Teachers, Texts, and Transactions:

Towards a Pedagogy for Teaching Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

A simple passion for reading compels many to enter the university literature classroom. What happens once they arrive may fuel that passion, or possibly destroy it. A romanticized relationship with literature proves to be an obstacle that hinders a deeper and richer engagement with texts. Primary research consisting of personal interviews, observations, and surveys, form the source of data for this dissertation project which was designed to examine how literature teachers engage their students with texts, discussion, and assignments in the university setting. Traditionally text centered and resolute, literature courses will need refashioning if they are to advance beyond erstwhile conventions. The goal of this study is to create space for a dialogue about the need for a pedagogy of literature.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my remarkably patient guppies.

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PREFACE

I am what I consider an "accidental teacher." Having always had a romanticized notion of books and words, I applied to the PhD program in literature at a large state university in the southwest for the sheer pleasure and sole purpose of studying literature. I wanted to be surrounded by people who read, who talked about reading, who understood the interdependency between literature and culture, and who revered the written word as much as I always had. I had no intentions of teaching.

Once I was accepted to the program I decided to become a teaching associate in order to fund my coursework and so began an intensive four week summer training schedule followed by a semester long training program for novice teaching associates under the instruction of experts in the field of composition and rhetoric. Under their guidance and mentorship we learned compositional theory, some as ancient as Aristotelian rhetorical proofs and Quintilian's declamations. We discussed Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction composition," James Berlin's social-epistemic theory, Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and Sharon Crowley's ideas about invention and application of historical and/or traditional approaches to teaching and learning composition. We discussed the goals, objectives, and outcomes specific to our First Year Composition (FYC) courses. We worked with one another to create reading and writing assignments that were rhetorically sound and that supported the university's vision for its Writing Programs. We workshopped innovative ideas about how to engage first-year students in the research and crafting of arguments, strategies they would need in order to be successful at the university. Our mentors provided us with opportunities to practice presenting activities or assignments,

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and then the space to reflect on what we had learned from our own presentations as well as those of our fellow teaching associates. We practiced grading "student papers" and discussed how to best encourage growth and development with our comments. After our intensive summer schedule, and during our seminar where we continued to cover methods and issues of teaching composition throughout the semester, it was time to teach.

After my first 50 minute class, with my first 19 FYC students, I realized that I had become a teacher, albeit a bit accidentally. I very quickly learned that the most exciting part of teaching, and the most challenging, was engaging students with the multitude of opportunities offered in FYC: our class discussions, the texts, their peers during group work, and high stakes formal writing assignments. Luckily, engaging students in the composition classroom was a topic that was thoroughly discussed, practiced, and reflected upon in our seminar. Because of that training, I had many different tactics readily available to help me encourage student engagement. The ability to meet these challenges further solidified me into my new identity as a "teacher;" this has led to semester after semester of both student and teacher success in my classrooms.

While I found my experience teaching composition rewarding in so many ways, what I really hoped for was to teach literature. I applied to teach break-out sections of a Survey of British Literature, after teaching approximately 15 composition courses. I was accepted and was eager for my preparations to begin. But there was no intensive workshop. There were no opportunities to share teaching approaches, syllabi, and lesson plans with my peers who were teaching similar courses, under the direct supervision of experts in the field. What I found instead was a type of informal apprenticeship wherein

I taught a smaller "break-out" section of students from the larger lecture group. An experienced British literature professor taught the large lecture section and was our "expert in the field" from whom we were to glean teaching advice, classroom pointers, and feedback on our own teaching; yet we had no formal structure in which to do these things. The professor also observed one class for each teaching associate once during the semester in order to provide more individualized, albeit still informal, feedback. The apprenticeship was designed for the four people teaching the course to meet occasionally and informally to discuss the assignment design, the midterm, and the final; but ultimately the professor designed the course and the teaching associates were expected to follow the teacher's lead. Without instruction in literary pedagogy, teaching associates, myself included, found themselves simply teaching the material the way it had been taught to them. While we had learned to engage students with their writing practice in the composition classroom, we had yet to discover how to engage them with their reading practice in a literature classroom; how to engage them in textual analysis, either for in-class writing assignments or more formal essay assignments; or how to engage them with classroom discussions based on prior engagement with a multiplicity of texts. These are not necessarily the skills that take priority in a composition classroom, and so were not the focus of our teaching associate training. These were instead the skills we were expected to acquire in the classroom as we taught.

Regardless of whether this approach for preparing graduate students to teach literature was "better" or "worse" than the preparation for teaching composition, it was indeed *different*. Once I found myself teaching literature, I relied on the ways I had been taught when I was a student. I merely mimicked professors I had experienced over the

course of my education in my attempts to engage my students with the material, with the course, with each other. Some things I tried worked; some did not. But the disquieting aspect of my early successes teaching literature was that it was serendipitous; I stumbled upon successes in the classroom by sheer accident.

Once I realized that my approach to engaging literature students was mimetic, I began to seek out critical help for student engagement specific to the literature classroom. The sources available were rich in their ability to help a novice teacher to teach specific content, offering many different ways to discuss particular texts. A useful example of this is the MLA *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* series. The series offers teachers historical and critical resources for individual texts as well as suggested approaches to teaching these texts. The series is a powerful resource for literature teachers and offers novel ways to interpret or approach a text. As an illustration, there is a book in the series entitled *Approaches to Teaching Faulkner's As I Lay Dying*, edited by Patrick O'Donnell and Lynda Zwinger. This text offers historical information about the writing and publication of the novel, contextualized insight into the culture represented in the novel, and even genealogical charts which can only be rendered a necessity for any Faulkner novel. In addition to the contextualizing information, the text offers different critical approaches to teaching the novel. There are, for example, chapters such as "'It Means Three Dollars': Following the Money in *As I Lay Dying*" by Deborah Clarke and "*As I Lay Dying*: Approaching the Postcolonial" by John T. Matthews, to name only two of the fourteen offered approaches. All of the techniques within this resource offer unique perspectives on different ways to interpret Faulkner's work, whether that is reading and presenting the novel through a feminist lens, a

postcolonial lens, or a socio-cultural outlook, the approaches prove valuable for teaching Faulkner's content. Where it, and other resources such as this, lacks is in the formulation of an overarching literary pedagogy within which one could explore Faulkner's work.

While these approaches are helpful for an experienced teacher to reconsider specific texts, they do not offer any insight to novice teachers to help navigate the complicated web of engagement that *is* the literature classroom. In fact, they do not seem to recognize at all that the classroom is a complicated web of engagement. If the discussion questions offered by resources geared towards teaching specific texts did not generate classroom discussion, then what should the novice teacher do? If the recommendations for assignment design did not engage a group of students, how could the novice teacher adjust that design in a way that will better inform and direct the student? How can the novice teacher engage students with textual analysis or with their own writing concerning texts? How can the novice teacher engage students with each other in the classroom, or, with the teacher? Those are the types of questions that are not answered in critical sources of individual texts; instead, they became the types of questions around which I designed my research.

Inherent in my research questions is a particular understanding of what constitutes student engagement. Part of my research involved observing and interviewing teachers of literature. When I set out to interview teachers and observe classes, I used the words "student engagement" to refer to a holistic or global view of how I believed students were guided to become committed to their course of study which included their participation in class discussions, their persistent interest in a particular text and whether that was extended and maintained by the in-class activities (such as discussions, writings,

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lectures), and, eventually, if this interest and critical engagement were represented in formal high-stakes writing assignments which are often the one significant tool of assessment in literature courses. One observation that I found particularly interesting in my study, and which will be discussed in the following chapters, is that while each teacher identified as having designed their course to capitalize on student engagement, their understanding of this concept and use of this phrase was distinct from one another.[i] I will discuss my findings from my research in the chapters that follow. Chapter 1 provides a review of the scholarly literature which helps to situate this dissertation, followed by a discussion of my methodology in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The initial research question that provided the impetus for my study was deceptively simple: how do literature teachers engage students with texts in the university classroom? As will become clear in the following chapters, my initial research question fostered many others. My approach to answering my initial question, and those that followed, will be outlined in the next chapter, "Methodology;" the themes that emerged from my primary research create the structure for my dissertation as well as for this review of literature. The larger themes that immediately emerged as significant to my analysis were *teacher*, *text* and the variety of *transactions* that take place within the classroom and within each of these are topics that also help to organize this literature review.

Not surprisingly, the teacher's role in the classroom is a significant determining factor in how students are engaged with texts. The topics or subtopics directly concerning the teacher's role that were most relevant in order to answer my research question(s) were training opportunities specifically for student engagement and/or general preparation for the classroom, including direction in developing an individualized pedagogy; reflection; reflexivity; and teaching style. While these subtopics surfaced immediately from the primary data collected, surprisingly little secondary research has connected these areas with the university literature teacher. What research is available concerns the teacher's role in student engagement in the classroom and it tends to focus on primary education, while critical sources concerned with the university English classroom tend to focus on engagement within composition studies. There is a glaring

absence of critical work investigating the ways literature teachers navigate the complicated engagement between student and text in higher education. While some of this work done on primary education and composition can be applied to my analysis of what is happening in the literature classrooms at the university in my study, there is most certainly a gap in critical perspectives concerning preparation and development of pedagogy for literature teachers.

1.1 Teacher Preparation

My review of literature concerning teacher training and preparation for the university literature classroom uncovered a thin body of research.[ii] Stephen W. Wilhoit's *Teaching Assistant's Handbook* is a useful text specifically written for novice teaching associates who would be in either a composition or a literature classroom. The handbook was utilized in the teaching associate seminar offered at my university where we focused mainly on the suggestions offered for the composition classroom as that was the primary purpose for our position. The book does offer teachers some suggestions for preparing to teach in the literature classroom; however, these suggestions are remarkably basic at their core and offer little insight into *effective* literature teaching, instead focusing on the mechanics of classroom management and syllabi policies. In fact, the direction offered in the handbook is that if one were to obtain an assignment to teach a literature course they should "expect little additional training." Wilhoit goes on to offer, "Most departments do not offer advanced workshops for TAs teaching literature courses for the first time. Therefore, you will need to take advantage of whatever informal support systems you have developed, getting advice and guidance from your teaching supervisor, professors, and fellow TAs" (180). The handbook points out the gaps in teacher preparation yet does

little to fill that gap. In fact, I argue in this dissertation that the "informal support systems" discussed by Wilhoit is not only an accurate depiction of the English department in my study, but that it undermines the very development of a literary pedagogy.

Unlike the limited availability of sources to prepare literature instructors at the university, there are a multitude of field-specific sources for literature dedicated to the training and preparation of primary and secondary educators[iii]. The body of literature dedicated to the preparation of university composition instructors was far richer than that geared toward preparing literature instructors and included sources such as John Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* and *Teaching Writing Creatively*, edited by David Starkey. Many excellent sources are available to assist the composition instructor, and while there may be some applicable information, not all of them are relevant for my project. Nonetheless, a few critical sources geared for composition instruction did prove useful for my work.

One such work that is informational for both composition and literature teacher preparation is Margaret J. Finders and Shirley K. Rose's article, "'If I Were the Teacher': Situated Performances as Pedagogical Tools for Teacher Preparation." Finders and Rose identify the difficulties inherent in preparing teachers for the classroom. They recognize the importance of each of the multitude of roles that teachers play in the classroom and argue they are equally important; furthermore, they recognize that in the university setting teacher preparation includes "gain[ing] knowledge of literature, composition and theoretical frameworks" (205). The missing connection Finders and Rose describe is

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between prospective teachers' "emerging disciplinary expertise, their experiential knowledge, and their future classroom contexts" (205). Accordingly, they argue that it is the job of teacher educators to help novice teachers to build this connection; this practice has become explicit in the preparation of teaching associates at my university for the composition classroom. However, the practice has not become explicit or tailored for the preparation of prospective teachers for the literature classroom which I argue has a different set of "future classroom contexts" than does the composition classroom.

Finders and Rose describe their own role as teacher educators and how they must navigate the difficult terrain of teacher preparation: "As teacher educators, we do not presuppose a single unified role for 'teacher' but see 'teachers' as simultaneously occupying multiple roles, which are fluid, fragmented, and transient positions that are complex, conflicted, and constrained by context" (208). As apt as this description of "teachers" is, it does not reflect the current culture of teacher preparation within the field of literature. In order to build connections between these multiple and often simultaneous roles, Finders and Rose argue that situated performances[iv] "create a dynamic frame that allows for rehearsal, for replay, for revision" (216). The focus on revision moves this reflective activity from an abstract intellectual exercise to one based on action and change in approaches to teaching. However, these examples of situated performances happen in a group with a specific and predetermined structure. This raises the question of whether this opportunity to participate in situated performances has a place specifically in the preparation of literature teachers. One of the early findings of my research, and confirmed by my own experiences, is that literature teachers often tend to self isolate, or, at the most, congregate according to their areas of research and interest. The question

remains if the act of reflection-revision can continue, or can be created, for isolated teachers in the field.

Finders and Rose argue that a "teacher education program must provide teaching experience and tools for reflection on that experience" (206) and provide for pre-service teachers to practice this through what they term "situated performances." The pedagogical tools advanced by Finders and Rose provide an excellent opportunity for pre-service teachers; it can and has also been applied to those preparing to teach composition at the university level. Yet these practical applications offer little for the teacher of literature. Where and how can this practice take place at the university level for novice literature teachers? As mentioned in my preface, incoming teaching associates have ample opportunity for situated performances in writing classes. However, the practice is not expanded to include specifically those who are preparing to teach literature. Traditional preparatory pedagogical tools such as "classroom observations, peer consultations, one-on-one advising, and review of teaching materials such teacher commentary on student papers, classroom handouts and syllabi" (Finders and Rose 218), in addition to the potential for situated performances as outlined above, are not designed or utilized specifically for teacher/student/textual engagement in the literature classroom.

While Finders and Rose argue for the importance of formalized opportunities for situated performances, Thomas Newkirk describes a similar situated performance that is far less formalized. In his introduction, "Locating Freshman English," Newkirk offers insight into how composition teachers develop their pedagogy in a way to create a comprehensive and student-focused curriculum. He describes an oral culture in the field of composition where "between conferences, teachers walked to the water cooler […]

and swap ideas about teaching" (2). He says that, "it was there that the curriculum for the program was made and remade each day" (2). Newkirk's description of the pedagogical development within composition raises two significant points for my study. The first point is the reliance on making and remaking curriculum each day. The recursive nature of pedagogical development he describes I argue is important to the field of literature, a field that can rely upon century old texts, and often decade old pedagogy. The second significant point Newkirk makes is the image of the "water cooler" approach to pedagogical development; this image simply raises the question: where is the literary "water cooler"? The primary research conducted for this dissertation indicates a university and/or field specific culture in which literature teachers self isolate. I argue that the recursive nature, oral culture, and collegial and collaborative approach described by Newkirk should play important roles in the development of a literary pedagogy.

1.2 Pedagogy of Reflection and Reflexivity

Two important subtopics that teachers in my study spoke about directly were the ideas of reflection and reflexivity. However, the literature on both reflection and reflexivity neglects to connect the concepts specifically to the field of literature in higher education, relying instead on primary and secondary education, as well as offering a strong emphasis on business applications. The application of these practices to a university literature program I believe is invaluable when considering the current field experiences of university literature teachers. The practices no doubt are different in this area. Yet so far no one has offered such practices for the teaching of literature in higher education.

Donald Schon's work in both *The Reflective Practitioner* and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* offers an understanding of reflection for my purposes[v]. In his first work, Schon describes reflection-in-action as a process whereby the practitioner reflects on the problem or student obstacle at the moment in the classroom at which it happens. He goes on to argue that because "each practitioner treats his case as unique, he cannot deal with it by applying standard theories or techniques" (*The Reflective Practitioner*, 129). Both the application and ability to do this in the literature classroom is a clearly difficult to teach novice literature teachers. My study will show that for many of our teachers this is a natural and successful process; however the question remains how to naturalize the process for novice teachers. In Schon's second work he offers approaches to teaching reflection in practice by using examples and experiments. Most useful to my discussion is Schon's description of "How the Teaching and Learning Processes Can Go Wrong" (*Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Ch 6, 119). He points out in this chapter that there are "contextual features on which the success of the dialogue of student and [teacher] may depend" (119). The features Schon includes are "the stances adopted by the two parties toward their joint effort at communication, the theories-in-use they bring to their patterns of interaction, and the qualities of the behavioral world they create for each other" (119). The same features are made manifest in the literature classroom and will inform my research; the link between Schon's work and the university literature classroom is a link that has yet to be made.

