Prospective secondary teachers' conceptualizations of literacy and literacy in their content areas

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PROSPECTIVE SECONDARY TEACHERS’ CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF LITERACY AND LITERACY IN THEIR CONTENT AREAS

by

Jane Costello Bonacci

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
Department of Literacy Teaching and Learning
2015
Abstract

This dissertation examines preservice secondary teachers’ understandings of literacy and literacy in their content areas as they participated in a required undergraduate course within a teacher preparation program. Through multiple case studies of four preservice teachers, this dissertation documents the interaction of literacy histories, prior experiences in schooling, and prior beliefs about secondary teaching and learning with adolescent literacy coursework.

Two central questions drove this practitioner inquiry: What are preservice secondary teachers’ initial conceptualizations of literacy and the nature and function of literacy learning and teaching in their content area? How do preservice secondary teachers’ engagements with coursework reveal and shape their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their content area?

Participants for this study were four prospective secondary teachers enrolled in an adolescent literacy course in a teacher preparation program in a small, rural, liberal arts college in the northeast. Data, collected during one semester and in an interview four months after the completion of the course, included observations and field notes, participants’ journals, demonstration lessons, audiotaped transcriptions from class activities, student assignments, and interviews. Using constructivist grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2006, 2008) to analyze and interpret data, two central findings emerged. First, the focal participants’ experiences as literacy learners, schooling experiences, and their content area expertise (what they brought to the course) shaped, and in some ways, constrained their conceptualizations of literacy. Change, often provisional, occurred in subtle and complex ways; each participant questioned previously
held assumptions often in non-linear, messy, productive ways. Second, participants
largely maintained their initial views of literacy in their content area. Efforts to develop a
broad view of literacy and demonstrate its efficacy for content area pedagogy were
minimally successful.

This research explores the complexity of preparing secondary content area
teachers to teach through a content literacy lens. Implications for literacy teacher
educators are drawn that include shifting from a traditional content area approach
toward a disciplinary literacies pedagogy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my committee members, Dr. Kelly Wissman, Dr. Cheryl Dozier, and Dr. Peter Johnston for their support, hard questions, and challenges over the years. As they listened to my emerging ideas, Kelly and Cheryl’s queries helped me view this work through facets I might have otherwise overlooked, opening spaces for discoveries and critical understandings. Peter’s expertise and insights have strengthened this work considerably. I remain grateful to each of them for their guidance throughout this journey.

Coursework with scholars and teachers at the University at Albany provided an intellectual sounding board as I prepared to traverse this path. To Drs. George Kamberelis, Donna Scanlon, Carol Rodgers, Robert Yagelski, and Melissa Freeman, my gratitude. I extend gratitude to Dr. Kathleen Hinchman for providing critique as I searched for direction at the onset of this research.

I thank my colleagues where this study was conducted, who paused during their busy teaching schedules to ask after my progress, share experiences, and offer very sane advice at various stages of this process. Thank you to all the student participants who made this research possible, and, in particular, thank you to the focal participants, who allowed me to explore their learning (and my teaching) as they prepared for secondary teaching careers. I could not have done this without them!

Friends and colleagues Ann van der Meulen, Marvin Bram, Nancy Bailey, Marta Albert, Peg Kennedy, and Cindy Shepardson helped in ways too numerable to list, but I could not have written this dissertation without their kind words, critiques, and wise counsel. With deep appreciation, I thank them all.
Finally, thank you to my family—immediate and extended—for their love and steadfast support, and for their reminders of what is real. They stood by me even though they could not understand why I would put myself through this undertaking in the first place—for that, I am ever so grateful. I especially want to thank my husband and partner in all things, whose love and unwavering encouragement gave me the determination to struggle through the most trying moments of this research and writing process. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Qualitative research, at the beginning of this new century, is integrally connected “to the hopes, needs, goals, and promises of a free democratic society” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). It is clear that what we do as teachers connects powerfully to issues and events in the wider world. As a teacher educator, I have developed a philosophy and an approach to teaching aimed at helping preservice teachers develop an awareness that the way we practice and teach literacies has consequences for learners that matter both in and beyond schooling. The broad purpose of my study was to examine preservice content area teachers’ conceptualizations of literacy and literacy in their content areas in an effort to understand the ways in which teacher education might more effectively prepare future teachers to meet the challenges of 21st century schooling. My understandings of literacy learning and teaching have developed and continue to develop over time through my experiences as a public school teacher, as a learner in advanced studies in literacy, and as an instructor in a teacher education program.

Problem in the Field

For almost a decade, I taught literacy courses for prospective teachers in a small, private college located in rural upstate New York. The adolescent literacy course from which these data are drawn had been firmly established and taught by several colleagues before it became my responsibility. I eagerly took up this course, tweaking and adjusting it somewhat each semester, but was never wholly satisfied with my teaching or student learning. I wondered what I could do to improve the course, my students’ learning, and my teaching practices, but first I needed to examine what was transpiring in the course.

At the time I was teaching the adolescent literacy course, the field was shifting from a content area literacy approach to a disciplinary literacies approach. That is, from a cross-subject
area, general comprehension strategies and vocabulary building approach (Stevens & Bean, 2003) to an approach focused on discipline-specific literacies for learning disciplinary discourses and practices (Draper, 2008, 2010; Moje, 2008b). Although the course I taught was clearly framed in a content area literacy approach, this shift in the field was gathering momentum as I wondered what the course, my students, and I needed to become more fully prepared to meet the demands of 21st century literacies.

Teachers’ conceptions of literacy, content area literacy, and their pedagogical practices deeply influence their students’ learning (NCTE, 2011). Lee and Spratley (2010) observe that secondary students face continually more complex challenges and argue that

…supporting [struggling adolescent] readers as they grapple with the highly specific demands of texts written for different content-areas will help prepare them for citizenship, encourage personal growth and life-satisfaction on many levels, and open up opportunities for future education and employment. (p. 2)

Thus, preservice content area teachers’ conceptualizations of and practices in literacy and literacy pedagogy is a particularly productive research domain. The case for attention to preservice content area teacher education has been built (Draper, 2010; Fang, 2014; Moje, 2008b). As a literacy teacher educator concerned about my students’ learning and future teaching, I regarded calls for a shifting focus of secondary literacy with a sense of urgency.

Moore, Readence, and Rickleman (1983) note that content area reading instruction, with its emphasis on strategies “attempts to enable students to cope with the special reading materials and tasks encountered during the study of school subjects” (p. 429). Bean (2001) added social practice and critical dimensions to the concept of content area reading and writing. Extending this understanding, Alvermann et al. (2010) define content literacy as students’ use of reading, writing, oral language, and computer-mediated communication technologies to learn subject
matter. These understandings of content literacy framed the adolescent literacy course and informed my teaching practices.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert that inquiry and practice are often viewed as dichotomous enterprises. They argue instead that working the dialectic of inquiry and practice means researcher and practitioner take on “integrated and dynamic” roles in a relationship understood as “reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic” (pp. 94-95). Here, dialectic denotes “…the tensions and presumed contradictions between a number of key ideas and issues that have to do with research, practice, and knowledge” (pp. 93-94). The research process, for me, was indeed alive with tensions between the shifting field of content area literacy, my practice, and my professional knowledge. While I was confident in my knowledge of literacy and literacy pedagogy, I was less confident in my knowledge of content-specific literacies. What could my students teach me about their processes as learners in their subject areas? How could I facilitate this transaction? Alive with tensions (between participants’ subject area expertise and my expertise in literacy) and contradictions (perceptions of literacy’s role in content pedagogy), working the dialectic between research, knowledge, and practice at a time of transition in the field was both challenging and fruitful.

By deciding to closely examine the course—that is, to observe, participate in, and analyze what occurred during the 15-week semester—I aimed to (1) learn what preservice secondary teachers bring to an adolescent literacy course and how they think about the role literacy plays in their content area; (2) learn how these prospective secondary teachers navigate and respond to coursework; and (3) learn how I can improve my practice and contribute to teacher preparation literature. I have shined a light on my practice, which revealed some uncomfortable truths, and I have also learned that puzzling through these truths can lead to better practice, although often not in a straightforward way. Reflexivity is, therefore, crucial to this work and I aim to
demonstrate the ways my presence as a teacher researcher both complicated and illuminated the “twisting path” (Smagorinsky et al., 2003, p. 1401) I traversed to understand our—my students’ and my—conceptual development around literacy and content area teaching and learning in the context of this adolescent literacy course.

**Research Questions**

My subjectivities as an individual, experienced literacy professional, advanced student in the field of literacy pedagogy, and teacher educator influenced the course design (topics, readings, assignments, activities) as well as the research design. My pedagogy was designed to introduce students to new ways of seeing, thinking, and acting in relation to their future content area teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I sought to have my students reflexively develop their own ways of taking up, setting aside, adapting, questioning, and/or (possibly) rejecting the pedagogical content and practices taught in my courses. As such, I attempted to create a context where we co-constructed our understandings of literacy and its function in content area pedagogy. My research was designed to better understand the ways prospective teachers’ concepts of and practices in literacy influenced their engagements with coursework. The major questions driving this study were:

1) What are preservice secondary teachers’ initial conceptualizations of literacy and the nature and function of literacy learning and teaching in their content area?

2) How do preservice secondary teachers’ engagements with coursework reveal and shape their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their content area?

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Next, in Chapter Two, I review the empirical literature that guided my study and its conclusions. I consider four overall streams of research. The first two streams of research
informed the design and implementation of this study. I review (a) research that examines teachers’ conceptualizations of literacy and (b) research that looks at the ways teacher education coursework might influence conceptual change in literacy. The second two streams of research informed the conclusions drawn from this study. I review (c) research that shapes the domain of secondary literacy toward a disciplinary focus, and finally, at (d) research that offers directions forward in preparing prospective teachers for disciplinary literacies pedagogy. Chapter Three focuses on setting, participants, research design, and data analysis strategies used in this study. I include a discussion of practitioner research with all of its rewards and complexities and explain why this was a powerful and appropriate stance for this study. Findings from each case are presented in Chapters Four through Seven. These findings include the ways the focal participants’ experiences and stances as learners, their beliefs about teaching and learning, and their understandings of their disciplines influenced their engagements with coursework and contributed to their conceptualizations of literacy in content area pedagogy. Chapter Eight brings together the findings in a cross case analysis that demonstrates the complexity of preservice content area teacher learning in the context of a paradigm shift in secondary literacy. Chapter Nine presents conclusions and their implications for my practice as a literacy teacher educator, for teacher education programs at the institutional level, and finally, for the field of secondary literacy teacher education.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

I situate my study in a body of work representing preservice teachers’ concepts of literacy and literacy pedagogy and secondary content teacher preparation. Literacy, adolescent literacy, content area literacy, and disciplinary literacy are contested and evolving constructs. Stevens (2002) argues that until the mid 1990s, research on literacy in adolescents’ lives fell largely “under the arcs of secondary and/or content area literacy…defined as the processes and skills necessary to read and write in the content areas…” (p. 267). Qualitative studies then began to investigate the ecological validity of the quasi-experimental research settings of the late 20th century, and to focus on questions about the social, cultural, and political aspects of secondary education (Hinchman & Moje, 1998). The Adolescent Literacy Commission’s position statement (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999) “raised the need to reposition the adolescent at the center of inquiries into literacy processes and practices” (Stevens, 2002, p. 268). The shift in terminology from content area literacy to adolescent literacy denotes a broad, generative view of literacy ecologically based to include multiliteracies, widening notions of text, literacy’s role in identity formation, and bringing so-called out-of-school literacies into the classroom (Alvermann, Phelps, & Gillis, 2010). An ecological stance toward adolescent literacy considers the dynamic aspects of adolescent literacy learning that include the interactive nature of learner, text, and context (Alvermann et al., 2006; Moje, Dillon, & O’Brien, 2000).

At the same time literacy researchers began to argue for an emphasis on the subject area literacies students need to succeed in middle and secondary schooling (Bean, 2001; Draper, 2002; Moje, 2008b). Draper (2002) writes, “Powerful content-area instruction must provide adolescent students access to information, skills, and processes while it provides students access to the discourse, texts, and tools for thinking and learning particular to the content area” (p. 379).
Specifically, Draper (2002) calls for math, science, and social studies methods instructors to intentionally address subject area literacy: “[I]t is time for all educators, not just literacy educators, to recognize the power of literacy—reading and writing—and provide, in their courses for preservice teachers, explicit instruction about the implications of literacy…content is not separate from literacy” (p. 380).

To address my research questions regarding preservice secondary teachers’ concepts of literacy and the role of literacy in their content area, I discuss studies that look at preservice teachers’ beliefs about and conceptual change in literacy. Next, I discuss research that explores the ways secondary teacher education coursework might contribute to conceptual change in literacy. Following that, I draw from research that examines the literacy processes involved in content area learning and teaching. This research addresses the breadth and depth involved in building knowledge in this domain. Finally, I look at research that offers directions forward in content area literacy teacher preparation with a disciplinary focus.

**Teachers’ Conceptualizations of Literacy: Beliefs and Practices**

**Reading teacher education: Findings from research on beliefs.** A number of studies have examined preservice teachers’ previously constructed beliefs and knowledge through an examination of personal histories in an effort to determine the relations among psychological, sociological, epistemological, philosophical, and ethical beliefs and understandings (Hall, 2005; Hollingsworth, 1989; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) assert that preservice teachers’ “[p]ersonal histories evidence accumulation, integration, editing, and synthesis across actors, actions, and consequences to form a coherent belief system” (p. 87).

Hall’s (2005) review of 19 studies (conducted between 1970 and 2003) involving pre- and inservice content area teachers found support for the theory that “teacher beliefs, rather than pedagogical knowledge, drives instructional decisions in the classroom” (Hall, 2005, p. 408). Pre-
and inservice teachers’ beliefs about literacy often reflect a stance that while reading instruction is supported to some degree, learning content and reading can be separated and content learning is not dependent on being a proficient reader (Hall, 2005). This sentiment may contribute to placing less importance on literacy as a tool of subject area learning. Indeed, prospective and practicing teachers’ “historic recalcitrance” toward content area literacy instruction has been documented (Lesley, 2005, 2011; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995).

However, in their meta analysis of research on reading teacher education, Risko et al. (2008) found that “reading teacher preparation programs have been relatively successful in changing prospective teachers’ knowledge and beliefs, and…that under certain conditions pedagogical knowledge influenced actual teaching practice” (p. 252). While just 11 of the 82 studies reviewed examined teacher candidates’ beliefs about content area reading instruction, Risko et al. note that a few of those studies found that prospective teachers were more positive about and receptive to the notion of content area literacy. Overall, however, the researchers found mixed results in the literature that examined beliefs about reading instruction to support disciplinary learning. Citing research that found prospective teachers to be “highly resistant to change” and/or where their beliefs act as “filters” that prevent the development of new perspectives and foil attempts to examine misconceptions, Risko et al. (2008) summarize by stating, “Despite efforts to either change or broaden perspectives, researchers have not established explicit links between expressed beliefs and practice, factors that may contribute to established beliefs, or reliable measures for exposing individuals’ beliefs” (p. 263).

Beliefs-in-use. What are these “links” and “factors” regarding beliefs, and “reliable” ways of helping preservice teachers change and/or broaden their perspectives? Risko et al. (2008) report that a number of studies involved helping prospective teachers make their beliefs explicit or objects of study and demonstrated that “instructional and situated events can be catalysts for
changes in beliefs” and “clearly refute the idea that beliefs are intractable” (p. 263). It is clear the construct of belief itself is contested. Risko et al. (2008) provide a compelling critique of the “troubling characteristic” of these belief studies:

Too often the belief construct is viewed as a static and stable entity. Or beliefs are treated as a tightly formed construct lacking complexity… what is needed is a careful and comprehensive examination of beliefs as a dynamic that is affected by multiple situated and cultural histories and events, and beliefs are examined during the activity of the events rather than retrospectively. (p. 263)

Risko et al. recommend that researchers examine both expressed beliefs and beliefs-in-use and that future beliefs research “examine the nuances of belief changes, teasing out specifically situational factors influencing beliefs and developing tools that can capture beliefs in the happening” (p. 264). Understanding beliefs as a dynamic is both necessary and integral to literacy teacher education.

**Epistemological beliefs.** Documenting the effects of teaching content literacy from a traditional, technical perspective, Moje (1996) raises important questions about the ways in which epistemological beliefs—in this case, a limited role for literacy in learning—facilitate and/or constrain literacy conceptualizations and practices. Moje wonders, for example, what aspects of literacy and chemistry learning the students in the focal chemistry class might have missed as a consequence of their teacher’s beliefs (e.g., the purpose of literacy was to accumulate foundational chemistry knowledge) and practices that emphasized achievement but deemphasized the use of literacy to “grapple with concepts while constructing chemistry knowledge” (p. 193). The teacher’s belief in science as the organization of information, and literacy as an organizational tool, shaped her pedagogical practice and her students’ chemistry learning. This close examination and careful exploration of the influences of life experiences and
histories, the mutually constitutive dimensions of practice, and the role of context in content literacy teaching and learning informed how I analyzed, in the present study, the ways preservice content area teachers’ concepts of literacy enable or constrain their engagements with coursework.

Smith Davis and Brown (2013) designed an exploratory study to “establish a foundation for future research about the disciplinary literacy practices in the field of mathematics” (p. 172). The researchers drew from Siebert and Draper (2008) who noted that mathematics teachers “tend to resist adopting literacy strategies” presented in content area literacy courses because they are often seen as “unrelated or contrary to mathematical ways of thinking” (Smith Davis & Brown, 2013, p. 173). Smith Davis and Brown (one with a background in literacy, the other with a background in mathematics) observed the instructional practices found in an undergraduate mathematics course for non-math majors specifically designed to increase their quantitative literacy using real-world applications as course content. Interested in whether the use of literacy strategies promoted students’ capacity “to adopt mathematical ‘habits of mind’” (p. 173), Smith Davis and Brown sought to discover what types of instructional practices related to literacy were present in the course, and if they were present, could the literacy practices used be connected to students’ increased quantitative literacy. The researchers aimed to examine students’ beliefs about and dispositions toward mathematics and to identify classroom activities and practices in line with disciplinary literacy instructional practices.

Smith Davis and Brown (2013), adapting the work of Boaler and Greeno (2000), interpreted their student participants’ “types of knowing” in the following ways: received knowing, which is provided by an external authority; separate knowing, where the learner aligns her/his content knowledge within the boundaries of the discipline; connected knowing, where learning is constructed socially, and the learner seeks perspectives of others to expand/reconcile
personal knowledge; and finally, constructed knowing, which is a combination of separate and connected knowing where the learner constructs, refines, and validates her/his own knowledge (Smith Davis & Brown, 2013, p. 180). Students expressed a preference for “step-by-step” instruction, which initially seemed to align with “received knowing” but evidence from the think aloud events the researchers observed indicated that

…this method may provide a tool for more fully apprenticing students into the ways of thinking and knowing in mathematics especially when attention is paid to convergent, divergent, and evaluating questions (Ciardiello, 1998) during the exchange. (Smith Davis & Brown, 2013, pp. 180-181)

Importantly, Smith Davis and Brown (2013) posit that increasing learners’ quantitative literacy is connected to moving learners toward an empowered stance (i.e., constructed knowing) and this movement can be facilitated with the use of instructional practices such as those related to literacy observed in this math course. The researchers found practices consistent with those discussed in content area/disciplinary literacy courses such as metacognitive processes (evident in students’ clarifying questions and in interview responses regarding challenges of math content), vocabulary building, and formats that involved discussion, questioning, and think aloud. Teacher modeling and demonstration through think aloud were the most prevalent of all the literacy activities observed in the math course.

Smith Davis and Brown (2013) believe building on instructional practices already present in mathematics classrooms will create increased opportunities for quantitative literacy development. They suggest that further investigation of these instructional strategies (e.g., Think Aloud) is needed and that “…it may be beneficial to work specifically with pre-service mathematics teachers to increase their awareness of quantitative literacy and to expose them to different types of Think Aloud structures, formats, and levels of questions during literacy-based
coursework, for use in future classrooms” (p. 182). This research underscores the importance of recognizing disciplinary ways of knowing and communicating, demonstrates the relevance of particular literacy practices and approaches for building disciplinary knowledge and documents the ways these particular instructional practices can positively influence learners’ epistemological stance.

**Teacher Education Coursework and Conceptual Change in Literacy**

While a number of the studies in this section of the literature review did not look specifically at what we now call *disciplinary literacy*, many of the issues (e.g., narrow views of literacy, sociocultural and critical dimensions of literacy, pedagogical and epistemological approaches to secondary literacy) continue to drive the search for relevant and meaningful content area literacy instruction. The research below demonstrates ways teacher education coursework might help us move forward in that direction.

**Literacy histories and preprogram beliefs as coursework.** Preparing preservice content area teachers to navigate a shift in thinking frequently begins with an examination of their own literacy histories for the purpose of building an awareness of the influences on their beliefs about and practices in literacy. The research is replete with studies that document the effects of post secondary coursework on preservice teachers development of professional knowledge. As discussed above, Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) assert that prospective teachers’ pedagogies are shaped from their experiences in course work (assigned reading, writing, peer-peer and peer-teacher conversations), early [student] teaching experiences in the classroom, and the “socializing effects of the broader school environment as well as the society in which we live” (p. 109). Importantly, Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) also argue that teacher educators’ personal histories impact preservice teachers pedagogies. Teacher educators’ practices—our foci, the questions we ask, the ways we structure coursework and assignments—are shaped by our
histories, and the researchers suggest that we reveal these influences to our students as a means of “com[ing] to know our mutual world of classrooms and students” (1991, p. 110). Similar to Knowles and Holt-Reynolds’ (1991) use of autobiographical writing as a vehicle for learning, Blachowicz & Wimett’s (1995) use of “autobiographical reminiscences” led to an understanding “that literacy is not a static or unitary concept but one that has been flexibly defined within and across cultures” (p. 340). Further, autobiographical reminiscences, the authors claim, helped preservice teachers to conceive of literacy as having broader functions beyond “commonly recognized academic ones” (p. 340). Preservice teachers’ pre-program beliefs about teaching, acting as cultural filters, dynamically interact with course content and field experiences, bringing about varying levels of teacher knowledge and emerging pedagogies (Hollingsworth, 1989; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991).

**Pedagogical beliefs did not align with practices.** Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) examined the relations between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices in teaching comprehension. Predictions of classroom practices were made based on teachers’ conceptions and theories of practice before classroom observations took place. Using Harvey’s (1986) notion that a belief system is a “set of conceptual representations which signify to its holder a reality or given state of affairs of sufficient validity, truth and/or trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide . . .” (p. 562), Richardson et al. (1991) found that teacher pedagogical beliefs did not always align with practices (as observed) in the field, suggesting that a change in beliefs was taking place and was preceding change in practices. Put another way, beliefs did not always align with practices. The researchers underscore the importance of understanding theory arguing, “…practices without theory may lead to misimplementation or no implementation at all, unless teachers’ beliefs are congruent with the theoretical assumptions of the practice” (p. 579). Richardson et al. suggest weaving together three forms of knowledge in course content: (a)
teachers’ background theories/beliefs/conceptions of teaching/learning literacy; (b) theoretical frameworks and effective practices as suggested by current research; (c) “and alternative practices that instantiate both teachers’ beliefs and research knowledge” (p. 579).

**Expanding concepts of literacy.** As research has demonstrated, the move from content area reading to adolescent literacy to disciplinary literacies demands expansive and evolving definitions of literacy. Blachowicz and Wimett (1995) report that preservice teachers’ constructs of literacy can expand in response to the question *what is literacy for?* (as opposed to the question *what is literacy?*). The former yielded broader literacy concepts focused on purposes that ranged from personal development and social interaction to societal and political participation. Examining the functions of literacy in their own lives, the urban preservice teachers in this study articulated a “much richer, more diverse perspective” as opposed to the limited (e.g. technical, individual, “schoolish,” p. 336) conceptions expressed when attempting to define literacy.

In an intentionally aligned general pedagogy and secondary content literacy course set, Freedman and Carver (2007) examine preservice teachers’ understandings of adolescent literacy development. The content of both courses was integrated through readings and assignments in an “inquiry-driven process enriched through content literacy strategies” (p. 655). Goals of the content literacy course included understanding literacy and learning processes involved in building content knowledge, recognizing that language is a common learning tool, and developing strategies that call upon reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking in academic contexts. In facilitating critical inquiry and reflective practice, Freedman and Carver (2007) underscore the importance of examining teacher beliefs asserting, “If beliefs predict action, our efforts to help students develop their beliefs must be deliberate and ongoing” (p. 656). Concerned with how prospective content teachers come to understand their roles as teachers of content literacy, Freedman and Carver use their students’ reading logs as evidence of changing
beliefs. They created descriptive categories that reflected students’ learning as they progressed through the semester’s experiences and coursework: “Naïve Wonder,” “Dawning Realization,” and finally, “Intellectual Rigor” (pp. 658-659). Freedman and Carver found that deliberately linking the general methods and content literacy courses allowed their preservice teacher participants “to think more broadly, deeply, and concretely about teaching and learning and the role of adolescent literacy development in both” (p. 664). With the alignment of the methods and literacy courses, Freedman and Carver establish common goals that included understanding content literacy processes and incorporating multiple literacies in pedagogical moves that involved examining beliefs and reflective practice.

**Critical praxis.** Lesley (2005) sought to understand and address prospective teachers’ “historic recalcitrance” toward content area literacy instruction. Examining the role of critical literacy in the context of content area teaching and learning, Lesley emphasizes literacy as a tool for advocacy and effective reading comprehension developed through student interest and pedagogical relevance. Her research questions were concerned with what happens when students enrolled in a content area literacy course experience course content with critical literacy praxis and how student responses to such a course reflect their theories about literacy and their roles as literacy practitioners. Drawing on the work of Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2002), Fecho (2001) and others, Lesley, taking a teacher researcher stance, organized her graduate level content area literacy course around student-driven issues through a pedagogy of questions. Generated from key class discussions, the questions were posed by class participants. To guide her analysis, Lesley drew from Fairclough’s (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a theoretical framework, which enabled her to see connections among language, power, and identity. Lesley analyzed transcripts from class interactions that occurred at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, student questions (as sets), and the researcher’s reflective journal
for evidence of participants’ understanding of agency and advocacy in light of critical literacy theories. Merging critical practice with content area literacy strategies and instruction, Lesley explains, “I wanted them to transact with the texts of their lives, the texts of their content area subject matter, the texts of content area literacy pedagogy, and the subtexts of social power residing within each of these texts” (p. 325). Key transcription snippets reflect the students’ initial confusion about and resistance to a secondary content area literacy course requirement. Over time, however, Lesley observed that her students were “coming to terms with viewing teaching as self-advocacy, advocacy for others, and global advocacy” (p. 332). Her pedagogy of questions, where students reexamined their beliefs and discussed and explored diverse perspectives, facilitated the development of an understanding of content literacy and the role teachers play as advocates for their students’ learning. Lesley (2005) documents a shift in students’ attitude, from “…viewing themselves as literacy instructors to a sense of viewing content area literacy as advocacy” (pp. 332-333).

Drawing from the work of Britzman (2003) and Lortie (1975), Heydon and Hibbert (2010) set out to disrupt the cycle that teacher candidates’ beliefs and practices are often entrenched in the way they were taught. The researchers developed a two-semester literacy course with the goal of helping candidates critically examine how their personal backgrounds might privilege particular social, racial, and economic dimensions of literacy pedagogy which, in turn, deeply influence instructional decisions. In their study, Heydon and Hibbert (2010) mapped preservice elementary teachers’ progress as they attempted to “relocate” their beliefs about literacy (accumulated over time through experiences with literacy learning) from a personal to a political frame. Coursework introduced alternative perspectives on literacy acquisition as well as an introduction to the “inherently ideological dimensions of literacy, and the role of literacy in enactments or productions of power (Lankshear, 1994)” (p. 800). Through
course readings, assignments, and activities, teacher candidates were offered opportunities to reexamine their taken-for-granted notions about literacy while developing a critically conscious pedagogy that reflected changing definitions of literacy and classroom demographics (pp. 797-798).

Heydon and Hibbert (2010) recognize the difficulties in this work: while the data show some positive outcomes in terms of student learning with the course’s approach, “disrupting and critiquing the beliefs candidates bring to their learning and teaching offers only a partial solution… subjectivities are not always changed easily or quickly” (p. 803). Their ongoing interrogation left them with questions about their own beliefs and practices: the researchers wonder if they had defined “progress” too narrowly as a direct move toward their “preferred framework.” They wonder if progress could be envisioned differently and how course dynamics and interactions affected participants’ learning. Additionally, noting that the candidates privileged the experiential over the theoretical (evidenced in their participants’ valuing what their field placement host teachers taught over what they were taught at the university), Heydon and Hibbert (2010) call for future inquiry that considers how teacher education might meet this challenge by developing relationships between the field and teacher education faculties “so as to create optimum learning opportunities for candidates in this era of changing literacies and student demographics” (p. 803).

As demonstrated in these studies, teacher education coursework can and does influence conceptual change in literacy to some degree, although it is not clear if, in fact, classroom literacy practices change as a result (Freedman & Carver, 2007; Heydon & Hibbert, 2010; Lesley, 2005). If our goal is to help prospective teachers develop their knowledge of literacy processes and practices important to learning in their subject areas so that they can provide adolescents with strong literacy instruction, then teacher education coursework, as a place to begin, can provide a
context in which prospective teachers negotiate theoretical and practical terrain in a community of learners.

**Epistemological perspectives as coursework.** Holt-Reynolds (1992) argues that preservice teachers’ prior knowledge and beliefs about “good” teaching are critical for teacher educators to recognize and for prospective teachers to explore. Holt-Reynolds explores how preservice teachers use knowledge (unexamined lay theories, tacit, developed over years of participation in schooling) “based on untutored interpretations of personal, lived, experiences” (p. 326) to make decisions about the value of the ideas presented in their coursework. Preservice teachers in a secondary literacy course “held no concept of learning that included the development and strategic use of cognitive skills” (p. 341). Learning, for these preservice teachers, was largely a matter of motivation, and as a result, strategic processes that facilitate knowledge production and were emphasized in the course, were often undervalued or dismissed. Although not intentionally debated, the preservice teachers in this study viewed knowledge as a thing to be transmitted (cf. Smith Davis & Brown’s, 2013, “received knowledge” stance), with teacher and textbook as sources of that knowledge (cf. Johnson et al., 2011). Holt-Reynolds underscores the importance of troubling epistemological stances to expose differences between “lay” definitions and principled (researched) definitions through opportunities to dialogue with preservice teachers that help them to identify “the premises with which they disagree” through a critical examination of their personal history-based beliefs about learning and teaching (1992, pp. 344-345).

Foregrounding a sociocultural (as opposed to a technical) view of teaching and learning, O’Brien, Stewart, and Moje (1995) suggest that pre- and inservice teachers “. . . incorporate strategies instruction informed by critical awareness and careful analysis of the complexities of secondary-school curriculum, pedagogy, and culture” (p. 454). O’Brien et al. (1995) call for a “complexities” research agenda informed by multiple theoretical perspectives (e.g. cognitive,
social, motivational, cultural, linguistic, constructivist, social constructivist, and critical views) that involves framing content disciplines as more complex and layered than ‘subject area’ pedagogies, each having its own discourse forms for conceptualizing and constructing knowledge (p. 457-458).

**A pedagogy of multiliteracies.** In her action research project with preservice content area teachers, Sheridan-Thomas (2007) found that her students “could talk/write about multiple literacies [an emphasis in her course] more coherently that they could apply the concept” in their content area lessons (p. 142). She notes the importance for literacy teacher educators to step back and look at “how students are making sense of what we teach” (p. 142). This led her to rethink the need to demonstrate the ways multiple literacies can be applied to subject area pedagogy and to provide more opportunities for students to practice integrating multiple literacies in their lesson plans. With the goal of improving her own practice, Sheridan-Thomas (2007) recommends that content literacy courses (1) explore preservice teachers’ literacy histories and current practices early on in order to “open up a mindset/perspective that [is] carried through the rest of the course” (p.138); (2) build deeper understanding of multiple literacies by allowing preservice teachers to work with adolescent learners and engage in discussions about their out-of-school literacy practices; (3) move from awareness to application through demonstration/modeling multiple literacy practices with prospective teachers so that prospective teachers know how to design engaging lessons that incorporate multiple literacies with content; and (4) provide many opportunities for preservice teachers to design, present, and reflect on content area lessons that include multiple literacies.

As both researcher and instructor of a content area literacy course, Stevens (2002) and her student participants explore understandings of the term “adolescent literacy” against traditional notions of content area reading. Interested in having her students consider broader
concepts of “learner,” “text,” and “context,” Stevens built these culturally situated notions into the course design. Based on the New London Group’s (1996) pedagogical framework, the concepts of situated practices, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice informed her students’ exploration of adolescent literacies. In designing their lesson plans, the preservice teachers demonstrated transformative practices evidenced in a blend of text formats, literacy processes and practices, choice, and student voice. By contrast, Stevens (2002) found lack of transformative practices in demonstrations involving the use of specific content area strategies taken from the course textbook. Here, strategies were placed traditionally front and center in instruction and the teacher was positioned in “the time-honored role of assisting students to comprehend text” (p. 271). In her analysis, Stevens suggests possible reasons for resistance to transformative practices. She describes the more traditional classroom literacy practices as a “magnet of sorts” that pulled the developing teachers back to familiar institutional and societal discourses. These preservice teachers, she asserts, recognize that they are “at the figurative bottom of the hegemonic structure of higher education and secondary schools. It is not their place to question curriculum and instruction traditionally used” (p. 272). Constrained by standards, curriculum frameworks, and educational text publications, Stevens argues that school systems generally do not support transformative classroom literacy practices.

While Stevens’ prospective teachers “superficially” recognized the need to connect to secondary learners’ interests and cultures, they adhered to notions that the teacher is the sole decision maker when it comes to text choices, maintained “a traditional denial of voice, choice, and power from adolescents,” and effectively closed down options that adolescents regularly exercise out-of-school everyday (p. 273). Placing literacy practice decision-making solely in the hands of the teacher, Stevens argues, all but disables the central focus of adolescent literacy:

What the field of adolescent literacy demands more so than any other conceptualization is
the continued placement of the adolescent at the center of instructional practices. We must rely on this reconceptualization to assist us in pushing against narrow definitions of literacy that remain at basic levels of decoding and factual comprehension. (p. 273)

Stevens (2002) cautions that we should not abandon secondary content area literacy in favor of out-of-school literacies, noting that school-sanctioned literacies remain the reality for academic progress; rather, both literacies should be considered and given purchase in middle and secondary content area classrooms. For this to happen, transformative practices on the part of teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers are necessary. Yet, Stevens argues, policy makers and institutions of higher education participating “at the higher hegemonic level of formulating the knowledge, abilities, and dispositions secondary teachers should have” (p. 274) contribute to the status quo and the disconnect between adolescent literacy and the world of schooling, insinuating powerful institutional constructs and discourses and thus reinforcing traditional approaches to literacy teaching and learning. In an effort to transform literacy instruction across all grades, Stevens concludes with a call for reconceptualizing literacy to include traditionally disconnected themes (e.g. culture, learner, text, pedagogy) through ecological inquiries that honor “the complexities of literacy processes and practices in dizzying times of burgeoning literacies” (p. 275). This study makes no claims about transformative practice being easy to achieve, but Stevens offers possible reasons (e.g. dominance of institutional forces; default to the familiar) that seem very plausible and realistic from an undergraduate preservice teacher perspective.

**Shifting Views on Content Area Literacy: Consulting Disciplinary Experts**

I include this area of research because at the time of the present study, the contextual backdrop included a steady development of and calls for a disciplinary literacy approach to secondary content area teaching—a paradigm shift currently underway. Over the course of this
dissertation, the field formerly known as content area literacy has been reimagined and theorized as disciplinary literacies. While traditional approaches to content area literacy offered generic skills and strategies instruction to be applied across subject areas, disciplinary literacy focuses on discipline-specific literacy processes and practices. Researchers have examined these processes and practices in an effort to develop sound pedagogical and curricular programs in teacher preparation. As we shall see, my initial data gathering and analysis were informed by the historical framework. Over the course of the study, my analysis became informed by new developments in the field.

**Retooling content area literacy.** Using a construction metaphor, that is, specific “tools” to accomplish specific tasks, Johnson, Watson, Delahunty, McSwiggen, and Smith (2011) ask, “What does it mean to be literate in particular disciplines and how do we begin to shift to disciplinary literacy?” (p. 101). The researchers, all teacher educators, explored what they perceived as a disconnect between teaching methods, content disciplines, and literacy education. Johnson et al. (2011) consider the challenges of addressing literacy across the curriculum (cf. Draper & Siebert, 2010) in their graduate and undergraduate courses, particularly their students’ concerns about having to take a literacy course when they were going to be teaching math, science, or social studies. Johnson et al. wanted to understand the most effective tools for achieving literacy in a particular discipline. They examined content area literacy and disciplinary texts, reflected on their own experiences as literacy teacher educators and conducted interviews with their disciplinary colleagues (in math and geography) where they shared perspectives related to texts, literacy, and practices within our fields…We consulted major academic journals and disciplinary websites to establish a greater understanding of the disciplinary fields, and we discussed our lived experiences as content/disciplinary literacy instructors. (p. 102)
An understanding that emerged from this study included the disciplinary experts’ observation that what is taught and the textbooks used in K-12 classrooms do not reflect what actually occurs in their fields. Not surprisingly, they also observed that transmission was the predominant pedagogical model rather than disciplinary doing of math and geography. As with Moje (2008a) and Hynd-Shanahan (2013), Johnson et al. contend, “Literacy instruction in content area classrooms should aim to build an understanding of how knowledge is constructed within the discipline” (p. 107).

Johnson et al.’s (2011) use of the construction metaphor is effective in “retooling” content area literacy coursework: just as tool makers consult the tool users to design and refine the tools of the trade, content literacy educators need to consult and collaborate with experts in the disciplines to develop literacy curricula that is most relevant and useful. The researchers call for further collaboration with experts across disciplines to support preservice and inservice teachers’ disciplinary literacy development, and to continue to build relationships “that bridge the gaps between content knowledge and disciplinary literacy with the ultimate aim of understanding that to be literate in a discipline we must construct content knowledge through the practices and habits of mind common to that field” (p. 109).

**Disciplinary habits of mind.** What do some of these disciplinary practices and habits of mind look like? In a study that examined the ways in which disciplinary experts read texts in mathematics, history, and chemistry, Shanahan, Shanahan, and Misischia (2011) used think-aloud protocols to identify and characterize specific features of literacy and literacy use in those disciplines. The researchers analyze differences in sourcing (consideration of the source of the text or author perspective), contextualization (consideration of when a text was written and the influences on it), corroboration (consideration of agreement, disagreement, or differences across texts), the use of text structure (consideration of how the text is organized) and graphics or visual
aids (consideration of graphics, illustrations, tables, charts, etc.). Shanahan et al. (2011) also looked at the practices of close reading, rereading, and critical analysis in response to mathematics, history, and chemistry texts. The researchers found that while the experts engaged in similar strategies they used them differently, to varying degrees, and for different purposes. For example, historians contextualized to understand the author’s perspective while chemists contextualized to determine the relevancy of and consistency with current scientific findings. Critique, for mathematicians, was focused on accuracy; for chemists, critique meant locating scientific evidence; and for historians, critique meant weighing differences in context and perspective. Especially intriguing is the idea that across these disciplines, similar strategies were used differently and for different purposes. This may be the shared language needed to “bridge the gap” between content knowledge and disciplinary literacy (Johnson et al., 2011) and key for subject area pedagogy.

Examining the ways in which various disciplines approach texts (cf. Donahue, 2003), Shanahan, Shanahan, and Misischia’s (2011) study offers implications for secondary content area classrooms. For example, they argue that following the practices of historians, high school history classes need to use many primary and secondary text sources as opposed to a single textbook. Additionally, the textbook needs to be heavily supplemented. In contrast, chemists supported the use of one single authoritative textbook “to master a current account of ‘how the world works’” (p. 423). Mathematicians generally agreed with the chemists about the use of a good textbook. Shanahan et al. (2011) conclude, “How readers read depends on many factors, including their level of domain knowledge, their purposes for reading, the characteristics of the text, and whether there was one text or multiple texts that had to be interpreted together” (p. 424). It seems crucial that literacy teacher educators develop this awareness of similar strategies used differently and for different purposes.
**Fostering specific literacies.** Recognizing conflicts between literacy advocates and content area teachers, Draper and Siebert (2010) discuss reasons for content area teachers’ “resistance” to implementing reading instruction in their classrooms, pointing out that content area teachers “…may perceive that the literacy practices described and defended by literacy advocates have been designed only to meet literacy goals without similar attention to content goals” (p. 21). Both literacy advocates and content specialists are concerned with the needs of adolescent learners, but the conflicts arise, Draper and Siebert argue, in part, because of differing goals. In an effort to find common ground, the researchers set out to “bridge differences and create a fruitful working relationship” between content area teachers and literacy specialists by “rethink[ing] literacy instruction using broadened definitions of text and literacy” (emphasis in original, p. 23).

