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Secondary English Teachers' Attitudes Toward disciplinary and Literacy Learning Implications for Pedagogical Praxis and Reform

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SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD DISCIPLINARY
AND LITERACY LEARNING
IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS AND REFORM

by

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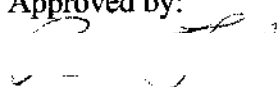
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

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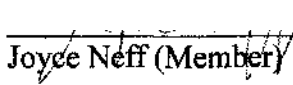
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ABSTRACT

SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD DISCIPLINARY AND LITERACY LEARNING IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS AND REFORM

Stephanie Kay Sugioka
Old Dominion University, 2010
Director: Dr. Robert Lucking

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to examine the epistemological stances of the two teacher participants, that is, to determine their attitudes toward student literacy and their beliefs about the purposes of English as a discipline; (2) to describe the interplay between their epistemological stances and their pedagogical practices, in particular with respect to their use of research-based literacy strategies; and (3) to arrive at a means of supporting them in their use of more effective pedagogical strategies, in this case including more in-depth discussion in their classes for the purpose of furthering their students' critical literacy. The study used a combination of qualitative and formative research methods to accomplish these aims. As a result of multiple interviews with the teachers and observations of their classes, I concluded that they had similar epistemological stances with respect to literacy and the purpose of teaching English; that is, both felt it important to instill both functional and critical literacy in their students. Despite these beliefs, however, both teachers neglected a strategy shown by extensive research to be an effective means of fostering higher level thinking skills in students: having them engage in meaningful, in-depth discussion of the processes and ideas engendered by their studies. Thus, I chose urging the teachers to include such discussion as the intervention designed to help improve their literacy pedagogy, and I supported their efforts to do so by offering my help with both planning

and instruction. Nevertheless, neither teacher seemed able to implement the suggested intervention to a considerable extent. Both teachers cited curricular restraints and classroom management issues as obstacles to doing so. Based on my observations of their classes, I concluded that it was not so much the nature of their epistemological stances that precluded their use of research-based literacy strategies as it was the contextual constraints of curriculum, administrative policy, and certain cultural features of the school and surrounding community.

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This dissertation is dedicated to
Professor Jeffrey Hamilton Richards,
my husband and best teacher.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In their insightful book *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*, David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995) trace the history of educational reform over the course of the twentieth century. They conclude that despite the best ideas of bright-eyed idealists, determined government officials, and ambitious entrepreneurs, basic institutional practices, which the authors call “the grammar of schooling,” have changed very little; in short, the best-intentioned, most carefully planned, and enthusiastically implemented attempts at school reform have, essentially, failed. The primary reason for these failures, the authors state, is that most would-be reformers neglected two crucial factors in the educational equation: the values of the communities in which schools resided and the practices of educators within the schools themselves. True, lasting reform, they claim, will take place gradually and “from the inside out rather than the top down”: “To bring about improvement at the heart of education . . . has proven to be the most difficult kind of reform, and it will result in the future more from internal changes created by the knowledge and expertise of teachers than from the decisions of external policymakers” (pp. 134-135). Moreover, Tyack and Cuban are not alone in this belief. According to Lee Shulman (1999), “Educational change must always be mediated through the minds and motives of teachers” (p. vii). It is primarily the teacher who translates policy, curriculum, and subject matter into the stuff of teaching and learning. If these authors are right, then one would expect to see a multitude of studies whose goal is to uncover the best means of tapping into teacher knowledge and expertise. In the area of literacy instruction in general and English pedagogy in particular, such studies are surprisingly few. Much has been written about

accountability, assessment, and the need for reading and writing standards; promising methods and strategies for instilling literacy; and student motivation and achievement in this area. But considerably less has been said about English teachers' attitudes toward literacy and beliefs about the purposes of their discipline on the one hand, and the ways these attitudes and beliefs might affect their pedagogical praxis on the other. This needs to change. A shift is in order from the current overemphasis on student achievement on one end of the literacy equation to a careful consideration of the pedagogical epistemology and praxis of the English teacher on the other.

The matter of teacher pedagogy becomes particularly pressing in English studies because, beyond conferring the skills needed to read and write effectively, the purposes of English as a discipline are fraught with ambiguity and contention (McComiskey, 2006; Yagelski, 2002). Opinions as to exactly what the English curriculum should contain remain highly varied both within the secondary context and the academy. If we fail to understand why English teachers teach and to specify exactly what it is they should be teaching, how can we know what a teacher of "high quality" should look like? Without this understanding, it is impossible to determine which attributes and attitudes we expect English teachers to hold in common if they are to teach effectively.

Further complicating the picture are the multifarious influences that affect every teacher and the elusive nature of teachers' pedagogical understandings. These influences include teachers' life experience, their previous instruction in their discipline and in instructional methods, the nature of the student population they teach, their school culture and social environment, the curricular guidelines they must follow, and their professional and collegial relationships. With respect to English teacher epistemology and pedagogy, it becomes important to determine how these varied

influences may have affected teachers' attitudes toward literacy, beliefs about English as a discipline, and knowledge of student understandings. It is possible that this overabundance of variables might have discouraged researchers from empirically investigating matters of teacher attitude and pedagogical praxis; however, it is precisely the complexity of these matters that makes careful examination, analysis, and evaluation all the more imperative. To these ends, this study will probe English teachers' attitudes toward disciplinary and literacy learning, examine the apparent relationship between these attitudes and the teachers' pedagogical praxis, and attempt to arrive at some useful conclusions concerning professional development and institutional reform.

Background

A growing body of research shows the importance of literacy skills for adolescents in all areas of academic endeavor (Vacca & Vacca, 2008), and in no other field is the need for effective literacy instruction more pressing than English language and literature. Although most earlier efforts addressed literacy practices at the elementary level, researchers and educators have recently become increasingly concerned about literacy deficits in adolescents. Whether the current perception of a crisis in adolescent literacy results from inadequate education, an increasingly complex and demanding literacy environment, or some combination of the two remains to be fully addressed. However, it is generally agreed that between 60 to 70 percent of adolescents are reading and/or writing below grade level and as a result are unprepared to competently perform their academic work and to function well in the larger world (Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Myriad studies undertaken within the last two decades seem to show what "works" when it comes to teaching literacy; these attributes include, for

example, some choice in reading materials and essay topics, social activity around reading and writing assignments, and relevance of these assignments to student experience (Allen, 2002; Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Lesesne & Buckman, 2001; Pitcher et al., 2007; Vacca & Vacca 2008; Zirinsky & Rau, 2001). However, many of these studies do not specifically address literacy instruction within the English classroom, and because other educators look to English teachers to model the practices and strategies that will foster literacy skills in students, it is crucial that more in-depth research be undertaken in this area (Wolfe and Antinarella, 1997).

What is certain is that the literacy development of students will inevitably be affected by their teachers' pedagogical practices and underlying assumptions about the purposes of English as a discipline. Thus much depends on teachers receiving adequate education, training, and professional development with respect to those practices most likely to foster literacy in their adolescent students. However, there is some evidence that even teachers who know about and have even been trained in the use of generic literacy strategies—English teachers as well as those in other disciplines—choose not to implement them in their own classrooms (Chapman, 2004). One reason that teachers may resist incorporating these strategies is that they see such practices as inimical to their primary mission of teaching the content of their disciplines (Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Other factors that militate against effective literacy instruction may include the need for teacher control, the push for content coverage, the culture of the school, and the previous modeling that the teachers have themselves received. All of these issues must be addressed if teachers are to be persuaded to integrate effective literacy instruction into their content teaching (Chapman, 2004). It will do no good to reform curriculum unless the pedagogical practices of teachers are aligned with it.

Recent reform efforts associated with the standards movement and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 have often left the teacher out of the literacy equation. However, even a cursory look at the history of such attempts over the past century reveals that most top-down literacy reform efforts have been only minimally successful or have failed miserably (Kohn, 1999; Sizer, 1984, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Increased standardized testing, "teacher-proof" curricula, and other decontextualized strategies have not adequately addressed the complex interaction of factors affecting literacy development in adolescents. Without teacher buy-in, literacy reforms have little chance of being practiced at all, much less effectively implemented (Yatvin, 2008). Curricular reform must flow from pedagogical practices—and not the other way around. Researchers need to observe what teachers are actually doing, why they do it, and how they do it. In other words curriculum should be based on the real practices of teachers and the true needs of students. The only way to get at this information is through close, careful observation of how literacy pedagogy actually works in the classroom.

Research Questions

Because it is teachers who actually do the work of instilling attitudes and cultivating skills necessary for the literacy development of their students, it is essential that we examine their beliefs about the purposes of English as a discipline and about the pedagogical practices most likely to further these purposes. In the words of Elizabeth Moje (2008), "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" (p. 80). It is for this purpose that I undertook the current study. I elicited teacher beliefs about literacy and its

pedagogy and observed the ways in which these aligned (or not) with the teachers' instructional acts. From the information thus gathered, I made inferences about how teachers' effective literacy moves within the classroom can be supported by professional and curricular development.

My research questions were thus as follows: What are teachers' attitudes toward literacy instruction? What do teachers feel are the primary purposes of English as a field of study? How do these beliefs seem to translate (or not) into practices intended to foster literacy in their students? Are teachers integrating the strategies that recent literacy research has deemed effective (e.g., think alouds, read alouds, cooperative learning, choice in reading materials)? Which factors, academic and nonacademic, seem to militate against effective literacy instruction? What do student responses reveal about the effectiveness of teachers' literacy practices? Finally, how can English teachers be encouraged to integrate into their pedagogy attitudes and practices likely to foster literacy in their adolescent students? (For a list of research questions, see Appendix A.) The answers to these questions should have clear implications for the kinds of administrative support and professional development English teachers need to effectively teach their discipline and instill literacy in their students.

Definitions

Three terms that are frequently used here deserve some attention because of their ambiguity and complexity. These are "literacy," and "curriculum," and "pedagogy." Until relatively recently, the word "literacy" primarily denoted functional literacy—the ability to use reading and writing for practical purposes. However, the meaning of the term has recently evolved considerably to include both functional and critical literacy. One who possesses critical literacy is able to read not only at the level

of decoding and comprehension but also at that of analysis, synthesis and application; he or she is able to construct not only a coherent, relatively grammatical essay but also one that reveals these same higher order critical thinking skills.

The meaning of the term “literacy” has been further complicated by the multimodal forms of expression associated with electronic sources; thus the term “digital literacy” has been added to the equation. Moreover, many would argue that the ability to speak articulately, to listen intently, and to interpret visual images accurately is also essential to students’ literacy skills. It is even possible to speak of a “social literacy” that allows learners to relate well to and thus to learn from others, whether teachers or classmates. The danger here is that the meaning of the word “literacy” will be expanded to such an extent that it ceases to be useful (Sperling & Dipardo, 2008).

Countering this expansive tendency, scholars and educators recently have begun to refer to “disciplinary literacy” (Moje, 2008). This term implies that each discipline has its own forms and conventions that require a specific set of skills to use and comprehend. Thus “literacy” in an English class may differ from “literacy” in a math class. If this is true, then we would do well to narrow our definition to an aptitude that is especially appropriate to the field. The original derivation of the word literacy, from Latin “letters,” may be of some help here. Because English studies pays particular attention to the use of the language—whether read, spoken, or written—it makes sense to adhere closely to this original sense of the term. Whereas visual literacy may be most important in an art class as digital literacy might be in a computer class, disciplinary literacy in English must focus on the word as the unit of meaning essential to literacy acquisition. Of course, to understand the significance of words, students must be able to think critically. Thus disciplinary literacy in English inevitably

necessitates critical literacy. A working definition of literacy in English might then be as follows: the skills and knowledge necessary to fluently comprehend and effectively use words in written and spoken contexts.

The term “curriculum” presents a similar problem. The definitions of “curriculum” embraced by the two curriculum experts Allan Glatthorn (2006) and Eliot Eisner (2002) are quite comprehensive. Glatthorn defines curriculum as a combination of both what is formally planned by experts and policymakers and what is actually experienced by learners. For both Glatthorn and Eisner, curriculum encompasses everything from the most general aims, goals, or objectives to the most specific aspects of instruction as practiced by teachers. This definition, however, is simply too broad for our purposes. Although the two overlap in practice, for the purpose of this discussion, curriculum will be distinguished from instruction. Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead (2006) delineate the following aspects of curriculum: *“the recommended curriculum, the written curriculum, the supported curriculum, the taught curriculum, the tested curriculum, and the learned curriculum”* (p. 6). This discussion will deal primarily with the written and supported curriculum. Eisner (2002) distinguishes between the “operational” and the “intended” curriculum. The intended curriculum is developed by experts; the operational one is taught by teachers. Ideally, of course, the two are perfectly aligned, but in practice, they can be quite different. Again, when used here, the term “curriculum” will refer to Eisner’s intended curriculum. For our purposes, then, “curriculum” will connote the written plan devised and supported by policymakers, experts, and teachers.

As to “pedagogy,” according to the eleventh edition of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, it means “the art, science, or profession of teaching.” Originally

derived from a Greek term meaning “to lead the child,” it is used here to encompass both the teacher’s attitudes and beliefs on the one hand and his or her practices on the other. What a teacher believes about the purposes of his or her profession determines, to a large extent, how he or she “leads the child.” The connection between the two—that is the beliefs and the practices—is well established with respect to the teaching of English. Thus Sperling and Dipardo (2008) describe a number of studies whose premise is “that how one teaches English grows from different understandings of the nature of writing, literature, and learning to write and read” (p. 84). In particular, they cite one study that “shows how teachers [*sic*] literary orientations—these being primarily either text centered or reader centered—determine how teachers teach literature to their students, a finding supported by qualitative case studies based on interview and observation as well as large-scale survey studies” (p. 84). If it is true, then, that English teachers’ attitudes toward literacy and beliefs about their discipline directly affect their teaching practices, it becomes doubly important to discover just what those attitudes and beliefs are. Although, in the context of this study, “pedagogy” and “pedagogical praxis” have approximately the same meaning, since “pedagogy” implies both theory and practice, the term “praxis” has the added connotation of practice as informed by theory and as such refers more specifically to what a teacher does as a result of attitudes and beliefs about theory. The teacher may have practices in the context of his or her teaching that result from external pressures rather than internal beliefs; the term “pedagogical praxis” exists in contradistinction to these more mechanical acts and is thus more specific than mere “teaching practices.”

Significance of the Study

This study is designed to address concerns recently raised by literacy researchers that have been largely ignored up to now. These include the need for increased attention to the importance of specific disciplinary contexts within which literacy learning occurs. For example, Conley et al. (2008) remark:

Researchers need to reverse the pattern of recommending generic learning strategies for complex disciplinary contexts, assuming instead that the starting point for such research is the disciplinary contexts themselves. Only by examining the discipline-specific ways that learning problems and opportunities are characterized will literacy researchers be able to research strategies for learning from text with any kind of credibility. (p. 100)

As these researchers recommend, I take as my starting point particular high school English classes, where I examine how teachers' instructional moves play out with respect to literacy learning. From this close examination of actual classroom interactions, I make inferences about the possibilities for enhanced disciplinary literacy pedagogy in English. Closely related to this emphasis on disciplinary context is the call for "not only large-scale 'scientifically based' projects but also critical social and cultural investigations in local settings" (Sperling & Dipardo, 2008), which the current study is designed to carry out.

Another crucial but often neglected factor in the literacy equation is the lived experience of English teachers as they cope with the many demands of large class loads and confusing and sometimes conflicting signals from administrators and students. In the words of Sperling & Dipardo (2008):

Research has underscored the ways varying and sometimes competing conceptions about reading and writing, knowledge and learning, can live side by side as teachers navigate such often-contradictory influences on their teaching and thinking as high-stakes assessments of their students' reading and writing, school-level evaluations of their teaching, English department policies and practices, district and state policies, their own ways of reading and writing, and their own professional development experiences (p. 85).

Only by examining these teacher experiences from the inside out can we understand the attitudes toward and practices of literacy instruction on the part of English teachers; and only when we gain this understanding can we hope to discover the possibilities for helping teachers to enhance their literacy pedagogy. This study aims to achieve both these goals.

An additional contribution that this study makes to the field is its attention to contextual matters such as curriculum, school policy, and community culture. Some prominent thinkers maintain that recent education research has been too narrow in its focus with an emphasis on results that can be replicated under laboratory conditions but not in real educational contexts. For example, TheodoreSizer (2004) says:

I am encouraged by the recently renewed interest in educational research but am disappointed both in its scope, one now dominated by the social, behavioral, and increasingly the biological sciences, and in the apparent indifference to the question of how the results of research might affect the taut complexities of schools. Further, matters of mass education are not only technical and procedural; they are also cultural and philosophical. The influence of humanistic disciplines is hard to discover in contemporary research planning.

Finally, most current discussion assumes that research results will lead to detailed practices that will feed into the existing system—the very system that research has shown to be greatly flawed. (p. xvii)

English education researchers Sperling and Dipardo (2008) similarly emphasize the importance of “the reciprocal relationship between literacy learning and the cultural social practices of classrooms and communities” (p. 87). Although my study focuses intensely on the classroom literacy environment, it also attempts to contextualize these observations by including an analysis of the school setting, the community culture, and matters relating to curriculum and professional development.

Finally, the methodology of this study is designed to address problems with past studies that have done little to foster close collaboration between university researchers and public secondary schools. Recently thinkers have deplored the research-practice divide which serves the best interests of neither the academy nor the schools. For example, Sperling and Dipardo (2008) are eager to promote “efforts to bring the work of research and teaching together in ways that not only offer profound integration but also begin to dissolve altogether the distinction between the work of English educators in the secondary classroom and [in] the academy” (p. 63). My study attempts to effect this integration by relying on a modified version of formative research methodology, which includes introducing a potentially helpful intervention to teachers during the actual research process; it is thus specifically designed to promote productive collaboration and thus to bridge the divide between researcher and practitioner. In the words of Reinking and Bradley (2008), formative research is an approach “that provides richer, more meaningful information that contributes directly to practitioners’ need not only to find workable instructional options but also to provide specific guidance about

how to implement instructional interventions given the diverse variation in classrooms” (p. 7).

An added advantage of this approach is that it reaches beyond the status quo to ask what could be rather than *merely* trying to make the best of what is (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). This asset would seem to answer Sizer’s (2004) complaints about the lack of valuable reforms emerging from schools of education:

There appears to be little incentive in these Schools for aggressively original, sustained, comprehensive *invention*. Analysis and assessment of the status quo, largely dependent on statistics, are King. There is nothing wrong with analysis and measurement, but if they dominate the institutional culture one ends with Education Schools that are focused more on the techniques of autopsy than with the creation of new life, surer of tinkering with the accepted rather than risking something new. (p. 109)

It is precisely this “new life” that formative methodology is designed to engender.

Before we can know what can be, it is necessary to understand what is, but when this understanding is gained, it is time to move on to new solutions and expanded possibilities.

Thus although small in scope, this study aims to address a number of issues that are in pressing need of our attention: the discipline-specific nature of literacy, the characteristics of the lens through which English teachers view their literacy teaching, the divide between literacy research and practice, the complex cultural context in which literacy learning occurs, and the rich possibilities for the reform of literacy instruction in the English classroom.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Any study of adolescent literacy instruction must take into account multiple influences on English teachers arising from a variety of sources. A closer examination of these sources should help to clarify the issues underlying the dominant trends in current literacy pedagogy for teachers of English. These trends closely relate to the following areas: literacy and discourse theory; curriculum development and implementation; pedagogical knowledge and training; the functional purposes of English as a discipline; and the cultural environment of school and community.

Literacy and Discourse Theory

Over the past two decades, the term “literacy” has undergone a not-so-subtle transformation in meaning. Traditionally, it has connoted the ability to read and write at a functional level. However, the term is now commonly used in a much broader sense and actually incorporates the qualities of critical literacy. As the word “critical” implies, critical literacy refers to the higher levels of cognition, notably the last three cognitive domains of Bloom's famous taxonomy: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (1956). However, critical literacy goes beyond mere cognition. The learner should not only have a deep understanding of an object of study in itself but also comprehend the way it is related to other facts and concepts, and be able to apply this understanding to other areas of knowledge for his or her own purposes. Whereas we tend to view critical thinking as a means of processing received information, critical literacy is also active and creative; those who have it should be able not only to process received knowledge but to generate new ideas. Perhaps most important, critical literacy implies the ability to contextualize ideas, knowledge, and information. In his study of literacy and

discourse, James Gee (1989) describes a primary discourse that people acquire from their families and a secondary discourse that they use to negotiate a setting in the larger world. What allows the individual to critique *both* of these discourses is, he says, "powerful literacy" (p. 542). This powerful literacy is, in fact, critical literacy. Both terms refer to a metacognitive process that allows the learner to place a thing or concept in its larger perspective. Thus to apply the principles of critical literacy to a pedagogical practice is to understand not just its purposes and functions but also how those relate to a larger educational, social, cultural, and political context.