According to Schon, "Educational institutions have epistemologies. They hold conceptions of what counts as legitimate knowledge and how you know what you claim to know" ("The New Scholarship," 27). He argues that these kinds of epistemologies are

not necessarily consciously taught to or embraced by individuals, but that they are "buil[t] into institutional structures and practices" (27). I would add to the institutional epistemology presented by Schon a number of additional epistemologies that overlap and, often, struggle against one another. While my university has a particular epistemology, that epistemology fluctuates and morphs within the study of English, and even more so among the fields of composition, rhetoric, linguistics, English education, film and media study, creative writing and literature. The palimpsestuous nature of these epistemologies is made clear during my classroom observations where there was evidence of a rather traditional and romanticized understanding of the roles of the university as hallowed purveyor of intellectual pursuits for an exclusive group of participants, of the teacher as conduit of said pursuits, and of the text as centralized authority of learning. These roles will be explored further in later chapters. Within the university, Schon argues that "new scholarship" should have "a kind of action research with norms of its own, which will conflict with the norms of technical rationality – the prevailing epistemology built into the research universities" (27). Schon's argument is in response to Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered*; it is applicable to my study in which the question of epistemology is fundamental in a teacher's ability to formulate their own pedagogy for the classroom.

Ann R. Thomas and Robert R. Lee in "An Inquiry into Group Reflection," set out to determine if Schon's ideas about reflection-in-action can be extended from an individual process to a group process. They draw on Schon's ideas that professionals work within the culture established by their organization, which often limits or discourages "inquiry of self or others" (1), an argument which I believe pertains to

traditional ideas of literary studies. The discouragement for "inquiry of self or others" in a university setting is often reflected in the ways many teachers develop pedagogies, often in unconscious ways that rely upon the teacher as center of knowledge which then further discourages students from a deeper engagement with course content. The result of this is often a student passivity that those same teachers find frustrating. Further, the discouragement of inquiry reinforces a pedagogy born of an organizational culture of isolation and individual genius that is often pervasive at the university. Thomas and Lee agree with Schon's suggestion that because there is no encouragement for an "inquiry of self or others," many professional approaches or processes are viewed as "mysterious," and "largely unknown and untaught" (2). Here again we can recognize what could easily describe literary pursuits including teaching and learning at the university. Thomas and Lee conducted group conversations that were designed specifically to be opportunities for reflection-in-action and found that while it proved to be an effective approach to group insight and learning, facilitation was needed in order to sustain the group's reflection. Their discoveries buttress the facilitated reflective process that I will conclude must happen for literature teachers.[vi]

Willem J.A.M. Overmeer in "Reflecting on What?" deals with the issues that can arise when participants, in Schon's terms, "talk about reflection rather than engaging in it" (qtd in Overmeer 1). The overarching problem for Overmeer was that participants struggle with the ability to capture and articulate what it is they are doing in order to construct a subject on which to reflect. For literature, reflecting on and analyzing are not natural acts. These skills must be taught which means the necessity to do so should not be ignored. Overmeer also calls attention to the fact that his article is part of an online

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conference and that the added layer of technology makes reflection-in-action all the more problematic. I agree with the claim that an added layer of technology challenges the opportunities for and ways in which reflection-in-action can take place; the contention is useful because it sheds insight on the difficulties associated with teaching online, hybrid, and/or in blended spaces. His main concern is the *quality* of the discussion and reflection in an online environment, but he questions the overall construction of online environments in terms of their effectiveness for introspection, learning and insight. If Overmeer is right to be concerned about effectively constructing digital spaces in which teachers have the professional opportunity to reflect, as I think he is, then we need to reassess the ability of teachers to reflect-in-action in digital classroom spaces while teaching online, hybrid, and blended courses.

In addition to reflection, or rather as a complementary piece, is the concept of reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity is important to how teachers develop their pedagogy and classroom approaches, yet reflexivity has not been applied specifically to the study of the university literature classroom,. My definition of reflexivity is dependent upon Jay Rothman's ideas. Rothman is in the field of conflict resolution, yet his ideas warrant inclusion in my research based on my findings of classroom expectations on the part of both student and teacher. In his article, "Reflexive Dialogue as Transformation," Rothman suggests a process of facilitated conflict management wherein "disputants and third parties identify identity conflicts and engage proactively in a creative conflict management process at the midpoint between these two extremes" (345). While this at first seems far afield of the literature classroom, his description of "conflict" draws us closer to an educational application: according to Rothman, "when people's essential

identity needs are threatened or frustrated, conflict almost invariably follows" (345).

What we often find in the university classroom, not exclusively the literature classroom,

is a form of conflict which is caused by an identity crisis as described by Rothman.

Teachers and students actively bring into the classroom a culmination of their previous

classroom experiences, and when these experiences are challenged, that is, when either

student or teacher is moved outside of their comfort zone in terms of identity and role,

conflict ensues. Often this conflict manifests as resistance, in either, or both, student and

teacher – in the classroom this resistance is more often passive resistance, but it can

undermine and damage the classroom regardless. According to Rothman, it is not until

"the other is viewed as 'like self' with respect to motivations, needs and values" (352)

that conflicts such as these are resolved.

Rothman's ideas play an important part in my research for several reasons. Most

significantly, students and teachers enter the classroom space – and here specifically the

literature classroom – with preconceived ideas about what will take place and why, often

based on previous experiences, but equally as often based on collective ideas about what

the purpose of the "study of literature" *is*, as well as *what* it entails and *why* we study

literature at all. Teachers, departments, and universities as whole entities that challenge

preconceived ideas about the study of literature often find themselves embroiled in

classroom conflict. While formal and facilitated "reflexive dialogue" is not normally

utilized in the university literature classroom, I have found in my research that effective

teachers find themselves negotiating this space regularly, and informally, with their

students. How, why, and when they engage in reflexive dialogue proves important to the

successful classroom.

Ian Darling's paper, "Action Evaluation and Action Theory: An Assessment of the Process and its Connection to Conflict Resolution," posits a comparison of Schon's ideas about the reflective practitioner with Jay Rothman's alternative notion: reflexivity. Darling quotes Rothman's definition of reflexivity as that which "involves delaying the instinctive and unexamined reactions to external stimulus, and analyzing them before responding" (1). Darling draws on the idea of reflexivity as a process that takes place prior to reaction, in order to argue that reflexivity augments reflection; however, he suggests that since the two occupy separate spaces (reflection occurring after an event, reflexivity occurring prior to an event), one cannot subsume the other. For Darling, they are separate events. He implies that while each is an alternative form of introspection, the pro-active nature of reflexivity is perhaps the more powerful of the two.

Jan Fook asks whether reflection and reflexivity are the same in her article "Reflexivity as Method." This distinction is significant when considering pedagogical approaches or potential classroom strategies for student engagement. She distinguishes "reflexivity as a position, and reflectivity as a general process" (11). She argues that the two, reflexivity and reflectivity, become interdependent "to the ultimate point where this reflexive positioning and the reflective process it entails, become the research act itself" (11). Within my study, the application of this process is significant to the teacher who must craft and re-craft their pedagogy within a particular epistemology, and often during the course of a particular course.

1.3 Teaching Styles

The study of teaching style is linked to the study of learning styles, both of which have a lengthy history.[vii] Many studies of teaching styles begin with the assumption that

the question of authority in the classroom drives style and pedagogy formation; this assumption has been made in my own research for this dissertation. Mark Bracher speaks to the question of classroom authority, specifically in the university literature classroom, in his article "Transference, Desire, and the Ethics of Literary Pedagogy." He points out that, "in recent years, literature teachers have become increasingly sensitive to the ethical issues entailed by their position of authority, and with the current culture wars, the question of pedagogical ethics has become a central point of contention in the humanities in general and in the study of literature specifically" ("Transference" 127). Bracher divides the responses that teachers have had to the question of authority in the classroom into three categories. He suggests that "some teachers attempt to negate their authority by becoming as much as possible, just another member of the class" (127); a second category of teachers try to be "forthright about their authority and explicit about their values" (127) in an attempt to recognize and discard potential hurdles regarding positionality. The third category of teachers "attempt to vitiate the coercive effects of their authority by engaging their students in a discussion of its contingent, constructed nature" (127). Bracher argues these three stylistic approaches fail in their attempts to negate the teacher's authority and instead reinforce "the same master/servant dynamic" (127) that establishes the basis of many literary pedagogies.

Bracher asserts that the reason for the teacher's inability to shift authority in the classroom has to do with transference. He cites Lacan's concept of subjectivity for support in that "transference arises whenever there is a 'subject supposed to know'" (128). Bracher suggests that transference is particularly ubiquitous in a literature classroom because students go to the university looking for "subject supposed to know,"

and the literature classroom "offers students a multiplicity of such subjects presumed to know – with teachers, authors, characters, and critics being the most notable" (128). While the "subject [is] supposed to know" is true of any class at the university, I argue that the transference in the literature classroom is notably complex because of the layers of cultural, historical, literary, compositional, and interpretive theories and understandings of the different types of texts and interactions that take place between student, teacher, and texts. "Transference, Desire and the Ethics of Literary Pedagogy" is significant to my research because Bracher has engaged with the discussion of "traditional" pedagogies and their limits, as well as potential pitfalls of "new" pedagogies. His discussion will be central to my discussion of teaching styles and pedagogies within the university literary classroom.

The teacher is, of course, not the only significant factor in the equation; the position and role of the text(s) is obviously significant. "Text" in this project represents many things, underscoring the complexity of texts and our sometimes difficult interaction with them in the literature classroom. Primarily, for my project, the "text" is that thing with which teachers attempt to engage their students, usually a creative work (poem, short story, novel, essay) composed by a recognized author. However the often overlooked texts in the literature classroom are those produced by students; writings about the assigned text being taught become texts of their own. Lectures produced by the teachers become individual texts. Websites produced by teachers for specific courses become texts, as do the discussions between students or between teacher and students in the online environment. I would even argue that the classroom discussion about any given text becomes a text of its own. A simple example to illustrate this is my

transcription of classroom discussions; by transcription, those discussions become tangible texts that can be read and analyzed in the same way a more "traditional" text can.

According to Bruce Miller in *Teaching the Art of Literature*, there is an assumption that the teaching of literature "ought to grow out of the teachers' and students' reading of it" (xv). Miller suggests that "we decide to teach those works that we liked best, hence, our desire to teach our specialty. Then when we teach these works, we present them in a way that opens up our students' minds to just those qualities that we ourselves have discerned" (xv). This assumption is significant to my research question regarding how literature teachers engage students with texts. Miller's ideas about "the relationship between teaching of reading" (xv) will inform my study in the ensuing analysis of how we choose our texts and approaches to teaching those texts. Miller's book is unique in that it includes both a discussion of how literature is taught in general, as well as suggested approaches to teaching particular texts. His pedagogical discussion informs my study in useful ways; however his suggested approaches to teaching particular texts underscores a larger problem that I recognized in my research. While there are many useful recommended approaches to particular texts, one of which is the MLA *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* series mentioned in my introduction, the field lacks a larger discourse about how to engage students with the many types of texts in the literature classroom. An important concept, and one to which I will return in Chapter 5 is the privileging of particular types of texts in the classroom.

While composition studies privilege the texts students create in the classroom, in large part because that is in keeping with the objectives of composition studies, the texts

produced about literature by students in a literature course are generally not privileged in the same way. I argue that this lack of focus is to the detriment of the student as developing literary scholar. I entered my research project with the hypothesis that student writings can also become part of the transaction of engagement in conscientious and useful ways, but I found in my classroom observations that they seldom are.

1.4 Classroom Culture

The culture in any given classroom can help to determine whether the objectives of the course are met, how much "learning" takes place, and how effectively a teacher can negotiate that classroom space. In most cases, the classroom culture is assumed to be connected to the larger culture of that particular field of study and/or the university. However, there are examples in the literature of cultural shifts in the literature classroom as well as the field of literature that these can prove beneficial and/or challenging for student and teacher engagement.

Mary Beth Hines and Deborah Appleman describe a common "landscape of literature classrooms" in their article "Multiple Ways of Knowing in Literature Classrooms." They cite work done by Applebee; Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith; Nystrand and Gamoran; and Rabinowitz and Smith in a description of a literature classroom that "offers an expedition into places all-too-familiar" (141). According to Hines and Appleman's reading of the research, the "landscape of literature classrooms is dotted with students who write and speak for the teacher-as-examiner, displaying rather than creating knowledge as they read (more often than not) canonical texts by males of Eurocentric heritages" (142). Because of this widely accepted classroom culture, literature teachers have found interesting ways, pedagogies, and teaching styles to shift

the students' engagement and learning. The interesting aspect for me here is that no one has informed the student of such cultural shifts. Students continue to enter literature classrooms with a particular image of the subject and classroom in mind based either on experience or on predetermined perception. As I found in my research, when that culture is challenged or shifted, students can find new places and new ways to create meaning, to engage with the content, and ultimately new ways to learn.

Bjorn Krondorfer and Robin Bates offer an interesting approach to teaching literature in the college classroom that in large part affects the culture and expectations within that space. In "Ritually Enacting the Reading Experience: A Dramatic Way to Teach Literature," they describe the ways they have begun to "engage students in ritual enactment of reading" (236) in college literature courses. Their goal was to "help students bring their individual experiences with literary texts into a communal forum and, second, to enable students to construct collective readings of these texts" (236). Their choice in "ritual" enactments of readings "emphasizes the communal, the playful, and the transformative elements of individuals within a collective" (237). Essentially, Krondorfer and Bates have attempted to change their classroom culture from one of isolated reading and analysis, often out of context, to one in which there is communal engagement and learning taking place. Their efforts prove effective in that they have moved students from a position of passive learning to one of active learning, and have incorporated not only the language of the text but also the unspoken aspects: "voices, bodies, movement, gestures, intonation and spontaneity" (237). They conclude that as a result of this approach students are able to engage with a text in a way that incorporates otherwise "ignored parts of a text and unconscious reader responses" (237) which only

serve to enhance students' understanding and ability to analyze the texts in question. I argue that the successes experienced by Krondorfer and Bates are dependent upon not only novel approaches to teaching, but also to a shift in the culture of their classroom; they have essentially adjusted a culture of individualized and often isolated textual analysis into one of a communal understanding of the material. In fact, their approach underscores the relationship between style and classroom culture. As mentioned earlier, classroom culture is generally determined by field of study or university, but it can, as in this example, be greatly impacted by style. In chapter two I explicate my methodology for my project design as well as my data collection.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The methodology behind the design and execution of this project was driven by my original question and has determined the parameters, including the necessary limitations. My initial research question was: how do literature teachers at Arizona State University (a large, R1 state university) engage their students in the classroom? In order to answer that question I included observations of instructional approaches, observing in particular how teachers generate new classroom discussions and how they maintain students' interest in the assigned literary texts; in addition, this project was designed to consider the ways that teachers negotiate the transactions between student and text, student and student, student and teacher, as well as the web of transactions that take place at the interstices, and how this informs their instructional approach and determines the level of engagement in the classroom. I was also interested to learn how teachers developed their own teaching practices and pedagogies while working at a university where research is endemic. In addition, I considered the ways teachers did, or did not, utilize electronic and digital texts in their efforts at engagement. This multiplicity of approaches to data collection culminated in a large body of raw data that helped me to draw some conclusions about my initial research question; however, not surprisingly, the data raised many more questions than answers.

Prior to the collection of data, I completed an online training session regarding ethical research and submitted an application for exemption to the Internal Review Board (IRB) at my university. Once the exempt status was granted,[viii] recruitment of teacher and student subjects began. For my purposes, no distinction was made concerning

university ranking of the teacher participants; all are referred to as "teacher" throughout

my study, yet they range from lecturer to professor. I recognize that university ranking

can often affect teacher motivation in syllabi formation, course content, and which

courses they teach, but I wanted a variety of perspectives from several levels of the

ranking system in order to determine if ranks had an overall effect on how they engaged

their students.

In order to identify teacher participants, I emailed participant requests to those

who: 1.) teach for the major, 2.) teach courses that I do not teach and 3.) are teachers

from whom I have never taken courses. While I recognize that all observer biases and

their effect on an observational study cannot be completely removed, these three

qualifications were in place to limit any observer bias that I felt I could personally bring

to the project. The participant requests were scripted per IRB instructions and included

information regarding the purpose of the study as well as their responsibilities as a

participant.[ix] Four teachers fitting these criteria answered the request. Once the four

participants were identified, they were given a Teacher Information Letter informing

them of the details of the study, including their responsibilities as well as my own

responsibilities as researcher, and directing them for more information should they have

any concerns regarding their participation[x]. Individual consent forms were not required

for either teacher participants or student participants.

