

7-5-2012

# I felt like the enemy and the savior all at once': English teacher identity in a methods course wiki

Michelle Jewett

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**“I FELT LIKE THE ENEMY AND THE SAVIOR ALL AT  
ONCE”: ENGLISH TEACHER IDENTITY IN A METHODS  
COURSE WIKI**

**by**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2012**

## **DEDICATION**

In memory of Cheri Lynne Jewett

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thank you to Dr. Don Zancanella, my advisor and dissertation chair, for his support and wisdom. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Penny Pence, Dr. Laura Haniford, and Dr. Janet Alsup. Gratitude to all the methods students in this study; thank you for allowing me into your teaching lives. To my husband, Steven, and sons, Elias and Kai: all my love.

**“I FELT LIKE THE ENEMY AND THE SAVIOR ALL AT ONCE”: ENGLISH TEACHER IDENTITY IN A METHODS COURSE WIKI**

by

**Michelle Ann Jewett**

**B.A., ENGLISH CREATIVE WRITING  
M.A., ENGLISH LITERATURE  
PH.D., LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND SOCIOCULTURAL  
STUDIES**

**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the identity constructions of two cohorts of preservice teachers enrolled in English methods courses during a semester of field experience. This research employs a qualitative methodology and documents the nature of participant’s responses posted to online wiki forum. Data sources include archived electronic interactions and course assignments such as reflective journals. Constant-comparative method as described by Creswell (2007), content analysis as described by Marshall & Rossman (2006), and Gee’s (2003) notion of affinity identity are used to examine the discourses and ideologies of methods students as they construct notions of English teacher identity. Study findings indicate a focus on the social practices of the domain of teaching secondary English and an absence of English Language Arts pedagogy and content, suggesting that developing teachers perceive the identity of an English teacher as a solitary, selfless giver who is responsible for nearly every aspect of classroom experience and interaction.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Developing a teacher identity in any discipline is not as simple as acquiring new vocabulary or rules for behavior; the trajectory from neophyte student teacher to expert instructor is not a linear, unproblematic path (Britzman, 2003; Alsup, 2006). Crafting a teacher identity while learning to teach is a struggle “to borrow, to negotiate, to claim ownership, and to take up that which seems already completed” (Britzman, 1994, p. 54). However, the identity of an English teacher is further complicated by social and institutional associations and expectations, both real and imagined, that often restrict and predetermine the roles available for developing secondary teachers (Carter, 2009).

Unlike other disciplines, English teachers are the “mediators of literacy and culture” and therefore “in the implicitly ethical position of ‘norming’ for students the ways in which language and literacy matter in America” (Staunton, 2008, p. 22). This humanist gatekeeper role is oftentimes the reason young English majors are attracted to the teaching of our discipline. But, the associated responsibility implicit in this role can limit and control the identities available to English teachers. Perhaps for this reason, secondary English teacher identity, more than any other discipline, is steeped in ideologies and “identity politics” (Zemblyas, 2003).

In the past fifteen years, anthropologists, sociologists, cultural theorists, educationists and others have become increasingly interested in teacher identity, its process and characteristics, resulting in the emergence of a new separate area of research (Beijaard et al., 2004). Essential to this research, is the sociocultural understanding that teacher identities are produced by, and in turn produce, teachers through multiple

discourses (Britzman, 2003). Becoming a teacher is viewed as an identity forming process where one engages in dialogical practices with others to author oneself (Danielewicz, 2001). “We borrow the very thing we feel authored by and that we then author” (Britzman Foreword in Alsup, 2006, p. xi). This process is often associated with Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “authoring of self”. Furthermore, because social structures position people in ways that reproduce societal norms and conventions (Fairclough, 1989), teacher identity is a social and ideological process that occurs through and is affected by participation in individual and local discourses as well as larger social, cultural, and institutional discursive practices (Gee, 2001).

### English: A History of Contested Ideologies

Since its inception by the Committee of Ten in 1893, the school subject we call English has been a contested, conglomeration of disparate fields with a discordant past (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006). With its history in rhetoric, reading, oratory, grammar and literature, the discipline has always been characterized by “competing viewpoints as to the ultimate purpose of knowing, learning, and teaching English” (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006, p. 47). In this century alone, English has been the home of many debates, primary among them, and the normative versus transformative curricular movements. The “cultural literacy” and “standards” movements of the 1970’s and 1990’s are two examples of normative movements that purported to uphold the Western values and cultural heritage of the status quo. In contrast, John Dewey and the Progressive Movement of the 1920’s and 30’s and Paulo Freire’s neoprogressive movement in the 1970’s both promoted transformative curriculum such as schooling for positive social change and democracy (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006).

There are many interpretations and historical accounts explaining why English continues to struggle under the weight of disciplinary expectations. However, one point of agreement remains consistent in these various accounts: the preeminent role of canonical texts in English classrooms (Brauer & Clark, 2008). Again, there are many explanations as to why the canon is still central in high school and college curriculum, as well as debates regarding its true purpose. But, many hold that the centrality of the canon stems from an implicit moral purpose of English teaching “based on the assumption that reading the great works of the literary canon would enrich the spirit and enlighten one’s taste as well as sharpen the mind” (Mayher, 1990, p. 16). Others counter that this idea of literature as scripture has outlived its usefulness, and call for a shift from the consumption to the production texts (Scholes, 1998) if not a radical rethinking of a fractured discipline (Yagelski, 2005; Luke, 2004; Tremmel, 2006).

The contested nature of our discipline can pose problems for novice teachers as well as their teacher educators (Meyer & Sawyer, 2006). This curricular dissonance does not ease the job of an English educator, nor does it translate into a seamless identity for developing secondary English teachers to “take up” with ease. “After more than a century of debate, it would seem that secondary English still suffers from an identity crisis” (Brauer & Clark, 2008, p. 294). This dissertation examines English teacher identity as constructed by two cohorts of methods students during their first semester of field experience in a large Southwestern university. In particular, analysis focuses on the online wiki discourses of participants as they construct beliefs about what an English teacher is or should be in the content of an English Methods course.

## The English Methods Course

In 1995, Smagorinsky and Whiting published *How English Teachers Get Taught: Methods of Teaching The Methods Class*. Prior to this publication, very little was known about how students in the undergraduate secondary English methods course were being taught in this country. In an effort to gain a preliminary understanding, Smagorinsky and Whiting examined 81 course syllabi from a broad range of public universities to see how these classes were generally organized, what books students were reading, what types of activities and assessments were given, and what theoretical approaches were evident in the class. From extensive analysis, the authors were able to provide a descriptive snapshot of common features of the English methods course. For example, the most common approach is the survey methods course. Here, students experience an introduction to as many issues as possible via multiple brief assignments so that they are exposed to a range of topics that they will encounter in their careers. Compared to other approaches, such as the workshop model or a reflective approach, the authors argue that the survey methods course has the least potential for preparing students for professional life.

The types of assessment and activities used in methods courses varied widely. For example: situated learning such as field experience, teaching demonstrations, working with students, simulating professional situations, tying instruction to state requirements, joining professional organizations, classroom research, analyzing professional materials, keeping reflective logs or journals, giving mini-lessons, writing lesson and unit plans of differing lengths, exams, portfolios, reports on literature, collaborative activities, analysis of teaching, and more. Smagorinsky and Whiting found that English educators' decisions about which type of activity to use were often determined by course textbooks. The

authors classify these texts to determine the major theoretical positions associated with each course. Methods texts most commonly come from a Piagetian or natural development approach. Other approaches represented in the syllabi include, but are not limited to, transactional theories of literary response, sociocultural perspectives on learning, and language as process.

Smagorinsky and Whiting conclude that with so many varying activities, approaches, and texts, English educators run the risk of turning the methods course into a “grab bag of ideas.” Although this study is over 15 years old, it reveals much about the state of the methods course, a course that has not been taken seriously according to the authors. They add that the education profession has exacerbated this perception by “treating the methods course so lightly that we have little formal knowledge about the ways in which it is taught” and therefore, English educators must “begin to discuss the teaching of preservice teachers as a meaningful, theoretically motivated, and important activity” (p. 111).

In 2006, Smagorinsky and others revisited the methods course in a report from the Conference on English Education (CEE), *Reconstructing English Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. From this Summit in Atlanta, Dickson et al (2006) published, “Are methods enough? Situating English education programs within the multiple settings of learning to teach.” According to the article, not enough has changed; teacher education programs tend to represent a “cafeteria style” approach and many courses still suffer from “structural fragmentation” (p. 314). The authors contend the need for programmatic coherence and disciplinary conversations within and beyond the methods course to address new problems facing teacher education such as governmental mandates, testing,

and increased pressures to certify teachers using alternative routes (p. 319). Dickson et al believe this will require investigating the effects of teacher preparation, examining the nature of learning, valuing field work, teaching purposeful observation, and initiating political “calls to action” with students and colleagues. Similar to Smagorinsky and Whiting’s findings, the authors state, “perhaps we have not done enough to articulate for ourselves and the public what we know about the substance and usefulness of our own courses and programs” (p. 321).

In an effort to provide support and cohesion, CEE also published a position statement: “What Do We Know and Believe about the Roles of Methods Courses and Field Experiences in English Education?” from the 2005 Atlanta Summit. Belief statements about programs, course work and field experience are detailed in this document, including possible implementation ideas and resources for further reading. Regarding methods course work, belief statements are as follows:

“Instruction that addresses the teaching of English language arts:

- infuses core principles of content, pedagogy, and professionalism and provides opportunities for practice, reflection, and growth.
- emphasizes that teaching and learning are social practices influenced by specific contexts.
- attends to diverse texts and literacy practices.
- fosters understanding of the teacher candidate’s shift of role from student to teacher.
- prepares teacher candidates to choose appropriate materials, methods, and assessments which promote and enhance student learning.



- enables teacher candidates to articulate rationales for pedagogical choices.
- supports teacher candidates in becoming proactive in their own teaching and professional lives.
- promotes reflective inquiry informed by firsthand experiences” (p. 4-7).

Although the development of teacher identity is not included in these belief statements, Chapter Three will connect some of these goals, such as reflective inquiry and articulating rationales, to concepts of teacher identity. Forthcoming research will also argue for more explicit identity work in the methods course.

### Background

In the 2008 and 2009 fall semesters at a large public university in the southwestern United States, two cohorts of preservice English Education students participated in an English methods course wiki. During this time, participants were also beginning their field experience. As the instructor, I designed a course wiki as a place for students to post assignments and extend the classroom experience beyond our one-day per week class meeting. While students were expected to post assignments and discuss course readings each week, participation evolved into other types of optional, but related interactions. While this use was an atypical application of the wiki interface (which is designed for collaborative writing more than social networking), one student put it best when she described the course wiki as “a mini Facebook just for our class.”

The framework of this study is based on poststructural notions of a decentralized and socially constructed self that is fragmented and fluid: a paradigm that finds an ideal home in the transitional space of the Internet. In fact, online experiences provide multiple and flexible models of reality that acknowledge and encourage this constructed nature of

identity, making it a “significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life” (Turkle, 1995, p. 180). This study does not focus on the nature of online environments in general, or on the structure and function of wikis. Rather, it makes use of student contributions to a class wiki as data. Therefore, it is not a study about wikis or online environments, but it does view identity construction within the context of the wiki.

While there are many ways to approach investigations into teacher identity such as studying images, metaphors, and concepts of self or by examining the enactment of specific “teacher-like” behaviors in the field, this study investigates English teacher identity by examining what the participants themselves deem important. These identity constructions emerge from methods students’ discourses about their expectations, experiences, and perceptions in the field. Specifically, I focus on the ways in which methods students construct the identity of an English teacher by analyzing different wiki assignments, including Reflection Wheel Journals (RWJ) and student discussions. It’s important to note that the wiki assignments were not designed to construct or analyze English teacher identity, but to initiate reflection on classroom experiences and prompt text-based discussion beyond the classroom. However, because becoming a teacher is an sociocultural and identity forming process, methods students’ notions of English teacher identity were present within and revealed by these online discourses.

### Research Questions

This study investigates preservice teachers’ construction of secondary English teacher identity as expressed in a methods course wiki using the following research questions to guide inquiry:

- 1) How do methods students perceive the identity of an English teacher?
- 2) What ideologies are present in methods students' discourses of English teacher identity?

### Significance of the Study

There is much to be gained from a greater understanding of teacher identity, particularly how it relates to English Education and what is both believed and communicated when one states, "I'm an English teacher." Identifying the features of novice teachers' new identity, as well as investigating the experiences and discourses that shape these constructions, is a valuable tool for teacher educators. In a review of identity literature, Beauchamp et al (2009) found that despite the wealth of research, there remains a need to more effectively address identity in teacher education. Luehmann (2007) argues that teacher education must look beyond the building of teacher knowledge and address the development of professional identity if it hopes to have any impact on curricular reform. "Learning the 'skills' of teaching and disciplinary content, although important, is not enough to create a happy and successful secondary school teacher" (Alsup, 2006, p. xiii). With nearly 50% of new teachers leaving the profession by the end of their fifth year (Ingersoll, 1995), Alsup continues, "we must bring issues of identity into the methods class if we want to slow the exodus of young teachers from the profession" (Alsup, 2006, p. xiii).

Becoming a teacher is a nuanced and gradual process. It spans years not months and occurs in both overt and implicit ways. However, because student teaching is a crucial period in the development of a teacher, studying discourses at this pivotal time offers a snapshot during this complex process. Britzman (1994) believes that field

experience is especially fertile ground for investigating teacher identity because this is when novices begin to “speak and act as subjects from within a discursive field that they did not set up” (Britzman, 1994, p. 61). She explains:

Cultural stories can narrate the painful and private moments when student teachers fall back on useless routines, become confused or anxious when things do not go as planned. . . . To study the cultural stories of student teaching, then, is to study the uncanny, the creepy detours, the uneasy alliances, and the obvious clashes between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses. (p. 59)

“Acknowledged or not, questions of character and identity and not only technical skill, have always been center stage in teacher education,” (Bullough, 2005, p. 143).

Because teaching emerges from inner life, self-knowledge is central to being and becoming a teacher (Palmer, 1998). “The things teachers stand for define who they are” such as what they consider “good” or “valuable” “what ought to be done” and what they “endorse or oppose” (Bullough, 2005, p. 144). According to Bullough, “identity is...a framework for action and the personal grounding of practice” and therefore, the challenges of teacher induction and identity must include “determining how (teachers) will be for and with others” (Bullough, 2005, p. 144).

This dissertation is exploratory in nature; with it I seek to better understand secondary English teacher identity by exploring methods students’ discourses regarding what they find “good” “valuable” and “what ought to be done” in their new profession. What methods students “stand for” and how they “will be for and with others” in the English classroom is part of constructing a teacher identity, an identity that in turn,

frames action and grounds practice; this self-authoring process is sociocultural and ideological, with subsequent implications for secondary students.

It is my hope that by gaining a better understanding of novice teachers' construction of English teacher identity, what they "take up" yet "seems already completed" (Britzman, 1994), teacher educators can exert greater influence in this complex process, a process that is already influenced by many competing discourses. This might be through the development of critical identity assignments, revised English methods courses, or lead to related areas for further teacher identity research. A greater understanding of the discourses and associated ideologies that shape English teacher identity may also allow teacher educators to disrupt predetermined identities and revise some of the institutional and social forces that have been known to limit and alienate developing teachers in the past. As Jackson (2009) explains:

"When we see how certain structures and discourses get produced and regulated (and others silenced), then we might contest them, reconfigure them, and make space for new ways of learning to teach that reward difference rather than identity. It is then that we can give up the idea of expecting a predetermined teacher "self" to emerge from a linear path of the student teaching experience and instead open up new possibilities of multiple and contingent knowledges, experiences, and subjectivities that are productive in the making of a teacher" (p. 396).

### Organization of the Study

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. Chapter One describes the problem under investigation and the questions that guide it. In Chapter Two, I present a review of

relevant literature that informs and contextualizes this study. Chapter Three includes a discussion of research design and methods, data analysis and theoretical frame. Chapter Four is the analytic narrative of the wiki data, with a discussion of emergent themes. Chapter Five provides a summary of findings, analysis, and implications for research.

### Definition of Terms

The following section is a list of terms and definitions used in this dissertation. These are included to clarify vocabulary used throughout this study as well as to explain some of the associated theoretical concepts upon which this study is based.

#### *Discourse*

The term discourse used here draws from Foucault's (1972) discursive regimes: the understanding that all of our experiences, and understandings of these experiences, and consequently how we understand ourselves *through* these experiences, occur in language. Thus, discourse is historical, cultural, socially constructed, and enacted by individual narratives and trajectories (Gee, 2001). Furthermore, because discourse is relational and therefore unstable, it is an interpretation as well as in need of interpretation (Smith & Watson, 2001). While discourse is, by definition, tied to the production and reinforcement of power, Foucault recognizes that through exposure, discourse can also undermine and thwart power. Discourse is "never just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world" (St. Pierre in Jackson, 2001, p. 396). For this reason, as it is used in this study, discourse is not wholly disembodied and deterministic, but embedded in experience and provides opportunities for resistance through exposure and critique. In Chapter Four themes from wiki data are drawn from methods students' discourses about what it means to be a secondary English teacher.

## *Identity*

Foremost, identity in this study relies on a poststructural and sociocultural definition taken from the work of Smith and Watson (2001) who describe identity as cultural, historical, relational, always in process and fluid in nature; multiple, contextual, and unstable, situated in power relations, and constructed in language. Methods students' constructions of English teacher identity are revealed in their discourses about what they "endorse or oppose" in the classroom, including beliefs and descriptions of the behaviors they think teachers should engage in with students. These "insider" discourses about "what ought to be done" in the classroom and what English teachers "stand for" point to James Gee's (2003) concept of "Affinity Identity." Affinity Identity is key in this study as it is a useful way to view the socially and contextually embedded identity methods students "take up" as they become English teachers.

Gee (2001) outlines four interrelated perspectives or "ways to view identity" or "what it means to be a certain kind of person": Nature-Identity (N-Identities are "states" of being not chosen and based on nature), Institutional-Identity (I-Identities are based on positions occupied in society), Discourse-Identity (D-Identities are recognized by others as individual accomplishments) and Affinity Identity (A-Identity are based on experiences and practices we share with affinity groups). While all of these perspectives overlap and are likely a part of methods students' discourses, the principles of A-Identity appear to figure most prominently given that participants share an affinity group: secondary English preservice teachers in a methods course during in field experience.

### *Affinity Group*

According to Gee literate members of a particular affinity group can identify one another in ways non-members cannot. Another way to think of affinity groups is “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991) which refers to relations of people who have in common a shared ability and interest in a given practice. We are all part of many affinity groups at any given time. Gee explains affinity group this way:

“People in an affinity group can recognize others as more or less ‘insiders’ to the group via shared endeavors, goals and practices. They may not see many people in the group face-to-face, but when they interact with someone on the Internet or read something about the domain, they can recognize certain ways of thinking, writing, valuing, and believing as well as the typical sorts of social practices associated within a given semiotic domain” (Gee, 2003, p. 27).

By nature of my methods class, the course wiki, and field experience, participants in this study are members of a very specific affinity group made up of cooperating teachers and fellow student teachers in the methods course and on the wiki. As members of this affinity group, methods students are joined in the shared goals, practices and endeavor of becoming an English teacher. However, being a member of an affinity group includes recognizing the “ways of thinking, writing, valuing, believing” and “social practices” associated with its semiotic domain. In this case, that domain is teaching secondary English.

### *Semiotic Domain*

Just as we are members of many different affinity groups, we are also participants in many associated semiotic domains. Members of an affinity group (such as English



teachers) determine “how one will be for and with others” (Bullough, 2005, p. 144) by developing and enacting specific kinds of English teacher work and adopting corresponding language, ideas, and strategies to perform that work; this is done by acquiring the associated semiotic domain. Gee defines semiotic domain as “any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities (e.g., oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs, artifacts, etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings”; he lists first-person shooter games, modernist painting, cellular biology, and midwifery among his examples (Gee, 2003, p. 18). According to Gee “semiotic domains encourage people new to them to take on and play with new identities” (p. 51).

The taking on of domains Gee likens to becoming “literate” in a given semiotic domain. He explains, “if we think first in terms of semiotic domains and not in terms of reading and writing as traditionally conceived, we can say that people are (or are not) literate (partially or fully) in a domain if they can recognize (the equivalent of ‘reading’) and/or produce (the equivalent of ‘writing’) meanings in the domain” (p. 19). This “reading” and “writing” (or recognition and production) of meaning in the semiotic domain requires “taking on” discourses and practices and learning “what teachers stand for” (Bullough, 2005, p. 144) Furthermore, “all learning in all semiotic domains requires identity work. It requires taking on a new identity and forming bridges from one’s old identities to the new one” (Gee, 2003, p. 51). Thus, methods students’ reading/identifying and writing/enacting the domain of teaching secondary English allows them to construct an associated English teacher affinity identity.

As forthcoming analysis shows, methods students in this study “take on” the associated A-identity of English teacher by recognizing and producing what Gee calls the “internal and external design grammar” of the semiotic domain. But, this process is not simple or without dissonance. In fact, without what Gee calls “meta-level thinking about semiotic domains” (i.e. active learning and critical thinking about the relationships between the semiotic domain being learned and other semiotic domains), this process of becoming literate in a new domain can be challenged if not jarring. To be explained in greater detail in Chapter Four, this type of meta-awareness between domains occurs in instances of what I come to call “push back” in methods students’ discourses. Of course, some domains can be more “loaded” than others; where boundaries are particularly contentious or blurry and where social, institutional, disciplinary powers exert tremendous influence. This dissertation is therefore its own attempt at meta-level thinking about the semiotic domain of teaching secondary English.

#### *External/Internal Design Grammar*

What literate members of a semiotic domain are “reading” in order to distinguish insiders is what Gee calls “external design grammar” and defines as “the principles and patterns in terms of what one can recognize as what is and is not acceptable or typical social practice and identity in response to the affinity group associated with a semiotic domain” (p. 30). Knowing the external design grammar of a semiotic domain like teaching secondary English means one can answer questions (modified from Gee) such as: Do you know what counts as thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing like someone who is into teaching secondary English? Can you recognize the sorts of identities people take on when they are teaching secondary English? Can you recognize what counts as

valued social practices to members of the affinity group associated with the semiotic domain of teaching secondary English and what counts as behaving appropriately in these social practices?

Literate members of a semiotic domain also “write” “internal design grammar” which is defined by Gee as “principles and patterns in terms of what one can recognize what is and is not acceptable or typical *content* in a semiotic domain” (p. 30). Knowing the internal design grammar of teaching secondary English means one can answer questions (again, modified from Gee) such as: What sorts of practices/curricula/pedagogy count as typical or atypical of secondary English teaching? What sorts of practices/curricula/ pedagogy are English teachers likely to find most valuable (or least) and for what reasons? Note that “content” as it is used by Gee here is not referring to disciplinary content per se, but to the general content of whatever domain is being learned (for example, learning the content of a video game in the domain of first-person shooter games). However, the concept of internal design grammar as it is used in this study, does encompass this discipline-specific definition because it is the content of this particular domain, teaching secondary English.

In Chapter Four, analysis of wiki discourses show how methods students “read” and “write” the internal and external design grammars of the domain and in doing so, become literate in teaching secondary English. This results in methods students “taking on” the associated A-Identity of secondary English teacher. Note that this constructed identity remains relational, social, contextual, and in process and in this study, the ascribed A-Identity is a unique snapshot in space and time of methods students in the wiki during field experience. Further, the associated identity described in this study is

certain to have evolved as each participant finished the course and presumably moved on with her career; new teaching experiences and greater interaction with colleagues leads to an ever-widening English teacher affinity group and therefore an fluid and evolving A-identity.

### *Ideology*

Ideology as it is appears in this study is embedded within discourse and tied to identity. I draw upon Althusser's (1970) theory, which states that material institutions, rituals, and discourses produce the values, desires, beliefs, choices, thoughts, and intentions that make up our social practices. Althusser recognized that it is our institutions (familial, religious, educational, state and social services, and so on) that have the power to limit and impose social roles and "conform subjects to particular behaviors, beliefs, and identities" (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 42). Most importantly, because we perceive our ideologies as the natural order of things, their power and influence are hidden and self-produced.

### *Methods Student*

The term methods student is used interchangeably with similar terms such as: preservice teacher, developing teacher, novice teacher, and student teacher as well as the more general term, participants. This term refers to secondary English Education students enrolled in the *Teaching of English* methods course who took part in the wiki during the first semester of their field placement.

### *Sociocultural*

Because identity research is interdisciplinary by nature, it's important to situate this study and explain the tradition from which it has emerged. Specifically, this

sociocultural inquiry relies on the American sociolinguistic tradition of Hymes (1974) with a focus on the role of language and communication in cultural practices.

### *Wiki*

Wikis are dynamic web pages that can be created and edited by anyone with a web browser. For this study, methods students participated on a methods course wiki that I designed using a free site called Wetpaint wiki. This was a closed wiki determined by class membership and students were required to post assignments to the online forum multiple times each week.

### *Wiki Posts*

The term wiki post is used interchangeably with words such as: comments, threads, reflections, online responses, or discussions. These terms are used to describe different types of written responses, both required and optional, made by student participants on the course wiki. These took one of three forms that will be discussed in more detail in chapter three: 1) assigned, open-ended, text-based responses to course readings, 2) assigned and scaffolded reflections on field experiences, and 3) unassigned, open form, student directed discussions.

In the next chapter, the *Review of Related Literature* will offer a more comprehensive analysis of key influences to this study as well as how this study differs from other related research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

#### Teacher Identity

In the past, the humanist notion of identity was understood as bounded individuality, consistent and purposeful in thought and action, and by extension, a teacher's identity was viewed as a fixed "repository of particular experiences in classrooms and schools, the site of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and values" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 107). More recently, poststructuralists have defined identity as much more subjective and fluid, situated in experience and discourse and therefore not unified or stable (Zembylas, 2003). This means there is no one core "teacher identity" to be crafted and then perhaps later, dissected and understood by researchers and teacher educators. Instead, if one wants to better understand the "teacher-self" one must look at how teacher identity is "constituted through social interactions, performances, and daily interactions within a school culture" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 109).

In his seminal work on the inner life of teachers, Parker Palmer argues that self-knowledge is a prerequisite to knowing one's subject matter and students, and that identity and integrity, not technique or methods, are essential to becoming a 'good' teacher. It follows that if teacher educators want to impact a developing teacher's growth and identity, we must "do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives" (Palmer, 1998, p. 12). This 'talk' is dynamic, relational and a "discursive counterpart of lived experience" (Sfard and Prusak, 2005, p. 17). Although there seems to be little doubt that as preservice teachers move through their education programs and into positions in schools they undergo a shift in identity and that therefore,

identity formation is important to teacher education and development, there is less consensus as to how this process works, its characteristics and development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

### *Teacher Identity Research*

In Beauchamp & Thomas' (2009) "Understanding Teacher Identity: An Overview of Issues in the Literature and Implications for Teacher Education" the authors identify the following overlapping issues common to investigations in teacher identity:

- The connection between identity and self
- The role of emotions
- The role of stories and discourse
- The role of reflection
- The link between agency and identity
- Contextual factors that promote or hinder identity construction
- The responsibility of teacher education programs to shape identity construction for developing teachers

However, the authors note that different researchers offer differing reasons for why teacher identity matters. Some use it as a frame or analytic lens to examine teaching, others use it as an organizing element for professional lives, and still others, as a resource for teachers to explain, justify or understand themselves in world. In a 2004 review of recent research, Beijaard et al found that studies on teachers' professional identity could be divided up into three categories: 1) focus on identity formation, 2) focus on associated characteristic identification and 3) focus on representations within teachers' stories.

Below are examples of some of this work and the research addressing many of these issues.

Current research on teacher identity explores a number of differing approaches for understanding this process. For example, some examinations involve looking at the central role emotions play in the development of teacher identity via emotional discourses (Zembylas, 2003) and the reporting out of mental states (Vasquez & Urzua, 2009). Or, some examine how teachers use narrative (Britzman, 2003; Watson, 2006, 2007) and metaphor (Alsup, 2003, 2006) to perform and construct their identities. Others explore how previous perceptions and beliefs about teaching impact preservice teacher identity (Friedrichsen et al, 2008) via reflection (Walkington, 2005) and performance (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Stillwagon, 2008).

