CREATIVE INTERFERENCE IN THE TEACHING OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A CRITICAL APPROACH TO TEACHER EDUCATION

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Curriculum, Instruction, and Teacher Education—Doctor of Philosophy

2018

ABSTRACT

CREATIVE INTERFERENCE IN THE TEACHING OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:
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In this dissertation, I elaborate a pedagogical practice of creative interference. I use curricular and instructional disturbances to open the possibility for different ways of thinking and acting. I aim to confront problematic representations of people and cultures through complex social contextualization, and to interfere with discourses that legitimize a disposition toward multiculturalism grounded in equality that allows, promotes, and strategizes silence about difference. My focus is less on what students did, despite situating myself in teacher education. Instead, I consider the text, myself as a teacher educator, and the context of community-based learning. This project is one of reflective practice: of the curriculum, my own teaching, and the reflective practices of students engaged in service learning. However, I hope to reframe reflection away from prescriptive models toward *diffraction*, in which interference is the outcome.

My dissertation is centered on three distinct articles. This alternative format allows me to employ a variety of qualitative research methods, including: critical literary analysis, autoethnography, and community-engaged scholarship. While children's literature provides the background for these articles, the projects are not exclusively possible in the context of children's literature as a part of teacher education.

The first article asks teacher educators to consider how they make curricular choices and challenges simplistic binaries to determine what is good. This article focuses on a literary text, and as a result is very much about children's literature. The second article troubles the notion

that student learning is the only way to think about teaching. It explores the unintended consequences of instructional choices resulting from sociopolitical stance-taking relative to the teaching of children's literature. I argue the process of inquiry is more valuable than achieving the development of an abstract disposition. Children's literature then becomes the site for the final article. I consider a pedagogical choice to collaborate with community and to send students to unfamiliar territory where they negotiate relations in teaching and learning. With the multiple levels of expectations and requirements, my understanding of community partnerships evolved in ways that incline me toward increasing student agency.

Taken together, these chapters begin to develop a pedagogical framework for engaging difference. This pedagogy considers the risks and uncertainties inherent to the difficult conversations in teacher education (and the world more broadly), with the intention of deconstructing preconceived notions of multiculturalism that prospective teachers might hold. The articles represent pedagogical rehearsals of diffraction as a means to challenge and re-think the ways that teacher education limits the possibilities of reflection. I offer diffraction as a pedagogical practice of creative interference.

Keywords: multicultural literature, teacher education, inquiry, critical pedagogy, complexity

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin with my committee. Dr. Laura Apol invited me into the world of children's literature—thank you for that. She has been supportive throughout my experience as a doctoral student. Dr. Sandro Barros has been a consistent reader and supporter of my well-being. We share a (crazy) worldview, and his presence provided me with a sense of community. Dr. Avner Segall challenges me to think differently. We share a desire to confront difficult knowledge and as a result can ourselves be difficult, but his challenges make those with whom he interacts better—I hope to do the same. Dr. Carrie Symons graciously joined my committee at a late stage, and I cannot thank her enough for supporting me and my work with such little notice.

Dr. Janine Certo, my advisor throughout my doctoral program, has always answered me with honesty and shared her love of life with me. Unfortunately, she was unable to serve as a committee member, but I would not be here if it weren't for her.

I also want to acknowledge Mary Hennessey's contributions to Chapter IV specifically, and more broadly her support of my service to the community.

I thank my family: my mom, the first reader of my writing for over two decades; my dad for making me attentive to the details, and for his strength in the face of illness; my brother for showing me that human lives are shaped by contingency; my aunt for writing to me while I wrote this dissertation; and the support from many others.

I appreciate my friends and colleagues—they put up with the experimental exchanges and confrontations that shape my thinking.

And most of all, I want to thank Miley, my accomplice in life, for getting on a plane to Michigan with no idea what to expect but trusting that we would find a way to be happy. 爱你

PREFACE

My journey to improve self and society resembles the Islamic notion of jihad. Ahmed Rashid (2002) explores the notion of jihad as *struggle*. Appearing rather innocuous, *struggle* refers to wresting free from some restraint. *To struggle* implies acting in opposition to, and as a result is divisive: those who share your struggle and those against whom you struggle. The struggles that I consider in this dissertation are internal and external: to push myself and society to be better. In part, *better* means to seek to improve oneself across physical, intellectual, and other capacities. I also believe it means working against social practices that perpetrate harm toward cohabitants of this world. Many take up a similar struggle, and we work and live in opposition to the systems that perpetuate inequity and their agents.

Rashid (2002) describes two levels of jihad: the greater jihad "involves the effort of each Muslim to become a better human being, to struggle to improve… In doing so the follower of jihad can also benefit his or her community" (p. 2). The personal struggle to become better, and to have the community benefit as a result, emerges from the ethics of my learning: it is insufficient to unquestionably participate in society when learning about one's choices could reveal a negative impact on others. For example, I learned that owning a car makes me complicit in the exploitation of people and resources to maintain an unsustainable fossil fuel economy. Thus, I do not own a car. I undertake the greater jihad in this way among others.

The lesser jihad arises as "rebellion against an unjust ruler, whether Muslim or not, and jihad can become the means to mobilize that political and social struggle" (Rashid, 2002, p. 2). My teaching is one social forum in which I undertake the lesser jihad. I use an institutionally-provided platform to bring social issues to the forefront, especially those that may not be part of

the everyday discourse or thinking of students. I confront students with the realities of racism and colonialism, and model my acknowledgement of my complicity in the atrocities of the neoliberal military state.

In Chapters II and III of this dissertation, a central theme I address is the perception in the neoliberal West that Islam is not only a threat, but fundamentally at odds with and excluded from "our way of life" (Mann, 2015)—in Chapter IV I shift toward consideration of language minorities, but the West similarly frames speakers of languages othered by English as antagonists. While the "capacity to cut up the world is biologically rooted and culturally elaborated" (Davis, 2004, p. 6), the West's cultural elaboration of its epistemology through dichotomization (Davis, 2004) results in Othering (Derrida, 1976): distinctions that divide, disguised as a natural order.

Distinction as an acknowledgement of difference can avoid deficit models, but often difference is *imposed* instead of *engaged*. For example, Homi Bhabha (2012) claims stereotyping is when an image becomes the identity of a group: stereotyping erases the individual and imposes this image on the Other. As a result, the narrative of threat – found in the actions of the Mullahs, Sheikhs, and Caliphs of militant Islam conscripting suicide bombers and killing innocents – becomes the image that the West imposes on all Muslims. There is more to the struggle of jihad than this image provides. I aim to complicate this perspective.

The establishment of Islamophobic narratives in Western minds began with the rise of Islam, but post-9/11 discourse reaffirms this hatred for another generation. For this reason, readers of this preface are perhaps already concerned that I am taking up jihad. Rashid (2002) explains, "In Western thought...jihad has always been portrayed as an Islamic war against unbelievers" (p. 1). Likened to the Christian Crusades, Westerners "focus on the bloodshed,

ignoring not only the enormous achievements in science and art and the basic tolerance of [Islamic] empires, but also the true idea of jihad that spread peacefully throughout these realms" (Rashid, 2002, p. 2). The Western perception emerges from a regime of truth (Foucault, 1980) – a socially constructed truth paired with power – in which Others, often brown-skinned, are dangerous because they are not like us; we are not perpetrators of violence against them. This ideology is dangerous, perhaps more than the threat of Islamic militancy.

The omission of violence against the Other is of particular concern. In an active, Lacanian ignorance, the Western mind creates an ahistorical context in which political interference, colonialism, and global oil economies, for example, are absent. The narrative rests on the dichotomy of good and evil, wherein the goodness of the West is unquestioned. This narrative tends to be reproduced through teaching and formal schooling.

Good and evil are a common dichotomy invoked in the Western tradition. The most dangerous aspect of Western dichotomization is that it disguises self-serving bias as universal truth:

> Dichotomization, because it is rooted in the assumption that it is a process of labeling parts of the universe as they really are—that is, as if the observations were independent of the observer—has tended to be cast as an ethically neutral, objective process. (Davis, 2004, p. 10)

The world is more grey than black-or-white, and good tends to include some bad. Brent Davis (2004) proposes that we reframe dichotomies as bifurcations to be "attentive to the partialities associated with any distinction... a bifurcation foregrounds both the biases that prompt a distinction and the biases instilled by a distinction" (p. 10). My jihad is about acknowledging the

bad in what I once thought was good, and more abstractly to recognize that these are not so distinct or different from one another.

Difference is at the heart of this dissertation, but difference is not absolute. Davis (2004) claims, “The bifurcation attitude is concerned with samenesses and shared assumptions, in contrast to the dichotomization attitude that is attentive principally to differences” (p. 11). I hope to avoid dichotomies here, preferring to center the multiplicity of experience; however, I honor difference. I recognize that difference exists internally, and that sameness results from the complex entanglements of our universe. This dissertation explores sameness and difference, inviting readers to join me in jihad to better self and society.

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Between East Lansing, MI and Newton, MA

2017

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I – INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I explore what it means to be a teacher educator. Along the way, I make choices as a teacher and researcher that, according to Karen Barad (2007), inherently create possibilities and exclusions. While exclusions are unavoidable, my goal is to open possibilities: as a teacher, I hope for students to consider ways of thinking that challenge their accepted knowledge; as a researcher, I intend to extend conversations about diversity and difference in teacher education. In choosing to foreground curriculum and my own instructional practices, I exclude what students do. I situate *teacher education* – the verb, the process of preparing students to become teachers – in the background to foreground my learning about/through being a teacher educator. My thinking about *teacher education* – the noun, university-based teacher preparation programs as well as courses, teachers, and curriculum – has led me to develop pedagogical practices that challenge prescriptive notions of learning and reflection, and to embrace uncertainty as possibility.

I begin from the premise that one can learn by questioning that which one *knows to be true*, and that this inquiry is reflective. These truths are often social constructions tied to power (Foucault, 1980), and in my context include the inherent negativity of stereotypes, the notion that learning is a measure of teaching, and that the learning of students who use languages othered by English is the domain of ESL instructors. Questioning "truth" is counterintuitive, and thus often requires a catalyst. In this dissertation, I explore my attempts to be a catalyst and to introduce disturbances with the intention of opening possibilities where normalized/ing discourses close them—for students and for myself. I call this a pedagogy of creative interference.

My experience inclines me toward a complexity view of teaching and learning—a position from which I embrace unpredictability and uncertainty. In an educational climate that continues to value standardization, uncertainty can be understood as something to be controlled or minimized. Uncertainty could also be framed as possibility. In my teaching and its representations in the chapters that follow, I attempt to enact creative interference as a pedagogy of possibility (Simon, 1992). I use disturbances and other instructional choices to try to create opportunities to imagine worlds beyond the familiar to deconstruct preconceived notions of multiculturalism that prospective teachers might hold. My notion of creative interference is complex and not easily summed up concisely. As a result, I will elaborate my stance via several entry points throughout this introduction.

This dissertation emerges from ethical and pedagogical questions about teaching and teacher education; from epistemological and methodological questions about educational research; and from ontological and social questions about the nature of my and others' experience in/of the material world. I wonder about questions like *what social purpose do teaching and schooling serve in an unjust society?*, *what can we come to know through research (about teaching and its relationship to learning)?*, and *what role do I hope to play as an educator in a shared world?* While these questions are not necessarily answered in the chapters that follow, I extend these three threads throughout this dissertation. They are complex and entangled, and they provide a conceptual background against which I establish an ethical position as an educator (an agent of a social institution), critical social researcher (member of the resistance), and White man (holder of multiple identities discursively constructed as dominant).

I use this project to explore such questions locally through my teaching practice as an instructor of a children's literature course for undergraduate prospective teachers. While this

work could have emerged in many contexts, children's literature makes possible central features of my pedagogy: I could engage students in consideration of beliefs because literary texts for children are ideological (McCallum & Stephens, 2011); and I could address social and cultural topics because the sections I taught were designed with a global focus. However, the importance of children's literature varies across the three chapters that follow as the focus shifts from curriculum and text selection (Chapter II), to inquiry into my own pedagogical choices (Chapter III), to my instructional application of external commitments to community and language (Chapter IV). These chapters provide multiple perspectives on a similar project: my teaching as interference with normalized discourses surrounding how White America responds to a world of difference and superdiversity.

While I claim to be *critical*, I do not advocate for critical readings of literature—approaches that hold texts accountable for assumed-to-be-universal discursive constructions. I intend to use those taken for granted constructions, such as stereotypical characters, to direct questions away from the text toward people and systems that influence everyday struggles in the lives of teachers, students, and unimagined others. Allen Luke (2012) notes that critical literacy approaches "view language, texts, and their discourse structures as principal means for representing and reshaping possible worlds" (pp. 8-9), but how educators enact critical literacies is "utterly contingent" (p. 9). To be critical, as I understand Luke, examines power relations through analysis of textual discourse, but its objective is to engage in social critique and action, not solely to understand the text. As a result, the articles that follow begin with textual analysis, then provide critique of my teaching, and work toward action as part of teacher education.

My perspectives – as teacher and as researcher with motivations that bridge social, personal, and professional commitments – are taken up in the subsequent chapters, not exclusive

of one another, but I foreground different commitments in each chapter. I agree with Davis' (2008) claim that "educational research and educational practice might be considered aspects of the same project—namely, expanding the space of human possibility by exploring the space of the existing possible" (p. 63). In the following sections of this introduction, I situate my work within an ethical dialogue, consider a notion of self as multiple, and frame my interference within a social context. I conclude with an overview of the remaining chapters, and my purpose in undertaking and organizing them as I present them here.

Questions of Ethics in Teaching

In *Teaching Against the Grain*, Roger Simon (1992) puts forward two questions to guide teachers toward "a purposeful vision that can provide the ethical grounds for the determination of pedagogical practice" (p. 14). He first asks, "what are the desired versions of a future human community implied in the pedagogy in which one is implicated?" (p. 15). The ethical principle I adopt here, like Simon, is that teachers can and should imagine a future world, and that they have agency to build, shape, or create that world through their pedagogical and curricular choices. Agency is a privilege and community is a responsibility, as he indicates with his second question, "how should we relate to other people who also have a stake...in articulating future communal possibilities?" (p. 15). In consideration of other inhabitants in the future world I envision, my purpose is to describe, elaborate, and advocate for an ethical practice in/of teacher education: what I call a pedagogy of creative interference.

The context I consider here is a class with a teacher and students, and those students intend to teach other students in mainstream school contexts. It is not my intention to advocate for teachers' control of the future – or classrooms and students – when they assert agency. For a

start, agency in schools is limited by structural obstacles. *Teaching and learning* in a practical sense, or schooling, are part of this work, but I also intend for this dissertation to model learning in a broader sense—my own learning. *Schooling* is one way to imagine *teaching and learning*, but this dissertation embodies a notion of learning that goes beyond school. I draw from transdisciplinary sources to coalesce my learning into my thoughts about teaching and what teachers might do.

I can influence the next generation of teachers, so I acknowledge that "pedagogy is hardly innocent" (Simon, 1992, p. 56), and, as a result, my choices may cause harm. As a teacher educator, my pedagogy can impact students, and students of the students I teach. I justify my ethical stance through consideration of larger networks of stakeholders and community. My responsibility is not only to students, but to their future students and to the future world I imagine. Yet interaction with and consideration of students in the present is integral to teaching. I must build rapport before embarking toward a future world. Otherwise, students would not accompany me in inquiry. With a foundation of rapport, I can begin to open possibilities, but Simon (1992) cautions,

> a progressive pedagogy cannot proceed from the intention of getting...people...to think and act as we do… the task for the progressive cultural worker is to engage...people so as to provoke their inquiry into and challenge of their existing views of 'the way things are and should be'. (p. 46)

As a result, a practice of creative interference is intended to provoke inquiry, and to understand inquiry as a vital part of teaching, but not to determine its outcomes before inquiry has begun.