In addition to a variety of "teaching" ranks, another goal was to have a wide

assortment of course formats included in terms of size and function – so with these four

participants there is representation of a large lecture course, a hybrid course and a fully

online course, as well as two more "traditional" face-to-face courses. The teacher

participants have varying years of experience teaching in the field that range from six to thirty years.[xi] In addition to the wide range of experience, there is a variety of observable classroom approaches and methodologies among the four teacher participants, all of which become crucial to my study. Teachers who volunteered to be observed teach courses for English majors; the courses range from 200-, 300- and 400-level courses, designed for Sophomore, Junior and Senior level students.

Once teacher participants had been identified, and prior to the start of the semester in which I was to conduct my observations, I conducted interviews with teachers that lasted from 45 minutes to two hours, depending on how many open ended questions the teachers asked or to which they responded. The teacher interviews collected solely qualitative data and included such questions as, "What specific things do you do in the classroom to raise interest and engage your students with classroom discussion, with individual texts and readings from your syllabus, and with writing assignments?" and "What obstacles or frustrations do you face in the classroom in terms of engaging your students?"[xii] My goal with the initial interview was to identify if teachers' efforts to engage students in the class were implicit or explicit, to determine to what degree student engagement drove their course development, and finally to ascertain how and if student engagement impacted pedagogy in an overall sense. Immediately following the end of the semester I conducted a post-interview with each of the teacher participants in order to determine their sense of how engaged that particular group of students had been.[xiii] My goal with the second interview was to discover how teachers determined the level of engagement in the class, how they assessed that engagement, and how (and if) it impacted their pedagogy during the semester depending on individualized group

responses. Both interviews included open ended questions and allowed follow-up questions from both myself and the teacher.

The interviews were conducted according to the guidelines offered by Irving Seidman in *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. Seidman offers a number of helpful techniques in not only designing interview questions, but also helpful tools such as treating the interview process as a relationship between researcher and participant. The building of rapport between interviewer and participant suggested by Seidman aids in creating an interview situation wherein participants feel they can share information freely and honestly; the building of rapport proved useful in my own interview practices in that each of the four teachers spoke candidly about their own experiences and the field in general. Once interviews were completed, I transcribed them from audio tape using Seidman's suggestions of how to best capture what had occurred during interviews.

Upon the completion of the interviews and their transcription, I utilized Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Source Book* to begin to code and make meaning of the qualitative material. This research is in no way meant to be a linguistic analysis. Instead, my goal was to identify the most significant aspects of teacher/student engagement that could be generalized to or replicated in other classrooms. That is to say, I looked for effective tools for student engagement in individual classrooms, as well as any approaches that were common or shared between the classrooms. Miles and Huberman's chapter, "Making Good Sense: Drawing and Verifying Conclusions," was particularly helpful in my endeavor to generate meaning from the qualitative data. They suggest coding the interviews according to "themes,

patterns [. . .] and clustering" (245) in order to determine which pieces of information were most significant to my own study. Once I identified and coded the themes, patterns, and clusters of information, it became immediately clear what information would be most significant. These then became the thematic organization of the review of literature in my dissertation, as outlined in Chapter one, as well as the organization of my dissertation as a whole.

Student participants were selected by virtue of being enrolled in a course with a teacher participant. I introduced the project to students during the first ten minutes of class, near the beginning of the semester. They were each offered a Student Information Letter[xiv] in which they were informed of their rights as a student participant, as well as instructions for how to opt out of the study without penalty. After the description of the project and the distribution of the Student Information Letter, I distributed the Student Pre-Survey; students' return of the questionnaire was considered their consent to participate. Among all of the students surveyed, there were only three students who chose not to participate. The questionnaires were collected and coded numerically with a corresponding key so that students' pre-surveys could be matched to their post-surveys in order to discern if there were any correlations between students' opinions prior to the semester and those at the completion of the semester. There were no personal identifying markers on either the pre- or post-survey.

The Student Pre-Surveys[xv] collected both qualitative and quantitative data and were designed utilizing research design suggestions found in John W. Creswell's *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. The mixed methods approach outlined by Creswell and utilized in my research specifically

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with the student surveys included pre-determined instrument based questions, as well as both open- and closed-ended questions (Creswell 15). Once the pre-surveys were completed, the quantitative data was computed and the qualitative data was coded in an effort to identify, as with the teacher interviews, potential themes, patterns and clusters. My goal with the student pre-survey was to identify possible correlations between student motivation for taking a particular class, enjoyment and personal interests in their specific course topic, and their preferred method of classroom / information delivery. The student data was computed and considered per course, as well as in the amalgam of all participating courses.

The students completed a Student Post-Survey[xvi] during the final two weeks of class; these were distributed, collected, and coded in the same manner as were the pre-surveys. My goal with the student post-survey was to categorize student reactions to different pedagogical approaches in the course as a whole. I was especially interested to determine if the pedagogical approaches identified by the students as most effective corresponded to those identified by their teachers as most effective. I was also interested to determine potential causes for shifts in literary interest on the part of the student over the course of the semester.

In addition to pre- and post-surveys and interviews, this research includes my observation of 5 different courses. The types of courses varied and included, as mentioned earlier, large lecture format, traditional face-to-face format, hybrid and online. There were approximately 6 opportunities for observations per class, distributed over one semester. The in-person classes were audio-taped for transcription and note-taking purposes only, while the hybrid and online course observations recorded the engagement

online; both online and audio-taped classroom interaction were incorporated into the collection of data. My observations of the hybrid and online courses were blind to the students, while my observations of the more traditional courses were, of course, obvious to the students. While observing the face-to-face courses I positioned myself in the back or corner of the room in an effort to be as least disruptive as possible. During the observations I noted any physical interactions in addition to verbal cues that teachers utilized to draw students into class discussion, how they generated new discussions, how they conveyed contextual information, and how they informed students about their instructional approach.

I have not identified where specific data was retrieved (course, survey, observation, interview) unless it became significant to illustrate a difference between teachers or courses. The pieces of data collected from each of the student surveys were also treated as one body of data unless it became significant to demonstrate a difference in student reception between types of delivery systems (online, hybrid, face-to-face, lecture) or between courses due to course content. When students must be identified individually their personal identification is protected with a pseudonym. Teachers identified individually in this dissertation have their privacy maintained with pseudonyms; they are referred to throughout by the names Beverly, Arthur, Frank and Alexander.

My methodology and framework is based in large part on two studies: James Paul Gee and Elisabeth R. Hayes' book, *Women and Gaming: 'The Sims' and 21st Century Learning*, and "A Measure of Student Course Engagement" written by Mitchell M. Handelsman, William L. Briggs, Nora Sullivan and Annette Towler. *Women and*

Gaming provided the structure of my study in that Gee and Hayes identified and studied "passionate affinity groups," those groups that self-select based on a common interest or "passion." For this reason, I have chosen to study literature courses that are offered for the English major; my hope was to discover "passionate affinity groups" within literature classrooms which may or may not affect the pedagogy of engagement. In addition, my research depends upon the personal observation, interview, survey and study of distinct people who provided me with vignettes that illustrate effective classroom engagement practices in the same way that Gee and Hayes' study relied upon first person research and personal vignettes to exemplify their conclusions.

"A Measure of College Student Course Engagement," was one of the few pieces of research I found that corresponded rather closely with my own study in both methodology and purpose. In this study out of the University of Colorado at Denver, Handelsman, et al. questioned student engagement, noting as I have that literature concerned with student engagement at the college level was limited at best. They drew attention to the fact that what literature was available focused on what they termed the "macro level," aimed at determining engagement at institution levels or geared towards defining engagement as a "global quality" (184). They set out to determine engagement at a "micro level" (184), as did I, by focusing on specific courses. Their study targeted required lower division college courses, such as mathematics. Where our studies diverge, aside from course topic, is that Handelsman, et al. assessed the "relationship of engagement to grades" (185) whereas my research does not factor grades into the data. I looked for different types of engagement, regardless of assessment, that were effective

according to both student and teacher. Their study will be discussed in more detail later in this dissertation as I begin to offer conclusions based on my research.

One final note in my methodology relates to operational definitions used in this dissertation. I recognize that many of the terms I use here and throughout – engagement, pedagogy, tradition, text, to name a few – can be used in a number of ways to mean a number of things. For example, Handelsman, et al. noted assorted definitions of "engagement" they found in their literature review. For their purposes, they chose to differentiate between "skills engagement, participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement, and performance engagement" (184). An interesting aspect of my research uncovered for me the fact that even within our own field we define these terms differently. In fact, in my first interview with Frank I asked him, "what specific things do you do in the classroom to engage your students with (classroom discussion, writing assignments, texts and readings)?" His immediate response was, "that depends upon what you mean by 'engage'" (personal interview). It became clear then, and was confirmed throughout my research, that significant terms would take on different meanings for different teachers in different courses. Rather than impose my own operational definition for "engage," I became more interested in what *Frank* thought "engage" meant. Throughout this dissertation those terms with fluid meanings will be defined as they become significant, and within the context of the speaker and the course.

CHAPTER 3

TEACHERS: "IF YOU'VE GOT IT, YOU'VE GOT IT"

I began my research with teacher interviews prior to the start of the semester in order to begin to answer my initial research question, "how do lit teachers engage their students in the university classroom?" My teacher interviews were designed to explore how the teacher participants engaged students in the classroom and how student engagement informed, or was informed by, their pedagogy. I was interested to learn what kinds of previous experiences, trainings, and ideas teachers bring with them into their practice and how they are made manifest in the classroom. In addition, I hoped to understand how / if teacher participants articulated their pedagogy to their students. This chapter explores the role of the teacher and student in developing a literary pedagogy by drawing on my interviews with the teacher participants as well as my observations of their class meetings.

An initial interview question asked of all teacher participants was direct and specific: "Do you have an explicit pedagogy to teach literature?" The answers ranged from distaste of the mere word pedagogy to a detailed articulation of specific critical approaches, but seldom a clearly expressed pedagogy. The conflation of classroom practice and critical literary approach as a means to describe one's pedagogy illustrates one of the noteworthy details of my study. I turn now to the Oxford English Dictionary as a starting point to define pedagogy. According to the OED, pedagogy is the "art, occupation, or practice of teaching. The theory or principles of education; a method of teaching based on such a theory." The inability to clearly express the governing

principles or methodology of teaching literature demonstrates my argument that there is not an accessible discourse for literary pedagogy. .

One teacher's response differentiated pedagogy and engagement in a significant way. When asked about his pedagogy, he replied: "Explicit pedagogy? First of all, I don't like the word pedagogy. Um, have a damn good time? And in the process – and that is part of how you engage people – be a human being" (personal interview). Interestingly enough, over the remainder of the interview the same teacher described a well-thought out pedagogy of text-centered student engagement wherein he uses class discussion in order to encourage students "to use their imaginations to delve into meaning, to analyze." He continues in his description of his own literary pedagogy as he describes where class discussions should take the students: "And I want them to throw ideas around, hypotheses. But I don't want them to let it stand as hypothesis, I want them to construct argument." However, this resistance to the *idea* of pedagogy, even to the word 'pedagogy,' is important. The resistance demonstrated by this response seemed to rely upon what one teacher termed an "organic approach," determined in large part by an engagement with students on a "human" level. Responses such as these indicate a romantic and essentialist view of teaching, of literature, and of learning.

The previous example of one teacher's anti-pedagogical perspective can be juxtaposed here with a description of literary pedagogy offered by another teacher:

I have designed it as a seminar. They write four short papers, they're discussed every Thursday in class. And they also lead the discussion of four other students' papers. So we have three groups, a, b, and c, and they rotate. So, every three weeks they have a paper due, every three weeks they lead a discussion. I think in

pedagogical terms it helps get them engaged in the material. They're not just

responsible for reading and talking about the material, but they're responsible for

thinking about it in terms of organizing a thesis, in terms of critical engagement. I

also like to get them to take some of our secondary material, some of the ideas

that emerge from that and talk about it in relation to the primary material. (Frank,

personal interview)

The essence of this pedagogy as described by Frank is that student engagement is reliant

upon the privileging of student-authored texts in the classroom, a viewpoint with which

Arthur's more romanticized notion of "organic" engagement would be at odds. Here

again I note the conflation of this teacher's classroom practice with their desired learning

objectives as a way to articulate their pedagogy. My own view is that what both Arthur

and Frank describe as their "pedagogy" is in fact a more apt description of classroom

activities and efforts to engage students than it is a literary pedagogy. These interview

answers demonstrate the variety of classroom practices upon which teachers build their

courses. I contend that this spectrum of praxis is on one hand beneficial to student and

teacher in that it allows for freedom to engage students with texts in different ways given

different teacher personalities, group dynamic, course content, etc. On the other hand,

the diversity of approaches is indicative of the absence of a larger discourse with which

literary teachers design.

In order to further understand how these particular teachers developed practical

applications in their classes I asked each teacher *how* they developed their pedagogy. My

goal with this particular question was to attempt to demystify what it is teachers do and

how they do it. One teacher participant, Beverly, articulated the crux of my study quite

well when asked how she developed her pedagogy: "I guess just observing people that I thought were really good and who got their stuff across to me, and whom I enjoyed listening to and whom I felt I sort of got the most out of that I could use myself and could use in my own" (personal interview). This answer was not surprising given my own experiences teaching. Beverly continues her answer:

> More like essentially by observing their examples. And also of course many of their methods I would actually pick up, types of assignments and you know, I would sort of, probably many times rework them for myself. So yeah, looking at really good people doing it. And I think my experiences, that is the traditional way in teaching literature. Because in many other disciplines, let's say rhet/comp or linguistics, they actually get taught how to teach. Whereas in literature, at least, traditionally has been like, well, if you've got it, you've got it. (personal interview)

Two significant things emerged from Beverly's insight. The first point is that teachers carry into the classroom remnants of their own experiences as the student which substantiates the claim from Britzman that "the teacher enters the apprenticeship classroom armed with a lifetime of student experiences" (Britzman qtd. in Finders and Rose 206). The second significant aspect that surfaced in the passage above is when the teacher expresses the lack of direct pedagogical training in the field of literature that is assumed present in other fields. While it is not my intention with this study to chart the kinds of preparatory work for novice teachers in other fields, I believe it is important to note that the perspective from within the field of literature, as articulated by Beverly, is that other academics are entering their respective classrooms prepared *differently*. Other

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teacher participants corroborate the idea that the impetus for literary preparation is traditionally organic, or to draw on Beverly's words, "if you've got it, you've got it." One teacher recalled being thrown as a "graduate student into a class without supervision." He resumed his answer after pausing to say, "I'll tell you, and I don't know about you, but that's how I learned. And I think that's how teachers learn. And I got to be pretty damn good at it." These perspectives support my argument that the study of literature is highly idealized and romanticized.

In addition, and not surprisingly, regardless of the differences in approaches or early teacher preparation, each teacher identified an informal mentor relationship as responsible for their pedagogical development. I asked "who or what do you think has prepared you to teach literature" in the hopes of gauging whether teachers felt prepared prior to teaching, and how they arrived at that preparation. One teacher returns to an earlier discussion of his mentor: "She realized that I knew what I was up to, and she let me loose. . . my mentor . . . Oh, fantastic person, and she was a taskmaster as well. Wonderful teacher" (personal interview). Descriptions of the kinds of informal apprenticeship by the teacher-participants in my study often demonstrated a mentor relationship which was often boiled down to an overall perspective of the mentor as the sage and the novice teacher as quixotic underling eager to learn the trade. While some teacher participants identified a positive model for their pedagogical development, one teacher, Alexander, offered the following:

> [I learned] simply by doing it. No one taught me. This is funny. What I learned
> is how much you do actually think on your feet that you don't think of when
> you're sitting in your study reading and prepping. I had many teachers, three

teachers at least, one guy in particular, he's long retired, but he read from

notecards, that he kept with his graduate students. He would allow no discussion,

his lectures were 50 minutes long, they were timed. I couldn't figure out why he

did it but it was his comfort zone, he didn't have to engage his students and his

tests reflected those cards. And I realized that's not the way I want to do it. So I

learned by looking at all the things I did not like, then I also looked at the way in

which I would see students coming prepared or not prepared. (personal

interview)

Although he has not said it so directly, Alexander's description of "learning what not to

do" from watching others still relies upon a particularly idealized perspective of looking

towards the teacher as individual genius who is the sole focus in the classroom.

Interestingly enough, I would venture to say that despite his statements to the contrary,

there are elements from his experiences as a student in the classroom he describes above

that he still draws into his own classes now as a teacher. Alexander continues his

description of preparation with the following colorful description of his informal

apprenticeship:

I use the term that Carlos Castaneda uses called stalking, because I'm a creative

writer. Stalking has bad connotations in this day and age, but it is thoroughly

appropriate for what anyone does who wants to learn anything. You stalk the

person, if you want to learn how to be a woodworker, you go to where people do

woodworking and you apprentice under that man or woman. (personal interview)

Alexander's account of "stalking" as a type of teacher preparation edifies for me yet

again the kind of romanticized apprenticeship that we may have found in another trade. I

am reminded here of a tradesman who might learn a skill by watching those practicing the skill and then become credentialed in that skill at the close of a practicum whereat the novice is recognized as having attained the proper set of documentation declaring the completion of the study. Frankly, this seems to be a romanticized, yet suitable, description of the university writ large.