Because a teacher's identity provides her with a sense of purpose and motivation and creates self-efficacy and job satisfaction, it has serious consequences for teacher practice, education and research (Day et al., 2006). Many studies have investigated how competing discourses (e.g., personal versus professional, sociocultural versus pedagogical, teaching versus mentoring) impact new teachers' sense of self (Britzman, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Marsh, 2002a, 2002b; Seifert, 2004) and examined better ways to design teacher experience and curricula to aid in identity development (Alsup, 2003, 2006; Franzak, 2002; Kim, 2003). Other studies have focused on identity as it relates to teaching dilemmas and conflict (Enyedy et al., 2005; Jackson, 2001), identity-as-narrative (Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Tatsis, 2011), the impact of co-teaching (Gilmore et al., 2009), and ways that identity relates to the sociocultural discourses of specific subject matter (Barty, 2004) and reform (Leuhmann, 2007).



There are varying opinions and interpretations of what we mean when we talk about teacher identity and more specifically, about which factors are more influential in the process of constructing it. However, one constant in research on teacher identity is the understanding that it is formed by relationships, internal and external, which in turn shape and are shaped by a wider, sociocultural or collective teacher identity (Barty, 2004). This collective identity is deeply tied to preconceptions teachers first bring to the profession based on a lifetime of experiences in the classroom as a student. Many researchers have used identity as a framework to explain how the discourses of a student's past have greatly influenced their teaching selves as they learn to become teachers. Thus, in the process of becoming a teacher, preservice teachers must become aware of these biases and reflect on the external and internal discourses that work to shape teacher identity, individually and collectively (Barty, 2004).

Miller Marsh (2002) conducted one such study in an effort to show how developing teachers are strongly influenced by their previous experiences as students and therefore, how their identities are rooted in both historical and current constructs of power. In this study, Miller Marsh challenged her Binghamton University preservice teachers to address some of their identity biases through the use of a series of group collaborative grading tasks. In an effort to explore the connection between teachers' pedagogical decisions and their identities, Miller Marsh's (2002) reflective assignments forced her education students to shift from a more traditional child-centered discourse to a sociocultural and critical discourse. As in this study, Miller Marsh believed that by exposing the power and identity issues inherent in teacher's discourses, choice and agency might play a greater role in the process of teacher education.

In another study of power and discourse as it relates to teacher identity, Jackson's (2001) "Multiple Annies: Feminist Poststructural Theory and the Making of a Teacher" follows the experiences of one student teacher as she participates in two very different field placements. Jackson served as Annie's supervisor and met with her regularly; data included both formal and informal conversations and interviews, classroom observations, phone calls and emails over the course of the semester. In a deconstruction of Annie's experiences and the subsequent competing discourses she encountered in her placements, Jackson concludes that the power of institutions, normative structures, and conflicting discourses produce teacher subjectivities and that these subjectivities require interpretation, exposure and critique by teacher educators.

#### *Teacher Identity Research Online*

Literature on teacher identity development as it occurs in online settings is not prolific, but it does exist. For example, the use of virtual practicum experiences were used to supplement existing classroom experiences and support identity development in Carrington et al's (2008) study of literacy teachers. Other studies have investigated teacher identity online, as well. For example, how online discussion positively impacts Social Studies content learning in teacher education courses (Courtney, 2009), how teachers tell stories during online lectures to establish identity (McShane, 2000), and how the use of case work and collaboration builds professional identity (Grion & Varisco, 2007; Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Wheeler et al., 2005).

In a doctoral dissertation with many similarities to my study, Lori Assaf (2003) examines the ways in which preservice teachers in an elementary education reading program construct their professional identities via participation in an online bulletin

board. Over the course of three semesters Assaf (2003) follows the work of six developing teachers using a cross-case study analysis to examine teacher identity development. Her data consists of online interaction, as well as interviews, reflective journals and electronic portfolios. In keeping with findings discussed above, Assaf (2003) states that computer mediated communication, by nature of its personalized mode and community-based structure, extends classroom learning and promotes collaborative reflection. In addition, she finds that the online platform provides a supportive forum for the authoring of identity. This process is messy however, and requires that preservice teachers negotiate multiple identities at a time (including a group identity). Assaf (2003) shows this negotiation to be difficult and unique to individual learners' practical experiences in the field as well as their facility to negotiate a variety of knowledge sources (personal, narrative, theoretical, academic, etc.). These personal and collective resources influence how developing teachers interpret course readings, classroom behavior, pedagogical decisions, and subsequently, perceptions of the professional self.

Assaf (2003) found that preservice teachers utilized four tools in their identity development: 1) personal beliefs, histories and knowledge, 2) telling stories, use of narrative writing, 3) application of field experience to practice, and 4) authentic voice to author the self as a teacher. The study concludes that the online learning environment provided a space for developing teachers to participate in a discourse community and in doing so, created conditions ideal for teacher identity development. Specifically, it extended the learning experience by providing a space for sustained conversations beyond the traditional classroom walls. Furthermore, the safe and supervised online environment became an effective tool for individual and collective reflection, enabling

the social construction of identity and group identity, particularly via the use of personal experience, stories, application of field practice and voice.

The use of wikis and other Web 2.0 applications as a tool for the facilitation of teacher identity development seems under-utilized and appears to be under studied. In the research culled for this literature review, additional identity-related potentialities wrought by this medium emerge. For example, in “On line Collaboration for Building a Teacher Professional Identity” a quantitative study by Grion & Varisco (2007), the authors found that novice and expert teachers differ dramatically in their flexibility for personal, social and professional identity change.

In pre and post text analysis of asynchronous online case-based discussions and problem-solving tasks conducted by 56 female students and/or teachers (with varying degrees of experience ranging from preservice to beginning (1-3 years) to expert), Grion and Varisco (2007) coded sequences related to social, cognitive and teacher speech. Statements were analyzed at four levels: 1) teacher perspective (e.g., teacher-focused, child-focused, inclusive), 2) consequences of action (e.g., for only students, only teachers, teachers and students, others outside the school), 3) assumptions about teaching (e.g., things taken for granted or not, awareness of lack of), 4) patterns of wholeheartedness (e.g., teacher-directed learning, education as interactive process, education as a complex and interactive process). All four factors were viewed as aspects of critical reflection, open-mindedness and responsibility and determined to be profession-related qualities and competencies, attitudes and feelings connected to teacher identity.

The study found that novice teachers were more flexible and willing to modify emergent professional identities and more likely to connect issues and problems with authoritative and theoretical sources than their in-service, expert teacher-peers. This research corroborates previously discussed findings about lack of theoretical reasoning in teachers' online discussions (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007), but also introduces new information about the apparent advantages of online learning for developing identity in novice teachers. The authors conclude that in order to enable real professional change, we must provide opportunities for authentic critical reflection by fostering a “novice state of mind, trust, sharing, individual and group learning” (p. 281). The unique features of online environments do not guarantee this, but appear to encourage it depending on the participant's willingness to invest in the process.

In her study of a blog (weblog or type of online reflective journal) maintained by a fifth year secondary science teacher identified as Ms. Frizzle, Luehmann (2008) found critical elements of identity work at play. Despite her non-novice status, Ms. Frizzle adopts a “novice state of mind” in her blog posts using the online forum to: tell personal and classroom based stories, foster professional community, explore a variety of sub-identities (e.g., self-as-learner, mentor, social justice advocate) and participate in a larger professional discourse. However, all of this identity work is contingent upon Ms. Frizzle's investment in the process of blogging, which according to Luehmann (2008) is extensive. Types of investment identified in Ms. Frizzle's work include time and effort, personal, intellectual, social, ideological, pedagogical, and advocacy; these investments offer a myriad of professional dividends that support identity work. Luehmann (2008) concludes that although the online environment creates a forum for identity development,

in simplest terms, participants' get as much out of the process as they are willing to put in.

In an effort to explore whether or not identity presented via online learning influences professional practice, Wheeler et al (2005) conducted a case study examination of six primary teachers at differing levels of practice. Using interviews and analyzing the teachers' online collaborative problem solving and discussions the authors found that while they cannot attribute changes in practice solely to teachers' online participation, changes in professional practice did occur nonetheless. The authors conclude much more research on how online experience impacts "real-life" behavior must be done before a causal link between digital expressions of teacher identity and classroom practice can be determined. While these studies provide evidence that teacher identity development is valuable for teacher performance and teacher education, it is less clear if the online expression of teacher identity differs from other oral or non-digital expressions.

#### English Teacher Identity

In the past, the identity debate has divided along the lines of an internal, philosophical, or psychological self versus an external, sociological, or anthropological self (Zembylas, 2003). In this study, however, identity is viewed as relational and dialogical, formed within *discursive practices* that are in a state of constantly *becoming* and embedded in a context of power relations, ideology, and culture (Jackson, 2001). Furthermore, secondary English teaching is likened to a text that one reads and writes to construct or self-author the associated English teacher identity.

### *English Teacher Identity Research*

“Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach; those who can’t teach, teach English” (Carter, 2009, p. 65). What is it about the “unwieldy hybridity of English/Education” (Staunton, 2008, p. 2) that qualifies it for such stereotypes and abuse? Why does Staunton, an English Educator, liken the life of an English teacher to a siren call that summons students to “sweet doom”? One reason, at least according to Staunton and Carter, has to do with culturally constructed and conflicting identities often imposed upon teachers of English.

For Carter, this conflict occurs within the predominant metaphors of the English teacher as saint or clergy commonly portrayed in popular culture and media. In films such as *Freedom Writers* and *Dead Poet’s Society* teaching is a near religious vocation and while potentially flattering, this conceit imposes identities that “do not construct teachers as professionals with specialized knowledge and skills, but as people whose work may be devalued as a collection of personality traits, or the work of a divine agency rather than the teacher’s knowledge and experience” (Carter, 2009, p. 62). For Staunton, this identity conflict stems from an institutional and theoretical divide between faculty of English departments and colleges of education, a division that pits the teaching of children against the teaching of literature (p. 22). Staunton challenges such dichotomies and proposes that instead of clinging to a “fetishized notion of the literary or of teaching” both college and secondary English educators must “change radically at the curricular and pedagogical levels if either is to succeed or even survive” (p. 22).

In the past decade, the call for change in English Education has been growing. English Educationists like Robert Yagelski in *Stasis and change: English Education and*

*the Crisis of Sustainability* (2005), Alan Luke in *The Trouble with English* (2004) and Robert Tremmel's award winning "Changing the Way We Think in English Education: A Conversation in the Universal Barbershop" (2006), all point to a fractured discipline in need of structural and paradigmatic revision. However, to do so will require change in teacher education as well as teachers' identities.

In her *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*, Janet Alsup (2006) explores the unique and oftentimes divided position of the English teacher identity. According to Alsup, "living at the intersection of multiple worlds and multiple ways of knowing" is not "a gap or an absence of identity" but a space "to experience a richer, fuller, and more complex understanding of self and other" (p. 15). From this perspective, Alsup's investigation of the development of 6 preservice English teachers during field experience shows how personal and professional teacher identities are not simply two opposing forces where one overcomes the other, but instead, "a teacher's identity is a weaving together of various subjectivities or understandings of self as expressed through genres of discourse and influenced by multiple life experiences" (pp. 41-42).

As indicated by the above discussion of current literature, studies on teacher identity tend to be generalized. While a few mention teachers' subject matter, most do not make the discipline central to their investigation, nor do they examine what role the content itself plays in identity development. English is distinct in both its ubiquity (required every year, grades 6-12) and its role as a force for cultural norming. For this reason, studies that have been conducted on the identities of English teachers,



specifically, can reveal additional insights about the unique nature and ideologies of this discipline.

For example, in Doecke and McKnight's (2003) "Handling Irony: Forming a Professional Identity as an English Teacher" the authors examine how developing teachers construct professional knowledge through their conversations with one another. The study examined a group of student teachers in an English methods course during their final year of their teacher education program. Specifically, a small group of four preservice students preparing to become secondary English teachers were invited to meet regularly to discuss all aspects of their field placements, including curriculum, supervising teachers, students, and so on. They were also prompted to write reflectively on their experiences and developing identities. Through the stories and conversations shared, the researchers hoped to gain insight into how knowledge of the English discipline acquired by graduates is transformed into what they called professional identities.

The discussion group, like the wiki in my study, created an opportunity for learning that most likely wouldn't have been available for student teachers at this time. Similarly, Doecke and McKnight applied Bakhtin's theory of the dialogical nature of language in an effort to show how participants wrote and spoke their way into English teaching. They approached teacher talk with an understanding that what was said was "less interesting as a reflection of what actually happened during their teaching" and more valuable when examined as "an attempt to voice their own 'opinions', points of view' and 'value judgments' within a noisy discursive field that is filled with conflicting voices" (p. 296). According to the authors, becoming an English teacher is not a passive

induction experience, but involves conscious appropriation of what preservice teachers determine are the language and values of the discipline. This active participation in the making of a teacher occurs via the application of various frames of reference which are used to process experiences and arrive at professional judgments.

However, despite expectations, the authors found far less evidence of what they called disciplinary identity in teacher's discourse and far more related to relationship development. Analysis of participants' discussions revealed that becoming an English teacher was a matter of entering into a set of relationships with students, supervising teachers, parents, administrators, etc. Furthermore, as it relates to the English discipline, participants' focus on personal relationships supported ideological-laden 'personal growth' models of English teaching as 'pastoral care'. Doecke and McKnight argue that professional learning is ultimately dependent upon how preservice teachers handle the ideological issues they encounter. The authors conclude that because beliefs and values drive teachers' identity, English educators must explicitly build questions of ideology into subject specific professional standards.

In another study, Alsup (2003) investigates undergraduate preservice teachers to understand why so many are confident in their teaching abilities prior to taking methods courses or having classroom experience. Here, Alsup observes that novice teachers' (over) confidence is built upon their unquestioned plans to replicate past school experiences with their own future students. She explains that students' high school memories of the English classroom often become internalized, foundational, narrative ideologies upon which teaching philosophies are built. Thus, classroom practice is driven by "deeply held ideological patterns that structure the teachers' beliefs about high school

teaching” (Alsup, 2003, p. 1). Alsup cites Lortie (1975) and Britzman (2003) as other researchers who have found teachers’ personal histories to have greater impact on teacher identity than university courses. But, she shows that teacher educators can counter this by providing opportunities for students to critically examine the relationship between their personal histories and their perceptions of “good” English teaching. Alsup uses two “pedagogical discussion” assignments to promote such critical examination and disrupt the “often oversimplified preexisting ideologies of English education students” (p. 3) that remain unexamined otherwise.

Another examination of English teacher identity Franzak (2002) presents a case study of a 28-year-old female enrolled in a student teaching seminar during her field experience. Here, the author conducts multiple interviews and observations in the university and middle school settings, to examine the affect of Critical Friends Group (CFG) protocols on identity development. These multi-level, collaborative protocols were used in the seminar course to discuss professional dilemmas and solve problems. Franzak found that the use of CFG’s aided positively in the development of professional identity by increasing this student’s confidence, independence, and commitment to the profession. The author found that the collaborative study group enriched understanding of the profession and through it the student, “found a safe place where her voice joined with others to foster change and a place to work through her own teacher identity crisis” (p. 265). For this novice teacher, identity development was supported by membership in a “safe” “community,” that provided opportunity for collaborative and critical inquiry about classroom experiences.

In one last example of English identity research, Haniford (2005) investigates the ways in which two preservice teachers discursively position themselves and their students through unit plan artifacts taken at different times in their teacher education program. Through a critical analysis of the curricular goals and decisions made in their lesson plans, Haniford examines how teacher's positioning through pedagogy influences identity constructions. Findings suggest that the two student teachers in this study had trouble connecting the content of English Language Arts to their students. In particular, written plans showed that participants had difficulty translating knowledge of their students (via observations or assessments) into academically relevant curriculum, "despite the availability of discourses (from the teacher education institution) encouraging a stance of inquiry and attention to all learners" (p. xi). As with studies by Alsop and others discussed above, Haniford and Franzak highlight the importance of supporting teachers' identity construction within their education programs, which includes critically examining the language and discourse of classroom experiences.

#### *English Teacher Identity Research Online*

While there are numerous studies on the development of novice teachers' professional identity (Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006; Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995), as well as how it is influenced by personal history and ideology (Lortie, 1975; Clark, 1988; Hollingsworth, 1989; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007), there are not many that explore how identity develops for preservice teachers of secondary English in an online setting.

One study including most of these aspects and similar to my study, is Jane Agee's "What Kind of Teacher Will I Be? Creating Spaces for Beginning Teachers' Imagined

Roles” (2006). Here, the author studied electronic discussion in a graduate adolescent literature class for preservice and novice English teachers. Agee designed course topics and readings to challenge participants’ assumptions about the teaching of secondary literature and in particular to promote a more critical perspective on the literary canon as the primary type of literature to be taught in the secondary English classroom. Agee found this led to teacher resistance stemming from differing epistemologies between teacher educator and novice teacher and manifested in “disjunctions between students’ imagined roles and models for teaching advocated in education programs” (p. 195).

Agee notes that preservice teachers arrive to education courses with little else than previous experiences as a student with which to guide such roles. These “imagined lives exist as key elements of identity, both in an individual mind and in the collective identity of a group of people” (p. 196). Thus, past student experiences lead to finely honed, deep-seated perspectives on what kinds of literature an English teacher is supposed to teach. When Agee’s teachers experienced dissonance between the two, resistance followed. She also found that even as professional identity is under construction, beginning teachers tend to seek out “theory and practice that offer a fit with his or her imagined role” in order to avoid such resistance.

In the next section I will examine research as it relates to technology in teacher education, and how this use may (or may not) lead to change. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relationship between Web 2.0 technologies and identity and the use of the wiki forum.

## Technology in Teacher Education Research

As more and more preservice teachers participate in some type of online learning, it is important that researchers investigate and better understand the impact and limits of such technology in teacher education programs. Given the ubiquity of technology and the on-going demand for it to be integrated into education—particularly teacher education—it comes as little surprise that online learning and the use of web-based applications with preservice and in-service teachers has become fertile ground for research. While primarily descriptive in nature, common themes emerge from this literature regardless of course content, grade level to be taught by prospective teachers, methodology, and types of data used in the study.

Foremost, investigations focus almost exclusively on discussion as it occurs within the online environment (Angeli et al., 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Edens & Gallini, 2000; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003-2004; Kaplan et al., 2007; Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Paulus & Roberts, 2006; Ryan & Scott, 2008; Singer & Zeni, 2004; Wade & Fauske, 2004; Wade et al., 2008; Wheeler et al., 2005; Whipp, 2003; Wickstrom, 2003).

The most common digital forum investigated is the asynchronous (i.e., not occurring concurrently or in “real” time) electronic discussion board (e.g., WebCT and Blackboard) (Angeli et al., 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Edens & Gallini, 2000; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003-2004; Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Paulus & Roberts, 2006; Ryan & Scott, 2008; Wade & Fauske, 2004; Wade et al., 2008; Wickstrom, 2003). A few studies examine discussion via email list servs (Kaplan et al., 2007; Singer & Zeni, 2004; Whipp, 2003) and one explores teacher collaboration in an

online problem-based learning module (Wheeler et al., 2005). Only one study examined for this review used a synchronous (i.e., occurring simultaneously) forum, the chat room (Paulus & Roberts, 2006), but in the same study the authors compared it with the asynchronous discussion board.

Online course discussion has the potential to reveal insights about the needs, processes and concerns of preservice teachers in ways previously unavailable to teacher educators. In the literature examined here, the focus of preservice teachers' communication fell into one of two categories: 1) student generated discussion about field experiences (Angeli et al., 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Edens & Gallini, 2000; Fedig & Roehler, 2003-2004; Kaplan et al., 2007; Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Singer & Zeni, 2004; Whipp, 2003) and 2) discussion via case study prompts (real or hypothetical) posed by professors (Paulus & Roberts, 2006; Ryan & Scott, 2008; Wade & Fauske, 2004; Wade et al., 2008; Wheeler et al., 2005; Whipp, 2003; Wickstrom, 2003). Course content included Educational Psychology (Angeli et al., 2003; Paulus & Roberts, 2006), reading assessment (Wickstrom, 2003), teaching practicum (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Edens & Gallini, 2000; Whipp, 2003), secondary literacy teacher education (Wade & Fauske, 2004; Wade et al, 2008), and various teaching methods courses (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003-2004; Kaplan et al., 2007; Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Ryan & Scott, 2008; Singer & Zeni, 2004).

Research culled on electronic discussion with preservice teachers varied in purpose, as well. For example, in some of the studies researchers investigated the technology itself and the ways in which it facilitated and enhanced (or not) discussion and reflection (Angeli et al., 2003; Nicholson & Bond, 2003). In others, the inquiry was

the discourse itself and the ways in which teacher discussion facilitated reflection (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Kaplan et al., 2007; Paulus & Roberts, 2006; Whipp, 2003; Wickstrom, 2003) and/or critical reflection (Ryan & Scott, 2008; Wade et al., 2008). Still others examined ways to scaffold online discussion to change teacher perception and produce greater learning (Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Ferdig & Roehler, 2003-2004; Paulus & Roberts, 2006; Whipp, 2003; Wickstrom, 2003). Additional approaches to online discussion research included analysis of online community, its features and social dynamics (Edens & Gallini, 2000), the way online discussion provides online peer mentoring and support (Singer & Zeni, 2004), how online discourse reflects issues of gender and equity (Wade & Fauske, 2004) and the influence discussion has on teacher identity and professional practice (Wheeler et al., 2005).

Despite differences in purpose, findings in these studies reveal some important similarities. Specifically, that the use of an online forum provides greater opportunity for teacher reflection (Kaplan et al, 2007; Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Ryan & Scott, 2008; Singer & Zeni, 2004), but is more likely to initiate the exchange of personal experiences than to foster critical thinking skills about the profession (Angeli et al, 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg, 2007; Hur & Brush, 2009; Paulus & Roberts, 2006; Ryan & Scott, 2008; Wade et al, 2008). Common findings also illustrate that digital social interaction leads to online community building and collaboration (Edens & Gallini, 2000; Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Singer & Zeni, 2004). Even when K-12 teachers voluntarily participate in online teacher communities outside of higher education (e.g., Teacher Focus and WeTheTeachers), research shows that they do so in order to combat



isolation, share emotions, explore ideas and experience a sense of camaraderie (Hur & Brush, 2009).

*Critical Thinking, Community & Reflection*

Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg's (2007) article, "Does Teachers' Negotiation of Personal Cases in an Interactive Cyber Forum Contribute to Their Professional Learning?" investigates the learning of student teachers in an online discussion forum during their field experience. Using a closed asynchronous forum, the authors analyze 12 message sequences; each comprised of a classroom based problem and subsequent discussion about possible solutions. Themes of sequences vary, (e.g., bullying, supervising teacher, standing in class, a test that's too easy, teacher-parent communication problems, etc.) as do the number of participants and responses per theme. Using a functional approach to discourse analysis, the authors examine the ways participants positioned themselves in their interactions. At the same time, Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg (2007) use a critical knowledge-based lens to see if these interactions led to different types of professional learning: moral, pedagogic and interpersonal.

The authors found that the learning process focused on the interpersonal, particularly power relations in schools (e.g., between teachers and parents, teachers and students, teachers and student teachers, etc.) and that student teachers' primary growth occurred in their professional identity as they participated in a community of teachers. Findings also showed student teachers, in general, disregarded theoretical considerations or connections in their discussions, primarily focusing on the practical. The authors conclude that it must be the job of the professor or online tutor to connect student teachers' experiences to the broader theoretical context of teaching and learning (on or

offline) otherwise, the learning that occurs in such digital forums will further widen the gulf between practice and theory, neglecting pedagogical content knowledge as well as knowledge about content and curriculum.

In another example of common findings, Nicholson & Bond's (2003), "Collaborative Reflection and Professional Community Building: An Analysis of Pre-Service Teachers' Use of an Electronic Discussion Board" the authors studied the online postings of a cohort of 17 student teachers during the course of their semester as interns in a middle school reading class. As with the previously discussed study (and others listed above) participants' emotional concerns often dominated the online conversation thus resulting in a strong sense of professional support and community in the digital environment. The authors also confirmed previous findings that the online forum encourages reflection, attributing this to access to a wider audience of peers. Furthermore, the authors found that participating teachers' reflective discourse improved over time, resulting in what they deemed, "opportunities for growth through collaboration" (p. 276). Unlike Ben-Peretz & Kupferberg's (2007) claims regarding the absence of critical thinking in the teachers' online posts, this study shows that professional critical thinking does in fact occur through the process of collaborative reflection.

There is little argument that reflection is one of the most common types of interaction experienced by teachers online. There seems to be something about the online forum that encourages reflection above and beyond other non-digital formats. This may be because online comments are a permanent extension of the self and ones spoken word or simply because one has more time to think and revise along the way (Singer & Zeni,

2004). The strength of the medium to promote reflection is exemplified in Kaplan et al's (2007) study comparing the journal writing of 56 preservice teachers during their field experience. The authors found that reflective content shared over an interactive e-mail list serve far exceeded the amount and quality of reflectivity contained in the same students' traditional print-based journals. Whether or not this reflection can be equated to critical thinking depends on one's position on the value of reflection and the role it plays in teacher professional growth. Regardless, given its potential as a vehicle to collaborate, share ideas and provide emotional support (particularly for preservice teachers during an oftentimes difficult period) the online forum provides teacher educators and their students a low-cost tool available 24 hours per day to connect, mentor and reflect.

#### *Web 2.0*

Web 2.0, a phrase attributed to O'Reilly Media in 2004 (Greenhow, 2007), refers to digital technologies using open architecture platforms such as Wikipedia and MySpace that allow participant/members to go beyond simply reading information (referred to as Web 1.0), to co-construct content or read/write the electronic environment. While such web applications were virtually nonexistent prior to 2002 (Greenhow, 2007), there are now hundreds of social networking sites available online (i.e., wikis, blogs, podcasting, videoblogs, micro-blogging, etc.). A "social networking" inquiry using Google search engine reveals networks on topics as far reaching as investing (Cake Financial), motherhood (CafeMom), diet and nutrition (3FatChicks), online games (Avatars United), genealogy (Geni.com), music (MOG), books (Shelfari), learning a language (Livemocha), knitting (Ravelry) and social justice (WiserEarth), just to name a few.

Another, more abstract way of understanding Web 2.0 is to think of it as the embodiment of Walter Ong's (1982) "secondary orality"; a type of communication made possible via technology that, like oral cultures, is instantaneous, yet unlike the orality of our past is "more deliberate and self-conscious...based permanently on the use of writing and print" (p. 136). This is not oral and not literate but in between, it lives in the boundary space, at once neither and both. Much like the aforementioned "social networking" technologies and transactions indicative of Web 2.0, secondary orality is situated and participatory, it allows and encourages the interpersonal interaction humans relied on exclusively in the past. And because this new interactive tool lives in and has created a type of third space for communication, it has also invited new ways of thinking. This has interesting implications for educators. By nature of this shift toward secondary orality, the advent of the Web 2.0 online learning environment pushes us to "re-imagine" traditional notions of students and cognition (Greenhow, 2007).

### *Boundaries & Selves*

Because they stand on the line between mind and not-mind, between life and not-life, computers excite reflection about the nature of mind and the nature of life. They provoke us to think about who we are. (Turkle, 1984, p. 307)

The embrace of Web 2.0 and its use in education is not automatically a cause for celebration. In fact, some believe these new technologies pose a challenge to learning and fear that traditional schooling may ultimately be displaced by digital media as the main resource for student thinking and skill acquisition (Shaffer & Clinton, 2006). Other concerns have been raised about the ways in which Web 2.0 technology has blurred the line between popular culture and concepts of formalized education in digital culture (Conrad, 2008), calling into question deep-seated norms associated with embodied

pedagogy (McEntee, 2008). Finally, concerns have been expressed about the quality of instruction, level of student thinking and conditions of assessment available when using Web-based applications (Greenhow, 2007).

To better understand these shifting boundaries and the ways in which online education impacts notions of learning, in the past decade researchers have been investigating the processes involved in participating in different digital environments. Research on educational technology tends to fall into four categories: 1) studies that promote the advantages of this technology and investigate the ways in which it increases student learning, 2) studies that examine strategies for implementation, 3) studies that discuss the social impact of educational technology, and 4) reports of the most common ways that such technology is used in the field (Greenhow, 2007).

For example, in a semi auto-ethnographic study of her participation in a photo sharing blog (Flickr.com), Davies (2007) found that technologically mediated experiences distort, extend and even call into question public versus private selves. By examining the social learning process and interaction that occurred between her online/offline selves and the “selves” of other “Flickrites”, Davies found that collaborative multimodal texts like Flickr instantiate literacy as a social practice. Furthermore, the process of interaction between individuals via their online identities embodied a “community of practice” and a negotiated, common “way of seeing” through participation and shared meaning. Davies concludes, “learning on Flickr is not just about words and pictures, but about the development of social and cultural knowledge and issues concerning the self” (p. 562). As we shall see, issues of identity are often associated with and perhaps even prompted by the use of Web 2.0 technology. This, too,

has implications for education, potentially altering who we are and/or how we see ourselves as teachers, students, and participants.