In this dissertation, I investigate the experience of being a teacher educator of children's literature working with multicultural and global texts to encourage prospective teachers toward social criticism and personal exploration. Inquiry is inherent to the reflexive, recursive practice of teaching. Teachers can research their practice to improve their work and the outcomes

possible for their students. Therefore, teaching – including my practice as a teacher educator – occurs in the present and looks to the past to shape the future. Learning, however, extends into the other identities I explore here. Ultimately, I aim to contextualize teacher education in ways that maximize the ability of prospective teachers and their future students to engage difference in a complex world, but not to dictate how that should be done or to "insist on a fixed set of altered meanings" (Simon, 1992, p. 47). The world is far too complex for static, universal reductions.

Background: A vision of the future

According to Lesley Kuhn (2008), our universe and our ability to make sense of it are "multi-dimensional, non-linear, interconnected, far from equilibrium and unpredictable" (p. 182). Reconciling unpredictability with a vision of the future is therefore a daunting task. Because I frame uncertainty as possibility, I believe that an uncertain future is also one in which possibilities are open. Closure, through the illusion of certainty and the reduction of choice, is often how education, a normative activity (Kuhn, 2008), operates. Teacher education can prepare teachers who resist this closure. In developing a pedagogy for an uncertain future, I aim to preserve choice and challenge certainty.

I draw upon complexity theory to understand "a dynamically changing, complicated, complex, and chaotic but understandable universe" (Mitchell, 2009, p. 118). A complexity perspective is ontological and epistemological, however Mason (2008) laments how "complexity theory has been largely silent" (p. 17) regarding the normative commitments of education, and "on key issues of values and ethics" (p. 6). My application of complexity includes an ethical commitment to a vision of the future, and therefore breaks the silence to which Mason refers. I

aim to extend that which is possible by challenging the taken-for-granted "certainties" of normative conceptions of knowledge.

The nature of our knowledge of the world is limited despite a desire to *know completely*. Mitchell (2009) claims, "the contingency of complex structures impels us to modify our conception of the character of usable knowledge claims beyond the narrow domain of universal, exceptionless laws" (p. 3), and to "expand our conceptual frameworks to accommodate contingency, dynamic robustness, and deep uncertainty. The truths that attach to our world are not simple, global, and necessary, but rather plural and pragmatic" (p. 5). *Probability*, rather than *certainty*, is a more accurate way to frame knowledge claims.

However, despite the contingent-knowledge position to which I adhere, I do believe there are near-certainties. From these I derive my vision of a future human community. On a timescale that some people find so abstract it borders on insignificance or absurdity, life will not exist on Earth in perpetuity. As far as we know, life exists only on our planet, but an infinite universe probab(ilistic)ly harbors life elsewhere. In any case, the null hypothesis suggests that life is anomalous to the particularities of our world. I feel responsible to begin from the assumption that in the distant future life must leave Earth to continue—not just human life. We are far too entangled with our ecosystems and tools to imagine that a future star-faring, multi-planetary society will solely consist of humans piloting fleets of metal, mechanical ships. More likely, future humans will continue to interface with machines and neuro-biological enhancements, and interstellar transports will require biological systems to sustain internal environments. From this imagined distant future, I interpolate two accessible and pertinent conclusions.

The first is that the differences that lead us to war and choices that accelerate the destruction of our planet need to be respectfully ended. Human conflict is inconsequential

compared to extinction. Different as we are, the various cultures and communities of the world need to work toward life-sustaining, peace-building, equitable norms of behavior. People will need to overcome conflict to unite in the common goal of continuing life. As a result, I begin my pedagogical pursuits with a desire to end larger global conflicts, which begins with inclusion of these conflicts in the curriculum and classroom interactions in ways that allow students to identify them as meaningful. Teacher education would do well to foreground contemporary social conflict. My second conclusion is that I need to care about others and provide opportunities for them to make choices. I believe many of our own choices limit others' in ways of which we are unaware. Teacher education can resist dismissal based on the notion that "it doesn't affect me"—a comment I hear often, to which I respond by asking, "But do you affect it?" Changing the state of global conflict might begin with choices to know and followed by choices to act.

These conclusions connect my vision of the future to the material present. Conflicts arise from people's identification with groups, communities, or states, and are fueled by the perception that other people/identities are at odds with their own. Interactions are material and discursive, and constitute the self in the world. Addressing these conclusions to bring about my imagined future is central to my teaching and research as well as personal commitments. The teacher and researcher to which I refer are parts of the self, another complex concept.

A Vision of Self: Diffraction

I inhabit a variety of spaces taking on diverse roles, so the objectives of this work include those of a teacher educator, an emerging qualitative researcher, and a social being in contexts rich with history. Largely due to my vision of the future, I care about the learning of others and

the ways they live in society; and how society shapes education and vice versa. As a teacher educator, I want prospective teachers to ask questions, develop an awareness of their ideologies and a respect for those of others, and to consider the complexities of context. Teachers could model for students a way to be in the world that promotes adaptability, a peace-building and equitable way of interacting, and curiosity about the complex system of global society/ies and cultures. This ethical notion resonates across my identities as a teacher and researcher.

To inspire thinking about interconnectivity and the self-in-the-world, teachers and teacher educators often use reflection, a common pedagogical tool. Lynn Fendler (2003) believes that teachers are inherently reflective, but guided teacher reflection may be less effective. The ways teacher educators utilize reflection might harness people's natural tendency to be introspective, as opposed to directing reflection toward a particular outcome. Fendler (2003) notes that criticisms of reflection highlight "the degree to which reflective practices serve to reinforce existing beliefs rather than challenge assumptions" (p. 16), and that perhaps "reflection will reveal no more than what is already known" (p. 21). While I believe, like Fendler (2003), that reflective practices can be beneficial, I also wonder whether introspection is indeed *reflective*, and what that might mean.

For instance, I come to know my appearance through a reflection, but any who observe me see the opposite of what I saw in the mirror. My reflective knowledge of self is actually a distortion of the reality experienced by the other selves with whom I interact. Given the desire to reach new insight through introspective practices, extending the metaphor of reflection to incorporate optics more broadly can lead us to other ways of knowing.

Throughout my life I've had an interest in the universe that led me to learn about physics, namely cosmology and quantum mechanics. These fields include the study of the behavior and

properties of light, or optics. In recent years, I have thought a lot about optics in relation to my work as a teacher educator. We describe colleagues as *brilliant*, and our work is meant to shed *light* on things, so we do not remain in the *dark*. Light-based metaphors abound, yet we limit them to the realm of geometric optics: lenses and mirrors. We can focus and reflect with these tools, but they are hardly the only ways to learn about light. Telescopes can magnify a small space, but scattered light can reveal a star's chemical composition. Various approaches to optics complement one another, but few have caught on elsewhere.

The value of physical optics for revealing much of our visible universe is undeniable. Mirrors (i.e. catoptrics) and lenses (i.e. dioptrics) reflect and focus light. Other optical phenomena, such as diffraction, reveal other qualities of light (and matter). Diffraction is an act of interference that reveals more of reality than what we might assume. These manipulations are material acts that create and limit possibilities. Karen Barad (2014) interprets a popular experiment from quantum physics as challenging common dichotomic understandings of light:

> The two-slit diffraction experiment queers the binary light/darkness story. What the pattern reveals is that darkness is not a lack. Darkness can be produced by 'adding new light' to existing light – 'to that which it has already received'. Darkness is not mere absence, but rather an abundance. Indeed, darkness is not light's expelled other, for it haunts its own interior. Diffraction queers binaries and calls out for a rethinking of the notions of identity and difference. (p. 171)

Diffraction therefore offers another perspective, and in addition to reflection, it may provide new ways of understanding self and others. Where reflection imagines a unified, unitary self, diffraction asks us to see difference (i.e. the other) within, and perhaps the self without. The creation of difference within is a vital quality of interference, and I will refer to this phenomenon as *creative interference* as I apply it to pedagogy throughout this project. Barad identifies "the material multiplicity of self, the way it is diffracted across spaces, times, realities, imaginaries" (2014, p. 175). This is the self I hope to be and to acknowledge.

This self, or these selves, materialize as/in my body, and also in digital and discursive spaces. This dissertation, for instance, may be read as a single product of one author, but it was written across a variety of temporal iterations of the self, expressing and making sense of ideas that at times feel foreign to other iterations of me. Consistent throughout, however, like Barad (2007),

> I am interested in understanding the epistemological and ontological issues that quantum physics forces us to confront, such as the conditions for the possibility of objectivity, the nature of measurement, the nature of nature and meaning making, and the relationship between discursive practices and the material world. (p. 24)

Thus, I consider the entanglements of ontology, epistemology, methodology, society, ethics, and pedagogy; not to disentangle them, but to diffract them to better understand their entangled nature.

Reflective practices in teacher education are widespread and take on a variety of meanings. My concern is a lack of depth, or that reflecting does not offer the means to understand as much as we might about self and world. I believe these entangled questions are vital for White prospective teachers to examine the values and ideologies of a society that maintains privilege and oppression. The other tools used in the study of optics may be metaphorically applied to teacher education. In addition to reflection, diffraction (and perhaps refraction) can provide multiplicity. Additive viewpoints from which different information can be revealed. Diffraction is interference, but interference can be creative in this sense: it can create light within darkness and dark within light. An educational enactment of creative interference expands possibility.

An Inequitable Present

Maxine Greene (1998) described ours as a "society of unfulfilled promises," in which education is proclaimed as a panacea for inequities yet reproduces the disparities between the majority and the minoritized. Similarly, Simon (1992) explains, "forms of power and legitimation in schools structure a field of possibilities and regulate actual behaviors, including thought, speech, image, style, and action. In this process of regulation, particular identities, knowledge…are normalized and privileged" (p. 10). My context is distinct from the schools to which Simon refers, but I can help shape the thoughts, beliefs, and values of future teachers in ways that challenge the normalized and privileged identities and discourses.

Persistent deficit ideologies in research influence educational and social policy. "This climate, and the policies and teaching practices resulting from it, has the quite explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society based on White, middle-class norms of language and cultural being" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). I believe in interfering with the attainment of that goal. To that end, Simon (1992) offers a starting point: "educational practice should participate in a social transformation that is aimed at securing fundamental human dignity and radically reducing the limits on expression and achievement imposed by physical and symbolic violence" (1992, p. 17). Part of my vision of the future, then, is that prospective teachers aim to transform society.

Educators and educational researchers are positioned to conform and to bring others to conformity, rather than to support revolutionary transformation. Fortunately, one of the goals of educational research, especially over the past quarter century, has been to identify and dismantle social injustices as they are enacted in research and education. Emerging from Critical Race Theory, culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), for example, focuses on the

teacher's conception of self and others, social relations, and knowledge. More recently, Paris (2012) offered *culturally sustaining pedagogy* because teachers could be "more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (p. 95). I find myself aligned with and inspired by this vision of teaching, and imagine a better future is possible when opportunities are widely offered. Teacher education could prioritize these approaches to pedagogy.

Teaching and teacher education continue to be mostly White so preparation for cultural and linguistic diversity is necessary. However, Paris and Alim (2014) later ask, "What would our pedagogies look like if the gaze weren't the dominant one?" (p. 86). Teacher education runs the risk of ignoring this question because the dominant gaze is normalized for many of those involved. While not necessarily intended for White people, I heed the advice to "turn our gaze inward, on our own communities and cultural practices" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 92). As White prospective teachers work to develop positive attitudes about minoritized groups, and research guides education toward sustaining the cultures of the minoritized, the gaze rarely falls on Whiteness—if it does, the participants in discussions around these issues are often White. Yet the inhabitants of the White world often either blame minoritized groups or try to save them. Another approach is to acknowledge that there are systems that oppress, and quite often White people are complicit in those networks. An acknowledgment that White people may not be/have the solution could go further to explore how we might be/have the problem.

Interfering Whiteness

Whiteness is a complex concept. I use this term for the sake of brevity, but more broadly to include labels that can describe me: Western, American, cis heteronormative, middle-class, *valued dialect*-English-speaking, able-bodied, man in a patriarchy. These are all normative and normalizing discourses constructed as exclusionary dichotomies, distinct but entangled with what it means to be White. Normalizing discourses do not invite revision from the outside, which is doubly problematic if White people "ultimately misunderstand the world they have created" (Matias, 2016, p. xii). Whiteness is difficult to confront – it's both elusive and shameful – but that difficulty is an ethical obligation precisely because it is self-serving not to.

One example of misunderstanding the world is that research enacts White middle-class as the standard against which others are measured. In an editorial for *Journal of Literacy Research*, Anders and colleagues (2016) call attention to "the subtle and dangerous argument embedded in the language gap rhetoric" (p. 131) that maintains "White middle-class approaches as the unchallenged norm" (p. 132). They go on to point out how "insidious biases in measurement continue to be promoted, primarily by privileged White researchers who seek to rank and diminish populations different from themselves" (p. 132)—biases embedded across the disciplines, though I focus on language and literacy in teacher education. I hope to avoid these practices in my own research and have thus diffracted variations of my selfhood.

In a context that is often White – teacher educators, prospective teachers, the institution, the nation – it can be difficult to position ourselves to turn our gaze inward. Social pressure to conform is difficult to overcome. While I may want future teachers to take up culturally sustaining pedagogies, I do not in my own practice because there is no need to sustain a dominant culture. Instead, teacher education for White prospective teachers may need something

different: pedagogies of creative interference that challenge the normalized experience of Whiteness.

Simon (1992) theorizes a pedagogy of possibility "capable of both affirming *and* challenging the immediacy of our everyday experiences" (original emphasis) in which participants "construct and present representations of the world beyond immediate experience so as to dialectically engage that experience and enable the articulation of new human possibilities" (p. 139). I support dialectical engagement with and among students using global books and editorial perspectives to contextualize our dialogues in ways that are uncommon to the students' experiences. The underlying ethics is resistance to unconscious conformity. Teaching, then, becomes

> a counterdiscursive activity that attempts to provoke a process through which people might engage in a transformative critique of their everyday lives… addressing the 'naturalness' of dominant ways of seeing, saying, and doing by provoking a consideration of why things are the way they are, how they got to be that way, in what ways change might be desirable, and what it would take for things to be otherwise. (Simon, 1992, p. 60)

Countering the discourse of a dominant culture, or any culture for that matter, is likely to lead to confrontation. People tend to resist criticism, and conformity is easier. Simon (1992) draws upon the Hebrew concept of *hevrutah* to imagine how this counterdiscursive interference can work. *Hevrutah* refers to "a sense of belonging to a moral culture that allows one to argue over its definition without feeling that an experience of collectivity has been dissolved" (p. 66). A future world built from arguments over morality that maintain community requires comfort, honesty, and authenticity (in the Heideggerian sense). Teacher educators need to establish rapport with prospective teachers before they engage in such critique.

However, the challenges and potential harm I ask White teacher educators to navigate are necessary. The pressure to fulfill socially constituted norms is incentivized by the economic

dominance and sociocultural hegemony of Whiteness. We risk becoming Heidegger's (2010) anonymous *das Man*: the social conformist who lives inauthentically, pursuing that which *one* values and foregoing their own choices. Whether or not a person willingly conforms to social norms, or if it is possible to avoid it, the conformist is complicit in society's deeds.