In the context of reading and writing across the curriculum, Draper and Siebert (2010) found that text referred to print materials such as textbooks, trade books, notes, and worksheets, and literacy to fluency in reading and writing these texts; thus literacy in a particular discipline meant being able to read and write the texts of that content area (Draper & Siebert, 2010). The problems that arise from using these limited meanings of text and literacy, according to Draper and Siebert, are (a) literacy specialists may not recognize a disciplinary literacy event, (b) content area teachers may not recognize a disciplinary literacy process, and (c) literacy specialists and content teachers’ goals may be at cross-purposes.

**Redefining text and literacy.** Draper and Siebert (2010) cite research that has contributed to expanding the definition of text to include nonprint materials, pictures, audio content, and tools used to learn content and build content knowledge. They define text as “…any representational resource (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) or object that people intentionally imbue
with meaning, in the way they either create or attend to the object, to achieve a particular purpose” (Draper & Siebert, 2010, p. 28).

Arguing that more expansive notions of literacy encompass the social contexts and ways of being (reading, writing, speaking, and acting) associated with specific disciplines (Gee, 2001) and include the multiple literacies adolescents bring to the learning environment (Moje et al. 2000), Draper and Siebert (2010) define literacy as,

… the ability to negotiate (e.g., read, view, listen, taste, smell, critique) and create (e.g., write, produce, sing, act, speak) texts in discipline-appropriate ways or in ways that other members of a discipline (e.g., mathematicians, historians, artists) would recognize as “correct” or “viable.” (p. 30)

Instructional implications for the secondary content area classroom. Recognizing that teaching content cannot be separated from content literacy instruction, and noting that the discipline determines what counts as text (see also Shanahan et al., 2011), Draper and Siebert (2010) recommend that content-area teachers focus their teaching on the texts and literacies that represent the discipline:

We embrace literacy instruction that truly supports the acquisition and learning of content-area knowledge and that allows individuals to participate fully in disciplinary practices—this is at the heart of what we mean when we encourage literacy instruction across the curriculum. However, we don’t accept any text or any literacy for any content-area classroom. Instead, we argue for particular texts and particular literacies for particular content-area classrooms. (emphasis in original, p. 36)

As with Johnson et al. (2011) and Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), Draper and Siebert (2010) argue for collaboration between content-area teachers and literacy specialists where agreement
about what counts as text and literacies in specific disciplines will foster effective literacy
instruction in content area classrooms.

The research discussed above points to a very real need for a paradigm shift in traditional
secondary literacy instruction. Where and how does such a shift in thinking and practice begin?
The research reviewed below offers directions forward for the field of secondary content literacy
teaching education.

**Directions forward in secondary content literacy teacher preparation.** The
literature in secondary content area teacher preparation has demonstrated the need for change in
program design and coursework in teacher education that foregrounds the literacies of disciplines
(Conley, 2012; Draper, 2008; Fang, 2014; NCTE, 2011). As reflective of the ongoing trend in the
field, these studies “…call attention to a theoretical shift in the conceptualization of content area
literacy courses away from generalizable principles of instruction and toward specific principles
related to the way knowledge is structured within the disciplines” (Risko et al., 2008, p. 263).

Dillon, O’Brien, Sato, and Kelly (2010) note that, compared to research in elementary
teacher preparation, there has been little empirical research done in literacy preparation at the
secondary level where the focus is on supporting older students’ engagement with disciplinary
texts as they continue to develop as readers (p. 638). In concurrence with Risko et al.’s (2008)
observation, Dillon et al. note,

[T]here are fewer teacher educators whose primary responsibility is to prepare middle
and secondary teachers of reading and fewer courses and field experiences dedicated to
the preparation of middle and secondary reading teachers compared to elementary level
preparation. (p. 638)

Middle and secondary teacher education in literacy has a “dual purpose” which is (1) to teach
reading development, and (2) to help prospective content area teachers develop an understanding
of the reading process and its role in learning content; this involves understanding linguistic and
discursive disciplinary practices (Dillon et al., 2010). Dillon et al. (2010) observe that this
articulation of language, literacy, and learning, the purview of teacher education coursework, is
often accommodated in a single, required adolescent literacy or content area literacy course. This
course “may be developed to complement subject area content or methods courses and field
experiences or it may exist as more of a generic course, the content of which [preservice] teachers
are expected to adapt to their respective disciplines” (p. 638).

**Critical analysis of secondary teacher education research.** Dillon et al. (2010)
describe a chasm in the research on secondary teacher preparation: literacy teacher educators
assumed their pedagogical knowledge would complement subject area pedagogical knowledge
while secondary content teachers were often positioned as resistant to incorporating literacy
practices into their teaching. The traditional and contested notion that “every teacher is a
teacher of reading” promotes the teaching of generic literacy strategies across content areas.
Dillon et al. (2010) assert that disciplinary experts see this as impractical and “counter to the
institutionalized practices within the disciplines (Bean, 2000; O’Brien et al., 1995)” (p. 639).
Teacher education programs focused on “beliefs-modification” made the assumption that
overlaying a literacy frameworks on content area pedagogy would solve the “resistance” problem
(p. 639). A disciplinary literacy approach, however, recognizes the limitations of such a program
and shifts the focus to between literacy teacher educators and content area teacher educators to
construct relevant preservice teacher curricula. Dillon et al. (2010) contend that currently,

> [P]olicy is driving an agenda that is reminiscent of the 1960s and 1970s—one that ignores
research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s in which literacy was more broadly defined,
while also ignoring the most current work that suggests literacy at the secondary level is
embedded in and productive of disciplinary practices and knowledge and thus cannot be taught apart from those practices and knowledge. (p. 640)

Dillon et al. argue that teacher educators need to work across literacy and content borders to develop teacher education programs that trouble the traditional infusion model that assumes generic cognitively based strategies, introduced in a generic content literacy course, can be imported into various subject areas.

The notion of disciplinary literacy is not without its critics, however: Faggella-Luby et al. (2012) argue that disciplinary thinking processes are too sophisticated for struggling learners to manage and that more generic cognitive strategies instruction is appropriate. Heller (2010/11) argues that the goal of secondary education is not to create disciplinary experts but rather subject area “amateurs.” Brozo et al. (2013) call for a pragmatic middle ground with an approach to secondary teaching that combines generic aspects of content area literacy with specific aspects of disciplinary literacy. Iterations of content area literacy, disciplinary literacy, and hybrid variations of the two, are the current challenge for literacy teacher educators and content teacher educators as they collaborate to develop coherent secondary teacher preparation programs.

**Teacher education studies focusing on literacies in the disciplines.** Moje (2008a) argues that, in order to engage in responsive disciplinary literacy pedagogy, we need to closely examine preservice and inservice teacher learning, noting:

We need to understand what teachers believe about their disciplines and how those disciplinary subcultures and commitments may shape their practice, especially in regard to teaching from, with and to texts (see O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995)... and we need to ask what else we need to do in preservice and inservice teacher education to foster an awareness of the role of text, language, and literacy in responsive teaching across the disciplinary subject areas of secondary schools. (p. 80)
Gritter (2010) urges content area literacy teacher educators to recognize and value their preservice teachers’ prior knowledge of and expertise in their subject area. However, Moje (2008a) contends that it is not clear that middle and high school teachers are themselves aware of their content area’s knowledge production and communication practices. Indeed, Johnson et al. (2011) note that preservice teachers often see themselves as “only” teachers rather than content experts. The disciplinary experts in Johnson et al. (2011) emphasize that being literate in a discipline goes beyond accumulating knowledge. Rather, it involves understanding a discipline’s foundational theories, knowing what questions are important to a discipline, and ways to seek answers to those questions; it means being able to successfully read and write in a particular discipline. Elementary, middle-, and secondary teachers must achieve these levels of literacy in order to apprentice their students in a discipline (Johnson et al., 2011). Implications for teacher educators include using disciplinary expertise to build programs and create curricula based on “habits and practices that are valued and used by experts in the field” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 108).

Research in adolescent literacy and in the disciplines has just begun “to scratch the surface” of the differences among the disciplines (Moje, 2008a, p. 66). To develop a responsive disciplinary pedagogy, Moje (2008a) calls for research in teacher education that represents an amalgam of perspectives. Strands of research involving cognitive literacy processes, disciplinary epistemological processes, disciplinary linguistic processes, and “linguistic and discursive navigation across cultural boundaries represented in everyday life and the disciplines” (p. 67). It is clear that developing a responsive disciplinary literacy pedagogy is challenging, complex, and crucial in going forward. As Moje (2008a) argues:

In sum, we need concerted and integrated efforts at many levels in secondary subject matter literacy teaching if such teaching is to become responsive to its constituents by not
only recognizing and valuing who they are, but helping them become critically literate, strategic adults who not only possess knowledge of the disciplines, but also know how it was produced and can participate in that production in the future. (p. 81)

Collaboration and consultation. In response to Moje’s (2008a) call for understanding the differences among the literate practices in the disciplines, Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, and Nokes (2012) report on the findings of the first three years of an ongoing study involving literacy and content area teacher educators, who, through collaboration, sought to better prepare preservice secondary teachers to support their future students’ literacy development. In this participatory action research (PAR), the teacher educators generated theories around literacy pedagogy and practice in their teacher education program as they cycled through the four phases (visioning, strategizing, performing, and evaluating) of PAR. Using a “dual approach,” Draper et al. wanted to improve their own practices for preparing content area teachers and in addition, help prospective content area teachers understand the role of literacy in their disciplines.

For the teacher educators in this research project, theoretical and practical changes included agreement on definitions of literacy, texts, and content area literacy instruction (p. 381; see also Draper & Siebert, 2010) and modifications in program and course design, instruction, and assessment (p. 386). Embracing broad notions of text and learning more about disciplinary aims and pedagogy, the researchers note that as participant teacher educators “shift[ed] their thinking about literacy and disciplinary learning and teaching, their work with preservice teachers changed” (p. 367). To address the issues of lack of support for literacy instruction in the content area methods courses and to assure that literacy teacher educators recommend appropriate literacy practices that complement disciplinary learning, the researchers conclude, “collaboration is not simply useful, it is essential” (p. 392). These collaborations, needed to
develop sound teacher education programs, must include literacy and content area teacher educators (see also Wilson, 2011).

As with Draper (2008) and Draper et al. (2012), Johnson et al. (2011) provide evidence that interdisciplinary collaborations among teacher education faculty and disciplinary faculty are important for effecting much needed change in secondary teacher content literacy preparation. For literacy teacher educators, in addition to recognizing clear differences among the disciplines (Draper & Siebert, 2010; Moje, 2008), recognizing commonalities across disciplines (e.g., the value of talk and think alouds in math; use of graphic organizers in geography) is key (Johnson et al., 2011). Johnson et al. (2011) suggest that “…building a common vocabulary related to particular tools and practices” and developing a content literacy curriculum “could actually move teachers closer to doing rather than simply reporting or talking about the discipline they teach” (p. 108).

**Summary**

As this review demonstrates, research robustly supports the influence of lived experience on our literacy conceptions (Hollingsworth, 1989; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991), beliefs about literacy learning and teaching (Hall, 2005; Moje, 1996; Richardson et al., 1991; Risko et al., 2008), and the need for change in the ways we think about and practice content area literacy (Draper & Siebert, 2010; Lee & Spratley, 2010; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). Helping prospective content area teachers develop a critical stance toward literacy (Lesley, 2005; Moje, 2008a) and preparing them for relevant content literacy instruction has not been fully realized (Bean, 2001; Fang, 2014; Hall, 2005). While research suggests that teacher education coursework and field experiences can affect preservice teachers’ deeply-held beliefs about literacy learning and teaching (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Lesley, 2005; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995; Richardson, et al., 1991), developing a wide view of literacy—one that is multiple in
terms of text, voice, and practice (Alvermann et al., 2006; Elkins & Luke, 1999; Moje, 2008a; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999)—and an awareness of the role of literacy in teaching and learning content will prepare preservice teachers to help their students achieve higher levels of literacy and effect much needed change in middle and secondary school literacy (Alvermann et al., 2010; Hynd-Shanahan, 2013; Moje, 2008b).

This is where I began my inquiry. What could I do, as a literacy teacher educator, to better prepare my prospective teachers/students to teach and support content literacy in their future classrooms? In addition to their beliefs about literacy and the role of literacy in their content areas, what knowledge about literacy processes and practices did my participants bring with them to the adolescent literacy course? Closely documenting their engagements with and responses to adolescent literacy coursework in the course I taught would help answer these questions. The following chapter details the how of the present study.
Chapter Three

Research Design

One of the principle ways by which our teaching is invigorated, and in which we maintain sanity amid the pressures of academia, is by conducting research that directly informs our teaching and by teaching in ways that directly inform our research. (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991, p. 88)

Research Focus

In this study, I investigate preservice secondary teachers’ concepts of and practices in literacy and literacy in their content areas as well as the ways their experiences with coursework influenced their concepts of and practices in literacy pedagogy. As an in-depth examination of literacy conceptualizations, this research focuses on preservice content area teachers’ processes of conceptual development and conceptual shifts toward the nature and functions of literacy in their content areas. Ultimately, I was interested in discovering whether and how preservice content area teachers might work to view literacy in their disciplines in both more expansive and particular ways. The course I taught, Adolescent Literacy I, was the first in a two-course sequence designed to build an understanding of adolescents’ literacy development with all its complexities and to examine the development of literacy competencies within and across disciplines. The basic ideological orientation embodied in the first literacy course foregrounds the idea that content literacy is comprehensive, multimodal, and critical and that it leads to a deeper understanding of the ways content area literacy instruction is consequential for secondary students’ social, economic, and political participation. As course instructor, I attempted to accomplish two seemingly disparate goals: to help students develop a more expansive view of literacy while also helping them to build awareness of the very specific literacy processes involved in teaching and learning in their disciplines.
To borrow from Moje (1996), with this research, I wanted to *understand* rather than *evaluate* preservice content teachers’ concepts of literacy. I examined what happened to their literacy concepts as they participated in and progressed through an undergraduate content area literacy course in a teacher preparation program in a small-size, rural college. I asked the following research questions:

1. What are preservice secondary teachers’ initial conceptualizations of literacy and the nature and function of literacy learning and teaching in their content area?
2. How do preservice secondary teachers’ engagements with coursework reveal and shape their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their content area?

**Methodology**

My study took place in a naturalistic setting as I availed myself of a preformed group enrolled in a required adolescent literacy course. It involved inductive analyses of interview, class session, and artifact data sources to construct meaning through descriptive and interpretive reporting processes.

**Practitioner research: Inquiry as stance.** Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) use the phrase *practitioner research* to describe the practitioner who is simultaneously a researcher “….continuously engaged in inquiry with the ultimate purpose of enriching students’ learning and life chances” (p. viii). As a teacher researcher, I am positioned to have an insider (*emic*) perspective. Here, personal theory, theory from the field, and practice—as praxis—converge and influence one another (Baumann & Duffy-Hester, 2000). Baumann and Duffy-Hester (2000) defined teacher research as “*pragmatic and action oriented*; that is, it involves reflecting on one’s teaching and practice, inquiring about it, exploring it, and then taking action to improve or alter it” (p. 78, emphasis in original).
Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) describe stance as “the various perspectives through which we frame the collection and interpretation of data” and assert it is crucial to recognize that “philosophical, ideological, and especially political and moral positions influence the ways in which [researchers] analyze and present data” (p. 32). Ely et al. (1997) argue that the “…complex network of belief systems and positions embedding, superimposing, and undergirding any research project” must be accounted for in the writing (p. 33). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe “inquiry as stance” as “a grounded theory of action that positions the role of practitioners and practitioner knowledge as central to the goal of transforming teaching, learning, leading, and schooling” (p. 119). In the present study, I investigate the complex network of beliefs and practices about literacy in relation to secondary preservice teachers’ engagements with coursework with the wider goal of transforming content area pedagogy.

Practitioner inquiry is a research genre that views the practitioner as a knowledge generator and agent of change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). With inquiry as stance, the boundaries between teaching and learning, between knowledge and practice become porous. Cochran-Smith (2003) writes, “…inquiry as stance is always about the links between thought and action” (p. 17) and that it is “not only reflective and critical…but also reflexive, with the learning of students…functioning as a kind of reflecting pool or mirror for the learning of their teachers” (p. 19). Inquiry is about following questions, wonderings, what if’s. It is about purpose and consequences and reconceptualizing education and schooling through connecting day-to-day work “to the work of others and to larger social, historical, cultural, and political contexts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a)” (p. 21). With inquiry as stance, Cochran-Smith (2003) explains that knowledge, built locally in inquiry communities, is a “process where teacher educators educate themselves and each other by regarding the work of others as generative but open to interrogation…over relatively long periods of time…” (p. 23). And with this stance, teachers and
teacher educators need to understand teaching as a highly political post where social change and more democratic schooling is an ongoing goal (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

I take a critical inquiry stance on the courses I teach, where in the actual classroom space, “the lines between pedagogy and research blur” (Fecho & Meacham, 2007, p. 179). Here, through dialogue, artifact collection, journal writing, and interviews, understandings about literacy are co-constructed (Fecho & Meacham, 2007). For this project, my teacher researcher lens facilitated my inquiry into preservice teachers’ development of literacy conceptualizations and practices and, through that process, allowed me to explore ways to improve my teaching practice through systematic analysis and reflexivity. I have a personal connection to this area of inquiry and am driven by what I want to know about preparing prospective teachers to be excellent teachers (Mehra, 2002).

**Issues of power in the contact zone.** As a metaphor for issues surrounding teacher research, Lytle (2000) draws from Pratt’s (1991) notion of contact zone, described “as a ‘social space where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power’” (p. 692). As course instructor, I was responsible for evaluating the students enrolled in my course. As both researcher and instructor, I was also involved in the collection and interpretation of the data. All of my data—the written assignments, notes on presentations, recorded classroom talk, the interviews—were evaluated and/or conducted by me. It is impossible to know to what extent my authority as instructor influenced participants’ responses and interactions during the course. I remained mindful that student participants might respond to questions in ways they thought I expected them to respond. Gore’s (1998) work was influential in my accounting of power throughout this research process. She emphasizes Foucault’s (1983) notion of power as neither “good” nor “bad”, but *there*, and that what is important to understand is the idea that power can be exercised *differently*. Gore (1998) contends
that power functioning at the microlevel is largely invisible in our daily practices unless we look for it and explains that although complete “removal of power relations is inconceivable,” it is not to say that power relations need be established as they are and thought of as fixed and immutable (p. 248). I worked to maintain awareness of power issues as they insinuated themselves into the research process. Ultimately, taking an inquiry stance on one’s practice involves assuming risks.

As a teacher researcher, Fecho (2001) describes “a working through” (p. 11) of issues such as how the dynamics of threat influence and are augmented by an inquiry pedagogy. For Fecho (2001), threat—where “one’s sense of constructed reality, belief, and/or identity feels imperiled”—is viewed not as a disabler of inquiry but as a “transactional element to be acknowledged and transcended rather than denied, ignored, minimized, or euphemized” (pp. 10-11). As with Fecho, I aimed to use writing to make sense of data—threats and all—to inform my own practice as well as the larger academic community. And like Fecho, “In taking an inquiry stance on my classroom, I have embraced inquiry as a way of knowing” (2001, p. 11). Fecho’s intent is to demonstrate for other educators the value of an inquiry pedagogy and provide a means to work through the dynamics of threat, an aim I share.

**Case study.** To answer my research questions, I selected a multiple case study design that utilized elements of constructivist grounded theory as an analytic tool (Charmaz, 2008). As particularistic (focused on a specific phenomenon), descriptive (full qualitative account of the phenomenon being investigated), and heuristic (designed to enrich, enlighten, and/or create new knowledge) (Merriam, 2001), case-study research “concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (Stake, 2008, p. 120). Case study research involves the investigation of a bounded system (case) or systems (cases) over time, in-depth data collected from multiple sources, and descriptive case reports developed from case-based themes (Creswell, 2007). Stake (2008) describes an*instrumental case*
study as one that is undertaken “to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (p. 123), and a multiple case study or collective case study as an extended instrumental case study. I believe that case studies demonstrate that “in the particular resides the general” while documenting and illuminating “the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place…” (Lightfoot, 1997, p. 14). Merriam (2001) agrees, writing “The general lies in the particular; that is, what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered” (p. 210).

In this instrumental multiple case study, I aimed to examine the processes involved in shaping literacy conceptualizations and practices among the preservice content area teachers enrolled in an adolescent literacy course; ultimately, the bounded systems (cases) I chose to study were focal participants from three subject areas: math, history, and English. Interested in the “local particulars” (Haas Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 3), I interpret and describe the ways coursework shaped these prospective teachers’ literacy conceptualizations and practices during the period of investigation (one semester and then four months following the conclusion of the course) and draw implications for teacher education.

Methods

Setting and participants. The students recruited for participation in this study were secondary education majors enrolled in a teacher education program located in a small, rural college in the northeast. This group of twenty white, working- or middle-class, undergraduate preservice content area teachers, was enrolled in Adolescent Literacy I, the first of two adolescent literacy courses required for degree completion. Adolescent Literacy I, the course from which the data were collected, was the preservice teachers’ introductory course in literacy learning and teaching. As third year undergraduate education majors, each of these students had selected a concentration in one of four disciplines: math, history, English, or science. As it happened, there
were no students with a science concentration enrolled in the course the semester of data collection. Nine students were math education majors, four were English education majors, five were social studies/history education majors, and two students with majors in other areas were enrolled to meet the requirement of one literacy course as education minors.

**Recruitment.** During the first class session, I presented students with an overview of my research project. I talked at length about what I was investigating and carefully read through with them the IRB-approved Consent Form, emphasizing optional participation and the assurance that there would be no consequences for non-participation in the research. To my surprise, all 20 students—the entire group—elected to participate in the study. This was completely unexpected and I suddenly saw data collection was going to be even more challenging than I had anticipated. Later, after initial data analysis had commenced, the course completed, and with the intention of developing detailed case studies, I engaged in purposeful sampling “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2001, p. 61). Merriam (2001) discusses Patton’s (1990) argument that purposeful sampling yields “information-rich cases” where much can be learned about issues central to the research. While I intended to select cases that represented the demographics of the student population enrolled in this small, rural college’s teacher education program, I was also interested in cases that showed varying perspectives on literacy learning and teaching. Additionally, where possible, I strove to balance for gender, ethnicity, and social class in an effort to capture both varied but germane cases that spoke to my research questions.

**Selected cases.** Related to and extending the criteria stated above, case selection criteria also included opportunity to learn (Stake, 2008), compelling and/or contrasting stories, and cases that seem most relevant for teacher education (Merriam, 2001). In narrowing the pool
to six participants, I sought those students whose participation in our course suggested compelling and contrasting cases; their responses to coursework were both complex and ambiguous. In addition, I was interested in investigating whether participants’ chosen content area influenced their literacy understandings and experiences with our coursework. Therefore, I made the decision to recruit two participants from each of the three content areas represented in our course: math, English, and history/social studies.

The semester following completion of the course, I sent emails to the pool of six students asking if they would be interested in participating in an informal interview regarding their ideas about literacy learning and teaching. Of those six, four students agreed to be interviewed: two English education majors, Meg and Ross; one history/social studies education major, Kris; and one math education major, Elise. They each signed another IRB-approved Consent Form and scheduled an interview with me.

**Data sources and collection.** Data were collected throughout the semester-long (15 week) course and then again several months after the course had concluded in a retrospective informal interview with each of the four focal participants.

**Observations and field notes.** As a participant-observer with an on the ground, first-hand, close-up view, I facilitated and observed participants’ interactions during in-class discussions and activities and recorded field notes immediately after class sessions. Observations and field notes from a total of 28, eighty-five minute class sessions generally took place during presentations, demonstrations, and small group work. I made 27 entries, ½ to one full handwritten page each, regarding participants’ engagements with the activity or task at hand asking myself questions such as What interactions do I notice? How are they making decisions? Are they dialoguing with each other? Collaborating and/or dividing the task? And after class, I
asked questions of myself with regard to student learning: Did the activity seem worthwhile or relevant to students? What is needed to strengthen opportunities to learn?

**Researcher notebook.** I kept a researcher notebook which allowed me to record research processes, experiences, procedures, and, in particular, notes about efforts at self-reflexivity. As with Chiseri-Strater (1996), the content of my Researcher Notebook entries is quite distinct from much of the other writing I was doing in relation to data analysis. I found this writing to be both challenging and revealing. The Researcher Notebook held reflexive accounts infused with uncertainties, disappointments, and successes—all of which frequently led to timely insights that would directly influence my practice. At times, I was uncertain about my ability to effectively teach and disappointed in my students’ responses (or lack thereof) to course content. I was struck, as demonstrated in the following excerpt, by the presence of inadvertent teacher-led “conversations”:

> I spend too much time talking! Alone! There are a fair number of students who hang in there, politely listening, responding when pressed, but a larger number are barely disguising their boredom (or are busy texting!). I feel utterly responsible—probably because I’m bored too. I know that I need to take more time (from where, I don’t know!) to research better, more effective texts that will serve to make us all think deeply about adolescent literacy and literacy in their disciplines and how they connect. [Researcher Notebook, 10/16]

I was also compelled to reexamine the expectations I held for the undergraduate preservice teachers:

> … trying to figure out what intervention I need to put in place here. It’ll be at least another class session before I can get to question-making, but this would be a start. I am wondering about this student’s methods class. I’d like to talk with her about what she’s reading and learning in that class. Surely they’ve discussed IRE, constructivism, and responsive teaching—or at least, that’s my hope. These are topics we discuss in
literacy, but they need to be a part of most, if not all, of their teacher preparation coursework. …

[Researcher Notebook, 10/24]

Maybe I’m expecting too much. I probably should have had Rethinking Mathematics on the required reading list. Alas, thought of this too late. This course is such a challenge! [Researcher Notebook, 11/6]

There were moments where my expectations and student learning merged in productive activity:

A nice, quiet workshop sort of hum ensued. After 10 minutes or so, we came together as a whole group and everyone, virtually everyone engaged—talking, listening, contributing insightful comments, connecting course content to new learning. Very exciting; you could feel the buzz. The time flew by. I want more of that.

[Researcher Notebook, 9/30]

And moments where I needed to shore up my data collecting processes.

Two really important conversations I should have recorded: one on Discourses we claim memberships to… and the other on beliefs we hold dear to our heart. These were great class discussions—lots of input even from the usually-quiet students. The conversations (initiated using prewriting and think, pair, share) were lively and rich. And now “lost” to me. [Researcher Notebook, 9/21]

The Researcher Notebook allowed me to keep my self in view with regard to data collection and analysis. Much of the content of the Researcher Notebook was borne in the immediacy of my responsibilities to my students, my professional self, and to the teacher education program.

Initially, as I collected data and recorded observations as field notes, I had not fully realized the value of this other data source until, given time and distance, I was able to notice dimensions of the processes of teaching, practitioner inquiry, and reflecting I hadn’t noticed before.
Audiotape transcripts of Reading Circles and small/whole group, in-class discussions. I audio-recorded class discussions, presentations, and reading circle discussions to capture student responses to selected texts on issues of content literacy, and for the purpose of obtaining a sense of how preservice teachers participated in peer-led literature groups and what they had to say about the topics discussed. I circulated around the classroom as students met in their small discussion groups. When I could not sit in and take notes on a group’s conversation, I audio recorded (with permission) the group’s discussion(s). The notes, observations, and transcripts generated from these sessions allowed me to (1) get an idea of whether and how students wrestled with assumptions about adolescent literacy and/or assumptions embedded in disciplinary topics, and (2) whether and how students took up the student-led practice (as opposed to teacher-led practice) of small group discussion. Ten recordings were made in total (four Reading Circle sessions, one set of Content Area Read Aloud demonstrations, one set of Reading Circle Presentations, two sets of Content Literacy Strategy Lessons, and two class discussions). I transcribed all classroom sessions.

Student journal responses and other course assignments (see brief descriptions below; See Appendix __ for extended descriptions of selected assignments). Additional data sources included 15 student journal responses to course readings and other student-produced artifacts (9 course assignments as written texts) that reflected/represented various literacy beliefs and practices. These artifacts were useful for the purpose of corroborating or contesting information gathered from observational field notes, in-class discussions, and later, interview data.

1 Group discussions were audio-recorded. In my teaching, I have frequently audio-recorded discussions for use in developing follow-up discussion topics and activities. Audio recording small group discussions is a common practice used by instructors in this teacher education program for a variety of purposes that include sharing and discussing multiple perspectives on key topics, self-assessment, and generating information used in later assignments. As has been reported frequently in the literature on qualitative inquiry (and which has also been true in my own experience), momentary disruptions stemming from audio-recording are minimal and short-lived, with classroom dynamics returning to normal fairly quickly.
Assignment descriptions. Addressing my first research question, the first three assignments were designed to capture participants’ initial conceptualizations of literacy and the nature and function of literacy learning and teaching in their content area. The remaining assignments allowed me to address my second research question regarding the ways participants’ engagements with coursework reveal and shape their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their content area. Below, assignments are briefly described:

**Course Expectations Card:** Students are asked to write 1) their expectations for the course, 2) a wish/or hope for self as a learner, and 3) a burning question about literacy or teaching (in class, first session)

**Questionnaire:** Written responses to the questions, what is literacy?, how do we learn literacy?, how do we teach literacy? and how do we use literacy? (in class, first session)

**Personal Literacy History:** “Write an autobiographical account of your literacy and learning development. This is a chance to tell your story of learning to read and write both in- and out-of-school. Include literacy experiences at various levels throughout your schooling and discuss the impact these experiences have had on your present attitudes, views, and beliefs surrounding reading and writing. Please keep the length at 3-4 pages” (course syllabus).

**Reflective Journals 1-15:** With the exception of the first journal (a 24-hour literacy diary), all journals were responses to topics under discussion in class that aligned with assigned readings. “As you complete the readings and participate in discussions and activities throughout this course, I ask that you keep a journal (in a separate folder or small binder) that records your developing understanding of literacy and how it relates to your discipline and future teaching” (course syllabus).
Content Area Read Aloud: “Select a trade book/picture book that deals with a theme/concept/idea/topic in your content area. Prepare a read aloud (the entire text or part of it depending on length) and provide a rationale for your selection” (course syllabus).

Reading Circle Journal: “You will have the opportunity to select, read, and discuss a non-fiction text with a small group of peers. The texts will be chosen from a limited, pre-selected list provided by me. Additionally, your group is responsible for a short culminating presentation” (course syllabus). [As culminating experiences, in addition to the journal, this assignment included a reflective letter to me and a group presentation].

Content Literacy Teaching Lesson: “This lesson can be done in pairs or individually. Pairs can be interdisciplinary if desired. The lesson will involve the use of one or more literacy strategies. You (and your partner) will teach this lesson to our class who will provide feedback in a timely manner” (course syllabus).

Literacy Strategies Toolkit: “Create a toolkit (binder) of strategies to increase your students’ literacy skills. This will be an important resource not only for this course, but for next semester (second required literacy course) and in your future classroom as well. You will receive more specific information about this project in class, but for now, make note that these toolkits will be collected for review twice before the end of the semester” (course syllabus).

Final Reflection: “This final reflection is your opportunity to synthesize and articulate your learning in essay form. Respond to specific questions and/or prompts regarding adolescent literacy, and reference specific readings and course activities in order to make connections between your experiences as a learner and your future as a content teacher.”

Additional written artifacts:
Investigation of Professional Organization Website/Journal Article Response

“Explore (online) your discipline’s state and national pedagogical discourse community organizations (e.g. NCTM, NCTE, NCSS, NSTA, NYSEC…). Make note of recent conference themes, particularly those that connect to standards in your content area. Also note any resources and/or reading suggestions available. Next, investigate your discipline’s professional journals and from one of them, select a recent (within the last 2 years) article that focuses on literacy development in your content area. Copy, read, and annotate the article and write a one-page analysis. Be prepared to share in class” (course syllabus).

Textbook Evaluation: “Working with peers in your content area, critique and assess a textbook in a review that you might present to the textbook committee of your department. Base your text selection and review on information gleaned from Ch. 5 in the Alvermann et al. (2010) text. Prepare an oral summary of your review to be shared whole class” (course syllabus).

Class session activities, collected artifacts: these were short, in class responses to questions, activities (whole and small group) recorded on chart paper, white board, or digitally on Smart Board.

Interview. Finally, once the course was concluded and grades were submitted, I conducted an interview with each focal participant (four interviews total) during the second semester when I was no longer her or his instructor. With the exception of the recruitment email, I’d had little to no contact with these participants since the previous semester. Lasting approximately 50-60 minutes and designed to tap participants’ tacit knowledge (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983), this informal, semi-structured interview focused on segments of data that seemed particularly fruitful for analysis and focused on getting answers to “why” and “how”
questions (e.g., "I noticed that you stated ___ in your personal literacy history. Could you tell me a little more about why you think/feel this and where your thinking seems to come from?" or, "how would you describe ____?"). Responses gathered through interviewing helped me draw out some of the belief, value, and practice components of attitudes and beliefs that motivated participants’ contributions to various data sources. I listened to the digital recording of each interview shortly after recording as time allowed. Additionally, I took notes during the interview so I could remember gestures, body language, and behaviors not captured in the audio recording. The notes were helpful as I listened to the interview recordings and made further detailed notes and memos. I shared the transcribing task with a professional transcription service and checked the transcriptions for accuracy as soon as they were made available.

With the exception of the interview, all of the data sources came from routine course assignments required of all students, regardless of study participant status. I expected that while these data sets were sufficient to answer my research questions, each source presented some limitations as well. For example, a particular student-produced written artifact (e.g., an assignment) did not necessarily allow me to answer, How do students’ engagements with coursework reveal and shape their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their content area? unless I have an artifact and/or other data set to use for comparison. Relevant artifacts or other data useful in this regard included, for example, comparing the Personal Literacy History with the Content Literacy Teaching Lesson or the Reflective Journals with the Literacy Strategy Toolkit assignments. In both examples, participants’ conceptual understandings of literacy rubbed up against actual practice, thus allowing for the possibility of seeing whether and how their literacy conceptualizations influenced their professional development. Using strategies of participant observation, artifact collection, interviewing, thematic analysis, and elements of a grounded theory approach (see below) was integral to both the design and process
of my inquiry that sought to understand the complexity of preservice content area teachers’ literacy conceptualizations in the context of coursework. Thematic analysis (Van Manen, 1990) “involves recovering themes that are embodied or metaphorically suggested through journaling narratives, interview, observation, or story, and can proceed in a variety of fashions” (Blachowicz & Wimett, 1995, p. 336).

**Data analysis.** Merriam (2001) explains, “…data analysis is the process of making sense out of data” (p. 192). For this study, I adapted grounded theory coding methods to make sense of my data. More specifically, the analytic processes I used centered on elements of constructivist grounded theory, a systematic but flexible, bottom-up approach, described in detail below. As an evolution of traditional grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory “adopts grounded theory guidelines as tools but does not subscribe to the objectivist, positivist assumptions in its earlier formulations,” calls for a reflexive researcher stance that attends closely to “empirical realities,” and requires the researcher to “[locate] oneself in these realities” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 206). Recognizing Strauss and Corbin’s (1994) assertion that grounded theory has been influenced by “contemporary intellectual trends and movements,” Merriam (2001) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that the researcher, with her or his particular theoretical orientation, cannot “enter the study with a blank mind, with no notion of what to think about or look for…the insights that form the basis of a grounded theory can come from existing theory as well as personal experiences and the experiences of others” (p. 49, emphasis in original). Indeed, “what we know shapes, but does not necessarily determine, what we ‘find’” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 208). Analysis, then, “is a complex process… guided by prior theoretical commitments and conceptual schemes” (Merriam, 2001, p. 49, quoting Schwandt, 1993, p. 9). A constructivist grounded theory approach fit both the design and process of my inquiry that sought to understand the complexity of preservice content area teachers’ literacy conceptualizations in the
context of coursework. I was not testing a priori hypotheses and gathering evidence to ‘prove’ them; rather, this inquiry was a process of discovery using a predominantly inductive approach to analysis with data gathered from a highly contextualized setting.

**Data reduction.** Smagorinsky (2008) advises the researcher describe how she or he reduced the “amorphous mass of data” to “something comprehensible and useful” (p. 397). My principles for reduction of data involved asking, what is useful? and what helps to answer my questions? More specifically, I asked, what is representative or illustrative of conceptualizations of content area literacy teaching and learning? What disjunctions arise? Is there evidence of new thinking or changed thinking? What does this look like empirically? These questions circumscribed data reduction procedures.

**Coding processes.** The researcher “as primary instrument of data collection and analysis” works to generate substantive (interpretive) theory “grounded” in the data (Merriam, 2001, p. 17). Interpretive theory, according to Charmaz (2006),

…calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon. This type of theory assumes emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life as processual. (p. 126)

Initial data analysis was ongoing as decisions were made regarding data collection and analysis processes from the beginning of the semester. In-depth data analysis commenced with the conclusion of the course and the interview. I read all data collected from each of the focal participants—classroom session transcripts, field notes, student-produced artifacts from both in-class work and as course assignments, and interview transcripts—numerous times and

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2 Charmaz (2006) takes the position that, as researchers, we don’t ‘discover’ data or theories, but rather ‘construct’ our theories “as we are part of the world we study and the data we collect” (p. 10). I qualify my use of the term ‘discovery’ here to mean “becom[ing] aware of (a fact or situation)” (New Oxford American Dictionary).

3 Ely, Vince, Downing, and Anzul’s (2001) proviso regarding the instrument metaphor is important here: “[W]e trust you understand it as person-centered, sensitive, and exquisitely human …[and] quite wonderful because it speaks to the researcher as a powerful, central, and active force in shaping and creating” (p. 329).
systematically coded for emerging themes. This initial or “open coding” proceeded inductively and generatively at first. As “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data,” initial codes that emerged from close readings of small data segments (e.g., word-by-word, line-by-line) were particularly crucial in this grounded theory analyses (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). For example, I used literacy conceptualizations as one of my sensitizing concepts as I analyzed the data. Using sensitizing concepts, the researcher begins with initial ideas to pursue or “certain guiding empirical interests” which “sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). Thus, as I read and reread data, I was sensitized to the ways in which preservice teachers’ concepts of literacy influenced, informed, and/or contributed to their responses to assignments, activities, interactions, practices, and questions surrounding content literacy understandings and literacy pedagogy. Codes such as “literacy for success,” “positive/negative literacy learning experiences,” and “view of self as reader and writer, user of literacy” became “construction of literacy conceptualizations”; “literacy in the content area,” “eye-opening experiences,” “support for literacy instruction,” and “epistemic statements” became “beliefs about and practices in literacy learning and teaching.” As I became more familiar with emerging themes in the data (e.g., literacy= reading), I engaged in “the conceptual stepping back” necessary for further developing substantive (descriptive) categories (e.g., expressed beliefs and beliefs-in-use) and conceptual understandings (Strauss, 1987, p. 29).

Focused coding helped me synthesize and explain larger segments of data that made analytic sense (Charmaz, 2006). This involved theoretical sampling which means returning to

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4 Handsfield and Jimenez (2009) provided a coding and conceptual frame table that allows us to see the ways in which dispositions interact with the discourses in both the wider field of literacy instruction and the more specific field of comprehension strategy instruction using evidence gathered in interviews, resource texts, and observations. Using the sensitizing concept/code “cognition and cognitive growth” (p. 171), the researchers provided an example of the ways their focal participant’s dispositions, resources from the field (e.g., NCLB, Fountas & Pinnel; Keene & Zimmerman), and her classroom practices interacted. Similarly, I used “function and utility of literacy in the content area” as a sensitizing concept/code in my study. Data sources included response journals, class session conversations, presentations, and interviews, all of which allowed me to see the ways in which literacy concepts influenced and shaped interactions across contexts and provided evidence for the ways in which participants’ engagements with coursework shaped their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their subject area.
data to both elaborate on and refine categories that contributed to developing theoretical explanations of the data (Charmaz, 2006), providing a lens through which to view the focal participants’ responses, and over time, lent interpretive guidance to theorizing about the relations among literacy conceptualizations and approaches to content area pedagogy.