The concept of critical literacy can be traced directly to the philosophy of John Dewey (1916), who states clearly that the primary business of education is to teach students to think: "The sole direct path to enduring improvement in the methods of instruction and learning consists in . . . the conditions which exact, promote, and test thinking. Thinking *is* the method of intelligent learning" (p. 153). Critical literacy is tied not only to the notion of the preeminent importance of cognition but also to the constructivist nature of knowledge acquisition: through the cognitive processing of their experience—by subjecting it to analysis, evaluation, and synthesis—learners construct their own knowledge. Moreover, essential both to Dewey's philosophy and to critical literacy alike is the *socially* constructed nature of knowledge: "Education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession" (p. 9).

Interestingly, much of the recent research that attempts to grapple most directly with the concept of critical literacy comes not from America but from Australia. For example, in their study of online discussion in schools, Love and Simpson (2005), of the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney, respectively, refer to critical

literacy as the underpinning of the national and state English curriculum in Australia. Nathalie Wooldridge (2001), a South Australian high school English coordinator, echoes this view when she says, "Critical literacy is not a technique or a set of strategies, but rather, part of a pedagogy underpinning a whole approach or classroom practice" (pp. 259-260). Mellor and Patterson, also Australian scholars, identify critical literacy as the direct inheritor of poststructuralist literary theory: "Poststructuralism in the English classroom . . . resulted in Australia in what is now called 'critical literacy'" (2004, p. 83). They trace the emergence of critical literacy from a rejection first of an elitist New Critical close reading (which privileges the text alone) and then of an individualistic Reader Response theory (which privileges the reader alone) to the need for a more inclusive approach that concerns itself with "questions of power and ideology and [with] how texts represent issues of gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (p. 85).

Highly influential with respect to critical literacy have been the ideas of the New London Group as expressed in its book *Multiliteracies*, edited by Australian scholars Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2000). As part of their attempt to create a "pedagogy of multiliteracies" capable of encompassing "local diversity," "global connectedness," and multimodal communications (p. 3), they describe the process of "Critical Framing," whose purpose is "to help learners frame their growing mastery in practice . . . and conscious control and understanding . . . in relation to the historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centred relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice" (New London Group, p. 34). Thus members of the New London Group conceive Critical Framing as a means not merely of conceptualizing information but also of generating new knowledge: "Through Critical Framing, learners can gain

the necessary personal and theoretical distance from what they have learned; constructively critique it; account for its cultural location; creatively extend and apply it; and eventually innovate on their own" (p. 34). Although they use the term Critical Framing, this description by the New London Group is one of the most explicit, comprehensive ones we have to date of what by any other name is critical literacy. It is this deeper, broader form of literacy that, ideally, English teachers should inculcate in their students. Moreover, in order to do so, teachers must be critically literate themselves.

Curriculum Development and Implementation

Unless literacy instruction is codified in and supported by curriculum, the chances that English teachers will practice it are relatively slim—thus the importance of a discussion of curriculum theory to that of content literacy. As previously noted, both Glatthorn et al. (2006) and Eisner (2002) distinguish between the curriculum that is planned and the one that is actually taught; Eisner calls the former the “intended” curriculum and the latter the “operational” curriculum (Eisner, pp. 32-34). Ideally the intended or written curriculum is perfectly aligned with the operational or taught curriculum, but this is not always or even often the case. If teachers see curriculum as imposed from the top down by policymakers and administrators, they are as likely to resist it as to implement it. Teachers are much more likely to buy into curricular reform if they have a direct hand in its development (Yatvin, 2008). Curriculum should proceed from pedagogy, and not the other way around. As Zirinsky & Rau (2001) point out, most English curricula as they now exist are centered either on tasks to be performed or texts to be read. Instead, they say, the curriculum should focus on what is

to be learned. In other words, curriculum for English classes should be based on sound pedagogy.

Pedagogical Knowledge of Student Learning Processes

Within the last decade numerous studies have attempted to identify what counts as effective literacy instruction. Apparently, students are more likely to acquire valuable literacy skills and knowledge if they have some choice of reading and writing assignments, can interact socially with peers and others in the process of working on these assignments, and clearly see the relevance of the assignments to their own experience (Allen, 2002; Graham & Perin, 2007; Ivey & Fisher, 2005; Lesesne & Buckman, 2001; Moje et al., 2008; Pitcher et al., 2007; Vacca & Vacca 2008; Zirinsky & Rau, 2001). With respect to reading, it is clear that students appreciate having some choice in reading materials; the ability to choose allows adolescents a degree of ownership and autonomy that they often greatly value during this crucial stage of their development when they are beginning to develop distinct identities as individuals (Lesesne & Buckman, 2001; Pitcher et al., 2007; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Moreover, being able to read texts that appeal to their particular interests is a powerful motivating factor for students of any age.

In addition, interest in reading seems to increase when it takes place within the context of social activity. Students who have been read to as children, for example, are much more likely to be avid readers as adolescents and adults (Allen, 2002). As adolescents they also benefit from the opportunity to exchange ideas about books in discussions with parents, teachers, and peers (Parr & Maguiness, 2005). In fact, anything that allows students to be actively involved in their reading is likely to promote their interest and thus their fluency (Ivey & Fisher, 2005). These activities

may include responding to a piece of reading by writing about it in a journal or a log (or a wiki or blog), acting it out by dramatizing it in a performance for their classmates, or illustrating it in a painting or collage (Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Moreover, the success of at least one cross-age tutoring program shows that older students who struggle with reading can benefit by helping younger struggling students with their reading (Paterson & Elliott, 2006).

Perhaps most important to student motivation and engagement is that adolescents be able to relate ideas and events they encounter in their reading directly to their own experience in some way. Of course, there exists a wealth of young adult literature that might serve this purpose (see Allen, 2002), but many classics, if effectively presented, can fill this need as well. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* concerns topics of profound interest to many adolescents: group affiliation and young romance. Research tells us that cultural relevance is of great importance as well. It is especially vital that marginalized groups such as Hispanic and African American students be able to identify with the characters of stories and novels they read (Powell-Brown, 2006). Fortunately much excellent multicultural literature is available to fill this need (see Lesesne & Buckman, 2001).

As with reading, choice of subject matter, opportunities for socializing, and relevance to student experience all play a role in adolescent students' attitudes toward and achievement in writing activities. Although ample guidance is needed, students benefit from having some choice of writing topics. Opportunities for exchanging and discussing their writings informally in pairs or more formally in peer review groups have also been shown to increase student interest in writing (Liebel, 2005). As with reading, students must be able to relate what they write directly to their own experience.

Moreover, it is important that they be given the chance to do considerable expressive and reflective writing in addition to and in preparation for the kind of analytical writing required for formal essays and research papers (Britton et al., 1979). With writing, the question of audience becomes crucial to student motivation and engagement; they need ample feedback on their writing from both teacher and peers (Tsui, 2002). Finally, adolescent students greatly benefit from the opportunity to "publish" their writings on a bulletin board, a school magazine, or a website (Redmon, 1997). The knowledge that their writing gives them the power to influence others and thus to more nearly control their own circumstances is especially motivating to adolescents who are in the process of establishing their identities with respect to their peers and their world (Holding, 2005).

Thus the practices and conditions that foster good reading skills are intimately related to those that promote effective writing for adolescent students. The two are best taught in tandem. A crucial requirement for both is, of course, ample class time. Research clearly documents the benefits of using classroom time for such activities as read alouds, paired reading, and silent reading (Powell-Brown, 2006). Students' writing also thrives when sufficient time is set aside for brainstorming, planning, in-class writing, informal discussion, and peer review (Vacca & Vacca, 2008). All of these practices require much more time than the traditional transmission model of literacy instruction; however, the benefits for students' reading and writing skills more than justify the additional time needed for them.

Further, for both reading and writing, research shows that students are much more likely to be motivated and engaged if they are allowed to bring to bear on their academic work the literacy practices they use outside the classroom (Pitcher et al.,

2007). These include text messaging, blogging, instant messaging, and consulting electronic resources as well as the reading of newspapers, magazines, and trade books (Yancey, 2004). At least one study shows that students who identify themselves as nonreaders or nonwriters often, nevertheless, frequently engage in such literacy-related activities (Pitcher et al., 2007). To take advantage of students' motivation and engagement in these extracurricular pursuits, we need to expand our definition of literacy and honor the interests and skills that students, in fact, already possess (Zirinsky & Rau, 2001).

Although we now have some idea of “what works” in fostering literacy in adolescent students, some studies suggest that relatively few teachers, even English teachers, incorporate all or most of these approaches and strategies into their teaching with any regularity. Most preservice teachers receive some training in employing these strategies into their content area teaching, but apparently many are not transferring what they have learned to their own classrooms. A recent case study of two English classes, by Carol Anne Chapman (2004), found this to be true of the two teachers in her study even though they had been identified as effective teachers by administrators and colleagues. From her observations and interviews of the teachers and students, she surmises that teachers were hesitant to incorporate effective literacy strategies into their teaching for a number of reasons. First, she senses that the teachers hesitated to relinquish control of their classes in a way that would have allowed for more student-centered instruction. Second, she notes that the current standards movement privileges coverage at the expense of time necessary to incorporate literacy strategies. Third, she describes how the school or community culture may militate against the adoption of practices likely to foster student literacy. Fourth, she points out that teachers tend to

teach as they were taught and that they may tend to follow the lead of cooperative teachers who are themselves deficient in pedagogical knowledge. Finally, she finds that an allegiance to discipline, in this case English, may take precedence over effective literacy instruction.

Some evidence also indicates that many English teachers tend to take a rather narrow view of their subject matter, to the extent that they fail to contextualize it in ways that might make it more relevant and meaningful to their students. In their recent comprehensive review of English education research, Sperling and Dipardo (2008) discuss a number of studies which conclude that English teachers in the United States, especially those at the secondary level, tend to disregard or exclude “social, cultural, historical and political perspectives to texts and ways readers read them” (p. 84) with the result that teachers fail both to engage students at the level of their own experience and to instill in them the critical literacy that would give greater depth, meaning, and applicability to their learning. Secondary English teachers have tended to retain the New Critical approach, popular in the academy only into the 1970s, which focuses on the aesthetic aspects of the text without regard to reader response or sociohistorical context. Moreover, according to Sperling and Dipardo, at least one study shows that secondary teachers have tended to resist attempts to broaden their perspective and change their practices despite professional development that included “intensive seminar readings of contemporary literacy research” (p. 84). The authors conclude that such studies indicate a need to “unpack teachers’ epistemologies” and to “work with teachers in multiple ways over time” (pp. 84-85).

Teacher Education and Professional Development

If many teachers seem unprepared for the complex, nuanced, difficult work of instilling critical literacy in their students, traditional schools of education must be held at least partly responsible for their deficits. Among the many criticisms leveled at education schools over the past two decades, education policymakers, professors from other disciplines, and sometimes education professors themselves have claimed that many schools offer courses that are “vapid,” “impractical,” “fragmented,” or “directionless” (Tom, 1997). The possible reasons behind these claims are too various and complex to discuss here in full, but most of them point to the decontextualized nature of the experience of preservice teachers in these education programs. Generic methods courses often fail to take into account the specific features and problems of a particular discipline. Students complain that they have trouble applying such methods equally to such diverse fields as art, mathematics, science, and English. Moreover the courses tend to be divorced from the actual context in which the students will be applying the skills and the knowledge that they are presumably learning. It is not until the courses are over that most students in traditional education schools do their practice teaching—their only opportunity to actively use the pedagogical content knowledge that their coursework should have conveyed. Thus several reformers advocate the earlier incorporation of the actual teaching experience into students’ studies (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 1995, 2007; Latham & Vogt, 2007; Tom, 1997; Van Zandt, 1998). The fragmented nature of many students’ education school experiences seems to result from a combination of the divide between the universities where they take their course and the schools in which they will teach, the lack of interaction between their education

professors and those in the students' specific disciplines, and the absence of coherence within the education schools themselves (Tom, 1997).

Because the traditional route to licensure through teacher education programs is both time consuming and of questionable value, alternative licensure programs—notably the much-touted Teach for America—have become increasingly popular over the past two decades. However, such programs vary considerably from state to state, and serious questions remain as to whether they adequately prepare preservice teachers for the rigors of their profession; many doubt that these programs are, as a whole, as effective as even the much-maligned traditional education schools (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Tom, 1997). A less famous but perhaps fairly typical example of an alternative licensure program is the one attended by one of my teacher participants. This program, which is offered by several public universities and community colleges, consists of two parts. The first part comprises 16 weeks of classroom instruction and opportunities for the student to observe classes in the public schools. The second phase takes place during the student's first year of employment, during which the program continues to provide him or her with mentoring and other forms of occasional support. To be admitted to the program, a candidate needs only a bachelor's degree and five years of relevant work experience.

More promising than either the traditional or the alternative route to certification are those teacher education programs that take a more holistic approach to the multiple kinds of experiences of developing teachers. Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999), for example, advocate an approach to teacher education they call "activity theory," which "highlights the importance of context in learning to teach" (p. 24). Activity theory takes into account the various settings in which teachers learn and teach

rather than focusing solely on the success or failure of individual teachers; thus, the authors maintain, it holds greater promise for reform of teacher education as a whole: “Studies that focus on the settings for professional development can reveal the kinds of social structures that promote the appropriation of pedagogical tools that, in turn result in [effective] teaching” (p. 24). Along similar lines, Linda Darling-Hammond (1995) advocates the development of professional development schools (PDSs), which bring together the disparate strands of the teacher education/professional development experiences for practicing and preservice teachers into a coherent whole:

PDSs create the settings in which novices enter professional practice by working with expert practitioners while veteran teachers renew their own professional development as they assume roles as mentors, university adjuncts, and teacher leaders. Professional development schools also provide serious venues for developing teaching knowledge by enabling practice-based and practice-sensitive research to be carried out collaboratively by teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. PDSs enable teachers to become sources of knowledge for one another and to learn the important roles of “colleague” and “learner.” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, para. 12)

These programs thus simultaneously accomplish the work of teacher education and professional development by bringing together the resources of the schools and the academy for the mutual benefit of both practicing and preservice teachers. Although still relatively few in number, the professional development schools that have been studied show considerable promise for improving both the quality of teachers’ lives and that of their teaching (Latham & Vogt, 2007; Van Zandt, 1998).

English as a Discipline

Inevitably teacher pedagogy and English curriculum development are shaped by how policymakers, administrators, and teachers view the purposes of the discipline in question. Unfortunately, there is currently considerable confusion both in the academy and in secondary schools as to what exactly English classes should be accomplishing (McComiskey, 2006; Yagelski, 2006). Here in no particular order is a list of the purposes of English that theorists and practitioners have proposed over the last century or so: teaching or cultivating functional literacy, critical thinking, social skills, technological literacy, or sociopolitical awareness; nurturing or inculcating cultural values, ethical values, intellectual development, personal growth, or aesthetic sensibility; and facilitating or ensuring individual success, economic contribution, or good citizenship. And even this list is by no means exhaustive. In general, English teachers tend to have fairly traditional views of the purposes of English classes—to transmit to students a body of knowledge about the language and the literature (the literary “canon” in particular). These traditional views are perpetuated by the previous modeling teachers have themselves received and by the dominant culture of the school and the community, what Tyack and Cuban (1995) call “the grammar of schooling,” which remains essentially impervious to most efforts at reform.

English as a course of study was a relative latecomer to the secondary school curriculum in America. It was introduced around 1873 as a result of pressure from the universities, which sought students with better writing skills and a wider knowledge of literature than a narrow classical education could provide (De Boer et al., 1951). Thus, even as its inception, English as a discipline was seen as a means of accommodating academic and social change. English education, as such, did not come into its own until

the founding of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 1911; only at this point did high school teachers assert their professional control over the discipline, which had been formerly dominated almost exclusively by colleges and universities (Yagelski, 2006). As early as 1917, the NCTE, in conjunction with the National Education Association, issued a report urging the restructuring of English programs to reflect a student-centered—rather than teacher- or subject-centered—orientation (De Boer et al., 1951). Moreover, throughout the first half of the twentieth century and beyond, NCTE continued its reform efforts by means of various reports and programs. For example, *An Experience Curriculum in English*, published in 1936, resulted from a report produced by a commission of 100 teachers of English from all school levels and all parts of the country (DeBoer et al., 1951). Among other things, this document "advocated the use of 'instrumental' grammar, to be taught directly as an aid in the improvement of individual learners' speaking and writing, in place of systematic grammar-in-isolation" (p. 8). As a follow-up to this report, the NCTE appointed a committee to look into the ways that the English curriculum could be coordinated with and integrated into the overall high school curriculum; the committee's report "included elaborate descriptions of various kinds of correlated and integrated programs at the high school level" (p. 9).

Many of these reform efforts were based on the educational philosophy of John Dewey, whose championing of active, student-centered learning became a cornerstone of progressivism, a school of thought still central to many reform proposals today. Dewey (1916) insisted that knowledge is not only individually but also socially constructed by the learner. He also stressed the importance of a good education for the purpose of teaching citizens to become intelligent participants in a democratic system.

This balance between the needs of the individual on the one hand and the exigencies of society on the other has made Dewey's ideas especially attractive both to those educators primarily concerned with the individual learner's growth and development on the one hand, and to those who insisted more heavily on the importance of the individual's contribution to the greater social good on the other. Moreover, Dewey's emphasis on social interaction appeals to many educators who see it as vital to fostering literacy in today's students.

Dewey's views continued to be extremely influential with English reformers throughout the twentieth century, and echoes of this influence can be found in the theories of Louise Rosenblatt, Donald Murray, James Britton, and Peter Elbow, among others. Rosenblatt, for example, like Dewey, helped shift the focus of English teaching away from "great works" and toward the experience of learners: "This recognition of the individual's experience and expression was inspired by a political commitment to expanding democratic participation in this culture" (Willinksy, 2004, p. 29). Similarly, participants in the 1966 Dartmouth Conference, which was sponsored in part by NCTE and the Modern Language Association (MLA) and which brought together fifty English educators from Great Britain and the United States, espoused typical progressivist values: "Participants agreed that increasing children's perception and self-awareness should be major objectives for language arts education and the process of language learning itself, and they described new pedagogies for teaching both writing and literature" (Soven, 1999, p. 12).

What then has become of all these sensible suggestions for pedagogical and curricular reform that have been made over the past century by the most highly respected luminaries in English studies and language arts? If Robert Yagelski (2002),

along with David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995) can be believed, very little: "Our classrooms, our curricula, and the structure of our schools have remained largely unchanged for most of the past century, despite various pedagogical reform movements, volumes of empirical research on writing instruction, and more theoretical arguments than we can cram into an ever-increasing number of professional journals and scholarly books" (Yagelski, 2002, pp. 4-5). Despite the sweeping changes brought about by technological advances, a globalized economy, and other powerful social forces, secondary English has remained virtually impervious to change or reform. In many of today's English classrooms as in those of a century ago, teachers would still rather lecture than discuss; the same "great works" are still required reading; and, despite overwhelming evidence of pedagogical ineffectiveness, grammar is often still taught in isolation from the writing process. Yagelski (2006) blames the lack of successful reform largely on the inflexible education bureaucracy and on the reactionary measures motivated by Sputnik, *A Nation at Risk*, and the standards movement. However, it seems reasonable to add to these possible obstacles the discipline's own incoherence and failure to provide a workable pedagogical framework on which curricular reform can be based.

In their extensive review of English education research from its inception, Sperling and Dipardo (2008) note that the same questions have persisted throughout the century or so of the existence of English as a discipline:

Does it serve to transmit a stable body of content and skills or to foster a more dynamic, shape-shifting process of meaning making? Should it reify a cultural mainstream or promote appreciation of diverse points of view and ways with

words? Is it more appropriately seen as a higher education gatekeeper or as preparation for life? (p. 64)

The answers to these questions will not only clarify the purposes of English as a discipline but also help to define the very nature of disciplinary literacy in English.

Cultural Environment of School and Community

In their book *Tinkering toward utopia*, Tyack and Cuban (1995) trace the history of public school reform over the course of the twentieth century. In the last chapter, they conclude that despite all the earnest and well-intentioned efforts of policymakers, officials, and administrators, basic institutional and pedagogical practices remain essentially unchanged. These failures, they conclude, resulted largely from the would-be reformers' neglect of two essential entities: the values of the communities and the practices of the educators within the schools themselves. Topdown reforms and highly scripted curricula have failed because for communities, teachers, and students, one size does not fit all. The educational process is culturally embedded in the community where it takes place. Theodore Sizer (1984, 2004), who participated in an extensive study of American high schools during the 1970s and has continued to be active in efforts at secondary school reform ever since, agrees—and adds that the school's services must be coordinated with those of the larger community if students are to receive the full benefits of their education. In some sense, learning is cultural growth; it depends absolutely on the relationships of teachers and students to their community.