### *Pedagogical & Cognitive Shifts*

Regardless of ones' position on the effectiveness of educational technology, such blurring of boundaries is an indication that as students become more digitally mediated and their learning more distributed, a shift in pedagogical thinking, particularly about the nature of learning, may be imminent. In a theoretical examination of the pedagogical implications of digital media tools Shaffer and Clinton (2006) state that current sociocultural theories of technology and cognition must be revised. Drawing on the work of Latour, Vygotsky and others, Shaffer and Clinton (2006) apply notions of distributed cognition, mediated action and activity theory to the emerging virtual culture, suggesting a new analytic category "*toolforthoughts*" is necessary to understand and evaluate the use of emerging technologies in educational contexts.

This would not be the first time a new technology has changed how we think about thinking nor the first time humans and their tools have coevolved. However, *toolforthoughts* moves beyond previous concepts of the human as initiator and controller of the artifact (and therefore cognition) to a symbiotic relationship between tool and thought whereby humans no longer occupy a privileged position in the exchange (Shaffer & Clinton, 2006). The authors propose further research to better understand the consequences of distributed mind in the digital culture. This will require a deeper examination of the cognitive and social patterns afforded by online activity and improved knowledge about what students are able to accomplish through online collaboration with others, tools, and the digital environment (Shaffer & Clinton, 2006).

Another theoretical shift prompted by the explosion of online learning, particularly in higher education, centers on the loss of embodied pedagogy or what McWilliam and Parker (1995) call the “semi-disappearance of the anatomical bodies of teachers and students” (p. 32). The authors recognize that the move to a disembodied campus has already begun and view this shift as not just a change in technology, but the rendering of shifts in subjectivities and ideologies, student/teacher relations and institutional practice. Much like Shaffer & Clinton’s (2006) symbiotic toolfought, McWilliam and Parker (1995) propose a feminist rethinking of pedagogy and technology using Haraway’s (1991) notion of a “cyborg” (a human-technology fusion) to analyze old assumptions about human/technology interactions and the blurring between our tools and our selves.

### *Identities Online*

With new tools often comes new culture; some believe the new learning culture brought by Web 2.0 has irreversibly changed education, shifting it from an informational paradigm to a conceptual one (Conrad, 2008; Prensky, 2007). Furthermore, it has been said that this new e-learning culture—characterized by “community, passion, and creativity through new forms of self-presentation and identity”—has created a “new kind of person” one who “demands the opportunity for self-presentation” (Conrad, 2008, p. 158).

The social networking tools now available not only allow learners to construct digital selves, but allow each participant to enact and preserve that online-student-self with peers. These highly personalized and interactive forms of self-demonstration allow students to synthesize and make meaning, to play and tell stories, to use empathy and

design, all of which are hallmarks of Prensky's (2007) conceptual paradigm (Conrad, 2008). But, whether or not the digital culture/environment actually creates new people, or simply allows us to see ourselves in new ways, is up for online identity debate (Merchant, 2006).

Based on his work with multi-player online video games, James Gee (2003) has developed a theory of identity as it occurs online. Specifically, he states there are three aspects of identity as it occurs in the electronic environment: one's "virtual identity" (i.e., the character in the context of the game), one's "real-world identity" (i.e., not essentialist but more like a composite of the embodied self) and one's "projective identity" (i.e., the identity that is born from interaction between the first two identities as it appears in the online environment). While Gee develops his theory based on the world of gaming, this idea of a tri-part identity as it occurs digitally is also applicable to other forms of virtual social interaction and learning.

### *The Wiki*

*Please, grant me the serenity to accept the pages I cannot edit,  
The courage to edit the pages I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

--The Wiki Prayer (Lamb, 2004, p. 12)

Wikis (dynamic web pages that can be created and edited by anyone with a web browser) are the ultimate example of Web 2.0 in action; examples on the Internet abound, the most familiar being such as Wikipedia, MySpace and Youtube. The word wiki (from the Hawaiian "wiki wiki" meaning hurry or quick) was coined by Ward Cunningham in 1994 to refer to the first open editing tool he developed (the WikiWikiWeb) to enable collaboration on the Internet (Augar et al., 2004; Lamb, 2004). Wikis vary widely in their features, systems, approaches and the ways in which they are used, but in general include



the following principles: 1) anyone can edit content at any time, 2) the hypertext format is highly simplified and easy to use, 3) wiki page titles are usually mashed together without spaces between words, 4) content is organized by emerging categories and concepts (not chronology), is never finished, and is created by multiple contributors (Lamb, 2004).

Although online for 15 years, only recently have wikis entered higher education and become popular with educators (Parker & Chao, 2007). While the research literature is limited (yet growing), claims have been made about the educational benefits and dangers of this emergent tool. At one end of the spectrum, wikis promise greater achievement, positive attitudes and increased motivation through student-centered collaboration, democratic ownership, and participation in a “community of learners” (Augar et al., 2004; Caverly & Ward, 2008; Felvegi & Callaway, 2009; Parker & Chao, 2007; Ruth & Houghton, 2009; Wheeler et al., 2008). At the other end, concerns have been expressed about susceptibility to vandalism, viruses and “social loafing” (i.e., unequal distribution of participation) as well as criticism about accuracy in socially defined knowledge and the relativistic nature of the “wisdom of the masses” (what Stephen Colbert calls “truthiness” in “wikiality”) (Augar et al., 2004; Arnold et al., 2009; Ruth & Houghton, 2009; Vratulus & Dobson, 2008; Wheeler et al., 2008).

As previously discussed, social networking tools like wikis blur the line between reader and writer, allowing participants to co-construct knowledge and in doing so, alter how students construct meaning (Caverly & Ward, 2008). In education, wikis can be placed into five “stages of inquiry” or types of uses: 1) a resource wiki (i.e., Wikipedia); 2) a presentation wiki (i.e., collaboration/construct of a group project); 3) a gateway wiki (i.e., students share and discuss a set of data); 4) an exploration wiki (i.e., Webquest); and

5) an illuminated wiki (i.e., a text is divided and each student shares their individual understanding) (Caverly & Ward, 2008). As fully editable websites, wiki's synchronous and asynchronous features can be used by educators to enhance social interaction, disseminate information, build a storehouse of knowledge, and prompt the collaborative production of documents (Augar et al., 2004). One advantage of this social software is its technological simplicity and relative ease (what Wheeler et al (2005) termed "transparent technologies") whereby allowing students and teachers to focus on the learning task (Parker & Chao, 2007).

Parker and Chao (2007) (citing Duffy and Bruns, 2006) list the following examples of how educators can use wikis:

- Students can post summaries and responses to assigned readings.
- A wiki can be used to publish course materials such as handouts and syllabi and students can edit and comment on them.
- Students can share reflections and thoughts regarding course content, teaching practices, learning experiences, etc.
- Students can brainstorm, edit and build a network of resources on a concept or topic.
- Students can plan, comment and revise the content of a group presentation or research project.
- Students can use the wiki for any type of group authoring. (In fact, the authors note, wikis stimulate writing, promote close reading and revision and ease students into writing for a wider audience.)

In addition to its power as a tool for instruction, wikis offer teachers and students experience that cannot be simulated in class or on paper, teaching participants “network literacy” in a digital and collaborative environment (Lamb, 2004). The wiki learning experience also exemplifies the constructivist teaching philosophy, requiring that instructors alter their practice and give up control of content; the medium is truly student-centered by design and therefore more meaningful and effective when teachers set up expectations and then allow students to assert their autonomy (Lamb, 2004).

*Wikis in Teacher Education Research.*

As with previously discussed research about the use of Web 2.0 technologies in teacher education, studies on the use of wikis with preservice teachers have similar findings such as advantages for student teacher reflection (Parker & Chao, 2007; Solvie, 2008) peer-led collaboration (Elgort et al, 2008; Engstrom & Jewett, 2005; Felvegi & Callaway, 2009; Parker & Chao, 2007; Ruth & Houghton, 2009; Vratulus & Dobson, 2008) and concerns over evidence of critical thinking and unequal distribution of participation (Arnold et al., 2009; Luce-Kapler, 2007; Solvie, 2008; Wheeler et al., 2008). Wiki research in teacher education also reiterates discussions about the ways in which social software challenges core educational assumptions about traditional curricula (Luce-Kapler, 2007; Ruth & Houghton, 2009).

In their comprehensive “Wiki as a Collaborative Learning Tool in a Language Arts Methods Class” Felvegi and Callaway (2009) examine the work of 37 preservice teachers over the course of two semesters as they complete their student teaching. The authors’ data include wiki posts, online and end of course reflections, email and interviews. Their goal: to understand how wiki participation facilitated the learning of

course content beyond the traditional (embodied) classroom. Using the theoretical frameworks of situated cognition (i.e., collective knowledge construction), constructivism (i.e., student-centered, socially constructed knowledge) and communities of practice (i.e., learners collaborate toward a common goal), the authors confirmed that, as other wiki research suggests, building course content in a (structured) shared space like the wiki, improves the learning and retention of material by: 1) extending the “classroom walls” 2) allowing greater student autonomy and ownership, 3) making knowledge creation a more active and personal process, and 4) requiring students to construct shared knowledge through collaboration.

In a similar study of 18 preservice teachers in a reading methods course during their field experience, Solvie (2008) investigates the use of a wiki to support knowledge construction as it relates to learning style preferences. However, the author finds that contrary to above, certain types of learners fare better than others in the wiki learning environment. Specifically, students with preferences of Abstract Conceptualization (i.e., logical analysis of ideas, systematic planning, preference for authoritative sources and intellectual understanding of a situation) had a higher number of wiki contributions and their contributions were of better quality, while students with high Reflective Observation preferences (i.e., careful observation prior to forming judgment, view issues from multiple points of view, like to analyze for meaning) contributed less often and their contributions were found to be of poorer quality (e.g., lacking critical thinking). Interestingly, students in both preference categories expressed enjoyment and comfort in the wiki contribution process. Solvie (2008) also contends that when using wikis in education one must address contribution inequality and encourage a higher quality of

wiki participation by providing greater structure, such as discussion scaffolds, and giving students clearly defined group and individual expectations.

In “The Good, the Bad and the Wiki: Evaluating Student-Generated Content for Collaborate Learning” Wheeler, et al (2008) state that it has never been more important for educators to adapt new social software, like wikis, into real teaching contexts. Building on the term ‘the architecture of participation’ the authors examine how wiki-type open architecture software leads to student collaboration and learning. Noting that many believe wikis are fast becoming a favorite social software tool in education, Wheeler et al (2008) emphasize wikis potential to develop student-centered communities of practice. However, the possibility of facilitating socially rich experiences and high-level thinking does not guarantee that the wiki environment will do so.

In their year long study of 35 undergraduate teacher education students using an anonymous, voluntary wiki for discussion, research and storage of class work, Wheeler et al (2008) found that the wiki 1) did not suit the learning preferences of all students, 2) led to competitiveness between students about ownership and intellectual property because it was anonymous, and 3) led to unequal distribution of participation. Despite these concerns, the authors believe the benefits of using wikis outweigh the drawbacks and that the democratic development of content at any time and from any place afforded by wiki software has the potential to transform student learning.

#### *Wikis in Teacher Identity Research.*

Because my study uses the wiki differently from its original intended design (as a forum to post work and discuss readings versus a place to co-create a group document), the research findings on wiki research may not be as applicable as findings from research

using other types of Web 2.0 formats, especially blogs. For example, in a recent doctoral dissertation, *New Teacher Identity and the Edublogosphere: A Multi-Case Study of First Year Teacher Bloggers*, Payne (2008) explored the sociocultural dimensions of identity formation in four first-year teachers as they voluntarily blogged about their classroom experiences. These posts are quite similar to the types shared by student teachers in my study. Payne found that the online format provided opportunity for teachers' identities to develop in six ways: pedagogical, personal, intuitive, intellectual, social and political. She observed that the online forum provided teachers with a "safe place" to interact, share their educational histories and experiences, and to initiate feedback and encouragement during times of struggle.

In the only study located for this review that examines teacher identity in a wiki (and blog) forum, Kidd's (2010) ethnography, "Using Online Communities, Wikis and Blogs to Capture the 'Boundary Crossing' of Novice Teachers" explores the posts of first year teachers during the six months of their first job. Kidd investigated the identity-forming cultural practices of participants in the "virtual field" or 'between space' of an online community. Like this study, Kidd created the wiki forum using the free, public site Wetpaint wiki. He found that while the wiki provided greater opportunity for participants to interact, the traditional blog forum allowed for richer reflections. Overall, he found the online community to be an ideal tool for teacher educators as it provides a collective place for novice teachers to 'see into teaching'. Kidd concludes that digital Web 2.0 forums such as wikis and blogs allow new teachers to become co- or lay ethnographers of their own identity development as they shift from 'outsider' to 'legitimate participant' in the profession.

## Summary

Identity is a growing field of research and considered vital to teacher development. Although there are differing accounts as to why teachers' professional identity is important, most agree it has serious consequences for practice, education, and research. Other common features of research include the role of personal beliefs and story telling in shaping identity. While some studies explored the identity development of English teachers online, data is inconclusive regarding the affect these digital experiences have on classroom behavior. Findings from English teacher identity research reveal a difficult process, fraught with ideological expectations and disciplinary contradictions. Studies show that novice teachers need reflective and critical understandings of their positions as English teachers in order to construct meaningful identities. Technology in teacher education research, particularly the use of Web 2.0 formats like wikis, discussion boards, and blogs are expansive. General findings regarding the use of such platforms include and absence of critical thinking, and an increase in community and reflection. However, it is argued that with the explosion of social interaction data, further research is needed to better understand online activity and the cognitive and social consequences of digital culture on students and identity.

In the next chapter, I will provide an outline of this dissertation study, the data used, participants, analytical framework, design, and research methods.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

This dissertation examines the identity construction of preservice secondary English teachers within the context of a methods course wiki. Specifically, I examine the archived, asynchronous reflections and discussions posted to a closed, online, wiki forum by two cohorts of student teachers during their first semester of field experience. This took place at a major Southwestern University over the course of the fall 2008 and fall 2009 semesters and included the contributions of a combined total of 21 student participants. This study interprets the discourses used by methods students to describe their field experiences and to construct identities as English teachers. In this chapter I describe the context of my study (methods course, wiki forum and assignments) and the procedures I used (methodology, sampling, data collection, data analysis). This chapter also includes short bios of each participant taken from their wiki profile pages.

#### *The Teaching of English Course*

Undergraduates seeking secondary teaching certification must take a subject specific methods course. For students seeking secondary English endorsement at my university, this methods course was titled *Teaching of English* and students were required to take it during the first of their two semesters of student teaching. This class met 2 ½ hours per week and was one of four corresponding courses taken during fieldwork; each class was made up of a cohort of roughly 25 secondary English teacher education students. The advanced disciplinary methods class is often considered to be one of the most important in a developing teacher's program; I was fortunate enough to teach it as a graduate assistant two consecutive years in 2008 and 2009. The *Teaching of English*



course description from my syllabus is as follows:

This course focuses on how to teach English/Language Arts to middle and high school students. Topics of study center on the practical aspects (i.e. planning, teaching, assessment) of becoming a secondary E/LA teacher. While content and activities are grounded in theory and research, the majority of our time will be spent 1) exploring E/LA teaching methods, 2) developing and critiquing lessons and units of instruction, and 3) preparing for the day to day responsibilities of life in the public schools.

The primary work of the course included weekly reading, writing, and wiki posting; a book group presentation, including lessons; and a ten day unit plan. The 2008 cohort was required to read the Kathleen Cushman's *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students* and one of the following texts in small groups: Carol Jago's, *With Rigor for All: Teaching the Classics to Contemporary Students*, Barry Gilmore's, *Speaking Volumes: How to Get Students Discussing Books and Much More*, and Jeff Anderson's, *Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, and Style into Writer's Workshop*. These groups read and discussed the text in class and online and then presented and taught multiple lessons from their text to the class. In place of the Cushman text, the 2009 cohort read Wong and Wong's 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *The First Days of School* and the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Jim Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion*.

Course sessions typically focused on the day-to-day realities of life in the classroom. The first thirty minutes of each class we wrote and discussed events from the past week. This often took the form of freewriting, sharing in pairs then whole group, and finally pooling resources and "trouble-shooting" conflicts and concerns for methods

students' classrooms. Following these oftentimes animated and heated discussions, I would give a whole class lesson on topics such as how to create a rubric, tips for classroom management, elements of a learning objective, and so on. Generally, the remainder of each class session included collaborative tasks such as designing lessons and unit plans, analyzing lesson and unit plans, discussing group books, and preparing group presentations.

In the 2008 position statement, "What Do We Know and Believe about the Roles of Methods Courses and Field Experiences in English Education?" the CEE Executive Committee outlined sixteen goals for a strong English education program. The items below are six of the eight belief statements about coursework that I believe connect to my own course:

Instruction that addresses the teaching of English language arts:

- infuses core principles of content, pedagogy, and professionalism and provides opportunities for practice, reflection, and growth;
- emphasizes that teaching and learning are social practices influenced by specific contexts;
- attends to diverse texts and literacy practices;
- fosters understanding of the teacher candidate's shift of role from student to teacher;
- prepares teacher candidates to choose appropriate materials, methods, and assessments which promote and enhance student learning; and,
- enables teacher candidates to articulate rationales for pedagogical choices.

For each of these items CEE offers suggestions for ways to implement these goals, some

of which directly align with my own goals and expectations for the *Teaching of English* course. For example, the first item includes the following recommendation: teacher candidates should “have opportunities to question, apply, and implement ideas and strategies” from assigned texts. The book group discussions and presentations provided this opportunity and support this goal. Possible implementation strategies offered for the third item: teacher candidates “engage in multimodal literacy practices” and the fourth: teacher candidates “maintain a consistent reflective posture demonstrated in discussion” are both qualities and goals for student’s participation in the methods course wiki. I will now provide a more detailed description of the wiki forum, expectations for assignments, and how it was used in this English methods course.

### *The Wiki*

The wiki interface we used comes from a free, online site called Wetpaint Wiki, currently Wetpaintcentral.com. This is a “click-and-type” website that is very easy to use and allows anyone to create a forum on any topic using text, photos, links, uploaded documents, videos, etc. As the creator or “administrator” of my Wetpaint site I am able to send invitations for anyone to join and can determine the type of role they play in the construction of the site. I decided to incorporate wiki assignments into this class as a way to extend the classroom conversation beyond our limited 2 ½ hours per week and to provide support should students need it during this typically difficult time in a teacher’s development. Although Wetpaint allows users to create forums open to anonymous users, I kept our course wiki “invite only” to reinforce class cohesion, maintain confidentiality, and cultivate a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Prior to the first class session, I set up the wiki homepage by posting the syllabus and detailed course expectations, including the following goals for the wiki:

- collect course information and related content
- create a forum for interaction & collaboration
- exchange lessons, thoughts and ideas
- discuss course readings and assignments
- share and reflect on classroom experiences
- compile, edit, and publish the learning process

In addition, I created pages for each student titled by name (these were their own personal “homepages”), and created pages for discussion of each text we were reading in whole and small groups. I sent email invitations (generated by Wetpaint) to each student in the class giving them the status of “writer” so that they could edit and expand pages easily. As writers, students had permission to add or edit site content and start and contribute to discussion threads, but unlike an administrator, could not delete information or invite additional members. On the first day of class I reviewed logging on procedures and spent some time troubleshooting for those students who were unfamiliar with the format.

Per the *Teaching of English* syllabus, my methods students also received the following initial description of wiki assignments:

As part of your weekly reading and writing activities you will be required to post at least two times per week. In general, these wiki posts will include: 1) assigned writing tasks such as Reflection Wheel Journals and student & teacher interviews; 2) reading tasks such as book group collaboration and responses to assigned

readings; and 3) responses to the posts of classmates and creation of new pages to share or discuss emerging topics of interest and/or concern.

Because students were required to post weekly assignments and discuss all readings on the wiki, participation made up a significant portion of their course grade. However, it appears that although grades may have initially prompted students to log on and post, as the semester progressed, the role of the wiki became quite authentic. In fact, authentic participation and the central role of the wiki in both cohorts exceeded my expectations. Oftentimes, at the beginning of each class meeting I would overhear students discussing interactions from the wiki or laughing about a specific exchange. During class, students regularly made references to the wiki. For example, a student might share the ideas of peers that they found there, or refer to a classroom event from a peer's fieldwork that was shared in the wiki, or connect an in-class text to a text-based post which they'd read, and so on. In some ways, the wiki began to feel like it was where the class actually "met" and our weekly 2 ½ hours together on campus was a satellite of support for the wiki and not the other way around.

As previously mentioned, this approach is a nontraditional use of the collaborative wiki writing format, and our course wiki seemed to function more like group blog and social networking site. Furthermore, to emphasize authenticity, avoid "teacher pleasing" and increase student ownership of the online community, I took on the role of silent observer, intentionally refraining from direct participation in all wiki interactions. This was fairly easy thanks to a Wetpaint tracking feature (which organizes all wiki participation by member) that allowed me to follow each student's contributions without detection. Despite my textual absence, the students knew I was tracking their posts for

grades because I made a point of referring to various discussion threads during class.

Also, I occasionally selected topics, events, or queries, from the wiki to build lessons or I began class discussions with an issue of concern or contention taken from the wiki.

Research shows that participation in networking activities appears to reduce the chances of teachers leaving the profession by about 90%, and the chances of changing schools by 82% (Scherff & Hahs-Vaughn, 2008). This is because teacher networks have been shown to provide pedagogical and emotional support, increase self-efficacy, and reduce isolation and stress (Scherff & Hahs-Vaughn, 2008, p. 194). The English methods course wiki provided one such network, serving as a “dialogic space” (Bahktin, 1981) within and between my university classroom and my student’s secondary English classrooms. Furthermore, it provided students with extended opportunities for open-ended discussions, an activity that, according to the research, has statistically significant effects on student learning (Anagnostopoulos, Smith & Nystrand, 2008). There are clear benefits for the creation and mediation of open, dialogic spaces, like the wiki, in teacher education courses. As Basmadjian (2008) explains,

“we need to consider the benefits of focusing on a smaller rather than larger number of instructional strategies in our methods courses. We need to consider ways to help English teacher candidates get beneath the surface level of teaching and learning, to ask questions of and challenge each other and their instructor about conceptions of teaching English. To achieve this, teacher candidates need time, but they also need multiple opportunities to think and talk about what they read, see, and hear from each other, the course literature, and other course tools” (p. 34).

In the next section I will explain the wiki assignments in more detail and outline my expectations for student's contributions to the online forum.

### *The Wiki Assignments*

In its most basic form, students were required to post two types of responses to the wiki each week, a response to the week's assigned reading and a response to the week's assigned writing. Weekly reading assignments were in response either to the whole class text (such as Burke), and involved online discussion with the entire class, or in response to selected book group texts and occurred in smaller forums of four or five. Students had the option of writing a freestanding, 1-2 paragraph reading log-type post, each week. Or, if they preferred, they could write multiple (5-7) shorter discussion-type responses or threads about aspects of the reading via interaction with peers. On the wiki I provided corresponding guidelines and offered the following open-ended prompt:

There is no wrong way to respond to the readings, providing you avoid summary. Think of these posts as a type of online reader response log or reading journal with a real audience. Remember that everyone in the class has read the same information, so the idea is to push one another's thinking, ask questions, and "discuss" your thoughts, feelings, ideas, and reactions, to what you've read.

Unlike the weekly reading assignments, weekly writing assignments had a little more direction and I provided class time to examine models, generate ideas, and discuss prompts. Students had three different types of required writing assignments: the student interview, the teacher interview, and the Reflection Wheel Journal (RWJ). One of these was completed and posted each week, alternating three times, for a total of 3 student interviews, 3 teacher interviews and 3 RWJs by the end of the term. As I will discuss in

the data portion of this chapter, student and teacher interview assignments will not be part of the data used in this study due to lack of IRB permissions from interviewees.

Therefore, I will not offer many details about the interviews other than to explain that methods students selected who they'd interview from secondary students and teachers at their practicum site, and that afterward, methods students read each other's interviews in class and we synthesized findings to gain broader insight into the needs and roles of secondary students and teachers.

The third weekly writing assignment, the RWJ (which *is* included in the data for this study) originated at Kansas State University and is designed to facilitate analysis of any situation affectively, cognitively and “transformationally” (Rousseau, 2010). After using the RWJ in a TESOL course at Eastern New Mexico University, student Barbara Rousseau modified the five-step process as it is used here. To clarify RWJ expectations, I provided time in class to read and discuss models of RWJs completed by other teachers supplied by Rousseau (see Appendix A). The RWJ is open-ended in that it allows students to choose an event to discuss. However, it is a scaffolded form of reflection, requiring students to address the following prompts:

- 1) Describe the event, experience or incident. What happened?
- 2) How did it make you feel? Use only simple words: impressed, frustrated, surprised, impatient, happy, concerned, excited, angry, etc.
- 3) What thoughts come up for you? (Cognitive)
- 4) Reflection: Explain #2. Why did you feel that way? (Affective) Critical Reflection: How does your socialization (background, meaning, etc.) shape your assumptions and feelings? Did you change your perspective?



5) A. Personal and professional growth B. Classroom Practice (Application)

Although much is said about the necessity of reflection, particularly when it comes to the student teaching practicum, many researchers note that more needs to be done to support reflection of fieldwork by novice teachers (Dickson et al., 2006). It's not that students don't learn from their time in the field per se, but that these experiences can become "miseducative" without "structures to help preservice teachers engage in more purposeful observation" (Dickson et al., 2006, p. 324). I used the RWJ because it offered my students one type of structure and served as a form of support for reflection on field experiences. By asking students to "revisit assumptions, beliefs, values, and the origin from which they came...to reflect on how they came to have a perspective and to consider alternative ways to view, understand and interact" (Rousseau, 2010, p. 49), this scaffold promotes the type of meaningful or "transformational" reflection CEE promotes in its belief statements regarding the needs of English methods coursework.

Overall, the *Teaching of English* students were required to post at least 12 reading responses to whole class and small group texts, and upload 12 written assignments (6 interviews, 3 RWJs, a "Profile" page and the Unit Plan) in the course of the 16 week semester. However, it was not unusual for students in both cohorts to post much more often than the requisite two times per week (Wetpaint threads are limited to no more than 2000 characters, but students can post as many times as they want). To encourage greater interaction I created additional, yet optional, wiki expectations for students in the form of "free topic" posts. I emphasized that students working toward an "A" in the class could expect to contribute such "additional posts" in the form of extra comments, new discussion threads, new pages, sharing of information or links, or anything else they

could think of that would benefit the class community. At the close of the semester, students were required to post handouts created for their small book group presentations and lessons, as well as upload their complete unit plans, including handouts, tests, etc. Ultimately, per the Wetpaint tracking feature, most participants contributed far beyond the above expectations, averaging close to 100 combined thread and page contributions per student (see Figure 1). This supports Ryan's (2008) findings that when given open ended and unstructured expectations for online discussions, preservice teachers log on more often and contribute more lengthy posts than required.

It is important to emphasize that just as students' use of the methods course wiki was authentic (i.e., required genuine and honest communication for real world purposes), so was the intention behind its creation. I did not implement the wiki to conduct research or collect data, I implemented the wiki as a class tool for reasons previously detailed. Furthermore, the expressed goals for wiki assignments and participation did not consider (or even mention) identity. For these reasons, I believe this dissertation is a "natural experiment" and that this wiki data is authentic. However, the absence of an overt focus on identity in the wiki does not mean that students' discourses failed to include it.

Reflection is noted as a chief strategy for constructing teacher identity (Walkington, 2005). In fact, research shows that to construct identity, preservice teachers need socialization opportunities to 1) reflect, 2) judge their own practice and the practice of others, 3) research the profession through inquiry and problem solving 4) share experiences and expectations in collaborative learning relationships that are open, non-threatening and encourage questions and opinions (Walkington, 2005). The wiki forum provided extended opportunities for all these criteria and in doing so, became an

authentic “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where methods students were able to “take on” the identity of an English teacher. Thus, despite the absence of a course prescription to do identity work, identity construction was naturally embedded in wiki discourses by nature of the context and community.

I will now turn to the participants themselves and how student sampling was determined from each cohort.