I analyzed categories for their properties and dimensions to the point of “saturation” before systematically coding for core categories and the relations of all categories to these core categories (selective coding) (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss, 1987). Categories are ‘saturated’ when gathering new data produces no significantly new theoretical insights nor reveals new category properties or dimensions (Charmaz, 2006). Examples of core categories are ‘function or utility of literacy in the content area,’ ‘where knowledge is located,’ and ‘sites of tension.’ I generated analytic memos, reflective notes, and data matrices to keep track of emerging ideas, questions, and possible convergences with existing theory during the coding processes. From here, conceptual elements of the theory and the relationships among those elements were drawn, as I made tentative hypotheses (Merriam, 2001). I noticed, for example, patterns of “thinking changing before practice” (Richardson et al., 1991) as well as evidence of what has been scrutinized in the literature as “resistance” to literacy instruction in the content area (Hall, 2005; Lesley, 2005). In this iterative process, I compared “…data with data, data with categories, and category with category” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 217).

Categories such as ‘literacy concepts,’ ‘epistemic statements,’ ‘disjunctures/tensions,’ and ‘literacy in the content area’ were collapsed, refined, and redefined through writing the cases. As I returned again and again to contextualize the data in this process, subcategories were developed (e.g., theorizing about tensions; transfer spaces: shifts in thinking and/or practice). Based on these various levels of analysis, I developed four detailed case-study accounts—one for each focal preservice secondary content area teacher: Ross, Meg, Kris, and Elise. Each account
unpacks the themes and patterns that emerged from analyses of data from each case. Finally, I conducted a cross-case analysis, looking for points of convergence and divergence across the cases, interpreting those I discovered, and drew tentative conclusions. I link my conclusions to past research findings and discuss what I learned in relation to my belief in the utility of viewing preservice teachers’ literacy conceptualizations through a sociocultural content literacy lens. I also generate implications from this research for preservice content area teacher education coursework.

Trustworthiness and reflexivity. From the beginning of the project, I worked to use reflexivity productively. I subscribe to Chiseri-Strater’s (1996) assertion that self-reflexivity is a “major goal” of the research process, understanding it as “turning in upon ourselves” to look “subjectively and reflexively at how we are positioned” in our research (p. 119). Our researcher selves, our relationship with our participants, and the specific research contexts, she explains, “will call for some measure of disclosure” (p. 120). As described above, I mapped these disclosures in my researcher notebook where I sought to acknowledge and track my subjective I’s to understand their potential for influencing what I observed, recorded, and learned. I found the Researcher Notebook invaluable for checking with and against field notes, class session transcripts, and impressions as I engaged in highly reflexive and recursive data analysis.

In addition to a clearly declared researcher stance (as outlined above) further steps to ensure trustworthiness included:

- Sustained engagement or long-term observation (Merriam, 2001). Data collection occurred over an extended period of time (throughout one 15-week semester) and then again three to four months after course completion at which time interviews with focal participants.

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5 Following Peshkin’s (1988) notion that subjectivity operates throughout the entire research process, I too found “the warm and the cool spots, the negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or wanted to avoid” (p. 18). Rather than exorcising subjectivity, Peshkin argues that by monitoring their selves, researchers can develop “…illuminating, empowering personal statement[s]” that attune them “to where self and subject are intertwined” (p. 20).
were conducted. This amount of time allowed me to become “…oriented to the situation” and “to be certain that the context [was] thoroughly appreciated and understood” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302).

- **Persistent observation** or depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a dimension of sustained engagement, elements or characteristics relevant to participants’ evolving literacy conceptualizations were identified.

- **“Richly descriptive” reporting** (Merriam, 2001, p. 8). Extended involvement, observations, classroom session transcripts, multiple written artifacts, and post-course interview transcripts allowed for the collection of data that are detailed, varied, highly descriptive, and specific. I attempted to account for the complexity of participants’ literacy conceptualizations and practices and the possible ways these influenced participants’ experiences in this adolescent literacy course.

- **Data triangulation** (Merriam, 2001). A wide range of data sources was used to provide a trail of evidence for findings and conclusions. (See Data Sources, beginning p. 8)

As both researcher and instructor, my primary research goals concerned understanding (not evaluating) the ways in which participants’ concepts of and practices in literacy and literacy in their content areas influenced course experiences and how concepts and practices may enable and/or constrain rethinking or remaking content literacy learning and teaching. As the instructor of this adolescent literacy course, I had both a responsibility for and a stake in participants’ professional knowledge building. As a consequence, I continuously and reflexively examined my relationships with my participants as researcher and instructor. I also continuously and reflexively examined both the relations between my research questions and the extent to which these questions tapped the emerging issues that data analyses revealed as most relevant and important.
This practitioner inquiry, with all of its affordances and constraints, allowed for a fined-grained analysis of what happened as the preservice teacher participants engaged with course content across a semester. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) acknowledge that critiques of practitioner inquiry revolve around issues of epistemology, methodology, and politics and are tied to ideas about what counts as “research, data, knowledge, evidence, and effectiveness, and who, in the final analysis can legitimately be regarded as a knower about issues related to teaching, learning, and teacher development” (p. 46). Studying one’s own practice—that is, following questions that “emanate from neither theory nor practice alone but from critical reflection on the intersections of the two”—can lead to new kinds of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, pp. 42-43), my aim with the present study.
Chapter Four

Ross

I wanted to be that person to kind of show [students] that English is an incredible thing and reading and literature is an incredible thing and even in college I’ve learned so much more about it.

So I just want to kind of put my mark on students and kind of open their minds to the world

—Ross, English education major [Interview]

While Ross’s passion for literature and learning imbued his responses to coursework, questions and uncertainties about meeting the needs of his future students complicated how he saw his role as a secondary English teacher responsible for content literacy instruction. Ross identified as an advocate for literacy and aimed to establish an equitable, inclusive classroom; however, he also expressed deep-seated concerns about “prepar[ing] for diversity” and supporting students who struggle in literacy. Grappling with tensions across affective and cognitive domains of knowing, Ross’s inquiry stance strongly influenced his beliefs about student and teacher learning. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Ross’s literacy history, concepts of literacy and their relationship to content learning intersected with coursework. I consider the ways course assignments and texts shaped—and in some ways, constrained—those concepts of literacy. Two major themes emerged as Ross navigated coursework across the semester: (1) Ross’s inquiry stance grounded his responses to coursework as he grappled with issues around language and culture, classroom management, and meeting the needs of readers who struggle with literacy; and (2) Ross’s concept of content area literacy encompassed both aesthetic sensibilities and mechanical skills.

These themes were later tapped in the post course interview where Ross shared observations of his most recent field experience as well as his current thinking regarding literacy in English pedagogy. I begin with a brief overview of Ross’s initial beliefs regarding literacy and
literacy in his discipline and then unpack each theme (with subthemes) providing descriptions and analysis of moments that were key to shaping his concepts of literacy as he engaged with coursework. These moments became fruitful spaces for examining ways in which beliefs, literacy histories, and coursework intersect and contribute to teacher learning.

**Initial Conceptualizations of Literacy and Literacy Learning**

Ross, a traditional age college student and English education major began the focal course in the first semester of his third year in college. His burning questions at the onset of the course were, “What does this course teach in relation to my role as a future teacher?” and “How can I make students want to read?” [Course Expectations Card]. Ross wanted to know how an adolescent literacy course would help him prepare to teach secondary English. At the onset of the course, he expected to build professional knowledge that included motivating students to read.

**English as experiential.** In responding to a Literacy Questionnaire during our first class, Ross defined literacy as “The ability and drive to read documents, whether it be books or other forms, for enjoyment and full understanding.” He wrote that we learn literacy “Through years of reading, it is slowly built into our desires. Offering students the ability to see the positives and creative sides of reading as well.” Ross wrote that we teach literacy by demonstrating the “… importance of knowing, understanding, and wanting to read” which “allows students to recognize its importance and practice it.” Ross saw the function of literacy as “…reading and comprehending the written resources around us.” It was immediately noticeable that the affective domain featured prominently in Ross’s English-oriented conceptualization of literacy that included descriptors such as “enjoyment,” “desires,” and “creativ[ity].” For Ross, at the onset of the course, the teacher’s role included demonstrating the importance of literacy and motivating students to build literacy skills.
Although literacy learning “was a difficult process” for Ross, he engaged in “practice, practice, and more practice.” These cumulative experiences “proved to be quite effective” as he considered his “abilities and passion for reading and writing today” [Literacy History]. In addition to support at home from his mother and grandmother who read to him regularly, Ross credits his teachers in elementary, middle-, high-school, and college who “worked diligently…to catch me up” and whose influence helped him to cultivate “a steady and consistent progression of positive attitudes towards…reading and writing.” All of this support led him “to be able to appreciate my skill in literacy to the point where I can study it as a career choice” [Literacy History]. Ross hoped to offer the same support to his future students. At the onset of the course, Ross self-identified as an avid reader and writer who especially enjoyed reading personal narratives, travel narratives, and historical fiction. Paired with aesthetic sensibilities in relation to literacy learning and teaching [Literacy Questionnaire] he also focused on literacy to read and comprehend “written resources” in our everyday lives [Literacy Questionnaire]. These initial understandings of literacy would be further shaped through interactions with peers and coursework across the semester.

**Developing Conceptions of Literacy in the Content Area**

Key ideas in the adolescent literacy course involved developing a broad view of literacy that included an understanding of multiple literacies and sociocultural dimensions that influence adolescents’ literacy development. We explored the role of literacy in learning content, specifically in building comprehension in interaction with disciplinary texts. In this way, we worked to understand the concept of learning content through literacy, the understanding that subject area knowledge is built through transaction with texts (Alvermann et al., 2010).

**Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions in the Contact Zone: Coursework**
The contact zone (Lytle, 2000) is the space where the preservice teachers “struggled with, rejected, or embraced ideas” (Agee, 2006, p. 203) they had encountered in coursework. Below, I tell the story of Ross’s engagements with coursework, highlighting his experiences in building an understanding of literacy and its role in English pedagogy that include issues around sociocultural dimensions of literacy, managing a classroom, and meeting the needs of readers who struggle.

**An inquiry stance.** From the beginning of the adolescent literacy course, Ross revealed his disposition as a learner and prospective teacher—he was open and willing to work to understand new ideas. He frequently described his new awareness of issues in adolescent literacy using phrases such as “a complete eye opener,” “completely changed my knowledge,” and “taken my understanding…a bit farther.” He captured this inquiry stance in response to a prompt regarding the role of literacy in English education:

> Literacy learning is very important in my discipline [English] because I need to understand it completely in order to teach it, which makes the teaching aspect of it even more important as that is what I will be doing each day of my career…I will have a huge job advocating for literacy skills everyday. It is literacy that allows each student to successfully understand something, read something, write something, and retain the knowledge whether it is through discussion, reading, or note-taking. The skills I have learned and will continue to learn, I will instill in each of my students. [Literacy History]

Ross’s goal was to make his students as “educationally competent as possible for their future educational and career endeavors” [Literacy History]. He saw himself as an advocate for literacy and a lifelong learner. Notably, Ross did not project his aesthetic sensibilities nor mention literature here. His concept of literacy was skills oriented and went beyond the English classroom because literacy, in his view, is a tool for learning across disciplines.
**Responding to issues of academic language and literacy.** For Ross, uncertainties began to surface early in the course in response to assigned readings around language and cultural dimensions of literacy learning. In response to a reading by Judith Baker (2002) entitled “Trilingualism,” Ross wrote,

> As a future educator, I vaguely understood the diversity I would experience in my classroom but this… has served as a complete eye opener, especially in how I will have to deal with the language barrier found in the public school systems. Baker… makes it quite clear that emphasis should be placed in knowing about the student’s language differences, incorporating these differences into the classroom via group work and discussion, and advocating that the choice of learning lies in the student and not the teacher… This has all changed what I know because I did not realize how important or pressing the issue of language will be in the classroom nor how I could combat this to run an effective learning environment. [Journal 2, emphasis added]

With an emerging awareness of language issues, Ross expressed his inexperience regarding “diversity” as a preservice secondary teacher whose own education in a small, rural high school, likely offered few opportunities for interaction with students for whom English was a second language. Due to this limited experience with people of diverse backgrounds, Ross perceived language differences as a problem rather than an asset (Nieto, 2002). At this point in his teacher preparation, language differences were something he needed to “deal with” and “combat” as opposed to recognizing the ways in which diverse languages contribute to a rich learning environment. Ross generated ideas for how he might put this new awareness of ways language impacts the learning environment into practice that included “learn[ing] English together,” and learning methods for “combating the language barrier I am likely to face…” [Journal 2]. While
he intends to build a learning community, Ross expressed concerns regarding his ability to meet the needs of English learners:

I think it may be obvious via my answers in this journal so far that I am quite nervous about the language barrier I am likely to face in my classroom… My only question deals with the ratio of diversity in the classroom in the public school systems, especially in the inner cities. How much diversity will I have to prepare for…? [Journal 2]

As a preservice English teacher, Ross expressed deep concerns about addressing “the language barrier.” He worried about future demographics and what he will have to “prepare for” in terms of meeting students’ needs, specifically in an urban school. Ross shared doubts about his ability to teach in a culturally responsive manner. An additional reading from one of our course texts, entitled “Language, diversity, and culture” (Alvermann et al., 2010), prompted Ross to make a contrast with “Trilingualism,” noting that the authors

…touch on accepting and celebrating the diversity within your classroom. This changes what I know because, previous to this class and its readings, I did not really have a full understanding of the diversity I will encounter in my classroom nor how I should handle it properly. This is a great influence…reading the methods other teachers used, like celebrating those dual dialect students, using scaffolding and direct instruction to reach these students…the importance of creating strong bonds with the parents of the students and recognizing the parent’s role as an educator outside of the classroom…Ignoring the differences between students and the differences in cultural and socioeconomic background will not lead to a successful connection between student and teacher.

[Journal 3]

In his future teaching, Ross hoped to “create a classroom that recognizes the differences in all of my students whether it is socioeconomic background, culture, language, or race” [Journal 3]. He
contemplated specific ways of thinking and pedagogical approaches that might foster such a classroom such as “celebrat[ing] diversity” and bilingualism. Ross also mentioned that he intended to use scaffolding methods and direct instruction to teach English vocabulary as well as make home-school connections. While Ross included a number of ideas for creating his future inclusive classroom, his worry about addressing the needs of “diverse” students was palpable, and as it turned out, he wrote about it in his next journal response in relation to classroom management.

Managing a classroom. Ross discussed his concerns in response to an assigned reading on creating a favorable learning environment: “Classroom management… I am probably the most worried about working in an adolescent English classroom whether it is at an inner city school or rural school.” Though he would “strive” to build a “favorable environment” and aimed to make “affective learning” part of his teaching repertoire [Journal 4], the worry was apparent. In looking more closely at this response, I wondered whether “classroom management” was more directly a control issue for Ross. He considered the affective domain and ways to put some of these ideas into practice that included “using corrective classroom management skills” and “promot[ing] respect and community” in an effort to “create a class united.” Specifically, Ross aimed to “use affective teaching methods to relate literacy content to my students in order to maximize their interest level and motivation in academic activities” through “cooperation, ability, and cross-age tutoring, giving students choice and power in their own learning” [Journal 4]. Ross had a vision of an equitable and effective future classroom, and wondered, “Is the use of ability grouping considered classifying students in a class?” [Journal 4]. His familiarity with ability grouping (from past experiences as described in his Literacy History) acted as a filter through which ideas of cooperative learning and interest grouping could not be clearly imagined. As would be expected, he wanted guarantees that so-called “best practices” are
effective. Ross wrote in very general terms that he intended to “incorporate technology” and “use direct instruction” in his future teaching. He also used the word “skills” in a generic manner, not mentioning skills unique to English content teaching and learning [Journal 5]. While Ross wrote specifically about online reading strategies and “how they may be the most important literacies that adolescents need to develop” [Journal 7], this insight was not expanded upon.

**Uncertainties, connections, and adaptations: Meeting “adversity”**. Midway through our course, students chose a trade book title connected to their content area to read and discuss in small group in a format modeled after Daniels’ (2002) Literature Circles. I was interested in having these preservice content area teachers experience (and ultimately value) constructing meaning socially in dialogue with peers. For the reading circle activity Ross chose to join the group reading *Teaching hope: Stories from the Freedom Writer teachers* by Erin Gruell. As one of the culminating assignments, Ross wrote a two and a half page letter to me about his experience as a reader and as a group member. Generally, he was very positive about the experience, but the text—written by teachers about their struggles—raised questions for Ross. He began the letter stating that reading *Teaching hope* “has proved to be an amazing and inspiring experience...” He continued, describing the text as having “extremely valuable information from the best sources... the teachers themselves.” Surfacing issues involving crime, alcohol, suicide, pregnancy, and drugs and the roles teachers play in their students’ lives, Ross asked, “Will I ever be able to rise to the challenge as a teacher in the face of adversity as these teachers have?” He continued, “This [book] has allowed me to take a peek inside the brutal and gruesome reality that also comes within the realm of teaching.” Clearly, Ross’s eyes had been opened to a different possible reality than the one he’d assumed (or hoped) would be his future. He talked about the “extremely emotional response” many of the accounts in the text elicited. He wrote, “...all of the stories were very touching and personal. The text moved me because it was so real and
raw...told straight from the teachers...I realized I will be facing similar situations in my own teaching career...” [Reflective Letter, Reading Circle Journal]. Ross affirmed that the text inspired him “to serve as a role model...” to help students reach their full potential. He continued, explaining a change in his thinking:

I was disappointed by many of the stories that involve students who showed such high potential and were not able to break free from the situations that their family, environment, friends, or choices put them in. I want my students to strive for their potential each day without question, but this text has shown me that this is aiming perhaps a little too high. I understand now, through these stories, that there will be...mystery, disappointments, and successes in teaching each day and each year. This has allowed me to view teaching in a new, more personal way and this is something I am grateful for. [Reflective Letter, Reading Circle Journal]

With a new perception of teaching, Ross seemed to be steeling himself for an extreme challenge. With few illusions and his eyes opened, he resolved to be the best teacher he could be. In response to the text and as part of his future plan for teaching English, Ross emphasized the importance of journal writing where teachers and students reflect on personal experience and build a cohesive and united class torn away from their societal or racial differences. I realize that I have some huge shoes to fill in order to use writing and literature to reach my students the way that these teachers have been able to. [Reflective Letter, Reading Circle Journal]

Citing enhanced “discussion and group work skills,” Ross declared that he found the reading circle format “a great success.” He continued,
As a student, I really enjoyed discussing the text with my group members and hearing the similarities and differences in our fears and experiences with teaching through our field periods, or even experiences we wish to have one day! It was reassuring to know that we all felt similar fears… [Reflective Letter, Reading Circle Journal]

Ross acknowledged the benefits of group work as “an excellent way to improve class cohesiveness and participation.” He saw discussion strategies as “the most worthwhile” strategies for his discipline because they allow for an exploration of text content as well as an exchange of perspectives all “while increasing group work skills.” Finally, he wrote,

…this experience has been extremely valuable in my teaching experiences. I have heard personal, first person perspectives dealing with the situations I… will be faced with as a teacher. This has alerted and helped prepare me faster and better than I think I ever would have been if I had not read this book. I would recommend this book to anyone, future teachers or not… [Reflective Letter, Reading Circle Journal]

The reading circle experience provided opportunities for Ross and his group members to share insights and make connections to their own experiences as learners in response to a text, and through their discussions, contribute to their developing professional knowledge. On a personal level, Ross viewed the reading circle format around the text *Teaching hope* a life changing experience within the context of his teacher preparation program. As in his previous work, Ross surfaced self-doubt and fears about teaching, “deal[ing] with” the “language barrier,” and meeting the needs of learners who struggle, but was ultimately reassured during the small group conversations with his peers, that he was not alone. Ross clearly resonated with this experience.

**Content area literacy encompasses both aesthetic sensibilities and mechanical skills.**
Literacy practices and the role of the English teacher. In response to a reading that discussed classroom and school structures that support adolescent literacy development, Ross put forth several specific ideas on what this might look like in practice in his future classroom that included using “thought provoking questions and demonstrations” to guide students as they read and build comprehension. As in previous journals, Ross indicated his plan to use cooperative learning approaches and reiterated his advocacy for literacy across disciplines. Still, he wondered if this way of thinking is widespread in the field, “Are schools today encouraging faculty in all departments to encourage students to think outside of their disciplines to increase literacy and promote learning as a group?” [Journal 8]. Ross recognized that support for literacy learning needed to be a school wide endeavor.

Content literacy lessons. Describing the text he selected for the content area read aloud demonstration as being “perfect to use in high school lessons on poetry”, Ross read aloud excerpts from The Place My Words are Looking For: What Poets Say About and Through Their Work (P. Janeczko, ed., 1990). Ross was not clear about his rationale for choosing this particular text, but provided a more general sense of his approach to teaching poetry. He read aloud the poem, “A Story That Could Be True” by W. Stafford, which he would use to “structure lessons to focus on literary aspects” although he did not provide concrete examples of the content he might teach using this text. Ross emphasized that the study of “poetry isn’t about simplicity of words, but the underlying meaning, tone, and literary elements…” His questions for discussion in response to the poem were: “What literary elements do you find?”, “What is the underlying tone?”, “What is the poet trying to convey?” [Content Area Read-Aloud Rationale]. Without specific objectives in this demonstration, it was not clear that Ross was convinced of or could envision the myriad ways content area read alouds could be used to enhance English pedagogy.
Ross developed his content literacy teaching lesson with fellow English education major, Matt. The focus of their lesson was to introduce and demonstrate the RAFT strategy, for a target audience of 11th grade students. The RAFT (Role, Audience, Form, Topic) writing strategy, generally a post-reading strategy, allows students to choose their role and/or perspective as writers, determine an audience, select a format for their writing, and decide on the topic and/or issue of concern (Alvermann et al., 2010). Ross and Matt presented a slide show that explained the strategy and how it is used while modeling a quick example. Next, after individually reading a handout by “Wm. Dollar,” participants, working in small groups, crafted a RAFT. For example, one group’s RAFT was organized as role: dollar bill; audience: personnel director; form: letter; topic: vacation time. The RAFTs were shared with the whole group and briefly discussed. Finally, Ross and Matt made suggestions for using this strategy across content areas and offered examples of instances where RAFT could be useful in history/social studies, art, science, and math, as well as English. Ross and Matt’s lesson was focused on teaching the strategy rather than using the strategy to teach English content. While they were able to introduce and teach the RAFT strategy, they missed an opportunity to discuss and demonstrate the ways in which it can be a potentially powerful format for taking up and arguing compelling and relevant disciplinary content from a particular perspective.

**Critical practices.** As a course topic, the introduction of critical literacy was met with a range of responses. Ross’s response to an assigned reading on the value of reflecting on reading and promoting critical literacy specified strategies for promoting critical thinking:

As an English teacher this sheds a lot of light on the importance of promoting critical reading and thinking within my classroom. I can utilize critical reading strategies in my own classroom using discussion webs and reaction guides. My students will be able to reflect on their reading and get the most out of their experiences. [Journal 11]
For Ross, critical literacy meant critical thinking. This interpretation of critical literacy as critical thinking or critical reading was widely held among the students in the adolescent literacy course. Despite in-class conversations and demonstrations of critical practices around texts, the majority of preservice teachers did not distinguish between critical thinking, critical reading, or critical literacy as concepts or approaches. A second reading about constructing comprehension through critical practice pushed Ross’s thinking, expanding his notion of critical literacy:

As an English major, I have taken a lot of classes up to this point that have all been based around thinking critically of texts and concepts. Seeing the different perspectives allows us to understand the text very differently...This article [McLaughlin, M., & DeVoogd, G. (2004)] has taken my understanding of critical learning a bit farther…allowed me to view questions that promote critical learning, told me my role as a teacher, how to form the correct environment for the process of critical learning, and various methods used to promote critical learning. [Journal 12]

As in several previous reflections, Ross described how assigned readings helped him extend and/or reconsider previously held beliefs and assumptions. While Ross recognized his thinking had expanded, he simultaneously reverted to a teacher-as-technician way of thinking where he is “told” what his role as a teacher is and what a “correct” environment would look like. Critical literacy, in Ross’s view, was a skill to be learned mechanistically. Although he named specific approaches he might use to promote critical awareness such as asking questions that help students view a text from different perspectives, using alternative texts and “juxtaposition to help my students think critically about a piece” [Journal 12], Ross misrecognized critical work as a technical application of particular procedures. His response here, while centered on considering multiple perspectives, did not extend the purpose of critical practice beyond a local context to include wider, sociopolitical dimensions.
For Ross and the other focal students in the adolescent literacy course, critical literacy was a difficult concept to grasp, though it developed—to varying degrees—with in-class discussions and activities involving critical practices over several weeks’ time during the course. This level of understanding was tentative at best: by the time of the post-course interview (four months later), none of the focal students distinguished between critical literacy and critical reading/thinking, an issue I address in Chapter Nine.

Teacher as literacy advocate. As a self-identified advocate for literacy [Literacy History], Ross’s receptiveness to ideas for building lifetime readers was evident. He was dedicated to “…spark[ing] an interest in reading for my students which they will hopefully be able to carry on their entire life” [Journal 15]. From the beginning of the course, Ross was concerned with issues of motivation and interest for learning content. His response here demonstrated a widened lens that included life beyond school—a larger purpose—as an advocate for literacy.

Ross covered a lot of pedagogical ground in the introductory remarks of his Literacy Strategies Toolkit, “assembled to assist in the process of teaching in an English classroom,” complete with descriptions of mastering literature and curriculum—language related to a technical vision of teaching. Yet, his role was to act as a “mediator and guide” rather than as a lecturer. Feeling “very strongly about” constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, Ross included a number of small group interactive strategies explaining, “Participation…will be important in my classroom…allowing students to work in groups and learn from each other” Ross’s rationale for this Toolkit assignment made clear what he valued at this juncture in his teacher preparation: strategies for developing comprehension, building vocabulary, and structuring discussion were important for English content learning and teaching. Interestingly, Ross included “Role Playing” as a strategy that “allows students to grasp various points of view and perspective on a topic.” The example he included, however, involved “teach[ing] the
importance of proper grammar” where students acted as interviewers and job applicants demonstrating either “horrible grammar” or “proper grammar and formal English.” Here again, mechanics and technical skills were central to his thinking around literacy.

Literacy for success. As the semester drew to a close, students submitted a Final Reflection (completed during finals week of the semester) that included the prompt, How would you describe the importance and function of literacy within your specific content area? Ross’s response was as follows:

Literacy in the ELA classroom is absolutely critical in every grade especially so in high school. Skills must be constantly developed and used every day so that students can be as successful as possible because, after all literacy is the most important source of knowledge a student can gain. It is not only important and used in the English classroom but in every stage and situation in life, both in and outside of school! Literacy development skills will account for almost all of my lessons no matter what grade I am in because in order for students to be successful in my English classroom, they have to be able to read and write formally and professionally, or be able to work towards that goal each day. Development of literacy skills gives high school students opportunities to be successful when they are outside of high school and in situations where there are endless possibilities. [Final Reflection]

At the conclusion of our course, Ross recognized literacy as “critical” to success in both schooling and life. Literacy, in his view, is the development of skills that, as an English teacher, he aimed to purposefully and regularly integrate into his lessons. Notably, Ross’s inclination to use affective descriptors (“desires”, “enjoyment”) to describe literacy, as he had done at the onset of our course, had been replaced by “skills” and “success” language at the end. I wondered to what extent course content, assignments, and discussions among course participants across the
semester influenced this shift in language around content area literacy. Indeed, as I reflected on this, a developmental perspective on adolescent literacy and literacy skills and strategies for academic achievement was an emphasis in the course. For this final course assignment, Ross’s advocacy for literacy had less emphasis on the experiential and more on “opportunities to be successful” beyond schooling.

Revisiting Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions: Interview Excerpts

The post-course interview was conducted four months after the conclusion of our adolescent literacy course. In the interim, Ross had completed a 140-hour field period during the month-long break between fall and spring semesters and was on track to student teach the following fall semester. I was interested in tapping tacit understandings of literacy as well as following up on particular issues and tensions surfaced in our course that warranted further exploration. Put another way, I wanted to learn how content from the adolescent literacy course may have been further complicated, questioned, and/or discarded in Ross’s experiences beyond the course.

Literacy practices observed in the field. Early in the post-course interview, I asked Ross to describe the literacy practices he observed in his most recent field period in a small, rural high school where he worked with a veteran high school English teacher who taught classes in grades 9-12. Ross “learned a lot from him” and described him as “very passionate” about teaching. The students would “dive into the books” they were reading.” The host teacher wanted his students to “have fun with the literature” because, Ross asserted, “if you're not motivated to read it yourself, they're not gonna be motivated” [Interview]. As he had done in reference to his grandmother’s reading aloud to him as a child [Literacy History], Ross used “fun” a number of

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6 Field periods: Four Field Periods (one for each year) are required of all students enrolled in this small rural college. Education students are required to complete two 300-level Field Periods, one in regular education and one in special education; one of these must be in a high-needs school; Adolescent education majors complete a Field Period in both grades 7-9 and grades 10-12.
times in relation to English teaching and learning. He recognized the importance of teacher modeling enthusiasm for reading and literature. Ross continued,

And [host teacher] said…they would actually act it out in the classroom… got ‘em up.

And I, for Romeo and Juliet, the balcony scene, I had them get into groups and we acted it out first, and then in groups they rewrote the scene as it would be said in modern English. So I mean it was, it was fun. I observed a lot of different literacy practices, but it wasn't as much that he told me what to do. [Interview]

I asked Ross if he had noticed students who were reluctant or non-participatory to which he responded, “Oh yeah, absolutely…in every class. So…like [host teacher] said you gotta find ways to get them engaged while they're moving…” [Interview]. The sponsor teacher, according to Ross, emphasized engagement and grouping students in ways that minimize disruptive behavior, moving students “away from their partners in crime.” Ross put this practice into effect. He described his own success—to his surprise—with a project he’d been able to do during this field period:

I mean it's [disruptive behavior] gonna happen so it's a never ending battle. You just gotta keep trying. I mean like when I did the Romeo and Juliet [contemporary] translation, those kids that I was sweating thinking that I was gonna have a problem with, they actually seemed engaged for once. [Interview]

I asked Ross what he thought helped the students to engage:

I think it was a new face. [Rewriting a scene] was something they hadn't tried before and it kind of allowed them to relate it to their own personal lives, which I think is really important… allowing them to be creative… [Interview]

So, for Ross, novelty, creativity, and connecting to their lives made the difference for those students typically disengaged from learning. These echo beliefs Ross had expressed during the
course the previous semester. In addition, his apprehensions about classroom management expressed during our coursework may have diminished somewhat as he implemented strategic grouping combined with sound teaching approaches. Ross reflected on his modest successes in working with challenging students. He recognized the power of helping students make real-life connections between the literary canon and their life experiences, a topic we regularly discussed as a pre- and during-reading strategy within the adolescent literacy course. We had talked about connecting strategies for engaging student learning in terms of linking new information to personal experiences, prior knowledge, and other texts. Importantly, the self-doubt Ross had expressed about “adversity” during the course subsided somewhat as he tapped his professional knowledge and was inspired and supported by the host teacher in this field experience.

Inquiry stance: Literacy in English pedagogy.

“A never-ending flow of questions”. During our post-course interview, Ross elaborated upon his inquiry stance as a learner. As he was discussing questioning as an instructional strategy for building comprehension, in addition to the usual English-oriented questions about style and literary devices, Ross added, “One of the things in literature that I've done more than anything and I really didn't realize happened is just…there's a never-ending flow of questions that nobody knows the exact answer to…” [Interview]. Talking about how some people are uncomfortable in that space, Ross added,

I remember in class with you, all the math majors had the biggest problem because math is so black and white. There's an exact answer, show how you got here and this is the definite answer, but when it comes to literacy there isn't, reading—there's no answer. It's what you make it and it happens even more in Literacy II, and it's driving [current literacy course professor] nuts, nuts. [Interview]
Bringing up this issue months after the conclusion of our course is significant; the math education cohort were holding fast to their “resistance” toward the role of literacy in their discipline. Ross continued,

… my brain is tuned in to knowing that you don't know what the answers are but you just keep asking questions. But all the math majors are asking [their current literacy professor], ‘I don't understand why we need to learn this, how is this gonna apply to math?’ and she's answering back with, ‘you need to tell me why you need to learn this’ and it drives them even more crazy because she's answering the question with a question and it just kind of brings it all around. It's just something you have to accept… That's why I was never good at math ‘cause I always came out with three different possibilities for answers… I'm better at reading books. [Interview]

Ross was comfortable with “accept[ing]” that answers are tentative at best and that building knowledge meant a continuous cycle of asking questions in pursuit of answers that give rise to more questions. In this way, he aligned himself with constructivist approaches to learning.

**Content area literacy conceptualized: Aesthetic sensibilities and mechanical skills.** Referring to the Literacy Questionnaire completed in the first class session of our course, I asked Ross to say more about his belief that learning to read was generative and “slowly built into our desires.” He described his personal literacy learning as a “huge developmental process” and that, over time, he became an avid reader and writer. Ross asserted, “you have to have some sort of desire to read or learn literacy, otherwise it's—you can't have the enjoyment or creativeness” [Interview]. He understood reading as a developmental process where motivation is key to developing as a reader and writer. This experiential learning or developing “desire” to advance in literacy affords “enjoyment” and generates creativity. Although he privileged a practical, skills oriented approach in coursework the previous semester, Ross’s aesthetic
sensibilities toward literacy were underscored here. What factors contributed to this shift in language? Upon reflection, part of it may be due to the nature of course assignments that began with a strategies focus (e.g., Literacy Strategies Toolkit) and emphasized adapting strategies, rather than beginning with a (disciplinary) text and analyzing what the text requires in terms of building comprehension and content knowledge. Another factor might have been the make up of the class itself: secondary English majors were in a minority while math majors were a clear majority; in an effort to engage the math education majors, I likely overemphasized generic strategies.

Interested in learning more about Ross’s understanding of literacy learning and its importance in his discipline, English, I asked Ross to say more about a statement he had made early in our course, “I need to understand [literacy] completely in order to teach it” [Literacy History]. He responded,

There’s a lot more, I guess, subsections and definitions to literacy than a lot of people know about… I knew it had to do with reading and writing and kind of learning how it occurs, but being a teacher I’m gonna be… promoting literacy each day and understanding it will allow me different ways of helping students progress in reading skills. Even if they are in high school… a lot of students will have trouble with reading and writing. So I guess my understanding of it is just kind of diving in head first… and kind of experimenting and exploring and seeing where I kind of fit in to the whole picture of it.

[Interview]

Though not explicitly described, Ross’s conceptualization of literacy was made complex with “more subsections and definitions.” He admired the ways his host teacher had used music as a means of enhancing comprehension and contextualizing literature for his students. For Ross, literacy went beyond reading and writing traditional print texts to include multiple modalities.
Further, as demonstrated in his field experience, Ross was comfortable with experimenting and exploring; he didn’t feel compelled to prescribe particular methods for himself ahead of time. As he had done during our course, he reiterated an advocacy role in promoting literacy and facilitating students’ progress in building “skills” [see Literacy History; Journals 2, 8, 15]. He was interested in promoting literacy learning experientially by encouraging his students to “dive in head first.”

During the interview, piggybacking on Ross’s response above, I asked him to expand on his ideas for “experimenting” and “exploring.” He reiterated his views about the role of motivation in teaching English and in literacy learning:

Strategies for kind of giving my students like a push… I guess motivating them to read assignments… finding ways to make plays that we're reading or poems or stories fun… letting them just kind of play with it and using the different reading strategies and writing strategies that we've been building in classes. [Interview]

Although Ross was not specific about how experimenting and exploring would look, he made clear his belief that motivation to read strategically involves “fun” and “play.” He added,

Just keep shaking it up, kind of keepin’ them on their toes... I mean as long as you keep trying, make it enjoyable for them…allowing them to be creative and get into it, I think they'll get the most out of it. If you don't give up, they won't give up. [Interview]

Here again, Ross referred to creativity as key for the English classroom. He acknowledged the importance of a literacy pedagogy that challenges and stimulates creativity. While noting the reality of “…days where you’re just gonna have to read through it…”, he prioritized creativity and persistence as he visualized his future secondary English teaching.

“**The biggest challenge**: Assessing literacy.” The previous semester, Ross had expressed uncertainties regarding meeting the needs of students who struggle. With this in mind
in the post-course interview, I asked Ross how he would go about assessing his students’ literacy needs:

I don't think test scores really give justice to students' comprehension. I would have to see them around a book or a poem or even if it's breaking them up into groups and having them read something together and then kind of scaffolding around that, moving from group to group and kind of, you know, seeing how they react to a piece. You know filling out a worksheet and saying...what are the basic structural elements of the story? Maybe an early project or a reflection journal...I could see myself doing a lot of journaling techniques to assess my students’ literacy progression. Giving them questions where they can just kind of let their thoughts flow... [Interview]

Emphasized in our course, informal assessment practices were likely reaffirmed in his recent field period and also in his current second adolescent literacy course. As means of authentic assessment, Ross valued small group work, observing student interaction in response to text, and journaling in response to open-ended questions. Following this thread, the topic of using portfolios as assessment across an academic year came up in our conversation. Ross added, “...seeing how their attitudes have changed and how much better they can write and what kind of books they're reading now versus then” [Interview].

During the course, Ross had expressed support for both small group work and journaling [Reflective Letter, Reading Circle Journal]. I pressed him further to talk about the students who may be below grade level on the literacy continuum and/or are reluctant readers and writers. He responded,

That's gonna be the biggest challenge when it comes to my classroom. That's something that I'm the most nervous about and something that I really don't have all the answers to yet. I think that you have to learn, you have to learn your students. You have to learn
about them, what exactly they're struggling with and then always plan each day... finding
a way... to help them, individualizing instruction. Some students may require more one-
on-one and then maybe they won't be as reluctant. I think you need to learn along with
your students...you know? [Interview]

Though he lacked confidence and was admittedly “nervous” about moving struggling students
along the literacy continuum, he demonstrated a disposition toward his own continuous learning
as a teacher as well as toward scaffolding student learning. For Ross teachers were co-learners
along with their students. Ross had many questions and few answers at this point in his teacher
preparation. At the time of this post-course interview, Ross was a student in the second required
adolescent literacy course which focuses on assessing and identifying struggling readers’ needs
and then implementing an instructional plan for meeting those needs. Despite having taken two
adolescent literacy courses, his uncertainty about being able to assist struggling readers and
writers persisted. Although not yet secure in his professional knowledge, Ross recognized the
complexity of this work: his doubts stimulated a keen awareness of ways to address adolescents’
literacy needs that begins with the affective dimensions of literacy learning and teaching. While
some of Ross’s assessment plans were traditional (e.g., “filling in a worksheet”), others are more
holistic and comprehensive (e.g., projects, journaling, portfolio evaluation). Though Ross readily
admitted his lack of confidence in his ability to work with students who struggle with literacy, the
idea of having to “learn your students,” individualizing instruction as much as possible, providing
feedback and guided practice are all sound pedagogical practices that Ross, at minimum, had
adopted theoretically.

Strategies for content learning. Ross talked about literacy strategies and approaches
to teaching that he considered important for the English classroom:
If I'm teaching poetry, a poem can mean something different to different people, which is something that I enjoy most about literature…to put yourself in the author's shoes… what made him or her write this way? There're a lot of possibilities. I guess just kind of teaching them to dive into a text and kind of letting it take you where it's gonna take you and asking a lot of questions about a text. [Interview]

Ross named strategies for building comprehension that included rereading, making connections, and questioning—strategies we discussed and practiced in our adolescent literacy course the previous semester. Here again, he emphasized having students “dive into a text,” experiencing the whole first as opposed to taking it up in segments. He went on to discuss the types of questions a reader might ask that included, “Why am I reading this story to begin with?” which presupposes setting a purpose for the assigned reading—another strategy discussed and practiced in the course.