In no other class is cultural context more important than in the English class, and as the student population becomes increasingly diverse and multiethnic, the urgency of this truth becomes increasingly apparent. Literacy teaching can succeed only when the cultural values embedded in the educational process are consonant with those of the

students being taught (Vacca & Vacca, 2008). A basic assumption underlying this study is that each class, each school, and each community has its own culture—its own intrinsic set of norms and values—and that literacy practices must constantly be examined in the light of this context.

The current study took place in an inner-city high school where African American students formed the majority of the population; thus it was important to determine the qualities of attitudes and practices particularly appropriate for dealing with minority students. Such a stance has been described by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001) and others as “culturally relevant pedagogy.” She states that it requires a “closer fit between students’ home culture and the school” (p. 159) and a deeper understanding on the part of teachers of the cultural characteristics of their students; she says, “Culturally relevant teachers utilize students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161). Teachers must work to incorporate the students’ home language into the classroom and to ensure that students learn “that which [is] most meaningful to them” (p. 160). Also crucial is that teachers cultivate in their students a high degree of critical literacy: “Students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). Moreover, teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy make a point of attending community events in which their students are involved and in insisting on the importance of “creating a community of learners”: “They encouraged students to learn collaboratively, teach each other, and be responsible for each other’s learning” (p. 163). As to implications for research, Ladson-Billings points out that “the place to find out about classroom practices is the naturalistic setting

of the classroom and from the lived experiences of teachers” (p. 163), which describes precisely what the current study attempts to do.

While subscribing to Ladson-Billings’s definition of “culturally relevant teaching,” Alfred Tatum (2000, 2006) and Lisa Delpit (2006) are even more specific about what this kind of teaching looks like when applied to the pedagogy of those teaching African-American students in urban environments. Tatum is particularly concerned with the social and academic development of black male students, whose school dropout rate has been a cause of alarm to many educators. Teachers of these students, he maintains, often have a poor understanding of their cultural traits and so misinterpret their behaviors. In addition to cultivating a deeper understanding of their students’ cultures, he says, these teachers need to combine the “use of culturally relevant literature and explicit skill development in reading in order to nurture student identities, “develop cultural competence,” and improve academic performance (2000, p. 63). Delpit agrees in principle with Tatum, but she pays particular attention to students’ need for personal relationships and for a sense of community. For example, she says:

African American [children] seem especially sensitive to their relationship between themselves and their teacher. . . . they not only learn from a teacher but also for a teacher. If they do not feel connected to a teacher on an emotional level, then they will not learn. (p. 227)

Delpit describes how her mother, a teacher, taught her students plane geometry by having them “make a quilt for a student who had dropped out of school to get married and have a baby. . . . School knowledge was connected to a sense of community” (p. 226).

Barbara Seidl (2007) and other teacher educators believe that learning to “develop bicultural competency” and “culturally relevant pedagogies” should begin with preservice teachers’ early educational experience. She describes a seven-year collaboration between the Masters in Education program at Ohio State University and the congregation of an African American church in Columbus, Ohio. Not only did these master’s students have opportunities to immerse themselves in the life of this black community, they also learned to confront issues of race directly so that they could “personalize cultural and political knowledge” and thus integrate it into their developing culturally relevant pedagogies (p.168).

Epistemological Stance, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, and Reflective Practice

How then to relate all these trends to the teaching of the actual English teacher in the real classroom? By the time he or she reaches the classroom, the teacher will have internalized the effects of these various influences in the form of beliefs, attitudes, and several kinds of knowledge. Teachers will have attitudes toward and beliefs about the purposes of their discipline and about the kinds of literacy they should be instilling in their students. They will have a certain amount of subject matter and curricular knowledge, as well as pedagogical knowledge of strategies for conveying that knowledge to students; they will have knowledge of the students they teach, as well as knowledge of the contexts (school, district, community) in which they teach. Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward disciplinary and literacy learning can be characterized as their “epistemological stance” toward their teaching (Hillocks, 1999); and the synthesis of the various kinds of knowledge they must draw on for their teaching can, perhaps, best be termed “pedagogical content knowledge” (Schulman, 1986). This study will be

particularly interested in the ways that epistemological stance and pedagogical content knowledge seem to interact within the teacher to produce particular teaching practices.

In his two-year study of high school and community college English teachers, George Hillocks (1999), insists on the necessity of examining both what teachers say and what they do; examining either in isolation is of limited utility: “We should expect to find ideas and beliefs about practice embedded in the actions of practice. On the other hand, if we watch only the classroom practice, without being privy to the commentary of the teacher, we will be unable to understand the intentions and assumptions underlying the performance. Therefore, to better understand teaching, it will be necessary to examine both what teachers do and what they say about it” (p. 24). Hillocks attempted to change the teaching behavior of his twenty participants by having them do extensive readings of current literacy research. This study, like Hillocks’s, will examine both what teachers say and what they do; like his study, it will also introduce an intervention designed to change teacher attitudes and practices. In his study, however, Hillocks discovered that it was extremely difficult to change a teacher’s epistemological stance, and without this change, the teacher’s practices remained unaffected as well: “On the other hand, this study suggests that if attitudes or epistemological stance were to change, perhaps other parts of teacher knowledge would also change” (p. 125). Teacher change, he found, was very difficult to effect; he concluded that it could take place only if a reformer helped the teacher to reconstruct his or her epistemological stance, and that this was likely to occur only after a long period of intensive “reflective practice” on the part of the teacher. The current study will attempt to help teachers engage in the kinds of reflective practice that are likely to engender more effective pedagogical praxis in the English classroom.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was a combination of qualitative, naturalistic methods and formative research, a relatively new approach that incorporates an intervention into the actual research process. Reinking and Bradley (2008) have written the only full-length book dedicated to describing this approach. They use the term “formative and design experiments” but acknowledge that this approach has also been called “formative research” (p. 1). The current study employs the latter term to avoid any confusion that could result from the association of the term “experiment” with conventional quantitative experimental designs.

According to Reinking and Bradley, the purposes of formative research are to address the complex interactions that take place in the classroom context and to bring about “positive change in education environments through . . . instructional interventions grounded in theory and guided by systematic data collection and analysis” (p. 6). Ideally, the authors point out, this approach should bridge the gap between research and practice in that it provides “workable solutions” to “practical problems” (p. 5). Moreover, research of this kind will likely bring about fruitful collaborations between researchers and teachers: “Foremost, in our view, this approach addresses directly the long-felt need and long-lamented failure among education researchers to align theory, research, and practice to make concrete, meaningful and readily usable recommendations to practitioners” (p. 114). To those who would argue that formative research violates the “objective” stance of the researcher on the one hand or the organic integrity of educational interactions on the other, the authors would argue that thus far neither conventional experimental nor naturalistic methodologies have been adequate to

the task of contributing substantially to the quality of pedagogical praxis. Experimental methodology results in broad generalizations that are often not usefully applicable to particular instructional situations, they maintain, while naturalistic methodologies provide rich description that nevertheless offers no specific solutions to practical educational problems.

The research design used here was that of the case study. The case study was suited to this project because it allowed an in-depth exploration of only a few participants or units of analysis. Cresswell (2007) defines the case study as “the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (p. 73). I take the school within both of my participants teach to be the bounded system in question. Each participant and the classes he or she taught I considered to be a case, and thus my study contained two cases. Each of these cases is described in depth in a “within-case analysis,” and each is compared in detail in a “cross-case analysis” (p. 75). According to Cresswell, the purpose of a case study is “to understand an issue or problem” (p. 73) by means of examining a few specific examples. The issue here was the teacher’s attitudes toward disciplinary and literacy learning, or his or her epistemological stance, and the ways this stance related to his or her pedagogical praxis. My assumption here was that if carefully carried out, this study would reveal possible means by which the teacher’s stance could be altered so that his or her pedagogical praxis would be improved. As Lee Shulman (1983) states:

One major virtue of a case study is its ability to evoke images of the possible. . .

It is often the goal of policy to pursue the possible, not only to support the probable or frequent. The well-crafted case instantiates the possible, not only

documenting that it can be done, but also laying out at least one detailed example of how it is organized, developed, and pursued. (p. 495)

As stated in the introduction, this study went beyond the status quo to ask what can be done rather than simply settling for what already is. The formative approach in combination with the case study methodology was well suited to revealing a possible means of pedagogical reform and professional support.

Incorporating the process outlined by Reinking and Bradley for formative research, I first collected qualitative data that provided a rich description of the instructional setting and classroom dynamics of the case in question. Once a baseline was established, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, I introduced an intervention designed to effect a positive change in the classroom dynamic. I then collected additional qualitative data that revealed the apparent effects of the intervention—intended or unintended. My research design thus had much in common with the traditional qualitative case study but with an added dimension provided by formative research.

Role of the Researchers

As a qualitative researcher, I was myself the instrument of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). Thus maximum self-disclosure is desirable to mitigate bias. I am an older middle-aged woman whose ethnic background is a mix of Japanese American and Caucasian influences. I have about twelve years of experience of teaching English classes at the college level and five years' experience of teaching English in high schools (public and private). My years of teaching high school convinced me that curricular and pedagogical reform are badly needed, and this was my motive for pursuing a doctoral degree in education. My research assistant, of Caucasian

extraction, is a former journalist who now works as a substitute teacher. She recently completed the course work necessary to certify her to teach high school English. She was my student in a literacy methods course that I taught as a graduate assistant at Old Dominion University.

My role was that of participant observer. The ideal was to immerse myself completely in the environment of the classes in which this study took place. The nature of formative research required me to treat the teachers I worked with as collaborators rather than subjects. I made a conscious effort to bridge the gap between the academy and the public school so that I was able to view events, inasmuch as possible, through almost the same lenses as my teacher-collaborators.

Participants and Demographics

At three different points in the ten-week study period, I interviewed two teachers, and over the course of the study period, I observed two different tenth-grade English classes for each teacher—one honors and one regular class. My sampling method was “purposeful typical case sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 236). My goal was to find two teachers who were not atypical of their profession but who exhibited maximum variation in their age, gender, and amount of experience. I made my wishes clear to the department chair of the English Department, and she recommended two such teachers: a young woman (in her thirties) with considerable teaching experience and an older man (in his fifties) with no experience whatever. At the end of the study period, I also interviewed the department chair both to give her feedback concerning my observations of the other two teachers and to gain an understanding of what I had observed through her perspective; unlike the other two teachers, who were white, the chair was an African American woman in her forties. The chair was not a full participant in the study as

were the two teachers whose classes I observed. Rather, I used the chair's feedback to provide perspective for what I saw and learned in the other teachers' classrooms. The setting for my research was an urban high school with a highly diverse student body.

Data Collection and Fieldwork Strategies

I collected data at the research site for a total of ten weeks. I observed each class about once a week and took detailed fieldnotes (See Appendices C and F for observation protocols). I interviewed each of the two teachers extensively at the beginning, middle, and end of the study; these interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis (See Appendices B, G, and H for interview protocols). In addition, I recorded in my fieldnotes informal conversations that I had with the teachers. I carefully examined all curriculum guides the teachers used and all handouts—including syllabi, tests, and assignment descriptions—they generated. I also kept a journal in which I reflected on my experiences in the teachers' classrooms.

After one month of purely qualitative, naturalistic investigation, I introduced interventions, in collaboration with the teachers, that I thought might help them to improve literacy instruction within the classroom. Unlike many of the researchers in the studies described by Reinking and Bradley (2008) in their book on formative methodology, I chose interventions that I hoped the teacher participants would themselves carry out rather than those that I myself would attempt to use in their classrooms. My rationale was that only an intervention in which the teachers themselves were invested could result in any prolonged improvement in their pedagogical praxis. I first shared with them my observations about their literacy pedagogy and then discussed with them ways that the effectiveness of their teaching might be enhanced. Specifically, for both of them, I recommended that they include

more meaningful, in-depth discussion in their classroom practice. Recent research (Pitcher, et al., 2007; Vacca & Vacca, 2008) suggests the use of extended class discussion for helping students to process the materials in their studies, and I noticed a lack of such discussion in the classes of both teachers. To the inexperienced teacher, I also suggested that he try to tap into his students' experience and to set a clear purpose for each assignment he made. I continued my observations for the next six weeks of the study, looking closely for any ways that teacher or student behavior might have changed as a result of the intervention.

Data Analysis

I subjected the data to intensive content analysis. With my research questions in mind, I carefully read the fieldnotes of the observations, the transcripts of the interviews, and the documents associated with the classes. I then articulated all major themes that emerged from my reading. For the interview transcripts, I was particularly interested in participants' stated beliefs about the purposes of English as a discipline and their attitudes toward student literacy. For the fieldnotes from class observations, I coded for types of pedagogical methods used and student responses to these methods. For both types of data, I was also alert to possible influences of curricular guidelines and school culture. I reread the material several times, coding for major themes and noticing possible effects—intended and unintended—of the intervention. I also looked for patterns that seemed to develop from the data, and I made note of illustrative quotations that seemed to demonstrate themes, patterns, or important trends. I discovered that because of the formative element of my research design, it was most useful for me to divide the analysis into five phases: (1) first interview, (2) first month of observations, (3) second interview and initiation of intervention, (4) last six weeks of

observations and implementation of intervention, and (5) analysis of third interview with teachers and interview with department chair. My research assistant read my initial interview transcripts and provided me with her written impressions before reading my analysis; I then compared her interpretation with my own. At that point she read my analysis, and we found our observations about the interviews to be quite similar. After she and I reached consensus on my findings, I shared the interview transcripts with the three teacher participants and asked that they give me feedback as to the perceived accuracy of my transcription; all agreed that the transcripts reflected what they had actually said

As part of the analysis process, I engaged in intense self-reflection to determine ways that my actions or attitudes may have influenced the results of the study. Essential to the formative approach, unlike the convention of traditional research, is that the researcher actually impact the dynamics of the research sample and site. However, as Reinking and Bradley (2008) assert, researchers must carefully examine both intended and unintended results of the intervention. With this model, there is no cut-and-dried “success” or “failure” but rather a clear-eyed examination of the results of the researcher’s attempts to help the teachers enhance the literacy learning of the students. However, I was aware of the need to guard against manipulating the data during the analysis.

The last step in my analysis of the data was to determine how my findings related to the larger context of the school and community in which the research took place. To this end, I examined the themes and trends that emerged in the light of possible influences outside the classroom: socioeconomic factors affecting the students, departmental curricular policy guiding the teachers’ choices, the culture of the school

and community, and the possible effects of the Virginia Standards of Learning and federal policy on literacy instruction. Again, to increase credibility and validity, I shared my thoughts about these matters with my assistant and the members of my dissertation committee and revised the write-up of my findings accordingly.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Research Site and Participants

Site

My research was conducted at a large urban high school in the southeastern United States. Brunswick High School (a pseudonym) is located in a medium-sized city and as of 2007-2008 had 2,039 students. Of these, about 2.59 percent were Latino, 33.34 white, 57.18 black, 2.69 Asian, and .15 Native American; about 36 percent were eligible for free lunches, and about 9 percent for reduced-price lunches (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). There were 107 teachers, and the student-to-teacher ratio averaged 19 to 1 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The school building is of older construction but pleasing design; it consists of four stories, and most English classrooms are located on the second floor. The two classrooms in which I did my observations were both of the same design with the door and the teacher's desk and blackboard near the front of the room and the desks arranged in five rows facing the front. Each classroom contained one computer near the teacher's desk at the front of the room and had large windows on the side of the room opposite to the door. Each class consisted of 20-25 students. Because of previous problems with violence and gang activity, the classroom doors were kept locked at all times, and students had to knock to be admitted late to class or if returning from the bathroom or appointments elsewhere in the building.

Participants

My participants were three English teachers. The first, Ms. Fenton (all names are pseudonyms), was a white female in her mid-thirties. She had twelve years of high

school English teaching experience, four years at her current school and, previously, eight years at another high school within the same district (an urban school like the current one). She held a master's degree in English. She taught six classes, all tenth grade, which included regular English, Honors English, and SAT preparation. The second teacher, Mr. West, was a white male in his early fifties. When he began teaching at Brunswick High School in September, he had no teaching experience whatsoever, and by the time of the first interview had been teaching only six weeks. He had a background in journalism and had acquired his certification through an alternative licensure program. He taught five classes, all tenth grade, which included regular English, Honors, and SAT preparation. The third teacher, Mrs. Harris, had been a teacher at Brunswick High School for seven years and department chair for the last three. She was an African American woman in her mid to late forties. My purpose in interviewing her was to provide another perspective, specifically one with an administrative element, on the issues I had explored with Ms. Fenton and Mr. West. Whereas, I interviewed Ms. Fenton and Mr. West three times each at the beginning, middle, and end of the research period, I interviewed Mrs. Harris only once, about a month after I had my final interviews with the other two teachers.

Data Analysis

My data analysis consisted of an intensive content analysis of my three sets of interviews and two sets of fieldnotes on my observations. Because my emphasis was on the attitudes of the teachers toward disciplinary and literacy learning, I thought it appropriate to begin with an analysis of the interviews with the teachers. I read carefully once through all seven interviews I had done with the teachers and then a second time, during which I assigned tentative codes. Finally I read the interviews a

third time and assigned codes to each theme I encountered. I then summarized each theme in list form and noted to which research question each code pertained. However, although I learned much as a result of this process and found it convenient to refer back to this original list of codes in performing my analysis, I discovered that the thirty-some themes I identified for the purposes of analysis were too fragmented to be truly useful in organizing the data analysis. I felt that I needed to take a more organic approach to the data. Further, I realized that because formative research is a process with distinct stages, each having a different purpose and emphasis, each stage seemed to call for its own method of analysis. Thus for the purposes of analysis, I categorized the data according to five different phases, as follows:

1. Interviewing the teachers to find out what they actually believed and what they thought they were accomplishing in the classroom. In other words, I needed to be able to describe their epistemological stance and their perception of their pedagogical praxis.
2. Observing the classes of the teachers for a month to find out how whether their stated beliefs about themselves and their works jived with what actually went on in their classrooms. In other words, what was the relationship between their epistemological stance and their pedagogical content knowledge on the one hand with their actual pedagogical praxis on the other?
3. Based on these observations, devising an intervention consisting of a strategy that research has shown to be effective, that would be relatively easy for the teachers to implement, and that they seem to be neglecting in their current praxis; informing the teachers of this intervention.

4. Observing the classes of the teachers for six weeks to determine whether they were implementing the intervention; helping them when possible to implement the intervention and supporting them in their teaching.
5. Debriefing with the teachers to discover their perceptions as to whether or not they had implemented the intervention and comparing their perceptions to mine; interviewing the department chair to get her perspective on the teachers and the intervention.

As already stated, each phase seemed to call for its own analytic method, and each of these methods is described in the appropriate section below.

Phase 1—Analysis of First Interview

The purposes of the initial interview with the two teachers were (1) to determine the epistemological stance of each teacher—that is, his or her attitudes toward literacy instruction and beliefs about the purposes of English as a discipline (RQ 1 and 2)—and (2) to discover the perceptions of each concerning his or her own pedagogical praxis (i.e., instructional strategies used, the rationale behind these practices, and the degree of their effectiveness [RQ 4 and 5]). Thus I identified themes in the teachers' responses that related to these purposes, noting the research question(s) to which each theme pertained. However, I also noted that there were themes not explicitly included in the research questions that nevertheless had potential importance for literacy instruction. Each theme is described below and labeled according to the research question (RQ) and the interview question(s) (IQ) to which it pertains. (See Appendix A and Appendix B for the research and interview questions.)

Interview of Ms. Fenton

Themes directly related to research questions.

Attitude toward student literacy (RQ 1, IQ 5, 7):

Ms. Fenton's attitude toward student literacy is that it should include both functional literacy ("you can read and write") and critical literacy ("the ability to understand the power and beauty of words"). She wants student to find pleasure in the written and spoken language ("play with it, enjoy it"). And she understands that the utility of literacy extends beyond academics to all areas of a student's life ("see how it operates in all areas of your life").

Purpose of English as a field of study (RQ 2, IQ 3):

Ms. Fenton feels that her purpose in teaching English is to instill functional literacy in her students ("to teach them to read and write effectively and to operate in society well"). However, she also feels English fulfills a larger purpose ("relate it to life, love, all the big, beautiful issues").