In addition to being curious about how teachers learn to teach, I was also curious as to what it is exactly they teach; I was interested to discover the skills that are privileged in a literature course. While I expected the analysis of assigned texts to be central, and therefore the analytical skills that teachers might find necessary to understand literary works central, I also wanted to know if literature teachers specifically taught students how to read and how to write. To that end, I asked the teachers, "do you teach your students how to write about literature in your courses?" One teacher offered the following:

> I will work it in . . . I will talk about it in class, but I will not go into it as
> intensively as I do in 200. We don't have the time. And there's an assumption
> that in a 300-level course that they know, or should know, how to do this. They
> should know how to use MLA. Am I deluding myself? Perhaps. But, there are
> certain expectations . . . What do we do with those people who are just taking
> these classes as electives, and are not in English, and have not been trained in this,
> do we not give them some edge? Well, I would have to know mathematics if I
> took mathematics class as an elective – I would have to have my earlier
> mathematics classes to speak the language, would I not? (personal interview)

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Recognizing that all of the teachers in my study, this one included, were teaching courses for the major, I found a few things interesting. While they rarely admit as much, teachers such as the one quoted above seem to believe that literature students who enter a lit classroom have a solid understanding of writing for literary analysis, but they often take for granted where and when students may have learned this skill, as well as the degree to which they have honed it. Students in classes for the major very well may have a solid foundation for writing. Students in the program for the major in my study are required to take ENG 200, Critical Reading and Writing about Literature. However, I argue that while one class, a class I confess I have experience in teaching, is a good start, it is not nearly sufficient to prepare students for a rigorous literature degree program. Whereas I could certainly advocate for more stringent requirements in preparatory writing for English majors, I prefer to advocate for the continuous incorporation of writing practice for students. I am not suggesting here "more" writing, as I consider the amount of writing required in literature courses to be sufficiently challenging. I am instead endorsing a conscientious incorporation of writing instruction as an integral part of literature courses.

The teacher quoted above continues in his description of how teaching writing intersects with analyzing literature in his courses:

One is to observe, and to note what you observe, in terms of examples from the text. They're very good at that. Not quoted usually, but paraphrased, much better I think. And then to draw comparisons, find similarities in examples, step two. Come to a conclusion, have a mini thesis, find what you find there. Step three, draw those all together in a thesis and an argument. And it works. The trick is to

put it into practice. And most people don't. And I have a variety, as I'm sure you

do, of skill levels of people coming in. Some people write beautifully (personal

interview).

Here again we are faced with yet another idealized notion of what happens in a literature

course. I find this answer comparable to the "if you've got it, you've got it" point of

view of teacher preparation articulated earlier. In this version, some students "have it" –

they write beautifully. It seems clear to me that this teacher is not privileging writing

instruction in the classroom but is instead applying the same kind of "individual genius"

to their students that we often identify with authors we study.

In addition to asking about writing instruction, I also asked teachers if they

specifically taught reading skills in their classes. One teacher in particular identified the

teaching of reading as the "big secret" of literature courses. He stated, "The idea is to

help them build a critical framework. Because they normally don't. They don't know

how to read. This is the big secret. You are actually teaching reading. See, that's all

you're really doing.   You'd be lucky to teach them writing. You actually are teaching

them how to read" (personal interview). It's noteworthy that this teacher called the

teaching of reading the "big secret" of the classroom. This teacher of course knows our

students can interpret the symbols on a page in order to "read;" however, they don't

necessarily have the strategies necessary for making meaning from what it is they are

reading. These are the strategies that need to be taught to literature students. It is clear

from his answer that the literature classroom is never to be seen as a point of instruction

in reading (or writing), but instead is sacred space in which students are imbued with

literary brilliance.

Paulo Freire is one of the most important contemporary thinkers on education, and while Freire's work is not without criticism[xvii], and his work is more suited to a discussion of education in general, he does make some valid points that I argue are relevant specifically to the development of a literary pedagogy. Dialogue and praxis are two of his main ideas that can instruct the development or support the need for a pedagogy of literature. Freire suggests that education relies too heavily on "banking," where the teacher "makes deposits in the educatee," and instead should rely upon dialogue. A dialogical education would result in, according to Freire, a "liberatory discourse" where both student and teacher can "illuminate and act on reality" (11). Freire's article, "What is the 'Dialogical Method' of Teaching?," written with Ira Shor and excerpted from their book *A Pedagogy for the Dialogue of Liberation*, focuses mainly on establishing a practice that goes against the traditional "teacher lecturer/student listener" dynamic that locates the point of authority with the teacher and alienates the student. The dialogical method is, according to Shor and Freire, "*for* freedom and *against* domination" (12); Freire and Shor articulate the political ramifications of the teacher/student relationship and while my dissertation is more focused on praxis than theory, the fact that classrooms are theorized politicized spaces cannot be overlooked. To further complicate this issue for my research is the well documented politization of language and literature.

The second focus from Freire that I find useful to my argument is his emphasis on praxis. His emphasis on praxis is clear in his and Shor's description of a common university course which could depict any Survey of Lit course at a large university:

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For the most part, though, teachers didactically lecture. In college, professors traditionally lecture to large numbers of students, who sit in big rooms either busily taking notes, or sleeping, or daydreaming, or doing homework from another course while sitting in this one, or talking to each other. A low-paid graduate student leads a recitation class afterwards to review what the professor said or what the textbooks say. This is 'cost-effective' education. Minimum personal contact between professors and students. (Shor and Freire, 12)

The survey course as described above seems like a necessary evil for a large university; it attempts to do its job, which is, ideally, to introduce a large population of students to a large body of literature representing a wide span of eras, genres, authors, major movements, and critical approaches. For example, a Survey to British Literature instructor may cover texts from the Romantic movement (1785-1830), incorporating authors such as Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, and then move through the Victorian period (1830-1901) with studies of Browning, Tennyson, Arnold, Rossetti, and Wilde. From there the instructor may direct students through a collection of texts from what might be referred to as "the Twentieth Century and After," navigating complexities of Modernism (early, high, and late modernism[s] generally demarcated from 1901-1944) with texts from authors such as Conrad, Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, and Orwell, and eventually touching upon the "late Twentieth Century," as the *endgame* of the course (referring of course to Beckett's drama of the same name) with readings from Beckett, Heaney, Larkin, and Muldoon. Admittedly, this is the series of authors and literary periods I teach in the Survey to British Literature course for majors. The fact that this assemblage of authors corresponds exactly to the table of contents in the Norton

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Anthology of English Literature is not coincidental. When it comes to the topic of syllabi

development, most of us would readily agree that textbooks "guide curricular and

instructional decision making" (Relan and Gillani, 42).[xviii]

Returning to what Freire and Shor express above, the description is the exact

classroom environment of one of the courses I observed for my study. The course was

taught by Beverly, an experienced lecturer with fourteen years of university experience,

who when asked to explain how she engages students with learning in a large lecture

format, says the following:

> I definitely want to hear their opinion, in fact I learn from that and that makes me
>
> see what I'm doing right, etc. But initially I must assume they know nothing.
>
> Some of them know a lot, but I can't take that for granted. And then as soon as
>
> possible I like to make it more of a dialogue than just me talking, and I encourage
>
> them to think of me talking not as a formal discourse where I hold forth from the
>
> podium of my wisdom, but you know, they can raise their hand, they can ask a
>
> question, they can make a comment, they can offer some insight that they have. I
>
> make it clear to them that it's not about me sort of channeling the canon. (personal
>
> interview)

This teacher's depiction seems a tough balance to negotiate in her class, however. The

course is a traditional lecture format by design; the lecture is provided two days a week,

for fifty minutes each meeting, in a lecture hall that holds upwards of 200 students.

Despite how much a teacher such as Beverly may try to engage her students with texts

and dialogue, there is a disconnect among the teacher's intention, the students'

expectation, and the course design. Even Beverly recognizes this fact as she laments that

she relies heavily on lecture: "the rationale for that is that it's my job, to disseminate certain material" (personal interview). Here again we are faced with a model of teaching that relies upon the teacher as the central figure in the class, possessor of power and disseminator of knowledge. During observations in Beverly's class these ideas were evident. While she did indeed try to engage students in dialogue during class, the students did not respond as they may have and did in other smaller classroom settings in my study. I do not determine that the lack of student engagement in the large lecture room was due to a lack of attempt on behalf of Beverly; instead it seemed quite clear from the students' responses during lecture that they simply weren't expecting to participate in dialogue in a class designed as a large lecture. This seems to be one of the inherent problems with the "lecture" format.

The emphasis on praxis and utilizing dialogical teaching/learning from Freire and Shor, as well as the attempts to make that manifest in a large survey course such as Beverly has, relies ultimately on an epistemological difference between traditional "teacher lecture/student listen" driven classrooms and those classrooms that engage students in a dialogical learning experience. Freire and Shor ask us to consider "how disturbing this epistemology [of dialogical education] is to a traditional educator" (Freire and Shor, 15).

I asked each teacher how they selected their reading lists and Arthur, in reflection about his own reading choices, explains, "That's why I took Benito Cereno off. I don't think I got good response to it" (personal interview).[xix] His ability to reflect upon past student engagement with texts is significant in his ability to build more productive syllabi in the future. Yet there are few formal opportunities for literature teachers to reflect

openly and with their colleagues on issues concerning pedagogy, and there is not a pedagogical discourse with which to conduct such reflection. In fact, during interviews the teachers not only indicated course design changes and syllabus changes were due to reflection, they also utilized the interview itself as a space in which to reflect. One teacher responds to questions concerning syllabus design: "I also give them. . . when I do finals and midterms. . . I think I need to revamp that, too. . . and I'm not sure how. . . maybe several selections of essay questions." Note here the lack of complete sentences and trailing off of ideas. The answer here, and others like it that appear throughout my interview transcripts, indicate something significant. The response was far less an answer about his own reflection, and far more a reflection in itself. Each teacher began to answer questions concerning syllabus design, course design, reading lists, and so on, but most frequently it was evident that teachers moved from being engaged in the interview as an opportunity to share their experiences teaching with me, to being engaged in a pedagogical reflection of their own. The additional interesting item of note in this interview answer is that the teacher articulates that they need to change their design, but they're "not sure how." I argue that lack of opportunity and discourse with which teachers could develop a literary pedagogy is the obstacle that teachers face as they develop their own syllabi, assignments, and discussions in isolation.

In addition to how teachers engage students with their assigned readings, I was also interested to learn how teachers design their paper assignments, particularly if they are designed with student engagement as a central focus. One teachers answers:

In my literature class they choose the paper topics. And I've gone over to one large paper, but I may do two smaller ones this time. I am going to revamp my

class. I was talking about quizzes earlier. I found that there's a lot of negative reaction to those – some people don't do well under pressure. So I'm going to do take home quizzes that will give them time and the only people I'm going to allow to take them, so I can gauge attendance through this, are the people who are there on the day I give the assignment. So I think take home quizzes, very brief, about 350 words, essays, and again, it will help teach them to write concisely and will help them out with their final exams. (personal interview)

The questioning of practices during the course of our interview was an interesting phenomenon that I experienced repeatedly during this project. In the response above it is clear that this teacher is, once again, utilizing the interview itself as an opportunity for reflection and revision. I argue that the lack of space and opportunity to discuss pedagogy, as was provided during the interviews, is one of the obstacles to teaching literature at the university. The second point that the teacher makes in the quote above is that writing assignments will "help teach them to write concisely," but he does not explain how the design and execution of this (or any) particular assignment will help students with their composition in the lit classroom because, I contend, that is not part of the discourse of literature.

In addition to the design of writing assignments, I asked teachers how they engage students with writing assignments in general. Arthur says,

I'm perhaps a little more traditional. I *don't* do group work in my class. We don't have time. And to write in a class of 38, in groups. I don't do well with that to begin with, it's not my talent. I will try to make the assignments very, very, very clear in terms of what I want. I have it all written out for them, I know that's not

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enough. But I always leave it open for them to come in, give me drafts, talk about

things. (personal interview)

Oddly enough, I hadn't asked Arthur if he does group work prior to his dismissing of it.

His mentioning of group work without prompting when asked about student engagement

is telling in that he seems to identify group work as a useful means to engage students. In

addition to group work he dismisses "writing" in the class, noting that there isn't time. I

find it problematic that a teacher identifies two ways to engage students and dismisses

them in one movement; however, I cannot fault Arthur, or other teachers with similar

responses, for this point of view. It is symptomatic of a larger dismissal of student

engagement that is rampant in a romanticized field that remains text focused.

When pressed further about his attempts to engage students in classroom

discussions, Arthur offers the following:

Just be yourself. Be yourself. And don't try to be, as we all have done when we

started teaching, somebody else . . . who is doing things that you think teachers

need to do. Especially in a humanities class. You're dealing with the human

condition – and you have to present yourself as a human being. (personal

interview)

An interesting point surfaced in his answer. Initially Arthur suggests that teachers not try

to be "somebody else" in the classroom; however, in earlier interview questions

concerning mentors Arthur (and, actually, the other three teacher participants) all

articulated the ways they had approached the lectern, so to speak, with mimetic

presentations they had experienced as a prior student of their mentor. Essentially, all of

the teacher participants reported that they had indeed "tr[ied] to be somebody else" in the

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classroom. Whether or not this disparity indicates a shift for Arthur, one from mimicking

respected mentors towards cultivating a sense of teacherly self in the classroom, is

unknown. It does seem to indicate that both approaches rely on similarly traditional and

romanticized views of the literature classroom: neophyte teacher enters the classroom

armed with a lifetime of experience as a student and commences the recreation of these

experiences for his own students. Once the teacher has gained sufficient experience, he

can become, as Arthur would attest, "himself" in the classroom. This arrangement is

perpetuated by the same romanticized views that created it.

CHAPTER 4

TEXTS: THE TROUBLE WITH MARGERY KEMPE

> Whan
> sche beheld this sygth in hir sowle, sche fel down in the feld among the pepil. Sche
> cryid, sche roryd, sche wept as thow sche schulde a brostyn therwith.
> Lord. (1.2.73, 4132-4134)

This chapter examines the role of *texts* in teaching literature through a focus on the following questions: How are texts constructed and read by literary faculty? How are they by literary students? To what degree does the unstable nature of texts, the fluidity of reading, the genre familiarity, and other contextual forces make both teaching and learning literary texts difficult?   I begin with Margery Kempe's autobiography both as a difficult text, one that many undergraduates and even some graduate students have not encountered but one with which most medievalist professors are intimately familiar. *The Book of Margery Kempe* was taught in my study by Beverly in a large lecture course, with the support of three teaching associates who handled additional context, student questions, and concerns in breakout sections once a week.

In *The Book of Margery Kempe* we discover that Margery Kempe has *many* troubles. Her autobiography, thought to be written in the late 1430s by a scribe to whom Margery told her story, includes an account of her marriage to John Kempe and subsequent births of their 14 children. Her marriage was initially interrupted by a vision of Jesus which occurred after the birth of her first child; her spiritual visions and mystical discussions with God became more frequent over the course of her marriage and led her

on a variety of pilgrimages and to her final decision to continue her marriage as a celibate wife. Over the course of her life, Margery's responses to her spiritual journey became increasingly troubled, leaving the reader with a frenzied and hysterical woman who "cryid [. . .] roryd [. . .] and wept as thow sche schulde a brostyn therwith" (Book 1, Part 2, Section 73, 4133-4). Lynn Staley, editor and translator of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which was the edition assigned to students in this dissertation study, describes Margery's text as her "attempt to gain personal, financial, and spiritual autonomy" and suggests that it is "a tale of radical reversal that touches us on many different levels. Margery does what very few are able finally to do, and the fact that she does so as a woman enhances the force of her story — she breaks away" ("Introduction"). Unfortunately, the students in my study were not able to discern Margery Kempe's accomplishments. I could surmise many reasons why this may have been the case, including students' difficulty with the language, their inability to understand the historical context and layers of narrators with which it was written, or perhaps their lack of comprehension of the unique position of a woman in medieval England.

Perhaps the largest trouble for Margery Kempe does not have to do with her personal trials and spiritual tribulations, but rather with the text itself. The textual history of her narrative is riddled with concerns about its lack of readerly attributes. In the introduction, Staley discusses the comments and concerns written in red ink by a "commentator" in the original copy of the text. The commentator,[xx] recognizing the difficulty of the text, gives marginal directions to other potential readers, at times redirecting them to begin a different chapter first in order to create a more coherent text

and at other times clarifying confusing phrasing or narration. Additional attempts in the classroom to bridge the gaps within the text, as well as the gaps between the text and modern readers, appeared difficult as well. The ample lecture material, visual presentation material, and additional links that students could access online provided by Beverly notwithstanding, I might argue that the context of a reading from the Middle Ages, in addition to the instability of this particular text, is simply too difficult for a beginning student to understand.