Whiteness needs to be critiqued from within to have any lasting effect. White people have not internalized important critiques of Whiteness that call for revision. For example, the narrative of Whiteness redacts militarism and colonization, slavery and oppression; omits Dresden, Pinochet, and eugenics; and includes with little impact Hiroshima, Iran-Contra, and Katrina. Neoliberal, colonial, White supremacy is critiqued for its greed and oppression domestically by #BLM and Occupy, internationally by #BDS and Boko Haram, and countless communities spanning a range of ideologies and methods. We need to acknowledge those views in our narrative, and I aim to provide challenging narratives as part of my teaching.

To bring creative interference into pedagogical and methodological practice, I consider recent literacy research that draws upon the baroque as a disruptive art. Burnett and Merchant (2016) operationalized six techniques of the baroque to "sensitize us to those affective, material, and embodied dimensions of meaning making that defy representation" (p. 260) because they are messy. The authors harness the "disruptive power" (p. 262) of the baroque "to look but also to feel differently about the everyday and the mundane" (p. 264)—that which conformity makes invisible. They use these baroque techniques to "animate literacy research" (p. 264), and I embrace four as the basis of my pedagogy because they parallel the insights I draw from complexity. Inspired by Law (2011), I guide my pedagogy with the understanding that: there are multiple viewpoints, and each is limited; boundaries are uncertain; meaning is made with different materials in different media; and transporting beyond everyday experience builds a

notion of otherness. The dominant, certain narrative is that with which I intend to interfere, and through this interference I aim to create possibilities to choose different understandings.

The Shape of the Dissertation

It's difficult to know where a dissertation begins, and to delineate where it ends. A dissertation is the product of research, and it's personal as well: a struggle between individual experience and the more broadly meaningful. The pressing questions I hope to pursue as a researcher emerge from and extend into the personal and the social. While this dissertation is a representation and product of my teaching, research, and service, it also involves more personal ideologies and ethics. These are entangled. It is not my intention to artificially disentangle these various aspects of a diverse me. I break them apart momentarily to acknowledge the multiple over the binary or singular; and blurred borders between. This *diffraction* helps me elaborate themes interwoven across these various professional and personal commitments.

My dissertation is comprised of three distinct scholarly articles. This nontraditional format allows me to employ a variety of qualitative research methods, including: critical literary analysis, autoethnography, and community-engaged scholarship. Like Burnett and Merchant (2016), who were inspired by the baroque, I present one of "a multiplicity of stories that could be told" and the chapters that follow "are drawn from...empirical materials...and stack onto one another in a precarious fashion" (p. 267). Presenting the stories in interference with one another, like diffraction, looks for understanding in the margins: "it is the gaps between the stories that are important" (Burnett & Merchant, 2016, p. 267). I attempt to reveal some of the meaningful spaces in – and in between – the stories make up the chapters that follow.

Chapter II – the first article – is a critical content analysis of Riad Sattouf's (2014/2015) *The Arab of the Future*. This chapter focuses on a literary text. Critical multicultural educators would benefit from training around selecting multicultural literature, and often, selecting quality multicultural literature requires consideration of *authenticity*—a multifaceted, difficult-to-define term that may include among its criteria that texts be written by insiders and be free of negative stereotypes. *The Arab of the Future* troubles the binary criteria teachers often apply when evaluating multicultural literature, perhaps causing teachers to avoid it. I situate the text within a broader sociohistorical context, supporting its pedagogical value for teacher education as a text that can be used to confront ideologies grounded in Othering. I argue that controversial texts support critical conversations by foregrounding difficult knowledge otherwise avoided by teachers selecting texts.

Chapter III – the second article – focuses on my reflective teaching practice. I initially intended to explore prospective teachers (i.e. the students in my class) as readers. However, now convinced of the unpredictability of learning outcomes, I methodologically abandoned the belief that one reader could predict outcomes for another. With the initial intention of affecting transformation of students' beliefs, I instead found that unintended outcomes may undermine my purpose. I conclude that developing prospective teachers' self-inquiry and reflection in broader social contexts offers access to critical ways of thinking and underlies teacher educators' work.

The final article –Chapter IV – traces the evolution of a service learning project I developed with a community volunteer group. This piece attends to service learning as a part of coursework in consideration of community. In it I explore the relationship between teacher education and community, and foreground language diversity as an area where schools and teachers could draw upon community knowledge. I elaborate some of the goals of pedagogical

scholarship and highlight the positions of power that influence community-researcher-teacher partnerships.

There are other intriguing elements of the data that I can pursue in future projects. I provide multiple perspectives of my work as a teacher educator through these articles, and I have made choices that inherently exclude other possibilities. I acknowledge important stakeholders, but my goal is to be free from the constraints of any single disciplinary view of what counts as data, what frameworks are acceptable, and what conclusions are valid. As a result of situating this project within, without, across, and in the margins of the traditions of educational research associated with teacher preparation, I leave many questions unanswered. I can provide only what I have examined, analyzed, and written.

Between these chapters I include a series of Interludes. Each is intended to highlight an orienting idea that frames the work that follows: empathy, reader beliefs and difference, and liminality. I draw from a variety of sources that contributed to my own thinking and learning about my teaching, this research, and my role in the world. These Interludes are intended to extend the dialogue that may emerge from the articles themselves.

I conclude this dissertation with a discussion across the findings from these three studies in consideration of my larger purpose to ethically orient myself as a teacher educator and educational researcher. While this work may appear deeply autoethnographic – and therefore raise questions as to why it is not framed more prominently as such – the gravitational center of these various pieces is not me, or my personal link to the data or phenomena I investigate. These chapters are the materialization of my reimagining *reflection* as *diffraction*: different intellectual and temporal perspectives, at times in interference with one another, producing information and insight inaccessible with/to a single mirror. This project is and represents multiple rehearsals of a

pedagogical framework for teacher education grounded in expanding possibility through creative interference.

INTERLUDE – EMPATHY

Reading, or more generally a *literacy event*, is commonly made up of a transaction between text, reader, and context. The first study I include began as an exploration into texts because teachers can select texts and therefore wield influence through curricular choices about which texts to use. As an educator aligned with critical multiculturalism (McLaren, 1995), or multicultural education for social change (Banks, 2008), I question what it is I hoped to achieve with texts.

Karen Spector (2007) describes narrative frames as "a window to the outside, an aperture that may embellish, distort, or obscure from view that which would otherwise be seen differently through another window" (p. 9). These frames are not inherently good or bad, but they offer access to difference. Throughout my teaching I had aligned with Thein and colleagues' (2007) notion that perspective-taking through literature would help the mostly White prospective teachers in my class develop new ways of understanding the world, their experiences, and those of others. This view derives from a sense that empathy can bridge differences. However, in *Empathy and the Novel*, Suzanne Keen (2007) argues that literature has no meaningful connection to empathy or to prosocial action. She makes the point that guided reading like what might occur in classrooms can boost literature's impact in this regard, but ultimately the average American consumers of fiction do not identify with characters different from themselves in ways that inspire readers to act to change the world. Yet the idea that books nurture empathy is still quite common.

Gene Seymour (2017) elaborated this sentiment in a literary review that I read shortly after defending my dissertation proposal. Considering literature's ability to grant White people

access to the pain of racism, he wrote, “Empathy is where most solutions begin regarding problems that are thought to be too abstract or formidable to confront. But empathy requires imagination, and the American psyche insists on seeing imagination as, at best, an indulgence…” (p. A11). His comment resonated with me as an educator on both counts: first, empathy might help us resolve the most difficult conflicts, and second, that the US cares too little about imagination. My inclination to agree became a point of curiosity as well: why did that seem so true to me even though I was aware that empathy is not linked to action, and neither are caused by reading?

Empathy is widely thought of as good. Empathy is to be cultivated, producing good people who care for others. People lament its absence in others. *Empathy* commonly refers to vicarious experiencing or feeling; in contrast to *sympathy*, which relates to feeling badly for others’ suffering. But how has an emotion tied to immediate experience become a moral social good?

The empathy-altruism hypothesis was put forth and tested a generation ago (see Batson, et al., 1988), and it appears to have entered the public discourse. The notion is simple: when people empathize with, they are more likely to help others. It’s logical enough to assume a society of good individuals, defined as those who would help others, would be a good society. Empathy helps to overcome selfishness, and societies function better for it. But is it an outcome of empathy or the ability to overcome selfishness?

Selfishness might be acting in one’s own best interest. However, selfishness can be disguised as altruism. Derrick Bell’s (1980) interest convergence theory indicates, at least in the case of White people regarding *Brown v. Board*, that people act when it’s in their better interest, and not necessarily because it is the right thing to do. His theory suggests that selfish actions can

be made to appear altruistic. People will disguise self-serving actions because *selfish* is a dirty word, even if doesn't always mean that others become victims to your desires. Defining one's best interest in exclusively selfish ways is generally perceived as immoral or bad for society, socio- or psychopathic. Yet these are the values espoused by neoliberal consumer capitalism. Common US ideology labels selfishness *individualism* to help resolve this tension, or it hides selfishness when interests converge.

Empathy might be morally superior to selfishness, but that does not necessarily make it the best framework for social policies or interpersonal relationships, as Paul Bloom argues in a series of essays that coalesced into *Against Empathy* (2016). Jesse Prinz (2011) put forth a similar argument of the same title suggesting that empathy is biased and narrow, and as a result potentially harmful. Bloom (2014) notes "Laboratory studies find that we really do care more about the one than about the mass, so long as we have personal information about the one" (n.p.). Assuming people have more personal information about those close to them, we may tend to feel empathy for those we know, and my concern is this extends to *people like us*.

Bloom's utilitarianist argument for the greater good raises serious questions about empathy used to exclude others—what does it mean to put America first? We might be aware of our globally-entangled existence, yet few policies are made at the supranational level. There is a structural obstacle to empathy being broadly applied through policy in that nation-state governments – like corporations – are inherently insular and selfish, unlikely nor often asked to be empathetic. Bloom (2013) concludes an essay for *The New Yorker* with this consideration:

> Such are the paradoxes of empathy. The power of this faculty has something to do with its ability to bring our moral concern into a laser pointer of focussed attention. If a planet of billions is to survive, however, we'll need to take into consideration the welfare of people not yet harmed—and, even more, of people not yet born. They have no names, faces, or stories to grip our conscience or stir our fellow-feeling. Their prospects call, rather, for deliberation and calculation.

Instead of empathy, he offers compassion: "compassion involves concern and love for your friend, and the desire and motivation to help, but it need not involve mirroring your friend's anguish" (Bloom, 2014, n.p.). So, are we at a semantic impasse, or is there a valid challenge to the primacy of *empathy* in the zeitgeist?

I struggle with whether empathy – truly feeling what another feels – is even possible, or if it echoes the crisis of representation as Patti Lather (2009) suggests, raising concerns about imposed sameness and sentimentalization. Perhaps it's not *empathy* at all that we need to cultivate. Bloom thinks it might be compassion. Seymour (2017), although following the common trend of empathy-appreciation, offers a hint at another idea: imagination. Maybe *empathy* is the trending term, but compassion and imagination are the vital characteristics. But does any of it matter if no action follows?

Ultimately, though, empathy is not useful if it doesn't lead to action to alleviate suffering. "As Mother Teresa put it, 'If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will.'" (Bloom, 2014, n.p.). Without action, empathy offers very little. I want to have the courage to honor and value difference, feel compassion and help others – known, imagined, and unimagined – regardless of my own better interests. I bring this desire to my selection of texts. A text may not change a person for the better, but I believe it can begin a discussion.

II – (RE)CONSIDERING AUTHENTICITY AND INSIDER-AUTHORS IN MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

The normalization of xenophobia in the US and throughout Europe is alarming. As globalization of communication and trade networks blur borders and bring formerly disparate cultures in proximity, a major challenge for contemporary society is to overcome divisive worldviews that lead to violence and inequitable distribution of material resources. As educators take up this task, perhaps inspired by critical approaches to multiculturalism (e.g. McLaren, 1995), they need to foster student dispositions and capacities that can replace exclusionary primary group identification. While deconstruction of problematic worldviews is an initial step, Kathy Short (2017) adds: "Freire makes it clear that we should also be looking for reconstruction…in order to develop counter-narratives, and to offer new possibilities for how to position ourselves in the world" (p. 6). Therefore, teachers would do well to be prepared to reconstitute social narratives that maintain status quo inequities.

Over the Spring and Fall of 2016, concurrent with the divisive US presidential election, I took an explicitly anti-Islamophobic position in teaching a children's literature course as part of a teacher education program at a large Midwest land-grant university. I intended for the undergraduate prospective teachers in the class to envision multicultural education for social change (Nieto, 1992) through the enactment of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). These commitments lead teachers – both me as a teacher educator and the students as prospective teachers – to multicultural literature (ML), a contested term (see Cai, 2003) that I return to in the implications for teacher education.

Teachers selecting ML often intend to provide their students with reading experiences that reflect their lives (a mirror), and that allow them to see other people and worlds (a window) (Bishop, 1990). I am committed to selecting ML that functions as a window for the mostly White prospective teachers in teacher education because they will likely go on to teach in less monocultural environments. In this way, prospective teachers gain experience with unfamiliar texts and characters that may serve as mirrors for their future students. Here, I make a distinction between texts that contribute to teacher preparation and ones that might be used in the classroom. While there is overlap, the purpose of this analysis is not to advocate for using a particular text in K-12 contexts.

As part of my ongoing work as a teacher educator, I explore the pedagogical possibilities of critically engaging a controversial book in which the criteria teachers often use to evaluate multicultural literature begin to break down: Riad Sattouf's (2014/2015) *The Arab of the Future* (*Arab*). I begin by elaborating upon authenticity in/as text selection, specifically regarding authorship. The author of the focal text could be considered an insider, but one who is inside multiple cultures and therefore might also be outside each of them. A critical reading provokes questions about what it means to be an insider and considers the problematic representations of Arabs that may cause teachers to avoid this text. Sattouf is a satirist writing a memoir, but his characters and his humor can be interpreted negatively, and his book dismissed by teachers. My analysis challenges the notion that authentic ML must be written by easily-defined insiders and free from stereotypes—especially in teacher education.

The Author as *Insider*

One part of teacher preparation in children's literature is text selection, which requires consideration of authenticity, "the basic criterion for evaluating multicultural literature" (Cai, 2002, p. 38). Authenticity in ML, like culture itself, is a complex and elusive notion (Fox & Short, 2003). As a result, authenticity is not easily applied as literary evaluation. Selectors of texts (e.g. teachers) would do well to critically undertake their consideration of authentic ML.

The contributors to Dana Fox and Kathy Short's (2003) edited volume understand authenticity as the portrayal of beliefs and values of a culture – not just facts about it – and an accurate depiction of life and language. These academics and children's authors tend to agree that authenticity is not easily defined, and the editors deliberately arrange the chapters to provide a dialogue that encourages text selectors to think critically about authenticity.

An important thread regarding authorship emerges in considering ML authenticity: the question of who has the right to write. As Shelby Wolf and her students (1999) describe, there have generally been two positions taken up in response to this aspect of authenticity. The first proposes that the author's prowess at the craft of writing – or "aesthetic heat" (Wolf, et al., 1999) – allows for the imaginative representation of the unknown. Literary worlds are imagined by readers; thus, authenticity relates to authorial literary world-building that allows for the reader's suspension of disbelief. As such, regardless of an author's cultural identity, it may be possible to authentically depict an un-experienced culture. This premise underlies fiction more broadly: if authors only wrote about what they knew firsthand, literary worlds would be much smaller.