### Sampling

Because my study seeks to understand secondary English teacher identity in methods students’ discourses during field experience, of the 26 students who gave IRB permissions to use their wiki contributions, five were not included here because they did not fulfill these criteria. Specifically, in 2008 17 students enrolled in my *Teaching of English* course, 11 gave IRB permissions, and two from this group were eliminated. Both individuals were cut because they were not student teaching at the time: one was a foreign exchange student from France and the other was working ahead in her education program. In 2009, 25 students enrolled in my course, 15 gave IRB permission and three of these participants were also cut. One, because he was in the Elementary Education program, one because he was in the secondary Social Studies program, and one because she was in her third year of full time employment as a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and was in my class to finish her credential. Finally, forthcoming analysis shows that of the 21 participants’ contributions, some became more relevant than others’ in understanding teacher identity construction. Thus, this sample shifts from convenience to criterion to theoretical sampling with some participants appearing more often in the data analysis than others.

## Participants

Research trends continue to show that the majority of beginning English teachers are white (89%), under 30 years of age (80%) and female (90%) (Scherff & Hahs-Vaughn, 2008, p. 180). Participants in my study appear to support these statistics as far as gender and age are concerned with 90% female and 98% under 30. However, participants are much more ethnically diverse than national trends and only 60% white. Specifically, 12 white female, 3 white male, 4 Latina female, 1 African American female, and 1 Native American female. Participants in both cohorts are under 30 years of age, with one career changer in her 40's. At the time, all were students in the university's Teacher Education Department, working towards a credential in secondary English and took my class because it was required for certification.

For their first wiki post assignment, students were required to complete an "About Me" page to introduce themselves to the class; cohorts were given similar prompts and sentence starters to choose from (provided by Wetpaint and slightly modified by me) such as: Interests... Occupation... Hometown... My hero(es)... If I could live anywhere, it would be... Advice I'd give to my former self... My dream job... Slogan... To unwind and relax I... I find it utterly infuriating when... I'm happiest when... One moment I would love to relive again would be... During high school... One thing I would change about the world would be... Sometimes I wish I could just... The best three words to describe me are... and, I decided to become a teacher because.

Using pseudonyms, below I provide a brief description of each student using excerpts from these profile pages in alphabetical order. These are self-identifiers and limited in scope, but provide some information about each participant in their own words.

## *Participant Profiles*

### *Amy*

“I became a teacher because: I wanted a career that would challenge me. I tremble at the prospect of making widgets or counting money for a living, especially because I have a strong dislike for monotony. My dream job is to teach English for the Department of Defense in Germany. What else you should know about me: I despise the media, radio and television inclusive, but I love HBO. Also, I believe our system of government to be an impenetrable, collective dictatorship. I'm sick of being lied to by politicians. I believe technology has begun to catalyze the end of human existence. Though my ultimate goal is to become a filmmaker, I intend to teach revolutionary literature, including books by authors such as George Orwell and Ayn Rand. I have not yet heard a positive thing about teaching, but knowing that many teachers and professors have changed my thinking patterns, positively influenced me, and altered my perspective for the better, I intend to follow in their footsteps. What I look forward to most is sharing my passion for writing.

### *Brooke*

“I became a teacher because: I feel like it is the best way to make a difference in young people's lives. That is very important to me. The best phrase to describe me is: An acquired taste. If I could live anywhere, it would be: Somewhere I haven't been before. What else you should know about me: I'm dying to join a book club so if you know of one... I'm beginning the Master's Program. I absolutely love to read and write. I am currently in the middle of 3 different books: *Anna Karenina*, *Their Eyes were Watching God*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*. I got my B.A. in English- Creative Writing. Other than school, I really like to be outside and do all kinds of things. Climbing, soccer,

Backpacking, Fishing, Scrapbooking, and Cooking are my favorite past times. I also love to travel and have been to Spain, Portugal, Scotland, and England. I briefly went to Belize and Honduras as well.”

*Dana*

“I am the baby of my family. I have an older sister who is 27 and an older brother who is 30. I love my family with all my heart. They have always been there for me, and I read and watch enough news to know that this is a true blessing. I'm in the secondary licensure program in the Communicative Arts field. I got my bachelors in Spanish and Dance with an emphasis in flamenco. I am in the semi-professional group, (name of group) and it is one of my life's passions. I study with the Encinas family, and their great teaching methodology is one of the reasons I am inspired to become a teacher. I love to read, and I have an extensive book collection. I think reading is sexy. Yep, I said it. I do tend to pick the best-looking cover when I pick a book to read. I know it's a bit shallow, but I am what I am. I'm also a big movie buff, because my family and I have been going to movies almost every Sunday since I was a child. So if you ever want to quote your favorite movie lines, I'm the girl to do it with.”

*Emily*

“I became a teacher because: I love English, and I love working with high school students. I believe this is the way I am going to make a positive change in the world. My hero(es): God, My Mom, my fiancé, and all the authors who give this world beauty through literature. I have my wonderful parents and two older brothers. My family is very close. I also have a second family, which are my friends. They are all amazing, and are so supportive. So I have always had a great group of people cheering me on, and they are

the main reason I will be able to graduate with my degree in only four years. I am also getting married June 2009 to another education major. I am student teaching in a ninth grade English classroom. My CT is one of the most respected teachers (at the high school), and while a few of our styles are different, I know I will learn so much from her. I am excited to see how my own beliefs about teaching will change, or be altered at all.”

*Grace*

“I have lived (here) my entire life. I am currently finishing up my BA in Secondary Education. I have two younger sisters. I also have a toy poodle named Button. I am a reading maniac, and a professed bibliophile. I love reading and I love books. My all time favorite book is the Bible with *East of Eden* coming in second and *Pride and Prejudice* coming in third. However, I enjoy all things Jane Austen and I am a huge fan of British and American Romanticism. When I'm not reading or going to school I like to knit, play the banjo, or play the guitar. I have been playing the guitar for eight years and the banjo for four. I don't play any sports, but I love being outside and enjoying the beauty that each day has to offer.”

*Hailey*

“I am from Commerce City, Colorado which is a tiny industrial suburb of Denver. The high school I attended had a diverse population like (here). I knew many students who spoke no English, many of my friends had children during high school and only 4 of my friends went on to college and stuck with it. I loved high school but had many friends who hated it. I believe being connected to something in the school is very important to helping students stay motivated. I cheered for four years, played basketball, was senior class president, a peer tutor/counselor and in Talent Search (yes, I was one of those kids

who never wanted to go home). I was able to go to college because of a terrific program called the Daniels Fund College Prep and Scholarship program. They along with Talent Search and my mom helped me make the dream of going to college come true. I am happy to say that in May I will be the first person in my family to graduate from college. I believe that my diverse upbringing helps me understand somewhat where students are coming from. I was raised by a poor single mother on welfare (I know it almost sounds like the Tupac song heehee), however, we did not use a hotplate.”

*Isabel*

“Superpowers: Flight vs. invisibility? Neither, teleportation. If I could live anywhere, it would be: Arizona. Advice I'd give to my former self: Don't worry so much. What else you should know about me: I started off as an computer science major, so although I decided teaching would be better for me, I still I hope to make technology an important part of my teaching. I'm currently student teaching (finally!) 10th grade at (school) after a couple of years as a computer science major and then another semester or so of floundering around trying to figure out what I *really* wanted to do with my life. Teaching had always been on the back of my mind though and I wanted a job where I could really help people.”

*Julie*

“I became a teacher because: I had been coaching cheerleading and decided I loved working with teens and being a role model to them. Also, my grandma was a high school teacher who worked with the severely disabled and down-syndrome kids and my grandpa taught Special Ed at the University of Wisconsin and I used to go to work with them. The best word to describe me is: Feisty. What else you should know about me: I



grew up a military brat and moved my whole life. I have lived in 5 states, Japan and Germany and visited countless other Asian and European countries. This is my 8<sup>th</sup> year in college and I'll graduate with 200+ credit hours. I have been working as a substitute and auto sub for 4 years which has been invaluable experience. I have an amazing boyfriend who is an EOD Tech (Explosive Ordinance Disposal) with the Air Force. He has been in Iraq since April and should be home the first week of November or so.”

*Katherine*

“Interests: I am deeply interested in social justice and becoming a teacher who positively impacts her students' daily lives. I am also very interested in working with at-risk students (several people in my family were at-risk students, including myself - I dropped out of high school). Some of my ‘lighter’ interests include cooking - I'm constantly thinking about different flavor combinations, gardening (flower and vegetable) and bicycling (I ride about 50-75 miles every week). What else you should know about me: I have very little patience for negativity and sniveling.”

*Kayla*

“The best word to describe me is: Dedicated. Interests: Reading, writing, painting. Favorite movies: *Cool Hand Luke* is my all time favorite, but I love anything with Bruce Willis. My hero(es): Harper Lee, Wonder Woman. My superpower is: My ability to laugh. My dream job(s): Teaching English. What else you should know about me: I have two daughters and three grandbabies--all boys. My younger daughter just graduated from (Community College) for Fire Science and my older daughter is in Nursing school. I am very proud of both of them. Slogan: You're never too old to learn something new.”

*Lauren*

“To unwind and relax, I typically like to go to the driving range or golf course with my boyfriend. One moment I would love to relive again would be my high school graduation day, it was the first and only time that I was with all of my siblings. Sometimes I wish that I could just get back to my country life. During high school, I loved school spirit! The best three words to describe me are: clean, quirky, anxious. My dream job(s): Acting in silly TV commercials or on set with Hannah Montana! What else you should know about me: I am from a small town. My grandparents raised me. I have two brothers and one sister. I have always been an independent person because of my childhood. My friends are my family. I love holidays. I really like cars!!!! I clean with Clorox. Slogan: I do it for the kids.”

*Megan*

“Life plan: get my MA in secondary ed, join the Peace Corps, come back and teach English for a few years, find a job where I can travel the world. To unwind and relax, I typically like to meditate in the mountains. I find it utterly infuriating when people are late because it shows disrespect. One moment I would love to relive again would be bungee jumping off a cliff in Switzerland summer 2008. One thing I would love to change about our world would be to teach people how to communicate better so they can understand each other and not fight. I regret that I bought a new car 2 years ago. The best three words to describe me are: passionate, independent and silly. My superpower is: always being able to see the good in people. Some cool things I've done: backpack through Europe, help create a community garden with children, worked at a National Park in Wyoming, ran a 10K for charity. Some cool things I want to do: see monkeys in

India, lobby for mandatory media literacy classes in all high schools, help my parents buy a house, foster a child. Slogan: Not that I want to be a god, or a hero, just to change into a tree, grow for ages, not hurt anyone.

*Nancy*

“Occupation: Sewing, babysitting, glittering (yes, that is a job and I do actually get paid for putting glitter on things). Facts to know about me: I love theatre.

I have two adorable kitties who like to do my homework for me as illustrated (photo) above. My favorite authors are William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe and Oscar Wilde. If I were a millionaire, the biggest room in my mansion would be the library, and I would have millions of books! My favorite thing to do in my free time is read. I would some day love to teach senior AP English and Creative Writing. I am a poet. I play drums in a rock band. I am vegan/wheat free. I love animals of all kinds (excluding insects) I love new friends!”

*Nick*

“Occupation: Automotive Tech. The best word to describe me is: Ridiculous. Interests: Making people laugh, Hockey (for University), Having fun. My hero(es): My father. My superpower is: Making people laugh when they’re mad at me. If I could live anywhere, it would be: Atlantis or Canada. My dream job(s): To be the guy who taste tests the inner juice of the Gusher fruit snacks. What else you should know about me: I can ride a unicycle, I can juggle, I’m scared of clowns. I think the world should relax. Slogan: Get real with it, or I swear I’ll...”

*Olivia*

“Slogan: It's not what you teach always, but how you teach it. I joined this wiki because: It feels like a ‘Facebook’ for class. (and I love Facebook, and class is alright too). The best word to describe me is: Sociable- I love people, and I love to talk with them! Interests: writing, reading, soccer, snowboarding, skiing, (it is possible to do both) traveling around the world. My mother is my hero. I look up to her every day in everything that she does. My superpower is: Talking. I do it way too much! If I could live anywhere, it would be: Colorado Springs. There, I can snowboard and get all the snow I could ever want! My dream job(s): to become a High School Counselor. What else you should know about me: I have traveled to England, France, Italy, Austria, Germany, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. (and I enjoyed France and Italy the best by far).”

*Paul*

“The best word to describe me is: Laid Back. Interests: Any type of outdoor activity. I really enjoy playing any sport. I also have a crazy little dog named Rudy who keeps me very active. My hero(es): My two main heroes are my parents. They taught me how to succeed in life and I always look to them for advice and guidance. My superpower is: Being able to fly, then I would not have to ride the city bus everywhere. My dream job(s): I have always wanted to be a teacher, so when I finally become a teacher I will consider that pretty dreamy. What else you should know about me: I am a pretty laid back guy. I like to make new friends and love talking to people. I look forward to getting to know all of my classmates and Instructor better. Hopefully we can build professional relationships that will help during our year of student teaching, and extend into our profession as we become teachers.”

*Penny*

“Hometown: Na'neelzhiin. The best word to describe me is: reserved. Interests: sewing, organizing functions. Favorite movies: all the *Die Hard* movies. Favorite TV shows: *CSI: Miami*, *King of Queens*. If I could live anywhere, it would be: home on the Rez. My dream job(s): Superintendent of Gallup/McKinley Schools. What else you should know about me: I am nice and helpful. I LOVE cats.”

*Robert*

“Occupation: student, cashier. Hometown: Dorothy, New Jersey. Interests: movies, books, comics. My hero(es): Jerry (classmate) cause he wears pants with the pants rolled up past the calf and frilly shirts. My superpower is: over-complicating the simplest things. My dream job(s): I often dream I'm a short-order cook in a bookstore. Then wake up screaming. What else you should know about me: Pigeons hate me.”

*Shannon*

“The best word to describe me is: Fantastical. Interests: reading, movies, music, humor, candy, puppies and dancing. My hero(es): My grandparents. My superpower is: If I could have any super power in the world it would be to fly!!! But my real world super power is healing. If I could live anywhere, it would be: The Adriatic, the most beautiful blue water on the planet. My dream job(s): Music Video Director!!! Or TV show writer. What else you should know about me: I am optimistic, and idealistic. Slogan: Thank goodness for the support of (University) instructors and my fellow student teachers... It's a jungle out there!!!!!”

*Tiffany*

“The best word to describe me is: Bubbly. Interests: I love hanging out with family and friends, but who doesn't like doing that? I love to run in half marathons, go shopping, eat wonderful sushi and a great glass of wine while watching the sunset. I am passionate about church and reading the number one book on my list, the Bible. I am truly blessed to have such an awesome network of people and without them, Jesus knows I would be lost! My hero(es): Jesus, my parents. My superpower is: Encouraging others. My dream job(s): To be a mother, however for a career, I can't wait to teach and ultimately become an educational counselor. What else you should know about me: I'm clumsy, I love red lipstick, I love the rodeo, I am dating my high school crush (hopefully marrying him), I want to travel the world! Slogan: Live, laugh, love.”

*Victoria*

“The best word to describe me is: Optimistic. Interests: Spending time with my wonderful kiddo, cooking, reading and just living life! My hero(es): My incredible mother. My superpower is: Multi-tasking. If I could live anywhere, it would be: I'd like to move back to Seattle. My dream job(s): Teaching High School English and being the activities director. What else you should know about me: Nothing is as important to me as family is, especially my great little kiddo!”

In addition to these bios, below Figure 1 includes the number of wiki page & thread contributions by participant, as well as their teaching status (if available) as of the time of writing this dissertation.

**Figure 1: Wiki Contributions and Teaching Status of Participants**

	# of wiki page/thread posts	Teaching status as of 2011
Amy	13/69	Completing M.A. in English, not teaching
Brooke	14/36	Public school: Grades 10 & 12 Honors & AP English
Catherine	92/26	Charter school: P/T Grade 12 English & grade 10 History
Dana	10/35	Charter school: Grades 9 & 10 English
Emily	10/50	Public school: High school English teacher
Grace	29/26	Substitute teacher
Hailey	46/20	Public school: 10 <sup>th</sup> grade English
Isabel	41/40	Unknown
Julie	30/25	Public school: Grades 6 & 8 English, regular & accelerated
Kayla	34/37	Unknown
Lauren	35/25	Substitute teacher
Megan	54/48	Not teaching; left program
Nancy	52/59	Completing M.A. in English and substituting
Nick	40/53	Charter school: High school English teacher
Olivia	40/69	Park Service education program instructor
Paul	55/47	Education Asst. in high school Behavior Intervention Program
Penny	43/49	Public Reservation school: Grades 9-12 English
Robert	56/32	Substitute teacher
Shannon	34/22	Substitute teacher
Tiffany	49/30	Charter school: Grades 6-8 English, Department Head
Victoria	89/61	Public school: 7 <sup>th</sup> grade English, regular, accelerated, & ESL

### The Student Teaching Practicum

As stated, all participants began their yearlong field experience at the start of the fall semester. Placements were primarily at the high school level, with 3 (Robert, Tiffany and Olivia) of the 21 at a middle school site. The university stipulates that student teachers observe initially, and over the course of the term, take on more classroom

responsibility. By November, methods students are expected to take over the full time instruction of two to three classes and design and implement a ten-day unit plan by the end of the semester.

As a means of providing additional context, I have listed below all references participants made to curriculum. This includes all texts and text related activities, as well as any other instructional practices. In Figure 2, I include all the texts that were mentioned by genre; in Figure 3 I include all text-based instructional methods mentioned by participants. Other non text-based instructional activities described by student teachers include the following: a compare and contrast essay, a “Bellringer” on metaphor, daily journals, Daily Oral Language, Latin and Greek prefixes vocabulary game, an autobiographical book jacket, a “Personal Shield” project, a weekly essay, finding a library book, correcting an exam, taking a vocabulary test, A2L testing (local standardized test), letter writing, grammar worksheets, crossword puzzle and maze worksheets, going over a project rubric, a timed essay, a Fish Bowl activity, and creating a “writing territories” list on topics to write about. Overall, grammar was the most common type of non text-based instruction mentioned.

This snapshot is understandably incomplete as it only includes the curriculum and instruction mentioned on the wiki, and certainly additional texts and activities were experienced in the term. However, these mentions of English “content” (i.e., the types of reading, writing, listening and speaking text/activities that took place in methods students’ secondary classrooms) are worth noting given the general absence of pedagogy in methods students’ identity discourses as discussed in Chapter Four data analysis



**Figure 2: Texts Read in Field Placements**

<b>Play</b>	<b>Short Story</b>	<b>Novel</b>	<b>Film</b>	<b>Poetry</b>	<b>Mythology</b>	<b>Non Fiction</b>
Merchant of Venice	The Fall of the House of Usher	Lord of the Flies	The Sixth Sense	They Odyssey	Baucus & Philemon	Self Reliance
Hamlet	The Open Boat	1984	Thrown of Blood			
Romeo and Juliet	A Christmas Carol	The Good Earth	Shane			
Julius Caesar	The Most Dangerous Game	Freak the Mighty	From Hell			
Macbeth	Yours truly, Jack the Ripper	Treasure of Lemon Brown				
The Crucible						

**Figure 3: Text-based Instruction Conducted in Field Placements**

<b>Method of Reading</b>	<b>Discussion/Activity (whole class)</b>	<b>Writing related to texts (on own)</b>	<b>Projects &amp; Presentations</b>
Audio Book	Analyzing Character	Journals	Book Jacket
Teacher Read Aloud	Connecting Text to Self	Cause & Effect Chart	Greek God Report
Whole Class Read Aloud	Tone & Diction	Cornell Notes	Debate
Reader's Theater	Foreshadowing	Five paragraph essay on theme of text	Trojan War Poster
Quaker Reading	Archetypes	Written Conversation	Poem analysis with group poster & presentation
SSR	Symbolism	Theme Analysis	Archetypes in Media presentation
Learning Centers	Theme	Dialectical Journal	
	Figurative Language	Reading chart with vocabulary, plot and reactions	
	Sensory Images	Rewriting text in new genre	
	Vocabulary Worksheet	Character Descriptions	
	Highlighting text during read aloud	Summary/Review	

#### Analytic Framework

As introduced in Chapter One, this dissertation takes a poststructuralist and socially situated approach to identity construction, based upon the belief that identity is subjective, fluid, and occurs through discourse (Zembylas, 2003). With its emphasis on interpretive inquiry and participant meaning, this study also works within a social constructivist paradigm, relying as much as possible on participants' views of the situation as formed through their interactions with others (Creswell, 2007). Most importantly, I rely on Gee's (2001, 2003) theories of identity as an analytic lens.

Specifically, I use his concepts of semiotic domain and internal/external design grammar as they relate to affinity identity. Affinity identity is a useful way to view the socially and contextually embedded identity that methods students “take up” (or reject) as they become English teachers. It is a useful tool for exploring methods students’ discourses and identity construction and for connecting them to possible ideologies per the following research questions:

- 1) How do methods students perceive the identity of an English teacher?
- 2) What ideologies are present in methods students’ discourses of English teacher identity?

#### Methodology

Because this is an investigation of discursive practice and data is isolated to communication artifacts of participants’ wiki posts, content analysis is an ideal methodological approach. Designed for written documents and the raw material of communication (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), content analysis originated in communication research and has been used to describe quantitative as well as qualitative approaches of textual analysis. In the most general sense, content analysis involves “comparing, contrasting and categorizing a corpus of data” (Gerbic & Stacey citing Schwandt, 2005, p. 46).

In the last decade researchers have struggled with finding ways to practically and systematically analyze the enormous quantities of communication data wrought by web-based learning; content analysis appears to be one effective approach to quantifying the often overwhelming amounts of online text into messages for analysis (Stacey and Gerbic, 2003). In her early influential work, Henri (1993) developed a qualitative

approach to computer-mediated communication (CMC) research and argued for the development of more qualitative tools to analyze how students use this medium to develop and communicate ideas (Gerbic & Stacey, 2005, p. 46). While the original content analysis techniques can require some adaptation to address differences brought by the online medium, many contemporary researchers endorse content analysis for CMC research (Gerbic & Stacey, 2005, p. 46). In fact, the use of content analysis techniques for analyzing transcripts of asynchronous, CMC have been steadily increasing, particularly in formal educational settings (De Wever et al., 2005; Gerbic & Stacey, 2005).

#### Data Collection

As stated, students were required to post to the wiki at least two times each week, one in response to course readings and another using one of three open-ended writing assignments. Two of the three writing assignments were in the form of student and teacher interviews and while these were informative, they were eliminated from this study because I did not have IRB permission from the dozens of teachers and students that were interviewed by my methods students. Thus, the data used in this study are: 1) Reflection Wheel Journals (3 per student); 2) threaded discussions, comments and pages about assigned readings (whole class and small group); and 3) optional student-led comments, threads and pages on self-selected topics (e.g. information gleaned from a school in-service, complaints about the university program, inquiries about how to sign up to be a substitute, “rants” and stories about CT’s, emotional support and advice, and so on).

Because the purpose of the wiki was not to conduct research and I did not decide to pilot this study until the end of the fall 2008 semester, I did not ask methods students

for permission to use their posts until the end of the term. In fall 2009, I briefly mentioned the study to the second cohort at the beginning of the semester, but did not explain it fully until the close of the term. With both cohorts, at the close of the semester I spent class time introducing the study and answering questions about its purpose and how posts would be used. Because I did not want a conflict of interest or for students to feel pressured to give IRB permission, I did not give methods students the consent form (Appendix B) until after the semester closed and final course grades were submitted to the university. At this time, I mailed the letter and an SASE and if students were willing to participate, they signed and mailed permissions back to me.

The Internet provides a whole new realm for qualitative data creation and storage. The Wetpaint site used for the course wiki automatically archived (and continues to do so) all data stored for this study and therefore is easy for me to maintain and access. According to Wetpaint, as long as I occasionally log on to the wiki, it will remain active and Wetpaint will keep it up, indefinitely. This means should any of the students want to, they could also log back onto the wiki at any time (providing they remember their password); it remains just as it was they last time they were there. For data collection and as backup, I downloaded each thread, page and post to my personal computer using a feature on Wetpaint that allows the administrator to place all information from their site into a desktop zip folder.

To organize data, I read through it to locate only those posts within a discussion that were contributed by participants who had given IRB permission. I created a Word document for each type of discussion and compiled the data there. For example, *Fires in the Bathroom* discussion was cut and paste into a Word document titled “Fires” and

consisted of every post in chronological order made by participants who gave IRB permission. I cut and paste each post in every text and non-text based discussion, and titled them in this way, excluding the posts of those methods students who did not agree to participate. I saved these Word documents alongside the original complete discussions downloaded from the Wetpaint site. For the Reflection Wheel Journals, I titled files by participant pseudonym and cut and paste all three RWJs into one Word document for each methods student.

In recognition of the many ethical concerns related to saving, copying, reading and archiving large volumes of electronic text by others, I made every effort to protect the anonymity of my participants and to maintain my role as limited participant observer. All data files were saved on my personal laptop in folders labeled by 2008 or 2009 cohort. Also, I printed and stapled together a hard copy of every edited text and non-text based discussion (titled by student generated page name or title of text), and every RWJ (titled by participant and numbered 1-3) and stored this data in a file cabinet in my office. In the next section, I will elaborate on how I approached analyzing this data.

### Data Analysis

The unit of analysis determines how an overall message is broken down into manageable chunks for coding (De Wever et al., 2005). As previously discussed, online data can be enormous in size and this wiki data was no exception. Specifically, I had 145 pages of discussion and 126 pages of RWJs. The choice of the unit of analysis should capture the true content of the original discourse (De Wever et al., 2005). Based on this understanding, the data in this study is broken into thematic units of content for coding and analysis. A “thematic unit” is defined as “a single thought unit or idea unit that

conveys a single item of information extracted from a segment of content” (Rourke et al., citing Budd, Thorp, and Donohue, 2001, p. 9). Thus, to manage the quantity of data, chunks of content were broken down and coded by individual participant and thematic unit.

Initially, the data analysis process was superficial. I read through the data and assigned labels that consisted primarily of what I thought the participants were “doing” in their post. For example: Inquiry, Sharing, Connecting text to Classroom, Problem Solving, and so on. While helpful, these codes did not reveal anything related to identity or ideology and served mainly as a way to summarize the data rather than analyze it. After spending some time away from the data, as well as reading more research on teacher identity development, I returned to the wiki data and began to re-code with a more critical lens. In this second round of content coding I took a step back from what the participant was “doing” with the post and approached each unit interpretatively—all the while, considering questions about identity and ideology. This time, codes emerged from the data that were much more complex and relevant, and came from the language of the participant’s themselves, such as “making a difference” and “building student success”.

Because I am working from a social constructivist paradigm, such interpretive coding is aligned and appropriate. This inductive approach effectively allowed categories and themes to emerge from the content. The next step of analysis utilized the constant comparative method, a process that involves taking units of discourse from the data and comparing it to emerging categories using different levels of coding (Creswell, 2007). This time, units were grouped and read “against” one another to confirm when passages contained ideas, claims, and positions representative of emergent categories and were

associated with larger discursive themes. This level of analysis helped me to fine tune codes and differentiate one (and it's related properties) from another, until categories became "saturated" (e.g. data offers no new information to understanding the category) (Creswell, 2007) and were determined to be themes.

Selecting thematic categories involved, "systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need[ed] further refinement and development" (Morrow & Smith citing Strauss & Corbin in Creswell, 2007, p. 290). This stage of data analysis involved cutting and pasting all similarly coded posts into one document, printing this document, highlighting key passages within each unit, cutting and pasting again, and then color coding passages within these passages; all the while reading, re-reading, analyzing and re-analyzing until criteria, relationships, and patterns became clear. Once contrasted, compared, and saturated, core categories were assigned in vivo codes, using the exact words of participants to label themes (Creswell, 2007). Criteria for theme status was determined by 1) how often the category appeared in the data across participants and cohorts, 2) the inclusiveness of the category, 3) the flexibility and variation allowed by the category and, 4) how clearly the implications of the category related to my research questions. On average, each of the themes appeared in the discourses of ten methods students and appeared no fewer than three times across cohorts.

Overall, a number of data collection and analysis strategies were used to enhance "confirmability" in this study, including: the use of verbatim participant language and mechanically recorded data, as well as the use of triangulation via multiple data sources, cohorts, and time periods (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Furthermore, to document



this process, I wrote analytic memos (Creswell, 2007) with questions and observations about the data, as well as explanations of categories, patterns, and themes as they emerged and evolved. These memos included definitions of properties of categories and subcategories, as well elaboration on specific attributes and subtleties of analysis as it became more refined, particularly when comparing similarly coded passages and writing the analytic narrative. Analytic memos were kept together in an analytic journal; this resource was essential for writing the narrative, findings, and conclusions.