Making connections between English content and history content was another approach Ross discussed in the post-course interview. He asserted that in English pedagogy, it was important to recognize that “history and English are closely tied together”:

Yeah, I mean I think a big mistake would be just throwing a text out there and saying we're gonna read this and only looking at it [as] a novel … but not why was this written, under what circumstances was this written… You have to ask questions in English…opening your mind to it. You get a completely different understanding of a poem or a story knowing…about the circumstances of the author… [Interview]

Foregrounding an inquiry stance, Ross demonstrated a fairly solid theoretical foundation of pedagogical practices and a level of specificity appropriate for English teaching and learning: contextualizing a piece of writing, questioning, being open-minded, and building and using
background knowledge when planning lessons are all part of his toolkit or repertoire at this point in his teacher preparation course of study.

“English is an incredible thing . . .” Drawing the interview to a close, I asked Ross what made him decide he wanted to be a teacher. He responded,

I just wanted to help people period…and then I realized that I had more of a passion for reading and English in high school. I had a lot of influential teachers…I guess I steered myself towards what they were doing and how they had an effect on people that was just awesome and they had an effect on me... I wanted to be that person to kind of show [students] that English is an incredible thing and reading and literature is an incredible thing and even in college I've learned so much more about it. So I just want to kind of put my mark on students and kind of open their minds to the world. [Interview]

Ross possessed altruistic reasons for wanting to teach led by his desire to help his future students understand and experience the “incredible thing” that is reading and literature. He stayed true to his vision to share his passion. He wanted his students enjoy to literature, to “open their minds to the world,” which is surely one way to develop a consciousness (sociocultural, political, historical, and economic) and awareness of the wider world. Finally, I asked Ross what he will bring to the field of English teaching. He responded,

I'm bringing a sense of youth, which I think is gonna help me immensely…in my first couple of years of teaching, which is gonna be a nightmare, an exciting nightmare. That's gonna help me connect to my students and learn about the processes of teaching them literacy and English and literature. Just never giving up, just an undying passion to learn more about the realm of education and how I can successfully teach my students in different ways and being creative and assessing their needs and just, I guess just my
excitement about teaching and my excitement about literature, my past and how I learned about it and how I can implement that into helping them learn it. [Interview]

Here, Ross echoes beliefs and inclinations he expressed throughout the course. He reiterated his passion for literature and for learning and his excitement about teaching. The “exciting nightmare” was an accurate description of teaching for Ross who, from the onset of our course through to the post course interview months later, pitted his penchant for reading, writing, and literature against very real concerns about managing a classroom and uncertainty about “language barriers” and his ability to assess and address the literacy needs of his future students. While his enthusiasm is unmistakable, the “nightmare” might be further captured in his belief in the “never ending battle” that is teaching. Ross’s concerns about creating a favorable classroom space and supporting students who struggle with literacy betrays both a self-awareness and a willingness to “just dive in” and learn by doing. He senses where he is on the twisting path to becoming a teacher and anticipates the risks involved in learning to do so.

Coda

Looking across a semester of Ross’s engagements with coursework, I observed subtle shifts in his conceptualizations of literacy and literacy learning and teaching in his discipline. Using descriptors such as “enjoyment” and “creativity” in relation to literacy, Ross taking an aesthetic view, placed an emphasis on the experiential aspect of English learning and literature [Literacy Questionnaire; Literacy History; Content Area Read Aloud]. Embedded in much of his work across the semester, this experiential approach to literature was apparent in statements such as “put[ting] yourself in the author’s shoes,” and “a poem can mean something different to different people…something I enjoy most about literature” [Interview]. Ross’s view of teacher as advocate for literacy was clearly expressed at the onset of our course [Literacy Questionnaire; Literacy
History], carried throughout the semester [Final Reflection] and expressed again in the interview four months later.

A practical dimension tempered Ross’s aesthetic sensibilities and experiential approach to literacy. While he wanted his future students to experience the pleasures of engaging in literature and to support their creativity in responding to and producing their own writing, he also wanted them to be “successful” beyond schooling [Literacy Strategies Toolkit; Final Reflection] and to “open their minds to the world” [Interview]. In relation to English pedagogy, Ross used the phrase “diving in head first” or “just diving in” a number of times throughout the interview, as a way of expressing the importance of immersion and/or beginning with the whole of a piece before breaking it down for analysis. On several occasions, Ross provided details about the how of literacy methods for teaching English [Journals; Final Reflection]. For example, in relation to contextualizing a given text and building awareness of the author’s intent, he was clear about the types of questions he wanted to engage in with his students. Ross was specific about the classroom environment he wanted to create where learning was “fun” and students would “dive in” and “play” with English literature [Interview]. Ross was comfortable in an exploratory, experiential space where questions beget more questions and answers are just out of reach [Interview].

**Shaping literacy conceptualizations.** Ross’s aesthetic perspective and experiential approach to literacy teaching and learning were thus complicated with exposure to our course content. The introduction of sociocultural dimensions of literacy learning early in the course, prompted Ross to express palpable fear about meeting “diverse” students’ needs [Journals 2, 3] and managing a secondary English classroom [Journal 4]. Indeed, over the course of the semester, Ross revealed a profound sense of uncertainty about his ability to meet these teaching challenges [Reading Circle Journal Reflective Letter]. Notably, however, some of these fears
subsided as he drew on his professional knowledge and found success in his recent field experience. Experiencing theory in practice allowed him to begin building his pedagogical repertoire in an informed way: he found ways to engage and motivate otherwise disengaged students.

Ross commented numerous times in his journals about “eye opening” experiences or “changed” thinking as he completed assigned readings, responded to them in writing, and later shared ideas in class [Journals 2, 10; Reading Circle Journal Reflective Letter]. Ross resonated most strongly with the reading circle activity. Likely a combination of compelling text content and the small group discussion format, as a preservice English teacher, he was in his element.

Notably, Ross did not question literacy’s integral role in English pedagogy, although he saw literacy more often as a vehicle for developing skills and less as processes for learning content. Ross was critical of his peers’ resistance to recognizing the role of literacy in teaching and learning subject matter; his reasons for doing so were of an epistemological nature. For Ross, knowledge building was not a “black and white” enterprise, but instead involved questioning and “accept[ing]” tentative answers [Interview], both of which he believed were essential to content learning. As a secondary English teacher candidate, Ross was receptive to the concepts introduced and developed over time in the adolescent literacy course. Grounded in an inquiry stance, the tensions Ross expressed were of a personal, self-directed nature: his fears about being adequately prepared to teach were real, but stronger was his willingness to forge ahead and learn in the process.

**Questions to carry forward.** By the end of the course, Ross’s change in language was evident: he used less affective and more skills-oriented descriptors in relation to literacy in English pedagogy; this was a consequence, perhaps, of an emphasis in coursework on cognitive processes and literacy strategies for increasing text comprehension. Ross understood and labeled “drawing
inferences” and “visualizing” as mechanical skills, thus privileging “skills” over descriptors he had brought with him to the course such as “creativity,” “enjoyment,” and “exploring.”

Representative of his beliefs in use, I hoped that he was not permanently replacing one with the other, but was, in fact, working to sort out and include both stances in his imagined practice. By the time of our interview, Ross’s descriptions of literacy practices he had observed in his most recent field experience once again captured affective dimension in his attention to engagement and motivation. His conceptualization of literacy and its role in English pedagogy was under construction as he worked to incorporate both stances. As evidenced in various completed assignments and lesson demonstrations, content through literacy was not fully realized during our course. However, Ross seemed to grasp the concept intuitively as he described his field experience students rewriting a scene from Romeo and Juliet in contemporary language: students were comprehending the text through acts of reading, writing, and translating.

The next step in Ross’s professional learning would include unpacking his implicit understandings about how experts in his discipline engage in literacy and articulate what those practices are. As reflective of the content literacy lens that framed the course, Ross emphasized strategies (e.g., questioning, RAFT) that might be shared across subject areas as opposed to articulating those strategies or processes that might be unique to the discipline of English. Langer’s (2011) notion of “envisionment building” in English language arts is apropos of Ross’s case. Envisioning knowledge in ELA recognizes the ways students’ social and cultural experiences influence their learning “[b]ecause the content of English is so close to human experience” (p. 116). Envisionment-building activities emphasize discussion, writing, and exploration of literature as students manipulate content and ideas in support of cognitive and linguistic learning in ELA—all of which encompass the sociocultural and affective dimensions Ross was concerned with.

What additional changes to context and coursework would have further supported Ross’s
learning in relation to literacy processes and practices important to English pedagogy? On an individual level, what was needed to allay his fears about meeting his future students’ literacy needs? Reflecting on these questions provides direction for me and other literacy teacher educators as we build awareness of the unique literacy practices and processes valued in the disciplines and work to recast adolescent literacy/content area literacy coursework so that it is responsive to the needs of students, like Ross, whose specific disciplinary processes were “invisible” to him as a successful learner in his content area (Schoenbach et al, 2003, p. 134).
Chapter Five

Meg

“Literacy fits pretty easily into English…especially from the experience in my last field period here, I mean, literacy strategies should be used up the wazoo because those kids needed them.”

–Meg, English education major [Interview]

In this chapter, the back and forth, the stops and starts of preservice teacher learning are brought to the fore. A secondary English education major with traditional, teacher-centered inclinations, Meg identified as a successful student and avid reader who believed finding “the right book” was the answer for struggling or reluctant readers. An introduction to sociocultural dimensions of literacy complicated this notion, challenged Meg’s deficit views of learning, and shaped her understandings of English pedagogy. A subsequent field experience led her to further question assumptions around language and culture and tested her beliefs about teaching across differences while simultaneously reaffirming her ethic of caring. This case study traces Meg’s arc as she grappled with these issues in relation to teaching English content literacy. Three major themes emerged as Meg engaged in coursework across the semester: (1) Meg’s enthusiasm for literacy strongly influenced her engagements with coursework; (2) Meg’s conceptualization of literacy was complicated by an awareness of the ways sociocultural dimensions impact literacy learning; and (3) Meg conceptualized content area literacy as separate from teaching content.

These themes were later tapped in the post course interview where Meg shared her most recent field experiences and current thinking regarding literacy in her content area. I begin with Meg’s initial conceptualizations of literacy and then unpack each theme (with subthemes) in turn first as they emerged during the course, and secondly, as they emerged in the interview. I conclude this chapter with a summary of Meg’s case and draw connections among themes.
Initial Conceptualizations of Literacy and Literacy Learning

Meg, a traditional age college student, was a secondary English Education major who, when I met her, had three semesters remaining (unlike her course peers who had four semesters to complete) before graduation. She was a conscientious student who seemed genuinely interested in the course from the beginning. On her Course Expectations Card she wrote that she wanted “to get a feel for literacy” because she was considering going on for a masters in literacy once she completed her undergraduate degree. She also mentioned that she hoped to get an A in the course, adding, “But more that that, I want to deserve that A and have gained more knowledge to be applied in my career.” Grades and professional knowledge mattered to Meg.

Meg’s conception of literacy, at the very beginning of our course, emphasized reading. She defined literacy as “the teaching of reading and the reinforcing of reading” [Literacy Questionnaire]. She wondered how literacy was implemented in disciplines other than English [Course Expectation Card]. However, by the second class, her 24-hour Literacy Diary, where students were asked to keep track of the ways everyday activities involved literacy practices, indicated a shift in thinking. It was likely that our discussion and question posing during the second half of our first class and the assigned introductory reading on what it means to be literate helped to expand her perception of literacy going beyond reading. Meg’s 24-Hour Literacy Diary included frequent use of email, a cell phone (Blackberry), Facebook, blogs, websites, texting, written assignments, and YouTube among her literacy practices.

In her Literacy History, Meg wrote, “I have always been a reader…” and went on to describe a family of avid readers who share books among themselves and their extended family. “I grew up with an excitement for reading and learning.” Meg’s literacy history was rich with significant moments surrounding literacy learning and practices.
At the onset of our course, Meg defined literacy as “reading” and believed reading and writing were “invaluable skills that students will need no matter what direction they decide to go in” [Literacy History]. Meg imagined herself a published author and who admired “teachers who made classic books come alive” [Literacy History]. Additionally, as a future secondary English teacher, she aimed to “inspire” her future students “to enjoy activities as well” [Literacy History]. Entering our adolescent literacy course, literacy-for-enjoyment drove Meg’s conceptualization of literacy.

**Developing Conceptions of Literacy in the Content Area**

**Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions in the Contact Zone: Coursework**

This section highlights the ways Meg’s beliefs and practices intersected with course content to produce both insights and tensions. These insights and tensions represent key themes that were later tapped in the interview.

**Enthusiasm for literacy.** Meg made clear her enthusiasm for literacy from the beginning of our course. Her interest in and passion for reading was the overriding influence on her conceptualization of literacy and on her imagined practice as a future secondary English teacher.

It is this love of reading and writing that influenced my future…When I was in elementary school, I met a woman who was a reading teacher, and that cemented the deal for me: I wanted to teach, so I could not only read but share the love of reading with others. [Literacy History]

She continued, “I have long held the belief that people who dislike reading simply have not found the right book yet…I hope as a teacher, my enthusiasm is infectious” [Literacy History]. With these comments, I wondered whether Meg’s enthusiasm as an avid reader might preclude an understanding of the complexity of literacy development for those who struggle with literacy.
While finding “the right book” might be a viable approach for some reluctant readers, Meg did not see this belief as problematic for those who struggle to read. Over time, an understanding of the complexity of literacy development would complicate Meg’s thinking. She would expand her relatively uncomplicated view of reading to include social and cultural dimensions she had not previously considered. Her enthusiasm for literacy would expand toward advocacy for literacy.

**Textbook access.** As an indication of her advocacy for content area literacy, Meg was a staunch supporter of teaching students how to access textbooks. In response to an early reading on content literacy and reading processes, Meg admitted to having struggled with textbook reading in high school but since that time and perhaps as a consequence of expectations at the college level, her literacy skills developed further. Interestingly, she wrote that she needed to remember this aspect of her own literacy development:

…as an education student, I “forgot” much of this, since my own literacy skills increased and my perspective changed…reading this [introductory chapter] impressed upon me the importance of remembering the students’ perspective… since I read this, I have realized the importance of teaching literacy strategies… [Journal 2]

Meg imagined what this new awareness might look like in practice. She discussed being “sympathetic to the plight of my students,” and “mak[ing] a point of showing my students how texts can be constructed” so that they will be able to access the material. Aware of the role text structure plays in comprehension, Meg didn’t divorce herself from the learning enterprise, suggesting that she, as a college student, would benefit from rehearsing strategies for textbook reading. However, in the early weeks of the course, there were doubts.

What can teachers do to make textbooks easier to comprehend when we have little choice in which textbooks we can use? How do we engage and motivate students who have ‘checked out’ and disengaged from reading long ago? How will students respond to
learning literacy strategies in math and science classes? How can teachers integrate literacy strategies into an already packed-full curriculum? How do we show students that textbooks are a great resource of information, thus shifting dependence from the teacher to the textbook and making students more independent learners? [Journal 2]

Engagement, motivation, relevancy, time—issues that drive adolescent literacy instruction—came to the fore in Meg’s developing understanding. Notably, in these comments, she revealed her view of literacy as an add-on; literacy was somehow separate from content teaching and learning. Serendipitously, responding to these questions of Meg’s was the crux of the adolescent literacy course. Comprehension strategies, engagement, content learning through literacy processes specific to subjects as well as across subject areas, textbook access, and debunking the idea of literacy as an “add-on” were all examined, frequently tried on as ideas, and turned over again and again throughout the semester.

**Sociocultural dimensions complicate literacy.** Sociocultural dimensions of literacy and language were a particular concern of Meg’s throughout the semester, and as it turned out, during the field period she completed after our course had concluded. In an early journal response to an assigned reading concerning language, diversity, and culture in relation to literacy learning, Meg indicated a change in her thinking; she had believed that the best way to address diversity…is to ignore it and act neutral…but this chapter stressed that this route is not beneficial at all. Instead, we should take advantage of the rich cultural knowledge in our own classrooms…[Journal 3]

Meg went on to say that in her future classroom, she will “validate the language differences (and similarities)” of her students. She continued,

Rather than telling students they are “wrong” for the casualness of their everyday speech, I will take the attitude that there is a time and place for various varieties of English that
we speak. I will strive to bring students who are of a different culture and speak a different language into the learning of my classroom so they are not isolated because of their differences. I will try to take advantage of the presence of such students, utilizing their knowledge. [Journal 3]

While Meg seemed to have a clear vision of what this “validation” might look like in practice, she had questions about it as well: “How can teachers learn about the individual cultures of their students without being rude or intrusive? How much ‘general knowledge’ of a culture can one take as true for a student?” [Journal 3]. She was willing to admit to being unsure about how to create an inclusive and effective learning environment; the goal of cultural competency had come into view for Meg. As a site of tension, Meg would surface language and discourse issues in later written responses to coursework and they would predominate in much of the interview conducted several months after our course concluded.

**Equity issues.** Meg discussed the benefits and drawbacks of tracking students and ability grouping in response to an assigned reading on creating a favorable learning environment. As she saw it, tracking “allows teachers to tailor learning to the level of the students, hitting that zone of proximal development for more students” but that “lower track students do not receive the same quality education as higher track students” [Journal 4]. Meg recognized an inequitable consequence of tracking, and found herself grappling with this issue. At this point, ways to provide “the same quality education” for all students seemed to be a relatively straightforward endeavor for Meg, as she aimed “to offer the highest quality education to all my students, regardless of their ability level” [Journal 4]. Yet, she complicated it with an avalanche of questions wondering how one actually creates an optimal learning environment:

- How do we show students the importance of literacy skills?
- How can I fit in choices when I have little choice over what I cover?
- How can I supply the benefits of ability tracking
without the negative aspects? How does one create a respectful, diverse environment that allows the most learning to take place? [Journal 4]

Meg surfaced important tracking and equity issues here as she began to recognize the complexities involved in pedagogical decision-making toward effective and equitable education. These issues would predominate as Meg shared her most recent field experience in the post course interview.

“Teaching hope”. Midway through our course, we began reading circles (modeled after Daniels’ Literature Circles, 2002). Meg joined the group who chose to read Teaching Hope: Stories from The Freedom Writers teachers (Gruell, 2009), a text written by practicing secondary teachers who share poignant stories of the numerous challenges they face in doing the work of teaching. During one of the group’s conversations in response to Teaching Hope, Meg revealed a shift in her thinking:

I don’t know, when I first started reading this book, I was like, wow, this is something I’ll never have to deal with, but then, thinking about it more, there was this kind of stuff [in her high school]; like I had a friend whose mom was murdered, and I didn’t usually think about it, but, I mean, if you did open up to a teacher, which he could have, I don’t know…” [Transcript, Reading Circle session 4]

Meg’s recognition that she had indeed been exposed to many of the issues presented in the text in her own experience as a student seemed to close the distance between herself as a prospective teacher and the practicing teachers in the text. This created an opening for Meg to consider wider possibilities for her future practice. The group continued to discuss the ways this text, with its moving, emotional content, had affected them as readers. Meg’s sense of empathy as a reader was apparent. As she progressed through the text in concert with her peers, she began to identify with and recognize herself in many of the anecdotes, expressing an awareness that the challenges
presented within the text were not implausible possibilities for her future teaching. The teacher-writers’ anecdotes in *Teaching Hope* seemed remote to Meg and the others in her group at first, yet, dialoging about the text allowed them to close the distance incrementally. As evidenced in their conversations, the group members as prospective secondary teachers were able to make connections to their own experiences as students and build awareness of the ways sociocultural factors impact student learning.

“...Reminded me of why I wanted to be a teacher...” In her reflective letter to me regarding both her experience as a reader and as a member of a reading circle who read *Teaching Hope*, Meg contextualized the messages for herself personally. Although she and her group described many sections of the text as “depressing” and “extremely sad,” Meg asserted that they “were still worth reading. They reminded me why I wanted to be a teacher” [Reading Circle Journal, Reflective Letter].

During her group’s Reading Circle presentation to our class, Meg shared a “break through” moment where a teacher in the text felt a sense of accomplishment. She described …that ‘ah ha!’ moment where you finally get that student who you couldn’t engage before or you finally break through to a class that had so much tension in it before… it just kind of reminded you of why you wanted to be a teacher… [Transcript, class session 11/11]

Meg had developed a sense of the challenges one faced as a teacher and expressed empathy toward those teachers as the contexts of these stories became possibilities for her imagined practice. Here, glimpses of Meg’s ethic of caring can be seen. While she held fast to altruistic reasons for teaching, her idealized notions of teacher and teaching began to give way to more realistic understandings of the ways in which social, cultural, and economic factors impact literacy learning at the secondary level.
Teacher-centered pedagogy; teacher control. Responding to an assigned reading on using technology in English pedagogy, Meg expressed concerns about teacher control and identified with the teacher in the article who experienced anxiety in letting students “take charge of the learning.”

I will try to let go of complete control and allow students to take charge of the learning once in awhile. I think it is easy to forget in our standard-driven world that learning should be about the questions and ideas the students have, as well as what we think they should know. [Journal 6]

Meg’s skepticism was palpable. She wasn’t completely convinced about students controlling their learning, but had clearly made an adjustment to her thinking, allowing for students to take charge of their learning “once in a while.” After a small group discussion around that particular reading, students added to their journal comments to include issues that others in their group raised, or that inspired new concerns. One of the notes Meg added to her journal was “Feeling uncomfortable with letting go of control of classroom.” Teacher control weighed heavily on Meg’s mind as a preservice secondary English teacher. She seemed to be most influenced by a traditional English teacher-centered pedagogical model where the authority of the text predominates.

Content literacy lessons. For the read aloud assignment, Meg selected a Grimm fairy tale, Rapunzel (Favorite Fairy Tales, 2001, Dover) as an introduction to a unit on traditional literature, “which includes fairy tales, myths, legends, and fables” and is “important [because] it is the heritage of all literature.” While this selection represented “European heritage” she explained, traditional literature “can also be a great way to incorporate diversity…Asian, African, and Native American traditions can also be explored.” She chose this particular text because it “is probably recognizable to most students” and “would make a great jumping off
point for the unit...” One of her objectives was to facilitate “discussion on the various adaptations of traditional literature” by comparing different versions of the fairy tale. She did not explain why she chose this particular fairy tale or this particular version of it over others. Although she selected and read aloud a text she might use to teach story structure, her response to the assignment did not appear to be taken up wholeheartedly (as evidenced by what seemed to be a hastily chosen text, an absence of a clear purpose for selecting it, and the assumption that the selection itself would be “recognizable to most students,” yet not being explicit about what that meant). Although skeptical of the effectiveness of using picture book read alouds at the secondary level, Meg implied that she would consider the possibility of using children’s literature (as an alternative text) in teaching secondary English content in her future teaching.

Meg developed a content literacy lesson with fellow English education major, Leigh. Their lesson topic was imagery—poetry through music, and was targeted for 9th grade students. Their goal for the lesson was to teach the concept of imagery and then have students find examples of imagery in lyrics from a selected country western song. Meg and Leigh chose the Frayer Model7 (vocabulary development) as their strategy for teaching the concept of imagery. This model was projected onto a SMARTBoard. They began the lesson by having participants view a music video where the lyrics celebrated high school football and compared a football game to life; e.g., “life’s a team game.” Projecting the lyrics, Meg and Leigh modeled the Frayer Model using the term “imagery” while asking participants questions to get them thinking about the figurative language of the lyrics (e.g., football’s “blood, sweat, and tears”). Participants found examples to share orally with the whole group. As required for the assignment, Meg and Leigh developed their lesson to teach English content using a literacy strategy. They demonstrated that

7 Frayer model: a graphic organizer with the focus term at its center and various spaces for a definition, characteristics, examples and non-examples surrounding the term
the Frayer Model had purchase for their content area and made suggestions for how this graphic organizer could be used across content areas. In addition, Meg and Leigh incorporated multiliteracies (e.g., video, music lyrics, SMART technology, talk) into their lesson, demonstrating an expanded view of what literacy learning and teaching in the content area might involve.

**Content area literacy conceptualized as separate from teaching content.**

*“Tools to read successfully”*. After assembling strategies over a seven-week period, Meg submitted her Literacy Strategies Toolkit, comprised largely of generic strategies—many of which had been introduced and practiced in class—with examples adapted specifically for English content, as per assignment requirements. Reflecting a lesson model we had examined as part of coursework, she had organized her toolkit according to, pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies, and then followed this with “strategies that are used throughout” a lesson. Her rationale included the following:

Literacy is an essential part of secondary education today, especially with the widespread literacy push in districts across the nation. For any content area having an arsenal of literacy strategies is vital to appealing to a diverse student body. As a future English teacher, literacy is even more important, as reading is a core part of my curriculum. From what I have experienced in my field periods I know there is a broad spectrum of reading abilities and not every student will find reading as easy as I do. But I love reading and it is my job to give students the tools they need to read successfully. This toolkit will be an invaluable tool in my classroom as I work towards that goal.

Expressed as a responsibility (“my job”), Meg anchored this rationale in her goal for helping her future students “read successfully.” As framed here, literacy as a tool reinforces Meg’s conceptualization of content literacy as strategies for students who struggle. Though not stated
explicitly, she indicated that literacy was “more important” in English pedagogy than, perhaps, math, science, or history pedagogy, due to the predominance of reading as a “core part” of her curriculum. Though she recognized “a broad spectrum of reading abilities,” sharing her “love of reading” was still very much a guiding principle for Meg.

**Developing a critical stance.** Meg’s thinking was charged in response to an assigned reading on the value of reflecting on reading and promoting critical literacy practices, a new concept for Meg. She wrote, “Thinking about it, I realize that critical literacy is important for students to learn…I never had experience with this in high school…felt quite new to me” [Journal 11]. As did the majority of her peers, Meg interpreted critical literacy as critical reading. For her, this meant developing a “skill” as opposed to a way of thinking, of filtering messages constantly encountered in daily life, of cultivating skepticism and a disposition for approaching texts (broadly defined).

Meg’s response to a second reading on critical literacy and comprehension demonstrated a commitment to approaching texts critically “…especially as an English teacher” in secondary schooling:

In college, critical literacy is used most of the time. It is a skill that has become almost second nature to me. However, I think people forget that it can be—and should be—used in high school as well…The best part of critical literacy is that it teaches students to think for themselves and not to blindly accept the arguments and opinions of others. This is always a good skill to have. [Journal 12]

As evidenced in Journal 11 (above), for Meg, critical literacy meant developing the “skills” of critical reading and persuasive writing. Her questions surfaced the issues of background knowledge, non-critical acceptance of text, and finally, time: “How do I incorporate critical literacy into my lessons without taking up too much time?” [Journal 12]. Despite noting that high
school students would benefit from learning these skills, Meg stepped back from a whole-hearted commitment to critical practices. Her view of critical literacy as a necessary skill akin to critical reading bumped up against her practical concerns regarding a critical reading approach to literacy teaching. The perception that working this way would “take up too much time” (a sentiment shared with her peers) would not be easily dispelled as it further fueled the notion of literacy as an “add-on” to teaching content.

**Persistence of previously held beliefs.** A traditional model of content area literacy—that is, one that implies generic skills and strategies to be applied across subject areas—fueled Meg’s notion of literacy as an add-on. Her advocacy and enthusiasm for literacy bumped up against a persistent view of literacy as separate from teaching content. Content through literacy, as forwarded in our course, was not yet part of Meg’s concept of literacy’s role in subject area teaching and learning. In response to our final course topic on developing lifetime readers, practical concerns seemed to override Meg’s enthusiasm once again, writing, “How do I have time for SSR?” In addition to the concern with time, Meg added a question about genre as well: “Should teachers require a manga or graphic novel as classroom-wide reading or just encourage students to read on their own?” [Journal 15]. While we had examined examples of these genres in class, at this point in her English teacher preparation, popular genres such as manga and graphic novels did not square with the school-sanctioned texts of her imagined practice.

**Literacy = reading.** Meg held fast to her notion of literacy as being largely about reading [Literacy Questionnaire]. In her Final Reflection for our course (at week 15), she responded to the question, How would you describe the importance and function of literacy within your specific content area? with the following:

As an English teacher, reading is the core of my curriculum. If students struggle with reading, they are going to be disadvantaged the entire time they are in my class. Students
will never be able to move forwards in their learning of English if they struggle with
*reading*. Therefore, literacy is of utmost importance. Literacy strategies will be a part of my
daily life as an English teacher. Many students have an unfulfilled potential in English
class because they struggle with *reading*, the basis of my course. Even more so, *reading* is a
vital skill throughout life, regardless of future goals. Using literacy strategies in my
teaching will be essential to being a successful teacher. [Final Reflection, emphasis added]

In Meg’s view, ‘literacy’ not only equaled reading but it also meant strategies for struggling
readers. Meg supported the teaching of literacy strategies to help students fulfill their “potential
in English” and recognized the consequences of low literacy achievement. At the conclusion of
our course, the pull in her imagined practice seemed to be toward a narrowly prescribed school-
based literacy as opposed to a broad view of literacy that included listening, speaking, viewing,
and representing knowledge making for students of wide-ranging levels of achievement.

**Revisiting Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions in the Contact Zone: Interview**

**Excerpts**

At the time of the post course interview, Meg had completed her final field experience
and was enrolled in the second required adolescent literacy class. This was her last semester
before student teaching and graduation. Interview prompts were designed to tap Meg’s tacit
understandings of literacy and literacy in her discipline both retrospectively and prospectively.
She expressed many of the same beliefs about literacy and literacy in her content area that she
had expressed during our course, although some of her conceptions had expanded and had
become less abstract and more concrete, possibly as a result of (1) her field experience in the
interim, (2) enrollment in the second adolescent literacy course, and (3) the effects of time and
distance from the topics and activities experienced in the first adolescent literacy course. As is
demonstrated below, with the completion of her final field experience in the interim between our
course and the interview, Meg’s idealized imagined practice had been tempered; the gap between theory and practice had narrowed somewhat as she shared her thoughts during our semi-structured interview.

**Advocacy for literacy in the content area.** Meg’s enthusiasm for reading and advocacy for content area literacy was expressed throughout the interview. As an avid reader, Meg surfaced themes of interest, engagement, and motivation for reading. She still believed that finding the “right book” was the key for reluctant readers and so she parlayed her enthusiasm for books toward transforming reluctant readers. She asserted, “I have converted people. They say, ‘oh I hate reading,’ I’m like, let me find you *the* book, and I find them the book and then they can’t put it down.”

As a prospective secondary English teacher, Meg had a plan for facilitating her future students’ reading interest using peer recommendations in a systematic way. She recognized the importance of peer book recommendations not only from her own experience as a high school student and member of an informal book club but also from a previous field experience where she observed a successful peer book recommendation program in an English classroom. As a topic in the adolescent literacy course, we had examined peer book recommendations in relation to adolescent literacy development and building life-long reading habits. It is likely that Meg had both experiential and theoretical understanding of this practice.

**Textbook access: Personalizing experiences.** As they had during the course, the themes of learning to negotiate textbooks and read informational text came to the fore a number of times in the interview. Meg shared the following anecdote:

I remember ninth grade…we wrote an informational like research paper, and in tenth grade, we wrote a persuasive research paper, but nobody taught me how to read persuasive text and informational text or how to read research articles. Nobody taught
me how to do that and I think back now I'm like, wow, I wrote really crappy papers because I didn’t know how…Nobody taught me how to read these other texts. The focus is so much on the literature, which I obviously… I think that’s important to read literature.

Meg again critiqued her own schooling experiences with literacy. Recognizing that powerful literacy goes beyond “literature,” she asserted that if she’d been taught how to approach informational text “[it] would have made me a better writer, a better learner… It would have made school so much easier and that’s, I think, one of the things that kind of breaks my heart…” [Interview]. Her personal experience of struggling to read textbooks in secondary schooling might have been an obstacle to reaching her full potential. Meg’s personal experience shaped her belief in teaching literacy across the content areas.

I asked Meg about the types of texts she planned to use in her future classroom. While not mentioning specific genres or forms, other than a textbook, she indicated that she would use a wide variety of resources:

…There’s no end to, I think, what you can bring in, and that’s one of the great things about English—it can be so open ended…I will pull out their history book, all right let’s read about history. How are we going to attack this reading? …Nobody teaches you how to read a textbook but that’s a skill that’s essential…There needs to be like a school skills class, let me teach you how to use school skills.

During our course the previous semester, Meg had suggested that literacy, as she conceptualized it, was “more important” in English than other content areas [Literacy Strategies Toolkit]. Interestingly, at the time of the interview, and perhaps as a consequence of her latest field experience, she identified more strongly as a student who struggled to read content area
textbooks. Meg’s expressed concern for teaching students how to access textbooks across content areas had become a more urgent and important piece of her professional knowledge.

“Resistance”. As a literacy advocate, Meg talked at length about content area teachers’ resistance to teaching literacy strategies. She drew on her experiences as a student in high school, asserting, “Content area teachers are like, ‘I don’t want to teach literacy strategies,’ but it would make the learning so much easier if they had...” She continued, discussing the assumption that literacy “fits easy in English” but explained,

It doesn’t necessarily fit easy in English, I fit it into English. It is an active effort on my part to fit it into the English...Like the math people were saying, ‘oh I never read my math textbook.’ I read my math textbook! Maybe it was because you picked up on it so easily, but I struggled more in math...I had to rely on my math textbook... I’m like you don’t read in math, what? How do you do math without reading?

Here again, Meg argued the value of learning to navigate a textbook. Her frustration with her preservice teacher peers was clear. Drawing upon her personal experience as a student who struggled in math and who depended on her math textbook to “keep up,” she wholly disagreed with her peers’ skepticism about the important role literacy plays in learning mathematics. As a site of tension, Meg was both discouraged and confounded by her peers’ response to their coursework in adolescent literacy across two semesters. Her critique was based on first-hand experiences as a student who struggled to comprehend textbooks and as student in a teacher preparation program. Thus, Meg’s imagined practice included goals for integrating literacy strategies across content areas:

When I finally have my own classroom...I will make that effort to bring in literacy strategies that are not just for literature, but for reading all types of text because if the other teachers aren’t gonna do it then who will?
Here again, Meg makes clear her view of literacy as strategies to be adapted for accessing various types of text and that this is a responsibility she is willing to assume.

**Sociocultural dimensions complicate literacy.**

**Literacy practices observed in the field.** I asked Meg to describe the literacy practices she observed in her most recent field experience in an urban high school. She began, I was at S___ High School, which is an inner city school and the majority of the students are minority races and there’s a lot of gang violence, a lot of my students were in gangs. I had a hand-full of students who had children or were expecting children, which kind of blew my mind. So it was definitely an eye opener… because I’m not from—I had to drive 45 minutes to get there, so it was pretty outside where I live. You know, I was going from like, cows and corn, to an inner city school…

Clearly out of her comfort zone in this school site, Meg’s developing sociocultural consciousness is brought to the fore. The school site—student population and physical location—were “outside” of her experience. She made a pedagogical decision hoping to capture the students’ attention:

Reading was hard for them because a lot of them lacked the support at home that I, for me, I just take that for granted, you know? …Reading aloud was big for them. They could pay attention. Like just to tell them to sit there and silently read—it was eleventh grade—to tell them to sit there and silently read, that didn’t really work for them, but reading aloud was really helpful.

While reading aloud might have been a sound strategy, Meg implied that the students before her struggled with reading because they lacked support at home, a dominant and erroneous assumption reflected in a cultural deficit view of literacy learning (Nieto, 2002; Purcell-Gates, 2002). Acknowledging the power advantage of academic language, Meg made an effort to affirm the students’ linguistic flexibility:
I’m like, literally, we won’t be able to communicate… I said, you know…when you’re writing essays or you’re conversing with teachers you have to change the way you speak. And I told them, you know, a lot of you already do this automatically… So it was just kind of, once they realized, ‘oh, I kind of already do this,’ it was pretty easy for them to realize it doesn’t take that much more effort to really up the ante.

She said that when writing, students regularly toggled between what Meg called “street language” and “scholarly language” observing that,

They had a problem taking what they were thinking, translating it, and getting it onto the paper…by the time all that process happened, they kind of forgot what they wanted to say.

Meg recognized writing as a process and that for some students the process involved the extra step of translating “street language” into “academic language.” Meg was indirectly calling up our course topics and discussions around the sociocultural dimensions of literacy learning and teaching, academic literacy, and adolescent literacy development as she described these experiences. She continued to talk about essential skills and the use of academic language:

I mean these kids literally if they’re going to make it out of the situation that they’re in they have to learn [to use academic language], that is an essential skill that they have to learn…Which a lot of… unfortunately some of the teachers… I mean unfortunately fortunately, I guess it’s how you look at it… Some of the teachers try to reach out to them by allowing them to use that speech, which is nice ‘cause it engages them, but at the same time, if they’re going to progress in schooling, they need to learn that other skill.

In our course, we had discussed issues around rule-governed vernacular language, code switching, and expanding repertoires. Here, Meg was wrestling with the implications involved in learning the language of schooling. Her thinking in this excerpt reaffirmed an early journal
response from our course where she asserted that she would not tell students they were “wrong” for using “their everyday speech,” but that she would make it clear to them that “there is a time and place for various varieties of English that we speak” [Journal 3].

Meg recognized the dangers of making assumptions as she reflected on a student she met at this high school:

I remember this one [student], he blew me away. He had an afro, he had the comb sticking out of his afro, he had two piercings here and here, and I immediately judged him, and then the last day there… he came over to talk to me and he was telling me how he finished all of his high school credits early and so he was graduating that June and he was going to [___University] like his brother, for chemistry. And I was like, oh my goodness, like I completely did not expect that of you. (pause) He, he blew—I, I literally—like my mouth dropped open. I was like oh my goodness I did not expect that…

Meg admitted to making an assumption about this student based on his appearance, holding low expectations for him as a result. Though Meg made these observations and pedagogical decisions using a cultural deficit lens, there were moments where a cultural difference lens complicated her assertions: she was learning to recognize her own biases and the consequences of those biases; her imagined practice of creating “a respectful, diverse environment”[Journal 4] both complicated and anchored this field experience.

Expecting to spend her last field period in an honors-level English classroom. Meg found that was not the case once she arrived at the site. Ultimately, she felt she had a “better experience” with the more typical students she observed, explaining that it was “an eye-opener” and “a completely different environment” from what she’d expected. She recognized and seemed to welcome the challenge involved in working with typical (non-honors) students. Contrasting this
field period site with previous experiences in rural and suburban schools, she added, “It was one of my most educational field periods…I wish I had had more time with the kids” [Interview]. Meg recognized the ways in which sociocultural dimensions profoundly influence the teaching and learning context. She witnessed the ways in which academic discourse and literacy achievement intersected with blinding assumptions and low expectations.

**Caring.** As she had done during our course [Reading Circle Journal, Reflective Letter], Meg suggested that caring was key to motivating and engaging students.

*I still care…that’s why I’m gonna be a teacher…*. Referring to her most recent field experience, Meg expressed her ethic of caring a number of times during the interview:

When I showed up they kind of gave me that eye like ‘what are you doing here?’ You’re just another adult who’s gonna tell me what to do, so it really…you have demonstrate, you have to do that caring, you have to be, like, I really am here because I want you to do better. I care about you and they’re like, ‘you don’t even know me.’ I’m like, I still care. You know, like, *that’s why I’m gonna be a teacher,* you know? Some of them were very resistant to it ‘till the very end, other kids, they opened up to me.

Critical of the teachers she observed for their “negative attitudes” and their low expectations for student achievement, themes of caring and respect played prominently in Meg’s field experience. She described being disappointed in teachers’ “negative attitude towards these kids,” and continued,

Even my host teacher… his attitude and his teaching. He even, his tone of voice—you could tell he thought they were stupid. He enraged me to the point that I was like I need to do better for these kids cause these kids deserve better teaching, they deserve more, they deserve respect. Because these kids do have a mind, they do have intelligence and if
somebody shows them that respect that they’re looking for and shows that they care, these kids can do things. They’re just not given the chance.

Meg reflected on her largely observational role this field experience and expressed frustration with “not getting many opportunities to teach” and wanting to “get my hands on them” to “teach skills.” Again, she contrasted her suburban field periods with the latest urban field experience:

…but just the challenge was there and I was like, ooh, I want it, I want to try and reach to these kids, and I did, a few of them, I kind of connected with. And I was like, oh, I want to help you guys so badly. I want to teach these skills to you… It was one of those experiences that reminds you why you want to be a teacher. I mean sometimes, a couple, like my other field periods were more of a middle class suburban thing and so things—I mean you have your challenges, but it’s pretty, you know, goes smoothly for the most part, especially because the two teachers I worked with…it was very routine. It wasn’t that bumpy of a ride kind of thing…which was fine, I mean it was probably good for my first two field periods getting my feet wet. But this one really, like, it reminded me why I wanted to be a teacher…Because there are these kids who—they need good teachers.