Another position toward authorship believes cultural *insiders* are better positioned to write about the experiences they know firsthand. The location of the author relative to the culture portrayed is thought to be assessable; because cultural outsiders tend to be easily identified, one

might imagine the opposite is also true. Authority is granted based upon insider-status because they know and have lived a culture. One foundation of this position is the belief that outsiders might misrepresent a culture (with plenty of evidence). This stance is further supported by calls to diversify the literary canon used in schools. Even though "gifted, caring, and responsible outsiders can write authentically, we nevertheless need the voice of insiders as well" (Torres, 2016, p. 206). This perspective suggests educators should select literature authored by cultural insiders, and thus diversify students' experiences with window- and mirror-texts (Bishop, 1990).

The exclusivity of the cultural insider can be tempered by a broader understanding of *knowing* a culture. Jacqueline Woodson (2003) includes among insiders those who have experienced the world of those about whom they write (see also Mo & Shen, 1997). Even this expansive notion of a cultural insider remains ill-defined/able, especially for teachers unfamiliar with the culture represented. Elaborating the difficulty of determining an *insider* in her examination of depictions of Muslims in picturebooks, Heidi Torres (2016) found that cultural insiders can more accurately depict a culture, but what it means to be an insider is complicated:

> To be authentic, authors must go beyond surface elements of culture to include ways of thinking, values, beliefs, and norms of behavior. Given the complexity and diversity of experiences within any culture, it is difficult even for cultural insiders to agree on what is considered authentic... (p. 203)

Evaluating authenticity based on insider-authors may not be tenable because culture is not fixed. As a result, labeling an author *inside* a culture may reinforce a binary, categorical worldview, when binaries can be insufficient or problematic.

The perspective that anyone can write about unknown cultures tends to be unpopular because it allows for the continued White male dominance of published/taught literature. Outsider-authored ML may exploit the represented groups and may be inaccurate. As a result, educators turn to the other option: stories authored by insiders. The assumption is that these will

not be problematic. However, the insider-author is capable of both troublesome and inaccurate depictions. While broader cultural representation in authorship remains necessary, especially for teachers selecting texts, the *insider* label can manifest as cultural essentialization.

Ultimately, authorship straddles text and context, two components of the experience of reading (with readers being a third). One perception of reading, as Lawrence Sipe (1999) notes, is that "meaning resides not in the author's intentions (nor in the text itself)" (p. 121). Many factors contribute to the world in which the reader reads. Regardless of the author's location relative to the depicted culture, there are other factors contributing to the meaning a reader derives from an encounter with literature, such as their lived experiences and encounters with other texts. Teachers might also consider how reading evokes meaning-making and make this a central part of text selection and evaluation.

Purpose and Questions

Arab may be controversial because it contains negative representations of Muslims. There are many reasons to avoid such representations, for instance, to interrupt their perpetuation. However, another outcome of avoidance is ignorance of troubling narratives. Ignoring stereotypical representations prevents educators from confronting them and their sources, and erases opportunities to provide counternarratives.

In her review for *The New York Times*, Leila Lalami claims Sattouf's representations may do "little to complicate most people's perceptions" (Lalami, 2015, n.p.) of the Arab world. She focuses on Riad's father, Abdul, the primary Arab character. Western readers are likely to agree with Lalami's (2015) observation, "The portrait Riad Sattouf draws…is far from flattering… [nearly] the cliché of the Arab brute" (n.p.). If cliché stereotypical representations do not

complicate our perceptions, then the stereotype must already be (in) our perception. This existing belief needs to be challenged by complicating the acceptance of the stereotype. Pedagogical choices to accompany these representations can create possibilities to interfere with unquestioned ideologies. However, avoiding a text like this and the discussions that can emerge through a critical reading, may close opportunities to question the broader social narratives of stereotyping that make this text *uncomplicating*.

I found the text complicating, especially regarding my notion of how texts can operate in teacher preparation. To dislike and to take as representative a character like Abdul might incline a reader toward negative impressions of Arabs, but without a context for his development I was making assumptions and generalizations about him. I wondered whether *the text* was the primary source of the changes a reader might undergo when encountering a text, and whether that depended on the reader or context. When considering authenticity, I imagine critical analysis – the reading and contextualizing – can transcend problematic representations found in the text. As a result, I pursued the following questions through a critical reading of this text:

1. How is the implied reader discursively positioned in *Arab*?
2. In what ways, if at all, might the text reify or reinforce (or undermine) Western stereotypes of Muslims in readers/readings?

Theoretical Framework

Because I situate *Arab* as children's literature (I return to this), I consider how children's literature functions ideologically. I then overlay postcolonial criticism and a framework for understanding difference through Othering to situate this ideological inquiry.

The subject position of the implied reader provides a theoretical framework to approach content analysis. Robyn McCallum and John Stephens (2011) elaborate the entanglement of texts and ideologies, providing an understanding of texts and their relationship to ideology:

> all aspects of textual discourse, from story outcomes to the expressive forms of language, are informed and shaped by ideology, understanding ideology in its neutral meaning of a system of beliefs which a society shares and uses to make sense of the world and which are therefore immanent in the texts produced by that society. (p. 360)

Beliefs, discourses, and social relationships are entangled, and children's literature is both a product and producer of culture. The authors go on to specify that texts serve social functions and contain "an assumption that writer and implied reader share a common understanding of value" (McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p. 360). Social values can establish and be established by the subject positions available in a text, including the implied reader. McCallum and Stephens (2011) explain "subject positions implied within texts...inevitably seek...reader alignment with or against the social attitudes and relationships that constitute the narrative" (p. 362). Clare Bradford (2017) similarly notes, "readers are positioned to align themselves with protagonists and hence to acquiesce to textual ideologies" (p. 20). In other words, the implied reader subject position indicates the values the author assumes as shared with the reader and often conveys through the protagonist—and in some cases, deliberately satirizes to engage the reader in questions about these values.

In addition to the implied reader, subjectivity shapes how people understand difference. Western individuality centers human experience around the Self, delineating an identity through exclusion of the not-Self, or Other (Derrida, 1976). While perhaps inescapable, Othering (re)produces binary thinking: us and them. Acknowledging difference in itself is not objectively wrong, and it can be good at times; however, crossing over into stereotyping is troublesome. *Stereotyping* is when an image of the group becomes the identity of those within the group,

erasing other characteristics; broad narratives replace individuals (Bhabha, 2012). The White Western worldview (and those Othered by it) learns to notice the differences that set Others apart, and often uses these images as the basis for exclusion and inequitable social practices, consciously or otherwise. Accessing multiple narratives could presumably work against stereotyping by challenging the image.

Specifically, postcolonial criticism reveals the Western construction of an Othered Arab world in relation to a normalized Europe. For instance, the hijab is often taken up by the West as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women, while Western women's fashion is decoupled from its patriarchal roots. Edward Said (1978) deconstructs how the West created the Orient as an object of study. The construction of cultural distinction serves to locate the Orient outside the normalcy of the West and has the capacity for stereotyping and division—traditionally used to bolster White supremacist narratives. Bhabha (2012) suggests that culture can be liminal, and his notions of ambivalence and mimicry challenge the neat categorization of culture that emerges from Western Othering. When binary categories break down, so do the grand narratives that uphold Western exceptionalism. Gayatri Spivak (1988) similarly argues that Europe constructs itself as the "Subject" of the modern world, that which gives shape to the non-European world, but one that cannot exist without the Other. Further, according to Norbert Elias (1982), Europe is made to appear as an achieved state of civilization, one which cultural Others have yet to attain, establishing a sense of progress with the West as its terminal. The identity of the West is in part built upon a devaluation of Others.

When readers (un)consciously hold these views – that Arabs are inherently different and lesser, or the West is the benchmark of progress – stereotypical representations that appear in controversial texts may be difficult to confront. Othering erases nuanced Arab identities in favor

of stereotypes and makes invisible the subject who constructs and erases. As a result, texts may not complicate the views of readers aligned with the implied reader; further engagement with context can facilitate complication.

Methods

This study emerges from my work as an instructor of a children's literature course for undergraduate education majors. I interrogate a text to explore the possibility of meaning-making to enact social change. To that end, I use critical content analysis to contextualize and consider *The Arab of the Future* (Sattouf, 2014/2015).

Critical reading can be practiced by readers, applied pedagogically, and provide the framework for a critical content analysis. This approach "involves bringing a critical lens to an analysis of a text...to explore the possible underlying messages within those texts, particularly as related to issues of power" (Short, 2017, p. 6). For some, critical approaches are used to deconstruct a text, but I use texts to engage in social criticism: deconstructing and reconstituting. Like Short (2017), I begin from the notion of critical as "a stance of locating power in social practices in order to challenge conditions of inequity" (p. 1). Identifying the West as privileged in a binary of its own construction, I believe teachers and researchers have an ethical responsibility to reject the ideologies that support inequity by offering alternate narratives.

Arab as Children's Literature

Set in the late 1970s, Sattouf (the author) recounts his early childhood (as Riad the character), told through the story of his father, Abdul-Razak al Sattouf[1]. After receiving his

[1] Sattouf uses Abdul (p. 2) and Abdel (p. 6), though this second reference could be contextually interpreted as incorrect. Both can be transliterated from the Arabic name عبد. I use Abdul throughout.

doctorate in history from the Sorbonne, Abdul, a Syrian, takes his family – his French wife Clementine, and Riad, their son – from France to Libya then Syria to pursue his academic career and dreams of realizing pan-Arabism. Riad's childhood provides glimpses into his father's ideological journey of alternating admiration and disillusionment with each nation and its leader, never far from Sattouf's skepticism and satire. Parallel to his father's arc, Riad makes friends and meets bullies while trying to make sense of a changing world, often looking to Abdul for guidance as Abdul looks to national leaders; rarely do either receive it.

Despite not having been written specifically for children, I consider Sattouf's graphic memoir within the genre of children's literature. Children's literature is ideological and expresses an author's understanding of society via the assumptions and desires expressed regarding children. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer (2003) define this distinct genre by some shared characteristics, like focalization and narrative structure. "Children's books tend to...be focalized through children or childlike characters" (p. 208), and Nodelman (2008) later claims this "marks a text...as one intended for child readers" (p. 19). *Arab* is primarily focalized through Riad, the child-character, suggesting its inclusion in the genre.

Children's stories often follow some variation of the home-and-away narrative structure (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003): born in France, Riad goes away to Libya and Syria, and returns home to France. The theme of home and away also serves to locate oppositional binaries, like boredom/excitement or civilized/barbaric (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003), indicating an understanding of the world as divided between the normalcy of home and the strangeness of away. Those residing in the away are Othered (Derrida, 1976) by their difference from home and the implied reader, but when characters return home, it often appears changed. The recognition

of difference everywhere – home as well as away – is a necessary step to move past the binaries of Othering, for characters and readers alike.

Selecting the Text

I included *Arab* in a set of global books as part of a children's literature course for undergraduate prospective teachers specializing in global education. Having used translated graphic memoirs in the past (Abirached, 2007/2012; Satrapi, 2000/2003), I sought another to stay contemporary. I selected this text set to explore literary representations of Arab and Muslim experiences—two identities often entangled and conflated by outsiders.

I initially selected global books based on insider authorship, though I frame these books as outside students' experiences: I want students to become comfortable reading and selecting window-texts (Bishop, 1990). In a course text, *Reading Globally, K-8*, Barbara Lehman and colleagues (2010) define global books as "international either by topic or origin of publication or author" (p. 17). I desired multiple representations (see Gibson & Parks, 2014), and thus considered the presence of stereotypes in any individual text as an entry to discussing cultural representation, not a reason to censor a text. Because *Arab* contains what can be considered stereotypical representations, class discussion surfaced beliefs worth interrogating, making the text pedagogically valuable for preparing teachers.

Researcher Subject Position

I read *Arab* as a window-text because I am an outsider. I have spent most of my adult life living outside the US, including in the Middle East, but I do not know the world, cultures, or era that Sattouf portrays. I have learned from my experiences that a single narrative does not

represent a culture, and the recognition of being an outsider forces me to make more of an effort to understand what is being portrayed. Through critical reading and content analysis, I connect cultural representations to a continued search for knowledge, justice, and community.

Regarding the multiple roles teacher-researchers hold, Short (2017) explains: "Critical content analysis is embedded in a tension, a compelling interest in exploring texts around a focus that matters to the researcher and, because we are educators, that matters to young people as readers" (p. 7). I designed the course section and selected the texts in critical response to growing xenophobic sentiment in the US manifested as Islamophobia. Whether this is a priority for young people – and this is where I might diverge from Short – is less relevant than if prospective teachers see it as a priority after the course. This is to say my role as a teacher educator cannot simply be compartmentalized. Short (2017) describes a difference between teacher researchers and other scholars, claiming "our intentions as researchers differ in significant ways because of our commitment to, and knowledge of, children, adolescents, teachers and classrooms" (p. 2). Likewise, I cannot disentangle my research from my desire to prepare teachers who will enact critical readings and dialogue in their future classrooms.

Readings

Although Short (2017) imagines the "first step of analysis is immersion as a reader, rather than as a researcher, in the identified texts" (p. 8), I first read as a teacher. I selected *Arab* as a course text, reading it before the semester. My initial reading was personal, but I was deeply engaged pedagogically, considering what content, contexts, and perspectives were made available. Specifically, the settings in *Arab* – France, Libya, and Syria – stood out to me as ways to connect literature to global events.

My "second" reading, as a researcher, occurred after the course; though I had engaged with the text multiple times in the interim throughout the course. I read specifically for focalization, social processes, and closure (Short, 2017, p. 11). Because I noticed a cultural dichotomy, postcolonial criticism informed my third reading, which "focuses on broad themes or issues that emerge from the interplay of data and theory" (Short, 2017, p. 12). I considered how progress was entangled with Eurocentrism, and referred to book reviews (Atassi, 2016; Lalami, 2015; Shatz, 2015) to understand wider social response as represented in mainstream media. I present my findings in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

I include as part of my findings a bottom-up analysis and top-down framing of the text (Bradford, 2017). I begin with a text-level examination to explore the subject position of the implied reader, highlighting representations and stereotypes that situate this text as problematic. The focus is on Abdul, the primary Arab character. How readers may be positioned to view him – as a representation of the Arab of the Past – uncovers problems associated with an unquestioned alignment with the implied reader. Abdul's expressed stereotypes compel the implied reader to dislike him (and find this text unacceptable for classroom use), but readers' classification of Abdul *as* a stereotype instead of a character is problematic. Readers can avoid viewing Abdul as representative of Arabs, by acknowledging him as a single character that adds texture and nuance to a complex culture, which, like all cultures, contains some negativity as well.

Critical reading also utilizes a top-down understanding to place a text within a social and historical context, much like how texts can be used in classrooms. I situate *Arab* within more

expansive textual and contextual webs, intending to support an approach to critical reading that relies less exclusively on the text itself.

The Arab and the Implied Reader

Riad's initial presentation as stereotypically European – blonde hair, "refined and delicate" (p. 3) – challenges the reader to view him as Arab at all, yet in the final line of dialogue Abdul refers to Riad as "the Arab of the future" (p. 153). Left unspoken, but present nonetheless is the Arab of the past: perhaps Abdul, who earns a doctorate in history (p. 6). The story is focalized through Riad, positioning the implied reader to observe Abdul without necessarily understanding his motivations except as mediated through his son, a character equated with the West.

Abdul's expressed beliefs are accessible and obvious, and he affirms the privilege of the West. Abdul thinks "France is wonderful" (p. 5) as he pursues his degree. During this time, he elaborates a vision for the future derived from a Western notion of progress: "I would change everything in the Arab world. I'd make them stop being such bigots, get educated and join the modern world" (p. 5). Arabs, bigoted and uneducated, have yet to progress to the developed state of the West. This troubling perspective introduces the binaries of Western Othering—but this practice is not likely what readers will question.