In Chapter Four, I will present the discourses of participants and explain the seven themes that emerged from the wiki data. In Chapter Five, I will explore findings, conclusions, and future implications for this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYTIC NARRATIVE

The purpose of this chapter is to explore what methods students' online discourses reveal about their identity construction as developing English teachers. Because the data in this study consists of writing in a "naturally occurring" class wiki, methods students' identity-related discourses are more embedded and less explicit than they might have been if the data consisted of interviews, observations, or writing tasks where the goal was to surface thoughts and feelings about identity. Nonetheless, seven interrelated themes about English teacher identity emerged from methods students' discourses.

As outlined in Chapter One, methods students' wiki discourses are viewed through the lens of Gee's (2001, 2003) socially situated theories of identity. Specifically, Gee's concept of taking up an affinity identity, which is based upon the social experiences and practices shared within an affinity groups. The principles of A-Identity figure prominently in the wiki data because participants share the affinity group of secondary English preservice teachers participating in a methods course during their semester of field experience. As members of this group (which includes students and cooperating teachers at the school site), methods students are developing and enacting specific kinds of English teacher work and adopting corresponding language, ideas, and strategies to perform that work. This process Gee (2001) likens to becoming literate in the semiotic domain of the affinity group, in this case the semiotic domain being that of teaching secondary English.

In the domain of teaching secondary English, methods students are becoming literate 'insiders' by reading (i.e. identifying) and writing (i.e. enacting) what they

interpret to be its external and internal design grammar. Internal design grammar refers to the content or in this case pedagogy of the domain, while the external design grammar refers to the typical social practices of the domain. In becoming literate in the domain of teaching secondary English, methods students are constructing an associated English teacher or affinity identity. This identity is not knowledge of, conception of, or awareness of, a previously established and fixed “English teacher identity” but an experientially and discursively constructed self that is unstable, fluid, and certain to change; particularly once methods students finish student teaching and move outside this time, place, and affinity group to expand their teaching experiences among new colleagues.

The themes in this study are based upon methods students’ recognition and meaning making in the semiotic domain of teaching secondary English. As discussed in Chapter Three, to be considered a theme concepts appeared in the discourses of roughly ten participants a minimum of three times across the two cohorts. Themes are examples of literacy acts and identity work as methods students “take on and play with” the identity associated with this domain. Each is written in the form of a conclusive statement and provides a synthesis of methods students’ discourses in English teacher identity:

- Teachers build student success
- Teachers motivate students
- Teachers meet student needs
- Teachers build classroom community
- Teachers build caring relationships
- Teachers never give up believing in students
- Teachers make a difference

As forthcoming analysis argues, all of these themes come from participants' learning the external design grammar of the domain and therefore are answers to the following related questions:

Do you know what counts as thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing like someone who is into teaching secondary English?

Can you recognize the sorts of identities people take on when they are teaching secondary English?

Can you recognize what counts as valued social practices to members of the affinity group associated with the semiotic domain of teaching secondary English and what counts as behaving appropriately in these social practices?

In other words, all of the above themes are what methods students' determine count as thinking, acting, interacting and valuing for someone who is teaching secondary English. These themes surmise the sorts of identities methods students' believe people take on when they are teachers of English. These statements are a synthesis of the social practices and appropriate behaviors methods students' determine are valued in teaching secondary English.

#### Thematic Patterns

Throughout the seven themes two patterns emerge: 1) emphasis on teacher responsibility and sacrifice, particularly through verb usage, as well as in incidences of "push back" and 2) limited discussion about disciplinary content and pedagogy for the teaching of English Language Arts. While these patterns will be explored throughout the analytic narrative, I will outline their key features and highlight their significance below.

### *Teacher as Selfless Giver*

Across all seven themes participants' verbs continually reinforce and emphasize the responsibility of the teacher over the secondary student. For example, when methods students "set up" "build" or "create" success, the secondary student is often ignored and their own responsibility in the exchange passive or peripheral. As forthcoming analysis details, the cumulative effect of participants' verbs and associated metaphors emphasize an affinity identity that is responsible for all aspects of the classroom including secondary students' behavior and learning. The domain of teaching is consistently described in unidirectional terms where the teacher is the supreme architect of interpersonal interactions and classroom environment, which requires personal and professional sacrifice.

However, some methods students resist "taking on" this identity (or take it on and then reject it afterward), resulting in what I call "push back." Push back occurs when participants question the limits and plausibility of the selfless giver affinity identity. However, whether methods students are adopting or rejecting this construction, their discourses indicate an implicit understanding that selfless giving is a "natural" or typical part of thinking, acting, valuing and interacting (i.e. its external design grammar) in teaching secondary English. Push back can also be likened to Gee's (2003) meta-level thinking about semiotic domains. Such meta-level thinking Gee describes as active learning and critical thinking about the relationships between the semiotic domain being learned and other semiotic domains. This appears when methods students' understanding of teaching secondary English bumps up against or challenges previous understandings of other domains. For example, how English teaching differs from other content areas such

as Math or Social Studies, or how it requires competing responsibilities such as evaluator or disciplinarian, or how the English teaching encompasses other roles such as parent or therapist. Specific examples of “push back” and how methods students’ understandings of different domains create conflict will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the role ideology might play in the affinity identity of the selfless giver as well as possible reasons why methods students’ discourses focus on external design grammar of the domain.

### *Absence of the Pedagogy and Content of English*

The lack of discussion regarding English Language Arts content, curriculum and pedagogy is surprising; particularly considering the wiki is part of an English methods course. As stated, data themes and thus, methods students’ discourses, focus primarily on the taking up the external design grammar of the domain. In other words, they answer the above questions about what is and is not acceptable or typical social practice and identity for teaching secondary English, with very little consideration about content or internal design grammar of the domain. As discussed in Chapter One, internal design grammar answers the content-related questions of the domain. In this study, such questions relate to the discipline of English and can be summed up as follows:

What sorts of instructional practices/curricula/pedagogy count as typical or atypical of secondary English teaching?

What sorts of instructional practices/curricula/pedagogy are English teachers likely to find most valuable (or least) and for what reasons?

In other words, the instructional practices typical of secondary English are generally absent from or otherwise subordinate within wiki themes. English Language Arts

curriculum and pedagogy—what English teachers teach and why they value and teach it—is missing from methods students’ associated affinity identity.

While curriculum, pedagogy, and the instructional practices related to the teaching of English are not a part of these themes, internal design grammar does occasionally surface in methods students’ discourse (see figures 2 and 3). However, this language only occurs in subordination to the external design grammar of the domain. For example, in reading response posts and RWJ’s the content of the English course is occasionally mentioned (e.g. grammar worksheets, Greek God Report, SSR, character analysis, *1984*). However, such mentions are only given as background information to set a scene. Therefore, references to content are part of a broader description and serve to support methods students’ explanations about what it means to think, act, interact, and value as secondary English teachers. When a methods student references a specific novel, an instructional method, or teaching experience it is to provide context for communicating the larger concept of the external design grammar and associated theme. Ultimately, the social practices and appropriate behaviors methods students’ determine are valued in teaching secondary English subsume references to its content.

The cumulative absence of content/internal design grammar is especially significant and points to holes and subsequent areas for revision and inquiry in English methods course curriculum; this, as well as ideological implications of this absence, will be discussed further in Chapter Five. I will now turn to each individual theme and provide examples of student discourse and analytical support.

#### Teachers Build Student Success

Throughout their discourses, methods students use metaphors and verbs that

cumulatively reinforce a belief that teachers are almost exclusively responsible for all secondary students' interactions, behaviors, and performance. This is especially true regarding "student success"; what student success looks like beyond external descriptions, for example how a teacher might "ensure" its development, remains vague. For example, methods students state that teachers must, "push these kids to do their best" and "know how to push them to that next level" yet offer limited, if any, elaboration as to what this "pushing" looks like or what "best" and "next level" entails. Discourses related to the theme of student success primarily refer to what is and is not acceptable or typical social practice and identity and lack specific instructional strategies and pedagogy to get there. However, as methods students becoming literate in the external design grammar of the secondary English teaching domain, they interpret secondary student success via subordinate personal, curricular, and managerial teacher decisions. How one treats secondary students, how one sets up assignments, and how well one manages the classroom misbehavior are all possible avenues to the primary value of student success. In all instances, an English teacher is someone who creates student success; it is her responsibility regardless of specifics and content.

#### *Student Success is Personal*

In a RWJ Nancy recounts an incident where her CT forgot to plan modifications for a visually impaired student when showing a subtitled film to the class. Nancy was distressed by her CT's failure to consider this student's disability in her planning and concludes that student success is contingent upon how teachers consider and treat their students. In her reflection, Nancy explains as a teacher, it is her responsibility to show, "I am truly interested in their success as students and also in them as individuals." While



Nancy uses success in terms largely undefined, she does provide a specific way to get there: showing she is “truly interested.” In other words, student success depends on how she interacts with and treats her secondary students; it’s personal. Furthermore, it requires that a teacher value beyond the academic to the students “as individuals.” This implies a level of commitment that Nancy felt her CT lacked and as a result, the CT ended up having to read aloud the subtitles of a Japanese film so that the visually-impaired student would know, at least in part, what was occurring onscreen. This upset Nancy greatly and solidified her conclusion that without invested interest in students a teacher cannot lead her students to success.

Similarly, Shannon shares a story about a secondary student who assumes (erroneously) that Shannon thinks he’s cheating when correcting his own exam. Like Nancy, Shannon connects success to personal qualities and behaviors of the teacher. Reflecting on the student’s mistaken assumption of her distrust, Shannon concludes that this experience secured her, “belief that if a student doesn’t feel safe motivated and respected then they CAN’T be successful!” Student success, like safety and motivation here, remain externally defined and superficial in use. What remains clear is the teacher’s responsibility for making success happen. An English teacher is someone who makes students feel safe, motivated, and respected; her affinity identity is contingent upon the success of her students. She is defined by what she is able to bring out in them (e.g. how she is “for and with others”). Without such personal qualities, student success cannot occur.

Within methods students reading of behaviors necessary for secondary student success, a number of concepts that appear in other themes are introduced. In particular,

classroom community, motivation, safety, and relationships, appear here as well as in a variety of other contexts in the wiki. For example, in a discussion of the weekly assigned reading Megan explains that, “Building a strong classroom community is one of the most important things any teacher can do to ensure success.” Here, she suggests using “ice breaker activities” on the first day of school and considers success in terms of helping her secondary students get to know each other better. Like Nancy and Shannon’s posts, Megan associates student success with personal behaviors of the teacher and how she treats her secondary students as well as how effectively she brokers personal interactions among them. Many of these ideas will come up again in future themes and emphasize teacher as primary architect of all aspects of the classroom, including secondary student behavior and performance. While Megan does mention content here in the form of icebreaker activities, it is still subordinate to the broader theme, as is the case in examples below.

#### *Student Success is Instructional*

Unlike personal associations regarding teacher behavior and student success, Victoria associates success with the instructional choices of teachers. In her RWJ, Victoria shares an incident from her 9<sup>th</sup> grade ESL class where a secondary student plagiarized a Greek God report. Here, she connects success to performance on a writing assignment, explaining that, “because of this I realized the importance of setting up ones’ students for success, by providing them with specific guidelines.” For Nancy, Shannon, Megan, and Victoria, student success depends upon teacher behavior and values. However, for Victoria it requires that the teacher provide explicit guidelines and assignment expectations, something she believed her CT failed to do, which led to the

secondary student copying his report off of the Internet.

Earlier in the semester, in a free topic discussion thread about a professional development workshop she attended, Victoria discusses the issue of secondary student success by asking questions in terms of degree: “As teachers, we have the ability to push our students to success, but what happens when we don’t push enough, or push too much on certain things?” Between this earlier post and the later RWJ above, Victoria’s language has shifted. Initially, Victoria adopted the external language of social practices and behaviors of the domain such as “pushing” students to success; later her language evolved to a concrete and curricular teacher behavior, “providing guidelines” for writing. This is a good example of how discourses can evolve as methods students spend more time in classrooms with secondary students. While Victoria’s shift has potential to expand her understanding of teacher behavior by connecting student success to the related internal design grammar of curriculum, ultimately, pedagogy is subordinate to the construction because her experience is used to reinforce a primary focus on external design grammar. Specifically, it is the teacher’s responsibility to build success and therefore, it was the CT’s failure to do so that led to a student cheating. In both Nancy and Victoria’s examples, the CT is described as thwarting student success and by extension does not fulfill the social practices and behaviors typical of a secondary English teacher.

### *Student Success is Managerial*

For Paul, success is not associated with personal or curricular decisions, but with the managerial aspects of being a teacher. Describing the first time he supervised an inclusion class with another teacher, Paul explains, “each and every day must be

structured for classroom success.” He states the day’s activities “went smooth” and from this experience concludes that success is “keeping students on task” “creating a positive and effective learning environment” and being able “to help these students at every step along the way.” Unlike previously discourses of student success, for Paul success is tied to on-task behavior, limited disruptions, and effective classroom management. Paul’s language points to success that requires order the teacher “must” structure into the classroom environment through “keeping” “creating” and “helping.” He adds that these behaviors allow a teacher to “make the classroom a successful environment not only for your students, but also yourself.”

Paul is one of the few methods students to associate student success with his own success and to touch on the reciprocal nature of any classroom exchange. But, like most methods students, Paul interprets the domain in language that is one-way, with teacher action as primary. Despite his recognition of these personal benefits, as with previous examples, Paul presents secondary students’ role in their own success as peripheral if not irrelevant. Near the end of his RWJ Paul states, “I need to make adjustments in my own life to allow for students to succeed in the classroom.” While he doesn’t elaborate on these adjustments, Paul’s personal sacrifice “to allow” secondary students to succeed (or behave in any way in the classroom) is another example of the selfless giver affinity identity that emerges from the wiki data. Not only is the teacher responsible for student success, he must be willing to alter his “own life” to get there. This kind of “whatever it takes” language of sacrifice and responsibility is a pattern that appears throughout participants’ discourses.

In sum, an English teacher is someone who is responsible for student success,

which is determined by personal qualities, the ability to design instruction, and classroom management skills. It entails on-task behavior, planning assignments correctly, and positive classroom interactions. Conversely, if a teacher fails to “ensure” student success, the secondary student is likely to lose focus, cheat, become unmotivated, and feel uncared for. A teacher “sets up” guidelines and interest and structures and adjustments so that the student has everything ready and waiting; all students need to do is step into the environment and success will be inevitable. This is, at least, how methods students interpret the external design grammar of teaching secondary English.

As with forthcoming themes, English teacher identity is tied to external descriptions and language related to teacher responsibility and sacrifice. One participant may consider success an orderly classroom environment, while another may associate it with a secondary student getting a good grade on a report, while another as interacting well with peers in a “community.” Regardless, the means of getting there require that the teacher “build” “create” “set up” “make” “provide” “help” “keep” “push” “adjust” “allow” “ensure” and “motivate” students to success. The responsibility a secondary student takes in this exchange and their personal sacrifice to reach success remains largely ignored. In the next section I will explore the theme of motivation and how methods students read the teacher’s responsibility to “engage” so secondary students can more readily step into the success that has been designed for them.

### Teachers Motivate Students

A commonly voiced concern of methods students is secondary student behavior; and related to this, worries about motivation. If secondary students *want* to learn, they are more likely to behave. Or, as Olivia explains, “it was the government that made her go to

school, but it was the TEACHER that made her WANT to learn.” Like student success, student motivation depends upon the teacher’s ability to orchestrate circumstances that elicit a desire to learn. Similar to discourses regarding student success, methods students often interpret the external design grammar of student motivation in abstract and context-free terms. For example:

- “I must engage my students so that they will learn” (Penny)
- “I wonder how to snag a student’s attention and make them interested” (Brooke)
- “I think students will be hungry to learn if we as teachers can spark their interests” (Olivia)
- “We as teachers need to motivate and validate them because they CAN do it” (Nancy)
- “I must be a catalyst at times to spark their learning, while at the same time challenging them to learn for themselves” (Paul)

Teachers “must engage,” “relate” “validate” “be a catalyst” and “snag student’s attention” so students “will be hungry to learn.” If the teacher can “make them interested” and “spark their learning” he will not “lose the interests of the students.” In these examples, methods students do not offer specific pedagogy and curriculum as to how a teacher might “snag” and “spark” interests, only that it is what teachers do and therefore must be done. A way teachers address student motivation is through relevance. In particular, methods students’ discourses construct the teacher as one who is responsible for making curriculum relevant to secondary students’ lives to motivate them to learn. This may take different forms, such as using innovative literature selections or creating

nontraditional writing assignments, but ultimately the curricula is subordinate to the broader theme: an English teacher is someone who is responsible for making students want to learn.

*Motivating Students Requires Relevance*

In a text-based discussion Dana shares the following thoughts about student motivation. She bases her opinions upon her own experiences as a high school student while connecting them to what she believes are the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the English discipline. For Dana, motivating secondary students is determined by the instructional choices of teachers:

...we as teachers need to mix it up. We can't do things the same way always or we'll lose the interest of students, because they can't relate. I still feel like this is going to be the greatest challenge of teaching, but nobody said this job was easy.... I agree completely that teachers need to related material to students lives. It's what sparks their interest into the academic world. During my high school years few teachers did this, and I can honestly say I got nothing from their classes. That's why I'm so excited to teach English. Its benefits are everywhere, and everyday new material is coming out that English teachers can relate to their students. One teacher at (high school) is teaching *1984* and showing clips from *V from Vendetta*. AMAZING! I love it and I can't wait to go in the classroom and do the same thing.”

Dana presents many key ideas about what counts as thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing like someone who is into teaching secondary English. Foremost, she introduces a concept that is often associated with motivation in wiki discussions:

relevance. More than once and in a number of different ways she emphasizes that the “material” must be “related” to “student’s lives” to “spark their interest.” She offers examples of how this can be done, such as “mixing it up” and not using the same activities, lessons, or texts as well as using old texts with new such as teaching *1984* with the film adaptation of the comic book *V for Vendetta*. Dana notes such high-interest, contemporary materials have the potential to “relate” better to secondary students. Without variety and diversity she believes her students will get “nothing” from her class, as was the case when she was in high school. Dana feels this is the “greatest challenge of teaching,” but stresses that such sacrifices (like Paul’s life “adjustments”) are part of the profession as “nobody said this job was easy.”

Other methods students offer similar avenues for engagement via relevance and connecting English to “student’s lives.” For example, Amy promotes writing instruction that is “fun” and allows students “to express their feelings regarding their world.” She believes “steering them away from the hackneyed process of ‘Read the textbook. Analyze the happenings. Write an essay’” will be less “boring and formulaic” than the traditional curriculum because, “sometimes, children have a difficult time relating to literature, because it fails to address their lifestyles and interests.” For both Amy and Dana, an English teacher is someone who uses curricula to motivate and engage secondary students.

For Olivia, students will be more motivated to write and “will want to learn if they are given issues that they actually care about or that are relevant to today’s world.” She adds, “A good way to start is to give them something they are passionate about.” Hailey states that by “making it relevant to students’ lives” a teacher “gives material



street credibility” which makes the subject “easier to learn or at least the student has more motivation to try.” And according to Julie, teachers need to be “excited about the material” and “use many different tasks and activities and assignments to keep your students on their toes and interested.” For methods students an English teacher is someone who is aware of her students’ interests, lives, and passions and who incorporates these aspects into their curriculum.

As with previous examples of content, methods students’ discourses regarding student motivation subordinate the internal design grammar of content when discussing examples such as non-formulaic writing about real-world issues. Furthermore, discourses reinforce the primary role of external design grammar by emphasizing the teacher’s responsibility as in Dana’s language about the potential engagement the English discipline offers as long as teachers are willing to innovate and make changes so curriculum connects to students’ lives. Updated and alternative materials, variety, enthusiasm, and “street credibility” according to Amy, Olivia, Hailey, Julie, and Dana, engage students. As with previous themes, discourses about motivating students also reinforce the responsibility of the teacher and the passivity of the secondary student. “Giving” students issues they are “passionate about” and “steering” them to writing that encourages expression and addresses their “lifestyles and interests” while “keeping them on their toes” through diverse activities, all construct the teacher as designer of the classroom kingdom.

No matter how general or specific the language, methods students conclude the behaviors and social practices of the teacher are the ultimate source of student motivation. Although many discourses include curricular methods to increase secondary

student motivation, what this motivation looks like in terms of student behavior, and more importantly, students' responsibility in attaining it, remain missing. An English teacher is someone who motivates students with relevant materials; using "different tasks and activities and assignments" to increase engagement, she places secondary students' desires at the center of her work. The space between teacher's actions to engage and secondary students' reactions to being engaged is where student motivation occurs and yet remains absent in participants' descriptions. Without understanding secondary students' reception to being "sparked" methods students' language obscures this process. It also presents the secondary student, like "material" and "success" as an abstraction that lacks responsibility or agency.

### *Push Back*

Most methods students do not question the challenge of designing curriculum around secondary students. However, in a later text-based post on lesson design, Nancy struggles with the broader implications of this expectation and the pressure she feels:

"This (reading) suggests that every lesson we do has to be connected to every other lesson they've had or will have throughout their four years of high school, and to make them care, they all also have to be somehow connected to each student and their personal lives/interests. Maybe I'm taking this a little too seriously, but this figure freaked me out because I really don't think that I can possibly make that many connections with each lesson I teach. I guess I should just breathe and realize that all I can do is my best, but knowing myself I will always end up pushing myself to the brink of insanity trying to be perfect."

Unlike her peers, Nancy challenges the teacher's responsibility to connect curriculum to students' "personal lives/interests" which leads to a type of mini identity crisis. In her earlier statement, "we as teachers need to motivate and validate them because they CAN do it," Nancy uses confident and deterministic language, putting "CAN" in all capital letters to imply if a secondary student doesn't do it (because they can) it is because the teacher failed to motivate and validate as they "need to." Later, upon reading a section of her textbook, Nancy considers the amount of work this responsibility would entail; work largely undefined and based on teacher abilities that are mainly interpretive. She understandably begins to panic to "the brink of insanity" over the seeming impossibility of achieving such a feat. This is what I've come to call "push back" in this study.

As discussed in Chapter One, *push back* appears to complicate previously uncomplicated aspects of the affinity identity and can be likened to Gee's description of meta-level thinking about semiotic domains (i.e. active learning and critical thinking about the relationships between the semiotic domain being learned and other semiotic domains). *Push back* occurs when methods students question a previously accepted or unexplored part of the domain, either refusing to "take on and play with" the associated new identity or taking it on and then rejecting it afterward. *Push back* can lead to a type of identity crisis or confusion due to mixed messages or competing expectations. In all cases, *push back* reveals methods students' concern and frustration as they struggle with an affinity identity that is constructed primarily from external design grammar and selfless giving.

In this example of *push back*, Nancy is pushing against the weight of responsibility associated with motivating students. If teachers are to motivate secondary

students by making curriculum “relevant” to “students’ lives” then it follows that teachers must know in detail the lives and experiences and abilities of their secondary students. This realization remains absent in the language of methods students and may be what makes Nancy feel so overwhelmed. The teacher is responsible for using knowledge about her students to design curriculum (i.e. external design grammar), yet methods for uncovering this information and confirming its accuracy (i.e. internal design grammar) are unclear. Nancy concludes that the only way to complete such a vast interpretive job and bridge this gulf is for the teacher to become “perfect.” As with previous themes, discourses regarding student motivation are simplified or incomplete, but constructed as if they are not. This absence leads methods students to believe they have all the necessary content and criteria to interpret and enact the associated teacher identity when they often do not. Nancy’s *push back* reveals the need for a more critical and contextualized understanding of the domain of teaching secondary English using meta-level thinking about the relationship between this domain and others. By making explicit the impossible expectations the (motivating students through relevance) theme places upon an English teacher, Nancy exposes the pressures of being “perfect”; a concept that overshadows participants’ discourses regarding what it means to be a selfless giving teacher.

Designing curriculum so that it connects to students’ interests and increases motivation is also associated with the theme of “meeting students’ needs.” As with all themes in this study, this theme builds upon the responsibilities of a teacher. Yet, meeting student needs provides a bit more direction on how methods students can get there. In the next section I will explore participants’ understanding of getting to know their secondary

students in the context of meeting their needs and what this reveals about constructions of teacher identity.

### Teachers Meet Student Needs

In his RWJ on successfully teaching a lesson from his unit plan, Paul reflects on his first experience teaching lessons he'd designed: "I need to plan my daily activities and assessments to reflect my students' needs. I can see how I need to change certain activities in my lessons to bring my students in and keep them attentive." In this passage, Paul introduces the theme of "students' needs" while tying it to the previous theme of motivation and relevance. Making instruction relevant to increase student motivation or "bring them in" and "keep them attentive" is similar to and often associated with meeting student needs. Both themes focus on the teacher's ability to read, anticipate, and incorporate the experiences of secondary students into the classroom.

However, wiki posts regarding student needs also emphasize a teacher's responsibility to individualize instruction. Specifically, methods students interpret an English teacher as someone who considers secondary students' 1) talents and learning styles, 2) learning (dis)abilities 3) culture, and 4) personality when designing curriculum and grading assignments. Some participants also push back against the pressure to meet these needs, questioning teacher behavior and social practices that exempt secondary students from responsibility, require more than other disciplines, and can be plagued by institutional mandates.

### *Meeting Student Needs Requires Individualized Instruction*

In a text-based forum Nick expresses his understanding of individualized instruction as follows: "Try not to overwhelm the students by making their learning

boring...all students are different from each other in the way they think and perform. Give students the option to show off their individual talents to their teachers.” With his focus on the needs of the student, Nick promotes “options” based on the “individual talents” of secondary students. He recognizes how different students are from one another in how they “think and perform” and believes that to ignore these differences will lead students to become “overwhelmed” by boredom. A specific way methods students discuss secondary student needs is through different learning styles. As Amy explains, “multiple intelligences exist... (and) it will be my job to find what works for the various learning styles and teach accordingly.” As with the previous theme, a teacher’s ability to address these diverse needs as well as secondary students’ role in this process, remain unaddressed. Such individualization is simply “my job,” an unexamined feature of the external design grammar of the domain of teaching secondary English.

Returning to the aforementioned RWJ about the time Nancy’s CT showed a subtitled movie to the class without considering how a visually impaired student might access it, Nancy continues: “I know that I will be extremely dedicated to differentiating and modifying my instruction to meet the needs of all my students.” Unlike Paul’s explanation above, Nancy is placing student needs within the context of those with disabilities. It is not only about motivation, but access to curriculum based on the abilities or “needs” of individual secondary students. Overall, students’ needs are reflected in the ways students are “different from each other in the way they think and perform.” This may be in the context of Special Education as mentioned by Nancy, but can also relate to a secondary student’s culture. In a later part of his same post, Paul states, “it is essential

that teachers be culturally responsive to students. This means we must build and adjust our teaching by taking all of our students into account.”

Discourses about meeting student needs utilize many of the same verbs and implied metaphors of responsibility and sacrifice from previous themes where the teachers “must build and adjust” “bring” “make” “keep” and “give.” According to Nancy (and reminiscent of her *push back*), this requires an “extremely dedicated” teacher who is committed to meeting these needs. Student needs are associated with “activities and assessments” and “culturally responsive” “teaching” (Paul), individual thinking, performance and “talent” (Nick), as well as basic access to curriculum (Nancy). In sum, when designing curriculum and evaluating secondary students, a teacher must “take into account” students’ culture, ability/disability, learning styles, and individual talents. Teachers should also be mindful of a student’s personality. In a text-based post, Amy shares the following related classroom story:

“(student) was expected to help introduce and discuss his views regarding men and civility. He failed to say a word for the duration of the activity, which means my CT gave him an F for the lesson. I have talked to this student before and though he seems to have great energy on an interpersonal level, he may be shy when it comes to group work/participation. Why should he be censured for this aspect of his personality? My CT and I have discussed grading; I will be allowed to grade the students at my discretion. This is a relief for me. I believe students should have a fighting chance when it comes to grades and not be denigrated for the differences in their personalities.”

This passage about individualized instruction and assessment exemplifies the types of loaded (and external) associations methods students make with meeting student needs. Amy's giving students a "fighting chance" implies without doing so the teacher is abandoning the secondary student. Amy concludes that if a teacher doesn't individualize to meet needs, this will result in a denigration of students' "differences in their personalities." In this light, methods students' recognize that failing to value the different talents, learning styles, cultures, abilities and personalities of students is not appropriate behavior for an English teacher.