Her final field experience afforded Meg the opportunity to both reaffirm her motivation to teach and to feel some success in connecting with under achieving students. With a modicum of confidence, she implied that she could be that “good” teacher who is able to make a difference in the lives of students who struggle academically.

**Content area literacy conceptualized.**

**Critical practices.** During coursework the previous semester, Meg had been introduced to the concept of critical literacy, asserting that while the idea “felt quite new” she felt that the “skill…is important for students to learn” [Journal 11], though she also believed it would
“take up too much time” [Journal 12]. I asked Meg to discuss her current thoughts regarding critical literacy practices. She pointed out that high school students “don’t have to” be critical, but in college,

they try and develop that more of a questioning attitude, you know? …and I don’t think we encourage that enough in high schools. We don’t teach them, we teach them to just take it blindly, and unfortunately, most teachers hate that when students question like that, but it is important to do because otherwise people get mislead so easily.

Meg did not raise the issue of time and reaffirmed her belief that students need to learn critical practices. Yet she simultaneously observed that critical practices were problematic. I wondered whether this notion was based on observational experience (as a former high school student and as a preservice teacher who’d recently spent time in schools during field periods) or if it reflected an internal struggle between dominate and alternative discourses of schooling. Meg continued, “But that I think critical literacy’s gonna come. It’s going to be hard to implement because other teachers aren’t going to like it… But it’s so important.”

While Meg valued questioning as a pedagogical approach and for helping students become critical consumers, she also maintained that there are “more right answers” as she talked about general, acceptable interpretations of literature.

Oh especially teenagers…they love to question the authority of the author, love to question, you know, why, why should we believe that? Why not this? You know students would love that…There are definitely wrong answers and there are more right answers…

Despite her support for developing a questioning attitude, Meg was not inclined, at this point in her teacher preparation, to push her thinking towards the political; she wanted to avoid “hot-button” issues such as “abortion, hate speech, and gun control” because she felt “they might be a
little dangerous” [Journal 14]. She thought of critical literacy as critical reading and was willing to entertain the practice of questioning—but only in pursuit of “more right” answers.

“Literacy fits...” I asked Meg to talk about the literacy skills and/or strategies that one needs for learning English content and to explain how these might be different from the kinds of literacy skills and strategies one might need for learning biology or social studies content. She responded,

Literacy fits pretty easily into English...especially from the experience in my last field period here, I mean, literacy strategies should be used up the wazoo because those kids needed them. Those kids were not natural readers. They were not read to as kids kind of thing, you know, they needed the literacy strategies and even as an English teacher, I'm teaching reading. I see part of my job is to teach kids how read different kinds of texts and I know most teachers focus on the literature aspect, which is important, but I think it’s also important because, like, where else are these kids going to get these skills? You know? I think that somebody needs to be teaching them how to switch...let me show you how to read a science book...

Here again, a cultural deficit lens predominated. The learners Meg encountered struggled with reading because of the “not-read-to-as-kids-kind-of-thing,” but she complicated this view with her stance of advocacy. The job of an English teacher, in Meg’s view, is multifaceted and goes beyond teaching English content (“literature”) to teaching secondary students “how to read different kinds of texts” in an effort to develop their skills for comprehending a range of texts. Meg conceptualized literacy as strategies. Though not explicit about what those strategies include, she acknowledged that students need different strategies to access and comprehend narrative and expository texts.
“Everything overlaps…” Meg continued to talk about strategies in general terms, observing that students might be better served if secondary content areas were more integrated:

So I’ve already found that, I mean it’s important for any teacher to know the multitude of different strategies because like... you’re going to be interacting with all these kids, you’re not going to be just getting the kids who get math and you’re not going to just get the kids who get English, you’re getting all of them… and I think it’s important to show kids how these subjects integrate, you know. In life there’s no neat separate categories; everything overlaps and sometimes I think that we separate them too much… part of the problem… let’s work together, let’s give them a cross content assignment so that they can see how this works.

In the above excerpts, Meg combined previous beliefs about content learning with more recently built professional knowledge regarding literacy and collaboration. Her disposition toward making literacy an integral part of her pedagogical approach and in creating opportunities for her future students to engage in cross content assignments is both hopeful and practical. Meg imagined her future English classroom as a space where traditional subject area boundaries become porous and in fact “overlap” as she “teach[es] kids how to read different kinds of texts,” particularly textbooks. For Meg, adolescent literacy development encompassed the whole student, and it is the responsibility of all secondary teachers to support students’ literacy learning both within and across subject areas.

Coda

Across the semester, Meg’s experiences as a learner and commitment to the teaching profession influenced her developing conceptualization of literacy and its role in teaching English content. As I reviewed and analyzed these data listening closely to Meg’s words, I noticed subtle changes in her initial conceptualizations of literacy and its implications for English pedagogy; her
engagements with our adolescent literacy coursework shaped her ideas in subtle ways and by degrees.

**Juxtapositions.** Juxtaposing Meg’s responses revealed tensions in her developing conceptualizations of literacy and the role of literacy in English pedagogy. Her expressed interest in and growing knowledge about the importance of literacy in teaching content contrasted sharply with her perception of literacy as an “add-on” and her frequent referrals to constraints of time [Journals 2, 5, 12, 13, 15]. Holding on to largely traditional ideas of English teaching [Journals 3, 6, 15], Meg’s default pedagogical mode in lesson demonstrations was toward a teacher-centered model where official knowledge was disseminated [Journal 6; Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Teaching Lesson; Interview]. Meg expressed an interest in constructivist approaches to teaching such as questioning and discussion formats but sought to avoid the entanglements of debating “hot-button” issues in her teaching [Journal 14].

**Widening the lens—momentarily.** Early in our course, Meg’s concept of literacy was expanded as we co-constructed a broad[er] view of literacy and engaged in coursework and activities designed to promote the notion of learning content *through* literacy. She was able to rethink her initial concepts and managed to “try on” some of these ideas in both her imagined practice and empirically in class activities. While opportunities to push her thinking afforded by coursework compelled her to grapple with new ideas, with respect to *literacy*, her previous beliefs and experiences as a student of English and English education held sway [Final Reflection]: content area literacy meant teaching students generic reading strategies for accessing their textbooks and that this was the responsibility of all secondary teachers. Meg was ardently critical of her peers’ “resistance” to integrating literacy practices into their content teaching [Interview].

In her coursework, Meg often projected idealized notions of *teacher, student, English,* and *teaching.* These notions began to shift during her Reading Circle experience and were carried into
her field experience in an urban high school where she witnessed first-hand, the impact of social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions on school literacy learning and teaching. Her imagined practice of successfully teaching English curriculum in a relatively unencumbered manner was tested and complicated by that most recent field experience in a context unfamiliar to her. At the end of our course, while she theoretically understood sociocultural impacts on literacy, her practical experience in the field afterward brought the abstract to vivid reality. Additionally, Meg’s belief in the importance of caring was her guiding principle and in her view, beyond believing her students could learn, caring meant insisting that the students she encountered use the language of schooling, academic discourse [Interview]. Problematic on several levels, I wondered whether Meg’s understanding of caring sprang from a deficit view of learning and whether “these kids” need “skills” rather than rich curriculum. I wondered if, by extension, caring meant skills before rich curriculum (Nieto, 2002). Meg would have benefitted from opportunities to deconstruct “caring” as she began to recognize the dangers of making assumptions based on stereotypes [Interview].

Connections. Meg’s advocacy for literacy and her developing understanding of the impacts of sociocultural dimensions on literacy learning in general and content area literacy learning in particular are integrally connected. Her initial, relatively uncomplicated concept of literacy became “complicated” by the knowledge that literacy involves more than orchestrating cognitive processes and finding “the right book” but also encompasses cultural, linguistic, and social dimensions. While interest, engagement, and enthusiasm played significant roles in Meg’s shifting understanding of content literacy learning and teaching, her thinking was pushed to consider the experiences of culturally diverse students as well as the experiences of those who struggle with literacy.
Although literacy remained largely “reading” and content area literacy was conceptualized as separate from teaching English content, her concept of content literacy as skills and strategies reinforced her advocacy for teaching the whole student, for textbook access, and for teaching strategies across subject areas. Complicating these beliefs, however, were Meg’s unexamined assumptions behind a cultural deficit view of learning. Meg’s belief in “more right answers” and skills-focused instruction may preclude her mission to simply convert struggling readers to avid readers by finding “the right book.” These competing ideas and inclinations illustrate the back and forth, the stops and starts of Meg’s learning in the course and beyond in her field experience where she had an opportunity to put theory into practice.

Questions to carry forward. Meg’s conceptualizations of literacy as reading and content area literacy as strategies to be taught across subject areas constrained her learning in the course. Clearly, there were missed opportunities for deeper learning as she negotiated coursework. These would include opportunities to deconstruct “caring” and delve more deeply into sociocultural dimensions of literacy learning. Also, in their content literacy lesson, Meg and Leigh might have offered an opportunity for students to critique the lyrics of the song they used and delve more deeply into meaning, cultural practices, and alternative voices. Framed within content area literacy, the course structure and design may have contributed to these missed opportunities, an issue taken up in Chapter Nine. As a next step along the twisting path of teacher learning, Meg would articulate the literacy processes she used to learn English content and what content through literacy would look like in her future teaching.

Meg’s journey provides glimpses of the non-linear nature of sense making. At the course level, I wonder about ways the coursework itself might have unintentionally limited more expansive and durable notions of literacy’s role in teaching content—beyond generic reading strategies—and why literacy processes for teaching and learning English content remained
elusive for Meg, and by extension, for me. As with Ross, Meg would likely benefit from an “envisionment-building” (Langer, 2011) approach to further develop her understanding of literacy’s critical role in English language arts pedagogy. Meg’s engagements with our coursework illustrate her arc as an avid reader and teacher candidate who believed that “people who dislike reading simply have not found the right book yet,” to recognizing the complexity of literacy development, to asserting that the students she encountered in her field experience needed “skills up the wazoo.” These sentiments will continue to shift and become more nuanced as she grapples with the sociocultural, economic, and political realities in the field. Ultimately, Meg’s disposition as a lifelong learner is hopeful (“One of the best things about teaching is that I don’t even have to stop learning”). Mapping her engagements with coursework over time, indicates a trajectory going forward of continuous learning as she builds upon previous experiences and grapples with new ideas presented in new contexts across her teaching career.
Chapter Six: Kris

...there's a lot of alternative histories and I think more than anything...

I want to be more of a constructivist kind of teacher. I want to teach kids how to think.

—Kris, history/social studies education major [Interview]

As a non-traditional age student and prospective secondary history/social studies teacher, Kris brought worldly experiences to bear on her engagements with coursework. Kris’s background in psychology and her view of what history is influenced her understandings of literacy learning and teaching through a content literacy lens. A study in contrasts, Kris expressed insightful glimpses into the processes involved in a content literacy approach to history pedagogy, yet she was challenged to carry these understandings through assignments and demonstrations. Two major themes emerged as Kris engaged in coursework across the semester: (1) Kris’s conceptualization of literacy in her discipline was influenced by her beliefs about learning and her view of history as a discipline; and (2) Kris’s practices were inconsistent with her expressed beliefs about history/social studies pedagogy. These themes were later explored in the post course interview where Kris shared her most recent field experiences and current thinking regarding literacy in her content area. I begin with Kris’s initial conceptualizations of literacy and then unpack these major themes (with subthemes) in turn as they emerged during the course. Next, I flesh out these themes as they were addressed in the interview. I conclude this chapter with a summary of Kris’s case and draw connections among themes.

Initial Conceptualization: View of Literacy and Literacy Learning

Of the four focal students, Kris was the only non-traditional age college student. She had spent some time in the military and had also transferred college credits, many of which were in psychology, from another college before enrolling in our teacher preparation program. Kris was the mother of a second grader at the time of the focal course. As a history/social studies
education major, she had “Noooooooooo idea!” of what to expect in our Adolescent Literacy course [Course Expectations Card]. When invited to write a question, Kris wondered, “Are kids locked into a particular reading level based on genetics? Meaning is their [sic] a ceiling of learning for students?” [Course Expectations Card].

In responding to a Literacy Questionnaire, also completed during our first class, Kris defined literacy succinctly as “reading and comprehension.” She wrote that we learn literacy “by example, then we practice reading with someone who can. Then, hopefully, alone.” According to Kris, we teach literacy through a “combination of phonics, memory, and context.” Her response to the question, “How do we use literacy” was “Practically. NO IDEA.” [Literacy Questionnaire]. After our “broadening literacy” discussion during the first course session, Kris completed her “24-hour Literacy Diary” for our second course session. She recognized and included a wide range of literacy practices such as having a phone conversation, writing song lyrics, reading the news online, and watching a YouTube documentary [Journal 1]. Her initial concept of literacy had expanded to include language and communication practices beyond reading alone. After the first week of classes, Kris surfaced an interesting detail in her Literacy History:

Literacy is something that until the first day of this course, I had never spent any quality time thinking about. The irony is that I’ve done voiceovers and acted in training videos for phonics, comprehension, and reading programs. There are thousands of people in the world who have seen me as the mascot for these programs as they sat in training rooms learning about the methods that I taught, and yet I know absolutely nothing about the process. Memorizing the script was the only ‘literacy’ involvement I had! [Literacy History]
Despite her experience as an actor doing voiceovers and training videos for various commercial phonics, comprehension, and reading programs where she memorized scripts, Kris admitted that she knew “absolutely nothing about the process.” Yet, it is notable that Kris thought of literacy as a process, rather than something one does or doesn’t have, as evidenced in this statement, “literacy isn’t just about what you can and can't do with your brain…you need to be able to focus if you want to learn” [Literacy History]. Disclosing her personal difficulties with attention throughout schooling, Kris emphasized the roles focus and attention play in literacy learning. She added, “I can’t help but think that I’d be at a much higher learning level if only I could harness my day dreams and inability to sit still” [Literacy History]. She believed her challenges with attention had a direct impact on her literacy development:

I’ve always been a good reader, but my attention span is painfully short and I find reading extremely difficult, even if it’s a story I’m invested in. It doesn’t feel like that is a problem with my mind, though; more with my body. I need visual stimulation or to be up and running around. Sitting still and concentrating is the most difficult part of reading for me… Concentration is my Achilles’ heel. [Literacy History]

It is interesting that Kris found “reading extremely difficult” yet saw herself as a “good reader.” Perhaps this was a consequence of her view of reading: she recognized that she was adept at word recognition and had a “fascination with words” and was able to “read” with fluency; requiring concentration, comprehension was considered a secondary component of what it means to read. This view was illustrated further in an anecdote Kris shared about teaching her son to read. She had pushed him to sound out words in board books which, according to Kris, her son “hated” to do, so she “tricked him” by giving him his own iPod loaded with music. As a result, he learned to read the artists’ names on the playlist. “Slowly, but surely, he had to figure out how to read if he wanted to hear a particular song…Today, he’s well above grade level in
reading but struggles with comprehension” [Literacy History]. With this statement, Kris put forth the view of reading as decoding and word recognition; in her thinking, comprehension was separate from the whole of reading.

Early in the course, then, Kris focused on psychological/cognitive dimensions of literacy and literacy pedagogy with the use of phrases such as “…genetics…a ceiling of learning” and descriptors that included “phonics [and] memory,” emphasizing a predisposition or aptitude for literacy learning. As it turned out, Kris held fast to this cognitive emphasis on literacy throughout the course and beyond. She asked questions regarding connections between literacy teaching and psychology toward the end of an early journal response: “Does literacy education tie to a particular theory in psychology? Is there a method or style that works best? For example, behaviorism works well on autistic children” [Journal 4]. With her strong background in psychology, Kris was seeking a psychological theory to explain the whole of literacy learning and teaching.

However, Kris also saw literacy as learning (or possibly that literacy and learning are one and the same), as she demonstrated with this statement: “I guess literacy is exercised daily at my house; I just never pulled it apart from the rest of learning before” [Literacy History]. The view of literacy expressed here seemed to be more expansive than a decoding or word calling view of reading and, in fact, implied that literacy is a part of all learning. Holding competing ideas with regard to literacy, Kris recognized literacy as a process and a part of all learning but frequently projected a simple view in her written responses and assignments.

**Developing Conceptions Literacy in the Content Area**

**Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions in the Contact Zone: Coursework**

Below, I tell the story of Kris’s experiences with our coursework, highlighting the ways her beliefs and practices bumped up against our course content. These intersections caused
tensions that challenged Kris’s beliefs and helped her articulate—by degrees—expanded notions of literacy and the role of literacy in history/social studies pedagogy. Kris’s responses to topics surrounding assigned readings, discussions, and demonstrations during our class sessions are captured below. With regard to assigned readings, on a number of occasions, Kris responded to the wrong reading because she used older editions of our course texts. At other times, when the articles were made available online, she followed our syllabus and was on the same page as her peers.

**Expanding concepts of the role of literacy in history/social studies pedagogy.** In response to a reading that distinguished literacy from content literacy and reading fiction from reading informational text, she wrote, “I never actually thought about how reading one is different from another.” She continued, commenting on the characteristics of content area texts and the notion of organizing texts for different purposes, writing, “something so simple as realizing the structure of these books never occurred to me…” Although she preferred “fiction to a book of math problems” she concluded, “thinking of that helps me understand why text books need to be engaging…it’s easy to mentally check out…”[Journal 2a]

In this journal excerpt, Kris expressed an expansion of her thinking around content area reading and informational texts. She continued, making a personal connection regarding the role of both interest and prior knowledge:

I enjoy reading history so if I pick up a book on the Romanovs, it is easy for me to understand it because I know background information and can place it amid my previous knowledge of Russian and world history…Again, it never dawned on me to analyze this process. [Journal 2a]
From this inward-looking response, it was clear that Kris’s thinking around texts and content teaching and learning had been stimulated. She recognized the roles of interest and background knowledge in building comprehension.

**Academic language, cultural issues, and perspective.** In a response to Judith Baker’s (2002) essay, “Trilingualism,” Kris wrote that she agreed with Baker in that educators (and society) “think from a right/wrong-only perspective.” Providing evidence for her thinking, Kris continued,

> I like Baker’s analysis and rationale. She points out that, at times, her students are forced to choose between their culture and seeming uneducated. This is an issue that I have worked on with kids in the past. If they sound too intelligent, their family thinks they are trying to seem better than their heritage. If they continue to speak incorrect but understandable English, they run the risk of appearing uneducated or ignorant to others. I also like how [Baker] took the time to understand her students’ home language first. Simply taking an interest can mean so much and increase a child’s motivation to learn or adapt…I’ve always been a fan of class discussion…kids go to school with certain prejudices and/or ideas about life and maintain them for 13 years without so much as considering a different viewpoint because it’s not mentioned. [Journal 2b]

In this journal excerpt, Kris surfaced the theme of perspective which remained fairly constant throughout her semester coursework. Although she claimed to support discussion as an effective learning approach in the classroom, she did not carry this through in her lesson demonstrations (see below). Kris did, however, provide a picture of how this way of thinking about language and culture would influence her future teaching, asserting, “I will validate that it is fine for them to speak a certain way at certain times.” [Journal 2b] Toward the end of this journal response, Kris stated that she was curious about how much time she should dedicate to language issues “as a
social studies or special ed teacher” [Journal 2b]. Kris was conflicted here. She admired the author’s approach to accommodating her secondary English students’ home language practices while learning to expand their repertoires with the use of academic literacy, and she agreed with this practice—to a point. Kris would allow her students to speak “certain ways” at “certain times” and questioned how much time would need to be devoted to supporting students’ expanding linguistic repertoire.

Kris shared an anecdote about transferring from a school in the northeast to a school in Florida as a middle school student and learning about “The War of Northern Aggression”:

I had no idea what that was. The problem wasn’t a lack of education or a lack of understanding the material. It was that in New York, we call this The Civil War. It was a different perspective that I wasn’t aware of. Examples like this need to be kept in mind when teaching students from various backgrounds. They may have learned different terms and/or ideals regarding a subject…I am also a strong believer that a lot can be inferred by what is not said. [Journal 3]

Here again, Kris’s response emphasized perspective. She had made a connection to personal experience and seemed to resonate with these ideas. Concluding this journal, Kris referenced Vygotsky, the importance of scaffolding and differentiating instruction, and being “a student-centered teacher” [Journal 3].

Questions regarding perspective surfaced again in Kris’s response to a self-selected article on critical practice in social studies teaching that she found in a journal published by the National Council on the Social Studies. Kris was in agreement with the article authors who argued the importance of taking a critical stance on historical accounts; she agreed that the views and values of text authors were reflected in historical writing and should be viewed as subjective rather than objective accounts. She wrote,
We’ve been talking about culture in class and I see how this is relevant to our lectures and discussions…we need to be aware of the author’s agenda. I believe it is possible for the author to not have an overt agenda and still sway to a particular side…I wonder if I have a bias. I try, consciously, to be objective but I’m sure I have strong opinions that are opposed. Should teachers stay neutral on topics? Are they just a medium by which to share information or do their experiences and opinions count as part of the lesson?

[Professional Organization Website/Journal Article]

Here, Kris’s comments and questions were thoughtful and reflexive. As she turned the lens on herself, questions about objectivity, neutrality, and the teacher’s role emerged. Kris had an inclination to work in critical ways, but was uncertain about what this would look like in the classroom. In week four of our course, by choosing this article, Kris had serendipitously set the stage for later assigned readings and discussions involving building critical awareness and promoting critical practices.

**Content literacy strategies: Expressed beliefs and practices.** In response to a reading on planning for content literacy, the use of various web resources, and tools of technology, Kris claimed, “teaching in the 21st century is very different than in the past… the teacher needs to make [learning] applicable socially, personally, and cognitively.” She wondered “whether you can be too creative…too artsy” and that in attempting to meet the technological demands of 21st century classrooms, learning may not be “academic enough” [Journal 5]. Kris acknowledged the impact of technology on teaching content but had reservations that it might be used in superficial ways. Her thinking about creativity was pushed, however, in response to an article on using multiple literacies in teaching US history. Animated, she “was sincerely inspired” and “whipped out a piece of paper and began writing a list of creative ways that I could teach US history and government.” She agreed with the author’s premise that to make history come alive,
students need to “understand the emotional side of history just as much as the intellectual.” Kris asserted, “If you want the facts to become real, you need to make students feel what people of the past felt.” Then, surprisingly, she walked back from this assertion:

While I think this is a great way to teach, I’ve always worried that administrators and parents won’t agree. It kind of goes against the status quo…I wonder if I’ll encounter any resistance if/when I attempt this in my own classroom. I wonder if it is possible to go too far from the mainstream. [Journal 6]

As a site of tension, Kris’s enthusiasm for critical and creative practices was abruptly tempered as she imagined the possibility of “resistance” from administrators and parents. The pull of the familiar, that is, the transmission of historical “facts” was a mainstream practice and one she was not inclined to thwart at this point in her teacher preparation.

In response to a reading around classroom structures that support adolescent literacy development, Kris argued that literacy teaching and learning is the purview of all content area teachers, stating succinctly, “if [students] can’t read, they need to be taught.” [Journal 8].

Referring to anticipatory activities as a means of engaging students, she commented,

I have a teacher now who is great at making us interested in the material, but I often think that her methods are almost too distracting. I wonder where the fine line lies…I’d like to apply this to my classroom if I could do it in a curiosity/higher order thinking way…ask opinionated questions for discussion or ask students to pick a side and argue…the ability to change one’s perspective, even momentarily (for the sake of debate) requires a lot of intelligence. A student has to let go of their own beliefs and knee-jerk reactions to information.” [Journal 8]
In Kris’s view, student interest can be fostered with “higher order thinking” practices such as engaging in debate, taking on different perspectives, and suspending beliefs for the sake of argument.

Throughout the adolescent literacy course, we examined an array of tools and strategies for enhancing content area learning. Kris critiqued the use of graphic organizers, asserting that although “memory and retention are strengthened,” they are “…just trendy and not very useful…I don’t like that some graphic organizers try to regulate thought…trying to make all students think uniformly. I plan to be a wacky liberal teacher who has unconventional methods that work…” [Journal 9]. Kris critiqued conventional methods of vocabulary study recalling personal experiences “frantically trying to memorize definitions in high school and then forgetting them as soon as I turned in my test” [Journal 10]. She queried, “Why not take the time to figure out what the best method is and then trick the students into learning rather than blaming them when they don’t pick it up your way?!?” [Journal 10].

Kris was seeking a “best method” that would “trick” students into learning. In the course we discussed ways to help students develop awareness of how they learn as well as how to be strategic learners (i.e., use of metacognitive strategies). Kris continued, writing, “I agree that vocabulary helps students’ comprehension…because I believe the problem with comprehension is vocabulary.” Her view that difficulties with comprehension were exclusively or predominantly an issue of vocabulary knowledge is problematic. In the course, we examined vocabulary as a component of comprehension, not the whole of it. This limited understanding may have precluded Kris’s development of professional knowledge for supporting students’ comprehension of disciplinary text (for example, teaching and practicing making inferences, determining importance, monitoring, etc.).
Content literacy lessons. Although Kris wanted to be identified as a “wacky liberal” teacher who planned to use “unconventional methods” in her future teaching, she also held fast to “mainstream” practices that wouldn’t disrupt the “status quo” [Journal 6]. Despite her assertions about using alternative methods in her future teaching, Kris showed little evidence of this in her teaching demonstrations. Her work employed largely conventional, teacher-centered methods, as described below.

The target audience for Kris’s content area read aloud demonstration was 9th grade social studies. Saying only, “It pertains to my content area,” Kris provided no substantive rationale for her selection, the topic of which was “the discovery of new lands.” Kris shared a few before- and after-reading questions she had developed but did not suggest questions to ask during the reading. She proceeded to read aloud a litany of facts, superficially strung together, with little to no context to anchor participants nor compel them to listen to this text read aloud. Kris had not adhered to the assignment guidelines and did not incorporate course content (e.g., during reading strategies; scaffolding techniques) into her lesson idea. The demonstration did not align with Kris’s expressed beliefs about the use of creative, unconventional, and/or “higher order thinking” practices.

Critical awareness and classroom discussion. Kris was “glad” she read the chapter, “Reflecting on reading,” in our one of our course texts (Alvermann, et al., 2010) that included ways to promote critical awareness and use discussion techniques in content area classroom. Supported in an earlier journal response [Journal 8], Kris foresaw discussion “as being my primary method of instruction.” She continued,

Discussion is more akin to how we utilize the material taught in social studies outside of school. Teaching the skill of discussion intelligently is as much of a goal for me as is getting the dates and facts correct. This also coincides with literacy in general because
some of the biggest inhibitors of literacy are lack of vocabulary and lack of fluency.

[Journal 11]

Kris maintained that discussion would be her primary method of instruction. Yet, there may not be room for discussion when her conceptualization of history teaching and learning seemed to privilege facts, dates, and correctness as demonstrated in the lesson described above.

Kris continued this journal asserting that discussion teaches diplomacy where students “learn how to be critical of other opinions and discuss them politely…bear[ing] in mind not only their own beliefs, but those of fellow students…” Kris valued the exchange of ideas but qualified the circumstances of the practice, adding, “The only downfall I see to this is that it could be very tangential since every student brings something else into the classroom…Different beliefs, experiences, and expectations can lead the class off track. It is the responsibility of the teacher to prevent and correct this if/when it happens” [Journal 11]. As a site of tension, Kris’s belief in the power of discussion for content learning bumped up against language of constraint and correctness. Specifying constraints, Kris endorsed discussion and critique where the teacher’s role is to control and “correct” when/if the conversation veered from the intended topic(s).

In response to another reading on critical literacy as comprehension, Kris wrote,

It is important to teach students how to think critically. They need to step outside of the author’s voice and analyze what is truth, what is fabricated, and what is omitted…Sometimes it isn’t that the author is being intentionally misleading, they simply are viewing it through a different lens. [Journal 12]

As she had done in earlier work [Professional Organization Website/Journal Article], Kris brought perspective and analytical skills to the fore. She described a Latin American History textbook she used recently that, in a discussion of Christopher Columbus, “completely glossed over the fact that the natives were invaded, brutally attacked, threatened, killed… and
enslaved… which is kind of a significant detail that shouldn’t have been absent” [Journal 12].

Kris continued,

As a teacher, it will be my job to teach students to be critical readers… Teaching kids to be critical thinkers empowers them. They become more open minded and fluid when it comes to different viewpoints. I will most definitely be holding on to this. Especially since my content area is social studies and there are many different accounts of the same event. I just wonder if this could confuse kids, though. Or make them distrust everyone. [Journal 12]

Making connections to her experiences with disciplinary texts, Kris seemed to resonate with the most salient ideas put forth in the article. She articulated the need for critical practice in social studies pedagogy. Yet, while she wrote convincingly about “definitely holding on to” critical practice, she wondered if such practice would “confuse” students and cause them to “distrust everyone.” As a site of tension, Kris revealed competing beliefs: though she valued critical practice, she was also pulled strongly toward teaching through a single lens—a comfort zone—using “facts” that project a particular, uncluttered “truth.”

Learner stance. As a learner, Kris welcomed challenges. For the Reading Circle activity, Kris elected to read a math oriented trade book, *The golden ratio: The story of PHI, the world’s most astonishing number* by Mario Livio because she was “curious about the concept.” She joined a group comprised of four math education majors. In her reading circle journal, she wrote, “Even though I’m not a math major, I like understanding things like certainty…there are universal truths.” Interestingly, the math education majors appreciated Kris’s perspective and questions. During the group’s presentation, Cara (a math major) commented,
Our group was really interesting ‘cause Kris—she’s not a math major—so she brought in her perspective of how she felt [about] different concepts… all of us are math majors, so we kind of knew where it was coming from, so it was good to have her perspective.”

Kris reciprocated, “It was good to have them teach me things that I didn’t know…” This sentiment was underscored in Kris’s reflective letter to me about the reading circle activity.

I’m glad I chose “Phi” for our reading circle assignment. Not only did I get an opportunity to read about something I know very little of, but I did it with others who are familiar, which increased the meaning I was able to extract from it. [Reading Circle/Reflective Letter]

Here, Kris privileges a particular view of learning: knowledge is “extract[ed]” rather than built from text; a view at odds with her expressions of constructivist alignment. Kris’s content literacy teaching lesson provides an empirical evidence of this.

Rather than work with a peer, Kris chose to work independently on the literacy strategy lesson assignment. She developed a social studies/history lesson on ancient Greece for a 9th grade audience. While her objective was not stated explicitly, she expected students to learn about and compare ancient to modern Olympics. Strategies used in her lesson included note taking and organizing notes to compare ancient and modern Olympics. Course participants were instructed to individually draw a Venn diagram graphic organizer. Kris distributed strips of paper each containing a few sentences from a cut-up text (taken from Internet) that compared ancient Greek Olympic games to modern day Olympics. She read aloud a short excerpt to begin the lesson and then instructed the whole group to listen closely as individuals read aloud their excerpts. Participants were to figure out how to order the excerpts and read aloud their sentences at the appropriate time. Their other task was to take notes on the graphic organizer. Finally, toward the
end of the lesson, participants completed the Venn diagram as they shared information in response to Kris’s questions.

Kris’s cursory use of literacy strategies (in her case, listening and note taking on the graphic organizer) in an IRE-structured lesson underscored the gap between Kris’s imagined and real practices. She demonstrated little incorporation of the adolescent literacy course content (e.g., use of an engaging text; deep learning of content within a true discussion format). As with her content area read aloud demonstration, this lesson made use of a text that presented history as decontextualized facts to be sequenced correctly. Despite opportunities for critiquing and evaluating content area texts (textbook evaluation assignment) and introducing compelling historical texts (annotated bibliographies, read aloud demonstrations, reading circle groups), Kris’s concept of history-as-facts persisted throughout our course.

**Persistence of previously held beliefs.** While Kris assembled the minimum number of strategies required for the Strategies Toolkit assignment, she neglected to compose an introduction or rationale, so I could only speculate as to her understanding of the role of literacy in history/social studies pedagogy. Adapted for a social studies classroom, Kris included strategies for vocabulary building, note making, and discussion formats, and incorporated various graphic organizers with examples using social studies topics. But it was her Final Reflection (a take home final) that revealed an apparent lack of understanding of or investment in the course content. Kris’s response to the prompt, How would you describe the importance and function of literacy within your specific content area?, was unusually brief:

Functional literacy is particularly important in the area of social studies. Simply put: the majority of material is read. Students must be able to extract and comprehend key points in order to store them in long-term memory and analyze them using executive level functioning. [Final Reflection]
Kris perfunctory response to this question, written at the conclusion of the semester-long adolescent literacy course, contrasted sharply with the more developed written work she had completed earlier in the semester (e.g., various journals and assignments) as well as with general comments made during class discussions. It is possible she did not understand the question. Perhaps glancing at the word “function” in the question prompted her thinking of “functional literacy.” This response, with terms and phrases such as “extract,” “store in long-term memory,” and “executive level functioning” reflected Kris’s psychological emphasis on literacy pedagogy—a lens she brought to the course and here seemed to elude much of the work we had done in class to forward both a social theory of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) as well as an awareness of content learning through literacy, that is, building content knowledge through transaction with disciplinary texts.

Revisiting Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions in the Contact Zone: Interview

Excerpts

The interview with Kris was conducted four months after our course had concluded. At the time of the interview, Kris had completed a January field period during the month-long break between fall and spring semesters, was currently enrolled in the second required adolescent literacy course in our teacher education program, and was preparing for student teaching the following semester. Kris’s beliefs about learning and her view of what history is are expanded and threaded through her evolving conceptualization of literacy in her content area. Illustrating the twisting path of teacher learning, Kris’s responses provide further evidence of inconsistencies between her practices and expressed beliefs about history/social studies pedagogy.

**Literacy practices observed in the field.** I asked Kris to talk about what she observed in her field period in terms of literacy. She responded first by saying, “I'm not very proud of my field period. I'm not. I'm not very inspired by it… it was kind of a disappointment”
and then continued, describing the first of two secondary teachers she had observed who assigned his seventh grade students an essay on colonization using specific content vocabulary. She continued,

And he sat down and actually wrote out the first paragraph for them and let them copy and paste it. It was like the introductory paragraph and this is probably about half an hour of hands raised and answering questions and he was getting frustrated…because it seemed like these kids had never known how to write an essay. So it really bothered me. Rather than teach them to fish he gave them the fish. He gave them, literally, the first paragraph start to finish…he sat down and did it for them and he would stand at the front of the computer lab and say okay and you know if you want to talk about this word, here’s how you could do it. And I’m just like what? You’re dictating an essay that they’re gonna hand back to you and you’re going to grade and what have they learned…?

Kris continued, contrasting the American history teacher with the global studies teacher who “seemed to have a better handle on things”:

He was more creative with his assignments. He would make a commercial or do a skit kind of stuff. And he had a lot of these really interesting packets…it wasn't just busy work…. I mean they discussed it…. all different kinds of stuff that they had to figure out….I guess it was seat work but the way he did it, you know, they discussed it. He would walk around and answer questions and every once in a while he'd stand up and say okay guys let’s talk about this. You know? I think that they had to internalize more information to answer the questions.

In the former account, Kris critiqued a questionable practice antithetical to constructivist pedagogy. She contrasted this problematic practice, in the latter account, with what she identified as a more beneficial way of teaching where students and teacher respond to questions.
through discussion and research, and where she perceived deeper learning occurred. In practice, our adolescent literacy course was largely centered around discussion (often in response to a text and/or a practical demonstration) as a means to build comprehension and content knowledge. We emphasized the value of discussion/dialogue/conversation as a lesson format for teaching and learning in the content areas. In contrast to her demonstration lessons the previous semester, with this critique, in her field observations, Kris recognized effective practices and articulated an understanding of the value of talk for student learning.

**History and history pedagogy.** As illustrated in the following anecdotes, Kris’s concepts of history and history pedagogy were barriers central to her realizing a constructivist approach to teaching. Relying on her experiences of teaching as transmission, she had yet to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

*Just the facts...* Kris’s view of history-as-facts drove her practice of orally quizzing students during her field experience:

I’d be like, so, what did you guys learn today? You have to be able to give me one fact and they’re like, I don't know. I would push them and push them and they couldn't give me one fact... so that's how the question thing started... [Interview]

She was compelled to start “the question thing” both in and out of the classroom:

There are certain things that I would rattle off and shout out. I’d be walking down the hall... and I'd point at somebody and I'd be like...what did Martin Luther do, you know, or what was the Zion Movement all about? It started off as the kids were looking at me, like what is wrong with you, and then it got to the point where they would run up and they would shout facts at me or I wouldn't let them walk out the door. I'd be like, wait a minute, you need to tell me about the Balfour Declaration...and that was kind of like...their exit pass and, but because I was so, you know, I'm kind of a bouncy goofy
person anyway and I didn't—I wasn't holding their feet to the fire and it wasn't a formal assessment... [Interview]

Students responded to Kris’s game-like informal assessment. As discussed above, and in evidence here, in Kris’s experience and practice, much of history learning involved memorizing and repeating facts. Despite her expressed support of a constructivist approach to pedagogy, critical practices, and discussion formats, it appeared as though had Kris maintained her conception of pedagogy as the transmission of historical facts.

“The way I saw it…” Given time and distance from our coursework, I asked Kris to reflect on her content area read aloud demonstration (facts about “the discovery of new lands”) from the previous semester in our course. She responded,

I think… since my background is more in psychology, I know that pretesting helps you retain more information, then you learn the lesson and then you test again and so I think it was more just a strategy, not that I would actually… Hmm I don't know what I'm trying to explain, what I'm trying to say…that if those were a set of facts that, say, for the regents, you know it's a constant... And I think it was more the way I saw it in my head. I guess obviously not from the external point-of-view. It was more like checking to say okay are you guys paying attention? [Interview]

Kris was circumspect in discussing her read aloud demonstration, choosing not to approach constructive criticism, but choosing instead to rationalize her thinking. She recognized the influence her psychology background had on her pedagogical practices, but didn’t extend her thinking—at this moment—to consider how the demonstration might have been different.

**Learning and critical practice.** During the course, Kris’s thinking had been animated as we explored the topic of critical approaches in relation to content literacy teaching and
learning. She had more to say about the role of critical practices in history pedagogy in the interview:

I mean as far as I’m concerned kids…don’t have to memorize anything these days. They just have to learn how to synthesize and analyze it all… separate the fact from the fiction, and you know, understand the agenda behind it, but yeah… I do think that factual information… that’s part of the comprehension… Like you have to be able to know Christopher Columbus did this, or so and so did this. You have to be able to internalize that and know it in order to piece it all together in your head. So I think, I mean, I would like to think the students should memorize certain things. [Interview]

Kris was accommodating a complex notion of learning that includes coupling facts and memory with skills of analysis and synthesis. I asked Kris about how she planned to engage in critical practice in her future teaching. She responded,

Well social studies is gonna be easy. I mean I can say go to Fox News, go to MSNBC. Read a headline about, you know, a given topic that’s popular that day and tell me what you think. You know, it really is as simple as that. I mean there are so many contrasting opinions in politics and history that the sources aren’t gonna be hard to find. [Interview]

Talking about the complexities of teaching history, Kris continued,

…it sparks these huge things and people get, they're so invested in it and I think that's the other thing about social studies content… it becomes this political thing…truth shouldn't be political and neither should education…I could keep [controversy] out of my classroom and just keep it fun and uplifting [but] I want them to argue. I don't think a lot of people can do that articulately and intelligently and stay calm. [Interview]

While Kris was interested in having her students examine controversial issues from various points of view, she pulled back from fully recognizing the political nature of the historical content she’ll
be teaching. In the course the previous semester, Kris had raised a question about being “neutral” in the context of political issues [Professional Organization Website/Journal Article]. Despite her reservations and concerns about critical practices, from this excerpt, it seemed she intended to be a critical practitioner—or at the very least, she would use a variety of resources representing “contrasting opinions” in her future teaching.