Despite the good intentions of the commentator and the teacher, it appears as though Margery Kempe remained elusive for students. In the course for which students read Margery Kempe, and of the students who were polled in that course, 42% of them identified *The Book of Margery Kempe* as their least favorite reading. Equally as revealing, 0% of students polled listed *The Book of Margery Kempe* as their favorite reading. In answer to the question "why?", aside from the students who indicated a general dislike of the text, the comments seemed to focus on the difficulty of the reading because of the language, historical context, (un)likability of the character, structure of the narrative (including narration, theme, and lack of textual breaks), and plot. The answers offered ranged from "Margery was annoying," and "I just could not bring myself to stand the constant crying" to "Easily one of the worst/most poorly written books I have ever read. Its sole redeeming quality seems to be that it allows people to talk about life during this time, which I'm sure exists in other, better, texts" and "Margery Kempe was awful! Barely readable and I feel that it taught me nothing about literary history. Another work that has more structure would have been so much better" (Survey Open Comments). I found this last comment particularly interesting. The articulation from the student that

the lack of structure in *Margery Kempe* made the text "barely readable" suggests that my argument concerning the nature of the text is reasonable. I contend that students (and very often teachers) are prepared to encounter a particular type of text that is endorsed early in our educational experiences as a text worthy of study; *Margery Kempe* is not such a text. In very early educational settings students are taught terms such as narrative structure, protagonist/antagonist, rising action, climax, and resolution, among others. These terms indicate a stable text with a traditional narrative arc, and while these terms and the types of texts to which they generally refer are useful, if not necessary, to the early study of literature, they are not the only terms, nor type of text, a student will encounter.[xxi]

The trouble with Margery Kempe illustrates in my study the trouble with *texts*; or more to the point, Kempe's text causes us to question what students anticipate reading in a literature course, what they might consider to be a valuable text, and the potential gap between their expectations and what they find. Much of their expectations stem from a series of rather romantic notions and assumptions about the purpose of literature, the study of literature, the definition of literature, and literature teachers. Some of these assumptions speak to the point of the culture of the literature classroom and of the university as a whole and will be discussed in other chapters. But as was shown with *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the question of what constitutes a literary text, and more importantly, a literary text *worth studying*, may not be a simple question.

This chapter could just as easily have been titled *On the Origin of Ennui* for the lack of student enthusiasm shown to Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin's text was assigned to students who were entering a study of Victorian literature,

and, as a side note, were upper divisional English majors. Of the students assigned to read Darwin's text, 52% listed it as their least favorite. If I were to argue that the type of literary reading a student expects to encounter at the university determines whether, and to what degree, students "liked" or "disliked" a text, then I would expect to discover that 0% of students listed *On the Origin of Species* as their favorite text – which was indeed the case. One student articulated quite well the problem with Darwin's text: "It was a useful text to read, but I wasn't sure how to approach it as a piece of literature, as a theory to apply to the other texts, or as something to analyze rhetorically for its ability to persuade" (SOC). This student's articulation of the difficulty of approaching a text such as *On the Origin of Species* as "a piece of literature" highlights the disconnect between student expectations, assumptions, and working definitions of "literature" as they enter the university. To further problematize the issue, we must recognize that teachers themselves have different expectations, assumptions, and working definitions of literature. I am not suggesting that literature teachers *should* have the exact same view of literature regardless of type of literature taught, or experiences teaching, but that we should recognize these differences and make them more transparent to the student.

The teacher who assigned Darwin did so because he felt as though students would not be prepared to understand the more conventional pieces of literature from the same time period. During our initial interview at the start of the semester he reported:

"[I] wanted to situate Darwin not so much in the 19th century, but I wanted to give them some introduction to 20th century problems that are important problems in the history of science and that are related to Darwinian theory like emergence, emergence in particular. Of course, natural selection, sexual selection, a variety

of sort of thematic topics. Which, if you look at the syllabus you'll see it's sort of organized that way. But I did that for pedagogical purposes, also. I wanted them to have some background in addition to the literary reading" (interview response). Frank, the teacher who assigned the Darwin text, did so for the best of reasons. His goal was to provide students the necessary background he felt they would need in order to understand the more traditionally literary texts from the same time period. Frank recognized that students had difficulty with Victorian literature, his area of expertise, and worked to augment student understanding by providing lectures, weekly writing assignments, and student-led discussions. However, in the end it seems that students were not able to budge from their romanticized view of literature, which was surely reinforced with the remaining Victorian texts in this class, in order to understand Darwin as a work of literature that situated the late nineteenth century.

Students not only disliked Kempe and Darwin, they seemingly *despised* them as evidenced by their language choices in their open comments: "boring," "dull," "dry," "insane," "awful!," "whiny," "annoying," "trudge," "too difficult," "hated it," "least entertaining," "barely readable," "very, very dry," "one sole redeeming quality," "couldn't bring myself. . .," "she was crazy," "difficult to read," "taught me nothing," "hard to follow," "did not understand it," "only book I've ever fallen asleep on multiple occasions trying to read," "worst/most poorly written books I have ever read," and, finally, "there's not enough space to fully answer why." The students' conflation of "good text" with "I enjoyed reading it," or "bad text" with "I disliked reading it," as demonstrated in these word choices above, unfortunately does a disservice to the study of literature. Our goal in the literature classroom should never be to evaluate the

"good/bad" quality of a text, but rather to inculcate a deeper and broader understanding of the culture and historical moment in which a particular text was created. While I would judge this is not a new idea to most literature teachers, I suspect it is completely unrecognized by students.

In order to understand the students' comments and ratings, we have to question how, where, and why students get their ideas about what literature is, and what pieces are worth studying in the classroom. Students often enter the university with an idea of what type of "traditional text" they will find, most likely taught to them through their high school teachers who were probably taught similarly romanticized views of literature. While challenging students by drawing in texts that aren't those kinds of narrative structures without a proper foundational understanding of literature writ large, teachers unwittingly reinforce students' dislike or discomfort with them and strengthen their resistance.

In my initial interview I asked each teacher how they selected their texts. Beverly, who taught the survey course, said, "the ones that I like. Essentially. Of course you first have to look at the official catalog description, and then work within the parameters of that, and then I usually try to come up with some organizing principle, such as a theme for example, let's say monsters in literature. Or concepts of genius in 19th Century literature" (personal interview). To be fair, I should also mention that this course was a late addition to Beverly's teaching schedule; another teacher could not cover the course at the last moment so Beverly "inherited" the syllabus, including the reading list. She reported that her reading list would have looked very similar, but there may have been additions or changes to the assigned texts. That aside, there are a number of

interesting things about Beverly's answer. Primarily we should note that she views the university catalog as a stable and durable text that constructs the parameters of the course in place of the social or political process whereby most college courses actually are constructed. I would expect students have the same fixed perspective of course descriptions. The other point she made that is worthy of note is that she picks the texts she *likes*. She is certainly not alone here; each teacher interviewed indicated in some way that their text selections hinged upon their own interests as well as the objectives of the course. But her response emphasizes the "good/bad/like/dislike" kind of Hegelian discourse of binaries that we find so often in our students. The difficulty with which our students move beyond a simple like/dislike of a text towards a more analytical understanding of text is perhaps reinforced by our own emotional connections to the literature we teach.

But Beverly's task is not an easy one. The survey course in particular carries a lot of responsibility in terms of introducing relatively new literature students to a wide spectrum of texts. According to Karen Smith, professor of world literature at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, "Necessarily, the world literature survey [. . .] involves philosophical and pedagogical compromises that have made it not only a recurrent target of criticism, but also a touchstone for rhetorical statements on the fundamental value of literary study, and indeed of the humanities as a whole" (585). Smith's point is that teachers have a difficult task in crafting courses and selecting reading lists that prove the usefulness of the literature classroom while maintaining sound pedagogical approaches. While Smith's argument centers on the difficulty and purpose of selecting specific texts for a *world* literature course in order to "prepare students for 'global citizenship'" (600), I

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believe her argument can be extended to highlight the difficulty of selecting texts for any course wherein the student is expected to be presented with demonstrative texts of a particular time, region, genre, etc.

Similar to Beverly, Arthur, when asked how he selected his reading list, replied, "Books I like. [chuckle] Books I think are important. Books I think they'll respond to." Upon further prompting, Arthur says,

> It's very instinctual. You know, I do have a logic behind it, but when they first appear in my imagination, it is instinct. And it's like there's all these – you do it too, I'm sure – these things you remember, floating around saying, 'teach me, teach me.' And you say that might work, it might not work. And there's so many things you leave out in classes. (personal interview)

What Arthur describes here I suggest is often the case: literature teachers work in isolation under the misguided and idealized notion that literature is something "instinctual." In some cases, it may very well be – this I do not wish to prove or disprove. But what happens in the event that a literature teacher does not have the "instinct" required, according to Arthur, to design an effective and engaging reading list? I would go so far as to suggest that Arthur's views indicate an essentialist perspective of the field. The additional point here adds credence to my earlier claim that our approach to selecting texts is mimetic of our own experiences as undergraduates and lacks a pedagogical discourse which literature teachers could then use to develop their courses.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, teachers, myself included, often fall under the spell of a well edited textbook. The convenience of ordering one book in which students can find every (or nearly every) reading for a course, a book in which there will be ample

introductory material for each author and time period, is often difficult to resist. One

teacher I interviewed describes his choice in readings, and in anthologies. When I asked

Alexander how he selects his texts, he replied:

> The reading list is based essentially on, I use the Norton for English and I use the
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> McGraw Hill for the American lit and I go through and look at the representative
>
> sections of each of the, you know, the Romantic, Victorian and Modern and what
>
> I try to do is to pick – the Norton is really good because it has a section called
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> Victorian issues, which has a lot of women's issues, and also has some Marxism
>
> in there, you know, the plight of the lower classes and the industrial classes and
>
> all that. There's some anti-war stuff in there also in WWI. And so what I try to
>
> look for are the essences. . . So I just go through and pick what I think is
>
> representative of the era. (personal interview)

Here we have a teacher who is reliant upon the parameters set by particular textbooks to

determine the learning objectives of his course. We hear again the echo of a lit teacher,

working in isolation under the guide of idealized notions, trying to discern the "essences"

of certain texts or literary genres – a particularly organic perspective of teaching. This is

by no means meant to be an indictment of Alexander's practices; nor is it meant to be a

condemnation of textbooks. Quite the contrary. What he describes is not at all unusual

for many literature teachers. Despite the fact that literature teachers often expressly

challenge traditional views of the canon in their courses, often those traditional views are

replicated by the tools we choose to use in the classroom. As a side note, upon a cursory

inspection of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ninth edition, the edition I use

for my own survey courses, I cannot find the word "postmodern" printed once.

Alexander calls attention to some of the inherent problems with selecting readings, including with his own choices in anthologies later in our interview. He remarks:

> So some of the reasons for choosing texts may be limited by the tools. Are teachers, for examples, limiting themselves to the . . .are you teaching the texts in the order they fall in the anthology? Are you teaching the texts you were taught and therefore are the ones you feel are important? Is it good to have that kind of random and ambiguous approach? Do we want to codify or do we want to have a standardized literature course design? I don't think this is the answer – difference is good, but maybe this does not afford novice teachers the kinds of opportunities they need to leave the university with the experience necessary to get a job. Or, is it a short shrift to the students who come into it expecting one thing but receiving another? And how much of it has to do with what the student expectations are for the classroom and what the teacher expectations for the classroom? (personal interview)

Alexander's questions have contained very neatly some of the many complications my research project was designed to examine. He goes on to explain:

> And so, pedagogically, one of the things I'm searching for is to train students to see, especially secondary literature, that it's you don't need to be able to command in its entirety. You need to be able to associate big ideas with their authors. […] You can manage them, you can put them to work, and put them into juxtaposition with other ideas and other texts. And so I'm partly training them, I think, in how to digest, how to summarize, how to find a thesis and we're doing it through discussions of their own papers (personal interview).

Alexander's desire to teach his students how to use texts that he considers "secondary"[xxii] is certainly laudable and fills a gap that I perceive to be a problem in literature courses. The question remains whether he explicitly teaches these skills in the classroom or whether he simply expects students to know how to do these things.

As illustrated above, the question of which texts to use and why is one with which all literature teachers must contend. However, the addition of digital texts challenges our field in new (and potentially exciting) ways. We suddenly have very easy access to texts that are often not included in anthologies or textbooks. We can find different "versions" of the same poem, for example, or the same drama. This access has acutely brought to our attention the instability of texts because of the many ways they can be created, accessed, and digested. We often recognize that the earliest known texts had been unstable: for example, they were often oral or poorly preserved. But once technologies advanced, particularly print technologies, we expected stable, truthful texts. It has been hard to convince readers that these things are merely our own assumptions until now. The production of digital texts has forced us to reconsider the question of textual stability and their place in the classroom.[xxiii] I surveyed students to see if and how often they were accessing their assigned texts online or on electronic devices (such as Nook, Kindle, iPad, etc.). Of those who responded, 28% reported accessing their texts electronically whereas 56% reported not accessing their texts electronically. Many of those who reported accessing their texts electronically noted that they did so only because there were texts assigned that were not available in print. Interestingly enough, those students who reported not having accessed texts electronically included comments such as, "No, hell no!" and "never!" The vehemence with which they responded to questions regarding

electronic sources reinforces for me a desire to maintain traditional avenues for, and therefore traditional types of, literature. The point missed by those resistant to digital texts is that texts are unstable even (some might say especially) in a printed format. A study of the publishing history of any of the texts we teach could illustrate this point. Electronic texts have quite simply brought the issue of textual stability to the forefront. I would speculate that the resistance to electronic texts is in part related to the idealized expectation that a text is a tangible "thing" that does not change; but I would also speculate that a great deal of this resistance is related to the romanticized relationship so many of us have with literature. We must remember that reading literature is a visceral experience. Our romanticized vision of that includes turning onionskin sheets, smelling the historical journey that actual text took before winding up on a used bookstore shelf.

In addition to texts that are assigned and read either in paper copy or electronically, there are additional texts present in the literature classroom: student texts. In a composition classroom students' texts are privileged; they become the central focus and driving purpose, and determine, in large part, the day's activities (peer review, for example), the day's lecture (based on student essays, students might benefit from a review of a particular rhetorical approach), and even in some cases, the course calendar (if students exhibit the need for more time in their writing, then calendars can be adjusted accordingly). In a literature classroom student texts are rarely even acknowledged apart from their use as an assessment tool. On the contrary, Frank's course is designed to move student writings to the center. As a description of how he engages students with their readings, Frank offers the following:

They write four short papers; they're discussed every Thursday in class. [Students are instructed to write short critical responses in which they form an argument that extends from the reading] And they also lead the discussion of four other students' papers. So we have three groups, a, b, and c, and they rotate. So, every three weeks they have a paper due, every three weeks they lead a discussion. I think in pedagogical terms it helps get them engaged in the material. They're not just responsible for reading and talking about the material, but they're responsible for thinking about it in terms of organizing a thesis, in terms of critical engagement. I also like to get them to take some of our secondary material, some of the ideas that emerge from that and talk about it in relation to the primary material." (personal interview)

Frank's attempts to engage students results in a refocus of the in-class activities from a traditional lecture format to one that decentralizes authority away from the teacher and the text, and towards the students and student-written texts. This was a unique approach of the different classes I observed in my study. I could argue for potential problems that might arise from expecting students to deliver polished writings without explicit instruction as to their composition. However, due to my classroom observations I am able to contend that his students were the most participatory of the classes that I observed. This, of course, could be due to a number of reasons (the content, the fact that this is an upper divisional course, teacher personality, time of day, etc.) – and while I cannot draw a causal relationship between the exercise of student led discussions (that are focused on student writing) and a higher rate of participation, there is certainly a correlation.

I was interested to learn if students' motivation for studying literature affected their perceived outcomes at the end of the course. In the pre-survey the students were asked why they had chosen to study literature and were permitted to mark each answer that applied. The answers, illustrated below in Table 1, were not surprising. Of those who responded, 65% reported having a personal interest in literature (Table 1 A1). 42% expressed their desire to expand their cultural and historical knowledge (Table 1 A2) and 39% indicated preparation to work in the field of literature (Table 1 A3) as their motivating factors. Finally, 15% reported that English was not their major (Table 1 A4), and 12% indicated an "other" motivation (Table 1 A5). Note that approximately 200 students were surveyed, but many selected more than one answer to the survey questions.