Effective literacy pedagogy (RQ 4, IQ 6, 7, 9, 10, 13):

Ms. Fenton claims to incorporate a number of effective literacy strategies into her teaching. She asks open-ended questions ("a lot of questions about the big issues in life") that use "higher level questioning strategies" in order to get students to think critically about the material. She personalizes her instruction ("I tell stories from my own life"). She differentiates instruction for minority students ("I find current authors to match the gender or the race [of students])." She attempts to draw on students' prior experience and interests ("I . . . try to keep . . . the writing prompts and activities centered around their own interests"). For example:

So for instance we did an essay called “this I believe” essay, and it’s about what they believe in life, what’s important to them, and that tends to be really effective—focusing on their interests. Of course, the curriculum keeps you from doing that completely.

As can be seen from the foregoing quotation, Ms. Fenton also says that she gives students as much choice as possible in reading and writing assignments (“I give them as much choice as I can because—again we’re super constricted”). She claims to prefer more authentic writing assignments as opposed to the formulaic ones mandated by the curriculum (“I like biographical sketches, . . . multigenre papers . . . poetry and response”). Thus she gives students as much freedom as possible with the writing assignments but notes that she may be atypical in this respect (“I’m more liberal than everybody else in this department”). She says that she gives students ways to “publish” their work, including having them read their papers aloud, putting them up on the wall, and submitting them to the school literary magazine.

Possible obstacles to effective literacy instruction (RQ 5, IQ 9, 10, 12):

Ms. Fenton sees the curriculum as limiting some of the ways she can be effective in her teaching. She is unable to incorporate as much choice in writing assignments as she would like because of curricular requirements (“we’re superconstricted”). The curriculum mandates that at least two papers based on the methods of development be assigned (“we’re required to do cause and effect, compare and contrast”). The students apparently have almost no choice at all in what they read, as this is decided beforehand in accordance with the written curriculum. Moreover, the students have virtually no access to computers in school, as there is only one in each classroom and there are relatively few available for student use elsewhere.

Ways in which the teacher is supported (or not) in his/her efforts to integrate effective literacy pedagogy into teaching (by means of professional development or mentoring) (RQ 7, IQ 13):

Ms. Fenton does not see the professional development provided by the school district as helpful or relevant to her teaching (“We have professional development that’s a big joke”). She feels that what is taught in these sessions contradicts what she is actually required to do (“the professional development days just make me kind of angry”).

What has helped her in her teaching, she says, is the college English and education courses she has taken, from which she adopts material for her students (“stealing things from my college course and watering them down to a high school level”).

Themes indirectly related to research questions.

Three major themes emerged that are not specifically related to the research questions but that nevertheless impact literacy instruction. These are as follows:

Influence of community, cultural characteristics of student populations taught (IQ 15):

Ms. Fenton describes the culture of the community surrounding the high school as “bizarre” because of the differences in the makeup of the two major population groups, the children of upper-middle class professionals on the one hand, and those of working class parents with lower socioeconomic status on the other (“so we have the extreme polar opposites”). She notes that the students of one group tend to respond quite differently to instruction than do those of the other.

Social skills, moral values, and classroom management (IQ 17):

Ms. Fenton says that teaching social skills and moral values in English class is necessary and unavoidable (“You do it whether you think you are or not because you

tell people how they need to treat others”). She also points out that social concerns and moral issues arise naturally from the reading of the literature.

Treatment of teachers as professionals (IQ 18):

Ms. Fenton states that what would most help her to be more effective as a teacher would be if she were treated as a professional and allowed to make more decisions about how she teaches: “I think the biggest, would be people backing off and treating teachers like professionals, . . . let us choose a little more what goes on in the classroom to help the students do well.” She gives an example of a time she taught summer school and had more control of her curriculum; she claims that she was able to have students do more reading and writing than usual and that student behavior was better, partly because of stronger support by the administration (“it actually is a better learning environment because the administration does not back down”).

Overview of first interview with Ms. Fenton.

Perhaps most noteworthy is that Ms. Fenton does not seem to regard instilling literacy skills as conflicting in any way with the purpose of English as a discipline. Rather, she sees the aims of functional and critical literacy on the one hand as being consonant with those of disciplinary literacy on the other. Both concern teaching students to read and write effectively, think critically, and relate what they read and write to all areas of their lives. Nowhere, for example, does she mention the importance of teaching a literary canon, a hallmark of the traditional approach still dominant in many high school English classes.

Also of interest is that, according to her own account, Ms. Fenton incorporates virtually all the strategies that research has shown to be effective in instilling literacy in high school students; these include drawing on student experience and prior knowledge,

giving students choices as to their reading and writing, personalizing instruction by sharing her own experiences with students, and giving them opportunities to “publish” their written work. She neglects only one major method of engaging students in literacy activities, and this concerns tapping into the digital literacies that they employ outside the classroom. However, she is much hampered in doing this by the lack of access to computers in her class.

Ways in which Ms. Fenton feels unsupported in delivering effective literacy instruction also deserve mention. Her attitude toward the curriculum is that it constricts her choices rather than providing her with constructive guidance. Moreover, she feels that the professional development provided by the school district is irrelevant to her actual experience in the classroom.

According to Ms. Fenton, nonacademic matters such as community culture and classroom management have a profound impact on her English instruction. The extreme divide between the two types of student populations she teaches require her to differentiate her instruction for each group. Moreover, it is clear that though not a stated purpose of her teaching or an official element of the curriculum, the teaching of social skills and moral values plays a considerable role in her instruction. Further, this kind of teaching arises naturally from the study of literature, where such issues are embedded.

Interview of Mr. West

Themes directly related to research questions.

Attitude toward student literacy (RQ 1, IQ 5, 7):

Mr. West's attitude toward student literacy is that it should include both functional literacy ("Competency in reading and writing) and critical literacy ("a higher level where you're going to be able to deal with complex documents").

Purpose of English as a field of study (RQ 2, IQ 3):

Mr. West feels that his primary purpose is to teach the students how to write. Because he has a strong writing background and because of students' writing deficits ("how desperately kids need writing skills"), he believes he can teach them "without any training whatsoever." He is less certain about literature, about which he fears he is not very knowledgeable ("I have a long way to go").

Effective literacy pedagogy (RQ 4, IQ 6, 7, 9, 11):

As to literacy strategies, Mr. West mentions three. One is altering the pace of his teaching to allow the students to follow his lessons ("I was going way too fast") and simplifying his lessons ("strip some things out of the lesson plans to allow for time just to know the kids"). Another is asking open-ended questions ("I'm a big believer in the Socratic method") in order to "try to let them teach each other." A third strategy is the use of cooperative learning, specifically peer editing to help his students write their papers. However, he is not happy with this practice ("it hasn't worked very well") and is considering abandoning it altogether ("we're not going to waste class time like that").

Possible obstacles to effective literacy instruction (RQ 5, IQ 11, 12, 18):

Mr. West sees classroom management issues as impediments to his teaching ("so many of [the students] just wasted their time"), and he is especially concerned about the lack

of access to electronic resources (“that’s really . . . disappointed me about the way [this high school] is set up”), specifically the lack of computers in the classroom. In fact, when asked what would most help him improve his teaching, he names technical support (“If I had a technology guru who could give me all the bells and whistles technology wise and stick by me and teach me how they work”).

Ways in which the teacher is supported (or not) in his/her efforts to integrate effective literacy pedagogy into teaching (by means of professional development or mentoring) (RQ 7, IQ 4, 13):

Mr. West relies largely, at this point, on materials he received while attending his alternative licensure program:

[My] content teacher for [the program] . . . gave us some amazing resources.

She gave us this book here. It’s . . . like an encyclopedia of anything and everything you need to know, and I refer back to that book a lot.

He also counts on getting help in his teaching from the other teachers in the department, especially those on the sophomore team: “[T]he department in general is awesome. I mean there’s a lot of good teachers to lean on.”

Themes indirectly related to research questions.

Influence of community, cultural characteristics of student populations taught (IQ 15, 16):

Mr. West is amazed at the difference between the two very different student populations he has encountered in his teaching:

I knew coming into [Brunswick] that this is the school that has the highest of the high and the lowest of the low. And I knew it would be a very challenging job to begin with, but I was curious about how they blend these rich . . . kids and

these kids from the projects. It's almost like you're in two different schools. You're in the same room, but you're in two different schools . . . I don't know that many schools in the country have this kind of a situation, and it's a bizarre mix. And I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, but it's definitely different.

His teaching is directly impacted by some of these differences; for example, he describes a student whose African American dialect was so pronounced that he was unable to understand her ("this girl was saying 'music,' and I couldn't understand what she was saying"). He hopes to convince students with these speech patterns that he has their best interests at heart: "And I just try to not offend but just, you know, 'help me understand. I'm helping you, you help me.'"

Social skills, moral values, and classroom management (IQ 17):

Mr. West is surprised at the amount of time and energy he has to spend trying to instill social skills and moral values in his students ("I didn't realize how big a part of the job it was"). However, once he understands this to be true, he is determined to make it an important part of his teaching: [E]ven if these kids don't learn any English this year, I want them to come out of this class learning responsibility." He is amazed that students leave his handouts lying on the floor ("like they're trash"). He expresses strong feelings about the importance of moral lessons, implying that learning them may be even more vital than making good grades: "They have to learn to make good choices or bad choices. If you learn that lesson by failing a test, then that's a good thing."

Overview of first interview with Mr. West.

Many of Mr. West's concerns can be attributed to his status as a new teacher with minimal preparation and no prior teaching experience. He is surprised by the

unruly behavior and the negligible literacy skills of some of his students. He relies for his lesson plans and materials on advice from the other teachers and on the manual he received from his alternative licensure program. He copes as best he can with a learning environment that seems inadequate to him in some respects.

However, after only six weeks of teaching, he has learned that he needs to adjust his methods to his particular student populations. He is open to trying cooperative teaching strategies, and he attempts to use the Socratic method of asking open-ended questions so that the students can construct their own knowledge and learn from each other. Moreover, even though he is surprised by how large a part of his job classroom management is, he quickly acknowledges the importance of instilling social skills and moral values in his students, putting this concern almost on par with academic achievement.

Notably, Mr. West was raised in a rural environment, and his previous experience has been almost exclusively with rural and suburban schools. Thus it is not surprising that he struggles with some issues that arise with his inner-city, African American students, for example, his difficulty with understanding their dialect. However, he makes a real effort to connect with them and does his best to convince them that he has their best interests at heart.

Comparison of Ms. Fenton's Attitudes toward Pedagogy to Mr. West's

Because Ms. Fenton is a 12-year veteran and Mr. West is a complete novice to teaching, many differences between their two approaches are predictable and not particularly revealing—for example, Mr. West's reliance on the plans and materials of others as opposed to Ms. Fenton's preference for creating her own. However, precisely because of the differences in their backgrounds, similarities in their attitudes and

perceptions may be quite telling. With respect to their attitudes toward student literacy and their beliefs about the purpose of English as a field of study, they both see the instilling of both functional and critical literacy as important parts of their jobs, and neither apparently privileges teaching literature over fostering literacy; thus neither refers specifically to the importance of transmitting knowledge of the literary canon to his or her students. They have in common then the notion that the purposes of teaching literacy are closely allied with those of teaching English and that no inherent conflict exists between these two sets of goals. Thus their epistemological stances are quite similar.

As to integrating effective literacy strategies, understandably, Ms. Fenton's methodology is much more sophisticated than Mr. West's, and unlike him, she is able to articulate a number of research-based strategies that she incorporates into her teaching. However, their two approaches do have in common the fact that they are very much student centered, as opposed to teacher or text centered. In what the teachers say about their methods, both speak in terms of the students' learning and the necessity of tailoring their approaches to meet the needs of the particular students in their classes. Moreover, both show a certain willingness to personalize their instruction—Ms. Fenton by sharing her life experiences with students and Mr. West by making an effort to get to know his students and give them an opportunity to learn more about him.

Further, the two teachers' perceptions of the cultural characteristics of their students and their attitudes toward teaching social skills and moral values have much in common. Both are aware of the great cultural divide between the two types of student populations in the school, and both are aware that it poses a potential a pedagogical challenge. Both recognize imparting social skills and moral values as an inevitable and

ultimately important part of their jobs as English teachers. Thus, in terms of the nonacademic aspects of their teaching, the teachers are quite similar.

Phase 2—Analysis of Observations, First Month

Because my primary focus was on the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers, I conducted my analysis of the initial month of classroom observations based on what I had learned from the first set of interviews (see Appendix C for observation protocol). My purpose was to determine how the attitudes of the teachers were actually related to their classroom practice, that is, how their epistemological stance seemed to affect their pedagogical praxis—and how students responses seemed to reflect (or not) the effectiveness of this praxis. In order to arrive at the most promising instructional intervention, I also sought to identify what seemed to be missing from the teachers' practices that might improve their teaching. Because I was looking for rather specific kinds of evidence, I found it most helpful to develop a set of questions to guide my analysis; they are as follows:

1. Do practices of the teachers square with their stated beliefs and attitudes about the purposes of literacy instruction in secondary English classes? (RQ 3)
2. Are teachers integrating the strategies that recent literacy research has deemed effective?

For Ms. Fenton, does she really use all of the strategies she has named in the interview?

For Mr. West, does he use the Socratic method when he actually conducts his classes? (RQ 4)

3. Which strategies seem to be neglected and why? If the teachers are unable or unwilling to integrate these strategies into their instruction, which factors seem to prevent them from doing so? (RQ 5)
4. What do student responses seem to reveal about the effectiveness of the teachers' literacy practices? If the students are not engaged, then why not? (RQ 6)
5. Of the research-based strategies that the teacher seemed to neglect, which is the most obvious and which would be most likely to help him or her to improve instruction? (RQ 7—**Intervention**)

Observations of Ms. Fenton's Classes

1. Do practices of the teachers square with their stated beliefs and attitudes about the purposes of literacy instruction in secondary English classes? (RQ 3)

For the most part, Ms. Fenton's practices did clearly reflect her stated beliefs and attitudes about the purposes of English instruction. For the purpose of promoting functional literacy, she had students do ample reading and writing in class. Every class of Ms. Fenton's that I observed—whether regular or honors—began with a warm-up exercise in which students responded to a writing prompt. Moreover, these prompts also often reflected Ms. Fenton's belief that she should be directing her students' attention toward the bigger issues in life (and thus developing their critical thinking skills). In an honors class, for example, on Indian origin myths, she had the students do a warm-up that consisted of writing answers to the following questions:

Where did people come from?

Where did the earth come from?

What is your life's purpose?

Do you have a specific purpose because you're a man or a woman?

In this same class, Ms. Fenton read them a portion of Genesis from the Bible aloud to the students. She then had the students read silently three Native American origin myths, two from handouts that she gave them and one from their textbook. Finally, she gave them a homework assignment of writing their own creation or origin myths. For this purpose she gave them a handout that described the assignment, listed its requirements, and included a peer checklist and a grading rubric. This class was typical of Ms. Fenton's instruction, and it clearly demonstrated her stated attitudes and beliefs that the purposes of her instruction were to promote functional literacy and critical literacy in her students and to make them aware of the larger issues in life as they related to the students own experience in the greater world.

2. Are teachers integrating the strategies that recent literacy research has deemed effective? (RQ 4)

My observations of her classes during this first month revealed that Ms. Fenton used most of the strategies that she described during her initial interview. These included asking open-ended questions, personalizing instruction, differentiating instruction, relating materials to student interests, giving them choices as to writing assignments, and giving them the opportunity to "publish" their work. Of these, the only one not in evidence during that first month was differentiating instruction; in other words, I never witnessed her make a particular assignment to a particular student based on that students particular personal or ethnic traits. However, as can be seen from question #1, she frequently asked open-ended, thought-provoking questions of the students. Moreover, she personalized her instruction by sharing her own feeling and writings with her students. For example, in one honors class, in which she was assigning her students

to write a “This I Believe” essay, that is, a story based on their beliefs about what was important in life, she read an essay based on her own experience as an example. As to having students relate what they read to their own experience, in a regular class on Edgar Allen Poe’s story “The Masque of the Red Death,” she had students begin by making a list of things they feared. She then had students share items on this list with other and named some of her own fears as well. Her assignment, mentioned earlier, of the “This I Believe” essay, which she gave to both her regular and her honors students, is a clear example of her giving students choices as to what they might include in a writing assignment. Finally, in the classes that I observed students were often given opportunities to “publish” their writing and other assignments by sharing them with their classmates. At one point, for example, in her honors class, students were given the opportunity to read aloud to the class either the “This I Believe” essay or the origin myth paper mentioned earlier. Also, in one honors class, students were able to present totem poles they had made during a unit on Native American literature.

3. Which strategies seem to be neglected and why? If the teachers are unable or unwilling to integrate these strategies into their instruction, which factors seem to prevent them from doing so? (RQ 5)

A strategy that Ms. Fenton seemed to neglect was allowing students to bring the multiliteracies that they use outside of class to bear on the materials they were reading and studying in class. The factor that clearly prevented this from happening in class was the lack of computers or other technological devices in the classroom. The only computer was the one at the front of the class for the teacher’s use, and there was a school policy that forbade the students to use their cell phones (in fact, technically,

students were not allowed to have their cell phones with them at all), and several times I heard Ms. Fenton admonish a student to “Put away the electronics.”

Another strategy that Ms. Fenton seemed unable to incorporate, even though she noted it as desirable in the initial interview, was differentiating instruction for individual students by allowing them to read materials that were designed specifically to address their personal or ethnic traits. As Ms. Fenton had said earlier, all the students in all the regular tenth-grade classes were supposed to be reading the same works as stipulated by the curriculum; as were all students in the tenth-grade honors classes. This policy would have made it virtually impossible to differentiate instruction for individual students.

A final strategy that seemed to be neglected was class discussion—either guided discussion with the whole class or small-group discussion. Class discussion did take place, but it was ordinarily very limited in scope. In the example given above, for instance, where regular students were asked to list their fears, in the discussion that ensued, students were asked to name their fears but not to explain them or talk about them in depth. During the class when honors students were asked to list their beliefs, there was no opportunity for discussion. Rather, the students were instructed to immediately begin writing their rough drafts of the essay to be based on this list. During the honors class on Indian origin myths, students were asked to graphically represent the Genesis story and the three myths, but whereas the teacher then led a discussion about myths in general, the students were never given the opportunity to discuss the work they had completed on the storyboards. The reasons for this neglect of discussion were not readily apparent.

4. What do student responses seem to reveal about the effectiveness of the teachers' literacy practices? If the students are not engaged, then why not? (RQ 6)

Students in Ms. Fenton's class were generally well behaved and on task. Most of the time students seemed engaged in the class activities. For example, the regular students participated actively in the discussion mentioned earlier about their fears, as did the honors students in their discussion of creation myths. In her honors class for the Native American literature unit, the students had made totem poles that expressed their own identities and written a passage about their work. Students were quite enthusiastic in presenting their totem poles to their classmates, explaining the symbolism of the poles at length. Students seem to listen attentively when Ms. Fenton read her own "This I Believe" story in the honors class, and when Ms. Fenton was overcome with emotion during the reading, one student called out, "We love you, Ms. [Fenton]." When after being introduced to the story "The Masque of the Red Death," the regular students read the first part of the story while listening to it being read on a tape player, and their attentiveness was clear when they were able to answer questions about the plot and the setting after Ms. Fenton interrupted the recording.

The rare occasions when students did not appear to be engaged or on task most often occurred when they had been assigned individual work in their seats. For example, when honors students were asked to list the beliefs on which to base their "This I Believe" essays, two or three students appeared restless and uncertain. One of these asked another student if he could see her list of beliefs; she said no but that she would look at his list and help him choose a couple beliefs on which to base his issue. The first student gave her his list, and she marked two or three that she thought most

promising. Similarly, during the second part of the regular class in which students were reading “The Masque of the Red Death,” they were to complete “character cubes,” each face of which explored some aspect of a chosen character in the story. Again, several students appeared restless, getting out of their seats and talking about other matters with their classmates. One student said he couldn’t draw and asked another student to draw a picture of his character for him, which the second student did. Both of these instances seemed to reveal a need for the students to engage more closely with each other in discussion and collaboration.

5. Of the research-based strategies that the teacher seemed to neglect, which is the most obvious and which would be most likely to help him or her to improve instruction? (RQ 7—**Intervention**)

In my judgment, the only major research-based strategy the teacher obviously neglected that was in her power to control was that of allowing for more interaction among students, especially in the form of class or small-group discussion. As explained earlier, I noted several occasions when the ability of students to process material by discussing it might have helped them to more easily and more thoughtfully complete the assignment based on that material. Moreover, this observation was borne out by the behavior of the students themselves, who often seemed to seek opportunities to interact around the assigned activity, even when the teacher had made no provisions for them to do so.