**Content area literacy conceptualized.** I asked Kris to expand on an idea she’d expressed early in the course in her Literacy History, about literacy as a process rather than as something one does or doesn’t have. She immediately picked it up:

I was referring to the workings of my mind because I have a really difficult time focusing to say the least… Yeah, and I've slowly learned little techniques to kind of keep me channeled in to, you know, attention land. But when you're reading I think that's the hardest part... but I just I drift… If you actually want to retain anything it has to go through the proper channels of your mind into memory. Like, you know, the psychological things of that, of like, short-term memory, transitioning into long-term memory. So it wasn't just simply... You know, we learned that in class too, not just being able to call out the words on the thing. It's being able to comprehend them and part of that, I think, has to do a lot with attention in memory as well. [Interview]

Kris emphasized cognitive processes involved in reading and building comprehension as she recognized her own challenges with attention and focus. Referring to “memory,” she recognized the role that prior knowledge plays in the process of comprehension. Kris then revealed an interesting point of view about herself as a reader:

One thing that… the literacy classes that we've taken here…probably the most valuable thing that I've learned, is like, I didn't realize how illiterate I was in a lot of things… Somebody pointed out to me, you know, what about reading like a [technology] manual,
and I was like, you're right, I don't do that cause I hate it. I refuse. This is what it must feel like to read a social studies textbook to somebody else. [Interview]

In our adolescent literacy class the semester before, we had discussed this topic at length: the idea that we’re all struggling readers in some texts. Kris interpreted this idea as being “illiterate.” Yet, she was able to compare her struggles with particular texts to that of a student struggling to comprehend a social studies textbook, an experience that will undoubtedly inform her future teaching.

**Sourcing.** I asked Kris to describe how she thinks the literacy skills needed for learning history might be different from the skills need to learn biology. She responded,

> More than anything, more than I think any discipline, social studies you have to pay attention to the source. You have to pay attention to where it's coming from because I don't know if you've had a chance to read *Lies My Teacher Told Me*... But there's a lot of alternative histories and I think more than anything...I want to be more of a constructivist kind of teacher. I want to teach kids how to think. You know? And I think offering them the different...what's the word I'm looking for? Choices, the different voices, the different genres, the different anything. Anything that's opposing and letting them find out where their own personal compass is...[Interview]

Kris’s understanding of sourcing\(^8\) as key to the study of history aligns with the literature on the reading processes of disciplinary experts (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia, 2011). Although not evidenced in her practices, Kris was imagining herself as a “constructivist kind of teacher,” who will teach kids how to think as opposed to what to think, though her evolving understanding of

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\(^8\) Sourcing examines where the information comes from, who the author or authors are and their affiliations, and the form or genre of the document (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia, 2011, p. 405).
what this looks like in practice had not yet been realized (see below); her thinking was changing before her practices (Richardson et al., 1991).

“*I want to be the kind of teacher who’s…*” Toward the end of the interview, I asked Kris what she will bring to the world of teaching. She paused and said, “I’m pretty wacky,” then continued,

…I'd like to think that I'm not a very judgmental person and that I'm a fairly creative person… I'd like to think that I can bestow that upon my classroom. And more than anything, I see teaching as being a role model first and foremost before any education comes out of your mouth. Just standing in front of a classroom, how you present yourself is everything. I've been in the entertainment industry for like 14 years as an actress and I know that the moment I walk in the door that's when the audition begins… More than anything, I want to be the kind of teacher who’s like ‘cool, if you think I'm wrong you go find it…if you don't understand this, if you don't want to take this test, then you and I are gonna sit down and we're gonna come up with a creative way for you to show me, for you to demonstrate this knowledge to me, cause, bottom line, I need you to understand this. That's what I'm here to do, to show you information…Find a way to show me that you know this stuff. [Interview]

Here, Kris imagined accommodating all of her future students. High expectations were part of her plan. She saw herself as firm but fair; she was determined to facilitate her students’ learning and hold them to particular outcomes in a flexible manner. For Kris, being “nonjudgmental” and “creative” were virtues to “bestow” upon her future students. Contrasting these sentiments with the teacher-centered, transmission-style discourse in her demonstrations during our course, it was clear that Kris’s thinking was indeed changing before her practices; she was in the process
of bridging the gap between her beliefs and beliefs-in-use (Risko, et al., 2008). Concluding the interview, Kris asserted,

...I mean I just, I feel like I'm stronger in literacy than I can demonstrate to you right now. Like I know from your class, it's not something that I can point out and say I learned this, but I know somewhere down the line I'm gonna be like, wait a minute, I know what I can do. [Interview]

This statement succinctly captured a teacher-in-the-making. Kris’s pedagogical knowledge was still very much under construction as she continued her teacher preparation. She was confident and that she would be able to call up what she’d learned (and what she will continue to learn) about the processes involved in developing literacy and literacy in her content area.

**Coda**

As a preservice secondary history/social studies education major, Kris brought a wealth of real world experience to our adolescent literacy course. Her experiences in schooling, work experiences in the military and civilian worlds, experiences as a parent, background in psychology, and teacher preparation coursework shaped her engagements with the adolescent literacy coursework. This chapter explored the ways (1) Kris’s conceptualization of literacy in her discipline was influenced by her beliefs about learning and her understanding of what history *is*, and (2) that Kris’s expressed beliefs, practices, and new learning were often incompatible. These themes were integrally connected.

Kris’s concept of literacy and literacy in her content area was focused largely on the cognitive processes involved in reading and comprehension. Using terms such as “memory” and “phonics” [Literacy Questionnaire] and “genetics” [Course Expectations Card], Kris—though she recognized the importance of context [Literacy Questionnaire] and process in literacy learning [Literacy History]—transacted with coursework through a psychological lens with an
emphasis on individual, cognitive skill development. This lens worked to hinder Kris’s understanding of a social theory of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) as forwarded in the course.

Mismatching discourses. While Kris recognized literacy as a process and a part of all learning, she frequently projected a simple view of literacy: decoding was separate from comprehension and comprehension was a matter of vocabulary knowledge [Literacy History; Journal 10, 11]. While she viewed literacy learning as a developmental process [Literacy History; Journal 2a], learning history was about accumulating facts [Journal 6; Content Area Read Aloud; Journal 11, Reading Circle session 3; Content Literacy Teaching Lesson]. She professed to holding constructivist ideals with regard to teaching and learning at the secondary level [Journal 7; Interview], but her actual practices in class and in her field experience did not reflect this approach [Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Teaching Lesson; Interview]. Kris’s highly teacher-centered lessons lie in stark contrast to her recommendation to “be a student-centered teacher” [Journal 3]. While emphasizing multiple perspectives on historical issues [Journals 2b, 3] and wanting to work in a “curiosity/higher order thinking way” [Journal 8], Kris’s teacher-led (i.e., IRE) demonstration lessons were comprised of questions that had one correct answer [Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Strategy Lesson]. Kris was interested in developing her students’ critical reading skills [Journal 12] and juxtaposing historical and contemporary social studies texts, but did not want class discussions to become political because “truth” as she saw it, “shouldn’t be political” [Interview]. She expressed flexibility with regard to assessing student learning, but in practice, quizzed students demanding memorized factual information [Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Strategy Lesson; Interview]. For Kris, historical knowledge was “extract[ed]” not built [Reading Circle Reflective Letter; Final Reflection]. Even though she recognized and seemed to affirm new approaches (e.g., using
multimedia) to teaching social studies [Interview], and self-identified as “creative,” “wacky,” and “liberal” [Journal 9; Interview], Kris found comfort in certainty [Reading Circle Journal] and the status quo [Journal 6], holding fast to an inculcated, teacher-centered pedagogical model in her lesson demonstrations.

**Shifting ever so slightly.** Across the semester, there was evidence of degrees of movement toward a broader view of literacy and its role in teaching and learning history/social studies content. Kris’s initial definition of literacy as “reading and comprehension” was expanded to include language and communication practices [Journal 1, 8; Interview]. She recognized the role of text structure in building comprehension [Journal 2a] and the role of interest and prior knowledge in adolescent literacy development and content learning [Journal 2a, 4, 8]. Perhaps most critically—and as a promising departure from seeing history-as-facts—Kris aimed to teach her future students how to think, not what to think [Journal 12; Interview].

Also evidenced in Kris’s coursework were ideas in play. She recognized and disclosed the attention and focus challenges she faced as a reader. These personal literacy struggles [Literacy History; Journal 8; Interview] informed and will continue to inform her future pedagogical decisions. The combination of Kris’s interest in history [Journal 2a], her energy and enthusiasm for working with youth [Interview], and especially her contrasting theoretical/practical approaches to teaching and learning [Journals 5, 6, 12; Professional Organization Website/Journal Article; Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Teaching Lesson; Interview] revealed an engaged, lively mind very much in process of becoming a teacher.

For Kris, content learning through literacy, as she understood it, was not in question: she endorsed the use of literacy strategies (e.g., discussion, tapping prior knowledge, note-taking) and practices critical to history pedagogy (e.g., debate; sourcing). Although a concern about time surfaced in one of her early journals, she did not see literacy as a curricular “add-on.”
Questions to carry forward. As a student in our adolescent literacy course, Kris was a frequent contributor to whole and small group discussion. She was generally animated and engaged in these conversations and other students listened and responded to her in positive ways. It was interesting to contrast her disposition as student (learner) with that of her in-class teaching demonstrations (both the Content Area Read Aloud and the Content Literacy Strategy Lesson) where she clearly reverted back to teacher-led, transmission-style teaching. The constructivist model, while appealing to her intellectually and in practice as a college student herself, was not incorporated into her lesson designs except in the most superficial ways. Ultimately, she fell short of enacting her theorizing with regard to constructivist pedagogical approaches and more expansive notions of content literacy [Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Teaching Lesson; Literacy Strategies Toolkit; Final Reflection].

Kris’s journey brings to sharp relief the tensions produced at the intersections of beliefs, theory, and practice. Her epistemological beliefs about learning and literacy in her discipline, as well as her stance of history-as-facts contrasted sharply with constructivist approaches, her critique of binary thinking, and her expressed inclination to work in critical ways. This stark contrast between her espoused beliefs and her practice provides evidence that her thinking was changing before her practices (Richardson et al., 1991). Her beliefs-in-use (Risko et al., 2008) were incompatible with her expressed beliefs, which remained at the level of discourse. What situational factors might have been provided in coursework that would at once avoid misrecognition (or no implementation) of theoretical assumptions and afford development to the level of practice? What tools or supports might have prevented Kris, an engaged learner for the better part of the semester, from abruptly disengaging and reverting to expressions of unexamined lay theories [Final Reflection] toward the end of the semester? Had she “mentally check[ed] out…” [Journal 2a]. This chasm between Kris’s expressed beliefs and their practical
application was full of untapped possibilities for building professional knowledge. As I see it, the biggest obstacle for Kris to overcome is her view of history-as-facts to be extracted and memorized: shifting her epistemological stance is a first step in building the bridge that connects her expressed beliefs with practices that reflect those beliefs.
Chapter Seven: Elise

I just like math because it’s logical and you follow like a step-by-step procedure and for the majority of things, if you get this result… it always means the same thing. Even though the way to get to the result may be different, it always means the same thing…I like a final answer.

—Elise, math education major [Interview]

A math education major, Elise’s epistemological stance and distinct disciplinary habits of mind impacted her navigation of course content as she sought literacy practices and strategies relevant and applicable to mathematics pedagogy. While Elise demonstrated applications of course content for teaching math concepts, she was unconvinced of the utility of literacy in her discipline. Two major themes emerged as Elise engaged in coursework across the semester: (1) Elise’s concepts of what math is and what secondary math teaching and learning look like influenced her understanding of course content; and (2) efforts to conceptualize literacy broadly and build an understanding of its utility for teaching mathematics content were met with ever-increasing skepticism. In this case study, I explore the ways Elise’s engagements with coursework brought to sharp relief the tensions involved in developing a mathematics content literacy lens and provided an opportunity to reexamine traditional, generic “literacy messages” that often neglect, deemphasize, or misrepresent mathematics (Siebert & Draper, 2008).

Initial Conceptualization: View of Literacy and Literacy Learning

Elise, a traditional age college student and a math education major, began the focal course in the first semester of her third year in college. As described in Chapter Three, she was one of nine secondary math education majors in a group of 20 students enrolled in our adolescent literacy course. From the beginning of the course, Elise seemed interested in connecting literacy and math, as demonstrated in her responses on the Course Expectations Card. She wrote, “I expect this course to teach me ways to help my students read and
comprehend a math textbook” and that she hoped that she would “learn how to use literacy skills in a math classroom/ promote literacy.”

Initially, Elise’s conceptualization of literacy, although largely focused on reading and comprehension, also included the dimensions of talk and questioning in a social context. In response to the Literacy Questionnaire, completed in writing during our first class, Elise defined literacy as “the learning of how to read and interpret what is read.” Interestingly, of the four focal participants, hers was the only response to include the idea of interpretation in a definition of literacy. As a math education major, perhaps she was reflecting the idea that mathematical language, with its particular discourse, structure, and symbols, must be interpreted to be understood. Elise wrote that we learn literacy “through reading, critical thinking questions, and discussion,” and that we teach literacy “by creating an engaging environment that fosters question[s], discussion, thinking, and critical responses.” Her view of literacy also involved questions and questioning. In response to the prompt, How do we use literacy?, Elise wrote “in everyday life we think about and question what is read and what it means.” Clearly, Elise’s conception of literacy went beyond simply reading to include thinking, questioning, and talk that is not necessarily confined to the classroom.

Elise indicated that she had no difficulties learning to read and write in elementary school and described having home support from her grandmother and mother [Literacy History]. Elise used the word “interpret” again in her Literacy History as she responded to the prompt, How has literacy fit into your life in the past? “Every person needs to know how to read, write, and interpret things in order to be successful…these skills especially apply in school and the workforce.” Literacy was equated with success in both schooling and career. This was a prevalent theme in Elise’s work throughout the semester.
As a “pretty good reader and writer,” Elise explained that she used context clues and dictionaries to figure out unknown words. As a proficient reader, she had developed metacognitive fix-up strategies and recognized when she loses comprehension as well. She wrote, I sometimes find it difficult to understand dense content in texts, but I feel that my classes really help explain the content. I also use the [college’s academic support] office to help with paper editing on any major papers I have. [Literacy History]

To summarize, at the onset of our course, Elise’s view of literacy included cognitive, in-the-head processes such as “sounding out” [Literacy History], and beyond that, included interpreting, questioning, critical thinking, and discussion in “an engaging environment” as being important to learning and teaching literacy [Literacy Questionnaire]. Elise’s sense of literacy as practical emerged in her belief that everyone needs “literacy skills” to be “successful… in school and the workforce”[Literacy History].

**Developing Conceptions of Literacy in the Content Area**

**Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions in the Contact Zone: Coursework**

For Elise, sites of tension resided in developing and maintaining a broad view of literacy and in her perspective regarding the utility of literacy in math pedagogy. Below, I tell the story of Elise’s experiences with our coursework, tracing changes over time as she responded to topics surrounding assigned readings, discussions, and demonstrations during our class sessions.

With an evolving understanding that literacy involved more than reading, Elise explored this expanding view in the 24-hour literacy diary assignment [Journal 1] where she included examples of listening, viewing, and communicating electronically in both school related and non-school related contexts. In her second journal, Elise wrote, “Literacy in not just the reading of books, it includes using information, computers, new technologies, etc.” [Journal 2]. Here was a tentative indication that Elise would be open to exploring the role of literacy in learning generally
while building a deeper understanding of its dimensions. Her evolving perspective of literacy would assert itself as she transacted with our course texts and participated in discussions and activities across the semester.

**Situating literacy in mathematics pedagogy.** Connected to a developing a broad view of literacy, students were encouraged and supported in their efforts to consider the ways in which literacy processes facilitate content learning. For Elise, it was her opportunity to explore the ways math relates to literacy and literacy to math. As she engaged with our course content, two issues bubbled up that seemed most salient in this regard: the role of literacy in math pedagogy and teaching students to access a math textbook.

From the beginning of the course, Elise placed domain knowledge front and center with literacy as a tentative support or resource for getting at that domain knowledge.

…literacy learning can have a place in math. Math can be considered by many to be a different language. It is necessary for students to learn how to interpret the different numbers and symbols in order to succeed in math. I hope this literacy class gives me the tools that I can use with my students to help them develop an understanding of math and how it connects to ‘real life.’ [Literacy History]

Responding to an early reading on content literacy and reading processes, Elise indicated that her thinking has been revised, writing, “I always associated literacy with simply reading. Literacy is more the acquisition of knowledge and how it can be applied” [Journal 2]. Here, Elise articulated that her initial conception of literacy had shifted somewhat and now included building and using knowledge. She recognized a previous line of thinking as inadequate and began to develop a wider view of literacy in terms of its function in schooling and beyond. In thinking about how this expanded notion of literacy might influence her future teaching, Elise brought both domain knowledge and literacy into view, reiterating the need to teach students to
interpret mathematical language/symbols and connect math to “real life.” As expressed below her expanded view included literacy across a lifetime. She began to articulate an advocacy for literacy, wondering how she could help her future students understand “that literacy is an important life skill, not just something they need in high school” [Journal 2].

In response to an assigned reading concerning language, diversity, and culture in relation to literacy learning where the authors discuss interrupting the status quo by using strategies that support students’ examination of the sources of their ideas and values, Elise asserted that she would address the issue of gendered language found in classroom talk and text by making it “neutral.” She included ideas for how she might establish an inclusive classroom: “stress[ing] similarities, honor[ing] differences” and working with ESL/ELL teachers in an effort to “meet the needs of all students.” Elise then asked, “How can I be sure that I am not offending other students’ backgrounds when trying to include them in my lessons?” [Journal 3]. Here, Elise demonstrated an understanding of the complexity of “inclusion” and cultural competency while also expressing uncertainty about ways to accommodate and meet the diverse needs of her future students.

**Math-literacy connections.** Initially then, Elise was interested in making connections between math and other subject areas and in helping her future students access a math textbook. In response to a reading on planning for content literacy, Elise revealed that her thinking about content literacy had shifted, writing “I never thought about using literacy skills as objectives…but now I see how it is important” [Journal 5]. She further developed this idea of literacy as an organizing principle for connecting disciplines, asserting that doing so “can help me better tailor my lessons to meet the needs of all students and to teach them important literacy strategies that they can use across classes” as well as “help me improve my teaching” [Journal 5]. Though she does not name particular strategies, Elise, at this point four weeks into the course, was positive
toward literacy and open to embedding literacy strategies in her content teaching that would
transfer to other content areas. She would become less positive about doing so as evidenced later
in various written documents and post-course interview responses.

For Elise, “ways to use literacy in math classrooms” included “reading and
comprehension strategies” such as prereading and strategies for vocabulary development.
Concerned about student access to textbooks, Elise presented specific ideas for incorporating
literacy activities throughout the teaching/learning cycle that included using the textbook as
resource to verify and explain. Her plan included consulting literacy professionals and educating
herself on ways she might scaffold her students’ comprehension of text. However, from the
following questions, she indicated that the task would not be easily accomplished more broadly.

How/where can I address this issue in my school? What if literacy teachers don’t go for
the idea? How do I change the preconceived notions that literacy and math classrooms
aren’t a fit? [Journal 6]

Elise anticipated a lack of support for integrating literacy and math. There seemed to be a self-
awareness in her questions (e.g., “changing preconceived notions”); math-literacy connections
had not been part of her schooling experience.

“…they don’t know how…” In her response to an assigned reading on classroom and school
structures that support adolescent literacy development, Elise put forward a supposition as to why
math teachers might not take up the notion of ‘literacy’ as readily as teachers in other disciplines
might: “Math teachers need to incorporate texts into the classroom better. I think the reason they
don’t is that they don’t know how…” [Journal 8]. She continued with additional ideas for using
literacy as a tool for developing domain knowledge in a constructivist manner that included
scaffolding, using prior knowledge to build new knowledge, the use of graphic organizers, peer
partnering, and guided note taking. It was interesting to note that in this journal, Elise envisioned
herself as a knowledge-maker in the field of math education: as a future math teacher, she planned to bring content literacy ideas to professional conferences and also share her knowledge with colleagues.

Yet, despite these ideas for integrating literacy into math, Elise remained uncertain of actually being able to do this in her future teaching, adding, “I am concerned with incorporating these strategies into everyday lessons as a new teacher” [Journal 8]. In this statement, Elise stepped back from the above ideas for supporting literacy for content learning, expressing a real concern likely connected to anticipated time constraints and a view of literacy strategies as add-ons. She seemed to hold on to the view that literacy in math is extra, rather than moving toward the concept of content learning through literacy—an overarching principle of the adolescent literacy course.

**Trying on ideas: Considerations and rejections.**

*Demonstrations.* Developed for a 10th grade audience, Elise’s read aloud demonstration was focused on geometry. She selected *Sir cumference and the sword in the cone* (Neuschwander, 2003) because “it illustrates important formulas and facts,” such as algebraic expression, problem solving steps, and taking measurements “in a comical way.” The text presented geometry, shapes, and relationships between sides, points, and edges. Elise stated that she wanted “students to walk away with a better idea of the relationships between shapes, angles and sides of geometric shapes.” She included and demonstrated examples of questions to ask before, during, and after reading in her demonstration; these questions, written on post-it notes within the text, were especially helpful for building comprehension during reading. However, despite the relative success of her demonstration, as our course proceeded, Elise, in her written responses and later in her interview responses, was less likely to support the use of texts other than a math textbook in her teaching.
Elise, working with Cara, a fellow math education major, designed a lesson for a 7th grade audience that involved solving for x using the Pythagorean theorem. They utilized the PReP (pre-reading plan) strategy and the equation \(a^2 + b^2 = c^2\) to solve for x. PReP is a before reading strategy for assessing and organizing prior knowledge. Using manipulatives and a document projector, the lesson format involved both whole group and small group work/conversations on solving word problems using the theorem.

As per assignment guidelines, Elise and Cara developed a lesson using a literacy strategy to teach content. They demonstrated that the PReP strategy was effective for teaching a math concept and for solving word problems. Elise and Cara asked guiding questions to scaffold the learning and provided clear directions throughout the lesson. These ideas, pre-, during, and post-reading strategies, and promoting discussion for learning among participants, were focal topics examined throughout our adolescent literacy course. Despite the effectiveness of this lesson demonstration, as math education majors, both Elise and Cara remained unconvinced about the utility of literacy—as they understood it—in math pedagogy. They communicated and maintained a deep skepticism toward much of our coursework. As an example, during a demonstration of the discussion web (a graphic aid used to encourage students to contribute to a discussion around a central issue or question) (Alvermann et al., 2010) using a science-focused text, both Elise and Cara exclaimed, “how is this even related to math? I can’t see ever using this in math!” [Field note, 11/2]

Reflecting on reading/Promoting critical practices. In her response to an assigned reading on the value of reflecting on reading and promoting critical literacy practices, Elise asserted, “I don’t see using the majority of these discussion strategies in my math classroom. There aren’t many

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9 PReP consists of three phases: First, students brainstorm what they know about a topic or a particular vocabulary term. Associations are made between prior knowledge and the focal topic. Next, students reflect on initial associations through discussion and compare, extend, and/or adapt their prior knowledge. Finally, students reformulate their prior knowledge in light of new knowledge (Langer, 1981).
controversial issues in math that I feel need to be discussed” [Journal 11]. It is likely that she was referring to the authors’ discussion of teaching literacy to build critical awareness and incorporating critical media literacy into secondary content teaching.

Previously, in her journal responses, Elise had considered and written about discussion strategies such as peer partnering and questioning, but in this response where she flatly rejected the premise of critical practice, Elise projected a view that mathematics is binary: black/white, right/wrong. For Elise, math was a straightforward, objective body of knowledge for which there was little room for discussion.

After several class discussions and demonstrations and in response to a second reading on critical literacy as comprehension, Elise again rejected the notion that a critical approach is appropriate or necessary in mathematics pedagogy. Although she may have been interpreting critical literacy as critical reading, this assigned reading clearly did not resonate with Elise’s vision of herself as a future math teacher. She continued,

I am having trouble relating different perspectives in literacy to math. I understand that responding to text is important, but I am confused about different perspectives in math and how alternative texts can be used with facts. [Journal 12]

Elise believed that multiple perspectives were not found in mathematics education; in her view, facts are facts and cannot be disputed. Literacy was perceived here as a separate practice not related to teaching math content.

“Math is facts”. For the Reading Circle activity, Elise chose to join the group reading Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea by Charles Seife (2000), largely an historical account of the concept of zero as ingenious and powerful. In a transcript from a reading circle session, Elise’s affinity for math was clear. As a student of math and as a reader, she was compelled to ask questions, ask for clarification, and make connections to her own experiences, bringing prior
knowledge and learning to bear on her comprehension of the text. She admitted the concepts were “hard to read” but was able to build a deeper understanding in conversation with her peers. Although in this conversation she considered possible ways to use this text in a secondary math classroom (e.g., “you could read parts of it,”) she would later write in her journal, below, that she would neither recommend nor use the text in her future teaching because it was “…dry, similar to a history book.” She added, “Unless you have a math background this would be difficult to understand. Not high school [level]” [Reading Circle Journal]. Elise would say more about her experience of reading Zero in the post-course interview.

Although she was disappointed with the text, Elise was generally positive toward the reading circle activity itself. Yet, in response to a prompt about using the reading circle format in a future content area classroom, Elise wrote: “No. I don’t feel the students would learn what they needed with supplemental texts. Math is facts.” She continued, “I don’t see using reading circles in my math classroom” but imagined “math circles” as a way to adapt reading circles because she recognized that “social interaction is crucial in the classroom.” Elise described “students working together, talking through confusing points to solve a math problem” [Reading Circle Journal]. As forwarded in our course, understanding literacy as a social practice dovetailed nicely with constructivist approaches to content pedagogy. In her imagined practice, Elise adapted instructional practices—though she did not recognize them as related to literacy processes—involving talk, collaboration, and problem solving around text.

Throughout the semester, there had been a stark contrast between Elise’s view of writing and her view of reading in relation to learning math content. She embraced writing as a vehicle for developing an understanding of content. Elise was able to envision ways she might use writing-to-learn in her teaching:
I can see incorporating writing to learn in my future classroom. I really like the idea of power writing at the beginning and end of a lesson, so students can see how much they really learn in a lesson. [Journal 13]

Elise explained other uses for writing-to-learn that included web connections, checks for understanding, steps for problem solving, and study aids. Clearly, this prospective math teacher resonated with writing-to-learn as an effective literacy practice for teaching mathematics. However, Elise would retract this support for writing in the post-course interview.

Constraint: “How do I find the time?” Elise’s initial response to a chapter from the text Rethinking Mathematics (Gutstein & Peterson, eds., 2005) that provided an example of how student interest and making connections between mathematical content and real life problem solving can result in deeper student learning was positive. She wrote, “I guess I never realized how the interests can lead into such a huge project that I feel the students really benefitted from” [Journal 14]. While expressing agreement about using student interest to inform her teaching, Elise was simultaneously unsure of the practicality of implementing it regularly in her teaching:

I feel like this is a really good idea, but how do I find the time all throughout the year to do something like this? Could this be something I can use at times of the year where students lose interest in content, such as around the holidays, to ensure learning is still occurring, but without such dense material? What happens when you get the parent and students who question this untraditional way of teaching? [Journal 14]

Elise considered student interest important but a project-based assignment more time-consuming and “less dense” (or not challenging) in terms of content. In addition to relegating attendance to student interest to “around the holidays,” she was concerned about how an “untraditional” approach to teaching mathematics might be received by primary stakeholders. To complicate these tensions, as a preservice secondary mathematics teacher who supported “connect[ing]
math to ‘real life’” [Literacy History], Elise was not feeling empowered or secure enough to make an instructional decision that may raise questions.

**Approaching advocacy.** In response to our final course topic on developing lifetime readers, Elise moved away from a focus on content teaching to a focus on being a secondary teacher who supports adolescent literacy development more generally. In a sense, she moved away from the *what* (math content) of teaching to the *who* (identity as a secondary teacher and advocate), writing “I understand the importance of reading in adolescence and I can relate to them because I lost a lot of interest in reading from middle to high school” [Journal 15]. Here again, Elise approached advocacy for literacy and proposed ways of supporting her students’ literacy development in her future teaching:

> Instead of a free reading time in my mathematics classroom, I can see myself doing maybe research and reading on current math topics or the development of math topics. I hope that I can also relate math to things that the students may be reading/learning about in other content areas, such as history and English. [Journal 15]

Elise imagined how she would use literacy practices as a math teacher-researcher and provided specific examples of what that might look like in her future classroom. Once again, she emphasized awareness of and need for interdisciplinary literacy practices in secondary school, helping students to apply math to the “real world” and “when it is feasible…connect math” with “literature” [Journal 15].

Elise’s initial concepts of literacy [Literacy Questionnaire; Literacy History] contrast with those projected in her Introduction and Rational for her Literacy Toolkit. Elise wrote,

> The purpose of this literacy toolkit is to provide explanations and examples of various literacy strategies that can be used in my classroom. When I started literacy class, I didn’t really understand what a literacy strategy was. I have learned that literacy strategies are
any form of activity or learning that helps students understand the concepts…they are learning in a more effective way. Most literacy strategies can be adapted to any content area, it just requires a lot of thinking and planning ahead…

Elise continued the Toolkit introduction reaffirming her new thinking and beliefs about teaching literacy strategies across content areas:

- **Literacy is important to teach in all content areas. Literacy is not just reading and writing. It is understanding what you are reading and writing and being able to apply/relate to other things. The strategies and skills that students learn in school will be carried throughout their lives. It is important that we are guiding students with these strategies and skills so they can be successful.** [Literacy Strategies Toolkit]

Here, Elise briefly described her learning and understanding of the term, **literacy strategy** over the course of the semester. As “not just reading and writing,” she conceptualized literacy as serving the cognitive processes of comprehending, applying, and connecting to prior knowledge. She approached the idea of content learning **through** literacy. She viewed literacy as generic strategies that can be adapted for use across content areas. Elise also conceptualized literacy as “strategies and skills” necessary for success and developed across a lifetime. “Literacy for success” was a prevalent theme in Elise’s conceptualization of literacy from the beginning of our course and throughout the semester. As a prospective teacher, Elise saw her role as “guiding” learners.

For the final reflection, in response to the prompt, **How would you describe the importance and function of literacy within your specific content area?** Elise provided a rationale for using literacy to teach content generally, but was not specific about literacy’s role in math pedagogy. Once again, she mentioned the constraints of time:

- “…Many people cannot see the connection of literacy and math. Literacy is important to apply to all content areas because students can learn and use literacy skills across all
subject areas... Literacy skills and strategies will help teachers fix misconceptions students have at the beginning of a lesson and attack the areas that students need more practice and intervention on. Literacy skills and strategies can help students make deeper connections within and across the content. Teachers may not want to use them because they do require a lot of planning, preparation, and can be very time consuming in the classroom. I believe that in thinking long term, literacy strategies are more beneficial because you will save time...[Final Reflection]

A practical view of literacy predominates here. While Elise asserts, “literacy is important to apply to all content areas,” she was not explicit about “the connection of literacy and math,” or the ways she might teach math content using literacy strategies. Elise recognized the benefits of planning for teaching literacy skills and strategies and “thinking long term” because “you will save time,” but specifics regarding the what and how of literacy for teaching math content is unclear.

Revisiting Beliefs, Practices, and Tensions: Interview Excerpts

I turn now to Elise’s interview for further evidence of her understandings of, beliefs about, and dispositions toward literacy in her content area. At the time of the interview, Elise had completed a 140-hour field period during the month-long break between fall and spring semesters, and was enrolled in the second adolescent literacy course required in the teacher preparation program. Interestingly, throughout our hour-long conversation, Elise’s responses frequently indicated a particular skepticism toward literacy practices she previously supported for teaching math content.

Literacy practices observed in the field. Early in the interview, I asked Elise to recall her recently completed field experience. She described working in a middle school special
education classroom, noting that the students—sixth, seventh, and eighth graders—were all reading well below grade level. Elise explained that teachers read picture books aloud and asked questions based on elements of fiction. Because she had completed her field period during the school’s mid-year assessments, she indicated that reading was the focus and added that there was “very little time for math…the four weeks I was there was all IEP writing, alternative assessment.” Elise described the reading program in this middle school special education classroom as individualized reading instruction using leveled texts. In response to teacher read alouds Elise added,

…we found that the kids were doing better on like the storybooks rather than the factual books…sometimes I wondered whether they were answering the questions based on their experience or what they actually read in the book…

Up to this point, Elise had provided no critique of these practices, but her wondering here indicated that she edged toward critique as she began to generate questions about students’ reading comprehension. Emphasized in the adolescent literacy course the previous semester, strategies for tapping prior knowledge, developing background knowledge, effective question making, and building comprehension were demonstrated and practiced regularly. Here, after observing poor quality questioning in the field period special education classroom, Elise recognized the interplay of background knowledge and experience with meaning making and questioning for building comprehension. Her evolving professional knowledge of literacy development bumped up against questionable practice.

Content area literacy conceptualized. During the interview, I reminded Elise of the ways she defined literacy at the onset of our course. I wondered aloud how she might have

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10 As a requirement in the teacher preparation program, students arrange to spend one of four field experiences in a special education classroom.
developed her understanding of literacy that included descriptors such as “interpretation,” “discussion,” and “questioning.”

Umm… I would think from school… stuff has to interest me in order for me to read it… and like when I read things, I need to interact with them, and if it’s not interesting, I don’t interact… I think about how that affects me, like what questions I have while I’m reading, and how this is gonna relate to me and how I can use this information… versus… like, I usually don’t read just to read, it has to… relate to me somehow. [Interview]

Extending her original definition of literacy [Literacy Questionnaire], Elise clarified that interacting with text, which included the processes of interpretation, discussion, and questioning, all pivot on her interest and/or her ability to make personal connections to the text. Again, a practical orientation toward literacy predominates—she reads purposefully for information. With this interactive stance, Elise might extend her definition of literacy to include daily practices for generating student interest and establishing clear purposes for engaging in content literacy activities.

I asked Elise to talk further about the role of literacy in math teaching and learning. She began by describing the value of teacher modeling as an important pedagogical tool for math. The previous semester, modeling processes were an integral part of our adolescent literacy coursework. Elise had modeled both questioning during reading (Content Area Read Aloud assignment) and the use of a literacy strategy (PReP, Content Literacy Teaching Lesson assignment) for teaching math content. I asked Elise if she felt that working this way would benefit the students she described in her field period. She responded, “I don’t know if it’d work in my special ed classroom, just because of the way they learn and the way they are…” Elise hedged a bit, not willing to commit to modeling and strategic teaching for all students because of learning
differences. Her assumptions about what “special education” students can and cannot do seemed to preclude a strategic literacy approach to teaching content.

**Literacy strategies for content learning.** I wanted to follow up on Elise’s inclination to use writing-to-learn for teaching math content (Journal 13). At the time of the interview, Elise was less certain of using writing-to-learn in the classroom: “…Where do I fit that in? Like, I’d love to…but…what do I leave out… in order to put the other things in?” Again, Elise surfaced the pressure of time, trying to “fit in” what she seemed to consider an add-on or extra. As a site of tension, these themes were threaded through much of Elise’s coursework. Despite being initially “time consuming,” she had endorsed planning for content literacy because it would ultimately “save you time.” [See Journal 14 and Final Reflection.] Now, however, she seemed to walk back from this assertion.

Given a bit of time and distance, I asked her if she thought the toolkit might be helpful in her future teaching. She responded, “…you might find a strategy that works fantastic…you may not need 25 strategies. If your kids work really well with one strategy, then stick with that strategy…” [Interview]. Here, Elise misrecognized the idea *strategy*, of purpose (and appropriateness)—the idea that various literacy strategies can be used during different phases (before, during, after) of a lesson. Elise had shifted her thinking from that evidenced in her Literacy Strategies Toolkit introduction and rationale. I asked her about the role of discussion in math teaching and learning. Elise preferred to label this way of working as questioning. She responded,

Whereas I see a lot more, like, how do we do this? what do we do next? Math is thinking where you’re going. Like, I know where I want my students to go… what questions do I ask for them to get there…[Interview].

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Elise described questioning as a way to teach procedural (step-by-step) knowledge. During our adolescent literacy course (the previous semester), we examined various discussion formats (e.g., discussion web) for content area teaching and regularly used discussion in our own learning of course content. While eschewing “discussion” as a format useful in math pedagogy, Elise provided evidence that she understood the efficacy of questioning, recognized the value of teacher modeling, and would consider teaching a limited number of content literacy strategies.

 Accessing a math textbook; Supplementary texts in math. During the interview, I wanted to follow up on Elise’s thoughts about textbook access and textbooks as a resource in the classroom. I asked what she would want to teach her students about their math textbook. Beyond pointing out that the textbook contains useful examples of math problems, her response included the following:

 All those paragraphs in the beginning [of a unit] explaining the definitions, those aren’t really important. What’s important is reading the definition and knowing what the definition means. You don’t really have to know where it came from…

While she may have been drawn to some of the content literacy ideas put forth in our course (e.g., writing-to-learn; questioning strategies), the pull of her own experience as a high school student where she perceived that knowing mathematical definitions took precedence over concept development. This pull became stronger as demonstrated in the interview segments below.

Elise continued to talk about her experiences with math textbooks in high school, asserting that she never read them because she didn’t need to. In college, she admitted that she might use the course text as a source for examples, but added,

I don’t usually read—a lot of it is the theory behind the definition, ‘this man came up with this’—I really don’t care about that, that’s not interesting to me ‘cause I think of that
as history, so it’s not important, (laughs), um but like, the examples of how to like do something…

During the course Elise emphasized the importance of teaching students to access their textbook. Her strong assertions in this interview segment indicated that she had walked back from this; Elise’s learner stance, developed from cumulative experiences as a math student in secondary school, and her habits-of-mind, while challenged throughout our course, had been largely maintained:

I want them to know the definition and what the definition says, I really don’t care… like, if they know the theory behind it… they need to know the definition and how to apply it to what we’re learning.

Here, Elise reiterated her view of application over theory. Imagining her future teaching, she talked more in depth about highlighting what she felt was important in a math textbook and sharing that with her students. As a site of tension, Elise made clear what she valued in terms of mathematical content knowledge. As an advanced student in mathematics, she did not see privileging application to the exclusion of theory as problematic.

Thinking back to her read aloud demonstration the previous semester, I wondered whether Elise had shifted her thinking about using picture books and/or trade texts to teach math concepts. Relegating them to “a day before a break” when “kids aren’t paying much attention,” Elise added, “Like I said before, there’s not a lot of reading in math… I think it’s more of applying what you know” [Interview]. She emphasized strategies for tapping prior knowledge and questioning for math learning. When pressed to describe what additional literacy strategies might be used, Elise mentioned underlining as helpful for puzzling through word problems. Despite the relative success of her read aloud demonstration from the previous
semester, Elise remained skeptical—as she was toward the Reading Circle text—about the use of supplementary texts for teaching content.

**Math and math pedagogy.**

**Comparing high school and college math.** In the interview, Elise talked about the differences between high school and college mathematics and surfaced a number of constraints to embedding literacy into math instruction. As a student, reading in math meant reading examples for which she would take notes to remember steps in the process of solving a proof. Elise spoke with enthusiasm about a particular upper-level “proofs-based” math course she was currently taking where she described doing a lot of writing to demonstrate why a statement may or may not be true. She segued into a comparison of high school and college-level math courses:

… and that’s the most, like, literacy I’ve ever seen in math and I think if they did that more in high school it would be, like… more explaining stuff… like, at the same time, I think—I don’t know if the mind of a high school student can understand the whole argument behind it, ’cause even sometimes I don’t understand it…

Elise saw this deeper learning as out of reach for high school students. Describing another math course she’d taken her sophomore year in college she added, “it made so much more sense of all the stuff that we did in high school geometry…. I just feel like time’s a huge constraint with, like, high school classes.” Aware of curricular pressures, Elise’s view of literacy as an add-on meant taking time away from instruction. I asked her to explain the difference, in a nutshell, between high school math and what she was learning in college.

I think, basically we learn, like, how to use formulas in high school. And, in college you learn where those formulas come from and how they were developed and how we know that they’re true.
Elise took out her class notes to show an example of a division algorithm. The theorem takes up several pages of notes. She added, “So, like this? I would have never understood this in high school. I understand the theorem and why it works…” Solving proofs, according to Elise, involved using a list of “definitions and facts” and learning “how they all play together and how you manipulate them all…” In her view, literacy (especially expository writing) in math seemed to be ill suited for “the mind of a high school student” and more appropriate for postsecondary study. This contrasted sharply with her response to writing-to-learn (Journal 13) which she wholeheartedly endorsed for math teaching and learning the previous semester. Elise’s conceptualization of content literacy was filtered through her experiences as a student and her observations in the field as a preservice teacher.

*Math is thinking “step by step…”* I asked Elise to explain how a mathematician thinks in relation to literacy learning. She responded,

Well, it’s definitely like you have to think step by step through things. And you have to use what you know, facts you know, in order to create an argument… Your theorem is your main idea, and then your proof is why that main idea works.