Table 1

Reason for Choosing to Study Literature
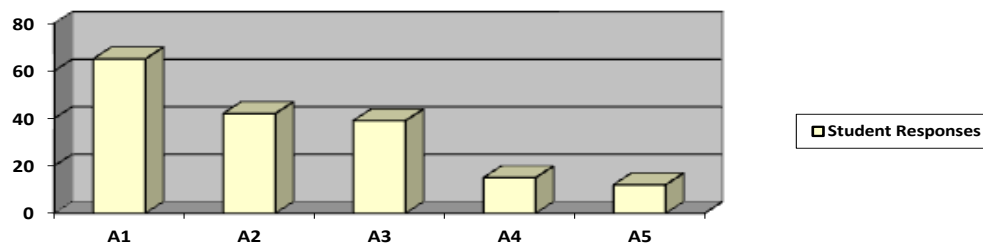
As is clear from Table 1, a desire to work in the field of literature is not the motivation driving enrollment in the English program. I would hypothesize that the personal interest in literature and the desire to expand cultural and historical understanding are both shaped by the romantic and idealized perceptions of studying literature I argue is instilled in early experiences with literacy. In fact, in addition to the statistical responses, there were also some open comments offered. These seem to

support my hypothesis: "Reading is my favorite pastime," "I just want to read good novels," "I just like to read," and most significantly, "both my parents are English teachers – it runs in my blood. I've always loved books" (SOC). Answers such as these support the same type of organic connection to literature that was expressed by several of the teachers during their interviews. I can conclude from my research project that the essentialist conception of literature, the idea that there is a particular essence that constitutes all things connected to literature, can interfere with the exchange of ideas (the learning) that happens in the literature course. This will be further demonstrated in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSACTIONS: OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

In Chapter 3, "Teachers," I have endeavored to demonstrate the ways in which teachers engage students by integrating their own experiences as a student into their teaching practice, whether consciously or not, as well as their own deeply held beliefs in the organic and romantic nature of literature. In large part, my reasons emerged out of my interviews conducted with teachers in my research project. In Chapter 4, "Texts: The Trouble with Margery Kempe," I integrated interview questions concerning texts with student survey responses in order to explain the ways in which romanticized views of texts are endorsed by teachers and reflected by students. In this chapter, "Transactions," I intend to draw in student survey responses (156 students were surveyed in pre- and post-surveys) as well as incorporate classroom observations in order to elucidate some of the complex transactions that take place in the classroom among teacher, student, and text. I argue that the various engagements, or transactions, enacted in the classroom ultimately reinforce long held ideas about how literature is created, taught, and consumed.

I was particularly interested in learning if student expectations determined what it was they learned. To put it another way, I was curious if their assumptions about literature had any bearing on the types of skills students reported to have gained over the course of the semester. As it turns out, there is a positive correlation of the general expectations students had at the start of the semester with the skills they reported to have gained after the course (see table 2). The pre-course survey asked the question, "What do you hope to learn from this particular class?" The post-course survey asked, "What did

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you learn or gain from this class?" Students were given seven answers from which to choose all that applied (noted in table 2 as A1-A7) and the opportunity to add open comments on each survey.[xxiv] See endnote ii for complete key to the responses illustrated in table 2. It is clear from table 2 that student experiences in class mirrored their expectations.

Table 2

Student Expectations of Learning Outcomes Compared with Skills Attained during Class
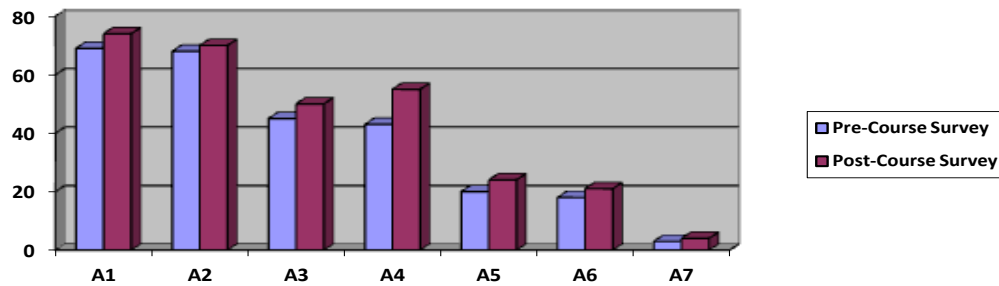
The two areas with the highest number of responses were the responses "broaden my broadening knowledge of this topic" and "expand a cultural or historical understanding." In the pre-survey, 69% of students reported that they hoped to broaden their knowledge of the course topic (table 2 A1); in the post-survey 74% of students reported having done so (Table 2 A1).[xxv] The second most common pre/post correlation had to do with cultural understanding which showed that 68% of incoming students surveyed in question A2 hoped to expand their cultural or historical understanding while 70% of students surveyed at the close of class indicated that they had (Table 2 A2). I contend that these two areas of responses illustrate that a particular understanding of the purpose of the lit class (i.e., an idealized and romanticized vision of its purpose) is

reinforced in the classroom. The aspect that I find most interesting is in the comparison between these top two responses and the bottom two responses. For questions A5 and A6 20% and 18% of students reported that they hoped to learn new reading strategies and new writing strategies, respectively, while 24% reported having learned new reading strategies (Table 2 A5) and 21% reported having learned new writing strategies (Table 2 A6). The responses indicated on table 2 as A7 include those students who selected "other" as their expectation of learning outcomes.

Table 2, specifically answers 5 and 6, illustrates my earlier point that reading and writing are not privileged in the lit course by students; as indicated in the table, only 20% of students expected to learn reading and writing strategies. Students enter the classroom expecting to interact with new cultural and historical knowledge about literary topics in which they are interested; not surprisingly, far fewer students expect to learn new reading and writing skills. It is possible that these surveys indicate a self-fulfilling prophecy: students gain from a course exactly what it is they expect to gain. Or it could quite simply mean that we are doing a good job of delivering the type of information that students hope to receive. Or, and I would suggest most likely, teachers do not use the literature class as a space to give reading and writing instruction. I am not suggesting that these statistics are inherently *good* or *bad*, but rather that the literature classroom is not viewed as a space in which to learn reading and writing skills. Although I grant that literature classrooms are (and I would argue, should be) focused on broadening cultural and historical knowledge, I still maintain that there should also be space for directly instructing students *how* to acquire that very knowledge through reading and writing in different ways.

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Some of the teacher participants deal with the issue of reading and writing instruction in direct ways. Alexander, for example, describes his approach to teaching reading in his classes. He breaks his students into groups and then students take turns leading the discussion each week for their group. During the course of the group discussions, Alexander has the opportunity to assess if students understand what they are reading. At the end of my initial interview I asked Alexander if there was anything else he thought I should know about his teaching. He revisited an earlier point he made that teaching literature is really about teaching reading. He says this about teaching reading skills during his group work activities:

> Well, this is what reading is about. If you're reading something, and you don't understand it, that is your first point of contact. Why don't you understand it? Go back to that line, let's read it aloud, tell me what you think it means, what you feel it means, and then engage the class. So you don't cover as much material, but you get every member of the group talking.

Alexander's attempts to engage students with material they don't understand are valuable attempts; revisiting misunderstood passages in order to unpack the material is a useful start to understanding. Based on my own experiences and my classroom observations, this revisit to misunderstood passages would be followed by assistance in identifying particular tropes, definitions, and symbolism in order to help students begin to make sense of difficult ideas and passages beyond a surface understanding. I agree that reading skills need to be taught in the literature classroom, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people, teachers and students alike, assume that students in university literature classes already have finely honed critical reading skills. In retrospect, I was remiss to not

ask some follow up questions: is this modeled in the class with the implication that students need direction with critical reading? Are students explicitly told that these are some of the many skills they will need to have if they are to engage with literature in more than a cursory manner? Do students understand that they may not have the types of reading skills that will help them to understand literature on more than a cursory level? Once again, students do not enter the lit classroom believing that they will be taught how to read and write; I would be curious to observe their response to explicit reading instruction. It should be noted here that during observations of each course I did not observe any explicit directions to develop critical reading skills.

Another advocate for small group discussion was Frank who describes his class as a seminar (see Chapter 3). He believes that "when you have to talk about your ideas with your peers, in a real seminar format, you have to be more serious about them than if you're just sitting like a lump on a log in the back of the class while the professor is droning on" (personal interview). During my classroom observations I did in fact see far more student led discussion and far less teacher focused discussion than in the other courses. In other words, Frank's seminar design does indeed seem to require a *different* kind of transaction between students and texts than in a traditional lecture class. Not only were the students controlling the discussion, but their own writing was the central text of the discussion. What I cannot conclude is whether or not the seminar format breaks with romanticized notions of literature classes or if it actually perpetuates them. If the teacher assumes that students are prepared for the critical reading and writing required to successfully navigate the seminar, and does not offer explicit instruction for doing so, then I am apprehensive about its effectiveness for student engagement. I am not

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suggesting that Frank fails to instruct his students in reading and writing critically; I am instead suggesting that it is not part of the general discourse of teaching literature and as such if students are not prepared with the necessary skills when faced with the task of analyzing texts and leading class discussions, then their preconceived ideas about literature are tacitly reinforced.

Group work such as Frank's is interesting to consider within the context of the field of literature. Group work is a strong part of the pedagogy in the composition classroom, but it is not one of the traditional experiences expected in a literature classroom. In my student pre-surveys I asked students what elements they found most frustrating in literature courses, and then at the end of the semester I asked what elements they found most frustrating in the course they were finishing. Of those surveyed, 43% of students identified group work as the most frustrating thing in a lit course. What was surprising was that at the end of the course only 9% of students reported that group work was frustrating in the course that just ended (Table 3 A1).[xxvi] Granted, group work was not utilized in every class, so it would stand to reason that the post-surveys would be lower – perhaps students did not find group work frustrating in their course because they did not have group work in their course. Or, perhaps, students were pleasantly surprised by the effective use of group work. In fact, in Frank's course, the course that relied almost entirely on group led discussions, only three students reported being frustrated with group work at the end of the semester compared with six students at the beginning of the course. What I can determine from the surveys is that students did not report a specific and significant frustration with groups that semester. In fact, one student in Arthur's class, a class that did not incorporate group work, wrote that they could have

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"perhaps benefitted from one or two more assignments or group discussions" (SOC). I would not have expected to read a request for group discussions given the initial report indicating such a high level of dislike for group work.

Table 3

Most Frustrating Elements of Literature Courses in General Compared with Most Frustrating Elements of this Course
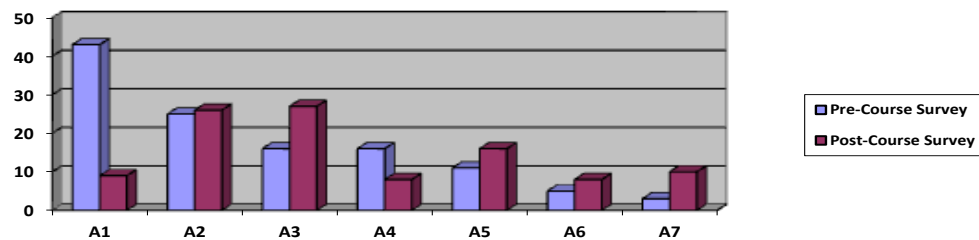
Another transaction that took place in the courses surveyed was the ubiquitous literature lecture. Not surprisingly, 16% of students reported that lectures were one of the things they found most frustrating (Table 3 A4). Interestingly enough, similar to the response concerning group work, at the close of the semester only 8% of students, approximately half of those in the pre-survey, identified lectures as one of the most frustrating aspects of their course (Table 3 A4). Here again, this correlation does not indicate any causality, but I would interpret the data as suggesting that students found the specific lectures to which they were exposed as far less frustrating than they expected them to be prior to the course. In one of the open comments a student notes that lectures are frustrating "only if the entire class consists solely of lectures; a literature class should involve discussion!" (SOC). I am compelled to agree with this student.

The student who noted that a lit course should involve discussion was enrolled in Arthur's course which included writing responses to prompts given in class and was discussion driven with very little (if any) lecture, based on my observations. At the end of the course, when the same question was asked, there were interesting responses from not only Arthur's course but all of them concerning discussion. One student in Arthur's course wrote in the post-survey that one frustrating element of that course was "some of the ridiculous peer comments. Teacher squashes most of the dumb ones, but not all" (SOC). Another student from a different course notes being frustrated with a "lack of intelligent 'in-text' based discussion from students; lots of 'I feel' and 'I think' but very little textual backing to statements" (SOC). Yet another student reports being frustrated with "students who don't understand material but feel the need to make ignorant comments" (SOC). Comments from students noting the impact that their peers can make on class discussions call to attention the complexity of the variety of transactions, including the group dynamic, that is at work in all classes. Interactions between teacher, text, and student are complex and involve far more than an engagement with the material.

Teachers are well experienced with difficult students, those identified above by their peers as particularly "annoying," who might try to take over discussions, who may be contentious or argumentative, or students with comments that seem completely detached from the text. During my post-interview with Frank he identified some of the problems he had with students in the course:

We had one woman in the front of the class with a very heavy Japanese accent. And she's engaged, obviously her ability to process English is a lot better than her speaking ability. So I tried to give her some space, but I also ignored her on

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occasion because her pronunciation was difficult for the students. We also had that one guy who has all sorts of wonderful ideas, some of them are crackpot, but nonetheless [. . .] So there were occasions when I thought I gave him too much free reign. But for the most part he raised interesting debating points. He would say things like, "this is wrong." And so that leads to a sermon on okay, what does it mean to say that a literary text is "wrong?" (personal interview)

I observed these students in class and noted a variety of techniques that the teacher used to redirect the discussion when it got tangled, especially with the two participants identified by Frank. I noted the teacher calling on students by name to ask them what they thought, asking students to clarify a question or point they had made, and backing up to revisit an earlier point. All of these techniques helped to direct the discussion around students when necessary, or toward students when necessary. I observed other teachers using the physical space of the classroom differently – sometimes moving towards students that they wanted to participate and away from those who were, perhaps, too participatory. I observed Arthur utilizing the course space in this way to direct discussion away from "that one student who talks in circles and you can't make sense out of them. I have one of those" (personal interview). According to my observations, each teacher was adept at directing the path of discussion.

During my pre-interviews with each teacher I asked how they engaged students in class discussion. I was interested to know how they began class discussions as well as how they maintained them. Arthur describes what happens when he has difficulty beginning a class discussion:

Getting the dynamic in play of just getting it off the ground [can be difficult].

And you know, I'll wait for awhile. Sometimes I'll just kind of sit there and look

at them. I'll say, listen, I'm not going to move on until one of you answers this.

I don't do that often, I don't try to be mean or anything, but very often they're shy

about raising their hand, but once I think one or two of them get going, that's

when the hands pop up and that's when everything gets good. (personal

interview)

This seems to be an instance where the teacher utilizes the power structure in the

classroom to his own benefit. In Arthur's course I noted approximately 11 students,

approximately 30% of the class, who actively participated in class discussions on the

days of my observations. There were a few occasions where two or three instances of

conversation would pass between students, but for the majority of the class discussion

Arthur punctuated student conversation with questions, answers, redirection, and the like.

I could not conclude if the students were responding to Arthur's discussion style in class

or if he were responding to theirs. Is this a matter of students enabling teacher-centered

dynamics of authority within the classroom? Interestingly enough, the course that relied

upon student led seminar-style discussions, taught by Frank, had the least amount of

teacher comments during class discussion. It was not uncommon for there to be 12 or

more passes of conversation between students, sometimes involving five or more

students, before Frank would chime in. Here again, I cannot conclude what is

responsible for the difference in participation. Course structure certainly seemed to play

a part, as did teacher personality; but I cannot determine to what degree other

contributing factors (e.g., student experience, topic, time of day) controlled the class

discussion. What I can determine is that there were no governing principles that seemed common between classes. I am not implying that there should be, but there clearly is a space to engage a pedagogical discourse for literature teachers.

Class discussion was reported as one of the things that students felt was useful in the literature classroom. I asked students in the pre-survey, "what was the most impressionable or useful thing you have received in a literature course to date?" (see table 4).[xxvii] Students were given five options and asked to select all that applied. In the pre-survey only 29% of students reported that involved in-class discussion was useful (table 4 A5). As is clear in Table 4, in-class discussion was the least reported of things found useful (A5). In the post-survey the number of students who reported that in-class discussion was the most useful thing in the course just ending remained about the same: 26% (table 4 A5). This was an interesting glimpse into students' sense of class discussion, particularly given that much of the practice of teaching literature involves developing techniques for discussion. It would seem from the surveys that perhaps developing other areas of teaching practice would be time better spent.