Hypocrisy, often utilized in satire, is Abdul's most obvious characteristic, and his desire to rid Arabs of their bigotry is a clear example. In Libya, Abdul reads Gaddafi's Green Book, giving voice to his resentment of colonialism and White supremacy. In the following panel, however, Abdul is upset that Gaddafi "thinks Arabs are black" (p.15). His critique of the West is interrupted by his desire to distance himself from Others perceived as less. Abdul's racism

emerges more intensely when he equates monkeys with "Africans. They're completely black with big thick lips and curly hair…" (p. 38). Abdul's abrasive personality undercuts any consideration of Western oppressive policies. At Clementine's insistence, Abdul reluctantly tells Riad, "Some of them [Africans] are nice" (p. 38), but his message indicates his skepticism. Riad then notices the monkey character "looked a lot like my father" (p. 39). Even though this comment erases the distinction between Black and Arab constructed by Abdul, it does so in favor of a Eurocentric model of Othering that categorizes both as animal, and unlike White Europeans.

A similar conversation Abdul has with Riad is about Jews. Because Riad has blonde hair, he is often referred to as "Yahudi" (Jew) by his Syrian peers, a product of nationalist propaganda against Israel. For contemporary Western audiences, anti-Semitism is among the worst forms of bigotry, and Abdul further entrenches himself as a pariah, saying, "The Jews are our enemies. They're occupying Palestine. They're the worst race in the world…" (p. 133). Again, Clementine disagrees with the "total crap" he is telling Riad. The text offers binary positions toward bigotry: the Arab racist hatred of Others, and the Western (distant) compassion toward Others. The implied reader holds the modern, Western perspective, and by contrast the Arab of the past holds different, lesser values. This dichotomy obscures how the West perpetuates racism.

Abdul became disenchanted with the West, his exodus from Europe precipitated by institutional racism (his degree without the highest honors, and a job offer misspelling his name, p. 6). He recognizes that to be an Arab in the West is always to be Other. Justifiably, he harbors resentment: "Westerners think the whole world should be exactly like them… Just because they're the most powerful… But that's only temporary" (p. 151). His desire to become modern equates to a desire for Western-ness, and this causes him to disdain his own culture's lack of progress while also hating the West for its inaccessibility. While his views of his own culture are

troubling, the racism that he experiences fails to garner more sympathy because the implied reader is set to respond to *his* bigotry—the image of the bigoted Arab overrides his identity, his humanity.

Abdul's initial desire to educate bigoted Arabs remains unchanged throughout the story despite his changing views toward the West. Abdul reasserts his perspective in a dinner conversation with his French in-laws toward the end of the book:

> "You have to be tough with [Arabs]. You have to force them to get an education, make them go to school… If they decide for themselves, they do nothing. They're lazy-ass bigots, even though they have the same potential as everyone else…" (p. 150)

Persistent deprecation could incline the implied reader toward believing him, but Abdul is both bigoted and educated. For the implied reader, his contradictory qualities call into question whether progress is even possible. Abdul's characteristics challenge the binary he sets up as the difference between Arabs and the West, a vital deconstruction perhaps lost to readers in his cantankerousness.

Abdul's desire for and rejection of the West are at the center of his struggles. He desires Western modernity, but he cannot be Western, despite his efforts, because he is marked as Arab, as Other, not of the West. The resulting resentment he has for both Arabs and the West is difficult to reconcile, and the implied reader is not encouraged to sympathize with Abdul and his identity tension. To focus on the stereotypes Abdul expresses is to overlook his experience as a stereotype in the West, and ultimately to disregard the most poignant critique of the West. The Arab of the past has no place in the world, so readers are positioned to align with Riad, the Arab of the future—but how are readers meant to understand this future Arab?

One possibility is that Abdul is referring to Riad's generation, but this is troubling. Out for a walk in Syria, Abdul beats three kids who tease Riad. Abdul refers to these uneducated

young Syrians as “Stupid filthy Arab retards!” (p. 91). These children provide an alternative definition of the Arab of the future, different from Western, educated Riad. The implied reader might consider two models of future Arabs: those who maintain the un/educated, bigoted, uncivilized traditions of lazy Arabs (p. 101), and those who assimilate into the West, leaving behind Arab culture except the occasional taste for unrecognizable food (p. 79).

A critical reading of this text provides a context to explore how Western media affirms this binary, providing an entry point to understanding the work teachers could do toward social change. We might begin to ask why the West requires Others to be less than or to assimilate, and what this means for understanding insider authors who may be pressured to assimilate to be published; or how these narratives uphold certain values over others. Validation of these models is not of curricular value but examining the Western narrative that constructs them is. The construction of an Arab of the past meets the expectations of a Western audience even if what Abdul says might inflame their liberal, tolerant sensibilities. The alignment with the implied reader subject position can provoke readers’ curiosity about their beliefs, not just animosity toward the beliefs of a dislikable character.

Taking Abdul’s depiction as representation – to see Abdul as more than the story of one character – is troubling: “Sattouf…seemed to want people to read as little into his work as possible and insisted that his project was to write about his childhood in a remote village, not about Syria, much less about the Arab world” (Shatz, 2015, n.p.). Thus, the implied reader might understand Sattouf’s account of his father – “a man he once worshipped but came to despise” (Shatz, 2015, n.p.) – not as representative of Arab men. The scathing portrait of his father is meant only as that, not to be understood by readers as *the* narrative of Arabs. However, Adam Shatz (2015) points out, “Sattouf didn’t call the book ‘The Boy from Ter Maaleh’; he called it

'The Arab of the Future'" (n.p.). With such a title, the implied reader is positioned to take this story as representative, considering everything Abdul says to be racist and stereotypical while ignoring the systemic injustices that he is victimized by and fights against. As a result, the text calls for further contextualization to consider its contemporary social importance. This contextualization is where I locate the potential for change in the reader's (i.e., prospective teachers) views and actions.

Arab in a Xenophobic West

Recently, a few popular graphic memoirs about childhoods in the Middle East translated from French have been critically well-received in the US: Marjene Satrapi's (2000/2003) *Persepolis* recounts her rebellious youth in Tehran during Islamic Revolution; Zeina Abirached's (2007/2012) *A Game for Swallows* relates the stresses of a community living through the Lebanese Civil War; and Sattouf (2014/2015) retells his transient years following his father from France to Libya and Syria in the time of Pompidou, Gaddafi, and Hafez al-Assad.

These graphic novels were contemporaneous with Muslim outrage at cartoon depictions of the prophet Muhammed, highly publicized in the Western media. These provocations led to attacks in the Netherlands and in France, where these graphic memoirs were first published. The satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was targeted in a well-known attack, and Sattouf was once a cartoonist for the publication, though his relationship with the magazine was professional, not political (Shatz, 2015). In this context, the graphic novel becomes a symbol of free speech and artistic expression – values associated with Western democracies – in opposition to traditional (i.e. yet to achieve modernity) censorship by the Othered Muslim extremist. Although these stories are perhaps more different than they are the same, in common they represent the Middle

East and Middle Eastern characters to a Western audience from the perspective of an insider-author who left the Middle East for the West; they might all be described as authentic.

The authenticity of these cartoonists' stories is thought to be inscribed in their identities, but labeling authors *insiders* can be reductive. Sattouf recounts being named the Arab of the future by his father, despite reader alignment to identify Riad more with the West than with Abdul's Arab world: he is out of place in the Middle East, both in his and others' perception, but he fits in easily in France. The notion that he is an Arab insider is troubled by his own story, yet his insider status is imposed from without. Further, Sattouf resists cultural and national labels in referring to himself (Shatz, 2015). Readers encountering insider-authored texts may imagine them to be authentic, thus accurate and unproblematic – in many cases they may be – but the insider label is a product of a categorical worldview grounded in Othering that can disregard the author's identity.

It might be challenging to *not* consider Sattouf an insider of his own memoir, but that is distinct from labeling him an insider of a culture. Perhaps his ability to both claim and distance himself from his Arab identity, muddying the waters for determining his insider-ness, creates the controversy elaborated by Yves Gonzalez-Quijano (quoted in Shatz, 2015):

> Because he's part Arab, everything he says becomes acceptable, including the most atrociously racist things. What he's written is very personal, a kind of self-analysis, really. But this analysis has entered a very public arena, in a totally explosive context that's much larger than he is. (n.p.)

If Sattouf were not Arab at all, the assumption is his work would not be acceptable. The trouble is that in the West (1) insider-authors, a label imposed from without, seem to be given carte blanche to represent a group if it is Othered by the West, and (2) readers may not critically engage the text, perhaps accepting these representations as typical or resisting them as stereotypical.

The authors of these graphic memoirs may not intend to represent a group, but their Western readers seem to impose it. These authors' representations are far from ideologically neutral: their memories, like many immigrant narratives, teeter between fond longing for a lost culture and anger at the forces that displaced them. Robyn McCallum and John Stephens (2011) argue that literary discourse "serves to produce, reproduce, and challenge ideologies" (p. 370), and readers perceive no author bias when the ideology aligns with their own. Perhaps Western audiences want these authors to be "inside" another culture because their texts align with Western values, affirming the West and its worldview from outside, the Other. Especially relevant in these graphic memoirs, the "interplay of overt and invisible ideologies is most evident in realist texts which thematize social issues, especially in representation of bodies and behavior marked by…race/ethnicity" (McCullum & Stephens, 2011, p. 370). If Sattouf is inside another culture, his representations are viewed as accurate, but the invisibility of his Western-ness only serves to reinforce a Western view of the Other. Representations of Arabs in literature can socialize Western readers into ideologies that conform to or interfere with the dominant Western narratives and beliefs. The West needs to be mindful of how the practice of labeling authors "insiders" can also make invisible the Western ideologies to which these texts conform.

In terms of Sattouf's representations, readers must be careful of how representative they imagine characters to be. Clearly, the stereotypes that emerge from Abdul are problematic, but a desire to limit stereotypes might assume texts have fixed meanings, influenced by their authors, where readers have little agency. In contrast, Nader Atassi (2016) places responsibility on the audience:

> *The Arab of the Future* can be read in many ways. In certain contexts and by certain audiences, it would be read simply as a scathing critique of Arab politics and society. Its cartoonish—verging on Orientalist—depiction of Arabs as anti-Semitic, sectarian, unclean, and submissive to authoritarianism doesn't exactly help combat long-held

> western stereotypes about Arabs. If anything, this graphic memoir may simply serve to reinforce existing prejudices regarding Arab 'backwardness.' (n.p.)

Readers make meaning from cultural representations, yet the expectation is for the author to produce accurate, stereotype-free material. Culturally and especially within education, the West insists upon positive representations by authors despite long-held stereotypes going unaddressed among readers. Palestine's ambassador to UNESCO, Elias Sanbar reiterates the importance of reader responsibility: "The problem isn't Sattouf, who has written a funny and sympathetic book. It's the readers who think they've understood a society as complex as Syria because they've read a single comic book" (quoted in Shatz, 2015, n.p.). Readers making the leap from a single, problematic narrative representation to cultural understanding are mistaken, and this indicates the need for critical reading. The purpose of critically reading multicultural literature is not to understand the Other, but to engage in dialogue around the very controversies that emerge from/in these texts.

Although many Syrians in France "vouched for the accuracy of Sattouf's depiction" (Shatz, 2015, n.p.), readers would do well to be careful about how they take up this knowledge. Even if *Arab* contains accurate cultural representations, it will not provide readers with a complete understanding of Syria or Syrian culture, Arabs, Muslims, France, or Libya. An authentic text may, to an outsider, seem to be how it is, especially when the author is labeled "insider." To understand culture takes more than a single book. Atassi (2016) explains that "Sattouf leaves out causality" as the story explores the political and social failures of Arabs, and "absent political and economic factors to explain social failure, the book lends itself to culturalist explanations" (n.p.), which is where responsible readers could, and teachers can intervene. His conclusion resonates with what teachers can assume as a guiding principle of critical pedagogy, the need for critical reading with social contextualization:

> Sattouf presents a portrait of Arab society and politics that must be reckoned with. These are undeniable historical failures that cannot be written off as mere dishonesty pandering to western Orientalists. But societies that are broken and divided do not emerge in a vacuum. Political authoritarianism, economic catastrophe and underdevelopment, as well as the dependency wrought by imperialism have wide-ranging effects on social cohesion and resilience. It is within this context that Sattouf's portrayal of the failure of Arab societies must be understood. (n.p.)

Providing this broader understanding to critically engage dominant Western narratives is how teachers begin to change ideologies.

Implications for Teacher Education

Multicultural teacher education takes several forms with a variety of goals, but Paul C. Gorski (2009) notes that course syllabi indicate a tendency "to focus on celebrating diversity or understanding the cultural 'other'" (p. 309). The latter aims for understanding to reduce that which *we* don't understand about *them* and perpetuates the Western ideological tendency toward Othering. The former, a pedagogical focus on celebration, suggests literature should be free from negative stereotypes. Teachers learn to select texts without stereotypical representations written by insiders with the intention to learn about *them*, comfortable that their selections are unproblematic.

Authenticity has come to mean positive representations in multicultural education, but authenticity can be negative, identities are always multiple, and representations are rarely generalizable. Authenticity is more complicated than the *insider* label. Authenticity is only somewhat and imperfectly measurable, but the practice of evaluating texts around authenticity, authorship, and stereotypes imagines it differently. While multicultural literature provides students of a variety of cultures with opportunities to experience texts as mirrors and windows

(Bishop, 1990), some of these texts can contain problematic cultural representations. I believe teachers' efforts to avoid these texts are misguided.

A first step toward social change is for teachers to include books written by authors from a range of cultural backgrounds, but labeling an author "insider" does little to break down binary categorizations derived from Othering. Othering leads readers toward understanding any representation of culture as typical and universal.

As a result, I propose that multicultural literature be understood as a body of work that represents the multiple experiences of a diverse population, not taken as representative. It is difficult to apply the label *multicultural* to any single text because it functions differently than other categorical labels. For instance, *children's literature* can be applied to an individual text given that it meets certain criteria (see Nodelman, 2008). Individual literary works can only be *multicultural literature* in relation to other texts in a set: applying *ML* to a single text absent from its relative position in a broader canon or text set stems from an identification of its characters' or author's non-mainstream identities—Othering (Derrida, 1976) despite the intentions of the labeler. A distinction emerges from how we might imagine texts operating in a class of culturally diverse students: texts and authors could be *representational* of the diversity of a classroom or society (about the presence of difference) as opposed to *representative* of a culture (about essentializing and making Others knowable). While this notion of multicultural literature as a body of work begins to move away from essentializing and stereotyping, text selection is only part of a teacher's work.

Readers' practices can be more powerful than the representations themselves: readers might evaluate in comparison to the normalcy of their own experience, viewing culture as static, understanding representations as typical; or they understand a representation as one story of

many, that may share some qualities with other characters in other stories. A book is by no means representative of an entire culture, just as its author cannot be either. Instead of censoring controversial texts, teacher educators might encourage a practice of engaging with cultural representations through critical content analysis and critical reading in the classroom (Johnson, et al., 2017). A starting point may be to move away from authenticity as a measure of quality, or to redefine it so as insider-authors are not so central.