Observations of Mr. West’s Classes

1. Do practices of the teachers square with their stated beliefs and attitudes about the purposes of literacy instruction in secondary English classes? (RQ 3)

Mr. West's practices only partially reflected his stated beliefs and attitudes about the purposes of English instruction. Certainly, he attempted to engage his students in a number of reading and writing activities designed to promote functional literacy. For example, he often gave students class time to work on their papers and tried to coach them through this process. He also had them complete grammar exercises that were designed to improve writing fluency. He gave students time to read in class—sometimes aloud and sometimes silently. However, for the most part he rarely moved beyond the literal level to engage students in discussions or activities that might stimulate them to think critically. Whereas in his interview, he stated that he felt his most important pedagogical purpose was to teach the students to write, he seemed at a loss for how to do this effectively. For example, in one regular class he had the students write a short essay comparing and contrasting two videos but set no purpose for the activity and gave them virtually no instruction about how to do so. The grammar exercises he assigned were never related directly to the students' writing processes and so did not really further their writing skills. Of course that his practices often fell short of his good intentions can clearly be attributed to his near total lack of previous teaching experience.

2. Are teachers integrating the strategies that recent literacy research has deemed effective? (RQ 4)

Not surprisingly, as a new teacher, Mr. West integrated few literacy strategies that might have made his teaching more effective. The only strategy that he used with some success was personalizing his instruction in order to engage his students in the material. He made a clear effort to get to know each student as an individual. For example, during paper writing workshops, he tried to meet with each student who needed special

attention so that he could address that student's particular problem. However, though Mr. West in his initial interview had voiced a firm belief in the Socratic method, he very rarely engaged either of his classes in a discussion that used open-ended questions to stimulate their thinking.

3. Which strategies seem to be neglected and why? If the teachers are unable or unwilling to integrate these strategies into their instruction, which factors seem to prevent them from doing so? (RQ 5)

As stated above, Mr. West neglected a number of literacy strategies that might have made his teaching more effective. Most notable of these were setting a purpose for written assignments, drawing on students' own interests and experiences to engage them with the material, and using whole-class or small-group discussion to stimulate students' thinking and to help them build a sense of community. For example, he had his regular students working on a comparison and contrast paper to compare characters from two different short stories, but he set no purpose for them to do the comparing and contrasting. In an honors class where he was teaching a poem by Anne Bradstreet about her feelings after her house burned down, he did nothing to prepare the students for the reading of the poem by way of tapping into the students' feelings about their own possessions. In neither his honors nor his regular classes was there evidence of meaningful discussion that might have helped students process the information covered. For example in an honors class covering the Pilgrims, Puritans, and early Colonial literature, he showed a long Powerpoint presentation about the history of this period without pausing to answer students' questions or allowing them to discuss the concepts covered.

It seemed clear that Mr. West's lack of teaching experience was largely responsible for his neglect of strategies that might have made his instruction more effective. His lack of familiarity with the literature he was teaching was a particular disadvantage. As a novice teacher, he himself did not fully understand the purpose behind the assignments he made according to the dictates of the curriculum; thus it was doubly difficult for him to help set a purpose for his students to fulfill the assignments. His inability to lead meaningful class discussions can also be attributed largely to his lack of experience. The limited training and exposure he had received from the alternative licensure program seemed inadequate in terms of providing him with the pedagogical content knowledge he needed to teach effectively.

4. What do student responses seem to reveal about the effectiveness of the teachers' literacy practices? If the students are not engaged, then why not? (RQ 6)

Almost every class of Mr. West's that I observed was beset with classroom management problems. The students would often talk out of turn, walk around the classroom, and throw pieces of paper at each other. On the occasions referred to earlier, several of the regular students working on the comparison and contrast paper complained that they didn't understand the assignment or how to proceed with it. Some of the honors students who had to read the Anne Bradstreet poem claimed to resent having to do so and to have trouble understanding the poem. ("I hate poetry," said one.) This same set of students protested loudly while Mr. West was showing the Powerpoint about Colonial literature, saying that he was going too fast for them to fill out their outlines or discuss the ideas being covered. ("What does this have to do with English?" said one student.) In one of Mr. West's regular classes, after he had assigned the

students to write a one-paragraph plot summary of each of the four stories they were to have read, the students began talking among themselves about what it means to be an American citizen. This discussion had nothing to do with the assignment, but it did seem to show a desire on the students' part to talk about larger ideas, which they were never, during my observations, given the chance to do in this class.

It was clear to me that there were many reasons that the students often were not engaged in the material: chief among these were that they were not given a clear purpose for any given assignment, that they were shown no way to relate the materials studied to their own experience, and that they lacked opportunities to process their readings and writings by means of thoughtful interactive discussion—whether small group or whole class. Of course, Mr. West's lack of classroom management skills, which is attributable to his status as a novice teacher, greatly contributed to all of these problems.

5. Of the research-based strategies that the teacher seemed to neglect, which is the most obvious and which would be most likely to help him or her to improve instruction? (RQ 7—**Intervention**)

Of the neglected strategies enumerated above—failure to set a purpose for assignments, to relate materials to student interests and experience, and to engage the students in meaningful discussion of their work—the one that seemed to me the easiest for Mr. West to address and correct was the use of discussion to help students process concepts encountered in their studies. For him, as a novice teacher, juggling the demands of a new curriculum and the needs of a student population with very diverse and particularly challenging characteristics was a task that would simply take much more classroom experience and trial-and-error practice before he could reasonably be expected to

improve to any great extent. However, more frequently allowing the students to interact with him and each other in large- and small-group discussion seemed a practice well within Mr. West's ability to undertake with the minimum of trouble. Through their behavior—their expressed need for clarification of assignments, their desire to ask more questions during class, and their constant off-task talking among themselves—the students seemed to themselves to manifest a need for such discussion. Ironically, Mr. West had in his initial interview stated that he was a big believer in the Socratic method; the problem was that he seemed to have virtually no idea as to how to put this method into practice in a high school English classroom. Allowing for more frequent and more in-depth discussion would have fulfilled a number of purposes besides helping the students to better understand the material; it would likely have helped to alleviate some of Mr. West's classroom management problems, to improve personal relations between him and the students and between the students and each other, and to create a sense of trust and community within his classroom that would in turn have fostered a better learning environment.

Observations of Ms. Fenton's and Ms. West's Classes Compared

Given that Ms. Fenton was a 12-year veteran and Mr. West a rank novice, it is not surprising that she, for the most part, was able to bring her practices in line with her beliefs about the purposes of English instruction whereas he, very often, was not. Nor is it particularly noteworthy that, unlike Mr. West, Ms. Fenton was able to effectively employ a number of research-based literacy strategies in her teaching. No wonder that Ms. Fenton's students most often seemed engaged and on task while Mr. West's frequently seemed unmotivated and at loose ends. What interested me, however, was that both teachers often neglected a strategy that required no extra technology or

materials and that could have resulted in substantial cognitive and social benefits for their students: that is, frequently engaging the students in meaningful discussions about their readings and their papers. On the other hand, both teachers used considerable time and energy asking their students to be quiet. During one of Ms. Fenton's honors classes, I counted her shushing her students 18 times, and there were probably times I missed. This means that over the 90-minute class period, she shushed her students at least once every 5 minutes. Mr. West's shushing counts were even higher, and he frequently confided in me that he did not understand why the students at Brunswick were so "chatty" while those at suburban schools he'd encountered knew to keep absolutely silent during class. It seemed clear to me that both teachers could save much time and energy if students were more frequently allowed to socialize in acceptable ways relating to their studies. For these reasons I determined that the primary intervention I would try to introduce into the classes of each teacher would be to encourage and support them in efforts to include more opportunities for discussion and socializing around the students' reading and writing.

Phase 3—Analysis of Second Interview and Initiation of Intervention

This phase of my research had three purposes: to elicit the teachers' impressions of their own teaching and their students' progress during the past four weeks of their teaching; to give the teachers my feedback on their instruction and its effectiveness; and to introduce my intervention to the teachers and to suggest ways it might be implemented.

Intervention

Based on the initial interviews, during which both teachers had professed a belief in the instructional efficacy of open-ended questioning, and on my subsequent

observation of their classes, which nevertheless revealed a dearth of meaningful, in-depth class discussion, I decided to urge the teachers to incorporate more of this kind of discussion into their classroom teaching. As has been stated earlier, discussion-based learning is vital for cultivating both functional and critical literacy in students. Many studies have shown that engaging students in social interaction around reading and writing activities greatly increases student's motivation to learn (Allen, 2002; Parr & McGuiness, 2005; Pitcher et al., 2007; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Moreover, extended discussion gives students the opportunity to process what they are learning at a deeper level. Finally, meaningful, in-depth discussion allows students to apply and enhance their critical thinking skills; it is a primary means of cultivating in them the ability to analyze and evaluate the social and moral landscape of their world. According to Ladson-Billings (2001), fostering this "broader sociopolitical consciousness" is especially crucial to culturally relevant pedagogy for minority students because it allows them "to critique the social norms, values, . . . and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 162). This critical stance can enable minority students to understand and overcome the social forces arrayed against them. At Brunswick High School, with its majority of African American students, many of whom came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, it seemed especially important to me that this kind of pedagogy be practiced by its English teachers. Further, aside from the benefits already described, I felt that including more opportunities for discussion might well help with the classroom management problems my two teacher participants were having, chief among them arising from students' desire to talk to each other; if students had more chances to talk to each other about the work they were doing, I reasoned, off-task talking might well be much reduced. Perhaps most important of all, free-flowing

discussion among the students about things that really mattered to them might help to create trust and a sense of community in the classroom—a sense that seemed to me to be sorely lacking in many of the classes I observed. In such a safe and supportive environment, moreover, the students' learning would be more likely to grow and thrive. For all of these reasons, then, I urged both teachers to make every effort to include more extensive discussion in their class activities. In addition to promoting this approach in my interview with each teacher, I wrote for each a detailed letter giving my reasons for making this suggestion and providing examples of ways that it might be implemented (for the full text of letters to the teachers, see Appendices D and E).

I began each interview by asking the teachers how they thought their classes had been going up to this point. My reasoning was that the teachers would be more likely to attend to my suggestions if I had first listened to their concerns about their classes.

Interview of Ms. Fenton

At this point, about eight weeks into the fall semester, Ms. Fenton had three main concerns: new administrative policies that added to her work load, the restrictions of the curriculum that resulted in extra work for her if she gave the students more creative assignments, and class management issues that both detracted from the quality of instruction and required her to use more time contacting parents and holding afterschool detentions. All of these concerns related to my research question 5 concerning factors that seem to militate against effective literacy instruction.

Concerning the administrative policies, Ms. Fenton stated:

[W]e have a lot of new rules and regulations with the administration. So, for instance, we're supposed to turn in our lesson plans a week or a week and a half in advance, which is okay, but because of all the interruptions, and this and that,

then our lesson plans change, so therefore basically you write your lesson plans two or three times. And that's caused my ability to get them finished on time to slow down. . . So I'm getting out of here like 6:00 or 7:00 . . . and so I get worn out. And I think because I'm worn out, I'm also not as effective with the kids, you know, just dealing with the day-to-day.

Also adding to her work load, Ms. Fenton believed, were the restrictions of the curriculum, which made it difficult for her to make more authentic assignments:

They [the students] really, really like the writing assignments where they make some choices. Um, so I try to throw some of those in there. That's causing me some difficulty too because I have to do the compare and contrast, and the real specific basic ones, and so I add the extra ones in there, which makes for extra work for me, because I have to do the required ones, but I have to do the others, but I feel like I have to have some of that creative stuff to give it some more juice. So on the same token, I'm creating more work for me, so I'm not sure how to balance that.

Finally, Ms. Fenton expressed frustration with several disruptive students, in one class in particular, whose behavior detracted from the quality of instruction and who required her to do extra work outside of class contacting parents and writing referrals. Perhaps most noteworthy, she stated that the difficult students especially wanted extra attention and that if they were allowed to write about subjects that related directly to their experience, they were more likely to be engaged and less likely to be disruptive: "They write about something; it's personal to them. . . . They want to share. I love letting the students read theirs out loud because they love to do that. . . . The only problem is it takes up time, and there's the curriculum, so I'm trying to think of ways to do that too."

Thus Ms. Fenton's concerns also related to my research question #4 (concerning integrating strategies deemed effective by literacy research) in that all of the problems she mentioned—whether they related to administrative policy, curricular requirements, or classroom management—either directly or indirectly, inhibited her ability to incorporate research-based strategies into her instruction. Moreover, all of these matters also related to time constraints in that all deprived Ms. Fenton of time, in class and out, that she might have used planning and implementing effective instruction.

Based on my initial interview with her and on my observations of her classes, I had anticipated Ms. Fenton's concerns about time and classroom management when designing my intervention. My reasoning was that adding more meaningful in-depth discussion to classroom practices would not require much additional class time, could be used within the constraints of the curriculum, and could actually help with discipline issues by redirecting the students' need to talk into more constructive channels. In my letter to Ms. Fenton, I expressed it this way:

After observing your classes for several weeks, I have only one suggestion of any substance. It is to try to include more discussion in your classroom. Many research studies show that discussion helps students to develop their critical thinking skills and to cultivate a sense of community within the classroom. I have observed that you spend a lot of time asking your students to be quiet; if you would give them more time for legitimate discussion of the material you are teaching, I think the problem of talking out of turn might be diminished. Fifteen-year-olds are just naturally talkers; and if you can capitalize on this tendency for instructional purposes, so much the better.

In this second interview, I gave Ms. Fenton a number of examples from both her regular and honors classes of instances where I thought that adding in small-group or whole-class discussion would have enhanced the students' literacy learning, whether they were brainstorming about a writing assignment or peer editing a finished paper. I tried especially to stress what I felt would be an improvement in the overall learning environment if the students were given more chances to interact with her and with each other:

The other thing that discussion does is that it builds a sense of community, and a couple of students didn't know each other's names. . . . if you do both the group and the guided discussion from the front of the room, it helps them to get to know each other, especially with the This I Believe essays.. And that just knits people together, and there's more like a feeling of trust in the room, and it's just a much better environment . . . for teaching.

Ms. Fenton seemed to listen carefully to my suggestions and said that she agreed with my views on the whole: "No, I think you're right, . . . and I have to watch myself with this. I'm so busy trying to get through either A the curriculum or B keeping the discipline that, I squelch the discussion. . . . I'm going to try to put more into the discussions." However, she also pointed out that, especially in her regular classes, classroom management issues sometimes made discussion difficult because several of the students simply did not understand how to respond appropriately in guided or small-group discussions. Ms. Fenton and I talked about the fact that a good deal of modeling and direct teaching might be needed at the outset so that students understood the conventions of discussion in a group setting.

I closed the interview by offering my support to Ms. Fenton by helping with her planning, taking a more active role in the classroom, and/or providing ideas for teaching the material from my own experience. Because I had actually taught the tenth-grade honors class that she was teaching, I felt I was in a position to help her in very specific ways. However, I also tried to stress that these were her classes and that it was up to her to determine the extent to which I should be involved. Finally, I let her know that I was soon going to attend the annual National Council of Teachers of English convention and that I would be on the lookout there for materials that might help with her teaching.

After the interview, I had a strong sense that Ms. Fenton agreed with me in principle and that she would make a real effort to incorporate more discussion in her teaching. I hoped that the impression I made on her would be strengthened by the letter I gave her at the conclusion of the interview that summarized my suggestions and explained my rationale for making them. (For the letter in full, see Appendix D.)

Interview of Mr. West

As I had done with Ms. Fenton, I began by asking Mr. West how he thought his classes had been going up to this point. Predictably, as a new teacher, he noted the steepness of the learning curve over his first eight weeks of teaching: "it's a constant learning experience." His primary preoccupation was with classroom management problems. He remarked again on the wide "gap" between the regular classes and the honors classes. He expressed frustration at what he perceived was the poor use his students made of the time he gave them to write their papers in class and concern that the grades of his regular students were so low. He attributed this lack of achievement to laziness rather than lack of intelligence. As in the first interview, he voiced his surprise

that the students in all his classes felt free to talk out of turn, and he wondered if this was “a cultural thing . . . in the way these kids come up through the schools” in the inner city; he reiterated that his experience with suburban and rural schools had not prepared him for this situation. He also expressed disappointment that his alternative licensure program had not adequately equipped him to deal with the kinds of problems he was encountering at this urban school. Thus his primary concerns were with sociocultural rather than strictly academic matters.

However, he did also voice some frustration with the guidelines for writing assignments provided by the curriculum and the Standards of Learning, in particular the requirements for a literary comparison and contrast paper to which the students had seemed particularly resistant.

Finally, he complained of a lack of support from the school in dealing with special needs students. He stated that in one class he had at least five special education students who should have been getting IEPs for every assignment but that he had no co-teacher in that class and no time to write the IEPs himself; in another class where he did have a co-teacher, he said that this teacher mostly sat in her chair and did little to help him with the students.

All of Mr. West’s concerns thus related to my research question # 5 concerning factors that seemed to militate against effective literacy instruction. By far the greatest of these in his view was the sociocultural aspect of his classroom—the students’ disruptive behavior and lack of motivation—with curricular matters and teaching assistance both running a distant second.

As I did with Ms. Fenton during the second interview, I made a number of suggestions that I thought might help Mr. West improve his teaching. However,

whereas for her I limited my suggestions to those concerning including more in-depth class discussion, with Mr. West I also urged him to try to relate his material more closely to his students' experience and to set a clearer purpose for their assignments. These were strategies that Ms. Fenton as a veteran teacher was already practicing but of which Mr. West seemed largely unaware.

In my letter to Mr. West, I included a passage similar to that in Ms. Fenton's about the desirability of incorporating more class discussion into instruction:

The first is to include more discussion in your classroom. Many research studies show that discussion helps students to develop their critical thinking skills and to develop a sense of community within the classroom. I have observed that you spend a lot of time asking your students to be quiet; if you would give them more time for legitimate discussion of the material you are teaching, I think the problem of talking out of turn might be diminished. Fifteen-year-olds are just naturally talkers; and if you can capitalize on this tendency for instructional purposes, so much the better. For example, after you showed the music videos to your students during your 7th block class on Oct. 22, I think it would have helped students to write their comparison and contrast essay if they had been allowed to discuss what they saw in the videos first. Such discussion is a valuable way of having students process what they have seen and heard before they have to respond to it in writing.

As stated earlier, I also suggested to Mr. West that he attempt to engage students by appealing to their interests and concerns:

Second, I think it would help if you made a greater effort to have students relate what they are studying to their own experience. If students see this connection,

they are much more likely to be motivated to do their reading and academic assignments. For example, on Friday, Oct. 30, several of your 7th block students were talking about their plans for Halloween when they come into your class. Your warm-up for that day was an adverb exercise in which you had them identify the adverbs in the sentences in the handout and specify what purpose the adverbs served. To tie the adverbs into something that interested the students, you might have had them first write a paragraph about their plans for Halloween or what they did last Halloween and then add in adverbs to make the paragraph more interesting. This would have helped them to see the purpose of using adverbs correctly and effectively, and it would have engaged them at the level of their own experience.

Finally, I tried to impress on Mr. West the importance of setting a clear purpose for each assignment:

My third suggestion actually ties into the second. It has to do with setting a purpose for each assignment or activity and motivating students to fulfill that purpose. For example, on Friday, Oct. 30, your 7th-block students were working on an essay comparing two characters from two of the four short stories they had recently read. The problem with this assignment is that there is no self-evident purpose for the students to make this comparison. I think this is one reason the students seemed to be having so much trouble with the assignment (writing their thesis statement). Fifteen-year-old students are very much taken up with establishing their own identities vis-à-vis the rest of the world. If instead of having them compare the characters to each other you could have had each student compare him/herself to the character with whom he/she most identified,

I think the students would have been more likely to see an authentic purpose to the assignment: that is, discovering more about their own identities by comparing themselves to fictional characters.

The substance of what I wrote in the letter was very close to the ideas I expressed in the interview, except that in the interview I tended to expand more fully on each point.

While he agreed that some of my suggestions were good ones, Mr. West seemed much less sure than did Ms. Fenton of his ability to implement them, which is understandable for a novice teacher who is feeling overwhelmed by a complex and unfamiliar situation.

As I had with Ms. Fenton, I closed my interview with Mr. West by offering to be available to him to help with lesson planning, to provide ideas from my experience with the same material, and to actually assist with the students in the classroom. And as with Ms. Fenton, I hoped that suggestions I made during the interview would be reinforced by the letter I gave her in the interview that summarized my main points and explained the rationale behind them. (For the letter in full, see Appendix E.)

