit of your participation in this study is that it might allow you to be part of a larger discussion 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, Christa Wenger, at 417-224-2179.

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 me, Christa Wenger, at 417-224-2179, if you have any questions about this study. You may also call her should any problems arise during the course of the study. You may also contact my Doctoral Committee Supervisory Chair, Dr. Candace Schlein, via email (schleinc@umkc.edu) or via phone 816-236-5754 regarding any questions or concerns.

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 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 to which you are entitled. I also might 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 risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Christa Wenger at 417-224-2179. 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 of Volunteer Participant

Date

Printed Name of Volunteer Participant

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH DIRECTOR LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Pacific Coast School District Research Director:

With the recent adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards coupled with the District's recent focus and shift to choice reading and building classroom libraries, text selection has become a significant topic of interest for most English educators. Therefore, I am interested in learning about the text selection experiences of three high school English teachers who have a minimum of five years of experience in the classroom. I would also like to examine district text selection documents, including book lists, course syllabi, and other important curriculum documents that might be related to my study. Moreover, I would like my prospective teacher participants to engage in three 60-minute interviews, which will take place during the teacher's free time at a location of his or her choosing. Additionally, I would like to observe each participant during one class period for one semester for a total of three times during my data collection. Observations will last the length of the class period in which I am observing. I will conduct my interviews and observations between February and June of 2017.

The study will be approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri—Kansas City. In this way, I will ensure that my study meets the institutional requirements for conducting ethical and confidential research. If you have any questions about this study, I would be happy to discuss in more detail. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Candace Schlein, via email (schleinc@umkc.edu) or via phone at 816-235-5754 for any additional information.

I would like to seek your approval for my qualitative investigation. In signing below, you show that you are aware of my study and you approve of my investigative activities. Thank you for your support in my research aims during the time of my study. I look forward to working with the Pacific Coast School District and those teachers willing to be a part of this process.

Sincerely,

Christa C. Wenger
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Education, University of Missouri-Kansas City

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

Name in print: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW ONE PROTOCOL

1. What kinds of schools have you taught in? Have you taught in a variety of types of school locations, such as rural, urban, and suburban?
2. What classes/subjects do you teach/have you taught?
3. Which particular classes you especially enjoy teaching? Why?
4. What are some of the challenges that you face with teaching particular classes? Explain. How do you overcome those challenges?
5. How do you describe yourself as an English teacher?
6. How might you describe your role and purpose in teaching secondary English Language Arts?
7. How do you select texts for your own classroom?
8. Name and describe some of the specific texts you have included in your high school English curriculum for the grade levels/classes you teach.
9. What considerations do you think about when deciding to include a text from your classroom curriculum? Please discuss specific examples.
10. What are things you think about when deciding to exclude a text from your classroom curriculum? Please discuss specific examples.
11. In what ways do you shape your text selection practices around student needs and/or interests?
12. What are some of your memorable and/or successful experiences with selecting texts for your classroom? What made them memorable? What did you learn from these experiences?
13. What are some of your challenging or less successful experiences with selecting texts for your classroom? What made these experiences less successful? What did you learn from these experiences?

14. How do the texts you select to be read and studied in your classroom affect how you teach or the strategies you employ?
15. Do you think students are engaged differently based on the types of texts they encounter? Why or why not? Do you have any examples of how this has played out in your own classroom?
16. How have your text selection practices changed or stayed the same since you began teaching secondary English Language Arts?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW TWO PROTOCOL

1. Are your text selection practices guided by national or state curriculum standards, such as the Common Core State Standards? How?
2. Are your text selection practices guided by local or district curriculum standards? How?
3. Based on your experiences, how does the district select texts to include in the high school curriculum?
4. Have you recommended a text for the curriculum? What was the result? If so, what were the names of the texts and what were they about? Why did you recommend the texts? If not, why not?
5. Do you feel like you have independence and choice regarding your text selection practices? If yes, why? If not, why not?
6. Does text complexity play a role does in your text selection practices? In what ways does it play a role?
7. Do you think that with the implementation of the CCSS text selection practices have changed? If so, why and how? If not, why not?
8. What factors do you think affect text selection practices for your classroom or the grade levels you teach? Explain.
9. Has CCSS influenced your text selection process compared to when you first began teaching?
10. Are your text selection practices connected to student outcomes, such as high stakes assessments? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW THREE PROTOCOL

1. What can you tell me about your feelings regarding your unit of study on _____?
2. Why did you select this particular text for study?
3. Have you taught this lesson/text before? If so, how was the lesson over this text different from previous lessons over the same text? If not, why did you include it in your curriculum?
4. What were the goals of this lesson that you had for yourself? For your students?
5. What successes did you experience when teaching this lesson/s?
6. What challenges did you face when teaching this lesson/s?
7. How did you go about creating materials for this lesson/s?
8. How did you/will you assess students over the material you taught?
9. Would you repeat the lesson? Why or why not? What would you change?
10. How did you/would you differentiate the material for students during this lesson?
11. Ask questions related to observation that include clarification, elaboration, rationale, or reflection on practice (these questions will emerge from my observation transcripts)
 - Can you clarify _____ that happened?
 - During your lesson, you said _____. Can you elaborate on this?

APPENDIX F
OBSERVATION MATRIX

Basic Information:

Teacher Name/Pseudonym	
Hour/Time/Date Observed	
Class and Grade Level	
Description of Basic layout of the room	
Number of students in room, including gender and race ratio, SPED, ELL	
Decorations and Evidence of Student Work	
Objectives	
Focus Work/s and/or Anchor Text	

Observation Criteria:

During observations, I will always include the information found in the above table as a way to organize observations between and among participants. However, each observation will yield different pieces of data, which means I will be observing a variety of aspects involving the teacher and curriculum. Therefore, after recording basic information about each observation, I will use a journal for my field notes to write down important and relevant information to the phenomena in my narrative inquiry, quotations, or other pertinent quick notes including but not limited to one or more of the following:

- teacher knowledge of the text and/or curriculum
- text engagement
- teacher enjoyment of the text
- student text connections
- teacher text connections
- use of materials,
- activities used by the teacher to engage students in the curriculum,
- lack of knowledge or confusion from the teacher,
- issues unrelated to academics,
- distractions
- teacher attitude toward learning and academics
- student attitude toward learning
- student interactions with the teacher
- student interactions with peer
- student interactions with the text
- differentiation of instruction

Upon completion of each observation, I will type out full field notes and include an additional layer regarding my personal reflections and interactions. These observations will function almost like a running-diary of my research so that I may capture the experiences of teachers.

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VITA

Christa Charee Wenger was born on December 26, 1982, in Des Moines, Iowa. She later moved to southern Missouri with her family, where she was educated at Hillcrest High School in Springfield, Missouri. In 2005, she graduated summa cum laude from Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri and was awarded with the Outstanding Graduate Award in English Education. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Secondary English Education.

After graduation, Ms. Wenger began working in a public high school outside of Kansas City, Missouri. In 2007, she began a master's program in curriculum and instruction at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She was awarded the Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction in May 2009.

Ms. Wenger entered the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in 2013. After teaching middle school and high school English language arts for ten years, Ms. Wenger moved with her family to the Pacific Northwest in 2015, where she began teaching high school writing at Pine Grove School.

Upon completion of her degree, Ms. Wenger plans to continue teaching high school and would like to find work as a secondary English language arts instructional coach or to find work at a university school of education in the near future. She will continue to pursue her research interests regarding curriculum, teacher voice, and text selection.