Conclusion

This critical content analysis highlights the pedagogical value of confronting problematic representations through complex social contextualization. When evaluating multicultural literature for use in a children's literature course with prospective teachers, critical dialogue (inclusive of perspectives and broader contextualization) is more valuable than non-confrontation with difficult knowledge, even if readers feel apprehensive about such engagement. It is far easier to categorize multicultural literature as good or bad – defining "good" as authentic, insider-authored, stereotype-free – but teacher educators might also consider the educative value of texts that meet some of these criteria, and ones that trouble either/or binaries of quality.

Arab is a memoir, and thus has authenticity, but perhaps not relative to a static notion of monolithic culture. Sattouf is a Western Arab, inside multiple cultures and therefore outside each of them, complicating the notion of *insider author*. While in- and outside both worlds, he can write as an insider while also Othering the Arab world. With a text like this, prospective teachers can engage in the dialogue about what it means to be an *insider* or not, and consider how stereotypes emerge in literature to support or undermine beliefs held widely in society. Such

inquiry cannot be achieved solely through consideration of author and text: context requires greater elaboration.

Using complicating texts that contain negative portrayals, some readers from dominant groups will find their stereotypes reinforced while other attentive readers will be disturbed. Critical perspectives, like postcolonialism's challenges to Western Othering, are necessary to surface deeper cultural beliefs about stereotypes held by Sattouf, the students, and me (i.e., authors and readers). Without examining stereotyping, we (Westerners) maintain privilege and power, accepting the image as identity of all the non-Western, non-White Others; perhaps especially when these stereotypes are authored by those we label *inside* another culture. A postcolonial lens calls into question Western normalcy and challenges us to scrutinize the ethics of our reading of text and context.

Controversial texts can help prospective teachers recognize troubling perspectives, but engaging affirming multicultural literature will not offer similar opportunities. Narratives like *Arab* shift value from authenticity to the practice of reading—something teachers might influence. How readers engage with the text will determine if they view representations as conclusive, or as an entry to critical dialogue.

INTERLUDE – READER BELIEFS AND DIFFERENCE

I often hear White American students say a book is not *relatable* when the characters and events are culturally different. I also hear them assert that "all people are equal," as if those unrelatable characters are no different from themselves. Statements like these arise in my children's literature course for prospective teachers, and they strike me as problematic because the discourse is dissociative, relying upon a morality that does not require recognition of difference. It's as if to say, *I don't need to acknowledge you because I already know we're the same*. The unrelatable-ness of the book is an excuse that assumes there is nothing to be done. The discourse shuts down investigation, and the default belief that *all lives matter* prevails.

I am concerned that these discourses conceal themselves as morally defensible, though I believe they are unethical because they silence. Freire's (2000) notion of dialogue is built upon trust, respect, and love, wherein participants embrace uncertainty and strive to transcend limiting situations, and new knowledge may be created. *Equality* is only the starting point from which dialogue can take place, but it appears to be an ending in the context of my course (and White America). I hope to cause interference to discourses that legitimize a disposition toward equality that allows, promotes, and strategizes silence among readers about difference.

These student responses are of interest to me because I intentionally select texts that are culturally distant, unrelatable by design. I hope for students to join me in a reading practice that follows Nodelman (2008), who describes his reading as emerging from his life on the margins:

> My reading practices focus on thoughtful response and critical thinking. Perhaps I am merely unable to respond either as insiders naturally do, with relatively thoughtless involvement, or as complete outsiders do, with absolute objectivity. I then privilege my inability as a goal for others to aspire to. (p. 89)

I aspire toward reading, teaching, and living a little less comfortably in the mainstream, embracing the margins. I hope for students to do the same in my course.

In the preceding chapter, I justify text selection by engaging in critical reading, but each semester brings different students and my work begins anew. This recurrence is both the most promising and most frustrating part of teaching: I can hone my craft with each repetition, yet sometimes it can feel Sisyphean.

As a teacher educator, I frame my claims to knowledge within my teaching practice. I define teaching as recursive and reflexive. It includes teacher inquiry in dialogue with students through their written work and in-class interactions across time. I adapt during a course to the evolving context, and I examine the past to inform the future. How I come to understand it as teaching or learning, or both, is at the center of my next chapter, in which I trace my trajectory over two semesters as a learning-teacher. I make the claim that teaching improves through continued inquiry. I further stress that teachers would do well to not measure their ability to teach solely based on the learning outcomes of the students in their class.

While I began this work as an investigation into readers, I quickly came to find that learning was unpredictable, and that readers' outcomes were not replicable—if that is desirable. There is no universal *reader* about whom I can make claims that hold true for all readers. What claims could I make regarding readers that would be of value the next time that I taught the course with a different group of students? How would these claims, as representations, be of any use to other teacher educators in different contexts? Could I possibly represent students as readers in ways that honored their multiple selves?

I wondered about these questions in consideration of the partiality of knowledge and came to believe I should avoid making claims about learners or learning, especially if I want to

know more about teaching. That reality is not discouraging. It makes me curious. The nature of our knowledge and our universe is uncertain: “Some of the uncertainty rests in ignorance of the many factors that contribute to complex processes… yet some is due to the role of chance or chaos affecting the process itself” (Mitchell, 2009, pp. 3-4). We can build our knowledge of contributing factors by investigating our actions and adapting them to meet our goals more effectively—but this cannot necessarily be said about influencing others.

To achieve a stance that encourages a more just world, I believe people can examine themselves to know themselves to whatever degree that might be possible. Knowledge of self can help equip us to better interact with others for mutually beneficial ends. Heidegger (2010) would refer to this knowledge of self as living authentically. I believe one can begin to know oneself well, and in the next chapter I explore myself as a teacher in greater detail.

III – CRITICALLY TEACHING CRITICALITY?: MODELING SOCIAL AND PEDAGOGICAL INQUIRY WITH LITERARY TEXTS

This chapter is derived from an Accepted Manuscript of an article (McCarthy, 2018) published online by Taylor & Francis in Studying Teacher Education *on 14 March 2018. The Version of Record is available online at:* http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17425964.2018.1449103.

> Obviously if we are to have teachers who are change agents, we must also have teacher educators who are prepared to be the same. Conceptualizing the education of teacher educators as a process of continual and systematic inquiry wherein participants question their own and others' assumptions and construct local as well as public knowledge appropriate to the changing contexts in which they work provides a way to think about it as a process of change. In this sense, the education of teacher educators from an inquiry stance can be understood as playing a significant part in the future of society.
>
> But...*un*learning is also a significant part of the process of inquiry, especially when groups are trying to interrogate their own assumptions about race and racism, social justice, and what it means to succeed or fail as teachers. The word, *un*learning, signifies both growth and the undoing or reversing of that growth. This contradiction is intentional, chosen to signal not only the potential but also the enormous complexity inherent in the ongoing education of teacher educators.
>
> —Marilyn Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 25

If formal education is entangled with a society's desires for its adult members (i.e. citizens), teacher education provides an opportunity to examine social and personal values, explicit and implicit, and their implementation through teaching and curriculum. Teacher education can be introspective for both teacher educators and prospective teachers; a process of inquiry into what and how we teach and why. Inquiry as a stance, free from time-bounded projects, enriches teaching, schooling, and education (Cochran-Smith, 2003). The autobiographical method of *currere* (Pinar, 2004) – one imagining of an inquiry stance – is "one of subjective risk and social reconstruction" in which "teachers remember the past and imagine

the future" (p. 4). Such inquiry consists of, according to Pinar (2004), complicated conversations we have with ourselves, history, society, people.

These conversations are difficult yet hopeful: despite structural limits, teachers have agency to influence individuals and society. Teacher educators and prospective teachers can examine personal and societal values and build a disposition toward (re)shaping the world. This self-study explores my teaching of critical literacies as part of a children's literature course for pre-practicum prospective teachers. I examine my pedagogy of creative interference: I remember my teaching to help me better meet my ethical commitment to social change as I imagine the future. I use inquiry to explore and perhaps justify this ethical stance, understanding inquiry into prospective teacher development as only part of a teacher educator's work.

A vital continuation comes through the (*un*)learning of teacher educators, including less-frequently researched graduate student teacher educators (Cochran-Smith, 2003). I share this inquiry to participate in the complicated conversations of teacher education. Teacher educators have many commitments: to content, to schools, to stakeholders, to name a few. The ethical commitment driving this project derives from a notion of education for social change (Nieto, 1992). Part of this work includes a vision of social justice. Ken Zeichner (2006) explains "advocates for teacher education for social justice have emphasized the development of sociocultural consciousness and intercultural teaching competence among prospective teachers so that they will be prepared to teach...increasingly diverse students" (p. 328). In this approach to teacher education, a central purpose is to develop capacities and dispositions among prospective teachers, particularly regarding how they navigate intercultural interactions.

Following my description of the purpose of this project, I elaborate a US-based context of teacher education that aims for social change through building prospective teachers' capacity for

and disposition toward culturally responsive teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), commonly through literature and reflective practices. In this context, prospective teacher transformation is often prioritized over teacher educators' reflexive examination. While these intentions may be good, I challenge teacher educators' assumption – one that I shared – that transformation is necessary, or that it is possible in any predictable way. As a result, next I consider what it means to *teach*, drawing on a complex notion of teaching as communication (Rasmussen, 2005).

Within this context and theoretical framing, I investigate two semesters my own teaching of children's literature using books I consider "global" – literature written by non-US authors, set outside the US (see Lehman, et al., 2010) – to communicate multiple perspectives of and through Muslim characters. My explicit intention was to work against broader social narratives and discourses of Islamophobia through discussion of texts and readers' responses, though I fell short in some ways. I initiated this work to understand how interfering with beliefs influences prospective teachers' responses to literature and the world; however, without a model for students to confront disturbances, my pedagogical choices were less successful. I conclude that self-inquiry into teacher educator pedagogy is necessary for teaching criticality, though I find it difficult to make claims about prospective teacher learning.

Developing a Critical Purpose

I teach a section of "Reading and Responding to Children's Literature" intended for a cohort of global educators-in-training. The global section was first offered in the Spring of 2014. After observing that first semester, I taught the section in Fall 2014, and again in the Spring and Fall 2016 semesters I investigate here. Over time I was given more autonomy, and the global

section became the space for me to explore pedagogy and curriculum. I believe I was asked to teach the section because I spent time abroad as a teacher.

I spent much of my adult life living outside the US, including in the Middle East, but I do not *know* the world, or culture. The world is too complex to possess as knowledge, but one can experience and learn for future interaction. I have experiences with people and cultures across a wide geography that lead me to consider how existence is entangled. I learned that a single narrative does not represent a culture, and at times being an outsider requires more effort to understand the world. From this personal perspective, my teaching and research connect sociocultural contexts to a continued search for knowledge and justice in a shared future.

I'm a White, anglophone, middle class, cis hetero male from the US. I am granted a privileged position in the global neoliberal system's hierarchy. Privilege doesn't disappear when I leave the US. Recognizing the system's inherent injustice creates my ethical struggle: I acknowledge my complicity and strive to minimize my negative impact while considering people and cultures. Perhaps paradoxically, I chose to live in places where I was a numerical minority, removed from the cultural, linguistic, and social comforts of my home culture. I called this *trying to be a minority* in Korea in 2007. But Western culture was never far away: I taught in my native language, I had access to my home culture, and I was perceived as a product of it. As a result, safety and status were secure. Instead of remaining complacent, I acknowledged the colonialist project that education can be, and began to question my role as an educator. *Why are White people teaching English all over the world?*

Setting aside economic implications, at the heart of this question is the notion that education is a transmission of values. It's ideological. English has value; particularly dialects common to a White cultural mainstream. A similar question can be asked of children's literature:

why are the majority of mass published books written in English by, published by, and about White people? And likewise, about US teachers and prospective teachers: *why are most teachers White when fewer than half of students are White?*

My agency to address such broad sociocultural questions is limited to personal interactions, the products of my research, and my teaching. In teacher education, my teaching can influence future teachers for a potentially wider impact. I speculated that teachers without a broad sense of self-in-the-world would contribute to the normalization of mainstream cultural experience that occurs in schools despite attempts at multicultural education. As a result, I designed the course section and selected the texts in critical response to growing xenophobic sentiment in the US manifested as Islamophobia.

Teacher Education for Superdiversity

Contemporary society is superdiverse: its diversity is diverse (Vertovec, 2007). While this level of diversity may be framed as a strength, it also challenges teachers to respond to students' cultural idiosyncrasies and to promote positive social and learning outcomes. Teacher education for social justice takes up this challenge. Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2010) explains

> Teacher preparation that fosters justice must deal with the tensions involved in meeting the needs of both white teachers and teachers of color and also focusing in the curriculum on the worldviews of social groups that have been marginalized or oppressed. (p. 460)

Social justice teacher education responds to the complexity of superdiversity by addressing individuals and the cultural experiences that shape their lives. While Karen Ragoonaden (2015) notes that TE programs "are natural sites to develop coherence around social justice, multicultural education, and culturally relevant pedagogy" (p. 82), justice and change are specific to critical multicultural education (McLaren, 1995). Teacher educators need to model

and use critical approaches to prepare prospective teachers to be culturally responsive (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and to support positive outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Teacher-student demographic disparity. Teacher educators often problematize the cultural gap resulting from "a homogeneous teaching force...working with an increasingly heterogeneous K-12 student population" (Haddix, 2008, p. 255). The *culture gap* between teachers and students, more bluntly, implies teachers' cultural Whiteness[2] often precludes direct knowledge of or experience with the oppressive conditions many cultural identities experience—a cultural (predis)position present among teacher educators as well. The *knowledge gap* that emerges from this culture gap indicates prospective teachers have limited capacity to identify and work to change these conditions. As a result, teacher educators are often concerned with shaping courses around White prospective teachers' transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000).

In her review of research on preparing prospective teachers for cultural and linguistic plurality, Christine Sleeter (2001) found courses were commonly intended to develop positive attitudes toward diversity among White prospective teachers. Teacher educators aim to transform attitudes and beliefs because they often observe that incoming White prospective teachers hold problematic ideologies. For example, Kumar and Hamer (2013) found a quarter of prospective teachers in their longitudinal study held stereotypic beliefs. More commonly, perhaps, prospective teachers lack "critical awareness of themselves as cultural or linguistic beings" (Haddix, 2008, p. 260); Whiteness is often invisible (see Matias, 2016; McLaren, 1995). Course-based interventions to transform these initial positions take myriad forms, including exploring

[2] Not exclusively racial, but indicative of a larger English-speaking, Western, US, Christian, middle-class, cis-heteronormative, able-bodied, neoliberal, and otherwise intersectional dominant identity – apart from gender in this context, although women certainly experience patriarchal oppression. I use 'White' and 'Whiteness' for brevity.

and exposing deficit beliefs through reflective writing (Brock, Moore, & Parks, 2007; Mueller & O'Connor, 2007; Haddix, 2008) and literary analysis (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002). While counteracting stereotypes is important, critical researchers and teacher educators would do well to be cautious of deficit models—including those they might apply to their White students.

Multicultural literature in teacher education. Research involving literature has prioritized prospective teachers' examination of their beliefs through experiences with multicultural books. Other ways of understanding and valuing become accessible through experiences with window-texts (Bishop, 1990). Global literature, a subset of multicultural literature, "not only illustrates and reflects the culture from which it comes, but it also gives us insights into the reasoning and belief systems of people whose outlooks and life experiences may be far different from our own" (Lo, 2001, p. 84). Alternate ways of knowing and being provide contrast to prospective teachers' own beliefs and identities, and teacher educators use this contrast to enter into discussions and self-reflection.