Comparison of the Second Interview for Ms. Fenton and Mr. West

Given the difference between their levels of experience, it was not surprising that Ms. Fenton's and Mr. West's concerns about their first few weeks of teaching varied considerably. Both voiced some frustration about classroom management problems and the restraints of the curriculum, but Ms. Fenton was much more concerned about the ways she felt the curriculum inhibited her ability to teach effectively, and Mr. West was by far more preoccupied with ways that student attitudes and behavior seemed to him to affect the classroom environment. However, it is worth noting that both teachers were strongly focused on the students' learning, and both were trying to arrive at better ways to enhance that learning in their classes.

Unlike the first interview, this one was only loosely structured around the teachers' concerns on the one hand and on my suggested interventions on the other, so there was more room for spontaneous input from the teachers. My interview with Mr. West turned out to be about twice as long as that with Ms. Fenton; understandably, as novice teacher, he had more concerns to air and felt in greater need of help. Ms. Fenton, on the other hand, as a result of her considerable experience had already dealt with many of the issues that preoccupied Mr. West and also required me to do considerably less explaining in order to understand the nature of my intervention. My interview with Mr. West was also much more interactive, and I was actually able to voice my suggestions as direct responses to his concerns. For example, when he complained that his students were lazy, I responded that their lack of motivation might result from the fact that the materials needed to be related more closely to their experience if they were to be fully engaged. In Mr. West's case, I felt my role to be closer to that of a mentor, which he seemed very much to need, whereas in Ms. Fenton's, I spoke more as one professional to another. With both teachers, however, in both my letters and interviews, I made a point of emphasizing what I thought was effective in their teaching and of expressing my gratitude for allowing me to be involved in their work.

My intervention was, of course, designed to address my research question #7, how teachers might be encouraged to integrate into their pedagogy attitudes and practice likely to foster literacy in their students. As stated before, to Ms. Fenton, I made only the suggestion that she include more discussion in her teaching, whereas to Mr. West, I also urged him to work on relating to the students' experience and setting a purpose for their assignments. However, my focus for both remained primarily on

including meaningful, in-depth discussion in their teaching praxis. My intervention was designed to require little extra preparation on the teachers' part, and with the reinforcement provided by the letter I had written to each of them and the help I offered each of them in actually implementing the intervention, I thought it likely that the teachers would be motivated to at least attempt to incorporate my suggestions into their teaching practices.

*Phase 4—Analysis of Observations, Last Six Weeks,
and Implementation of Intervention*

During this last period, I tried to make myself available to the teachers to help implement my intervention in their classrooms. I kept a journal to record the results of my attempts to help each teacher, noting both intended and unintended effects of my efforts. Finally, I carefully observed the classes of each to determine the degree to which the teachers seemed to be trying to act on my suggestions and the apparent effects of these efforts on the students (for observation protocol, see Appendix F).

Ms. Fenton's Classes

Although Ms. Fenton seemed receptive to my suggestions, she did not actively respond to my offers of help. Unlike Mr. West, she did not share her lesson plans with me in advance, and during the classes that I observed, she never asked me to assist in any way (although at one point when she was out of the room, I did help the students with their warm-up responses). Hoping to support my suggestion that she include more discussion in class, I gave her a book that I had bought at the November NCTE conference entitled *Talking in Class: Using Discussion to Enhance Teaching and Learning* by Thomas M. McCann, Larry R. Johannessen, Elizabeth Kahn, and Joseph

M. Flanagan (2006). However, she said she did not have time to read it during the next few weeks.

On the other hand, during this time, Ms. Fenton did confide in me as to some of her difficulties with administrative requirements and problems with student responses in class. For example, especially distressing to her were new administrative policies which did not allow teachers to give students a failing grade below 61 and that required teachers to accept and give credit for late work right up the last week of classes. She felt these policies undermined her authority and undercut student motivation for doing their work well and in a timely fashion. At one point, she also asked me for my insight into the reasons why a class activity in one of her regular classes had not gone as well as she had thought it might. From my privileged position in the back of the room, I was able to see things that the teacher might miss, and I commented to Ms. Fenton in this case that the students seemed to react defensively to a particular writing prompt she had given them. She seemed to appreciate this feedback.

Although she told me that she was trying to incorporate more discussion in her classes, I did not see real evidence of this from my observations. I shared this perception with Ms. Fenton after class one day, and she responded that she was genuinely trying harder to have more class discussion but that it was very hard to do—especially with her regular students. They tended, she said, to be passive and withdrawn, and many simply did not understand the conventions of having a discussion in which students carefully listened to each other and took turns speaking. In order for this to work, she said, she would have to spend time teaching the students how to have an orderly discussion. Further complicating the issue were the gang affiliations of some of the students, which would make them averse to sharing directly with a classmate who

might be a member of a rival gang. From my own experience of teaching regular students at this same school, I felt that Ms. Fenton was justified in some of these perceptions. However, I noticed that this dearth of discussion existed not only in her regular classes but also her honors ones. For example, I observed one honors class in which Ms. Fenton had just finished showing the students a movie that related to the Puritans and the class's reading of *The Scarlet Letter*. After the movie was over, the students were given no chance to discuss it and relate it to what they had been studying. Rather, Ms. Fenton simply moved on to the next activity.

Mr. West's Classes

Unlike Ms. Fenton, Mr. West responded quite positively and actively to my attempts to help with his instruction. He allowed me to assist the students in class individually when they were struggling with a grammar exercise or a piece of writing, and he accepted help with his lesson plans as well. Because time was short, we agreed that he would email me his plans several days in advance and I would provide him with written feedback via email in time for him to incorporate my suggestions into his plans. This worked quite well, and I observed Mr. West at several points actually using in class some of the strategies I suggested. For example, during one honors class when he was teaching Patrick Henry's famous speech to the Virginia Convention (and the use of rhetorical techniques to persuade), I suggested that he use a warm-up that required the students to speak or write persuasively:

I would begin this lesson by having students think about a time that they wanted something very badly and then had to persuade someone (maybe their parents) to let them have it. (Maybe a particular piece of clothing or type of cell phone). I would ask them to reflect on how they did this. Did they try to appeal to the

parents' emotions? If so, how? Their parents' reason? If so, how? I would ask if they got what they wanted—a sure sign that their persuasive efforts were or weren't effective.

I observed the class in which he used this warm-up, and the students responded well to this prompt. This activity was designed to tap into student interests and experience, a strategy that I had previously suggested to Mr. West in our interview (and in my letter to him).

More so than Ms. Fenton, Mr. West seemed in need of a confidante. He wrote me many long emails discussing discipline problems he was having in class, what was and was not working in his teaching, and how his students were doing with their work and their grades. Interestingly, Mr. West, a former journalist, had earlier commented to me that he was really more comfortable writing about his teaching than he was talking about it. I made a point of answering his emails in as much detail as could, reasoning that this was an unplanned but fortuitous opportunity to give him feedback on his teaching. For example, after observing the lesson referred to above, I wrote him an email containing this passage:

Meanwhile, I thought your eighth block class on Monday went quite well. The students responded well to the warm-up about a time they tried to persuade their parents to let them have something (some of the responses were absolutely hilarious), and I really like that you had them read portions of Henry's speech aloud rather than playing it to them on the CD. If you do something like this again, it might work even better to have students practice their parts beforehand and to have the other students roleplay their audience. In this case, the other students could have imagined they were members of the VA Convention, and

they could have decided whether they were persuaded or not by the student orators. Perhaps they could have done a freewrite about why the speeches were convincing or not.

At this point in the semester, Mr. West seemed very discouraged about his teaching and his students, and I tried in all I did to encourage him and to support him in his efforts.

Whereas Mr. West was receptive to my suggestions and actually incorporated some of them into his instruction, I still saw little evidence, during the six-week period following our interview, of meaningful, in-depth class discussion in either his regular or honors classes. For example, during one honors class near the end of this period, he gave each student a storyboard sheet and had them draw a picture of each main character from *The Scarlet Letter* and write underneath each picture a telling quotation from the novel that described that character. However, when the students were finished with the activity, they simply handed their sheets back to Mr. West. I asked him if they would have a chance to present the sheets or discuss them later, but he replied that he did not plan to have them do this. This was only one of many times when it seemed to me that he missed a good opportunity to engage the students in discussion that would have allowed them to reflect on and further process the material they were studying. When, at one point, I again urged him to incorporate more occasions for discussion in his classes, he replied with concerns about the regular students that were very similar to Ms. Fenton's: that the students did not know the rules of carrying on a civil conversation and that personal conflicts and gang affiliations made it difficult for the students to interact in an orderly manner. However, as just described, I noticed this lack of discussion in his honors as well as his regular classes.

Comparison of Ms. Fenton's and Mr. West's Attitudes and Practices

Whereas Ms. Fenton had seemed receptive to my suggested intervention, unlike Mr. West, she did not actually take me up on my offers of help. It was clear to me from our interview that she understood the rationale behind my suggestions, but she felt that she could implement the intervention without any assistance. This difference between the responses of Ms. Fenton and Mr. West is quite understandable given the difference in their experience. As a veteran teacher, Ms. Fenton felt fully capable of running her own classroom, whereas Mr. West as a novice was open to any offers of help that came his way. I found that the more specific I could be in my suggestions, the more likely Mr. West was to implement them, and because I did not have the opportunity to offer such specific advice in Ms. Fenton's case, I felt that my input had much less of an impact on her teaching.

On the other hand, both Ms. Fenton and Mr. West did seem to appreciate the opportunity my presence afforded to confide in an understanding third party their feelings about their students and some of the problems in the school. This was true to a greater extent with Mr. West, but both teachers did share some concerns in common—most notably those about the regular students' reluctance and perhaps downright inability to participate in class discussion.

Response of Teachers to Intervention

Despite their seeming receptivity to my suggestion that they include more in-depth class discussion in their teaching, neither teacher put this into practice to any great degree in the classes of theirs that I observed. Both gave as a major reason for neglecting to do this the behavioral and cultural difficulties with their regular students;

however, I noticed this dearth of meaningful, reflective discussion in their honors classes as well as their regular ones.

*Phase 5—Analysis of Third Interview with Teachers
and Interview with Department Chair*

My final interviews with the teachers were important for establishing whether or not they felt they had been able to incorporate my intervention into their teaching. I needed to find out if their perceptions squared with my impression that despite their agreeing with me in principle that introducing more in-depth discussion into their teaching might improve their literacy instruction, they had not, in fact, done so to any great degree. I was also interested in discovering how my presence in their classrooms and my interaction with them in the meantime might have affected them one way or another, in terms of how they felt or what they did in those classes. These matters were covered in the three rather general questions I asked during this loosely structured interview (for the final interview protocol, see Appendix G).

Interview with Ms. Fenton

When I asked Ms. Fenton whether or not she felt she had been able to incorporate more discussion into her teaching, she replied:

A little bit, not a lot. There's a couple things that went on for that, and one was, I think in the beginning, especially with the regular, I'm still working on the regular; honors is easier. But I have to really work on, Let's-- how do we have a discussion? How do we make sure it's not Jerry Springer? . . . And I didn't spend enough time on the regular with that. Um and then I guess the big one that we've talked about is just basically, you know, there's all these things that we're trying to get done as fast as we possibly can, and, you know, the

objectives, so I did have some and sometimes you weren't there. And with varying degrees of success.

Again, Ms. Fenton saw the resistance of the regular students as being an obstacle to introducing further discussion, but she seemed especially to emphasize that the need to cover the curriculum objectives left her with little time for discussion or any other extra activities. She felt pressured to cover material that would be included on the common test that all the tenth-grade students had to take for each curriculum unit (although clearly the common tests for regular students differed from those for honors students):

[Y]ou were talking about . . . discussion or just even creativity, um, and what's really killed it is the common test. Because with the common test, if everybody else covers all the way through, well, this point, in this book or these chapters, then I have to cover every single aspect that they cover on the same common test. So that's been-- Now that that's been implemented in the school, that's been the worst of it, because I used to not have to do that.

So in other words for each curriculum unit, all regular tenth-grade classes would be given the same test, as would all honors tenth-grade classes. This introduced an element of competition among the teachers, and it prevented teachers from differentiating instruction to any great degree because they knew that their students would be taking the same test as the students in all the other classes:

And with the common test, apparently, if you have sixty some questions, I have to be sure I cover each one of those elements on the common test, so even if I think something's more important or I would like to have an activity, I have to regulate it. . . . And then they score your record on the common test--the teachers are up against each other. We have to fill out forms or charts saying we

got an 80 percent pass rate or 60 percent or whatever and give it to the administration, so the easiest way to do that is to have questions that mimic or are similar to in some fashion those on the common test. We're really teaching to the test.

Thus teachers could not base their assessments on what happened in their individual classes; each was required to use the same test and thus, effectively, to cover the same material in a similar way.

When I asked Ms. Fenton what it was like to have me, another adult and fellow teacher, in her classroom on a regular basis, she replied that this did affect her thinking and perhaps her teaching but only to a small degree:

Um, honestly it wasn't too difficult because 1 at this level, the kids pay absolutely no attention to anything but themselves, so they're surprised to find out that you're here. Um, sometimes it's unnerving because, you know, I'm aware, how should I put this, I'm aware of how my ideals don't meet what's going on when I have another adult, an adult who's taught in there. That makes you a little self-conscious.

She also said, however, that she liked having someone to consult with about what was going on in her classes:

That was cool because a lot of time you did have the same take. And sometimes I think you had a better take on it than I did. . . . Like I couldn't understand why some of them when we were writing about adversaries in our life, I didn't understand why they were so bratty and not doing it. . . . so when you said well maybe some of them don't want to or it's touchy, that was interesting because in the next block someone wrote like a whole page who hadn't been writing much.

Ms. Fenton was referring to a time when the students in a class I had observed had resisted writing their warm-up response. She went on to say that based on my interpretation of the reasons for this, she might try to tweak that assignment the next time around.

Moreover, Ms. Fenton implied that she appreciated having the perspective of someone who shared her feelings about the potential educational power of literature.

As a result, we had the following exchange (S=myself; F=Ms. Fenton):

F: I think it was kind of cool that you picked up on honestly the discussion, the kind of group thing, I almost lost that feeling about literature. You know, it was sort of like, okay, got to make sure they get that term and that term and that term, and that's what you love about it, but it's been so beat out of the—out of all of it really.

S: Right. I know, yeah. Because literature gives you these really wonderful opportunities

F: . . . for discussion . . .

S: For discussion, for exercising critical thinking, for having the students relate it to their own experience, for learning something about the students by what they say.

F: And not the lower level protagonist antagonist, you know.

From all of her answers to my questions, it was clear to me that despite the fact that she had not felt herself able to follow up completely on my suggestions, Ms. Fenton valued having a confidante who shared her feelings about the importance of English as a discipline and who could give her feedback about the behavior of her students and the effectiveness of her teaching in a nonjudgmental manner. Thus, although it could be

said my “intervention” did not succeed, I felt that my study had had the perhaps unintended result of providing some support and encouragement to this teacher.

Interview with Mr. West

When I asked Mr. West whether or not he felt he had been able to incorporate more discussion into his teaching, he replied: “I think it depends on what we’re trying to do. I have felt so pressured to cover the curriculum that I tend to lose sight of great suggestions like that, especially now that we’re coming up toward the end of the semester.” Unlike Ms. Fenton, he did seem to feel he’d been able to do more with discussion in his honors classes, but like her, he felt that having discussions in his regular classes was virtually impossible:

Though, um, Honors, we have some pretty good discussions, and you’ve seen, the key thing with both of my honors classes, and probably more block 8 than block 6 is keeping those chatty kids at a minimum so that we can have a worthwhile discussion. With the regular kids, it’s almost impossible to have a meaningful class discussion because you’re almost talking one on one with a kid on this side of the room, and the kids in their immediate vicinity are listening, or can listen, but the kids on this side of the room, as soon as you turn your head, they’re off doing something else. They don’t care. They don’t want to listen. . . . So it’s very hard for me to stay motivated to try to do class discussion.

Mr. West went on to say that, moreover, he was not getting very much support with his special education students. In one class with five or six special education students, he had no co-teacher, and in the class where he did have a co-teacher, she did little to help with instruction.

However, Mr. West pointed out, although relatively little discussion took place around the material to be studied, he was more comfortable talking with his students about other matters, and he felt that these informal discussions were important in themselves:

I think that . . . as we started heading toward Christmas break, things got a little bit more relaxed. You knew you couldn't push as hard because they weren't going to be engaged no matter what you were doing. They just weren't locked in. And while that was bad from an instructional standpoint, . . . to me that time is extremely valuable because you just shoot the breeze with them about whatever. And they get to more understand that you're a real person; you're not just some talking head standing up there trying to shove stuff down their throat. And I think . . . being new, and the kids didn't know me, they didn't know who I was, there wasn't anybody to talk to and to say who is this guy, what does he do? It took a long time for some of the kids to figure out who I was and what I was about and uh. I feel like, other than a couple of kids, I've got a pretty good relationship, even with the kids who are failing, I've got a pretty good relationship with them.

He stated that these relationships with the students had come to seem especially valuable to him, that he had gotten to know them so well that he almost felt as if he were "in the middle of a book or a story" and wanted to "see how it comes out."

Mr. West went on to say that he felt he was better at working with the students one-on-one than in a group situation and that he would often pull a student aside and try to give him or her help individually. He would also often ask students to stay after school so that he could help them:

I stay after school pretty much every day with two or three or four. There was one day I had like thirteen kids here. It was impossible to work with them because it was too many. But, usually, I've got two or three. . . . See I think I'm more effective when I can just sit down with them. . . . I have a hard time, I guess especially coming from the background where I came from where you're able to work in a quiet environment, and you saw me working on papers, if I'm walking around, and I'm trying to help somebody with a paper, and I've got somebody pestering me back here. . . . I'm not effective that way.

When I pressed him about not including more discussion in his honors classes, Mr. West, like Ms. Fenton, mentioned the need to stay on schedule and cover the material: "You're so tied to this pacing guide and timetable, and . . . it puts you in some kind of mode to where you don't even allow yourself to think and use common sense sometimes. You're so concerned about staying on schedule." It was clear from what he said, however, that Mr. West himself still felt that having extended, in-depth discussions was important:

And I think that's probably where one of my greatest disappointments is because I went into this a firm believer in the Socratic method, and basically you're throwing something out there, and watching them bat it back and forth. Well, in an honors class, you could let that happen. You have to really manage it. In a regular class, it's a free for all in a minute and a half.

When I asked Mr. West what it was like to have me, another adult and fellow teacher, in his classroom on a regular basis, he replied that it did make him a little self-conscious but that he appreciated having the feedback on his teaching and the suggestions as to ways to do things differently. Again, he made the point that the

mentor assigned to him by his alternative licensure program was of little help in this regard because she was not allowed into the school itself and that, even if she were, she would likely just have overwhelmed him with too much information. Thus, he said my input and especially that of the other teachers was what he relied on to guide him in his teaching. I mentioned the long emails he would often write me about how his class was going, and he replied that this was helpful because he was “more of a writer than a talker.” I said that this was understandable because of his journalism background.

Ms. Fenton's and Mr. West's Responses Compared

From these interviews, it was clear to me that neither Ms. Fenton nor Mr. West, at least where their regular classes were concerned, had been able to introduce a substantial amount of in-depth discussion into their pedagogical praxis. Moreover, both gave me similar reasons for not doing so: student behavior issues and the need for coverage of the curriculum. Further, Ms. Fenton pointed out that since all students at a given level would be assessed by means of the same test, teachers felt additional pressure to cover the same material so that their students would be perceived as doing well.

As to my presence in their classrooms and my feedback on their teaching, both teachers said that they felt somewhat self-conscious about having another adult in the room during class time. However, both also said that they appreciated my feedback and the opportunity to air with me some of their concerns about their teaching and their students.

Here it should be added that Ms. Fenton did not seem to have anything like the same degree of trouble with classroom management as did Mr. West. Given her vast advantage of many years of teaching experience, this is perhaps not terribly surprising.

However, Mr. West's willingness to take time with his students and to engage them in discussion, even if it was not on the subject of the material, seemed an improvement over his earlier, almost dismissive behavior where the students were concerned. This change in his attitude and practices can be seen as a step in the direction of personalizing his instruction, a step that might eventually serve him well in his teaching. Finally, it also seems worth noting that despite the great difference between their amounts of teaching experience, both teachers responded in similar ways to my attempts to get them to alter their practices and to my presence as an observer and a helper.