### *Push Back*

The difficulty of addressing the multiple and diverse qualities, needs, and abilities of "all" students, particularly considering most secondary teachers average 90-120 per day, is primarily unacknowledged in wiki discourses. For most methods students, meeting all these needs appears to be entirely manageable and unproblematic (or at least as external "readings" of the domain are presented as so). However, in another example of *push back*, Amy reacts to this seemingly impossible feat, and is the first to point out the apparent absence of student responsibility. Counter to her above statements about personality and grading, Amy responds with frustration to a passage in her assigned textbook. In the reading from *Fires in the Bathroom* a secondary student requests more individualized support from his teachers. Amy reacts as follows:

"If teachers had the time and the resources to address the attitudes and the problems of every student in their classroom, perhaps the world would be a better place. Why must a teacher be held responsible for the apathy a student projects? If the student has neither the time, the resources, or the ambition to complete



assignments on time and with tenacity, why must the teacher be expected to reach out to these individuals who do not care enough to work on their own? High school students proclaim independence, yet they want us to hold their hands every step of the way. With a lack of resources and a lack of time, this is not possible.”

With each theme that emerges from the data, the responsibility of the teacher becomes more abundant and one-sided, and in turn, the associated identity constructed externally and in pseudo isolation. For example, there is little reference to the distance that exists between a teacher’s actions to meet student needs and students’ reactions to having their needs met. As Amy is lamenting, the cumulative absence of secondary students’ responsibilities, instructional or otherwise, renders their role so passive as to become nearly invisible. The teacher is “expected to reach out” and “hold their hands” while the students can maintain “apathy” and “independence.” It’s as if the greater the teacher is “held responsible” the less secondary students must try. This may not be intentional, yet may be why focusing primarily on what counts as valued social practices and behaving appropriately (i.e. external design grammar) leads methods students to an incomplete or one-sided understanding of teaching secondary English.

In a similar burst of frustration over the impossible responsibility of individualizing curriculum and “lack of resources and lack of time,” Julie shares her own *push back* in a text-based discussion on the use of “worksheets”:

“I’m beginning to wonder why English teachers are held at such a higher standard than all other subject areas. Why is it so negative for an English teacher to use worksheets and textbooks and test banks and all these other resources that math, science and social studies depend on solely? It’s no wonder we’re so stressed out

and the other cohorts get so bugged with our negativity in our Issues class! Why can't we pick the easy way out sometimes when that's what the other subjects always get? We need to maintain our sanity, too!"

For Julie this "higher standard" is unique to the discipline and makes teaching English more stressful than teaching other school subjects. Similar to Nancy's "brink of insanity" statement, Julie also expresses the burden of these expectations as a challenge to maintaining "sanity." In incidences of *push back* like this, methods students' discourses hint at a crisis of identity.

Julie is not pushing back against the secondary students themselves, but against the outside pressures of a discipline that she perceives to expect teachers work harder and do more with less help. This meta-level thinking about how the domain of teaching secondary English results bumps up against other disciplines/domains again points to pressures to be the "perfect" English teacher; an identity Julie and Amy take on and then reject. Megan also pushes back against the expectations of the profession, but in more general terms, as she feels that curriculum and students are not the problem that it's the formal expectations and structured planning required by state and district mandates that must be questioned:

"Instead of letting all these factors stress us out and worry about 'backward planning' and state standards, we should teach from the heart, just being conscientious about the many purposes of public education. Instead of planning lessons around the standards and trying to force things unnaturally, I think we should form lessons plans around students and the rest will fall into place if we remain aware, and always strive to improve ourselves and our teaching."

Megan believes as long as the teacher remains “aware” “conscientious” of the “purposes of public education” while “striving” for “improvement” then “forced” methods and requirements such as “backward planning and state standards” are unnecessary. All teachers need to do is “teach from the heart” and “form lessons around students” and “the rest will fall into place.” Megan also believes secondary students should be the sole curricular determiner and should preempt all other worrisome “factors” such as lessons and “state standards.” With no other identifiable support, Megan’s description is meeting student needs in its most extreme form. While this may seem like an attractive solution to the overload and stress, it carries with it an even greater burden of responsibility with even less structural and institutional support.

In all these examples of *push back*, methods students are reacting to the seemingly impossible construction of the English teacher identity. Through their reactions we can see this idealized “perfect” identity is considered in a vacuum; without context or content, methods students reject the associated identity as simply too much work and ultimately impossible to do, anyway. While this meta-level thinking can be jarring for methods students, it does reveal both the need for more critical thinking about the domain as well as the need for considerations of internal design grammar to provide a more complete construction of English teacher identity.

In the next section, I will explore the theme of classroom community. Community connects to student needs and is one more way for teachers to try to accommodate secondary students. In a later post Megan states, “creating a good learning community” is valuable because it allows “students to feel comfortable enough to open up and fill you in on what they need.” As with previous themes, methods students’ discourses about

community offer additional ways of thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing for English teachers.

### Teachers Build Classroom Community

Like student success, classroom community is a term methods students describe as a given, with little elaboration as to how it might function, nor requirements for membership. As with previous themes, the teacher's responsibility is also central. In the case of building community, safety and comfort are two preconditions identified as necessary. An English teacher is someone who provides this safe and comfortable environment so that secondary students can "open up." Classroom community is described as important because it increases 1) learning through interaction and 2) participation through belonging, two qualities that are valued social practices in teaching secondary English. It is the responsibility of the teacher to build community so that learning and participation can occur.

### *Community Increases Learning*

In a RWJ Nick shares a story about a 9<sup>th</sup> grader who, during an autobiographical presentation, tells the class she was raped and abused by her father. Although he is shocked and unsettled by the student's public confession, Nick reflects that the importance of community requires he "be ready for students to say things and feel comfortable around me." Nick explains this is important because, "a safe comfortable classroom is very helpful in terms of helping students learn. Making students feel more comfortable in my classroom will make the class grow into a community of learners instead of a group of students." Nick believes having a classroom community means students will be comfortable enough to share personal information and in doing so, this

will “help” them learn. Also, his elevation of a “community of learners” over a “group of students” implies that a group of students would not necessarily learn as much as a community of learners.

Like Nick, Olivia connects community to increased student learning in one of her weekly reading posts stating, “I will incorporate as many peer-to-peer interaction activities as I can to strengthen learning and understanding of one another...I want every one to feel safe and happy and not be afraid to share their desires.” Olivia raises the issue of safety as well, stating community will lead to less fear, greater happiness, and an increased likelihood that students will “share their desires.” Community for Olivia “strengthens learning” and provides a level of comfort that allows students to express feelings and “open up.” Olivia believes “peer-to-peer interaction” plays a key role in community, and she acknowledges that community includes students’ “understanding of one another,” something previously missing from Nick’s account.

The creation of a community that hinges on a student feeling “more comfortable in my classroom” is somewhat precarious, but despite his initial discomfort, Nick believes it is a necessity nonetheless. Methods students construct English teachers as people who value classroom community. But, when applying this concept to actual practice, descriptions lack elaboration and it remains unclear as to how community can actually increase student performance. Learning that a peer was a victim of abuse requires that secondary students interact with a new piece of information, yet doubt this is the kind of learning Nick is suggesting. As with previous themes, Nick and Olivia focus on the external design grammar of the domain when discussing community. Even in themes that include references to student learning—presumably a topic of central

importance to a teacher—methods students’ discourses privilege external over internal design grammar, focusing on the valued social practices, acceptable behaviors, and typical identities with little if any reference to the role pedagogy and curriculum play in the domain proper nor in the associated affinity identity of English teacher.

### *Community Increases Participation*

Methods students associate community with safety and comfort in the service of participation and feelings of belonging for secondary students. In a discussion about the assigned reading, Kayla connects community to her field placement this way: “I really like the idea that Burke has about creating a classroom community. Wong & Wong also suggest that it is a really good idea. I can see it already in my CT’s classroom, and I hope I am building one with the students already. I want them to have a safe place to learn and express themselves and I want to be the person to provide that safe place.” Ironically, in a later RWJ, Kayla brings up community again when recounting a story about a secondary student who (previously disruptive and disengaged) volunteers to read the part of Hale in *The Crucible*. Her CT not only won’t let him, but also ends up giving two parts to another student just to avoid giving one part to him. Kayla concludes, “Even with my observations of his behavior, I think that my initial reaction of ‘Great, (he) is finally willing to participate’ will stay with me throughout my career as a teacher. I would hate to miss an opportunity for any student, good or bad, to show that they can be part of the classroom community.”

As with previous themes, constructions of teacher identity can and will evolve (as is the fluid nature of identity). This appears to be the case for Kayla as she applies the concept of community to two different observations of her CT. Initially, she views

community as an aspiration, an abstract ideal, and a “safe place” for students to “learn and express”; she bases this conception on assigned readings of Burke and Wong & Wong and believes she witnesses it in her CT’s classroom. In the later RWJ Kayla’s explanation of community becomes more specific and is described as the teacher’s willingness (or refusal) to allow all secondary students to become contributing members of the class (if they so choose). In both instances, community is the responsibility of the teacher: she has the power to give community and take it away. In terms of affinity identity, a teacher is someone who builds community so that secondary students can participate and belong.

Isabel also associates community with participation. In her post on *Fires in the Bathroom* she writes:

“As usual, the reading made me think a lot about experiences I’ve had as a student and now in observing and working with the students this semester. In chapter 5, a student commented that teachers would use students who show they know the answers as a crutch to get participation; I’ve seen that all the time over the years. Not only does the teacher rely on these few students to answer questions, but as a student, I didn’t feel like I needed to answer because someone else would take care of it, a sort of bystander effect almost. Asking open ended questions like the reading suggests definitely goes a long way, but it’s also important to foster that sense of community that would make students comfortable to contribute to those questions, because just asking open ended questions wouldn’t be enough.”

Like Kayla, Isabel views classroom community as something the teacher provides or “fosters” to “make students comfortable” so they will be able to participate. Again,

discourses about classroom community are primarily external and place the responsibility on the teacher. Through use of familiar verbs such as “create” “build” and “make” participants emphasize the teacher is in charge of all aspects of the classroom environment, including the psychological state and wellbeing of secondary students, as well as how they feel they are received by their peers.

In Isabel’s passage she points out the passivity of the student. In this case she uses her own experiences as an example regarding classroom discussions, “I didn’t feel like I needed to answer (the teacher’s questions) because someone else would take care of it.” Instead of reflecting on her own responsibility in this past exchange, Isabel puts the blame back on her high school teacher, stating that contrary to her current textbook’s recommendation (to use open ended questions to generate student participation in classroom discussions), this is “not enough” for students like (past) herself. Isabel concludes that teachers must do more to get students to become contributing members of the classroom community; she does not explain what, specifically, this requires of the teacher only that using open-ended questions would not work with students like she had been and therefore, teachers must do more. Such gaps lead methods students to incomplete and one-sided understandings and allude to a “perfect” teacher identity. Though some may want to fill this gap with harder work, others decide to push back at the seeming impossibility to do it all, particularly in such personal ways.

### *Push Back*

As indicated by earlier examples of *push back* from Nancy and Amy, the degree and gravity of the selfless teacher identity is not lost on methods students. In her



aforementioned RWJ Kayla makes the following observation in her reflection of *The Crucible* read-aloud experience:

“I guess we will, as teachers, be everything to some of these students, including a surrogate pastor and parent. It is, in some ways, rather frightening to think that we will have these students entire lives in our hands, giving them opportunities to open up in discussion...At least we can provide a safe environment for them to open up and be who they are without judgment.”

Being “everything” to students and having their “entire lives in our hands” is “frightening,” particularly when one is being trained in the unrelated pedagogy and content of English. Within these descriptions of classroom community, the associated identity of an English teacher does resemble “surrogate pastor and parent” and can be likened to a selfless giver. As Julie puts it, “be prepared to teach things to your students that ideally should be taught at home.” Furthermore, providing a “safe environment” for secondary students to “open up” and be themselves “without judgment” seems more like the job description of a therapist than a teacher. While external design grammar encompasses the sorts of identity(ies) people take on when teaching English, without the balance or input of the internal design grammar this incomplete construction can lead to confusion about identity, too.

In a RWJ Megan explains she has a “lost feeling” when it comes to her job as a teacher: “I’m still dealing with a lot of issues of what a teacher really is. The difference between a teacher and a mentor can be very thin at times. In the classroom, it is hard for me to figure out what role I should be filling, or what role would best help my students.” Megan is uncertain about what a teacher “really is” and expresses honest confusion

usually missing from methods students' discourses. Megan explains that it's hard for her to "figure out what role" she "should be filling" and what role would "best help" secondary students. Megan's statement about the "thin" line "between a teacher and a mentor" is revealing and can be interpreted in many of the themes in this study. She and Kayla may be speaking for their preservice peers when they admit to the blurring of identities between "pastor/parent/mentor" and "teacher." Megan and Kayla's *push back* are examples of meta-level thinking about the domain, where their learning about teaching secondary English is thrown into relief against other domains (such as parent or pastor). This doesn't appear to be a rejection of the associated English teacher identity as with previous examples of *push back*, so much as questioning its incomplete construction. Thus, reading of the domain reveals gaps, which results in confusion about what one takes on when becoming an English teacher.

In the next section, the focus remains on the external design grammar of teaching secondary English, teacher responsibility, and sacrifice, as methods students explain how building relationships and caring for students is valued social practice and appropriate behavior for English teachers.

#### Teachers Build Caring Relationships

While making students comfortable and "open" are features of classroom community, these social practices are also part of teacher-student relationships. Similar to Kayla's "surrogate pastor and parent" analogy, methods students' discourses about caring and relationships constructs a teacher identity that is primarily interpersonal. Also similar to community, relationship building and caring for students is done in the service of student learning and growth. Ideas of selflessness and personal sacrifice are especially

evident in this theme; an English teacher is a selfless giver who builds relationships with secondary students because she cares personally for them.

### *Relationships Increase Learning*

Although Penny begins her reading post with a discussion about instructional practice (building prior knowledge), she quickly associates it with notions of teacher caring: “this idea of a student’s prior knowledge shows a student that the teacher cares and so far this semester, I keep reading and hearing that students want to know that the teachers care about him or her. After a student learns that the teacher cares, then a student will be open for learning.” Caring relationships are what secondary students want and need and are an avenue to learning. Emily also connects teacher-student relationships to pedagogy in a discussion thread about grading and student writing. Emily states, “one of the biggest problems I have with my CT” is “she gives students back papers with no comments.” Emily believes students are motivated and encouraged by comments and that “it says to the students you care about them and how well they do!”

Caring is made evident in the time and effort it takes for a teacher to provide comments on student writing; the internal design grammar (i.e. instructional practice) serves the external design grammar (i.e. the value of caring). For Emily, teachers can read students’ work and show they care by providing feedback. Conversely, if a teacher doesn’t provide feedback, she doesn’t care about student learning. While Emily admits this requires more time and effort than simply giving a grade, she states that caring should be directed to student performance and “how well they do” on assignments. While Penny’s concept of caring remains largely undefined (it is something secondary students “want” and relates to their “prior knowledge”), Emily’s description of caring is supported

by instructional practice. As previously discussed, such references to the internal design grammar and content of the domain are part of discourses, but are subordinate to the broader, primary social practices expressed in themes.

In a similar example, Megan describes building relationships in individualized, curricular terms, but stresses that secondary students remain the central focus. In a text-based post Megan describes her plan to select and purchase reading materials for each individual student in order to “inspire” them. She also plans to have follow up meetings with each one to discuss their reading. She believes by “getting to know my students more” this will make them “feel special and help them realize how invested I am in their education and wellbeing.” But like Emily, Megan subordinates instructional practice to social practice because without caring relationships, she believes reading could not be as effective or meaningful. Furthermore, Megan notes that finding books “might be a lot of work and expensive” (like Emily’s time consuming feedback) yet concludes that making students feel “special” and letting them know their teacher is “invested in their education and wellbeing” is what teachers do. The personal identity is once again in service of the professional and it requires giving of the self.

#### *Teacher as Selfless Giver*

Relationships by definition require more than one person and some type of reciprocation. However, teacher-student relationships as they are described in methods students’ discourses, tend to work one way and the teacher is the one doing all the work. In some circles, this might be considered a dysfunctional relationship (although, if a secondary student reciprocated this level of caring we might consider it crossing boundaries). In general, caring and “getting to know students” is described as a selfless

act. As Catherine reads the domain, building “meaningful” relationships with students is an occupational predisposition (typical way of thinking, acting, interacting and valuing for English teachers) and a way to access and better serve student needs:

“I suspect most of us who choose teaching as a profession tend to be more empathetic than the average bear, so our compassion naturally comes out.

Students will pick up on that and respond to it. I think one of the most important things we can do is treat our students with respect and dignity and that will lay the foundation for meaningful relationships. Something I’ve been noticing in my class is that students take what they need when they need it. When they need empathy or guidance or just an ear, they tend to ask for it in their own way, so we need to become familiar with their cues.”

Catherine associates teacher-student relationships with compassion and as with previous themes, places the student at the center. Like Penny, Catherine believes such relationships are wanted and needed by secondary students, but she attributes even greater responsibility to the affinity identity of the teacher. In addition to treating students with “respect and dignity” and making oneself available to students so that they may “take what they need when they need it,” a teacher must learn how to read and interpret “cues” to better identify and serve these needs. In a later post Catherine further explains that, “listening to students is also essential for building respect. Students will tell us what they need, often in non-explicit terms, so we need to pay attention to sub-text and the cues they’re giving us.”

Catherine is specific about how the teacher can lay the foundation for “meaningful relationships” such as expressing “empathy” and using “listening” skills.

Furthermore, a teacher's emotional availability initiates a form of exchange. This begins when the teacher initially gives respect and compassion to her students. Next, the secondary students realize this giving and indicate (in explicit or non-explicit terms) if they need more from the teacher or if they want something different. Then, the teacher must fulfill students' expressed needs anew. Subsequently, teacher behavior is selective and targeted; she must "pay attention" to "subtext" and clues to uncover students' unexpressed needs. This identity construction is reminiscent of Kayla's "surrogate pastor or parent" where the teacher serves the student and keeps their needs as the primary goal and center of the "relationship."

Reminiscent of Kayla's pastor analogy, Tiffany believes taking up the value of teacher-student relationships connects to her religious beliefs:

"Being a strong Christian and trying to live out my life as Christ did, I want to spread my love and compassion to my students and have them feel comfortable enough to discuss issues of real life...As a teacher it is important to support my students in growing as people...Shouldn't we support our students, no matter what? Shouldn't we give them the opportunity to have a voice even if we don't agree? Can you imagine telling a student that their thoughts don't matter?"

For Tiffany, caring relationships are not associated with student performance and learning, but with more generalized notions of a student's personal development and growth. Building relationships allows teachers to access students' "thoughts" and "voice" by providing "love and compassion" and "support" so that they can "discuss issues" and "grow as people." In language of sacrifice, it should also override a teacher's personal opinions on "real life." In a different but related post, Victoria describes "getting to know

the students in your class” and “finding out more about them” as a “personal investment...that keeps you fighting for what is right for them.”

Similar to previous themes (and in keeping with the limits imposed by external design grammar), methods students offer little elaboration as to how secondary students might receive and respond to a teacher’s “compassion” “love” and “investment.” Discourses support the implicit assumption that because this relationship is to students’ benefit, they would readily offer more information about themselves, “open up” and trust a teacher who wants to make them feel “special” and “fight” for what is “right” for them. Unlike earlier associations between relationships and instructional practices and learning, discourses of “empathy” “guidance” “support” and “growth” construct an affinity identity that seems more therapeutic than educational. Becoming literate in the domain of teaching secondary English does not include (or otherwise subordinates) pedagogy and curriculum to a selfless giving teacher identity.

### *Push Back*

In a different post later in the semester, Tiffany reflects on her relationship with one of her 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls. After unsuccessfully attempting to confiscate a lighter from the student, Tiffany calls a police officer to escort the student to the office. The lighter is found, the girl is suspended, and she stops coming to class. Tiffany explains in her RWJ, “I have been wanting to build a relationship with (student) because I know she is struggling. However, this situation made us take a huge step back in relationship building. She no longer trusts me, and hopefully one day this year she will want to participate in class again.” In comparison to Tiffany’s earlier post, the concept of building relationships with students has evolved. As with discourses about success,

community, and student needs, Tiffany initially spoke of relationships as externalized social practices. It wasn't until she was confronted with a difficult "real" relationship that she began to struggle with its complexity and question the previously unseen limits of this construction. This leads her to meta-level thinking about the ways the teaching domain relates to other "non-teaching" (e.g. policing) domains. As Tiffany reflects that the student "no longer trusts me" her original and ideal intentions about relationship building bump up against competing obligations to follow school policy, confiscate the lighter, and keep all students in her class safe. This provides insight into the student-teacher relationships discourse as Tiffany realizes students may reject a teacher's "investment" in their "wellbeing." As with some earlier examples of *push back*, Tiffany sums up the gap revealed by her critical thinking as one of competing identities: "I was really confused as to what I needed to do. I felt like the enemy and the savior all at once."

Tiffany's "savior" extends Nancy's pastor analogy into spiritual realms. Such religious metaphors contribute to the construction of a selfless giver teacher identity as well as add to expectations of responsibility and sacrifice. In the next section I will explore the theme of teacher persistence. The theme of persistence builds upon methods students' spiritual language and extends associations between teaching secondary English and religious faith. Believing in students and never giving up on them are values that methods students conclude are part of the affinity identity they take up as English teachers. As with other themes, the domination of external design grammar limits methods students' understanding of the domain and leads to an incomplete if not imbalanced construction.



## Teachers Never Give Up Believing in Students

“Believing in students” and “never giving up” are two phrases that appear in the posts of methods students in a variety of contexts. Whether used together or in isolation, these two phrases can be equated with the overall concept of teacher persistence. In discourses of teacher persistence, “believing in students” and “never giving up” are associated with student learning. In general, this occurs when methods students are working with secondary students who are struggling in some way, particularly with course material. As with themes discussed thus far, the teacher’s “believing” and “giving” tend to work one-way, perennially in the service of the secondary student with little reference to or concern for the student’s responsibility to persist in their own learning. In addition, while instructional practices and notions of student learning are invoked, keeping with previous references of internal design grammar, content is in service of the broader theme. Methods students’ increased religious analogies in persistence discourses, bolster associations between teacher responsibility and selfless devotion.

### *Teacher Persistence Creates Learning*

In a RWJ, Isabel describes working one on one with a struggling student who mastered a grammar lesson and then correctly taught it to the rest of his class. She reflects, “I will take experiences like this with me as a goal to reach with my students. This is especially important for students who may need longer to begin taking the initiative to improve.” Isabel states her CT had “written off” this student, and her positive experience taught her that, “I should remember not to give up on students. This also underlined to me how important it is to build an authentic relationship with students as a

teacher so that they know that you believe in them.” In language reminiscent of previous themes, an “authentic relationship” for Isabel is individualized; it takes into account secondary students’ abilities, and connects to learning and instruction. As the CT’s failure makes plain, it is also contingent upon teacher behavior.

For Isabel, working one on one with a secondary student who she believed her CT had written off led to the student performing well. This was evidence to Isabel that believing the student could understand the material and treating him as if he could, led to his mastering the grammar lesson. In the same RWJ Isabel applies this experience to another student, “who I feel like he’s checked out in class no matter what we do.” She explains that although this is “discouraging,” her success with the former student “remind(s) me not to give up either.” She concludes her RWJ by reemphasizing this belief: “I’ve always been told that people are capable of doing pretty much anything if they put their mind to it, so I tend to really believe in my students.”

In another RWJ Kayla reflects on a lesson she gave to 11<sup>th</sup> graders on Emerson’s *Self-Reliance*. After her CT harshly critiques the lesson, Kayla applies the theme of persistence to her own learning and extends the benefits of persistence to her students: “I will take to heart my CT’s criticism and learn from her and others how to be a better teacher. I will not give up on me or my students.” She concludes, “If they don’t get it, try again and again until they do; use different tools to help with that understanding.” Like Isabel, Kayla’s “not giving up” connects to teaching and learning. However, because she includes herself in the final phrase Kayla also acknowledges the connection between her own learning and that of her secondary students. Giving up on them would also mean giving up on her ability to teach them. While Kayla does not necessarily acknowledge

this directly, as with her previous “pastor and parent” comment, she does recognize the teacher’s responsibility to herself in this process.

The theme of teacher persistence stresses social practices over instructional practices where the former becomes a prerequisite for the later. An English teacher is someone who maintains an internal state of continuous giving and believing; for students to learn, a teacher must first persist. This construction further reinforces the “teacher as selfless giver” identity while maintaining the subordination of student learning to teacher sacrifice.

### *Persistence Requires Sacrifice*

In order to believe something, one generally holds some kind of faith or commitment to that which informs this belief. If I believe in my students and never give up on them, this means I have faith in or am committed to them, or possibly a larger abstraction such as learning. The basis upon which a teacher develops or maintains these beliefs is not present in methods students’ discourses. As with previous themes of student success, community, and relationship building, literal and figurative content support these social practices but do not establish themes in their own right. Certainly, secondary English teacher’s way of thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing is not subordinate to instructional practices, pedagogy or curriculum. Themes do not synthesize into statements like “Teachers Build Literacy” where persistence serves the broader goal of student literacy development.

In her text-based post on believing in students and never giving up on them, Olivia believes that the teacher must stay positive and over-ride personal feelings about secondary students: “I have already noticed that some students are hard to deal with, and

they just will not be positive no matter what I try and do! I need to make sure to always stay positive and never give up on a student, even if I really want to!” Similarly, Megan’s RWJ on a project she taught that over half the class failed to complete, also associates persistence with requiring a positive outlook and argues that this is more important than her own feelings or needs:

“I will never lose faith in my students. Letting them know that someone believes in them is so important to their education, not just academics, but personal as well. No matter how many times I feel let down by them, I will not lower my standards. I would rather cry myself to sleep every night because I’m so heartbroken and come in every day with renewed faith than let them down by not believing in them...It will never be too late to help them.”

A teacher is someone who is willing to make whatever personal or emotional sacrifice is necessary to help students learn. Megan’s associated identity is bordering on saintly in her willingness to give of her time and emotions. Reminiscent of Tiffany’s “savior” metaphor, notions of sacrifice and devotion emerge from Megan’s concept of teacher persistence. Despite wanting to “give up,” despite “discouragement” “crying” and “let downs,” never giving up means that “believing in students” comes before the needs of the teacher. Such sacrifice takes on religious associations as Megan uses the word “faith” two times in her description. While it is certainly indisputable that persistence is a valuable personal quality in any profession, this level of sacrifice along with the spiritual analogies seem like compensation, as if she is trying to fill a vacuum. If secondary students aren’t learning, believe harder. This vacuum also points to a gap that resurfaces throughout discourses and themes due to an emphasis on external over internal design grammar.

For Julie, believing in students means taking up an identity as parent as much as teacher. Drawing upon her experiences as a substitute, Julie explains that many secondary students have parents who are “merely roommates” and “don’t care about them at all,” because they “are too wrapped up in their own lives to notice what’s going on in their child’s.” She suggests, “You could be that ONE adult in that child’s life to push him/her to succeed and believe in him/her and gradually teach them a lesson on responsibility that no one else ever has.” Unlike Olivia and Megan, Julie acknowledges there are limits to teacher persistence and that “you can’t do it for them all, and you will lose some, but you pick a couple who you feel really need it and work on them. And you pray you can help and make that difference to at least one.”

Julie’s parental association and statement to “pray you can help,” Megan’s “never lose faith,” and other methods students’ allusions to sacrifice and “believing” reinforce Kayla’s earlier “pastor and parent” analogy and an associated identity bordering on saint-like. Julie’s last sentence also introduces a related and final theme in the construction of teacher identity: making a difference. All this talk of success and community, relationships and belief are presumably in the name of a goal or purpose. For methods students, the significance teaching secondary English is weighty. Making a difference, as I will discuss in the next section, is the language of teacher purpose and provides an explanation as to why teachers are willing to make such sacrifices.

### Teachers Make a Difference

Amidst discussion about appropriate teacher behavior, thinking, and valuing, it’s easy to forget why teachers should do it. Methods students’ interpretations about the purpose of teaching are often embedded in their descriptions of teacher interactions and

values. One concept that resurfaces in methods students' discourse is the idea of making a difference in the lives of students. This phrase and associated goals point to a teacher's reason for "building" success and relationships, "creating" community, "meeting" individual needs, "motivating," and "believing" in secondary students in the first place. Thus, teachers are those who are selfless and who perpetually work in the service of their students, no matter what the sacrifice. What they get in return for their caring, persistence, and detective work, is mostly absent and presumably peripheral, at least in this construction of affinity identity. However, making a difference is the first theme where the teacher's work benefits someone other than the secondary student.