Explaining the process she engaged in to solve mathematical problems, Elise opened her math notebook to show the procedural, “step-by-step” writing she had done to work through proofs. She continued,

I just like math because it’s logical and you follow like a step-by-step procedure and for the majority of things, if you get this result, it means that… it always means the same thing. Even though the way to get to the result may be different, it always means the same thing… I like a final answer… I don’t like the ‘well, maybe it could be this…’ That’s why I don’t like history… like 500 causes to this war? That’s great… sorry, it still happened…
Comfortable in the realm of mathematical certainty, Elise held the idea of literacy’s role in math learning and teaching at arm’s length. As a site of tension, challenging her to move beyond her comfort zone yielded—at the very least—an articulation and recognition of pedagogical practices in mathematics at the secondary level.

**Learner stance.** Elise’s view of math as a body of knowledge assembled as facts and her affinity for single, definite answers seemed to constrain how she experienced coursework outside of mathematics. She didn’t enjoy history because of its lack of definitive answers. The nature of the adolescent literacy coursework where we considered an array of possible approaches and answers to our questions was in stark contrast to Elise’s preferred way of learning. Her response to an interview prompt regarding critical practices in her future secondary mathematics teaching revealed that she believed critical practices were “beneficial in social studies and English… but there’s not… a lot of perspective in math.” Her thinking had not shifted from the previous semester where she flatly rejected critical practices for teaching math content. Elise went on to explain why math appeals to her:

… but some people like that, you know, discussion-based-we-can-do-this-in-so-many-ways, whereas me, it’s… I like things with a definite answer, so that’s what works…”

As a site of tension, Elise seemed disinclined to rise to the challenge of expanding her repertoire as a learner. It is my hope that with future experiences as a secondary math teacher, this ostensibly intractable stance will soften. Toward the end of the post-course interview, as a kind of coda, Elise added,

The main problem I have with like literacy class, like… not problem, but complication, I guess, I have with like literacy I and literacy II [required courses] is like (pause)… the fact that not everything will apply to your content area, and not everything can be
Manipulated. There’s 500 strategies you can use to answer a word problem, but not all of them will work… I don’t need 500 strategies on how to do word problems…

Hyperbole aside, Elise wanted to make clear that required courses in literacy for preservice secondary mathematics students were of limited value.

**Coda**

Looking at Elise’s experience with coursework—a timeline, in a sense—reveals startling changes, subtle shifts, and Gordian knots in her conceptualizations of literacy and literacy learning and teaching in her content area. At the onset of the course, Elise expressed an interest in literacy’s role in teaching math content; she had a positive attitude toward learning how to embed literacy into math teaching. As time went on, however, she became increasingly skeptical about the relevancy of our coursework to her content area. What confluence of conditions facilitated this movement away from more expanded notions of literacy and literacy in math pedagogy?

Elise’s cumulative experiences as a student influenced the epistemological stances and perceptions of math she brought to our course. A conscientious student, Elise aimed to fulfill course requirements as she dutifully completed work throughout the semester (i.e., assignments, demonstrations, presentations, small and whole group discussions) and was forthcoming about her skepticism (e.g., rejection of a number of discussion strategies and critical literacy practices for math). She tried on ideas for using literacy approaches for teaching math content and, on some occasions, at least briefly, she seemed to resonate with them (e.g., Content Area Read Aloud; Content Literacy Teaching Lesson). Elise evinced a willingness to entertain new ideas for teaching mathematics (e.g., teaching students to access a textbook [Textbook Evaluation assignment]; comprehension strategies [Content Area Read Aloud and Toolkit assignments]; ideas for adapting reading circles to the mathematics classroom [Reading Circle Journal]).
eagerly articulated the *what* of math (“definite answers…that’s what works”) but was challenged to articulate the *how* (beyond step-by-step) and *why* (and I could not help her) of mathematics pedagogy.

The coursework itself, reflecting a comprehensive view of literacy—reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing paired with a content area literacy framework—was not designed specifically for math pedagogy but rather for developing content learning *through* literacy; there was a focus on literacy instruction across content areas with an emphasis on strategies to develop comprehension in disciplinary texts, but again, not specifically for mathematics. While we co-constructed a broad view of literacy and practiced numerous strategies from the perspective of various content areas, there were likely not enough math-specific demonstrations to convince the preservice math teachers (a majority in our class) in general, and Elise in particular, of the value of content literacy for mathematics pedagogy. My thought was that the prospective teachers would take up the course content and *adapt* it to their subject area (Gillis, 2014), which, as it turned out, was an especially heavy lift for the preservice math teachers. The math students in our course were asked to explore predominant pedagogical practices in secondary mathematics; to think deeply about and articulate the literacy processes *they* use to learn math and to translate those into teachable strategies for their future students. In terms of literacy processes, I wanted them to consider, how one begins to understand mathematics: How does one think through, read, write, and create mathematically? This was the question that I hoped Elise (and her fellow math peers) would explore. Although Elise talked about engaging prior knowledge, questioning, and making connections as instructional methods, as *literacy processes*, these were not included in her thinking about the function and/or utility of literacy in mathematics pedagogy beyond the transmission of procedural knowledge.
Conflicting discourses. For Elise, many content area literacy “messages” did not speak to her as a future teacher of mathematics (Siebert & Draper, 2008). Generic content literacy strategies will only take the learner so far (Moje, 2008) and Elise was looking for discipline-specific literacy strategy instruction. She understandably asserted that math teachers “don’t know how” to embed literacy strategies into their teaching. This may be attributed to a disconnect between the pervasive literacy messages promulgated in secondary content area literacy courses (such as the adolescent literacy course at the center of this study) and mathematics disciplinary practices (Siebert & Draper, 2008). Traditional literacy messages, Siebert and Draper (2008) argue, often neglect, minimize, and/or misrepresent disciplinary influences. That is, they do not take into account the influence of mathematics on what counts as text, reading, and writing. Although, in the course, we worked to bridge this gap by expanding notions of text and literacy, the majority of math students met these attempts with tentative consideration at best.

Toward the end of the course, Elise had supported writing-to-learn strategies for learning math content, however, by the time of our interview, she had walked back from this stance citing time constraints. She had made a leap from writing-to-learn which generally involves having students briefly recall, clarify, or write a question regarding their learning in process, to the lengthier writing she was doing in her college-level math classes. Thus misrecognized, Elise claimed writing-to-learn inappropriate for high school students as they were not developmentally ready for such complex writing.

Parallel tensions. In this account, both Elise and I, it seems, experienced parallel tensions; in one sense, I see these as juxtapositions: Elise’s discursive frames circumscribed “Math [as] facts” and doing math as a step-wise procedure one learned in a straightforward way. The pull of her own experiences and observations in the field reflected a view that math, as an
objective body of knowledge, was transmitted from teacher to student; doing math meant following prescribed steps to arrive at the answer. This model runs counter to the theories of learning and principles advocated in our adolescent literacy coursework. Working in a constructivist manner using a sociocultural lens, literacy was forwarded as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) where theory and practice converge and where Elise found no accordance with her deep-seated understandings and experiences of learning mathematics; she was situated to question the utility of literacy in math pedagogy. Despite tentative indications at the onset of the course that she recognized multiple dimensions of literacy (talk, questioning, social interaction), Elise ultimately viewed literacy as “reading” and “writing” more appropriate for other subject areas. She perceived literacy strategies as largely generic and minimally helpful in teaching and learning mathematics. Other tensions that arose from Elise’s experience in our course involved conceptualizing literacy as an add-on: she frequently referred to the constraint of time as a reason for not integrating literacy strategies into mathematics pedagogy. In our course literacy was framed as a tool or process for learning content and building comprehension in disciplinary texts; we worked to recognize literacy processes involved in learning content. Because of Elise’s view of math as a body of objective knowledge to be transmitted as opposed to a social practice where knowledge is built collaboratively through subject area pedagogy and practices, she was neither inclined nor persuaded to explore literacy tools and processes for math learning. Elise’s expertise as a student of math, and my expertise in literacy were often at cross-purposes.

Tracing the arc of Elise’s story, I sought to understand how she went from initially open to ideas about the role of literacy in math education to incrementally closed to a number of these ideas once she encountered them through coursework. Her field period experiences shortly after completing our course served to magnify the contradictions (e.g., constructivist pedagogical
approaches for all except those receiving “special education” services) she observed and fortify her doubts about literacy’s role in teaching and learning mathematics content. I think of Elise as the one who turned away, the one who seemed to go in the opposite direction. Elise’s discursive frames collided with those underpinning our course, shining a light on previously unrecognized contradictions circulating at micro-, mid-, and macro-levels.

Questions to carry forward. I have attempted to illustrate the complexity of Elise’s learning in our adolescent literacy course where relations among beliefs about and practices in literacy, mathematics, and pedagogy converged. The journey for her, as a student and prospective teacher, as well as for me, as her instructor, was not smooth, and is by no means complete. In a sense, her grappling with our course content captures vividly the struggles involved in learning to become a teacher while simultaneously mirroring my struggles to teach—each in rapidly changing arenas.

I have learned and will continue to learn from Elise. Her story evokes compelling questions regarding how the discursive frames of the course bumped up against Elise’s understandings. The framing of course assignments, for example, may have contributed to the contradictions Elise experienced. In retrospect, it is clear that, as a whole, the assignments were not particularly relevant for mathematics pedagogy; did I inadvertently neglect, minimize, or misrepresent the influence of the discipline of mathematics in my development of these assignments? What would they look like if adapted specifically for preservice math teachers? Beyond assignments, how might course content have more effectively supported a mathematics content literacy approach? Ultimately, I want to understand how the adolescent literacy course could better meet the needs of students like Elise.
Chapter Eight: Cross-Case Analysis

Following Haas Dyson and Genishi’s (2005) admonition to resist “neat narratives” in search of singular truths, I attempt here to put these “competing stories… into dynamic relation with one another” that offer insights into their “resources and challenges” and the “transformative possibilities of social spaces for teaching and learning” (pp. 110-111).

The recursive process of moving within and across cases allowed me to see patterns and themes that had surfaced in both the course and the interview. Before the interview, I suspected that there would be some obvious connecting threads since the focal students had just completed their field experiences (independent of the course) and were enrolled in the teacher education program’s second required adolescent literacy course. For example, I expected they might have more to say about working in actual secondary classrooms making observations through a content literacy lens, and, perhaps in retrospect, they would discuss their observations of less than proficient readers in those classrooms, as this would be an area of emphasis in the second literacy course in which they were currently enrolled. The focal preservice teachers’ responses during the interview at once met, exceeded, and changed these expectations as I demonstrate below.

In this chapter, I present two overarching findings and the emerging themes that support them from within and across each case:

1. The focal participants’ experiences as literacy learners, schooling experiences, and their content area expertise (what they brought to the course) shaped, and in some ways, constrained their conceptualizations of literacy. Change, often provisional, occurred in subtle and complex ways; each participant questioned previously held assumptions often in non-linear, messy, productive ways. To varying degrees, students in the course (a) broadened their notions of literacy, (b) began to build awareness of the social nature of
literacy and of the influence of sociocultural dimensions on literacy learning, and (c) approached advocacy for literacy.

2. Focal participants largely maintained their initial views of literacy in their content area. My efforts to develop a broad view of literacy and demonstrate its efficacy for content area pedagogy were minimally successful. Broad themes contributing to this finding include participants’ (a) stances as learners and beliefs about their content areas and content area pedagogy, and (b) beliefs about the role of literacy in teaching and learning content.

Below, I examine each of these findings highlighting expressed beliefs (understandings) and beliefs in use (understandings in practice) to contrast and theorize about ways engagements with coursework shaped preservice teachers’ learning toward expanded notions of literacy and its function in content area learning and teaching. Finally, I turn the lens on my practice to explore these findings from my perspective as a literacy teacher educator.

**Finding One**

With the notion that beliefs (and thus practices) are more malleable than much previous research has put forth (Pajares, 1992; Risko et al., 2008), in my research, I hoped to disrupt the cycle that teacher candidates’ beliefs and practices are entrenched in the way they were taught (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010). Through coursework, participants experienced some disruption of prior beliefs and developed their understandings of literacy. Beliefs in use or understandings in practice were evidenced in various contexts throughout the semester. The most salient of these were encompassed in journal responses, demonstrations, and retrospectively in the post course interview. The focal participants each—at one time or another—expanded their conceptualizations of literacy. As Agee (2006) found in her work with pre- and inservice teachers, I too found tensions between focal participants’ pedagogical models, epistemological beliefs, and
their “imagined roles constructed around different sets of experiences” in schooling (p. 195). Agee explains that beginning teachers search for theory and practice that fit with [their] imagined role, “even as this role is under construction” (p. 196, emphasis in original). For my participants, this search, at times, ended abruptly when discursive mismatches seemingly approached impasse (an issue I take up at the end of this chapter).

**Reflecting on experiences as literacy learners.** From the beginning of our course, the focal participants all valued literacy, agreeing that literacy skills were needed for success in both schooling and career. This practical orientation to literacy learning and teaching informed and constrained the preservice teachers’ course demonstrations and imagined practice. Each disclosed her or his personal challenges as learners. Ross experienced difficulties in his literacy development but credited teachers throughout his schooling for supporting his literacy development and being instrumental in his decision to choose teaching as a career path. Meg, an otherwise avid reader, drew upon her experience as a student who struggled to read content area textbooks to shape her belief regarding content area teachers’ responsibility to teach their students to access their textbooks. Kris, struggling with attention issues throughout her schooling, emphasized the roles that focus and attention play in literacy learning. Elise, as a “pretty good reader and writer,” recognized when she lost comprehension, and as a result, had developed metacognitive fix-up strategies.

**Broadening definitions of literacy.** At the onset of the adolescent literacy course, I examined the focal preservice secondary teachers’ initial conceptualizations of literacy and their understandings of the nature and function of literacy learning and teaching in their content areas. During the first few weeks, the preservice teachers began to recognize, as Elise did, that “literacy is not just reading and writing.” All participants included multimodal practices in their “24 hour literacy diaries” that helped them to re-conceptualize literacy, if tentatively, to move
beyond narrow definitions, beyond ‘merely’ reading and writing. Elise, for example, articulated that her initial conception of literacy had shifted to include building and using knowledge generatively. I saw this as the beginning of understanding the notion of learning and teaching content through literacy, that is, through transactions with text.

Across the semester in our course, Kris’s conceptualization of literacy and literacy in teaching history was troubled by degrees. Her narrow view of literacy as reading and comprehension and that these were separate processes, shifted somewhat as she grappled with much of our course content, although the psychological lens through which she filtered literacy seemed to thwart much of her learning of key course concepts (e.g., the social nature of literacy; the influences of sociocultural dimensions on literacy learning; the complexities of comprehension).

Building awareness of the social nature of literacy: Sociocultural dimensions. During the adolescent literacy course, the preservice teachers began to build awareness of the social nature of literacy and of the influence of sociocultural dimensions of literacy learning. We considered issues of language, diversity, and struggling readers. As part of this, we examined constructions of difference based on dominant, possibly deficit, views of literacy learning. Ross was deeply concerned about his ability to meet the needs of English language learners and wondered “how much diversity” he would “have to prepare for” as a secondary English teacher. He revealed that he “did not realize how important or pressing the issue of language will be in the classroom” and did not know how he would “combat” this problem and establish “an effective learning environment.” Ross also revealed that “previous to this class and its readings, I did not really have a full understanding of the diversity I will encounter in my classroom nor how I should handle it properly.” These visceral concerns
became housed in Ross’s concepts of “classroom management” as our course progressed. [See below]

Meg raised language and discourse issues throughout our course and again in the interview the following semester upon completion of her final field period. In response to assigned readings and class discussions around meeting the needs of diverse learners, Meg shifted her thinking about “diversity” from “… ignore it and act neutral” to “take advantage of the rich cultural knowledge” in classrooms. She sought to validate students’ linguistic differences but was uncertain, as was Ross, of what was involved in creating an inclusive and effective learning environment. Meg recognized the complexities of tracking students and wondered how to “create a respectful, diverse environment that allows the most learning to take place.” Importantly, she began to recognize the ways in which sociocultural dimensions profoundly influence the teaching and learning context. Meg’s thinking shifted further during her reading circle experience. The text her group read, Teaching hope, initially led her to think that she would “… never have to deal with” the myriad social, cultural, emotional issues presented in the text, but to her surprise, many of the issues that had previously seemed remote, were, upon deeper analysis, part of her own experience in schooling. During the interview, Meg disclosed that during her most recent field period, she had made a dangerous assumption: she had formulated low expectations for a student based on his appearance. To Meg’s surprise, in a brief conversation with the student, she found out he intended to continue science studies in college. This encounter startled her into reexamining her own biases. She recognized the power of negative assumptions and low expectations. For Meg, this particular field experience was transformational in many ways. She observed the reality of the sociocultural dimensions of literacy learning that we had discussed in our coursework the previous semester, and began to examine her assumptions about “diverse” learners.
Elise aimed to “stress similarities” and “honor differences” but worried about “offending other students’ backgrounds” as she grappled with issues of cultural competency. She conveyed concern about her ability to accommodate her future students’ learning needs but noted that she was inclined to tap resources available to her such as working closely with English language teachers and working, as well, to “neutral[ize]” gender stereotypes in mathematical texts. Kris did not grapple with language and diversity issues to the extent the other focal students did. In her future history classroom she would “validate” her future students’ language differences, by allowing them to “speak a certain way at certain times.”

These responses—from white preservice teachers—to issues of diversity reflect a deeply ingrained set of assumptions that demand further examination at a personal, group, and program level. The focal participants’ normative experiences and dominant views about teaching and learning based on stereotypes and at times, deficit constructions of urban students, families, and schools, point to a cultural deficit stance which competed with their burgeoning cultural difference stance at this point in their teacher preparation (Purcell-Gates, 2002), an issue I take up further in Chapter Nine.

**Approaching advocacy for supporting adolescents’ literacy development.** In the adolescent literacy course, I emphasized literacy as a tool for advocacy and reading comprehension developed through student interest and pedagogical relevance (Lesley, 2005). I use the descriptor “approaching” intentionally here because the focal participants’ conceptualizations were focused at the classroom level and had not yet reached wider societal or global levels (Lesley, 2005). From early in the course and throughout the interview, both Ross and Meg, the English education majors, expressed advocacy for literacy, passion for English, reading, literature, and learning. Ross’s belief in having students “just dive in” and “play” with literature as well as his belief “If you don't give up, they won't give up” support this commitment.
Meg’s advocacy was evident in her belief that the underachieving students she encountered in her recent field experience needed to learn to use academic language “if they’re going to make it out of the situation they’re in.” These beliefs were also in evidence in Ross and Meg’s reading circle experiences as they exchanged anecdotes about their own schooling and previous field experiences.

As our course progressed, Elise began to widen her view from a focus on the content of teaching to the identity of teacher, thus encompassing advocacy for literacy as part of her identity as a secondary math teacher. Her learning experiences as a middle school student who had lost interest in books and reading guided her imagined practice as a supporter of and advocate for her future students’ literacy development. While she cautiously allowed that she would “connect math” with “literature…when it is feasible,” she focused her advocacy especially on interdisciplinary literacy practices (discussed below).

A belief in the ethic of care played a role in both Kris and Meg’s literacy advocacy. Kris’s stance on the importance of “taking an interest” in students’ lives is similar to Meg’s stance on caring. Meg’s expressed belief was shaped by her experience as a student in high school. During the interview, she asserted the importance of caring to engender student interest and engagement, saying “If a teacher cared about me as a person, I’d be much more willing to work for them and work hard on their assignments.” Caring also played an important role in her recent field period where she reiterated “that’s why I’m gonna be a teacher.” To underscore this conviction she added, “these kids need good teachers,” and she believed that she could be that “good,” “caring” teacher.
Finding Two

Focal participants largely maintained their initial views of literacy in their content area. My efforts to develop a broad view of literacy and demonstrate its efficacy for content area pedagogy were minimally successful.

**Learner stance and beliefs about their content area and content area pedagogy.** The intertwining nature of epistemological beliefs and educational beliefs (Pajares, 1992) can be seen in Ross’s disposition as a learner who was comfortable in and privileged the experiential, interpretive facets of English content pedagogy and where, in his view, knowledge was tentative and evolved through questioning. Like Ross, Meg identified as a life-long learner. She demonstrated an inclination toward flexibility in her thinking as she navigated challenges presented in her field experience. Epistemological tensions erupted as Kris grappled with her beliefs and experiences in light of new learning. Her beliefs about what history is and what social studies pedagogy looks like bumped up against constructivist theories of teaching and learning. For Kris, knowledge was *extracted* from the textbook—the source of knowledge—in her demonstrations. While course content informed her work to a degree, Kris’s beliefs were under construction: theory had yet to be realized in practice as she stood and disseminated official knowledge in her lesson demonstrations. The most striking productive tensions were located in this gap between Kris’s theory and her practice. Though explicit about the *kind* of teacher (“constructivist”) she wanted to be (Agee, 2006), this was not reflected in her lesson demonstrations or field experiences.

Smith Davis and Brown (2013) explored college students’ dispositions and attitudes toward mathematics and self. An undergraduate education major participant, when asked what he enjoyed about math, responded,
I love that it is black and white...there’s always an answer...there may be 7,000 ways to get the answer, but typically, it’s black and white...not like with English where, “well, in my opinion” you know. It’s very logical and I like that...(p. 176).

These beliefs about math echo Elise’s sentiments (and Ross’s observations of math students). Elise would also find agreement among mathematicians with her statement “Math can be considered by many to be a different language.” Wilson (2011) explains that the primary semiotic system in mathematics is numeric and symbolic (p. 438). Further, texts produced using this numeric and symbolic system assume a precise and objective world through agreed-upon, standardized meanings. Reading and writing mathematical text, Wilson argues, involves distinct practices and knowledge of conventions, with often a single, correct answer to a problem (p. 439). But evidence from this research suggests that Elise’s view of mathematics as an objective body of knowledge constrained her experience of outside coursework. With her overall disposition, “I like a final answer,” and learner stance, “Math is facts,” she maintained a skepticism about the relevance of literacy to math pedagogy; hers was an admixture of uncertainty, tentative willingness, and the need for definitive “proof” that literacy (as she perceived it) was relevant to math pedagogy. As course instructor, I was unsuccessful in meeting Elise’s needs regarding content literacy pedagogy.

**Considering perspectives and content literacy.** While Kris supported debate and discussion as a valuable pedagogical approach for social studies, she wondered, “Should teachers stay neutral on topics?” In coursework, Kris commented on the pervasiveness of “right/wrong only perspective[s]” and believed students needed to be able to let go of beliefs for the sake of debate and civil discourse. Kris, in reference to her experience as a social studies education major working with math education majors in her reading circle group, said “I think it was good to have multiple perspectives in our group and it worked out pretty well…” Kris was interested in having her students examine controversial issues, but pulled back from recognizing the political
in teaching as she asserted, “truth shouldn't be political and neither should education.” This raises questions about reading history from various perspectives and the critical work that involves. Wilson (2011) asserts that while one of the goals of history education is “to develop a shared sense of national identity and to prepare students for citizenship” (p. 440, citing NCSS, 1997) another, more recent goal is “to reject master narratives that indicate shared identities, and to instead emphasize individual or group differences…” using texts that reflect diverse perspectives and experiences (p. 440, citing Levesque, 2008). Kris’s thinking regarding neutrality may not be possible (Willis & Harris, 2000). Her reluctance to use politically charged texts for social studies teaching is similar to Meg’s eschewing of “hot button” issues as topics of study in ELA. This raises questions about what issues she would deem relevant and appropriate (not “dangerous”) for discussion in her imagined practice as a secondary English teacher. As I now see it, more work needed to be done regarding what Heydon and Hibbert (2010) call the relocation of beliefs from the personal to the political. As responsible secondary teachers, Meg and Kris would need to consider the social, political, and cultural contexts of current and/or controversial issues and ask critically oriented questions.

Demonstrating a willingness to consider and/or change perspectives was important to Kris as she discussed the problem of binary thinking. Similarly, Ross observed differences in perspectives in content area teaching and learning, saying, “…all the math majors had the biggest problem because math is so black and white. There's an exact answer…the definite answer…” but “when it comes to…reading—there's no answer.” This sentiment is borne out in Elise’s statement, “I like a final answer.” In contrast to Elise, Ross indicates that he is comfortable with uncertainty and perhaps willing to change perspectives, which, if channeled into his pedagogy as critical practice, could make for rich learning experiences for his future students.
Grappling with constructivist approaches in content area teaching. The discourses of constructivist approaches and learning content through literacy processes and practices led participants to voice classroom management and curricular concerns. Ross and Meg expressed apprehension regarding control and management. During coursework, Ross expressed his fears about being prepared to face what he referred to as a “brutal and gruesome reality” within which teachers engaged in a “never ending battle” for control. However, given time and distance from our course, and with another field experience under his belt, by the time of our post course interview, Ross was more sanguine about the adequacy of his teacher preparation and professional knowledge. As a prospective English teacher, he would work toward “opening minds” to those “incredible thing[s]” that are reading, English, and literature.

Framed as “control,” for Meg, managing a classroom meant teacher-led, transmission-style instruction as she demonstrated during our course. When introduced to student-centered, constructivist pedagogical approaches, she aimed to “try to let go of complete control and allow students to take charge of the learning.” She grappled with this issue in several contexts (classroom demonstrations; field experiences) as it kept bumping up against her idealized notions of teaching.

The discourses of constructivist approaches and learning content through literacy processes and practices led Elise to worry about stakeholders questioning “untraditional ways of teaching.” In her experience, content was transmitted from teacher or textbook to student and project-based lessons were irregular and possibly disruptive. Meg, too, was inclined to traditional practices but perhaps for different reasons: her expressed need for control led her to question “new literacies” where she might have to relinquish “complete control” of her students’ learning. Kris questioned whether some of these teaching practices might be “too creative” and also worried about stakeholders questioning a teacher’s decision to use innovative teaching methods.
Ross was expecting to be “told” what and how to teach with seemingly undisturbed acquiescence.

These examples of participants’ questions or lack thereof as in the case of Ross, can be seen as both healthy and troubling: healthy in their skepticism, perhaps, but troubling in their lack of agency. As teacher educators, we expect our teacher candidates to be change agents as they enter the field. But we also need to be cognizant of the careful stepping new teachers need to do to enter the field in the first place. As Stevens (2002) reminds us, preservice teachers recognize they are “at the figurative bottom of the hegemonic structure of higher education and secondary schools” and do not feel it appropriate to question traditional curriculum and instruction in school systems that generally do not support transformative classroom literacy practices (p. 272). Still, I had hoped that the focal preservice teachers would feel more secure in their knowledge about content literacy by this point—three years and two literacy courses in to their teacher preparation program.

*Thinking changing before practices.* As noted earlier (Chapters Five and Six), during our course, both Meg and Kris expressed an interest in constructivist approaches to teaching that included questioning and discussion formats, but both reverted to a teacher-centered pedagogical mode in their demonstration lessons. In Meg’s case, while she attempted to create opportunities for questioning and discussion in her class demonstrations, her belief in and reliance upon a model of tightly controlled, teacher directed lessons strongly influenced her practices that barely nodded to the social construction framework forwarded in our course. Kris expressed support for creative ways of teaching and later during the interview talked about using multimedia resources for teaching history content (e.g., vocabulary study; CNN vs. Fox). Yet again, a stark contrast emerged between Kris’s thinking and her practice. As discussed in Chapter Six, her Content Area Read Aloud demonstration consisted of 15 literal, recall-type questions calling for a single
correct response, and her Content Literacy Strategy Lesson was a dismantled text (cut-up sentences) where students were required to order the events correctly; there was one correct way to assemble this text and it needed to be done on the spot. It was clear from these demonstrations that Kris’s practices had not caught up with her thinking. In both Meg and Kris’s cases, Richardson et al.’s (1991) assertion that “a lack of relationship between beliefs and practices may indicate that the teacher is going through a change process” (p. 579) is ultimately hopeful, if, in fact, opportunities for further pedagogical development along these lines are provided.

*A twist on this: Practice changing before thinking?* Elise’s expressed skepticism toward a role for literacy in math pedagogy was not in evidence as she ably and convincingly integrated sound literacy practices into her math lesson demonstrations in our class. She tried on these literacy ideas and did so with aplomb. This lends support to a staff development model based on the idea that changes in beliefs follow changes in practices (Richardson et al., 1991). For me, questions surface about the directional pull between expressed beliefs and beliefs in use. In Elise’s case, is the flow bidirectional? Or is the connection non-linear altogether? Was Elise’s performance simply mimesis? And if so, what are the consequences of “going through the motions” if the theoretical basis is missing? These questions call to mind the “twisting path” of concept development Smagorinsky et al. (2003) refer to, but also the complexities involved in changing practices. Authentic change in practice requires sound theoretical understanding (Richardson, et al., 1991). In Chapter Nine, I discuss the importance of providing opportunities for prospective teachers to connect theories and practice.

**Literacy in their content areas.**

*Learning content is separate from literacy: Literacy as an add-on.* Both Meg and Elise demonstrated “literacy as an add-on” and “time constraints” mindsets. Throughout our course, Meg viewed literacy as an add-on. Rather than viewing literacy processes as an
inherent part of learning English content, she considered literacy and literacy strategies as needing to be “integrated.” Elise, too, held on to the view that literacy in math is an extra or add-on. Conceptually, she maintained a separation between mathematics content and literacy (Draper & Seibert, 2010; Hall, 2005). Overall, the focal participants viewed their disciplines as bodies of knowledge as opposed to communities of practice where people and their associated activities are at the center of the discipline (Draper, 2012).

*Issues of time.* During our course, Elise was highly supportive of the writing-to-learn strategy. She imagined incorporating “power writing” in her future lesson designs. In the post course interview, however, she walked back from this support, asking pointedly “where do I fit that in?...what do I leave out?” And though Elise believed writing-to-learn was “a really good idea,” she doubted that she could “find the time” to engage her future students in writing and project based learning. Meg too made frequent referrals to constraints of time throughout our course. While she vigorously supported the idea of sustained periods of time set aside for reading in school, she subsequently asked, “How do I have time for SSR?” For both Meg and Elise, beliefs and imagined practice are at odds. And while this could be interpreted as a process of changing beliefs (Richardson et al., 1991), in this case, I see the “lack of relationship between beliefs and practices” (p. 579) as evidence of their privileging the practices observed in the field over what they “learned” in coursework (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010).

*Reading “resistance.”* In her own schooling experience, Meg observed “resistance” to literacy in the content areas. At the onset of our course, Elise wondered how to change preconceived notions, extant in schooling, “that literacy and math classrooms aren’t a fit.” She asserted that math teachers don’t know how to use literacy effectively in teaching mathematics, and she anticipated a lack of support from teachers, parents, and administrators, for integrating literacy and math. Elise’s doubts imbued her work throughout our course. Her (understandable)
skepticism about the importance of literacy—the role of literacy—in math pedagogy, and her rejection of generic literacy messages (Siebert & Draper, 2008) coupled with the notion of time constraints left little room for a shift in thinking during our course. Significantly, months after the conclusion of our course, Meg and Ross each commented on the math students’ resistance they had observed in our course the previous semester and were observing once again in the current semester as students enrolled in our program’s second required adolescent literacy course. Their peers’ resistance to intentionally integrating literacy practices into their content teaching reflects a dominant view held by many who work in secondary education (Draper & Seibert, 2010; Lesley, 2005, 2011).

**Imagining the role of literacy in content pedagogy.** The focal participants each imagined a different role for literacy in their content area. While Ross imagined an integral role for literacy in his future English classroom, he was not specific about what this meant other than to suggest strategic practices such as rereading, asking questions, and making connections when transacting with text. Ross’s conceptualization of literacy was under construction: he understood it as more than reading and writing and having “a lot more subsections and definitions…” His focus was on “promoting literacy each day,” teaching reading skills and strategies while motivating his students and “finding ways to make plays that we're reading or poems or stories fun.” Above all, Ross wanted to share with his future students those “incredible thing[s]” English, literature, and reading. He, like Meg, demonstrated a disposition toward his own continuous learning as teacher.

Meg, Kris, and Elise imagined a more limited role for literacy in their content areas. Although Meg allowed “literacy fits” into English pedagogy, in her understanding, literacy was largely confined to reading. Initially, an affective dimension predominated her conceptualization of literacy as she emphasized the role of interest, engagement, and motivation in reading. Meg
believed her enthusiasm for books could transform reluctant readers and that, as discussed in Chapter Five, finding the “right book” was the answer for readers who struggled. Yet all of this was complicated by her field experience where the struggling readers she met needed “skills up the wazoo.” Meg’s vision of English teaching had changed abruptly: she had experienced English classes (“not honors”) in an urban high school and, as a consequence of that experience, her approach to teaching “those kids” who were not “natural readers” would be necessarily different. Further complicating this deficit view, her concept of literacy in English pedagogy was largely reserved for struggling readers who, unlike proficient readers, needed to be taught literacy strategies; she believed that these students needed literacy strategies because “they were not read to as kids.” These assumptions about who benefits from literacy instruction (only those who struggle) and why students struggle (because they were not read to) needed to be unpacked and critically examined.

As noted in Chapter Six, Kris’s conception of history teaching and learning “facts” had not been overtly modified or expanded. With regard to literacy, she focused largely on cognitive processes (e.g., memorizing) and cited vocabulary as the single most important contributor to the process of comprehension. In terms of literacy processes and practices in history teaching and learning, Kris understood and named the importance of sourcing text, but had not yet articulated additional literacy processes such as interpretation of multiple artifacts and synthesis of perspectives (Rainey & Moje, 2012). Although theoretically, she aimed to be “more of a constructivist kind of teacher” who would “teach kids how to think,” she had yet to provide empirical evidence along these lines.

Early in our course, Elise ventured, “Many people do not understand how math relates to literacy. There are ways to use literacy in math classrooms.” Yet her belief that “there’s not a lot of reading in math” acted to constrain her imagined practice. Johnson et al. (2011) argue that
reading math (not just math examples) exposes students to the grammar of mathematics and that reading classical math texts and having students write their own texts builds familiarity with the grammar of the field. The researchers also counter Elise’s belief that “What’s important is reading the definition and knowing what the definition means” asserting that being literate in a discipline goes beyond accumulating knowledge (Johnson et al., 2011).

**Literacy practices/strategies shared across content areas.** For the focal participants, the prevailing conceptualization of literacy in content area pedagogy was that of generic, cross-content area strategies. Both English education participants, Ross and Meg, talked about softening boundaries between subject areas. Meg expressed enthusiasm for cross content area assignments and Ross asserted that English and history should be tied together. At one point, Elise expressed an interest in making connections between math and other subject areas and, in fact, considered having literacy skills as objectives in math lessons. While she felt that teachers should help their students make connections across content areas, she also expressed doubts about the utility of literacy in teaching mathematics.

**Literacy strategies in their content areas.** Throughout our course, Meg expressed an interest in constructivist approaches to teaching such as questioning and discussion formats as she began to see the connections between talk (“peer interactions”) and literacy learning. Her notion of literacy expanded to include oral language interactions. Meg asserted as well that the job of an English teacher is to show students how to read different kinds of texts (expository and narrative) and genres with the idea that such exposure would transfer to other content area texts. Kris asserted that setting a purpose for reading and examining text structure were helpful strategies to teach and useful for teaching history content. As with Meg and Elise (to an extent), Kris considered class discussion as an effective component of learning. Despite Elise’s skepticism regarding literacy strategies for math pedagogy, she supported questioning and a limited number
of discussion strategies, text coding (specifically underlining), and modeling (as procedural think aloud) for teaching mathematics. Especially interesting was Elise’s plan to adapt the reading circle format to “math circles” where students work together in small groups to talk about “confusing points” in solving mathematical problems, a view she later stepped away from in the interview.

In the post course interview, there were a number of moments where Ross, Meg, and Kris shared ways they enacted a content literacy lens in their most recent field experiences. For example, Ross found success as he guided students in rewriting a Shakespearian text in contemporary language. Meg found that reading aloud engaged her otherwise reluctant readers. Kris critiqued her host teacher’s approach to teaching content by assigning his students to write an essay and then “doing the work for them,” yet teacher-led lessons were her default practice. Kris could critique but not yet practice the recommendations she was making—evidence that her thinking was changing before her practice. These topics (connecting text to students’ lives, valuing read alouds for secondary content teaching and learning, forwarding student-centered pedagogy) as components of course content, were examined, discussed, and demonstrated across the semester; later, the learning built in that context informed their field observations and practices. With these content literacy enactments, the focal participants demonstrated movement toward notions of a vital, relevant content literacy approach to teaching and learning. However, literacy processes specific or unique to their disciplines were not articulated (see below).

*Meeting the needs of struggling readers.* Research demonstrates that content area reading strategies are particularly effective for students who struggle with reading comprehension but teaching strategies, as these focal preservice teachers expressed, is often seen as an add-on to an already packed curriculum (Hynd-Shanahan, 2013). Although enrolled in the second required adolescent literacy course at the time of our interview, Ross expressed uncertainty regarding his
professional literacy knowledge. He lacked confidence and was admittedly “nervous” about moving struggling students along the literacy continuum. In practice, Meg’s experience in her most recent field period reversed her beliefs about the efficacy of an authentic, “just-find-the-right-book” approach, which she traded in for a technical, skills-oriented approach to reading instruction. And while we, in our course, had underscored the importance of providing middle- and high-school student with interesting, relevant, and appealing texts, Elise had no critique of the middle school students she had observed in her field experience reading assigned, leveled books designed for young children just learning to read. Both Meg and Elise’s experiences provide evidence supporting the assertion that preservice teachers privilege the experiential over the theoretical, valuing their field placement host teachers’ practices over what they were exposed to in their teacher preparation programs (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010).

**Struggling to articulate literacy practices they use to learn in their content area.** The focal participants were encouraged to analyze literacy tools and processes they use to learn in their content areas. Despite opportunities to do so (in lesson demonstrations, journal responses, and class discussions), focal participants struggled to articulate their own literacy processes in learning subject area content. Perhaps the difficulty in doing this could be attributed to the “invisibility” of these processes as successful learners in their content areas (Schoenbach et al., 2003, p. 134). As Rainey and Moje (2012) explain, many content area teachers hold deep understandings of the ways that knowledge is produced and communicated in the discipline, the types of argument that are valued, and the types of evidence and warrant that are acceptable. However, these practices can feel so much like second nature that teachers are not always fully aware of disciplinary reading and writing practices. (p. 76)
This brings to mind Draper and Siebert’s (2010) assertion that disciplinary literacy processes may go unrecognized by both literacy teachers and content area teachers. Ross focused on motivation but did not specify literacy processes unique to English learning and teaching. Meg maintained secondary teachers need to teach students how to read and write the various types of texts associated with each discipline. Using a history text, “even as an English teacher,” in her imagined practice she would “teach reading.” Despite Meg’s enthusiasm for reading and English literature and her expressed positive attitude toward literacy in her content area, she did not articulate with specificity how literacy relates to ELA pedagogy beyond general descriptions for developing students’ reading enthusiasm and supporting accessibility to disciplinary texts. As discussed above, Kris named sourcing as important in teaching history, but did not articulate additional literacy process unique to her content area. Although she was able to discuss generic literacy strategies useful in mathematics pedagogy (e.g., underlining), Elise did not name literacy processes unique to her content area.

**Disarticulation of pedagogical beliefs and practices.** This is where the most work is needed—in this open, and likely productive, space. This is where we, as a community of learners, needed to spend more time analyzing and investigating what it is we do as math, English, social studies, and literacy learners, to build an understanding of literacy processes involved in learning and teaching subject matter. I consider promising Richardson et al.’s (1991) assertion that a misalignment of beliefs and practices may indicate that a teacher’s changes in beliefs are preceding changes in practice, but I would argue that it may also indicate the durability of beliefs and the ineffectiveness of some coursework to convincingly disrupt taken-for-granted ways of thinking. Indeed, Richardson et al. (1991) argue that focusing on belief changes and behaviors in and of themselves may not lead to stable, authentic change without an understanding of supporting theory; congruency between beliefs and theoretical assumptions, they assert, will lead
to genuine change in practice. Below, I work to explain this disarticulation of beliefs from practices by turning the lens on my practice as course instructor.