More interesting for my research was the percent of students who responded that new knowledge about the specific topic was the most useful thing received in class (table 4 A1). In the pre-survey 53% of students identified new knowledge as the most useful, and in the post-survey 58% identified new knowledge as the most useful thing received.

Table 4

Most Helpful / Useful Things Received in Literature Courses in General Compared with

Most Helpful / Useful Things Received in this Course
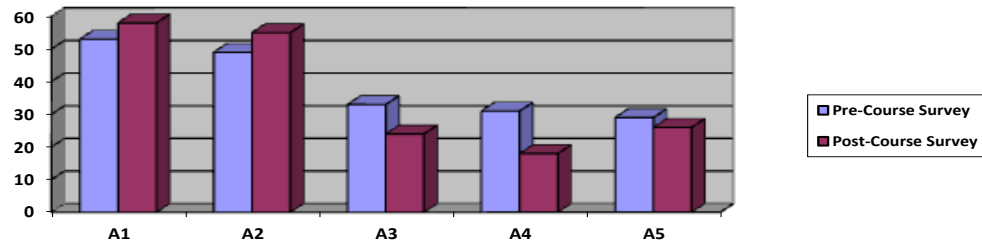
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contend that the focus on the topic of the course, on the content, as the point of

significance hampers the students' ability, as well as the teacher's, to see the literature

course as an opportunity for instruction in critical reading and writing skills. It can be

noted in table 4 once more where students place reading and writing skills in relation to

other skills developed in the lit course. Only 33% of students identified direction in

reading literature critically as useful in the pre-survey, and 24% in the post-survey (table

4 A3). This answer was higher than only one other in the survey: 31% of students in the

pre-survey, and only 18% in the post-survey, noted that direction in writing about

literature was useful in the lit course (table 4 A4). This last finding suggests that

direction in critical reading and writing about literature was simply not taught in these

courses. One of the students noted in the open comments that one of their key

frustrations was that the teacher "didn't really talk about ways to improve reading

critically." It would seem from this student's response that this type of direction is

noticeably lacking in the classroom.

I also asked students what they found to be the most helpful in-class teacher practice in the pre-survey. I was eager to learn if their responses mirrored the in-class practices that teachers reported in their interviews as important ways to engage students with readings, writing assignments, and class discussions. According to the survey, 54% of students find classroom discussion to be the most helpful in-class practice (table 5 A1).[xxviii] This is interesting when read in tangent with the surveys above which seem to indicate that in-class discussion was not one of the most helpful practices in general (only 29% of students surveyed) or in their particular course (merely 26% of students surveyed) (table 4 A5).

Table 5

Most Helpful In-Class Teacher Practice
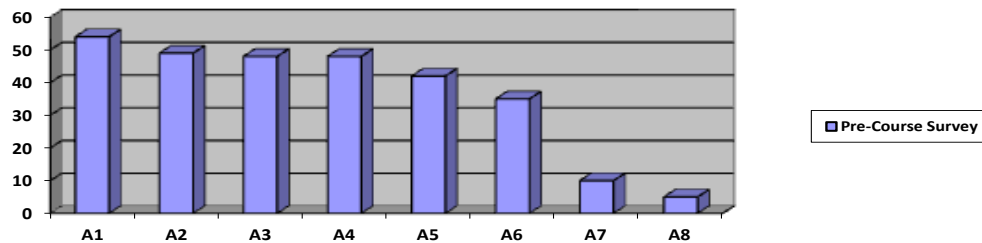
One noteworthy statistic in table 5 is that 49% (table 5 A2) of students surveyed indicated that help in reading literature critically was the most helpful in-class teacher practice. As a reminder, in response to the question, "what was the most useful thing received in this class," only 24% of students identified direction in reading literature critically (table 4 A3). This could mean one of two things: either students did not find the instruction for critical reading useful in the particular class for which they were surveyed, or it was not a perceived as a significant aspect of the course as offered. If it is the latter, then we must

consider the potential conclusion that students want instruction in critical reading as indicated in their response in table 5 and note a lack thereof as indicated in table 4.

I anticipated that the aspects of the course with which students would be most engaged would be those aspects that they reported having enjoyed the most. In order to gather this information the final question I asked in the post-survey was, "what aspects of this course did you enjoy the most?" As expected, students reported that they enjoyed the reading material the most (50%, table 6 A1).[xxix] This result seems to suggest that the

Table 6

Most Enjoyable Aspects of the Course
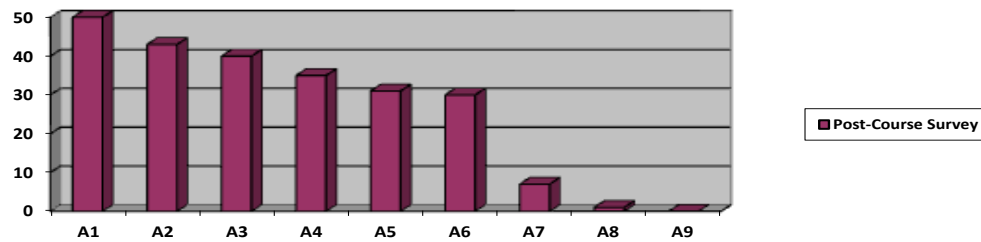
idealized relationship that students have with texts is reinforced by the course as well as by the teacher's idealized relationship with texts. Interestingly enough, group work appears as the response from 40% of students (table 6 A3). When considered alongside the general question, "what do you find most helpful in a teacher's in-class teaching practice," to which only 10% of students reported group work (table 5 A7), it is remarkable that there was an increase of 30% between the generalized view of group work prior to the course and the response of group work as the most enjoyable aspect in the post-survey. This difference could be attributed to a few different causes. For one,

the variation could have been caused by wording in the survey instrument: surely there is a difference between "most helpful" and "most enjoyable." As a matter of fact, it is possible that these two survey questions should not be juxtaposed at all.[xxx] There is a possibility, though, that the group work experienced in those courses that utilized group work affected a change in opinion concerning the use of group work in a literature course. Or, perhaps more to the point, students have identified the fact that they know that the things they find to be helpful in the classroom are not necessarily those they find to be the most enjoyable; while it is beyond the scope of this project, I would be interested to explore how the difference between what is "useful" and what is "helpful" impacts teachers' pedagogies and in-class practices. In the next chapter I propose a few conclusions that can be drawn based on the data collected and discussed here.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In an essay titled "Attending to the Word," instructor Deirdre Mahoney recalls her students' response to her instructions: "When I tell my students that the only way to read a book is with pencil gliding freely across the page (no highlighters please), they look stymied" (357). The response of these students is not unexpected. We have been taught from our earliest experiences with literacy not to write on any text. Children are admonished for scribbling in their books, and, as Mahoney points out, even colleges discourage writing in books as university bookstores often will not buy back textbooks that have been marked up. Instructors in my study feel similarly to Mahoney's students. During my interview with Alexander he shares the following:

> But I look at the book as a precious artifact. Most of us do, we're all book people.
> . . Also a problem. . . is writing in the marginalia and notes. . . and which I do, but
> I don't do that in any of my fiction books. And plus I like to keep them as new as
> I can. I don't bust them up. (personal interview)

I suspect that if I had asked a follow up question of Alexander regarding writing in less "precious" books, say, anthologies (books often viewed in the literature classroom as a tool rather than as a romanticized material text), he may have noted the importance of taking marginal notes. Mahoney goes on to explain that:

> Selected passages ought to be underlined, I maintain, and tricky vocabulary
> circled. Further, I suggest that handwritten symbols in the form of stars, asterisks,
> squiggly lines, question marks, brackets, and the like warrant placement alongside

their personal comments posted in the margins. After all, the white space on the printed page could use the company (357).

Her advice here is deceptively simple; yes, students need to be encouraged to engage with their texts in a physical way, but they also need clear direction on how to do this. Which passages should be marked and why? What kinds of things should students look for and note finding (or not finding) in a reading? Interestingly enough, Mahoney's essay appears in a composition textbook. This is, of course, a good place for it, but so too does it belong as a preface to any literature anthology. Rhetoricians and composition instructors have long recognized the importance of writing in/over/on texts as a way to improve critical reading skills yet this is not something that is explicitly taught in most literature courses. I would have to agree with Mahoney's observation that "educators and a whole lot of other well-meaning adults have worked successfully to ensure disengagement with the printed word" (357).

Mahoney is surely right about the ways we deter people from reading texts with pencil in hand as well as the negative impact it makes to engagement with texts and critical reading skills. I contend that our longstanding romantic relationship with texts is to blame for this and that the result is a divide between those who revere texts as objects which should never be damaged with a pencil, and those who view the margins as space in which they can enter into dialogue with the text. I am not implying that these two things are mutually exclusive. Indeed reverence and access intersect in many places and I maintain that these intersections are positive spaces where the student (and teacher) can locate a deep understanding of the text as both object and idea. An example of what this

looks like in the classroom I believe can be found in Alexander's hybrid course. He describes introducing the texts to his students in class thusly:

> I handed each one [a magazine], they got to choose their pulp magazine, I wanted them to smell it, to feel it, to get a sense of what it was, and then analyze your pulp in terms of your personal reaction. Its feel, smell, its degree of oldness. Did you think of who bought it for example, or where it was purchased? It was purchased by someone very close to your age, seventy years ago. (personal interview)

Clearly Alexander's introduction supposed that the students understand these physical texts in a material way. But I remain concerned that paired with his earlier statements wherein he indicates that he views the book as a "precious artifact," Alexander's introduction could foster an idealized relationship with texts. If they already held romanticized views of literature as I believe entering students do, then it is possible that Alexander's introduction augmented those beliefs. I assert that the intersection between the reverence for the text and the access point, the "margin" if you will, is in the hybrid portion of Alexander's class. In the virtual classroom space students are encouraged to manipulate and interact with the texts in more intimate ways than they are in the face-to-face portion of the hybrid class. Here is the opportunity for students to recognize texts as fluid and unfixed; here is the opportunity for students to enter into dialogue with the texts, filling the margins with their own ideas. The online or hybrid space was not my focus for this project, but as a part of my conclusion I would be remiss to not call for a more concerted exploration of blended spaces as avenues for pedagogical exploration.

Although I should know better by now, and my own research highlights my contradiction, it is difficult to shed the kinds of romantic notions about literature that I share with my colleagues and with many of our students. I am not entirely sure that it is necessary to completely suspend these ideas about texts and teaching, and I am not entirely sure what this means for our field. Is it enough to simply recognize these mechanisms at work in our classrooms in order to consciously try to sidestep some of the pitfalls inherent in them? Overcoming romantic and idealized notions of the field and / or classroom could lead to much higher achievements for teacher and student alike, while holding on to romanticized notions of literature perpetuates the privileged idea that literature is reserved for only the most elite: those who either "have it" or don't.

Many teachers, including those in my study, challenge traditional and romantic notions of texts and what happens (or what they believe *should* happen) with them in the classroom. However, based on my observations I would argue that we do not always reflect in our practices what it is we espouse in our beliefs. This is to say that while Arthur, for example, articulates the importance of student-centered classroom discussion that is not necessarily what happens in his classroom. While the literature teachers in my study identified the need for student centered pedagogy and a de-mystifying of canonical texts, that is not always what was reflected in the classroom. Alexander noted in his interview that he specifically teaches texts that are outside of the canon because "we're told to ignore them" (personal interview). His example is his specialty course where he teaches students that pulp fiction, named from the cheap "pulp" paper on which they were printed, actually makes significant literary contributions despite being often dismissed as mere "entertainment" that has little to no critical value. His incorporation of

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texts outside of traditionally expected "literature" found in the university classroom is laudable. One of his students noted in the post-survey that the most valuable thing he gained was "an expanded perspective on what is considered 'worthy' of literary criticism. I will take with me from this course a more open mind when it comes to deciding what is 'important' literature" (SOC). It would seem as though Alexander made strides in his course to break down the obstacles that often appear between text and student, more closely connecting his classroom practices with his articulated beliefs than some of the other teachers in my study were able to do. The discrepancies between what my research participants verbalize as important or worthwhile practices and what I actually observed in the classroom is an additional area that I would like to further consider beyond the scope of this project.

My hopes for this study are manifold. One hope is that my project will force those of us who prepare incoming novice instructors to question the ways that we prepare them to teach literature and make pedagogies much more explicit. The field of rhetoric and composition has been doing this for years in order to best prepare TAs for the writing classroom[xxxi]. The preparation to teach composition is invaluable to teaching associates, however, it does not necessarily ensure success in the literature classroom. One goal of this study is to draw attention to that gap in preparation of teachers for other fields at the particular university where my study took place. To institutionalize or formalize the preparation of teachers of literature indicates a particular privileging of methodology or pedagogy, but the problem is that we are so apprehensive of privileging one methodology over another that we simply embrace no methodology whatsoever. The result is an "apedagogical" field – literature teachers are not anti-pedagogical so much as they are

simply resistant and the result is a lack of pedagogy and a lack of opportunity or discourse which could be used to develop literary pedagogues. I argue that the resistance to the *idea* of pedagogy, even to the word 'pedagogy,' limits literature teachers' abilities to help students to develop their own literacy practice.

While literary theories and approaches to texts can and do change, the literature teacher's pedagogy is often static. I'm not suggesting that there is one pedagogy that is better than another, I'm proposing that there be a pedagogy for literature and in order for that to happen there needs to be an open discussion, a discourse assigned to this issue at this particular university. There needs to be a forum in which novice literature teachers can ask questions, and find out how to engage students and do all of these things for which there really is no forum right now. "Literature" and "innovation" are words that are seldom seen connected. In the field of literary studies we use words like "canon," "critical theory," and "cultural history." We often – rather, usually – privilege tradition and texts over unique perspectives and student engagement, much to the deficit of both teacher and student.

While I embarked on this research project to study the ways teachers engage students, the more revealing finding for me was recognizing the deeply rooted idealization of literature seemingly shared by student, teacher, and university. In addition to this finding was the recognition that our shared romanticizing about literature inhibits developing a shared discourse about literary pedagogy. An illustration of this is the answer offered by one teacher when asked how he knew if his students had met his objectives.

You can get a sense. If you hear a lot of interplay between the students, and

between you and the students, or students who come to talk to you afterwards.

That tells me. Now if there's dead silence then I know something is wrong. . .

It's not necessarily you don't have good subject matter, you're not posing good

questions. Sometimes they're just dead for the day. And it happens. . .Uh, these

are hard things for me to explain because I do them so instinctively, you see. I'm

sure you must be the same in your classes. Or maybe not. I don't know.

(personal interview)

The teacher's response above forces me to ask again, where is the space for those who

teach literature to share their pedagogies and practices as they relate to the field at large?

I fear that if literature teachers continue to work "instinctively" and in isolation, not

knowing what one another is doing or how they are doing it, we will continue to obstruct

a sorely needed pedagogical discourse.

Another outcome of my study is the recognition that we need to initiate a

discussion about the ways that literature teachers engage students with texts in an

increasingly digital world. That discussion is overdue and necessary, particularly at a

time when more and more students are coming to texts in electronic format. This

discussion needs to continue beyond the boundaries of this project to discover ways that

teachers can prepare to teach strategies for both print and electronic texts, how students

are best engaged in an online environment, and how students are affected by the

electronic interface of things such as Nooks, Kindles, and electronic texts, even in a

traditional face-to-face classroom. I did not design my research to specifically engage

this question in depth, but I see a need for further research in this area.

An additional beneficial reminder that emerged from my research is the recognition that teaching is a recursive process. This study has been a self-reflective process for me. As I analyze the data and try to determine the ways that these teachers have made manifest their pedagogies of teaching literature in the classroom, I wonder the same about my own. Do I make my objectives explicit to my students? Do I engage students with texts, with one another, with writing assignments and discussions in the ways I hope? Do I have an explicit pedagogy for teaching literature? The answer to these questions, and really the conclusion I am able to draw from my observations of and interviews with these teachers is that teaching (not only literature, of course, but any subject) is a recursive and self-conscious process that deserves a discourse of its own. This project has given me not only the tools but also the space to reflect upon my own teaching practices.

With this research I have attempted to describe what four literature teachers have experienced in the classroom. I have offered observations of patterns rather than an evaluation of any kind in attempt to describe the ways that teachers engage students – not to identify a "right" and "wrong" way of engagement, but rather to highlight the many ways this happens in the literature class. In fact, I would like to take the time here to offer my only evaluative comments. Quite simply, I was impressed by each of the four teachers in my study. They clearly are passionate about teaching and about literature and do everything in their power to convey their enthusiasm to their students. I was grateful that each allowed me to make audio recordings of their classes because during my observations I very quickly shifted from "researcher" to "student." The observations have inspired me as a student and as a teacher to see that there are many ways to engage

students, and that their engagement takes different forms. I sat in class imagining King Arthur's round table or wondering if Addie Bundren would ever make it to her final resting place. I sat on my hands to keep from shooting them into the air to ask questions or offer analysis. I can only hope that as a teacher I am as enthusiastic about literature and as knowledgeable in the class as my four teacher participants.