As with previous themes, making a difference is often presented in uncomplicated and external terms. For example, Catherine describes her intentions admirably: "I very much want to be a committed and dedicated teacher who strives to make a difference, regardless of how small it may be, in as many lives as possible." Commitment, dedication, and acceptance of limited impact do not discourage Catherine. She will "strive to make a difference" no matter "how small" in her students' lives. While this language is selfless and sacrificial, it's not clear what the difference will look like or how students' lives will be altered nor what methods will indicate when a teacher is "committed and dedicated" enough to make that difference. In contrast, other methods students explain what making a difference entails and how their teaching can reach beyond their students. In the following wiki discourses, a teacher who makes a difference is someone who works for the greater good; teaching is a civic responsibility that benefits a global society.

### *The Social and Global Purposes of Teaching*

In a text-based post Kayla reacts to a section of Wong & Wong that uses a consumer metaphor when describing secondary students. Kayla is upset by this analogy: “Is teaching all about money and product? I thought kids were taught to take care of themselves and create a better society and spark their imaginations to become the best person they could become.” Other methods students also emphasize the civic purpose of teaching secondary English. For Julie, “you are there to be the adult, to guide them not only to academic knowledge but in the social realm of society, too. You are there to teach them how to respect authority, how to respect themselves and to see what it means for others to respect them.” Kayla believes creating “a better society” entails students taking “care of themselves” and becoming “the best person they can become” while Julie believes this requires self-respect and respect for authority. Hailey describes the social purpose of teaching in language similar to Julie: “To me teaching is so much about modeling appropriate ways to participate and socialize in society. It is important that we show students how to respect others.”

For Kayla, Julie, and Hailey, the purpose of a teacher’s work goes beyond students to improve society. For other methods students the teacher’s purpose more readily connects to students’ future and how they might impact the “world.” In a different post Catherine explains: “As for teaching content and career/job training, I think it has always been our responsibility to help students learn to be ‘good’ citizens and prepare them for the next phase of their lives (whether it’s ditch digging or college).” In comparison to her general statements above, here Catherine provides a more detailed and future oriented purpose: democratic citizenry. Tiffany’s interpretation of the purpose for

teaching English also evolves. In a later post as she describes a frustrating day when the students wouldn't follow directions:

“I am hoping to touch lives and teach kids what they need to know for their future, not babysit and yell at them for talking...However, I have to remember that I am doing this for a purpose, and that is to help students that are struggling, like I did in school, and help them to understand how smart they are, how unique they are and how much they can impact their world and future.”

The discourses of teacher purpose and making a difference encompass personal and social benefits that can “impact” secondary students’ “world and future.” While the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of these benefits are unclear, they serve as idealized goals that point beyond the secondary students themselves. Based on methods students’ reading of this external design grammar, a secondary English teacher is someone who serves society as well as students; teaching secondary English is a means to an end and not just an end in itself. Making a difference is primarily a selfless act that is done for “a better society” a future “authority” and “world.” However, for some methods students the purpose for teaching does provide some personal benefits, as well.

### *The Inverted Purposes of Teaching*

Similar to previous posts, Brooke describes making a difference in terms of teacher sacrifice, but also acknowledges it will not be easy: “I know there are going to be some hard times with teaching, but I’m positive that the good will outweigh the bad. I’ve always told myself, that if a person makes a difference in just one other person’s life, then their life is worthwhile. That is my plan as a teacher, to go into my classroom everyday with the attitude that I can make a difference.” Brooke’s statement epitomizes the selfless



giver teacher identity, arguing that despite limited results, if she alters “just one other person’s life” her own life will be “worthwhile.” Along with the requisite commitment and dedication, Brooke believes making a difference is contingent upon a teacher’s internal or emotional state. In this case the teacher’s everyday “attitude.” This purpose does reach beyond the student, however. Through her own actions the teacher can positively impact herself by making a difference in the student, which will in turn make her own life worthwhile. In this kind of inverted fashion a teacher can achieve purpose through the outward or social success of her students.

Similarly, Tiffany believes making a difference involves sacrifice and offers a similar type of inverted teacher reward: “The truth is, life is hard. And teaching is one of the hardest professions in the world because so many people depend on you. I want to make a difference and leave a legacy behind with my students.” Although it remains unclear what difference ultimately looks like in terms of how students’ lives are altered, this change is potentially significant for Tiffany in the form of a “legacy.” Like Catherine’s “committed and dedicated teacher” Tiffany believes making a difference requires dependability in “one of the hardest professions in the world.” Through this sacrifice and dedication, benefits will be paid forward. It seems that even when methods students consider themselves (as in Tiffany’s “legacy”) it is in this inverted way where the teacher is a conduit for her students, who remain the central purpose of her work. Only through secondary students’ future success can a teacher’s identity be deemed “worthwhile.”

The purpose of teaching is presumably to make a difference in students learning the academic discipline of English. But, if such is the case, these content-related goals

remain subordinated, implicit, or absent altogether as methods students focus on taking up the external social practices and appropriate behavior of teaching secondary English. As evident throughout this chapter, English content, instructional practice, pedagogy and curriculum rarely appear in the discourses of methods students on the wiki. In the next section I will elaborate upon key features of this gap.

### What about Content?

The absence/subordination of internal design grammar to external design grammar in methods students' construction of the domain are apparent in all the themes in this study. As described in Chapter One, internal design grammar refers to the content of the domain (e.g. knowledge of different wines for someone learning the domain of wine connoisseurship). Therefore, the absence of content in methods students' discourses works at two levels as it refers to both the content of the domain of teaching secondary English, as well as literally, the disciplinary content of the domain of teaching secondary English such as reading, writing, speaking and listening pedagogy, curriculum, and instructional practices. In both usages, content is missing or included as background and support for the dominant external design grammar methods students focus on within the domain. Themes found in this study are statements based on external design grammar; we find "Teachers Make a Difference" but not "Teachers Make Literature Comprehensible" and "Teachers Build Caring Relationships" and not "Teachers Build Student Writers" and so on. Ultimately, methods students rely on the external design grammar—or ways of thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing for someone teaching secondary English—to construct the associated affinity identity they "take up" as they become English teachers.

While methods students' discourses include references to pedagogy and instruction, these are chiefly in service of the broader external design grammar that defines the theme. Methods students' lack of focus on content and the processes for teaching content are somewhat disconcerting, particularly since the wiki is embedded in a course titled the *Teaching of English*. What's surprising is not just how rarely content is discussed, but that when it is mentioned, it's done so in the service of non-curricular concerns such as building community, motivating students, and ensuring success. Most often, references to reading, writing, literature or other aspects of teaching English are used as a backdrop to discuss the social practices of the domain. In other cases, methods students use English Language Arts content to critique cooperating teachers (defining what is and is not acceptable behavior), and to support interpretations about teaching secondary English.

#### *Content is Context for CT Critique*

Another way methods students discuss disciplinary content occurs when recounting a classroom event that didn't go the way they thought it should due to some type of perceived failure on the part of the CT; content is used primarily as context for CT critique. For example, in the theme of student success Victoria shares a story about a student who copies his Greek God report off the Internet. In this RWJ Victoria concludes that the secondary student plagiarized because her CT failed to provide explicit guidelines for the assignment thereby neglecting student success. In another example, Kayla shares the story of a read-aloud of *The Crucible* where a habitually off-task 11<sup>th</sup> grader wants to read the part of Hale, but her CT won't let him. Kayla's use of content is to set the scene and provide specifics regarding her CT's failure to build community by

excluding one student from the read aloud. In a final example, Emily discusses the need for giving feedback on student writing in order to building caring relationships, something she saw her CT failing to provide.

In these cases and many others throughout the wiki, methods students use English content as context for interpreting what CT's should or shouldn't do; this is also in keeping with the features of external design grammar which determine what counts as acceptable or unacceptable behavior in the domain. What's interesting is that methods students' solutions to CT "mistakes" (such as a need for explicit guidelines or written feedback) are not necessarily misguided. In fact, these may be improvements over the CT's decisions or methods. However, methods students don't connect their proposed solutions back to curriculum or pedagogy per se, but instead connect perceived CT failure to concepts such as relationships and community, furthering teacher blame and responsibility. It is if an explanation can only be found via the responsibilities the teacher and not via a need to revise curricula or approach instruction in a different way. It's as if the lack of internal design grammar has created a blind spot.

While methods students' curricular critique and revisions are worthwhile, they are not presented as examples of effective pedagogy or theoretically sound curricula, but to support preconceptions about what a teacher should be. A teacher is someone who uses curricula so to better engage students, to ensure student success, and so on. Content is a means to an end, not an end in itself and this "end" is ultimately tied to further responsibility for the teacher and associated identity as the selfless giver. Clearly, methods students think about English Language Arts content; however, it is less clear

why content appears in methods students' discourses in such limiting ways, particularly considering that the wiki is part of an English methods course.

### Summary

Patterns from online reading responses, discussions, incidences of *push back*, verb usage, and Reflection Wheel Journals reveal multiple themes based upon the responsibilities methods students' interpret as the external design grammar of teaching secondary English. The collective discourses of methods students construct a teacher who is responsible for nearly every aspect of classroom experiences and interactions, including student performance, behavior, and students' willingness to learn. Unexamined and undefined concepts and subordinated or missing internal design grammar further simplify and distort methods students' construction of English teacher as self-sacrificing giver who places her students at the center of her work. Associations with therapy and social work, allusions to pastor and parent, point to a teacher identity primarily focused on the psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing of students. As Gee explains (2001, 2003), one reads/interprets the external grammar and writes/produces the internal grammar to become literate in a new semiotic domain such as teaching secondary English. This leads to trying on and playing with new associated identities. However, a noticeable absence of English content in wiki discourses indicates an unbalanced and incomplete construction of English teacher identity dominated by social practices and behaviors. In Chapter Five I will discuss possible reasons why "Teachers are Content Experts" or "Teachers Help Students Become Better Readers" did not appear as major themes in the wiki. I will also discuss what this imbalance between internal and external

grammar might signify for developing English teachers (and the English discipline) as they take up associated identities.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The process of identity development is sociocultural; it emerges from dialogical practices with others in an authoring of oneself (Danielewicz, 2001). This self-authoring is a social and ideological process that comes from participation in individual and local as well as cultural and institutional discursive practices (Gee, 2001). In other words, teachers are created by, and in turn create, their identities (Britzman, 2003). This occurs when members of an affinity group become literate in a domain through a process of reading/interpretation and writing/production, which results in the construction and taking up (or rejecting) of associated identities (Gee, 2001, 2003). These affinity identities are socially situated and therefore, fluid, unstable and evolving; they are determined by the internal (content) and external (social practices) design grammar of a domain.

In this study, methods students participate in identity construction within an affinity group of fellow preservice teachers (including cooperating teachers) during their first experiences in the field. This construction is based upon their interpretation and production of the domain teaching secondary English as they experience it during this unique time and place in their professional development. As stated, becoming literate in a domain includes learning its external and internal design grammar, or what is considered typical social practice and content of the domain. Specifically, the external design grammar answers the questions: Do you know what counts as thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing like someone who is into teaching secondary English? Can you recognize the sorts of identities people take on when they are teaching secondary

English? Can you recognize what counts as valued social practices to members of the affinity group associated with the semiotic domain of teaching secondary English and what counts as behaving appropriately in these social practices? And the internal design grammar answers the questions: What sorts of practices/curricula/pedagogy count as typical or atypical of secondary English teaching? What sorts of practices/curricula/pedagogy are English teachers likely to find most valuable (or least) and for what reasons?

As discussed in Chapter Four, the seven themes that emerged from methods students' wiki discourses focus primarily on external design grammar such as how English teachers think, act, interact, and value. Themes are statements that synthesize what methods students determine are the typical social practices and appropriate behaviors for secondary English teachers and collectively, construct the affinity identity of English teacher as selfless giver:

- Teachers build student success
- Teachers motivate students
- Teachers meet student needs
- Teachers build classroom community
- Teachers build caring relationships
- Teachers never give up believing in students
- Teachers make a difference

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which two cohorts of secondary English methods students constructed teacher identity within the context of a course wiki during field experience. This chapter begins with a discussion of how data



themes connect to current research and confirm some of what we already know about English teacher identity and associated disciplinary ideologies. The discussion then moves into analysis regarding the absence internal design grammar in methods students' discourses about teaching secondary English, including what this absence of pedagogy and curriculum might reveal about the discipline as preservice teachers construct it. Chapter Five closes with implications for methods courses, possibilities for future research, and a reflection on the personal implications of this study for me as an English educator.

#### English Identity and Ideology: Confirming the Research

The first question guiding this research study asks: "How do methods students perceive the identity of an English teacher?" As argued throughout Chapter Four, methods students' patterns of discourse and the themes that emerge from it answer this question as follows (at this moment in their development and in the context of the wiki): methods students perceive the identity of an English teacher as primarily selfless and giving, with little consideration of English pedagogy and curriculum. And it is from this answer, and the ideologies it implies, that we can attempt to answer the second question guiding this research study: "What ideologies are present in methods students' discourses of English teacher identity?"

The affinity identity methods students' associate with teaching secondary English reveal much (both by what is said and not said) about ideologies within the academic discipline. According to Zamblyas (2003), more than any other discipline, English is imbued in ideologies and politics of identity. This is attributed, at least in part, to the associations and expectations that surround the discipline, particularly its humanist

gatekeeper role and its function as a norming agent for the language and literacy of students in this country (Staunton, 2008). As discussed in Chapter One, ideology is perceived as the natural order of things, its power and influence unconscious and self-produced. In much the same way, methods students' learning the external design grammar of the domain includes what they perceive and interpret the natural and given (or typical and appropriate) social practices and behaviors of becoming an English teacher. Thus, just as these thematic statements construct associated identity, they also reveal associated ideologies.

Learning the domain of teaching secondary English includes the appropriation of the thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing that determine the qualities of an English teacher. This conscious borrowing is what Gee (1990) describes as adopting the language of the discourse community, or this case, the affinity group. As methods students learn the external design grammar of the domain, they are also adopting ways that they interpret English teachers think and feel about students, teaching, and learning. In large part, this can be viewed as talking their way into their profession. This process requires a certain imaginative leap, where one must pretend the role by first speaking its language. It's important to note that throughout the wiki, methods students' intentions are earnest (they really *do* want to build student success). But, without critical thinking (and without the balance of a complete understanding of the domain that includes the internal design grammar of content), these responsibilities cannot be the prescriptions or aspirations for teacher behavior in which they are intended.

McCormick (1994) explains that ideological statements serve as social glue by giving us “seemingly coherent representations and explanations of our social practices”

and “giving us the language by which we describe and thus try to perpetuate them” (p. 74). As highlighted in Chapter Four, methods students present teacher practice and behavior as easily assumable and unproblematic with very little critical thought or elaboration as far as disciplinary content. Motivating students and building caring relationships are typical teacher responsibilities; building classroom community and making a difference are simply “what we English teachers do.” Even when an aspect of (about the domain and its relationship to other domains), the problem is attributed to a personal failing (of the CT or of oneself) and not to the feasibility of or imbalance within any part of the identity itself. Since ideology is considered natural, it is above question; thus, even when methods students push back, content is subordinated, social practices are dominant, and the selfless giver identity is ultimately reinforced.

In *Teacher Identity Discourses*, Alsup explains that when preservice teachers compose traditional statements of philosophy their words appear to “solidify unexamined positions rather than encourage critical examination of ideologies and personal pedagogies” (p. 189). This is also the case in the discourses of methods students’, which often read like a series of back and forth philosophy statements filled with stock phrases and jargon. When participants state they believe in students or want to meet student needs, not only are these unexamined positions, as Alsup puts it, solidified due to lack of critical examination of implicit ideologies, but by mere repetition and collective reinforcement in the closed, digital forum, these positions are solidified further. According to Alsup, developing teachers must talk through beliefs, philosophies and ideologies with others to increase self-understanding (p. 187). While the wiki platform attempts to simulate such talk, the static asynchronous environment lacks the dynamic

give and take that is a part of face-to-face conversation. In light of this, the wiki forum may in fact reinforce the ideological nature of wiki discourses by limiting methods students' opportunity to critically examine interpretations together in "real time" to increase self-understanding.

In "What Kind of Teacher Will I Be? Creating Spaces for Beginning Teachers' Imagined Roles" Agee investigates the development of novice teachers enrolled in a graduate level secondary literature class. Through her examination of electronic discussions, Agee concludes that if a beginning teacher cannot bring her imagined teacher role into discourse with teaching and learning, she will develop a strong resistance to her adopted profession. Agee explains, "imagined lives exist as key elements of identity, both in an individual mind and in the collective identity of a group of people" (p. 196). If there is conflict between beginning teachers' new words (and associated thinking) and their imagined teacher role, identity struggles ensue. This was the case in incidences of *push back* where methods students appropriated the language and took up the associated selfless giving teacher but, then struggled with or even rejected the limiting identity when it bumped up against discourses and expectations within other domains. Similar to Julie's *push back* about the unfair expectations imposed upon English teachers compared to other disciplines, one of Agee's students asks: "Why are students expected to simply 'learn' or 'know' science and math, yet they're expected to 'love' and 'experience' literature?" (p. 194). For Agee's student and for methods students like Julie, what is and is not said about English as an academic discipline leads to questions and frustrations about what it *really* means to be a teacher of English.

The teacher as selfless giver who is responsible for all aspects of the classroom experience is the associated identity that emerged from methods students' wiki discourses. Similar constructions, as well as methods students' related language and metaphors, have appeared in other research. In "Priest, Prostitute, Plumber? The Construction of Teachers as Saints" Carter's analysis of popular film and media representations of English teachers (e.g., *Dead Poets Society*, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Dangerous Minds*) use similar language and also point to ideology:

"Teachers, like traditional housewife-mothers, are usually constructed as angels or saints or, at the least, clergy, thought to work from 'love' or one of its synonyms (passion, engagement, involvement, caring). They 'care' for their students and want to 'make a difference' (*what* difference is often left unarticulated). They are widely expected to channel all-but-divine resources of patience and affection to allow them to 'help' or 'save' even the most difficult student. 'Help' implies a covert metaphor of teacher-as-counselor, a traditional function of the clergy; 'save' suggests that students need nothing less than salvation from the ranks of the lost or the damned." (p. 65)

There are many reasons to be wary of such characterizations. Foremost, Carter explains, this idealization deprofessionalizes English teaching. While many secondary English teacher candidates are drawn to these images, such metaphors "do not construct teachers as professionals with specialized knowledge and skills, but as people whose work may be devalued as a collection of personality traits, or the work of divine agency rather than the teacher's knowledge or experience" (p. 62). Carter argues that culturally constructed representations like the teacher-as-saint and teaching as religious vocation not only

influence developing teachers sense of themselves, but in doing so, make them “complicit in perpetuating the many inequities in the salaries and working conditions of teachers as compared to other experts and professionals” (p. 67). Drawing on the same metaphors and language, methods students’ focus on external design grammar also deprofessionalizes English teachers. Moreover, the absence of English Language Arts content further strips professionalism from the associated English teacher identity.

### The Absence of Content in English Identity

The absence and subordination of English Language Arts pedagogy and curriculum in wiki discourses is somewhat alarming, particularly since this study occurred within the context of an English methods course. One would expect even in assignments and discussion that were not explicitly about the discipline that it would be in some way part of the agenda. To clarify, “content” refers to the mention of reading, literature, writing, language study, and the teaching of those subjects. As indicated in Figures 2 and 3 in Chapter Three, methods students did refer to instructional practices and curricular content in their wiki posts. However, as explored in Chapter Four, such mentions were contextual and provided little more than background to discuss the social practices and appropriate behavior of teachers. It is interesting that from this naturally occurring data we find “Teachers Build Student Success,” but not “Teachers Build Student Literacy,” and “Teachers Make a Difference,” instead of “Teachers are Literary Experts.” As discussed above, such incomplete and undeveloped language points to ideology.

Although it’s useful to expose the ideological nature of methods students’ discourses, it is equally important to examine what these perceptions reveal about our

discipline. The absence of content in methods students' construction of teacher identity supports Zembylas' (2003) claim: that English is more ideologically prone than other disciplines. One could argue that, at least in this study, English is so steeped in ideology that the discipline itself is irrelevant. Certainly, all of the themes in this study could apply to any subject area; meeting student needs is not unique to the teaching of English. Yet, it is noteworthy that these expectations are what aspiring English teachers believe their identity *should* entail. With admitted exceptions, a teacher of math or social studies, (or any other discipline), would be far less likely to identify with notions of the self-sacrificing giver or to place students as central to their identity. It seems that there is something about English that readily lends itself to this idealized self-perception and deprofessionalized job description.

In "Handling Irony: Forming a Professional Identity as an English Teacher" English methods instructors Doecke and McKnight (2003) document the discussions and reflective writing of a small group of student teachers in their last term of field experience. With a focus on participants' stories about university supervisors and classroom experiences, Doecke and McKnight designed their study to gain insight into the ways in which preservice teachers construct professional knowledge and identity through conversations with one another. What surprised the researchers is that much like the methods students in my study, traditional notions of professional knowledge of English as an academic discipline is not present in novice teachers' conversations. Instead, teaching is viewed "as a matter of entering into a set of relationships" and like incidences of *push back*, personal relationships "form the immediate context for professional growth and the development of an effective pedagogy" (p. 302). Doecke &

McKnight conclude that when English content is displaced by classroom relationships, not only does this deprofessionalize the discipline, but also it undermines participants “emerging sense of themselves as English teachers” (p. 302).

As in this study and the above research findings, when it comes to English, ideology trumps content for many developing teachers. But, where does this come from? There appear to be many sources. Foremost, this stems from a lack of critical thought and conversation by novice teachers, particularly regarding the disciplinary and pedagogical tensions and ideologies within English Studies, English Education, and English teacher identity (Alsup, 2003; Carter, 2009; Doecke & McKnight, 2003; Staunton, 2008). It’s worth restating that although this study investigates English teacher identity, I did not design assignments or introduce issues of identity into the course; methods students’ identity constructions emerged from “naturally occurring” data. In some ways, this makes these findings more “true” to what students think, as their responses were not mediated by the focus of my inquiry. However, my failure to introduce issues of teacher identity into the course (and the wiki) may also be one reason why methods students’ identities lacked critical thought and inquiry to begin with.

The predominance of ideology in English teacher identity may also stem from an ideologically prone discipline. What makes English more ideological than other disciplines is less clear. After all, novice teachers of English can’t be less likely to critique their discipline than those from other subject areas. According to Carter, portrayals of English teachers in popular media and film are to blame. According to Staunton (2008) this is due to the gatekeeper role of the discipline and its function as a norming agent of literacy and culture. However, according to Doecke and McKnight



(2003), the culprit is English pedagogy itself and more specifically, “a tradition of English teaching as pastoral care or ‘personal growth’” (p. 303).

### *Growth Pedagogy and the Student-Centered Curriculum*

In his seminal work, *Growth Through English*, John Dixon summarizes the ideas generated during the 1966 Anglo-American Conference at Dartmouth College (later referred to as the Dartmouth Conference). This event brought together experts from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada to evaluate and reform the text and teacher-centered English curriculum in schools at that time. *Growth Through English* and the Dartmouth Conference are credited with a number of significant changes in the teaching of English, particularly a shift away from English content to a focus on the learners themselves. Based upon the British “growth model,” Dixon and conference participants concluded that the purpose of English curriculum is the personal growth of individual learners via engagement with reading, writing, and speaking activities. This is also associated with naturalistic or experiential curriculum, and the argument that students should move away from formal structures of language and engage in diverse and purposeful “real world” discourse.

With its emphasis on student interest, activity, and engagement, “it can be argued that much current understandings of English teaching are formed, perhaps understandably, in a distinctively post-‘Dartmouth’ image” (Green, 2003, p. 10). Peter Smagorinsky in “‘Growth through English’ Revisited” (2002), states that Dixon’s text was significant as it “anticipates virtually every student-centered idea generated since” (p. 25). Some of the key tenets emphasized in personal growth curriculum include:

- Discussions between students are expressive or exploratory and about things that matter to them.
- Writing is exploratory, can be informal and creative, and focuses on process over product.
- The lives of students are central, as are their personal connections and feelings.
- The object of English is individual self-discovery and self-realization.

It is striking how clearly the above student-centered precepts connect to methods students' discourses, and in turn, how well growth pedagogy explains why English teacher identity has so little to do with English content. The above tenets, with their focus on students' experience and feelings, read much like the themes in this study. Similar to Doecke and McKnight's preservice teachers' content-absent identity constructions, "their professional learning is ultimately dependent on the way they handle the ideological issues with which they are faced. Their learning is driven by their beliefs and values rather than being shaped by what...English teachers should supposedly know and do" (p. 305). One irony (from Doecke and McKnight's title) is that despite preservice teachers' adoption of the personal growth language (in both my study and theirs) Dixon's proposed paradigm shift away from formalism and enculturation to a student-centered curriculum has yet to take hold in most English classrooms (Green, 2003; Smagorinsky et al, 2004; Smagorinsky, 2010).

### *Gap Analysis*

English has been and currently remains a subject influenced by many contradictory and competing ideas, making it "not so much an identifiable field of study"

as “a range of practices which contribute to the formation of a particular kind of person that societies have found they need, and which English is able to help produce” (Green citing Peel, Patterson and Gerlach, 2003, p. 9) With the national standards movement and onslaught of standardized tests over the past twenty years, it’s easy to see how the formalist tradition and the canon-centered approach have persisted. However, when novice teachers define themselves with this student-centered language and subsequently omit disciplinary content from their construction of identity, serious gaps emerge. Upon examination, the self-sacrificing giver who puts her students at the center of her work is a ghost identity, defined by what’s missing more than what is there; consequently, absences and gaps in the selfless giver identity may reveal more than its claims.

One previously mentioned gap wrought by a content-free, student-centered identity is the deprofessionalization of English teachers. Of course, growth pedagogy *does* require teacher expertise and concrete subject matter. However, the way it is translated into methods students’ affinity identity in this study, it requires neither. Furthermore, if novice teachers adopt selfless identities and view teaching as a pastoral vocation rather than a profession of academic knowledge and expertise, this leaves them to grapple with translating this contingent identity into concrete pedagogy and curriculum. However, according to Reid (2003), this ambiguity may also be part of its appeal:

“It is partly because of its Wordsworthian latitude that ‘personal growth’ has been a long-lasting ideology. Being imprecise as a purpose and rationale for English, it continues to appeal to a large number of teachers and students for that very reason: it can mean different things to different people” (p. 104).

This is one of the many problems with making one's content (or lack of content) central to one's identity, and may also account for "the strange persistence of growth pedagogy" (Green citing Reid, 103, p. 10). It seems that English teacher identity may fair better under the formalist and canon-centered traditions as it provides specific disciplinary substance and is not perennially contingent upon the student.

Another unforeseen gap in this growth-pedagogy-as-identity, stems from assumptions inherent in the student-centered model. Specifically, the romantic conception of children and the elevation of an individual students' growth over social responsibilities and membership, which Smagorinsky (2002) states "overlooks the need to take a more social view of teaching and learning" and assumes that "this growth will always be noble, respectful, and socially constructive" (p. 26). Through a series of examples taken from his own English classroom, Smagorinsky argues that despite the many strengths evident in growth pedagogy, it fails to address social group dynamics and issues of power that inevitably arise in the classroom. For Reid (citing Hunter, 2003, p. 105) the chief problem stems from a dominant ideology of personal inwardness.

While Reid acknowledges that bringing student experience, language, and emotion into reading and writing practices in the English classroom is "always legitimate and sometimes important," he concludes that doing so requires, "an important proviso: that these activities are framed by critical and meta-linguistic analysis that fosters an understanding of how 'selves' are shaped" because "in its extreme forms, personalism can be disempowering for students because it disguises the social constructedness of any sense of individual identity. It fails to alert them to the fact that selves, like texts or curricula, are produced by frames of interpretation, and can be reframed in order to bring

new possibilities into view” (2003, p. 104). Both authors conclude that the growth model and implied student-centered curriculum must find a way to include relationships and responsibilities to others. For Smagorinsky, the “others” he refers to are primarily fellow students. However, I would argue that given that developing teachers are translating the ideology of growth pedagogy into a patchwork identity, these “others” should also include the teachers themselves.

Yet another gap revealed by this student-centered, English teacher identity, comes from its failure to adequately prepare developing teachers for the classroom. Research in teacher education shows that for most preservice teachers the values of the school site (e.g., mandated testing, skill-based instruction, state standards, district curricula, etc) override and negate the constructivist ideals of the university (Dickson et al., 2006; Smagorinsky et al, 2004; Smagorinsky 2010). This means that methods students may be emerging from their teacher education programs with an identity poorly aligned with secondary schools and built upon “a complex interaction and exchange marked by a somewhat paradoxical reciprocity” (Green, 2003, p. 3). While some schools may welcome and even support student-centered pedagogy, more likely the environment will be indifferent if not hostile to this model. In addition, because “novice teachers who can critique but not teach the curriculum are not worth hiring or renewing” (Dickson et al, 2006, p. 316), identity re-construction may be inevitable, particularly if this identity is primarily ideological and lacks foundational understandings necessary to implement growth pedagogy successfully.