**Lens On My Practice**

I sought to explore the ways the focal preservice content area teachers’ engagements with coursework revealed and shaped their conceptualizations of literacy learning and teaching in their content areas. I sought to document the interaction of literacy histories, prior experiences in schooling, and prior beliefs about secondary teaching and learning with adolescent literacy coursework. As demonstrated in the literature, prior beliefs influenced the ways participants responded to course content (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010; Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt-Reynolds, 1992).

**Non-linear nature of knowledge production.** The experiences of these four preservice secondary teachers in the adolescent literacy course reveal four very different stories. The data show that the participants traveled a “twisting path” (Smagorinsky et al., 2003, p. 1401) toward concept development as they engaged with course content and made observations in subsequent field experiences. Recurring disjunctures bring into sharp relief this non-linear path of teacher learning. What is the significance of apparent and convincing conceptual understanding but its glaring absence—in any form—in practice? I am thinking of Kris here. Her lesson demonstrations lacked connection to our course content. And, by contrast, as Elise flawlessly performed content literacy applications, I wondered about the consequences of “going through the motions” where the theoretical basis is missing. Elise executed content literacy methods, but questioned their value for teaching math. Would this lead to the “misimplementation” or “no implementation” that Richardson et al. (1991) caution us about? What is the significance of the ability to demonstrate a concept in practice, but not believe in or value it? In both cases, there was little evidence of authentic change in practice because
theoretical understanding was in process (Richardson, et al., 1991). These questions illustrate the complexities involved in changing practices.

Over the course of the semester, there were obvious moments of disjuncture as I became increasingly aware of tensions in Elise’s negotiation of course content as she questioned (along with the majority of preservice math teachers in our course) the relevancy of key concepts. I also became aware of the many missed opportunities for all of us to engage in critical conversations. Given her thoughtful journal responses and facility with oral language (as demonstrated in class), I wondered why Kris’s work, toward the end of the course was not reflective of the work she’d done earlier in the semester. I was also aware of moments of coherence where the students’ content area expertise (Gritter, 2010) merged with course content. Examples of this can be found in Elise’s lesson demonstrations, the groups’ reading circle presentations, the majority of journal responses, the level of engaged, in-class discussions and questioning, and the small and large cooperative group work. Most apparent in the data, the focal participants’ learning was anything but linear, predicable, or stage-like as some research has claimed (e.g., Freedman and Carver, 2007).

**Coursework and discursive frames.** Taken as a whole, what were the situational factors that influenced beliefs and practices? In this cross-case analysis, the participants’ experiences with coursework provide evidence for those topics, activities, and assignments that were most influential (or perhaps caused the most discomfort or disruption) in shaping conceptualizations of literacy. The data show that building a broad(er) view of literacy (although the effort to build broad definitions was not robust), recognizing literacy learning as a social (as opposed to a solely individual) enterprise, and acknowledging sociocultural dimensions of literacy learning and teaching were influential course topics in shaping the preservice teachers’ conceptualizations of literacy.
What concepts fell short of intended goals? Disrupting deficit views—from white preservice teachers—toward issues of diversity, understanding the need for critical practices, a conceptual understanding of critical literacy, and an articulation of literacy practices they used in learning their subject area content were concepts left largely unexamined. Despite efforts to foreground content learning through literacy, the focal participants, overall, conceptualized literacy as separate from content (see Draper, 2002) which likely precluded their recognition and articulation of literacy processes and practices used in learning content. Through coursework, the preservice teachers in this study were encouraged to articulate the processes they used to learn in their content area. I had hoped to edge participants toward thinking about the how and why of learning in their subject areas, yet they more often privileged knowing content—the what—over their disciplines’ ways of knowing, communicating, valuing, and learning through social interaction—in short, their disciplines’ discourses (Rainey & Moje, 2012). Upon reflection, it is clear that the discourse of content area literacy constrained participants’ (and my) work toward this goal. The discourse of disciplinary literacy was missing from—and clearly needed in—this adolescent literacy course, an issue I discuss in Chapter Nine.

Admittedly, during the interviews, I was confounded and disappointed when the focal participants did not question or recognize tensions between what they learned (or were learning) in coursework and practices they observed in the field. As mentioned at the opening of this chapter, I had hoped that participants would say more about working in actual secondary classrooms during their recent field experiences, making observations through a content literacy lens; I hoped they would share observations about non-proficient readers in those classrooms, as this was an emphasis in the second adolescent literacy course in which they were enrolled at the time of the interview. While the focal preservice teachers’ responses revealed some loosely connected theoretical and practical notions regarding content literacy, there was little concrete
evidence of our course content in their observations. This brings teacher learning, conceptual understanding, and course design to the fore and has implications for literacy teacher educators, all of which are discussed in the next chapter.

**Coda**

Looking across these four cases has provided me with insights into my own assumptions and practices as a literacy teacher educator, particularly in the context of the theoretical shift in the field from literacy in the content area to disciplinary literacies explored in Chapter Two. Confronting my own beliefs and practices in a systematic way has shined a light on missteps and less-than-fruitful teaching approaches I examine further in Chapter Nine, along with a discussion of broader implications for secondary literacy teacher education.
Chapter Nine

Conclusions and Implications

Although I had taught the adolescent literacy course for several years, I had become increasingly dissatisfied with the messages and practices that constituted coursework. I wanted to learn what specifically needed to change to help preservice secondary teachers understand the literacy-content learning connection. After conducting this teacher research study, I have come to the following conclusions: I did not understand how students experienced the course and its purpose and I did not recognize the nature and source of their confusions. As I began to recognize these confusions, I started to realize my own confusions paralleled those of my students. These confusions emerged from multiple sources, including my practice and history, institutional constraints and practices, and content area/disciplinary literacies practice and research in teacher education. In this chapter, I discuss these conclusions and their implications for secondary literacy coursework within teacher education.

My Practice and History

As the field of content area literacy was shifting toward a disciplinary literacies approach, I found myself at a crossroads: my nascent understandings of what this shift meant bumped up against the constraints of the familiar—content area literacy framed the course description, course design, and my practices. In addition to this, the adolescent literacy course was informed by a literacy learning lens rather than a disciplinary learning lens (Moje, 2008b) which served to undermine the connections between literacy and disciplinary learning.

A key understanding from this research involves establishing clarity among approaches to secondary disciplinary literacy. I brought multiple, contradictory, and sometimes unarticulated theoretical frameworks to my teaching that can explain some of my students’ confusions and some of my disappointments. Tensions arose due to the fact that I was straddling several quite
different perspectives and did not successfully bridge them across the semester. These perspectives, framed by sociocultural theories of literacy, included literacies (new, multimodal, critical), adolescent/youth literacy development, and content area literacy. I wanted my students to expand their notions of literacy, know about the ways youth use and grow in literacy, see the value of literacy across content areas, and articulate the literacy processes they use to learn content in their discipline—the latter of which I knew very little about and for which I had genuine questions.

A content area literacy framework. The most problematic perspective evidenced in these data stemmed from the dominance of the content area literacy lens. This lens influenced students’ emerging conceptualizations of literacy in their disciplines, helping them to view literacy teaching and learning as separate from teaching and learning content; students envisioned content area literacy as discrete strategies, rather than teaching content through the literate practices of the discipline. Through my analysis of course assignment descriptions, student work produced in response to assignments, and in-class demonstrations and activities, I see that there was an emphasis on generic strategies. Students in the course were encouraged to adapt strategies to their content areas. Assignments such as the Literacy Strategies Toolkit and the Content Literacy Lesson, I now realize, reinforced the use of generic literacy strategies applicable across the content areas.

Although coursework aimed to help the preservice teachers explore literacy’s role in their own content learning and to support literacy instruction across content areas, it was the latter, more familiar “message” (see below) participants gravitated toward. This was likely due to an over emphasis in the course on strategies-to-adapt coupled with few opportunities to explore and name particular literacy processes (e.g., comprehension processes, writing practices, etc.) they use to learn in their content areas. More widely, the adolescent literacy course was informed by a
literacy learning lens rather than a disciplinary learning lens (Moje, 2008b). The course forwarded the development of generic comprehension strategies and skills as opposed to emphasizing learning in the discipline. I focused on the use of reading and writing strategies for comprehending content area texts and encouraged explicit teaching of generic strategies (e.g., summarizing, KWL, comparing and contrasting) that could be “applied universally across content areas” (Fang & Coatoam, 2013, p. 627).

**The students had difficulties theorizing their practice.** Although participants explored their literacy conceptualizations grounded in “personal theories,” I realize now that there were few opportunities for them to make a connection between these conceptualizations and literacy’s role in their content area pedagogy. For example, the Content Literacy Teaching Lesson feedback form, completed by an audience of peers, asked about the presenter’s lesson in terms of clarity of objective(s), alignment of objectives, activities, and assessment, what worked/went well, and suggestions to make the lesson stronger. There was no scheduled follow up for the presenter to reflect on her/his lessons nor on feedback from their peers or from me.

Based on Herber’s (1970) mantra, “content determines process” the principle of content through literacy—the understanding that content area knowledge is built through transaction with texts (Alvermann et al., 2010, p. 14.)—was a guiding principle in the adolescent literacy course. While the focal prospective teachers approached an understanding of content through literacy, the data suggest that the adolescent literacy course did not provide enough opportunities for the prospective teachers to fully explore and embrace the concept. We did not devote enough time to exploring texts of the disciplines and there was little discussion regarding differences among literacy practices in the disciplines.

Additionally, the students’ field placement experiences were not set up in a way that encouraged productive theorizing. Field experiences, scheduled between semesters, after course
completion, were not connected to particular courses or coursework. Without a content literacy focus or objective, it was unlikely that students would intentionally theorize specifically about enactments of literacy in the subject area classrooms they observed. The prospective teachers in this study, to varying degrees, privileged the experiential over the theoretical. Their field experiences trumped their learning when it came to literacy practices based in theory.

**The students did not articulate literacies in their content areas.** At the outset, we worked to expand our notions of literacy to go beyond reading and writing. Expanded ideas of literacy were tentative, however, as literacy was conceptualized as reading and writing in journal responses and assignments across the semester. I realized that while I had students brainstorm literacy in their everyday lives, I did not have them brainstorm literacy in their content areas [Journal 1 “24-hour literacy diary”]. It is possible the reality of the content area classroom (and their experiences within) overpowered changing notions of literacy. The students’ own education had likely been in content areas rather than in disciplines. It is also possible that they did not view themselves as mathematicians, historians, or literary critics but as knowers of mathematics, history, and English literature. The prospective teachers in this study were focused largely on the accumulation of (content) knowledge and not necessarily on the processes and practices of their disciplines. I explore this conclusion more closely from a mathematics perspective.

**Math-literacy impasse.** Perhaps the most unexpected and confounding issue arising from this study was the math students’ blanket “resistance” to recognizing the role of literacy in math pedagogy. Students’ beliefs about math teaching and learning collided with those underpinning the course causing contradictions and confusions. For example, the majority of math students viewed math as a body of knowledge to be accumulated as opposed to processes to be experienced in pursuit of constructing math knowledge. Elise, in many ways, is representative of the math students as she experienced moments of taking up and moments of rejecting the
content literacy ideas proffered in our course across the semester. She demonstrated tentative acceptance at times, but was ultimately most swayed by the pull of her own experience and her content area expertise, maintaining that she didn’t need “500 strategies” to solve a math problem. The deeper we went in to our coursework, the more difficult it became for Elise to move forward in her concepts of literacy and its utility for learning mathematics. She held values, beliefs, and theories she felt were incompatible with those explored in our coursework. And I, as course instructor, was not aware of the ways coursework contributed to this impasse.

*Math is thinking “step by step”.* Smith Davis and Brown (2013) interviewed math students who, like Elise, referred to the importance of proceeding “step by step” in “a certain order” for teaching and learning math (p. 177). Taking a deeper look at this, it became apparent that Elise’s preference for practical, procedural knowledge—the step-by-step method—apprenticed her into mathematic ways of thinking and knowing (Smith Davis & Brown, 2013). Yet coursework challenged Elise to conceptualize that being literate in math went beyond accumulating knowledge (Johnson et al., 2011). With regard to topics of study around comprehension strategies in the course, Elise supported and demonstrated asking clarifying questions, building vocabulary, and classroom formats for think aloud—all of which are integral to secondary mathematics pedagogy (Smith Davis & Brown, 2013). It is clear that Elise reflected and enacted mathematical ways of thinking.

**Institutional Constraints and Practices**

Another source of my students’ and my confusions and disjunctures stems from institutional constraints and practices. The purpose of the course and its relationship to other courses had not been sufficiently articulated or examined by the institution and those within it. The official course description did not reflect changes in the field of secondary literacy. The literacy course itself was taught in isolation from disciplinary methods courses. The field
placements within the program did not support students in conceptualizing, reflecting on, and theorizing practice or making connections to course content.

As was the case in this study, many secondary literacy courses within teacher preparation programs, following a traditional content area literacy model, are often taught in isolation from disciplinary methods courses (Conley, 2012). I inherited a pre-existing class with a course description (below). The official course description did not reflect changes in the field of secondary literacy toward a disciplinary literacies approach. In addition, the purpose of the course and its relationship to other disciplinary methods courses had not been sufficiently articulated or examined by the institution and those within it. As such, the course existed as separate from disciplinary coursework, institutionalizing a content area reading strategies approach, and was taught by a teacher who was unfamiliar with the disciplinary knowledge and practices of the students’ specializations.

Beginning with the official, institutionally required, course description for Adolescent Literacy I, a content area literacy approach informed the language used in the course:

Pre- or corequisite: completion of adolescent methods class. Designed to provide the secondary teacher with the necessary knowledge and skills to insure that his/her students acquire and use literacy skills necessary for success in middle and high school. (Offered every fall semester.) [College Catalog]

To align the course with my thinking at the time, I added the following to extend that description:

This first course introduces key theoretical and practical aspects of literacy learning and teaching that address the particular needs of adolescents in today’s diverse classrooms. In an effort to build an understanding of literacy, we will explore how we come to be literate, how literacy development evolves, and the complexities of adolescent literacy. We will
build a knowledge base of methods to support student learning and to enhance comprehension of classroom content materials through literacy. [Course syllabus]

With “use of literacy skills necessary for success,” the language of the “official” course description emphasizes a traditional content area literacy lens (Moore et al., 1983). My extended course description emphasized both adolescent literacy development (Stevens & Bean, 2003) and comprehension of content materials “through literacy,” that is, learning content through transactions with course texts (Alvermann et al., 2010). Combined, these descriptions are indicative of the content area literacy lens that framed the course. My research questions were borne of dissatisfaction with my instruction and the tensions I observed as preservice teachers engaged with coursework in previous iterations of the adolescent literacy course. I now recognize that many of these tensions sprang from the discourse of content area literacy (e.g., adapting generic literacy strategies to content area teaching).

In addition, the field placements within the program did not support students in conceptualizing, reflecting on and theorizing practice or making connections to specific course content. As a program requirement, the field experience was separate from courses or coursework, arranged by the individual student and approved by the student’s advisor. As observed in this study, three of the focal participants’ field experiences did not support theoretical or practical approaches forwarded in coursework. Elise’s observations in her most recent field experience reinforced her previously held beliefs about students who struggle in reading. She reserved constructivist pedagogical approaches (e.g., modeling strategies) for on-grade-level learners because, in her view, such approaches would not be appropriate for their “special education” counterparts; she did not critique the practices she witnessed in her field placement. Meg critiqued the incidences where the teachers she observed had lowered expectations of students who struggled in ELA. Kris witnessed a teacher “doing the work” for students rather
showing them how to accomplish a task; she too critiqued this teacher-centered model, but did not break away from this model in her own practice. Field placements, while potentially valuable, would be less hit or miss if coordinated among and across disciplinary and departmental boundaries.

**Content Area/Disciplinary Literacies Practice and Research in the Field of Teacher Education**

My practice is mired in a complex history within the field of teacher preparation related to content area literacy and disciplinary literacies. Scholars in the field are grappling with tensions stemming from ambiguous and often contradictory language that include the ways content area- and disciplinary literacies are interpreted, theorized, and practiced. Scholars and researchers recommend widely varying approaches to teaching secondary literacy. As discussed earlier, dominant literacy messages promulgated in traditional content area literacy coursework can be problematic for math teachers (Siebert & Draper, 2008).

Overall, content area literacy is seen as a “one size fits all” approach to strategies instruction and has as its goal to learn subject area content. This approach encompasses the cognitive requirements for reading and writing shared across content areas. Disciplinary literacy, in contrast, encompasses strategies and/or processes unique to each discipline and has as its goal to learn about and participate in the social, cognitive, and communication practices of the discipline. Disciplinary literacy “focuses on knowledge production of content instead of knowledge banking” (Mandarino & Wickens, 2014, p. 37). There are, however, debates about “what disciplinary literacy actually means in concept, goals, and practice” (Conley, 2012). Some of these debates begin with questions about the purview of secondary content pedagogy.

As discussed briefly in Chapter One, secondary school subjects or content areas differ in organization, purpose, and scope from the higher education notion of *disciplines* (NCTE, 2011).
Secondary school subjects often “constrain or control how knowledge is presented, while
disciplines emphasize the creation of knowledge” (NCTE, 2011, p. 1). Yet, Fang and Coatoam
(2013) argue that a disciplinary literacy approach is grounded in the following beliefs:

(a) school subjects are disciplinary discourses recontextualized for educational purposes;
(b) disciplines differ not just in content but also in the ways that content is produced,
communicated, evaluated, and renovated; (c) disciplinary practices such as reading and
writing are best learned and taught within each disciplines; (d) being literate in a
discipline means understanding of both disciplinary content and disciplinary habits of
mind…( p. 628)

NCTE (2011) urges teachers to view literacies and learning content as “mutually supportive and
inextricably linked” rather than as opposites (p. 2). Yet, critics maintain that disciplinary thinking
processes are too sophisticated for struggling learners to manage and that more generic cognitive
strategies instruction is appropriate (Faggella-Luby et al., 2012). Others argue that the goal of
secondary education is not to create disciplinary experts but rather subject area “amateurs”
(Heller, 2010/11). Still others call for a pragmatic middle ground with an approach to secondary
teaching that combines generic aspects of content area literacy with specific aspects of
disciplinary literacy (Brozo et al., 2013).

To complicate making this paradigm shift in the field of secondary literacy, there is little
information about what it takes to prepare teacher candidates for disciplinary literacy practice
(Conley, 2012); further, “the research on discipline-specific literacy strategies is still preliminary
and inconclusive…” (Alvermann, et al., 2013). What do these ambiguities mean for literacy
teacher educators? Below, I share implications for my practice, for addressing institutional
constraints and practices, and for teacher education.
Implications

Implications for my practice. As a result of this research, implications for my practice as a literacy teacher educator begin with clarifying perspectives (e.g., adolescent literacies, content literacy, disciplinary literacies, critical literacy, etc.) in the courses I teach by articulating them for myself and then fully articulating them in course descriptions and syllabi and carrying them through coursework and assignments. As an extension of clarifying perspectives in coursework, I need to help preservice teachers bridge and expand these perspectives by providing more opportunities to put theory into practice. This research illustrates that instruction in principles or concepts alone does not result in development of a concept but rather “principles divorced from application” (Smagorinsky, 2003, p. 1404). For example, my participants had vague ideas about approaches forwarded in the course regarding content area literacy instruction, strategic learning, constructivism, and critical literacy. Little class time was set aside for ruminating on these concepts, and even less time for practical application within the course. Prospective teachers need opportunities to reflect on and respond to feedback (both peer and instructor) on their lesson demonstrations.

As a literacy teacher educator, this research presents compelling evidence for the need to build an understanding of disciplinary goals through collaboration with disciplinary experts. This means literacy teacher educators have conversations with content methods instructors so that course goals for building prospective teachers’ awareness of disciplinary literacy practices and processes align with disciplinary goals. It will mean identifying effective strategies, dismissing the inappropriate strategies, and developing “our own knowledge of the roles text and literacy play in the disciplinary subject areas of middle and secondary schools” (Johnson et al., 2011, p. 101). Looking closely at the course in this research, the limits of my understandings of the roles text and literacy play in secondary disciplines contributed to a misalignment of my expectations as course
instructor with those of the preservice teachers. As discussed above, redesigning adolescent literacy/content area literacy courses and coursework begins with clarifying theoretical and practical approaches and seeing prospective teachers as partners as we share our expertise in a two-way exchange. Draper (2012) asserts that disciplinary practitioners possess funds of knowledge as well as “requisite social skills (literacies) to use that knowledge to work together to negotiate and create new knowledge. This view of the disciplines values both the cognitive and the social aspects of disciplinary participation” (p. 244). Developing a disciplinary literacy approach involves asking questions about what it means to learn in a particular subject area, examining cultural and discursive practices within a discipline, and reconceptualizing “language and literacy practice as an integral aspect of subject area learning, rather than as a set of strategies for engaging with texts” (Moje, 2008b, p. 99).

It is clear that traditional content area literacy courses such as the one at the center of this study, framed as it was by a literacy learning lens rather than a disciplinary learning lens (Moje, 2008b), led to confusions and disjunctures for participants. Through this research, I have become acutely aware that within the course, the discipline of mathematics, with its unique discourses and literacies, was deemphasized and misrepresented in broad messages to incorporate reading and writing activities into math teaching and learning, and that at times—as demonstrated in Elise’s case—these messages promoted questionable instructional practices not valued by math teachers and did not transfer neatly to sound mathematical practices (Siebert & Draper, 2008).

As was demonstrated in this study, traditional content area literacy messages were problematic for the math preservice teachers because they failed to “properly acknowledge the influence of the discipline of mathematics on what counts as text, reading and writing” (Siebert & Draper, 2008, p. 235). The principle of content learning through literacy became less and less relevant to Elise as the course proceeded. While Elise recognized and agreed with supporting
textbook access and valued the mathematics textbook as a resource in her future classroom, overall, math learning and literacy strategies were separate in her view; the latter not relevant to the former. With limited meanings of text and literacy, Draper and Siebert (2010) argue, problems may arise that include literacy specialists not recognizing a disciplinary literacy event, content area teachers not recognizing a disciplinary literacy process, and the likelihood that literacy specialists and content teachers’ goals are at cross-purposes. These problems did arise in the course: I did not recognize Elise’s mathematical ways of thinking (e.g. “step-by-step”) as a disciplinary literacy process; Elise did not recognize literacy processes (e.g., critical practices, writing-to-learn) as valuable to learning math; and, as described in Chapter Seven, with Elise’s expertise in mathematics and my expertise in literacy, our goals were often at cross-purposes.

With regard to sociocultural concepts, this research made problematic the focal participants’ normative experiences and dominant views about teaching and learning. Their cultural deficit stance competed with their burgeoning cultural difference stance at this point in their teacher preparation (Purcell-Gates, 2002). As a white teacher researcher, I realize now how these issues should be central within a course on adolescent literacy. Though introducing and developing sociocultural concepts of literacy learning and teaching was intentionally planted in the beginning of the course with the idea that these would be foundational concepts upon which to build other concepts, the two weeks of classes dedicated to this topic was not enough. The preservice teachers—and I—needed more time for discussion and reflection on issues of literacy development related to ethnicity, language, culture, gender, and able-ness so we could work together, as a community of learners, to understand and practice responsive teaching.

I continue to reflect on ways to help preservice secondary teachers move beyond superficial understandings of critical practices. To develop a deeper understanding of critical literacy, students need opportunities to put this way of working into practice. Course structure
and design— informs by a content area literacy lens—likely contributed to missed opportunities for deeper learning as the preservice teachers negotiated coursework. Activities and assignments calling for critique of content area materials and messages, pedagogies and practices—the stuff of the course—were needed so students could delve more deeply into meaning, cultural practices, and alternative voices (all of which point to the centrality of sociocultural lens). I agree with Lee’s (2015) contention, “…the demands of active engaged citizenship in the 21st century intensify the need for our young people coming out of our educational institutions to be both able and disposed to read deeply, critically, and widely” (p. 9).

Finally, the adolescent literacy course covered content widely, not deeply. I felt the need to address far too wide a range of topics in adolescent literacy. As Alvermann et al. (2010) argue, Addiction to coverage is dangerous because it tends to produce a false dichotomy between content knowledge and process knowledge. When knowing what takes precedence over knowing how…students are deprived of the opportunity to learn how bits of knowledge fit together and generalize to other areas of the curriculum or to real life… (p. 5)

Interestingly, I was seeking the how of literate practices of the disciplines, but was mired in the what of my familiarity of content area literacy. Shifting to a disciplinary literacy focus will necessarily foster deeper learning of course content as preservice teachers work to examine and articulate the literate practices of disciplinary learning.

**Implications for addressing institutional constraints and practices.**

Implications for addressing institutional constraints include frequent updates of “official” course descriptions that reflect the thinking in the field. As literacy education faculty become aware of and/or align themselves with research and theories in the field, it is incumbent upon them to coordinate, revise, and update a college’s “official” course descriptions. Beyond course
descriptions, the field experience program required by the institution could be strengthened through department oversight. With goals tied to a set of specific courses coordinated through education department faculty, disciplinary faculty, and secondary school faculty, prospective teachers may be less likely to privilege the experiential over the theoretical as they engage in productive theorizing.

The findings from this study illustrate the consequence of little coordination among content area methods coursework and adolescent literacy coursework. It is reasonable that prospective teachers would benefit from preparation programs where methods and literacy coursework align to encompass disciplinary literacy pedagogy. As Bain and Moje (2012) explain, “Current teacher education comprises ill-organized sets of educational experiences in different spaces, for different purposes, and led by people who don’t work with one another and may never even have met” (p. 62). Clearly, this was part of the tension I experienced as an instructor attempting to meet the learning needs of the preservice math, history, and English teachers enrolled in my adolescent literacy course. This excerpt from my research notebook captures this tension:

_I am wondering about this student’s methods class. I’d like to talk with her about what she’s reading and learning in that class. Surely they’ve discussed IRE, constructivism, and responsive teaching—or at least, that’s my hope. These are topics we discuss in literacy, but they need to be a part of most, if not all, of their teacher preparation coursework. … [Researcher Notebook, 10/24]_

With program faculty coordination, this tension would be obviated as instructors share across domains the purviews and aims of methods and literacy coursework. Further, it is often the case content area teacher educators and literacy teacher educators lack the training to be specialists in both domains (Fang, 2014). As this study demonstrates, my lack of knowledge regarding literacy processes important to and valued in mathematics pedagogy contributed to missteps and
roadblocks in both Elise’s and my learning. Fang (2014) and others (Draper et al., 2012; Draper & Siebert, 2010; Johnson et al., 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Siebert & Draper, 2008) argue for collaboration between content area teacher educators, literacy teacher educators, and disciplinary experts, and for a restructuring of content area literacy courses to emphasize disciplinary literacies. I say more about this in the following section.

**Implications for content area/disciplinary literacies practice and research in the field of teacher education.** Fang (2014) contends that emphasizing literacies specific to each discipline “presents new challenges for teacher education because it requires deep understanding of both disciplinary content and disciplinary habits of mind” (p. 444). Indeed, making a shift from content area literacy to disciplinary literacy involves a sea change in the way literacy teacher educators view their work in preparing prospective teachers to be teachers of disciplines. I contend that recognizing and addressing these challenges and tensions will help those of us as teacher educators to more effectively facilitate secondary preservice teacher candidates’ learning about literacy more generally and disciplinary literacies in particular.

**Building awareness of disciplinary literacies: Collaboration across disciplines, programs, and institutions.** How can teacher education support preservice teachers in learning how to teach disciplinary literacies? What kinds of courses, field experiences, and partnerships are needed? As suggested above, in small teacher education programs such as the one at the site of this research, instructors of adolescent literacy/content area literacy courses might partner with content methods faculty to establish common disciplinary literacy discourses and goals. Traditional (evolving) content literacy courses would intentionally infuse authentic disciplinary literacies into coursework while content methods courses would recognize and support disciplinary literacies as a tool for content learning. With this collaboration, possibilities for co-teaching or team teaching are opened up. In larger programs, coherence among content
area literacy and methods courses has been achieved as cohorts, formed by discipline, focus on learning in the disciplines (Bain, 2012). In either case, courses should be built around what prospective teachers need to know to facilitate their future students’ ability to engage with and learn from content area texts, materials, and practices at the secondary level.

Secondary literacy teacher educators might go beyond the institution to seek consultation with disciplinary professionals in the field and with classroom teachers and their students to ‘field test’ disciplinary literacy practices preservice teachers are expected to know. Disciplinary expertise would be used to build programs and create curricula that reflect disciplinary ways of thinking and doing that are valued and used by experts in the field (Johnson et al., 2011). Alliances with school districts will allow teacher educators to form partnerships with content area practitioners. These partnerships can inform each other’s instructional goals and promote the integration of theory and practice anchored in reality. Such alliances will enhance prospective teachers’ field experiences as course, program, and institutions share understandings of content learning through disciplinary literacies.

With regard to secondary literacy and mathematics, reimagining content literacy courses involves recognizing that many of the current, generalized literacy messages are of limited use to mathematics educators “because they seldom address the specific texts, discourses, and literacies that are common in mathematics classrooms” (Siebert & Draper, 2008, p. 243). A math text may be a graph, diagram, symbolic expression, manipulative, etc. Messages that call for teachers to incorporate adolescents’ multiple literacies into their school literacies come with few suggestions of ways mathematics teachers can support their students’ fluency with discipline-specific texts (Siebert & Draper, 2008). Confusing and/or misleading, these messages may force mathematics teachers “to choose between incorporating literacy activities that do not make sense to them, or rejecting the messages because they contradict their understanding of the discipline” (Siebert & Draper, 2008, p.
237, emphasis added). This underscores the call for literacy educators to collaborate with math educators in an effort to identify relevant mathematics texts and the specific ways those texts are read and written. Mathematics educators’ feedback can help literacy educators “avoid creating messages that misrepresent mathematical discourses and literacies” (p. 243). Rather than perceiving mathematics teachers as resistant or uncooperative, literacy educators must see them as partners with discipline-specific goals, texts, and literacies that need to be addressed (Siebert & Draper, 2008).

**Content area literacy/ disciplinary literacies: Teacher preparation enacting content and disciplinary literacies.** Teacher preparation courses need to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to analyze their own beliefs and performances in order to begin to question their usual practices and increase opportunities to experience and practice using the strategies they are required to teach. It is clear that the preservice teacher participants in this study needed more guided practice to facilitate integration of theory and practice. This would include more time for students to reflect on and critique their lessons demonstrations and for literacy teacher educators to be explicit regarding the purposes for doing so.

The content area literacy lens alone is inadequate for preparing secondary content teachers to teach 21st century literacies. In this study, the language emphasizing “strategies” in the course description, assignments, and activities—in short, the course design—worked to constrain the participants’ conceptualizations of literacy in content area pedagogy. The findings from this research provide signposts for rethinking secondary content area literacy teacher preparation as the field shifts toward a disciplinary literacies pedagogical approach.

**Directions for Future Research**

Because of the ever increasing complexity of literacies in the context of advancing technologies and changing demographics, research is needed to explore literacy—comprehensive,
content area, disciplinary—through multiple lenses: sociocultural, critical, and struggling reader perspectives. NCTE (2013) put forth a comprehensive literacy perspective that combines disciplinary literacy with transferrable literacy skills as it emphasizes literacy development across multiple contexts including subject areas, grades, audiences, and purposes. Empirical research in literacy preparation at the secondary level is needed that focuses on supporting older students’ engagements with disciplinary texts as they continue to develop as readers (Dillon et al., 2010). Additionally, while the literature on disciplinary literacy is replete with theoretical essays, there are fewer empirical studies that involve literacy teacher educators’ efforts to address this burgeoning arena. Research is needed that explores literacy teacher educators’ transitions as they shift from traditional content area literacy courses toward redesigned content literacy courses informed by literacies of disciplines (NCTE, 2011). As a disciplinary literacies approach gains momentum, the field of literacy teacher education needs research that collaboratively explores disciplinary literacies: where literacy teacher educators and content teacher educators collaborate with disciplinary experts, practicing secondary teachers, prospective teachers, and secondary students to explore the characteristics of disciplinary literacies to inform course design, secondary curricula, and professional development. Developing relationships between the field and teacher education faculties will help “create optimum learning opportunities for candidates in this era of changing literacies and student demographics” (Heydon & Hibbert, 2010, p. 803). Finally, future inquiry might investigate the experiences of middle school and high school content area teachers and their students who have made the transition to a disciplinary literacies emphasis.

**Conclusion**

My understandings of literacy teaching and learning were under construction as I entered this research, and while I have gained insight into literacy teacher education, these understandings continue to evolve. I did not enter this research without my own beliefs about
and years of experience in literacy education; nor did I enter this research expecting to find the answer to my questions. Rather, I understood the processes involved in literacy teacher education to be complex, but through this research, I have learned they were complex in ways I had not been aware of. What I perceived as my students’ “resistance” to recognizing the role of literacy in content area pedagogy was disjunction brought on by unexamined traditional literacy “messages” that served to neglect or de-emphasize content learning—particularly in mathematics. I learned that a content area literacy lens is inadequate and that teaching and learning in subject areas requires different literacies. I learned that literacy teacher educators need to approach content literacy from a disciplinary learning lens as opposed to a literacy learning lens (Moje, 2008b). My teaching practice emanated from a literacy standpoint that effectively disregarded the distinct differences among content area pedagogies. As Moje (2008b) explains, literacy teacher educators need to ask what it means to learn in secondary content areas or disciplines and work to thoroughly conceptualize the language and literacy practices of learning in the content areas. We must acknowledge the disciplines as discourse communities with distinct cultural practices that students learn to navigate (Moje, 2008b). A disciplinary learning lens, as I imagine it, brings together constructivist approaches, disciplinary discourses, and an awareness of the ways critical sociocultural dimensions influence learning—all of which combine to create relevant, viable, and vibrant disciplinary literacies to better serve secondary learners.
REFERENCES


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Purcell-Gates, V. (2002). "...As soon as she opened her mouth!": Issues of language, literacy, and power. In L. Delpit & J. K. Dowdy (Eds.), *The skin that we speak* (pp. 121-141). New York: The New Press.


content area teachers' understandings and applications. Reading Research and Instruction, 46(2), 121-150.


ED XXX Adolescent Literacy I

Syllabus

I. Course Description
This course is the first of a two-course sequence designed to provide the secondary teacher with the knowledge and skills to ensure that her/his future students develop and use the literacy strategies and skills necessary for success in middle and high school. [From college catalog]

This first course introduces key theoretical and practical aspects of literacy learning and teaching that address the particular needs of adolescents in today’s diverse classrooms. In an effort to build an understanding of literacy, we will explore how we come to be literate, how literacy development evolves, and the complexities of adolescent literacy. We will build a knowledge base of methods to support student learning and to enhance comprehension of classroom content materials through literacy. [Extended course description added]

II. Course Outcomes
Knowledge and ability to
• provide a rationale for facilitating content learning through literacy
• apply theoretically-based principles of reading and writing to learn and recognize factors that influence how an individual comprehends when reading content materials
• identify, select and use a variety of instructional strategies and materials to meet adolescents’ learning and literacy needs
• develop and deliver lessons that incorporate literacy strategies with a clear connection to ___ standards and specific content areas
• develop and articulate personal goals for literacy development (your own and your students’);
• develop and communicate a vision for effective content teaching
• maximize content learning while developing literacy skills
• demonstrate critical thinking throughout the course

III. Required Texts and Materials

Articles/chapters available electronically or as handouts
Choice text for Reading Circle (more information on this provided in class)
A content area textbook used in middle or high school
And copies of
• ___ Learning Standards specific to your content area
• ___ ELA Standards at the intermediate and commencement levels
• A printout of the “Core Curriculum” from the Resource Guide for your subject area

IV. Course Requirements
A. Successful completion of all Outcomes as described in Section II.
B. Class attendance and preparedness
C. Advanced notification of absence
D. Submission of quality work on time
E. Active participation in class discussions, activities, projects

VI. Assignments/ Activities
Note: Unless otherwise specified, all written work will be word-processed using 12-point font, double-spaced, and with standard 1” margins. [Further details for each of these assignments/ activities were provided in class.]

A. PERSONAL LITERACY HISTORY
Write and autobiographical account of your literacy and learning development. This is a chance to tell your story of learning to read and write both in- and out-of-school. Include literacy experiences at various levels throughout your schooling and discuss the impact these experiences have had on your present attitudes, views, and beliefs surrounding reading and writing. Please keep the length at 3-4 pages. Due 9/ (points 25)

B. REFLECTIVE JOURNALS
As you complete the readings and participate in discussions and activities throughout this course, I ask that you keep a journal (in a separate folder or small binder) to record your developing understanding of literacy and how it relates to your discipline and future teaching. I will provide a general format for these journals in class. Due for most readings (see class schedule) (15 @ 5 points each = 75 points total)

C. INVESTIGATION OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/ JOURNAL ARTICLE
Explore (online) your discipline’s state and national pedagogical discourse community organizations (e.g. NCTM, NCITE, NCSS, NSTA, NYSEC…). Make note of recent conference themes, particularly those that connect to standards in your content area. Also note any resources and/or reading suggestions available. Next, investigate your discipline’s professional journals and from one of them, select a recent (within the last 2 years) article that focuses on literacy development in your content area. Copy, read, and annotate the article and write a one-page analysis. Be prepared to share in class. More about this later. Due 9/ (points 30)

D. TEXTBOOK EVALUATION
Working with peers in your content area, critique and assess a textbook in a review that you might present to the textbook committee of your department. Base your text selection and review on information gleaned from Ch. 5 in the Alvermann et al. text. Prepare an oral summary of your review to be shared whole class. Details later. Due 10/ (points 25)

E. CONTENT AREA READ ALOUD
Select a trade book/picture book that deals with a theme/ concept/ idea/ topic in your content area. You will prepare a read aloud (the entire text or part of it depending on length) and provide a rationale for your selection. More details later. Due 10/ (points 30)

F. READING CIRCLE JOURNAL
You will have the opportunity to read and discuss a non-fiction text with a small group of peers. The texts will be chosen from a limited, pre-selected list provided by me. Additionally, your group is responsible for a short culminating presentation. Due 11/ (points 35)
G. CONTENT LITERACY TEACHING LESSON
This lesson can be done in pairs or individually. Pairs can be interdisciplinary if desired. The lesson will involve the use of one or more literacy strategies. You (and your partner) will teach this lesson to our class who will provide feedback in a timely manner. More about this later. Due 11/_(points 40)

H. LITERACY STRATEGIES TOOLKIT
You will create a toolkit ( binder) of strategies to increase your students’ literacy skills. This will be an important resource not only for this course, but for next semester (ED XXX) and in your future classroom as well. You will receive more specific information about this project in class, but for now, make note that these toolkits will be collected for review twice before the end of the semester. Complete Toolkit Due 12/2 (points 50)

4-5 strategies due October _ (review and feedback—no grade)
4-5 strategies due November _ (review and feedback on 8-10 strategies—no grade)
4-5 strategies due December _ (feedback and grade on total of 12-15 strategies)

I. FINAL REFLECTION
This final reflection is your opportunity to synthesize and articulate your learning in essay form. You will respond to specific questions and/or prompts regarding adolescent literacy, and reference specific readings and course activities in order to make connections between your experiences as a learner and your future as a content teacher. Due 12/_(points 50)
## APPENDIX B

### ED XXX Adolescent Literacy I

**Course Topics and Assigned Readings: Chapters and Articles; Reading Circle texts**

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224
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**Articles and Chapters in addition to course texts**


**Reading circle texts**


APPENDIX C

Post-Course Interview
Conducted during the semester following the course (when I was no longer their instructor), this interview focused on segments of data collected during coursework that seemed fruitful for analysis and getting answers to “how” and “why” questions. Interview questions tapped themes, issues, and questions that emerged during coursework and in the participants’ just completed field experience in the month-long break between semesters. I aimed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants’ observations of classroom literacy practices and their responses to these practices, descriptions of their own emerging teaching approach, their ideas and expectations in terms of literacy for themselves and their future students, their current literacy practices, their developing/new knowledge about literacy pedagogy and ideas about critical literacy practices.

Sample Questions
1. I noticed that you stated _____ in your literacy autobiography. Could you tell me a little more about why you think/feel this and where your thinking seems to come from?
2. Describe the literacy practices you observed during your most recent field experience. Why do you think__________?
3. How does/will content literacy fit into you future teaching?
5. How might you assess your students’ literacy needs? Progress?
6. In terms of who you are, what do you/will you bring to your future teaching? (Identities, strengths, philosophy, perspectives, etc.)
7. What is your understanding of critical literacy? What does it mean to you? How did you come to this understanding? What were the circumstances involved that facilitated your understanding?