NOTES

[i] The National Survey of Student Engagement offers the following definition for student engagement: "Student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning" (nsse.iub.edu). To expand my current research it would be interesting to differentiate between those engagement activities initiated by the student and those initiated by the teacher.

[ii] A sampling of sources available for the preparation of literature teachers includes Joseph J. Comprone. "Literary Theory and Composition" and Erika Lindenmann and Gary Tate. "Two Views on the Use of Literature in Composition." As should be clear, many of the sources offered that offer to prepare teachers to teach literature focus on how to teach literature in a composition setting.

[iii] For a small sampling of the resources available to elementary and secondary education teachers, see: Janice A. Jipson and Nicholas Paley. "Is There a Base to Today's Literature-Based Reading Programs?"; Steven Z. Anathanases. "Thematic Study of Literature: Middle School Teachers, Professional Development, and Educational Reform"; and Susan Hall. "Improving Practice by Making Tacit Knowledge Explicit." For discussions of literature classroom culture, see Todd DeStigter. "Book Talk: Toward Changing the Culture of Literature Classrooms." Finally, for specific

pedagogical development for the literature teacher, see Eds. Diane Zigo and Regina Dunlavey Derrico. "Book Walk: Works that Move Our Teaching Forward: 'Speaking' the Walk, 'Speaking' the Talk: Embodying Critical Pedagogy to teach Young Adult Literature"; and Emily R. Smith and Dorothea Anagnostopoulos. "Developing Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Literature-Based Discussions in a Cross-Institutional Network." This is a mere sampling of the body of recent critical work dedicated to preparing literature teachers to engage with their students through pedagogical development, assignment development and classroom culture. However, these examples, and the remainder of the body of critical work referred to here, are focused primarily on preparing primary and secondary educators.

[iv] Finders and Rose define "situated performances" as opportunities to provide "instruction in reflective contextualized practices; […] a pedagogical strategy that provides opportunities for prospective teachers to critically take up and reflect on the role of the teacher" (206-7).

[v] For additional readings on the practice of reflection, see Chris Argyris, "Reflection and Beyond in Research on Organizational Learning."

[vi] I am not suggesting that this does not happen informally between colleagues, or even semi-formally in university sanctioned workshops. For example, there is currently a Pedagogy Salon Series at Arizona State University Downtown Campus which a weekly workshop where pedagogues from all disciplines are invited to meet in a space where reflection and group insight is used to bolster individual pedagogies. Instead, I am suggesting that this is currently conducted in circumstances of happenstance, led by

individuals who are interested in pedagogy development, rather than at a university wide level. While the smattering of professional opportunities such as that mentioned here indicate a growing interest, a larger cultural shift recognizing the importance of professional reflection at the university writ large is wanting.

[vii] See for example: Frantz Fanon; Paulo Freire; Henry Giroux; Antonio Gramsci; Jean-Paul Sartre; and Rogoff Vygotsky, to name a few. While these theorists are important to the study of education, they will not be discussed at length in my work.

[viii] See Appendix A for IRB letter granting approval for this research project.

[ix] See Appendix B for Participant Recruitment script.

[x] See Appendix C for Teacher Information Letter.

[xi] It should be noted that my research is in no way evaluative of the teacher participants. My role was not to assess their teaching skills or ability to engage students, but rather it was to identify the different types of effective pedagogical approaches to classroom engagement in order to open a discourse on student engagement specific to the literature classroom.

[xii] See Appendix D for Teacher Pre-Interview Questions.

[xiii] See Appendix E for Teacher Post-Interview Questions.

[xiv] See Appendix F for Student Information Letter.

[xv] See Appendix G for Student Pre-Survey.

[xvi] See Appendix H for Student Post-Survey.

[xvii] See Taylor, P. *The Texts of Paulo Freire*. Buckingham: Open University Press. 1993.

[xviii] The discussion concerning textbook-centered teaching habits is particularly active in tangent with the discussions about "flipping" classrooms and digital education. For resources see Ibrahim, Mohamed and Rebecca Callaway. "Assessing the Correlations Among Cognitive Overload: Online Course Design and Student Self-efficacy" and Beetham, H., and Sharpe, R. (Eds) *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing for 21st Century Learning*.

[xix] The significance of the reading lists and how they are chosen will be covered in depth in Chapter 4.

[xx] According to Staley, the commentator is thought to be Richard Rolle of Hampole, "a well-known spiritual author of the fourteenth century" ("Introduction").

[xxi] The discomfort with which students find themselves experiencing less than stable texts such as *The Book of Margery Kempe* must make us question how we will teach and learn in the classroom as more texts become digital, and, thus, decentralized places of authority and stability. It is interesting also to note here that each time new technology has been introduced (the typewriter, for example) we struggle to overcome our resistance. This latest challenge of digital texts is currently discussed in digital "unconferences" as well as digital journals such as *Hybrid Pedagogy: A Digital Journal of Learning, Teaching, and Technology*. While this pedagogical challenge will not be discussed at length in my dissertation, except in direct discussion of hybrid courses, it warrants further investigation space permitting.

[xxii] Based on my observations of his course, he seems to be referring to texts that offer particular theoretical readings of texts he teaches in class with the term "secondary." I

recognize that the distinction between primary and secondary texts is problematic and suggests another layer of concerns when determining which texts are taught to whom and for what purpose.

[xxiii] For more on digital pedagogy, see Beetham, H., & Sharpe, R. (Eds.). *Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age: Designing for 21st Century Learning*. Routledge. 2013.

[xxiv] See appendices G and H for student survey instruments

[xxv] While all answers are not discussed here, they all prove to be interesting. The key for table 2 is: Broadened knowledge of the topic (A1), Expand cultural or historical understanding (A2), Improve critical thinking skills (A3), Learn strategies for discussing literature (A4), Learn reading strategies (A5), Learn writing strategies (A6), and other (A7).

[xxvi] The key for table 3, "Most Frustrating Elements of Literature Courses in General Compared with Most Frustrating Elements of this Course," is: Group work (A1), Reading material (A2), Writing assignments (A3), Lectures (A4), Classroom discussion (A5), Interaction with texts (A6), Teacher's response to written work (A7), and other (A8).

[xxvii] The key for table 4, "Most Helpful / Useful Things Received in Literature Courses in General Compared with Most Helpful / Useful Things Received in this Course," is: New knowledge of a specific topic (A1), Cultural / historical understanding (A2), Direction in reading literature critically (A3), Direction in writing about literature (A4), and Involved in-class discussion (A5).

[xxviii] The key for table 5, "Most Helpful In-Class Teacher Practice," is: Classroom discussion (A1), Help in reading literature critically (A2), Interaction with texts (A3),

Lectures (A4), Response to written work (A5), Interaction with students (A6), Group work (A7), and other (A8).

[xxix] The key for table 6, "Most Enjoyable Aspects of this Course," is: Reading material (A1), Teacher's interaction with students (A2), Group work (A3), The way the teacher used the texts (A4), In-class discussions (A5), Teacher's response to written work (A6), other (A7), Lectures (A8), and Writing assignments (A9).

[xxx] As a note of potential fault in the survey instruments, there was a pair of questions in the pre/post-surveys that asked students to identify the most helpful thing received in lit classes in general, and then again in their specific course. While "group work" was an optional answer in the pre-survey, it was inexplicably absent in the post-survey choice of answers.

[xxxi] For two instances where this scholarship is taking place, see Council of Writing Program Administrators (www.wpacouncil.org) and Stancliff, Michael, and Maureen Daly Goggin, "What's Theorizing Got to Do With It? Teaching Theory as Resourceful Conflict and Reflection in TA Preparation." *WPA Writing Programs Administration* 30 (2007): 11-28.

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APPENDIX A
IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	Maureen Goggin
	LL
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair
	Soc Beh IRB
Date:	06/22/2011
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	06/22/2011
IRB Protocol #:	1106006532
Study Title:	Texts, Teachers and Transactions

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) (2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.   It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATION RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Student Script:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Maureen Goggin in the English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to study the ways that college level literature teachers teach students in the major.

I am recruiting individuals to fill out pre- and post-surveys which will take approximately 15 minutes each. In addition, I would like to audiotape and observe 4-6 class meetings over the course of the semester. Participants must be 18 and older.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at ASU Dept. of English (480-965-3168).

Teacher Script:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Maureen Goggin in the English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to study the ways that college level literature teachers teach students in the major.

I am recruiting teachers to participate in a 30 minute interview at both the start and end of the fall semester. In addition, I would like to audiotape and observe 4-6 class meetings over the course of the semester. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at ASU Dept. of English (480-965-3168).

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INFORMATION LETTER

August 1, 2011

Dear Instructor;

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Maureen Goggin in the English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to study the ways that college level literature teachers teach students in the major.

I am inviting your participation, which will include a 30 minute interview early in the Fall semester, as well as a 30 minute interview at the end of Fall semester. You may skip any interview questions you do not wish. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. I would also like to observe and audio tape your class in order to distinguish different teaching styles. You will not be recorded, unless you give permission. If you give permission to be taped, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped. The recordings will be digitalized and stored on an external hard drive; all recordings will be destroyed upon transcription.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Participation is in no way connected to your professional performance or professional standing with the university. You must be 18 or older to participate in this study.

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the possible benefits of your participation in the research will be to the university. The university and others may benefit from better understanding how literature teachers conduct their classes, interact with their students, engage the student/text transaction and decide on their teaching strategies. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your interviews, a numerical code indicating which pre-interviews correspond to which post-interviews will be used in lieu of your name. Your responses will be confidential.

I would like to audiotape both pre- and post- semester interviews. The interviews will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do <u>not</u> want the interviews to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. In addition, I would like to audiotape and observe approximately 4 of your class meetings this semester.

Only the Principal Investigator (Maureen Goggin) and the Co-Investigator (Shillana Sanchez) will have access to the interview material or audiotaped class meetings during the completion of this research. The recorded interviews and audiotapes will be destroyed, deleting any electronic copies, after they have been transcribed.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Maureen Goggin, Principal Investigator, ASU Dept. of English (480-965-3168) or Shillana Sanchez, Co-Investigator, ASU Dept. of English (480-965-3168). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please provide a brief educational background including:
   a. What degrees do you hold? Where were they earned?
   b. How long you have taught at ASU? Elsewhere?
   c. What is your professional rank currently?
   d. What kinds of course have you taught?
   e. What is your area of expertise or interest?
2. Do you have an e-reader for your personal or professional use?
3. What or who prepared you to teach literature? Were these formal or informal lessons?
4. How do you select your reading lists? What drives your syllabus design?
5. Do you teach your students how to write about literature as a part of your course design? How?
6. What specific things do you do in the classroom to raise interest and engage your students with:
   a. Classroom discussion?
   b. With individual texts / readings from your syllabus?
   c. With writing assignments?
7. What are the obstacles or frustrations you face in the classroom in terms of engaging your students with:
   a. Classroom discussion?
   b. With individual texts / readings from your syllabus?
   c. With writing assignments?
8. Do you have an explicit pedagogy for teaching literature? If so, what is it?
9. What are your general objectives for your students at the start of the semester? Are these made explicit to the students? How are they conveyed?
10. How do you determine if and when your students have achieved your objectives?
11. Is there anything about your teaching practices, strategy, style, pedagogy, methodology you think is important for me to know?

APPENDIX E

TEACHER POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you rate/describe the level of student engagement this semester with:
    a. Classroom discussion?
    b. Individual texts/readings?
    c. Writing assignments?

2. How would you rate/describe the writing skills of students this semester? Preparedness for this course?
3. How would you rate/describe this particular group of students in comparison to other groups in terms of their understanding of the course material?
4. How would you rate/describe your own teaching practices, strategy, style, pedagogy, methodology this semester in comparison to other semesters?
5. Were your objectives for this course achieved? How do you know?
6. What in-class activity/discussion/reading/writing assignment was particularly successful this semester? Why?
7. What in-class activity/discussion/reading/writing assignment was particularly unsuccessful this semester? Why?
8. How would you recommend preparing future teachers to teach literature at the university?
9. Is there anything about this particular course, this semester that you think is important for me to know?

APPENDIX F

STUDENT INFORMATION LETTER

August 15, 2011
Dear Student:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Maureen Goggin in the English Department at Arizona State University.

I am conducting a research study to study the ways that college level literature teachers teach students in the major. I am inviting your participation, which will involve a 15 minute survey early in the Fall semester, as well as a 15 minute survey at the end of Fall semester.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can skip questions if you wish. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty; participation is in no way connected to your grade for the course and your instructor will not be informed which students have decided not to participate, or if they have withdrawn from the study. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

I would also like to audiotape and observe 4-6 class meetings over the course of the semester. You will not be recorded, unless you give permission. If you give permission to be taped, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped. The recordings will be digitalized and stored on an external hard drive; all recordings will be destroyed upon transcription.

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the possible benefits of your participation in the research will be to the university. The university and others may benefit from better understanding how literature teachers conduct their classes, interact with their students, and decide on their teaching strategies. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential; your responses will be anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known. Results will only be shared in the aggregate form.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Maureen Goggin, Principal Investigator, ASU Dept. of English (480-965-3168) or Shillana Sanchez, Co-Investigator, ASU Dept. of English (480-965-3168). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Return of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.
Sincerely,
Shillana Sanchez

APPENDIX G

STUDENT PRE-SURVEY

Please check all answers that apply. Feel free to expand on any of your answers in the space provided.

1. Why have you selected this course?

☐ It fulfills a requirement for my major

☐ Class meeting time was convenient

☐ Other (explain):

☐ Reputation of instructor

☐ Interest in topic

2. What do you hope to learn from this particular course?

☐ Learn new reading strategies

☐ Learn new writing strategies

☐ Learn new strategies for discussing literature

☐ Other (explain):

☐ Improve my critical thinking skills

☐ Expand a cultural or historical understanding

☐ Broaden my knowledge of this topic

3. Why have you chosen to study literature?

☐ In preparation to work in the field of literature

☐ To expand my cultural and historical understanding

☐ Other (explain):

☐ I haven't – this is not my major

☐ Personal interest in literature

4. What do you find **most helpful** in a teacher's in-class teaching practice?

☐ Help in reading literature critically

☐ Response to my written work

☐ Classroom discussion

☐ Interaction with students

☐ Interaction with texts

☐ Lectures

☐ Group work

☐ Other (explain):

5. What do you find **frustrating** in a literature classroom?

- ☐ Reading material
- ☐ Teachers' response to written work
- ☐ Classroom discussion
- ☐ Interaction with texts
- ☐ Lectures
- ☐ Group work
- ☐ Other (explain):
- ☐ Writing assignments

6. What has been the **most impressionable or useful** thing you've received in a literature course to date?
- ☐ Direction in reading literature critically
- ☐ Direction in writing about literature
- ☐ Involved in-class discussion
- ☐ Cultural / historical understanding
- ☐ Introduction to new reading material
- ☐ New knowledge about the topic
- ☐ Other (explain):

7. Do you have an e-reader for personal use?
  - ☐ Yes   Type:
  - ☐ No

8. Do you access your texts for literature courses online or in an electronic format?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Both

APPENDIX H

STUDENT POST-SURVEY

Please check all answers that apply. Feel free to expand on any of your answers in the space provided.

1. What did you **learn or gain** from this course?
☐ New reading strategies
☐ New writing strategies
☐ New ways to discuss literature
☐ Improved critical thinking skills

☐ Broadened knowledge of this topic
☐ Expanded cultural or historical understanding
☐ Other (explain):

2. What was the **most helpful and/or useful** thing you received in this course?
☐ Direction in reading literature critically
☐ Direction in writing about literature
☐ Improved critical thinking skills
☐ Other (explain):

☐ Involved in-class discussion
☐ New knowledge about the topic
☐ Cultural / historical understanding

3. What aspects of this course did you **enjoy** the most?
☐ Reading material
☐ Writing assignments
☐ Teacher's response to written work
☐ Teacher's interaction with students
☐ In-class discussions
☐ Other (explain):

☐ The way the teacher used the texts
☐ Lectures
☐ Group work

4. What, if anything, did you find **frustrating** in this course?
☐ Reading material
☐ Writing assignments
☐ Teachers' response to written work
☐ Teacher's interaction with students
☐ Other (explain):
☐ In-class discussion
☐ The way the teacher used the texts
☐ Lectures
☐ Group work

5. Which was your favorite reading and why?

6. Which was your least favorite reading and why?

7. Did you access your texts for this class online and/or in an electronic format?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No