In-class discussions are often the centerpiece of literature courses. Laframboise and Griffith (1997) used multicultural literature and discussions with prospective teachers to "create an environment where students are encouraged to examine values and attitudes, express divergent views, and learn reflective practices" (p. 382). Because confronting held beliefs can be difficult, teacher educators tend to ground these discussions in the text. Faust (2000) describes *responsible reading* as when a reader uses textual evidence "to account for their own reading and listen" (p. 29) to others'. Accountability creates a space for honest interactions centered on the text, and includes making real-world connections and considering absent voices, going beyond the local context of the book discussion—aspects of critical literacy. Similarly, Thein and Sloan (2012) extend the idea of trying on new perspectives to include an *ethical reading* and literary

discussion, which includes questioning beliefs and supports fluid, uncertain interpretations. Readers could voice opinions especially when they are uncertain. Uncertainty can inspire inquiry and lead to understanding.

Reflection to address beliefs. Escamilla and Nathenson-Mejía (2003) found many prospective teachers felt reluctant to take risks expressing their opinions and engaging their own biases in class. Considering her use of controversial literature with teachers in Israel, Yael Poyas (2016) elaborates the dilemma teacher educators face: a "critical approach unravels the safe emotional in-between space in favor of a conscious, exposing discussion of social and political forces" (p. 280). Teacher educators may attempt to balance openness and honesty with conflict and disagreement but should accept resistance and reluctance in response to "pedagogical practises that are designed to more explicitly contend with the moral logic that undergird students' [(un)conscious] commitments to inequity" (Mueller & O'Connor, 2007, p. 854). Often, prospective teachers sort through these complicated conversations through reflection.

To build upon prospective teachers' encounters with alternate beliefs, teacher educators often employ reflective writing. Fendler (2003) argues that teachers are inherently reflective, but teacher education is often "based on the assumption that teachers are incapable of reflection without direction from expert authorities" (p. 23)—a deficit model. Because it is difficult to confront beliefs, teacher educators may feel obligated to guide reflective practices, and they have had success in this regard. For example, Brindley and Laframboise (2002) found reflective writing in response to literature and classroom activities can lead to self-examination and discomfort, the consideration of multiple perspectives, and sensitivity to issues of multiculturalism. These findings indicate possibilities, not necessarily patterns, and teacher educators are not in control of these outcomes. As Fendler (2003) notes, "common practices of

reflection (journal writing and autobiographical narratives) may have unintended and undesirable political effects" (p. 23). For instance, journal writing may reinforce stereotypic beliefs about cultural Others experienced through literature when these stereotypes are present in a text. As a result, stereotypes may be confirmed through reflection.

Teacher educators can select texts and create a space for discussion of texts, but the discussions and self-reflection that follow are unpredictable. Unpredictable learning outcomes challenge teacher educators to evaluate their teaching; however, prospective teacher transformation does not indicate successful teaching *per se*. An examination of teaching, not learning – including reflection on how prospective teachers are framed in/through teaching – may contribute to how teacher educators enact critical practices toward society and pedagogy.

Theoretical Perspectives: Teaching and Learning Critical Literacies

Teacher educators may intend to develop prospective teachers' critical literacies to promote a disposition toward social criticism. Critical literacy understands that "one imbues a text with meaning rather than extracting meaning from it... [and] meaning is understood in the context of social, historic, and power relations" (Cervetti, et al., 2001, n.p.), extending Rosenblatt's (1982) notion of reading as transaction by considering the social: connections between texts and social contexts are part of a responsible reading (Faust, 2000). Ultimately, "critical literacy approaches set the reshaping of political consciousness, material conditions, and social relations as first principles" (Luke, 2012, p. 7). This disposition toward change is often framed as a *learner transformation*, not as teaching practices: something the prospective teacher does, not what the teacher educator does.

Understanding teaching through learning. Certainly, teacher educators would do well to consider theories of learning. Jack Mezirow's (1995, 2000) notion of learning as transformation accounts for the established beliefs held by adult learners, aligning with teacher educators' intention to transform prospective teachers' beliefs. Learning as transformation begins from *frames of reference*, like one's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977): a network of beliefs and experiences that mediate learning and meaning-making (Mezirow, 2000). Often these frames are taken for granted so examining underlying beliefs, ideas, and emotions through critical practices can lead to transformation. Transformative learning promotes "not only awareness of the source and context of our knowledge, values, and feelings but also critical reflection on the validity of their assumptions or premises" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). Awareness and criticality are central to transformation, but according to Schön (1983), this type of learning is nonlinear and non-rational.

A linear understanding evaluates teaching through learning outcomes: teacher input produces learner output. However, belief-changing discussions and reflections are unpredictable and uncertain, presenting a challenge to linear conceptions and suggesting an avenue for teacher educator *un*learning (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Understanding teaching through learning focuses inquiry on the development of particular dispositions that may not change within a single course. Further, unpredictable, subjective learning is an individual act, unlike teaching, a social act (Rasmussen, 2005). The challenges of developing criticality indicate that mediation or teaching is helpful, but transformation is ultimately achieved by the learner at their own pace, if at all. Even though teaching can encourage such learning, it is not possible to be certain of it.

Therefore, transformative learning, while desirable in asset-based applications, is not necessarily a productive measure of teaching as part of reflexive inquiry. Often for teachers,

"what is essential is the establishment of a firm connection between the intention of teaching and its result" (Rasmussen, 2005, p. 225), but this desire for linearity may oversimplify a complex system. Teaching may be unsuccessful if it is dependent on unpredictable transformations.

Teaching as participation and communication. As an alternative, Brent Davis (2004) describes teaching as "participating in the transformation of what is" (p. 184). The nature of this participation is contingent and perhaps unclear when considering students, but it offers alternate perspectives regarding the subject of transformation—teacher educators can participate in their students' and their own transformation.

To reconsider how teachers might participate in transformation of students, Jens Rasmussen (2005) understands teaching as communication: "a specialized form of communication aimed at stimulating learning…through deliberate disturbances to change the learner, [though] this intention is not always achieved" (p. 216). These deliberate disturbances are central to a critical literacy pedagogy, which often includes: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints, including those heard and absent; and focusing on sociopolitical issues, and connecting them to daily life (Lewison, et al., 2002). Teachers can participate in the transformation of their students by stimulating through disturbance: "the contents of teaching must appear as a problem for students, something they may each be disturbed or affected by, and which they therefore are prompted to deal with consciously" (Rasmussen, 2005, p. 232). The transformation of particular dispositions, then, results from posing meaningful problems, and teacher educators could model how to pose them.

Teacher educators may teach to transform, but participation includes self-transformation. Teacher educators' reflexive inquiry into teaching communicates to prospective teachers a critical stance intended to transform self and society.

Methodology

This investigation of my implementation of inquiry as a stance (Cochran-Smith, 2003) explored my pedagogical choices as disturbances, and my learning from prospective teacher responses to those choices—responses I took to be their reduction of complexity (Rasmussen, 2005).

I approached this project as self-study (Loughran, 2005), a methodology that emerges from my inclination toward teacher inquiry as practice. Teacher educators engaged in self-study are participants in that which they research, following the "humanistic commitment of the qualitative researcher to study the world… from the perspective of the interacting individual" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 13). The interactions, recursive as they often are, contribute to the non-linearity of TE practices, embodying *currere* (Pinar, 2004): teaching in the present becomes a researched remembrance to inform future practice.

In an analysis of self-studies with a multicultural focus, Schulte (2004) found the intention is often to explore the "evolution of one's own understanding and perspectives in order to meet more effectively the needs of all students… marked by a disruption of values or cultural beliefs through critical reflection with the goal of more socially just teaching" (p. 712). Teacher educators as well as prospective teachers need to go through this evolution. The "value of self-study in relation to multiculturalism resides in engaging preservice teachers in transformative experiences while simultaneously modeling one's own transformation process" (White, 2009, p. 9). These two layers are entangled, though I intended to explore the latter here.

My investigation is not about the extent to which students transform. Rather, I consider my own transformation as I respond to nodal moments in my teaching to learn how to model this process. Nodes, as I use the term here, are points of interaction (between me and students, among

students, and with texts) that recur from one semester to the next. I trace my transformation through choices I make differently when I encounter a node again.

Course Context

"Reading and Responding to Children's Literature" is required for elementary education majors as part of an undergraduate teacher education program at a large Midwest university. Classes meet once weekly for three hours, and five of the fifteen meetings are reserved for discussion around books selected for the whole class to read. Despite a somewhat more mixed group of students in the global sections, most students are female, White, 19-20 years old. Each section has roughly twenty students, mostly in their second year.

The two sections of the course that serve as foci for this inquiry coincided with the 2016 presidential election: the campaign season unfolded throughout the spring semester, leading to the election during the fall semester. The candidate who was eventually elected mobilized voters with talking points on immigration, diversity, and Islam, leading some to label him a demagogue. The magnification of social division throughout the year intensified my desire to promote critical conversations, and to communicate the importance of meaningful connections between the events of the world, our lives, and the books we read.

The nodal text. The texts I selected for discussion included fiction, memoir, and graphic novels, and were authored by Muslim and non-Muslim men and women from outside the US. While not my intention to normalize the US in opposition to global books, I never addressed this issue. These were texts I believed better aligned with my critical pedagogy (Lewison, et al., 2002). This is not to say all global books, or my narrowed subset, are effective. Poyas (2016) concluded that "asking [students] to critically examine the complex reality they live in, should be

done through rich, complex, multi-faceted texts" (p. 281). I focus on one text I selected and considered complex (see Chapter II): Riad Sattouf's (2015) *The Arab of the Future* (*Arab*). I assigned *Arab* in both sections of the course, and it serves as a focal node because I continued to assign this book—partly because of its controversial nature.

Arab provides an opportunity to confront representations of difficult, unlikeable stereotypes; characters are not celebrations. As Poyas (2016) notes of text selection, "My choice of a work, the way it should be read, and how it should be interpreted makes a political statement" (p. 272). The political statement I intend, stated from the beginning of the course, was to confront Islamophobia, including negative images perpetuated by social narratives constructed by dominant groups (i.e. US media and political discourses that vilify Arab Muslims) and others. Like Poyas (2016), the texts I chose were "culturally distant works that accommodated topics through which we could discuss issues of power relations, identity, gender, human conduct in times of stress and anxiety" (p. 274). Both Syria and Libya were undergoing serious changes following the Arab Spring, and US involvement (or lack thereof) empowered violent authoritarian regimes. These distant events and others displaced people, in turn fueling the xenophobia of the 2016 presidential election discourse, directly impacting the students and me, and our discussions.

Engaging a literary text. While students are assigned to read the books outside of class, sharing responses with other readers takes place in class. These discussions included an hour in small groups, followed by whole class sharing of salient points largely directed by me. In terms of Rasmussen's (2005) phases of teaching: I introduce a text as new information, prospective teachers select an understanding and begin to reduce it on their own, and discussions provide a forum to reduce uncertainty further while including peers' perspectives as new information.

Additional texts. To facilitate the connections and meaning the students might make, I included a variety of additional sources throughout the course that draw upon current events, like editorials and documentaries regarding social issues and power relations in the Middle East and elsewhere (see Appendix A). As Poyas (2016) explains, "Teaching literature means hearing diverse voices and including them into the social fabric" (p. 271). I included voices not present in the text, but present in the contemporary world. I aimed to prioritize the development of critical literacies and meaning-making practices that extend across texts and contexts.

Data Sources and Analysis

Self-study can be considered "a research methodology in which researchers…use whatever methods will provide the needed evidence and context for understanding their practice" (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 240). Teacher educators as researchers need to make choices knowing data can (at best) partially represent teaching and learning, or the motivations of and the residual effects on participants. With this limitation in mind, data sources informing this inquiry include prospective teacher journal writing over the course of a semester in response to prompts intended as disturbances, or interferences meant to open possibilities; discussion notes kept by prospective teachers during their book discussion; my pedagogical reflections; and course documents informed by interactions with colleagues, students, and educational research.

Student journals. I primarily investigate prospective teacher journals because they represent the most direct communication I used to prompt each student's reduction of uncertainty regarding course themes.

I asked students to keep a weekly journal used for structured freewriting shared with me through Google Docs. I provided questions or a prompt, and students wrote for about ten minutes

in response. While I agree with Fendler's (2003) stance that teachers are capable of reflection without my guidance, my inclination was that some direction was necessary to consider course themes and topics. I clearly informed prospective teachers in class and on the syllabus that journals are only graded for completion; they are low-stakes. To create a space that felt comfortable enough to express their ideas, I did not read and respond to these journals during the course itself—I came to question this choice because their journals could have been a dialogic space to engage their ideas.

Interactions I had with students throughout the semester led me to believe that the identities they chose to enact in class were like the voices I heard in their journals. These voices were often absent from the papers turned in for grades. Formal student work takes on an impersonal, professional tone that is less visible in face-to-face interactions, but these journals maintained an identity I had come to attach to the students.

Analysis of teaching. I accept that my memory of the course and the individuals involved in it are not actually separable from my return to the data as a researcher. Anyhow, I anonymized the journals and read for patterns across the students' responses collectively, hoping to shift focus from the unpredictability of individual experiences toward emergent patterns that could inform adaptations in my teaching. I understand that following up with an interview to further investigate emerging themes would enrich these data; I believe interviews would certainly extend my understanding of student learning. However, I am interrogating my own learning about my teaching practice. I rarely communicate with students outside of class, and email is almost exclusively the medium used when I do. Interviews are external to my teaching practice, and thus less relevant to me here.

While I initially considered multiple journals entries (the first day, following the book discussion of *Arab*, and the final day), the expectation of linear change over time is an assumption I hoped to challenge as part of this project. I instead framed my inquiry around specific nodes: points in the semester that emerged as important to my teaching. These nodes are not entirely disjointed, but linearly connecting them is less important than recognizing them as moments that recur across semesters, stacking upon one another in my teaching practice. While linearity might frame learner progression, I hope to situate this inquiry around teacher (i.e. my own) change: I can alter how I act in those moments that challenged my expectations because I will encounter them again, in another time and place with other prospective teachers.

Analysis was iterative. The interplay of theory – teaching as communication (Rasmussen, 2005) and critical literacies pedagogies (Lewison, et al., 2002) – provided the framework for a critical conversation (Pinar, 2004) in which I explored how I constructed disturbances intended to stimulate transformation. Removed from the local immediacy of the course, I returned to the journals to explore the patterns that emerged, putting these voices in dialogue with one another when they communicated to me similar notions or discourses. These patterns provided me with a sense of the students' reductions of uncertainty, which in turn informed the evolution of my teaching.

Power and Participation

Most pertinent to this project is that I am both the researcher and the instructor of the course I am researching. This research project began after the completion of the two course sections to minimize any conflict of interest I might have as researcher and a theoretically objective instructor with the institutional power to give grades to students.

While I feel justified to ask students to participate in various projects as an instructor, returning to their reflections and thinking about the course as research changes the nature of the relationship. I invite students into the process by eliciting feedback through several avenues: institutional course evaluations, and multiple spaces for written and verbal feedback. While students may be powerless to decline to participate in class, I offer to share some power in shaping my future teaching of the course.

While research is part of my teaching, I undertook the formal project represented here after the conclusion of the course, returning to the existing data retrospectively. As a researcher, I had power to represent students, and this presented an ethical issue: is it fair to those represented? On the one hand, I deal with the data anonymously and see their writing as artifacts of the course experience, not representative of the students themselves. As a result, our university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined this research exempt. On the other hand, I cannot escape the problem of representation. This report will represent some people incompletely. The image I provide is not intended to erase their identity (Bhabha, 2012); I hope for it to add texture to my and other teacher educators' practice.