## Discussion

There's nothing wrong with student-centered curriculum. I've done some excellent work with students using their ideas and interests to guide instruction and have witnessed the exceptional learning that this model offers, learning that increases student motivation and often exceeds other instructional methods. Theoretically, I would say I align myself with this tradition over formalist and canon-centered philosophies and know firsthand that it works with secondary students. Like many of my colleagues, I promote this pedagogical approach in my education classes and if my study is any indication, it appears my students are readily adopting the tenets of this approach, as well. But, if they're learning what I'm teaching, then what's the real problem? Foremost, I think growth pedagogy must be examined more critically, not only by the education students, but also by the teacher educators who pass on its language and ideology.

Although student-centered should not mean teacher-absent, this language can be problematic and confusing, especially if taken literally. Yes, power is deferred to students, but it's still up to the teacher to orchestrate coursework in such a way that students are at the center. Thus, student-centered is still teacher-centered to some degree. For methods students in this study, student-centered was about making secondary students feel safe and comfortable while getting them to open up and express themselves so they were successful and learned. However, this formulation assumes that what students want and need is worth needing and wanting *and* that it will be provide meaningful opportunities for curriculum and learning. It also ignores the possibility that students might not welcome teacher created opportunities for self-discovery; a student-centered freedom that teachers may not consider or support.

If the classroom is always teacher-centered, it could be more helpful to avoid dichotomous thinking of student versus teacher centered and explore levels of degree based on a continuum from student experience to teacher expertise. Pedagogy informed by disciplinary content and teacher knowledge is just as essential as curricula based on student interest and development. Ideally, the two are not mutually exclusive and work in tandem. Yet, the former is not adopted into English teacher identity when methods students portray teaching as perennially contingent upon students. This makes teaching seem primarily social and reactive, and as previously discussed, deprofessionalizes and deskills the teacher while obfuscating the content and purpose of the discipline. This absence may also contribute to the pendulum swing that often occurs once new teachers enter the classroom where they embrace the teacher-centered role and dismiss what they learned in teacher education as useless “theory” (or if unwilling to do so, leave the professional altogether).

“Student-centered” may simply be a misnomer. But, my worry is that this language deludes teachers and hides their responsibility from themselves. This self-deception may be useful in some ways, particularly for novice teachers. For example, it can help methods students as they transition from student to teacher. It can be a struggle to become an authority figure and some new teachers find themselves caught between images of teacher liberator on the one hand and fears of becoming an institutional mouthpiece on the other. Student-centered language can smooth over this transition by giving the impression that teachers are really on the student’s side. This eases developing teachers into their new teacher identity by allowing them to think they have less authority than they actually do.

Another way student-centered language hides teacher responsibility comes from the aforementioned issue of deprofessionalization. Growth pedagogy, at least as it is manifested in methods students' selfless giver identity construction, down plays teacher expertise by making teaching contingent upon students. There is little consideration of professionalism and expertise because it can only be called upon in the context of the needs of students as they arise. Since this can be hard to anticipate, it places decision making primarily in the middle of classroom interactions. This perception of teaching is not bad or untrue, but it may be deceiving; a lot of teacher decision making is based on prior thinking and planning and requires expertise that is not recognized in this formulation of teacher identity. And, while it seems counter-intuitive for new teachers to promote their own deprofessionalization, this is an ideology we've seen before in the teacher-as-saint, teaching-as-religious-vocation construction of teacher identity.

Overall, in the language of my methods students, the growth model has become over emphasized to the point of eclipsing other vital aspects of being an English teacher. The selfless giver identity orbits the student in a cycle of sacrifice and service, anticipating needs, creating wants, reading subtext and cue, in pursuit of an undeveloped abstraction called learning. This means the bulk of instructional time is to be spent (meeting needs, never giving up, building success) working toward a poorly defined destination that in many ways (at least in this construction) is out of teacher's control. The profession becomes the journey and what an arduous journey it is: a never-ending series of social practices and behaviors to set up the potential possibility for student learning.



Despite best intentions, the school structure can't help but influence the type and quality of self-discovery available for secondary students. Teachers are still expected to give the journal a grade, maintain order, send disruptive students to the office, show academic growth in student skills, and increase test scores along the way. Growth pedagogy assumes teachers have the freedom to give students what they need, and it assumes if they do, secondary students will embrace this opportunity, when in fact, many see such bids for self-expression as nonacademic or even a sort of trick (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Why do I have to get personal just to learn English? Furthermore, teachers are not trained as therapists. This is not a hobby to pick up while explicating *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Nor should teachers be expected to parent their students in order to offer effective English instruction. Ultimately, the selfless giver identity and corresponding metaphors of teacher as pastor or therapist weaken our subject matter. Not only because these constructions exclude content, but also because they raise questions about whether or not our discipline offers something to actually learn.

#### Implications for English Methods Courses

It's difficult to determine why methods students spent so little time discussing the internal design grammar of teaching secondary English on the wiki and more importantly, why their identity constructions have so little to do with English Language Arts pedagogy and curriculum. This absence is especially surprising given these interactions occurred in the context of an English methods course. It's possible that methods students simply understood the structural division between their Arts & Sciences courses and their School of Education courses and accepted that disciplinary talk doesn't belong here. Perhaps they felt subject matter content and instructional practices are fairly

straightforward and not worth debate. It's also possible that content was already set at their school site so it didn't demand attention. Finally, it could be that field experiences were so interpersonally intense that content simply became peripheral. All of these possible reasons for the absence of content can be addressed by teacher educators in various ways; through the use of guided reflection, discussion, and classroom inquiry, methods instructors can re-introduce content into the conversation by collectively investigating reasons for its potential absence.

However, it's also possible that methods students' discourses lacked content because they gleaned from their education courses that teaching is supposed to be all about students' feelings and needs and because English as a discipline has successfully blurred the lines between the personal and the academic via student-centered growth pedagogy. It is these later two possibilities that will require deeper consideration and critical work on the part of English educators, starting with an interrogation of the ideologies implicit in the history, pedagogy, and language of our discipline. As Green (2003) points out, "arguments are increasingly being marshaled for the value and even necessity of historical awareness and more broadly historical imagination in and for curriculum inquiry and praxis, particularly in English" (p. 2). He continues,

"This 'new English' is commonly associated with the 'inaugurating' moment of the famous Dartmouth conference in 1966, and viewed accordingly as a distinguished feature of the field in the late twentieth century. Moreover, these are all profoundly *historical* claims, registering particular views and version of history, and also expressing quite particular interests and partialities" (p. 2).

The border between English and “teaching” English is institutional and discursive, yet wide (Staunton, 2008). According to Staunton, not only do students and faculty struggle to put literary studies and teacher education into authentic dialogue, but also doing so may not be the solution. Staunton explains this division must be examined and not patched over into some type of hybrid “that ultimately changes nothing, producing neither effective teaching nor genuine inquiry into literature or classrooms” (p. 22). He argues that much is lost when we attempt to merge English and education and that this unsuccessful hybrid, “is not even a device for containing and maintaining the status quo of either discipline” but “simply a way of shuttling students back and forth across campus until they graduate, never having had to think about why they want to be English teachers or English majors in the first place” (p. 23).

It seems that we do an excellent job of telling our methods students what meaningful English isn't (e.g., it's not identifying adverbs or analyzing *Hamlet*), but we don't do a very good job telling them what it actually is. Methods students' discourses were not created in a vacuum; their content-free selfless giver identity construction may in fact be illustrative of an “empty hybrid” or identity crisis they inherited. Asking preservice teachers to think about why they want to be English teachers or English majors is certainly valuable. But, it's also important to recognize and examine the consequences of this division in teacher development so that this inquiry isn't only an exercise in theory. In my own teacher education, the gap between these very different departments and discourses was unacknowledged and like most ideology, invisible; my transition from English student to English teacher resulted in a throwing over of previous elevated notions of literature and a conscious shift to teaching. As this study shows, my experience

may not be unique. Becoming an English teacher should not be a choice between a love of students and a love of literature. Yet, methods students' content-free English identity make me wonder if they also chose an education self over an English self. If so, I doubt they knew there was a choice or that they were even making one.

Over a decade ago, Smagorinsky and Whiting argued that methods courses shouldn't entail assembling a bag of teaching tricks, but should be about learning "good work" that is holistic, process-oriented, critical, and transactional. However, in the absence of formalist or canon-based content in which to build a disciplinary teacher identity, methods students fashioned an identity from what they *did* interpret as important, creating an entirely social one. Although it is not enough to teach methods students about the historical, institutional, and theoretical divisions between English and education, it's a start. This means not just exposing the divisions between English and Education, but interrogating how this division plays out in course readings, field experiences, and their own socially situated teacher identities. This is certainly more than I had and more than I offered in my own methods courses.

For most methods students, work in English courses is separate from and foreign to work in pedagogy courses. For Staunton and others, the goal is to disrupt these false dichotomies and either/or thinking, yet avoid patching over these divisions in the process. Staunton argues that this will require "sustained derangement of the territories along the border dividing our practice" as well as serious consideration about "what it might mean to examine critically the images of our teaching selves" (pp. 152-153). For Alsup, this means we must "bring the issues of identity into the methods class" (p. 7). Had I, as Alsup suggests, encouraged transformative or "borderland discourse" to facilitate identity

development I may have been able to better help methods students negotiate this process (p. xiii). Alsup explains that borderland discourse occurs when preservice teachers experience cognitive dissonance between two (or more) discourses and find a way to “speak from this new space...to enact change” (p. 9). Similar to incidents of *push back*, borderland discourse can result in “increased meta-cognitive awareness and identity growth” (p. 9).

Teacher educators should encourage such dissonances and create opportunities for methods students to grapple with professional tensions inherent in our field. For example, in Alsup’s study, methods students examined their ideologies via visual metaphor creation and reflection, the telling of personal narratives, and talking to “informed and interested others” about beliefs and philosophies. If nothing else, my methods students’ identity construction should serve as a reminder as to what can happen if such identity work is excluded from the methods course and therefore, “teacher educators must understand that transformative teacher identity discourse is central to the professionalization of new teachers and to the general health of our educational system” (p. 195).

In addition to interrogating the historical and pedagogical divisions within English Education, and in addition to creating opportunities for methods students to uncover the ideologies that influence identity construction, methods courses also need to help preservice teachers question the culturally constructed language of their new profession. According to Carter, this means we must “expose and critique the saint-teacher metaphor” and in doing so, “challenge the language that surrounds teaching as a profession” (p. 83). Similar to Alsup, Carter suggests we ask methods students to

generate their own metaphors thereby developing alternative models that re-conceptualize the work of English teachers while resisting characterizations as saints “or eternally flawed would-be saints” (p. 84). This interrogation is especially vital. To allow methods students to expect success like Mr. Keating or Mr. Holland if they simply care more or try harder is a dangerous disservice. As Carter explains, questioning the validity of this predominant trope “is to cease calling on teachers to ‘make a difference’ without defining what difference is wanted and what resources are available toward achieving it. It is to refuse to remain complicit in the demand for miracles or the predication of pedagogy on love, which so devalues pedagogy as work” (p. 86).

Becoming a teacher of the most ideological discipline is likely to require the most analysis of how this ideology is conveyed, particularly through language. The good news is, we’re English majors, so ostensibly we enjoy language analysis and critique. In the methods course this would require critical semiotic readings of the English teacher in popular film and media as well as methods students’ own cultural constructions taken from friends, family, and their past experiences as students of English. An equally essential critique of ideology must also take place regarding the implications of growth pedagogy. Dixon and the Dartmouth participants provided us with a legitimate critique of English schooling in 1966. However, as my study and Doecke and McKnight’s study show, ironies run through the student-centered language and ideals of developing teachers that require some unpacking to be of use to novice teachers in the classroom.

There is a recognized conflict between the ideals espoused by growth pedagogy and the institutional environment in which teachers are eventually required to work. For Doecke and McKnight, this raises a number of significant questions that must answered

by new and experienced teachers, as well: “Can ‘growth’ pedagogy enable us to confront circumstances that are manifestly hostile towards the values and beliefs that it embodies? Can it be an ideology in the best sense of producing a sharp and insightful critique of our existing policy landscape? Or will it be merely an ideology in the negative sense, providing English teachers with a comfortable rationale for their actions without goading them into scrutinizing the consequences of what they do?” (p. 307). In the case of my methods students (and Doecke and McKnight’s students), I don’t have any evidence that growth pedagogy was even acknowledged as an ideology, much less an understanding of its role in their work in the classroom. For that matter, I don’t know that I understood this.

For Doecke and McKnight, teachers (and teacher educators) must “acknowledge how they’ve been positioned” and ‘interrogate why as a profession they have collectively been unable to implement the ethic of ‘growth’ pedagogy” (p. 308). For Green, this means we must explore the pedagogical and curricular “history of the present” while taking into account “the (dis)continuities evident in the (un)changing nature of English teachers’ work” (2003, p. 11). Had I integrated such inquiry into methods students’ conversations (or my own curriculum for that matter), perhaps the selfless giver identity could have been revealed or even disrupted instead of reinforced by wiki discourses. As it was, the ideology did what ideologies tend to do, spread and solidify unchecked. In terms of methods course curricula, this could require a historical survey of ideology in both English Language Arts content and pedagogy. A mini Ideology 101 that is not a “bag of tricks,” but a genuine investigation into the history our field, one that is presented as if unified and coherent, yet is actually a series of tensions, debates and divisions. Because,

“however we go about (re)thinking what we do and what we are, as English teachers in the present, it is important that we develop a rich and complex view of history, of *our* history as well as that of the larger social context, locally, nationally and globally. And that means being open to difference as well as identity” (Green, 2003, p. 11).

It is difficult for me to argue that methods courses should question student-centered curriculum and tenets of growth pedagogy. After all, its practices and ideals are aligned with my own classroom experiences and beliefs. This could be another reason why my methods students espoused the language so readily; it’s what their teacher wanted. I still believe growth pedagogy has much to offer secondary students and teachers of English. But, I must reluctantly admit that this too is ideology and therefore, I must also recognize the influence my own ideologies can have on my methods students’ perception of English teaching. Failure to do so makes me complicit in their deprofessionalization, and risks leaving them to formulate an identity that will not serve them well, if at all, in their future careers.

#### Implications for Future Research

This dissertation has confirmed many things we already know about English Education and teacher identity. But, this doesn’t mean there is nothing left to research about how English teacher identities and ideologies develop. If nothing else, my methods students’ discourses reveal places for further inquiry by the marked gaps in their identity construction, foremost among them, the absence of English Language Arts content. A closer examination of the role of English content in teacher identity is one avenue for further inquiry; how it is or is not manifest in the development of a teacher-self, as well as possibilities for greater integration of identity work into the methods courses. It would



be helpful to track the evolution of content in teacher identity during the first few years, as methods students' transition from education student to employed English teacher.

Does content eventually take a greater (or lesser) role in teachers' identity construction as they grow more comfortable in their profession? And, what role does student-centered curriculum play (or any other pedagogy) in this process? Such investigations might provide answers to many of the questions raised by this study, particularly how teacher educators can better understand and support English teacher identity development, as well as investigate the importance of content in this process.

Ultimately, our goal is to prepare methods students for the secondary classroom. Does growth pedagogy best prepare them for this? Is there a better alternative? If what is learned in the university is inevitably trumped by the school site (Dickson et al, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2010), are there ways we can avoid this while still equipping methods students with tools to function in the institutions in which they will dwell? This raises additional questions about the limits of the current school system. Maybe growth pedagogy fails because the system runs counter to it and so it cannot help but fail; maybe English pedagogy is as good as it can be given the hierarchical design and inherent limitations of the factory model of schooling? Maybe this is not pendulum swing but mirror checking? Investigation into how and why perceptions and identities change in the first years of teaching may also help to clarify the role of English Language Arts content and pedagogy in teacher development.

Furthermore, it might be helpful to examine the role of English Education in this process. In particular, how we as English educators influence our students' identity development and reinforce (or disrupt) the ideologies of our discipline. This could be via

a critical examination of ideologies present in our assignments and course readings. Just as student-centered is predicated on individualism, teacher identity construction is often discussed in isolation. Investigation into the socially constructed nature of teacher identity, with a focus on the role of ideology and how disciplinary ideologies are communicated and perpetuated by teacher educators, could elicit valuable insight into how teachers formulate identities.

### Reflection

If I look at my student evaluations from the *Teaching of English* course in 2008 and 2009 I might conclude I did an excellent job preparing methods students for their future classrooms. However, in light of this study, I have to wonder. Certainly, given the socially constructed nature of identity, there are additional courses and teachers and experiences that contributed to methods students' understanding of teaching secondary English. Yet, the next time I teach an English Methods class, I will think about teacher identity and subsequently, approach course design much differently. I may not have introduced or invented the selfless giver identity, but I didn't do anything to investigate its qualities and origins or hinder its construction. In fact, my instructional practices and curriculum most likely reinforced the limits and imbalances mirrored in methods students' student-centered interpretation of the discipline.

It is not surprising that Amy and Megan, two students most vocal on the wiki and responsible for many incidences of *push back*, left the profession at the conclusion of student teaching. Nor is it surprising that my methods students lacked critical thinking, a quality many secondary teachers lament missing within the thinking of their own students often due to lack of teacher support. This may be because, as Gee explains, "If children

(or preservice teachers) cannot or will not make bridges between one or more of their real-world identities and the virtual identity at stake in the classroom,” or “if teachers (or teacher educators) or others destroy or don’t help build such bridges, then learning is imperiled” (2003, p. 61). I’d like my methods courses to do more bridge building.

The socio-constructivist model for learning, or what Wilhelm calls the learning-centered inquiry model, is based on the following core assumptions: 1) learning occurs in context and cannot be extracted from the context in which it was developed and applied 2) what is learned is based on learner’s background, understandings, purposes and goals, 3) knowledge is socially constructed through interaction, questioning, negotiation, dialogue, evaluation and the “transformation of the learner” (Wilhelm, 2007, p. 27). All these criteria are a natural part of the student teaching experience, but to a much lesser degree, were a part of my methods courses and wiki. When research shows that school site experiences continually trump university site learning, this may be one reason why; experiences in the field are simply more contextually salient. While in no way can I (or should I) attempt to compete with learning in the field, I do believe cognizance of the limits of my student-centered approach as well as awareness of how learning occurs, means a more learning-centered model might better allow my methods students to build bridges between real-world and classroom identities.

In *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*, Wilhelm (2007) gives a brief overview of the teacher-centered and student-centered learning models, explaining how both are outdated and poorly aligned with what cognitive researchers tell us about learning. The “information-transmission” “topical coverage” “curriculum or teacher-centered” model, he explains, focuses too heavily on the *what*. It is an “authoritarian”

“curricular race course” where “teachers lecture and assign readings” and “students memorize information and take tests” (p. 28-29). Furthermore, the “natural learning” “discovery method” “student-centered” model is overly individualistic, focusing too heavily on *who*. He explains, student-centered teaching is “nurturing and stepping aside,” learning is “self-discovery” and the learner’s “interests, desires, goals and idiosyncratic, personal (vs. disciplinary) understandings” are central (p. 28-29).

As an alternative to these two models (which he describes as “going the way of the Model T”), Wilhelm proposes a model based on recent socio-constructivist cognitive research: the inquiry or learning-centered approach. He defines this model as “a multisided model that highlights the collaborative interactions and relationships between the teacher and the students, between the students and the content, and among the students and content and real-world situations. This focus allows us to teach for deep, disciplinary understanding” (p. 29). This inquiry model uses situations and obstacles (that lack predetermined outcomes) and requires students and teachers to become allies in a common project, leading to invention and creative problem solving. In other words, rather than teaching (or telling) methods students what English teaching is—my students and I struggle together to understand our construction of English teaching.

In 2008 and 2009, conscious meta-level thinking about what we do as English teachers was missing from my methods course. I immersed students in readings and wiki discussions (among other things), but did nothing to support critical thinking about all they were learning in and outside of our coursework. In Tharp and Gallimore’s *Rousing Minds to Life*, the authors conclude that in order to achieve meaningful, transformative growth, teachers need exactly what students need: “a clear vision and powerful assistance

to meet that vision provided continually over a sustained time period” (from Novak and Wilhelm, 2011, p. 171). I must admit I did not have a clear vision of how to put English and Education in conversation, nor did I provide powerful assistance to bridge this unforeseen gap. It doesn’t help that English Language Arts Content Standards are, as Wilhelm notes, “oddly devoid of content” and strike one “as goals floating in isolation” “without something interesting to respond to or argue about” (2007, p. 25).

I imagine an application of a learning-centered approach might result in a methods course built around inquiry questions like *What is English? Or, What is an English teacher?* Such a focus could allow my methods students to integrate university and secondary classroom experiences, interactions, readings, personal histories, interviews, and so on. This inquiry could include investigations into historical, disciplinary, ideological, and cultural constructions of English teachers and conclude with reflection and application (e.g. how does this new understanding of English/an English teacher change my perception of my identity/profession? How can I use this new understanding with my students? What implications does this new understanding have for my teaching?). Part of this inquiry could also include recognition of the selfless giver identity, where it comes from, as well as what role pedagogy and curriculum play (or don’t play) in self-perceptions. This will require a shift from talking about practice from outside to talking from within it (a habit that permeates the English discipline), a shift from reading the external social practices of English teaching, to writing and appropriating English content from within.

Today, I am much more concerned and skeptical when I hear or read statements in teacher education about “making a difference” “building relationships” and “meeting

students' needs." I am also more willing to consider alternatives to student-centered curriculum now that I see how it can limit students' understanding. While I won't necessarily impose my own meta-level thinking about teaching English, I will share what I've learned from this study with my future methods students. This means I intend to offer a more balanced presentation of English Education as a whole. In hindsight, I believe my focus on the practical aspects of being an English teacher in my methods courses meant that I, too, left disciplinary content by the wayside.

### Conclusion

In *The Rise and Fall of English* Robert Scholes asks, "What is becoming an English Teacher?" and answers with: "becoming an English teacher, includes a sense of one's own limitations, an awareness of how deep the sea of English is and how shallow and frail one's boat." He continues,

"We English teachers, it seems, have apprenticed ourselves to a discipline we can never hope to master—which means we must learn to enjoy reducing our clumsiness and ignorance without ever hoping to be perfectly graceful and wise. We must learn to enjoy the state of becoming, for we will never fully and perfectly be English teachers. Nevertheless, we need some idea of what it might mean to master this discipline." (p. 70).

While I genuinely love Scholes' imagery, and am comforted by his forthcoming assessment of the impossibility of our discipline (an assessment I share), after completing this study I wonder if our ability to see all perspectives as English teachers is both our strength and our limitation. While it is undoubtedly true that our field is never going to be as definable and concrete as math or social studies (nor do I want it to be), the span and

multiplicity of English leaves us with a bit of an identity crisis from the start. Even within his poetic confession, Scholes admits we must still come to some kind of conclusion about what it means to master English. Otherwise, we are driven to ideological gaps or overdrawn dichotomies, neither extreme doing justice to this valuable, if not misunderstood, academic discipline.

## APPENDIX A

### Reflection Wheel Journal Student Model

(Rousseau, 2010)

Alternative high school Language Arts class

1. One day two weeks ago during fourth hour, Wilber House, the kid who is so totally disengaged had his head down on the desk for the first 20 minutes of class. At first, I just left him alone, but then I knew if he didn't get busy on the writing assignment, he would have a bad start on the unit and it would be all downhill for him. When the rest of the class got busy, I walked over to him, and gently tapped him on the shoulder. He bolted upright with his fist clenched, like he was ready to hit me. There was tremendous anger in his face and he said, "Don't ever touch me. EVER." I backed off and thought I would have to process this and figure out how to handle this whole thing.

2. Frustrated, confused, embarrassed in front of the class, and a little shocked

3. My first thoughts were, "WOW, this kid has some anger issues. I don't know if I have the skills to deal with this. Was he asleep because he was up all night partying? Does he have a hang-over? What's up with him, anyway?"

I was taken off guard because I had a mind-set that kids *want to learn*; they want to learn what I have to teach them. If they just got involved in the lesson, they'd realize the value and the benefit of this work.

4. I realized that I was coming from my own assumptions based on how *I* was as a student—compliant, cooperative, and pleasant. So, no wonder I was shocked at his reaction. I was overlaying my reality on him! Nobody in my classes ever reacted to a teacher like that! This was why I reacted as I did.

I asked a few other teachers about Wilber's background. I was told his father was Hopi and his mother was Navajo—enemy tribes for many generations. I was also told that another student, a Navajo kid, was "bull dogging" him (eyeing him for a fight) over a girl. I felt sorry for him and tried to think of ways to engage him in our unit—at a personal, relevant level. I no longer felt frustrated when I realized he had tremendous self-esteem issues possibly holding him back. My brother used to act like this when my mom would try to approach him—explosive! I always thought she needed to back off a bit and give him space.

5A. I realized I needed to put my own background aside and be more empathetic with Wilbur, yet without overdoing it! It had to be a casual, gradual engagement with enough *relevance* to get him on board. But, I also had to come to terms with the fact that he may be so emotionally damaged, he just might *not* come around. I had to go where he's at! He's dealing with cultural ambiguity; and a certain amount of violence.



5B. Our unit was a compare/contrast research and writing project on themes in “Gandhi”. Choices for study included: selecting how resource dominance can keep a population under control (i.e. the British control of salt production—an Indian resource), massacres as a mean of control, various religions living in the same country (similarities and differences), and nonviolence as a means of activism. After a great deal of front-loading regarding gang-violence, revenge, and domination, I talked to them about how people must feel when their country is under the domination of another country to the point of massacres and economic controls. I warned them about the violence in the scene and told them the Sikhs were being massacred for simply gathering to discuss what they could do to achieve a voice in their country. Of course, the scene was quite moving. Afterwards, they wrote their impressions—most were outraged.

I casually walked by Wilbur and asked, “Pretty intense, huh?” He said, “Yeah”. Later I was able to talk with him more at length and asked him if he knew about the Hopi prophecies. He didn’t know. I told him to look it up on the web and let me know what he found. He was totally amazed and said he told his father who didn’t know the details he discovered. From that point, Wilbur was off and running. At the end of the unit he turned in a fascinating paper, comparing the plight of the Hopi being forced to live in austere conditions and enduring massacres as compared with the British atrocities and occupation of India.

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### LLSS 436 Student Teachers

- **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michelle Jewett, from the Language Literacy and Sociocultural Department at the University of New Mexico. The results from this study will be a part of my doctorate degree and will be submitted for future publication in a peer reviewed journal. You are identified as a possible volunteer in the study because you are my student in LLSS 436.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** The purpose of this study is to examine our class wiki and see how effective it was as a tool for learning in our English Methods course. The results of this study will be used to inform teacher educators and researchers about the use of wikis in teacher education.

- **PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES:** If you are willing to be a part of this study, your participation will entail the following:

1. *I will answer any questions you might have about this research study and process.*
2. *You will read and sign this consent form.*
3. *I will print, analyze and write about your wiki posts in my research study.*

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

1. *I do not foresee any risks or discomforts in this process. However, if for some reason after giving your consent you feel uncomfortable or change your mind, you may terminate your participation and your posts to the wiki will be omitted from this study.*
2. *Because participation in this study is unrelated to your performance and grade in LLSS 436, you will not be asked to give consent until after the course is over and grades are submitted.*

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

1. *As an individual participant you will not directly benefit from this study.*
2. *However, as a student teacher I believe your experiences will provide greater insight into the process of becoming a teacher and improve the quality of their education.*

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

1. *Wiki posts will be erased upon completion of the study and any copies will be deleted from my personal computer. I will be the only person with access to these posts.*
2. *For scholarly publication or any use of your posts in forums or presentations, all identifying information (where you work, your name, as well as any names you may have used within your posts) will be removed and pseudonyms will be given.*

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS AND REVIEW BOARD**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact: Michelle Jewett, 307 1732, [mjewett@unm.edu](mailto:mjewett@unm.edu) and Don Zancanella, 277-7782, [zanc@unm.edu](mailto:zanc@unm.edu). If you have other concerns or complaints, contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Mexico, 1717 Roma NE, Room 205, Albuquerque, NM 87131, (505) 277-2257, or toll free at 1-866-844-9018.

<b>SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT</b>
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I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

<b>SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR</b>
----------------------------------

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly providing informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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