Interview with Mrs. Harris, Department Chair

About a month after completing my work with the two participating teachers, I interviewed the chair of the English Department, Mrs. Harris. From her, I hoped to get a different perspective on the issues I had encountered with Ms. Fenton and Mr. West (for the interview protocol for Mrs. Harris, see Appendix H). First, I thought it important to establish Mrs. Harris's epistemological stance so that it could be compared to that of the other two teachers. Thus, I asked her the same question I had asked the others in my initial interview, what she felt it important for her to teach her students about the field of English. Her response quite similar to that of the other teachers in that she seemed to feel it crucial for English teachers to instill both functional and critical literacy in their students. Her answer differed only in that she put greater emphasis on functional literacy than had the other two:

Well, certainly, vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure. As you know the literature, I mean, they should know elements of the story, figurative language, poetry, and that sort of thing. They should have general knowledge of those

literary works that most educated people are—they should at least have been introduced to them. . . . Sometimes they won't remember the names [of the grammatical and literary terms], but they have to know basic things like subject-verb agreement, they have to know the terms of what a character, what characterization is, and they have to think about how, what the purpose of reading literature is. So I think when you read it, it's not just reading it to say, Oh I read *Macbeth*, but to understand how human nature hasn't changed since Macbeth's time until now.

Again, for the purpose of contextualizing the responses of the other teachers, I sought to get her perspective on curricular and professional development. She stated that the public school system greatly encouraged professional development but that sometimes lack of time and funds limited the amount that could actually be provided. As to curricular development, she said that the department had to follow district guidelines, which were in turn directly tied to the state Standards of Learning, but that there was some flexibility as to how the objectives might be met:

Well, we actually get guidance from downtown on that, we get curriculum guides at the start of the year; they're updated every year. And then that's the starting point, . . . Now . . . we cannot change the objectives. And we have some flexibility within the guides to choose this novel or that. And the way other decisions are made is in house. I know that we have had two fire drills, or like the snow days that took away time. Then I look at the critical things: What do we need to teach to meet the objectives? And then do we need to teach all of *The Odyssey*, or can we teach segments of it to point out certain aspects of an epic?

Most of the rest of the interview consisted of my giving Mrs. Harris feedback on my work with Ms. Fenton and Mr. West and my impressions of them as teachers and observations about their classes. I let her know that I thought highly of Ms. Fenton's teaching and that, although Mr. West as a new teacher was clearly struggling with classroom management issues, I felt he had made considerable progress since the beginning of the year. Ms. Harris agreed with this statement and added that his improvement had been even more evident in recent weeks: "This semester it came together for him," she said. I commented that both teachers had been very gracious and accommodating about having me in their classrooms and that I was grateful for their help with my project. Mrs. Harris rejoined that she had received only positive feedback about my involvement with the teachers and their classes.

Perhaps most important, I sought Mrs. Harris's feedback concerning two issues that had been of great concern to the teachers, especially Ms. Fenton: (1) that the restrictive nature of the curriculum prevented the individual teacher from including more creative and authentic assignments that would in turn elicit higher quality work from the students and (2) that the need to cover the materials indicated in the curriculum and pacing guide meant that minimal time was left for activities such as extended class discussion that might engage students more deeply in the material. Mrs. Harris firmly disagreed with both of these statements. Although curricular guidelines had to be followed in terms of meeting the required objectives, she said that there was considerable flexibility as to what works could be taught, the order in which they would be taught, and the manner in which they might be taught:

So teachers do have flexibility though, to do different things, but some teachers—it's just a matter of working with them and getting them to think

outside the box. We still have to do comparison and contrast, but not everything has to be--so there are some assignments that we can do one paragraph on. Nothing restricts a teacher from doing that. And then warm-ups, when we do warm-ups, we can have the This I Believe in not a full paper, but just one paragraph. We have students that are so weak in subject-verb agreement, and just constructing sentences, we have to have them write them.

She stated that the district English curriculum coordinator was very receptive to suggestions for modifying the curriculum for individual purposes and that this individual had never denied a reasonable request from Mrs. Harris that this be done.

When I told Mrs. Harris of my attempts to persuade the teachers to incorporate more meaningful, in-depth class discussion in their teaching, she agreed that this was desirable, but she denied that the teachers were prevented from doing so because of pressure to cover the curriculum. Rather, she said, this notion was based on a misperception that teachers often had about the nature of coverage:

I definitely agree with you [that more discussion is needed]. I said the same thing. But we've got to do more. . . . I tell them, the ninth and tenth grade teachers, you do not have to teach, they do not have to read every word of *Catcher in the Rye*. They want to put it on the curriculum, and then the same ones who say I don't have time to cover it, they want to show a movie. I say, you can't show the whole movie. Show a segment, and do a summary. And if they get behind on the reading, summarize that chapter with the key points, and then move on. But they will not do it. They want to stick word for word, chapter for chapter, and then they cannot get through it, you're absolutely right. But what is the point of covering a thing, when just what you said, the students

are not talking about it and engaged? But [Mr. West] he told me over and over, [Mrs. Harris], I just can't do it. He said, Stephanie [the researcher] gave me . . . some good ideas, and I tried them, but they just won't work with this group. And I said, "Really?" . . . He'd already decided. But we can do more; we've just got to get better at doing more within the guidelines that we have.

Thus Mrs. Harris seemed to be saying that neither curricular restraints nor pressure to cover the curriculum could be viewed as obstacles to the teachers' incorporating effective strategies, such as making authentic assignments or including in-depth discussion, in their teaching.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to examine the epistemological stances of the two teacher participants, that is, to determine their attitudes toward student literacy and their beliefs about the purposes of English as a discipline; (2) to describe the interplay between their epistemological stances and their pedagogical praxis, in particular with respect to their use of research-based literacy strategies; and (3) to arrive at a means of supporting the teachers in their use of more effective pedagogical practices, in this case including more in-depth discussion in their classes for the purpose of furthering their students' critical literacy. As a result of my multiple interviews with the teachers and observations of their classes, I concluded that they had similar epistemological stances with respect to literacy and the purpose of teaching English; that is, both felt it important to instill both functional and critical literacy in their students. However, because of the vast difference in the extent of their teaching experience, the ways in which the epistemological stance of each played out in practice varied considerably. Ms. Fenton was able, to a much greater extent than Mr. West, to

translate her beliefs into effective pedagogical praxis; that is, she incorporated a number of research-based literacy strategies into her teaching. An indication that these were successful was that her students were much better behaved and more likely to be on task than were Mr. West's. As different as the instructional practices of the two teachers were from each other, they had in common a neglect of the use of meaningful, in-depth discussion that goes beyond the literal level to potentially develop the students' higher level thinking skills. Although both teachers professed to believe that instilling critical literacy was an important purpose of their teaching, neither frequently engaged his or her students in this kind of discussion. Thus, I chose urging the teachers to include such discussion as the intervention designed to help improve their literacy pedagogy. I supported their efforts to do so by offering my help with both planning and instruction.

In the course of my research, it had become clear that certain factors seemed to militate against the teachers' use of effective literacy strategies in general and in-depth discussion in particular. Both teachers perceived curricular restraints and classroom management issues to be obstacles to effective literacy instruction, although Ms. Fenton focused more on the curriculum and Mr. West class management. However, the department chair, Mrs. Harris, disagreed with the two teachers that the curriculum was restrictive and attributed the teachers' difficulties to misperceptions of curricular requirements. Although both teachers seemed receptive to my suggestions and made some attempt to act on them, neither was able to do so to any great degree. As described earlier, they attributed this failure to extrinsic problems such as student misbehavior and lack of time resulting from the need for curriculum coverage. However, based on Mrs. Harris's testimony, this neglect may have resulted from misperceptions on their part rather than from any extrinsic influences. Although the

intervention was not a success in terms of substantially altering the teachers' practices, my presence in their classrooms and my availability as an advisor did have some unintended effects that were potentially beneficial in themselves. As a beginning teacher, Mr. West was more open than Ms. Fenton to accepting my help and support; however, both teachers expressed appreciation for my efforts, and both seemed to benefit from having me as a consultant and confidante.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

In his book about his attempts to reform teacher attitudes and practice, George Hillocks (1999) makes much of the importance of “epistemological stance” and its profound effect on teacher pedagogy and praxis. However, with my two teacher participants, a misdirected set of attitudes and beliefs was not really the issue. And although a lack of pedagogical content knowledge clearly diminished the efficacy of the inexperienced teacher, it seemed clear that, because he was open to learning from both his colleagues and his students, this difficulty could have been overcome in time. However, more problematic were conditions that were largely beyond the teachers’ control to alter. As Lee Shulman (1999) points out in his introduction to Hillocks’s book, matters of context may be much more important and influential than has generally been acknowledged: “It may well be that changing the context in which one teaches can have more influence on beliefs and practices than any individual interventions can hope to accomplish” (p. x). I certainly found this to be true in my study. For example, the culture of “coverage,” so prevalent in many secondary schools, was very much in evidence in the behavior of the two teachers. In the culture of coverage, class discussion, for instance, is not seen as particularly productive: it isn’t “doing” or “covering”; it’s “just talking.” The nature of the curriculum, the characteristics of the student population, the influence of administrative policies, the culture of the school and surrounding community—all these contextual influences can serve either to enhance or to severely limit the pedagogical effectiveness of English teachers.

In a recent essay, Burroughs and Smagorinsky (2009) tell us that very little empirical research exists concerning the effects of curricula on teacher pedagogy. In my study, the teachers, the more experienced one in particular, experienced frustration at what they perceived to be the deleterious effects of an inadequate and outdated curriculum on the quality of their teaching. Although the department chair maintained that the curriculum was flexible enough to accommodate different pedagogical approaches and methods, I was inclined to agree with the teachers about the restrictive effects of some aspects of this particular curriculum. I myself had tried to use the same formulaic writing assignments (e.g., comparison and contrast, cause and effect) when I had been a tenth-grade English teacher at this same school four years earlier—and with the same limited success as my teacher participants. Moreover, their responses accord with those of teachers in several studies of the effects of district-level policies on teacher practice: “In these studies, the teachers experienced frustration with the ways in which their agency as teachers was reduced by the strictures of the curriculum, particularly in terms of the ways in which the curriculum required that they follow scripted lessons and prepare students for district assessments” (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 178). These studies imply, the authors go on to say, “that teachers who enter the profession with a hope to enliven the pervasively ‘flat’ atmosphere of schools are often thwarted by curricula that are designed to homogenize instruction across classrooms” (p. 178). In my teacher participants’ classes, not only would students eventually be tested on the Standards of Learning for the state, but all the students at the same grade level in English also had to pass a “common test” for each unit. Clearly, this kind of standardization militates against any differentiation of or innovation with instruction, a situation that would be especially irksome to an

experienced, highly creative teacher like Ms. Fenton; thus, say Burroughs and Smagorinsky, “Such [standardized] curricula appear least inviting to teachers who view themselves as change agents or creative thinkers” (p. 178).

Rigid curricula and standardized tests also perpetuate the “culture of coverage” referred to earlier. If certain subject matter is to be included on a common test, the teachers naturally feel under pressure to “cover” that material. I am inclined to agree with the department chair’s point that this need for coverage is partly a matter of misperception by the teachers, for I witnessed in their classes quite a bit of “dead time” that could have more profitably been used for small-group or whole-class discussion or some other engaging activity. However, perception shapes reality, and the culture of this particular school and district seemed to perpetuate the belief that only activities resulting in “coverage” were truly worthwhile.

This study also revealed the great extent to which cultural features of the student populations and the surrounding community impacted the teachers’ pedagogical practices and their effectiveness. This particular inner-city school had all the characteristics typical of urban schools, including a diverse population with a high percentage of African American students of low socioeconomic status (SES); gang activity and violent incidents were common in and around the school. However, the school was unusual in also having a substantial population of students from upper middle-class families with highly educated parents. Relatively few students occupied the ground between these extremes, and there was thus a sharp divide between the two student populations. As a general rule, the middle-class students predominated in the honors classes, and the lower SES students in the regular classes. The teachers in this study stated that while the students in the honors classes knew the rules of civil

discourse and were thus easily able to participate in class discussions, the regular students could not be counted on to understand and observe the rules of civil group discussions. Further complicating the situation were gang affiliations that resulted in mistrust between some students and others, particularly in the regular classes. The teachers claimed that under the circumstances, it was very hard in these classes to implement my suggested intervention for improving pedagogical praxis—the inclusion of meaningful, in-depth class discussion. Such discussions might well have served to build trust between class members and to create a strong sense of community within each class. Sadly, I never saw this happen. Instead a catch-22 situation prevailed in which the mistrust and deficient social skills of these students made the teachers reluctant to engage them in discussion that might have helped overcome this mistrust and improve their social skills, resulting, in turn, in a classroom environment more likely to foster their intellectual growth and critical literacy skills.

What, then, of the possibilities for true professional development of these teachers within the context of the culture of this school and district? Hillocks insists on the importance of “reflective practice”—opportunities for extended periods of reflection and supported development for teachers—in helping them to improve their pedagogical praxis. The great obstacle to such an opportunity is a lack of time. Once teachers have finished their disciplinary and administrative tasks, relatively little time is left for instructional activities—lesson planning, extra reading, and so forth. As for time to actually reflect on what one does, it just doesn’t exist. I would have liked to ask my teachers to journal about their practices, but they were barely able to prepare to teach the next day’s classes with the limited time they had. This issue becomes especially crucial for beginning teachers like Mr. West. Most learning takes place in the

unconscious; it occurs only as a result of extensive processing, and a beginning teacher has even less time for such processing than does an experienced one. At one point Mr. West mentioned being “overwhelmed” by the amount of information on teaching he was receiving from his mentor, from the other teachers, and from resources he located online. What he needed was not more advice but more time in which to process the advice he was getting.

For the many reasons given above, it did not surprise me that my teacher participants were unable to implement the intervention I recommended for improving their pedagogical praxis: including more meaningful, in-depth discussion in their classes. In his two-year study of teacher attitudes in practices in high schools and community colleges, despite working intensively with the teachers to help them improve their teaching, Hillocks met with little, if any, success: “In our study, we have seen no teacher make substantial revisions in teaching while a class is in progress” (p. 124). As he found, too many factors militate against such reforms for them to be easily or quickly accomplished. In the course of working with my teacher participants, I realized that for the teachers to successfully implement my suggestions would have required a much more sustained, comprehensive effort than I could make by myself in just a few weeks’ time; I also came to understand that no matter how intensive my efforts, they would have remained unsuccessful unless they were supported by the prevailing culture of department, school, district, and community. For example, as long as the teachers were under pressure to have their students do well on a common test that covered very prescribed aspects of the material, I had little chance of motivating them to institute a practice that they felt might detract from their students’ “success” by using time that could be devoted to “coverage” of the material on which the students would be

tested. For my efforts to have succeeded, they would have had to accord with the underlying pedagogical attitudes, academic goals, and policy assumptions embedded in the surrounding school culture.

In their book about attempts at educational reform over the course of the twentieth century, Tack and Cuban (1995) note that despite many ambitious and intensive efforts to reform school systems and practices, educational institutions have proved virtually impervious to change from without. Pedagogical praxis has remained remarkably stable over the course of the last hundred years, and what they term “the grammar of schooling” continues to dominate educational policy and practice. Currently, the United States Department of Education under the leadership of Secretary Arne Duncan, is focusing on teacher quality: if we can have only top quality teachers, he maintains, education will improve dramatically and across the board. He aims to do this by making teachers accountable for the achievement of their students and introducing incentives such as increased teacher pay and school funding. No one can reasonably argue with the fact that having highly skilled teachers is desirable, but Duncan is once more committing the age-old fallacy of assuming that any one factor by itself can result in overall improvement of our educational system. As Shulman (1999) says, “Complex systems, such as classrooms and schools, cannot depend on simple single-cause models to guide their improvement or reform. While it is typically impossible to disagree with prescriptions (higher standards, smaller schools, smarter teachers, rigorous curriculum, etc.), reforms that treat each of these in isolation appear doomed to futility” (p. viii).

Implications for Practice

At the time of this writing, because of the current economic crisis in this country, there are talks of massive budget cuts and layoffs in public education; class sizes will probably increase, and the teachers who do manage to hold on to their positions will see their workload increase exponentially. Unfortunately, for teachers, time is already in short supply, and more time is undoubtedly indispensable if teachers and administrators are to overcome the obstacles enumerated above that interfere with the effective practice of literacy pedagogy. Perhaps most challenging and unruly is the issue of curricular reform. Revising a curriculum is an enormous time-consuming, labor-intensive task; it is thus not surprising then that it happens so rarely within school systems. In the school where I did my research, curriculum was largely dictated from on high—based on state standards and dictated by district guidelines. Teacher input was virtually nonexistent, a situation common throughout educational systems in this country. Of course, it is teachers who translate curricula into lessons, and it is teachers who understand the how curricular guidelines actually affect students. Without teacher input and buy-in, curricular reform is unlikely to be successful no matter how much money and outside expertise is devoted to the process (Yatvin, 2008). Somehow, a way must be found to include teachers in the curriculum review and revision process; otherwise the written curriculum and the taught curriculum will continue to be at odds, and the written curriculum will likely fail to provide substantial support for sound literacy pedagogy.

A similar situation exists with professional development. In this country less than one-fourth of teachers believe that they have very much influence over the policies and school decisions that affect their work (Varlas, 2010). This is not true of many

other countries: “In other competitive nations, such as Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland, this isn’t the case. Teachers there have substantial influence on school-based decisions, especially in the development of curriculum and assessment, and on the design of their own professional learning” (p. 3). Recent research indicates that teacher-led professional development is more likely to be successful than training models imposed from without (Selmadeni, 2010; Silva, 2010; Varlas, 2010). Teachers need time to observe each other’s classes and to discuss and reflect on what they find. I maintain that they could also benefit from the support and advice of college education and English professors who can help acquaint them with the latest research on teacher pedagogy and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 1995). For interventions such as the one I devised for my study to be effectively implemented, there would have to be a true partnership between English departments in secondary schools and university departments of English and education. This partnership would have to be fully supported by both the school and the university. As Hillocks’s study has already shown, it is not enough to have teachers do assigned readings and occasional consultations with university professors; teachers and university professors would have to work together for extended periods of time—during which, ideally they would make regular visits to each other’s classrooms in order to learn from each other’s practice. Only such frequent exchanges and sustained contact could substantially contribute to the professional development of high school English teachers.

One of the thorniest problems I uncovered in my research was the way in which classroom management issues resulting largely from cultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the student population can interfere with effective literacy instruction. Without trust and a sense of community within a classroom, little learning of any kind

can occur. Teachers need to learn how to work through issues of violence, race, and social injustice with their students in order to create such a sense of safety within their classrooms (Carey-Webb, 2001). To do so requires both moral courage and expertise. No matter how great the dedication of the teacher, however, he or she cannot be expected to resolve these problems alone but would need the full support of the school, the parents, and the community with all its resources. Administrators, discipline staff, psychological counselors, and parents would all have to work in close partnership with the teachers to create the kind of classroom environment where students feel comfortable discussing the difficult issues that touch their lives and know how to do so in a mannerly, constructive way. These are the only conditions which would enable the free exchange of ideas that would substantially foster the students' intellectual growth.

All of the reforms I have suggested here would require radical changes in the way teachers' time is structured and ultimately in the way school schedules are designed. As Elena Sliva (2010) observes, the prevalent schemes now in use simply do not serve the best interests of teacher or student:

The design of teachers' work still lacks core characteristics of most other professional work. Teaching today has few mechanisms for meaningful feedback or collaboration, no rational system for development and promotion, and a work schedule that is disconnected from the reality of what teachers actually do and what students actually need. (p. 60)

A schedule that conduces to effective literacy pedagogy on the part of English teachers would have to include time for teachers' reflective practice, participation in curriculum planning, and collaborative efforts at professional development. "Inadequate time for planning" is currently the leading cause of teacher dissatisfaction (p. 63). Contrary to

popular belief, providing teachers with this time need not involve extra expense or the hiring of more teachers. At least one program, Generation Schools, a nonprofit organization “dedicated to whole-school and systemic innovation in urban education,” has shown how restructuring the school day and year while using innovative staffing methods can provide the teachers with the time they need while making instruction more engaging and effective for students (p. 61). Teachers are given opportunities for lesson and curriculum planning, reflection and research, and collaboration with other teachers and school staff. Significantly, this model uses interns from nearby universities to take over some of the nonacademic duties of teachers so that they can devote more time to planning and professional and curriculum development. Collaboration with area universities and other community organizations is vital to this kind of systemic reform.

Implications for Research

The implications for needed research into secondary English teachers’ pedagogical attitudes and praxis follow directly from the implications for practice described above. If, as Hillocks (1999) believes, reflective practice is essential to the education and professional development of effective teachers, then research into ways in which it occurs is vital: “[M]ost important of all . . . will be the research that provides greater insight into how teachers become reflective about their own practice” (p. 137). I maintain that action research undertaken by the teachers themselves is apt to be most revealing and that this research is best carried out with the support of university English and education professors, who can help teachers to plan and document their efforts. Such collaborative projects would do much to bridge the divide so deplored by Sperling and Dipardo (2008) and by Reinking and Bradley (2008) between research and

practice; bringing the two together in this way would most likely enhance practice while enriching research. They would also foster closer relationships between public schools and the academy, which in itself would have major benefits for both secondary and higher education.

Ideally suited to the collaboration between teachers and researchers is the modified version of the formative methodology that I used in my study. No doubt, many such variations of this methodology, as elucidated by Reinking and Bradley (2008), hold promise for future research projects and as such should be included in those efforts. By offering the option of a useful intervention within the framework of their research, education researchers will find it easier to gain *entrée* into the field and to make practical contributions to the pedagogical praxis of the teachers with whom they collaborate. Moreover, the data thus gathered will be richer and more useful to researchers and teachers alike.

My study also has implications for continued research into matters involving teacher education. One of my teacher participants was a new teacher who had been certified by means of a recently instituted teacher licensure program. As his experience reveals, much research is still needed to determine whether such programs adequately prepare new teachers for the rigors of their profession. More broadly, the field would greatly benefit from any efforts to study the ways in which teachers are trained, inducted, and mentored before and during their first years of professional practice. Because of the multi-faceted nature of English as a discipline with its many cultural, social, and ethical dimensions, the need for research into the education and professional development of secondary English teachers is especially pressing. The disciplinary ambiguities and uncertainties of the rapidly evolving field of English make the teaching

of it particularly demanding and challenging, and the deeper knowledge that might be generated by further research would be of great value to a better understanding of both its theory and its practice.

If, as Burroughs and Smagorinsky (2009) maintain, virtually no empirical research exists on the ways teachers translate curriculum into practice and on the ways student learning, in turn, is affected, then the need for this kind of research is pressing indeed:

Empirical studies that document the effects of curricular organizations, we believe, ought to constitute the next generation of curriculum research. Without such investigations, theorists will continue to argue without the benefit of evidence, and the field will be left with many opinions but little data to support why curriculum is as it is and why it affects students as it does. (p. 180)

As implied here, these studies need to include data concerning teachers' epistemological stance vis-à-vis curricula as well as the ways curricular characteristics are likely to affect their pedagogical praxis; such studies need to gage the extent to which particular curricula are likely to result in teacher practices that both engage students' interest and enhance their achievement.

In a similar vein, more research is needed that examines all the documents generated in the teaching and learning process of high school English. These include not just curricular guides and policy statements but also teacher syllabi and the many handouts that teachers create for their students. Because of lack of time and resources, I did not formally analyze the many documents I collected from teachers during my study; to do so would have required a complete study in itself. Moreover, I did not examine student writings—papers and responses to teacher prompts of all kinds. Here

again is a rich source of data for future study. Further, examining all of these documents by relating them to each other—a teacher writing prompt, for example, to the paper the student produces in response—would no doubt contribute considerably to an understanding of the relationship between teacher pedagogy and student learning.

Finally, my research indicates a need for a more holistic approach to studies involving English pedagogy and praxis. The ethical dimensions of literary study and the ways in which personal interactions and cultural environments affect learning make such studies imperative. Researchers tend to shy away from such ambitious projects; it is easier to isolate one or two variables to “measure” or analyze, but education is a complex, many-layered process, and such oversimplification is unlikely to yield many significant insights. As Judith Langer (2009) claims, in order to thrive, adolescent literacy “requires educators to look to the classroom, program, school, and school-community relations—all contexts that deeply affect learning” (p. 49). According to her, schools that effectively foster adolescent literacy must work well at all levels—classroom, school, district, and community. Student literacy can be promoted or adversely affected by all the contexts in which it occurs; thus all cultural aspects of the learning environment must be considered if a study is to contribute significantly to an understanding of how to foster critical and disciplinary literacy in secondary-school English students.

Strengths and Limitations

Both major limitations of this study have to do with quantity—quantity of time and personnel. Ideally, the study would have been carried out over a one-year or even two-year period. For teachers to change their attitudes and practices takes time; improvements are likely to take place incrementally. For example, I was informed by

the department chair and one of the other teachers that Mr. West, my first-year teacher, improved his teaching considerably over the course of the semester following the one during which I had observed him. However, I was told by the official in the district administration that observers were not permitted in the school during the spring semester because of concerns about standardized testing conditions. Thus my research period was limited to the ten weeks during the fall semester when I could gain access to the teachers and their classes. Logistical obstacles also prevented my bringing co-researchers into the field with me. The same official made it clear that having too many observers in the school building would likely prove a distraction to the teachers and the students. It was only with some difficulty that I gained entrée into the field for myself. Under ideal circumstances, however, I strongly believe that it would be desirable to have a team of researchers working with a number of teachers in a particular department. For research purposes, this arrangement would provide triangulation during the data gathering process; multiple perspectives would prove invaluable in gaining insight into the thinking processes and pedagogical practices of the teacher participants under study. Moreover, a stronger presence of college students or professors would be more likely to encourage teachers to adopt the recommended interventions to improve their pedagogical praxis.

Although my study lacked multiple researchers, it did include triangulation of sources. I held three interviews with each teacher and one with the department chair, and I observed both an honors and a regular class for each teacher. I examined all written materials—syllabi, tests, curriculum guides, and class handouts—to support my class observations. I checked frequently with my teacher participants in informal conversations to verify my impressions of students and class activities. Finally, I

provided all three teachers with transcripts of all my interviews with them, and all concurred that the contents of the transcripts accurately represented what they had said on each occasion.

By some, my insider status within the school where I did my research might be regarded as a disadvantage; many methodology experts still insist that it is ideal for researchers to have no prior knowledge of the research site so that their observations and findings can be more “objective.” As it was, I had multiple connections with this particular school: my own child had attended it and graduated from it, and I had later taught there. However, I came to consider these connections an advantage in several respects. First, they helped me gain entrée into the school; the current department chair and I had actually worked together, and she was familiar with me as a person and as a teacher. I also knew one of the teacher participants in my study and had been on friendly terms with her during that earlier time; I believe that she regarded my presence as less threatening as a result. Moreover, because of my own teaching, I was aware of the general makeup of the student body and its particular cultural characteristics. Perhaps most important, I had followed the same curriculum and used many of the same texts my teacher participants used; thus when I recommended particular strategies to the teachers, I was able to be quite specific as to how they would be applied to the materials the teachers were actually using. Moreover, although I was able to take a predominantly emic stance with respect to my research, I also had the advantage of two additional perspectives—that of a student’s parent and of a college instructor. For example, when I was urging my teacher participants to incorporate more discussion in their classes, I could tell them with some authority that class discussion was the prevalent means of instruction in many college English classrooms.

The greatest strength of my study I believe to be its formative element. First, my offer to bring my own knowledge and skills to bear on my work with the teacher participants was a great help to me in gaining entrée into the field. The research coordinator for the district told me quite bluntly at the outset that she was tired of having observers come into the schools without providing any reciprocal benefits to them; and I felt that she, the principal of the school, and the chair of the English department all appreciated my offer of my own expertise as an incentive for their cooperation in my project. Perhaps just as important, I felt better about my research project because I knew that I could actually contribute to the work I was observing. And although my teacher participants were unable to fully integrate my suggested intervention into their teaching, they seemed to appreciate my help and my support. I could give them useful feedback about what was happening in their classes, and they could use me as an advisor and confidante. In particular, the inexperienced teacher seemed to find it helpful to air his concerns to a sympathetic listener who had considerable knowledge and understanding of his situation. Under normal circumstances, the only time most teachers are observed teaching in their classrooms is when they are being evaluated. I believe that my interactions with the teachers provided them with rare opportunities to get feedback from a knowledgeable individual who was there not to judge their work but to observe and support it.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are teachers' attitudes toward literacy instruction?
2. What do teachers feel are the primary purposes of English as a field of study?
3. How do these beliefs seem to translate (or not) into practices intended to foster literacy in their students?
4. Are teachers integrating the strategies that recent literacy research has deemed effective (e.g., think alouds, read alouds, cooperative learning, choice in reading materials)?
5. Which factors, academic and nonacademic, seem to militate against effective literacy instruction?
6. What do student responses seem to reveal about the effectiveness of teachers' literacy practices?
7. Finally, how can English teachers be encouraged to integrate into their pedagogy attitudes and practices likely to foster literacy in their adolescent students?

APPENDIX B

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Hello, _____. My name is Stephanie Sugioka, and I'm a graduate student at Old Dominion University in the Department of Teaching and Learning. As part of my research toward my Ph.D. degree, I'm examining the attitudes of English teachers toward incorporating literacy learning into their teaching. If you'd be willing to talk with me about this, I'd appreciate your signing this consent form. Thank you so much for your taking the time to meet with me. I want to assure you that anything you say will be kept in strictest confidence. Here is my contact information in case you have anything to add to our conversation or you have any questions about my research. Would it be all right for me to record our conversation?

I'd like to ask you about how you view your role as an English teacher.

1. What do you think is important for you to teach your students about the field of English?
2. What kinds of things do you do to foster literacy in your students? And by literacy, I mean not just the ability to read and write but also to think critically.
3. What sorts of curricular materials do you rely on to guide your teaching?
4. What sorts of texts do you use?
5. Why do you think it important that students learn about literature? What do you hope that they'll take away with them from their engagement with these texts?
6. What kinds of strategies do you use for engaging your students in reading, writing, and thinking activities?
7. How much choice do you give students about what they read and write?
8. Could you give me some examples of kinds of writing assignments you have your students do?
9. What sorts of outlets do students have for publishing their writing?
10. If your students have access to computers on a regular basis, what uses do you as a class make of electronic resources?
11. What kinds of opportunities do you have for professional development that is specifically related to incorporating literacy practices into your lessons?
12. Could you give me some examples of reading you yourself have done about recent literacy research?

13. How would you describe the culture of the community surrounding the school where you teach.
14. What sorts of things do you do to accommodate students who are English language learners or who come from other minority cultures?
15. What is your feeling about teaching social skills and moral values to your students?

Thank you so much for your time, _____. After I've had a chance to think about some of your answers, I'd really appreciate it if we could meet again briefly so that I can get you to verify that I've accurately interpreted your responses. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have in the meantime. Goodbye.

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL AFTER INTERVIEW I

1. What strategies, if any, does the teacher seem to be using? (Strat.)
2. Who is doing most of the talking—teacher or students? (Talk)
3. To what aspects of the text does the instructor draw the students' attention? (Text)
4. How would you describe the body language of the instructor, the students? (Bod. L)
5. Do the students seem engaged? What verbal or physical clues indicate the answers to this question? (Eng.)
6. How is the room arranged? (Room)
7. How much interaction is there between students? (Interact. S)
8. How many references do the teacher and students make to the students' own experience? (S Exper.)
9. What kinds of discussion take place? Whole class? Small groups? (Disc.)
10. What kinds of writing do the students do or have they recently done for class assignments? (Write)
11. What use is made, if any, of electronic resources? (E Resources)
12. What kinds of questions does the instructor ask of the students? (Qs)

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO MS. FENTON

November 6, 2009

Dear [Ms. Fenton],

First, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to interview you and observe your classes. This has been an immense help to me as I work on my research for my doctorate. I really appreciate your cooperation and the gracious way you have included me in your classroom.

Second, I want to make it clear that my purpose is not to judge or to criticize but only to help and to support. I see my work with you as a collaborative effort, and I feel very fortunate to be partnered with such a gifted teacher. I love the way you're willing to share your own experience with your students in order to model their assignments for them, and I greatly admire the creativity and ingenuity you put into your plans for the students' projects and papers. However, teaching is a difficult business even for seasoned veterans like you, and I think we all need all the help we can get.

After observing your classes for several weeks, I have only one suggestion of any substance. It is to try to include more discussion in your classroom. Many research studies show that discussion helps students to develop their critical thinking skills and to cultivate a sense of community within the classroom. I have observed that you spend a lot of time asking your students to be quiet; if you would give them more time for legitimate discussion of the material you are teaching, I think the problem of talking out of turn might be diminished. Fifteen-year-olds are just naturally talkers; and if you can capitalize on this tendency for instructional purposes, so much the better. For example, during your 7th block class on October 28, you had your students make a list of their beliefs as preparation for the "This I Believe Essay" (great assignment!). You asked them to choose one or two beliefs about which to write a personal narrative. When watching the students, as they were getting started on their essays, I noticed that one or two seemed at loose ends and slow to get started. I also saw a couple students trade lists so that they could get another student help them decide which beliefs they should choose. I think that this would have been a good opportunity for a think-pair-share activity, in which students might have paired up (each with another student they felt they could trust) and discussed their beliefs with each other and helped each other decide which belief(s) to use for the personal narrative. Recent research has shown that most learning takes place unconsciously; thus a lot of time is required for mental processing before a student undertakes a task like writing an essay. I also think that having students share their beliefs with each other would have helped to build a greater sense of trust and feeling of community within the classroom, thus helping to create an environment that is highly conducive to learning.

I have read much research (articles, books, etc.) that affirms the importance of using class discussion for instructional purposes. However, more than on research studies, I

make this suggestion based on five years of teaching high school students and at least fifteen teaching college students (mostly introductory writing courses). I have seen with my own eyes and in my own classrooms how carefully orchestrated discussion can work to engage students and develop their higher thinking skills. I have also seen that the more engaged the students are with their work, the fewer problems there are with discipline and misbehavior.

Again, I hope you will take my suggestions in the spirit in which they are given: as an attempt to help and support you in your teaching. I would like to make myself available to you both in the planning process and in the classroom when I do my "observations." I'll be glad to come to Maury during your planning times as well. Please just let me know how you think I can be of the greatest help.

Again, thanks for your help with my research.

Best regards,

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO MR. WEST

November 5, 2009

Dear [Mr. West],

First, I'd like to thank you for allowing me to interview you and observe your classes. This has been an immense help to me as I work on my research for my doctorate. I know it isn't always easy having another adult present when you teach, and I really appreciate your cooperation and the gracious way you have included me in your classroom.

Second, I want to make it clear that my purpose is not to judge or to criticize but only to help and to support. As I said earlier, given that this is your first teaching experience and that you were thrown into this at the last minute, I think you're doing an amazing job. But teaching is such a difficult business even for seasoned veterans, and I think we all need all the help we can get.

Here are some things I'd like to suggest that you try to make life easier for yourself and to help your students learn more deeply and efficiently:

The first is to include more discussion in your classroom. Many research studies show that discussion helps students to develop their critical thinking skills and to develop a sense of community within the classroom. I have observed that you spend a lot of time asking your students to be quiet; if you would give them more time for legitimate discussion of the material you are teaching, I think the problem of talking out of turn might be diminished. Fifteen-year-olds are just naturally talkers; and if you can capitalize on this tendency for instructional purposes, so much the better. For example, after you showed the music videos to your students during your 7th block class on Oct. 22, I think it would have helped students to write their comparison and contrast essay if they had been allowed to discuss what they saw in the videos first. Such discussion is a valuable way of having students process what they have seen and heard before they have to respond to it in writing.

Second, I think it would help if you made a greater effort to have students relate what they are studying to their own experience. If students see this connection, they are much more likely to be motivated to do their reading and academic assignments. For example, on Friday, Oct. 30, several of your 7th block students were talking about their plans for Halloween when they come into your class. Your warm-up for that day was an adverb exercise in which you had them identify the adverbs in the sentences in the handout and specify what purpose the adverbs served. To tie the adverbs into something that interested the students, you might have had them first write a paragraph about their plans for Halloween or what they did last Halloween and then add in adverbs to make the paragraph more interesting. This would have helped them to see

the purpose of using adverbs correctly and effectively, and it would have engaged them at the level of their own experience.

My third suggestion actually ties into the second. It has to do with setting a purpose for each assignment or activity and motivating students to fulfill that purpose. For example, on Friday, Oct. 30, your 7th-block students were working on an essay comparing two characters from two of the four short stories they had recently read. The problem with this assignment is that there is no self-evident purpose for the students to make this comparison. I think this is one reason the students seemed to be having so much trouble with the assignment (writing their thesis statement). Fifteen-year-old students are very much taken up with establishing their own identities vis-à-vis the rest of the world. If instead of having them compare the characters to each other you could have had each student compare him/herself to the character with whom he/she most identified, I think the students would have been more likely to see an authentic purpose to the assignment: that is, discovering more about their own identities by comparing themselves to fictional characters.

I have read much research (articles, books, etc.) that supports the above suggestions: using class discussion for instructional purposes, helping students relate what they read and study to their own lives, and setting an authentic purpose for each activity or assignment. However, more than on research studies, I make these suggestions based on five years of teaching high school students and at least fifteen teaching college students (mostly introductory writing courses). I have seen with my own eyes and in my own classrooms that these strategies really work to engage the students and develop their higher thinking skills. I have also seen that the more engaged the students are with their work, the fewer problems there are with discipline and misbehavior.

I have used your regular classes in my examples, but I have also seen ways that my suggestions could be applied to your honors classes. However, I stuck with the regular classes because these are the ones about which you have expressed the most concern. Again, I hope you will take these suggestions in the spirit in which they are given: as an attempt to help and support you during the very demanding and difficult first year of teaching. I really do think you have the potential to be a wonderful teacher, and I feel fortunate to be in a position to be involved in your work. I would like to make myself available to you both in the planning process and in the classroom when I do my “observations.” I’ll be glad to come to Maury during your planning times as well. Please just let me know how you think I can be of the greatest help.

Again, thanks for your help with my research.

Best regards,

APPENDIX F

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL AFTER INTERVIEW 2

1. Are teachers implementing the recommended intervention—the inclusion of more meaningful, in-depth discussion?
2. If they are, how are the students responding? If they are not, what obstacles seem to be preventing them from doing so?
3. What are the intended or unintended effects of my presence in their classrooms?

APPENDIX G

FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Do you feel you were able to act on the suggestions I made two months ago?
2. If you were able to incorporate these suggestions, what changes did you make in your teaching practices as a result?
3. Do you think these changes made any difference one way or another in the quality of your classes? If so, in what way?
4. If you weren't able to act on these suggestions, what might have prevented you from doing so?
5. Now I'd like to discuss the business of having me, a researcher, in your classroom as an observer. What was this like for you? How about having me consult with you about what when on in your classes—did this affect you and your teaching one way or the other?
6. I'd really appreciate it if I could check in with you later to find out how your teaching is going and to share some of the results of my research with you. Would this be all right?
7. Do you have anything else you'd like to discuss about our process over the last few months?

APPENDIX H

PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW WITH DEPARTMENT CHAIR

1. Which grades and classes are you now teaching at Maury?
2. How many years have you been teaching here? How long have you been department chair?
3. I'd like to ask you about how you view the role of English teacher. What do you think is most important for you and the teachers in your department to teach your students about the field of English?
4. What kinds of opportunities do you and the other teachers have for professional development?
5. I wonder if you could say a little about how curricular decisions are made in your department. How do you decide exactly what is to be taught in each grade?
6. What is your feeling about teaching social skills and moral values to your students?

My Feedback for Mrs. Harris

Impressions of Ms. Fenton's and Mr. West's classes

Problems with formulaic writing assignments

Disciplinary and grading issues

VITA

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Education

Old Dominion University, Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning, Norfolk, VA—degree expected December 18, 2010

Virginia Wesleyan College, Alternative Secondary Education Program for certification in English/language arts—including ten weeks of student teaching at Norview High School, Norfolk, VA—completed May 1998

University of Wisconsin at Madison, M.A. Chinese Literature, 1982
 Johns Hopkins University, M.A. Writing Seminars (Creative Writing), 1975
 Goucher College, B.A. English with Honors, 1973

Experience in Education

Lecturer, Department of English, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, August 2010 to present

Instructor, Department of Teaching and Learning, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, September to December 2009—Reading and Writing in the Content Areas

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, September 2007 to June May 2009—Reading and Writing in the Content Areas (ECI 408)

English Teacher, tenth and eleventh grades, Maury High School, Norfolk, VA, September 2005-January 2006

English Teacher (part time), twelfth grade, Norfolk Collegiate School, Norfolk, VA, September 2004 to June 2005

English Teacher, ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades, Catholic High School, Virginia Beach, VA, August 2001 to June 2004; initiator and sponsor of Creative Writing Club

Instructor, Old Dominion University, Writing Center and Department of English, Norfolk, VA, 1994-97, 2000-2001, 2006—courses taught include basic writing, ESL basic writing, composition, technical writing, literature