Findings and Discussion

In this self-study, I wanted to surface my teaching choices. My first choice was to use new material to disturb and stimulate prospective teachers' critical engagement; the second choice involved decoding prospective teachers' responses as representing their understanding, or reductions of complexity; the third was how to alter my teaching in the future to encourage prospective teachers to engage in critical reflection.

While Rasmussen's (2005) "point of departure" aptly describes my first choice, the term conjures a linear understanding of teaching. Instead, I re-conceptualize these disturbances as recurring interactions in which I have an opportunity to communicate ideas to students that possibly interfere with their held beliefs. Regarding my second choice, prospective teachers' reflective writing illustrated patterns of transformation in response to my disturbances, though not always as intended. The changes I made between semesters to alter future nodes illustrate my third choice: adjusting teaching to participate in intended transformations.

The nodes I include are the initial journal prompt, my use of additional texts, and my confrontation with beliefs following a discussion of *Arab*.

Establishing Initial Conditions

The first journal prompt asked students to freewrite in response to the course themes, including *Islam/Muslims*. I provided a place for students to write about this topic so I could get a sense of how they entered the course. In addition to writing, I asked the Spring section to rate their knowledge of the topic (1–little knowledge, 5–very knowledgeable)—none of the students rated their knowledge as a 4 or 5. This low self-assessment was unsurprising; however, fifteen students' responses indicated knowledge about Islam/Muslims. For example, one student (self-rated 2) wrote:

> My knowledge of Islam or Muslims is pretty much entirely based on what I have read through the news or from my religions class in high school. I have been to a Mosque and have a basic understanding of the religion and practices of the Islamic people but I do not know enough to call myself an expert. I know a good amount also about the current status of Muslims and their perception in the United States because I keep up with current events.

I would classify this student's knowledge more highly based on references to sources and experience, despite not actually sharing any knowledge other than using "Mosque." The

disclaimer of not being "an expert" indicates how my choice to include knowledge-rating shifted the focus, limiting how other forms of experiencing or valuing might be accessed. After the course, I speculated in my reflections that my "concern with *beliefs about* [was] derailed by asking specifically about *knowledge*." I chose to omit the self-assessment in the next iteration of the course.

In the Fall, journals contained patterns of discourse that drew from social understandings and relied less on *knowledge*. Looking across both data sets, the *distant objective authority* found in Spring was not present in the Fall—perhaps because of the shift away from knowledge in my prompt. Positions taken up in the Fall but less present in the Spring included other forms of knowing:

- school (knowing *of* Islam): "I think back to when I first really learned about Islam. I was in high school history class and we had a unit on Islam. Personally, the religion seemed fine to me; it didn't seem like the same religion that was being belittled by the US population and government. To me, Islam seemed like any other religion, and I remember changing my views on it because of that class";

- media (knowing *of* Muslims): "I have not had any first hand experience or interactions with Muslims, so everything I think is based upon things I have seen or read. The common perception many people have is that they are bad people and they are all terrorists. I know this is a negative stereotype, one that is not always true, but because of things like 9/11, many people have this stigma of them";

- local (knowing of Muslims in Dearborn, MI): "I grew up around Muslim children my entire childhood. Once Dearborn got too heavily populated, my parents pulled me and my brothers out of Dearborn schools and sent us to a private school in Allen Park";

- personal interactions (knowing Muslims): "I have had the fortune to know many Muslims in my life. I have had several friends who are Muslims and they are all decent people. Knowing many Muslims has allowed me the knowledge that Islam is no better or worse than other religions and that Muslims are no better or worse than any other person".

These responses indicated a variety of perspectives consistent with other findings: some in need of transformations, others not; some reluctant to discuss the topic, others comfortable.

These entry points are not meant to establish a baseline against which to measure transformation of beliefs. On the contrary, the data suggest that any group of students will be consistently unpredictable in both where they start and conclude the course. My introduction of course themes, however, indicated that I can discursively position prospective teachers to enter these conversations *as students*: distancing themselves from the expectations that come with being an expert, and bringing only their *objective* academic selves to the dialogue. The student identity, divorced from other selves, is perhaps less likely to be vulnerable and open to change because school often teaches students to succeed: to display competence, not uncertainty. Students learn to transform in the ways teachers wish them to, perhaps not undergoing intrinsically motivated change.

Introducing Disturbances

In the course sections under investigation here, I wanted to encourage students to make connections to lived experience and current events, hoping this would raise their sociopolitical consciousness. As a result, I introduced articles intended as deliberate disturbances that might stimulate prospective teachers to view these problems as their own.

In the Spring, I shared four articles over the weeks leading up to our book discussions (see Appendix). The articles were intended to support connections between the themes of the course, the characters and books, and the lives of the prospective teachers. While inclusion of these articles was political, I did not engage the topics directly in class discussion. In my reflective notes, I expressed dismay at my hesitance to confront and perhaps alienate prospective teachers who voiced particular beliefs, leading to a lack of discussion. I responded to prospective teacher comments regarding the articles, but never initiated conversations beyond my prefacing

comments. My teaching choices, in later reflection, "did not provide space for engagement" nor model how prospective teachers might reduce uncertainty regarding these texts. Unsurprisingly, these articles did not appear in later responses to literature.

For the Fall semester, I was perhaps a bit overzealous with the increase in materials I chose to share. Throughout the semester I asked prospective teachers to read about twenty other articles. In addition to the earlier pieces, I asked students to read an article about the state of the Arab Spring – a movement with which prospective teachers in both sections were largely unfamiliar – and myriad other topics including racism and Islamophobia in the US, and multiple perspectives on the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Early on, we took time to discuss these articles, exploring what it meant to make connections and be critical. Despite our promising start, there was too much to cover and our conversations in class could not keep up, so often these discussions were cut in favor of other content. As a result, the students did not mention these topics in their journals or in other course writing. I had wanted to create a disturbance, but instead the students may not have engaged with the content, or at least did not indicate there was any further consideration of their role in the world vis-à-vis the cultures and characters in the literary texts.

While these articles were intended to stir sympathies, and encourage recognition of real people suffering, I did not engage enough with prospective teachers' reduction of uncertainty as part of their own inquiry. All I may have achieved is to provide a decontextualized contrast: prospective teachers are less bigoted than other Americans; prospective teachers' childhood in the US was fortunate compared to those in Syria. Instead of engaging with a world that needed change and asking prospective teachers to participate, I allowed silence; a non-response that

positions prospective teachers voyeuristically, noticing the Other (Derrida, 1976) without any sense of shared existence or obligation. My first choices were spectacle, not critical.

Understanding *Arab* and Muslims

A few weeks later in each section, we read *Arab*, a text intended to invite critical readings. Following the book discussions, I asked prospective teachers to reflect on their thinking about Muslims in their journal writing. I repeated the same prompt after every book discussion (*Arab* was the third of five books in the Spring; fourth in the Fall).

In the Spring, the prompt asked: "Has this book contributed to your thinking about and understanding of human migration? If so, how? Has this book added to or transformed how you think of Muslims? If so, in what ways?" Eleven students claimed a change occurred and six did not (one did not respond to the Muslim part of the prompt). The nature of the change prospective teachers claimed included specific things (e.g. learning the title *Haji*), but most were general and not entirely positive: they learned Muslims are many and varied, the religion is widespread, and not all practice it the same way; men dominate, women are oppressed. The transformations that they claimed to have undergone were not connected to contemporary social issues (in part due to my failure to engage the articles more deeply), and many were negative turns.

The prospective teachers claiming no change had similarly undesirable reflections. Some did not notice Muslim characters despite my continued focus on Muslims. For instance, one student wrote:

> If there were Muslim characters and I didn't notice them, then being Muslim must be different than an idea that I originally had. The Muslim belief must not be something that can easily be seen on a person.

While this reflection mentions a change in perception, the absence of Muslim markers led to a claim that no transformation had occurred. In my course notes, I was critical of my choice to not scrutinize these journals during the course. I thought I had "missed an opportunity" to engage in inquiry with them.

While the text, discussion, and prompt provided disturbances and multiple viewpoints, prospective teachers mostly responded in ways that worked against my intention. One student comment illustrated an understanding of my intention clearly:

> For a while, we were trying to break the stereotype that all Muslims are the same, and while this book goes along with that idea, this is the first book that the 'bad guys' are given an identity and ideas and perspectives.

Introducing "bad guys" is part of a complicated conversation of what it means to understand and navigate difference critically—I noted this group's book discussion in my reflection. Despite intending to engage the existence of the bad by selecting *Arab,* I failed to direct prospective teachers away from universalizing the bad into stereotypes. I had chosen to ask about Muslims, and left room for vague references and stereotyping, knowing the text was challenging. Between semesters, my reflections assumed I had not provided enough direction, though Fendler (2003) points out that more direction may not be the answer and undesirable outcomes are possible.

In the Fall, to focus more specifically on the Muslim theme, I shortened the prompt to: "Has this book added to or transformed how you think of Muslims? If so, in what ways?" I hoped to allow more time to specifically engage the prompt and support critical engagement. A different pattern emerged in the responses: ten prospective teachers claimed to have had a self-defined transformation, while twelve experienced no change. Again, those who claimed a transformation often mentioned Muslims are not all the same. One commented that Muslims are different from American stereotypes, beginning to make social connections, but not going much

further. Additionally, some changes derived from feelings about Abdul, seen as sexist and racist, elaborated clearly by one student: "I guess my contempt for the father shaped this view a great deal." It seemed *transformation* reinforced negative views of Muslims. Not only was this unintended, but reinforced views indicated that disturbances can close possibility when they are not supported with appropriate modeling of how to open possibility.

The prospective teachers who said they had no transformation elaborated this position in the least worrisome ways. They referred to difficulty passing judgment based on a few characters, often claiming characters were disagreeable, but not representative of a religion. Two prospective teachers drew from personal experience to frame their response, for example:

> If this was my only view of Muslims it would not be a good one. Dirty, savage - in a way, uncivilized. I've learned enough about Muslims to know this is not the way to generalize them.

While the more direct prompt in the Fall inspired more passionate responses, prospective teachers strongly stood by their previously held beliefs (i.e. not to generalize). Some prospective teachers were already at a point where my intention to transform their beliefs was misguided and unnecessary. In fact, my direct inquiry about Muslims seemed to incline prospective teachers to generalize, working against my intention.

The journal prompts were intended to directly confront students with a cultural label that was also attached to the characters in the stories they just read and discussed, but this may have discursively positioned them in opposition to Muslims. By positioning prospective teachers in opposition to Muslims, they responded in defense of their views, and therefore never engaged in critical practices. One prospective teacher's comment elaborates the trouble with my prompt in relation to a challenging text with dislikeable characters:

> More and more I learn and reinforce the idea that there are people of all spectrums that lay in certain categories. So to say that all Muslim people do (insert any commonality) is

> not true because categories are socially constructed. I think this book shows a very negative aspect of what some Muslims can be but there are all types of people in every religion, race, ethnicity, etc.

Directly confronting prospective teachers with the general category of Muslims was unsupportive of nuanced understandings of an unfamiliar culture that avoid stereotypes. Instead, I perhaps led students toward generalizations, or made them defensive when they identified my prompt as implying they held negative views. I framed their transformation in ways that assumed a lack on their part, and in this way closed possibilities instead of opening them.

What I had intended was not effectively communicated widely: the reductions of uncertainty found in prospective teachers' journals indicated that the most promising reflections were exceptions, not patterns. Prospective teachers' criticality was likely present independent of my guided reflection. Patterns included recognizing in-group difference among Muslims – a change I am ambivalent about because difference might have been expected, especially at the midpoint of the semester – or a comfort in nonjudgmental views of Others. My teaching choices did not inspire critical engagement, but instead produced patterns of discourse that supported previously held beliefs or superficial change. Prospective teachers' reduction of uncertainty aligned with liberal or left-liberal, but not critical multiculturalism (McLaren, 1995): *change* reinforced why diversity should be celebrated; *no change* resulted from blindness to (negative) difference.

Concluding Remarks

Teaching and learning are entangled, but they are not the same. The responsibility of learners to desire and undergo transformation remains a complicating contingency for teachers: it is the learners who acknowledge external complexity and reduce it to something understandable

(Rasmussen, 2005). For teacher educators involved in projects aimed at developing critical literacies, prospective teacher discussions and reflective writing can illustrate certain patterns that inspire pedagogical responses. In this case, because critical responses were the exceptions, not the pattern, I found reflection in response to direct confrontation with a cultural label – "Muslim" – ineffective on its own.

How I guided reflection positioned prospective teachers in opposition, and as a result they were resistant to the prompt I used. My choice of a journal prompt worked against my intentions by framing Muslims as a generalized group, discursively constructing Muslims as the Other. I repeated the same prompt, highlighting its importance, but also reiterating the inherent difference model that we never began to deconstruct. Initial journals offered a space where prospective teachers used discourses of *knowing of*, *knowing about*, and *knowing* Islam or Muslims. Exploring these differences and the possibilities that are opened and closed can help situate class conversations and reflections within a practice of reflexive inquiry toward social change. The transformation in which I should participate, then, is better modeling of reflexive teacher inquiry and reflection regarding social issues.

My shortcoming could be the prompts themselves, but I imagine it was the lack of modelling criticality, and a hesitance to confront students more directly. While I hoped to teach confrontationally – disturbing the common cultural experiences of students – I needed to contextualize these confrontations better and signal my position not as in opposition to prospective teachers (asset- not deficit-models) or cultural Others. Davis (2004) refers to teaching as many things, including caring, which itself can be understood in many ways, though rarely as confrontation. In their discussion of caring in teacher education, Dwight Rogers and Jaci Webb (1991) consider the following belief: "Good teachers care, and good teaching is

inextricably linked to specific acts of caring" (p. 174). Caring can be understood as protecting, and therefore teaching-as-caring can mean avoiding confrontation through critical engagement; however, caring "is more than regard or protection, more than affect alone" (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p. 174). Confronting beliefs regarding caring for/about whom/what might provide a catalyst for critical transformation through reflexive inquiry. I can be clearer that confrontation with beliefs is about caring: caring for prospective teachers, and their future students.

Critical teacher educators can model what it means to select texts, have discussions, and reflect as part of a process of inquiry. Teaching is a reflexive, complicated conversation regarding pedagogy and society. I approach it as an ongoing process of change – (*un*)learning to teach (Cochran-Smith, 2003). I continue to try to do better, and to do good, but I recognize that without sustained inquiry, teachers and teacher educators may be liable to remain naïve to misalignments between their intention and practice. While like many teacher educators I hope to change prospective teachers' dispositions, I no longer assume every student's beliefs need transformation—or that immediate, measurable transformation effectively assesses teaching. Rather, I ask them to engage in inquiry with me.

INTERLUDE – LIMINALITY

Informed by feminist arguments regarding the crisis of representation (for example, Britzman, 1995), I struggle with the (im)possibility of representing ideas and people. Further complicating my work is the abstraction that occurs in teacher education, where teacher educators teach students to teach students. The binary identities of teacher and student, so clearly demarcated in discursive constructions of the world, become blurred and challenged in this dynamic, shifting context. Who we are (the participants in teacher education) is less clear.

A human notion of self is somewhat defined by what we claim we are not: "Man calls himself man only by drawing limits excluding his other" (Derrida, 1976, p. 244). This practice, Othering, allows us reduce Others to labels, even though we attribute great complexity and nuance to our own identities. This identification through exclusion is dynamic and relational, in that we may exclude or include others depending on the social circumstances, and thus social and cultural groupings are less stable than we may like to believe. Further, Bourdieu (1990) notes about historical realities that "one can always establish that things could have been otherwise, indeed, are otherwise in other places and other conditions" (p. 15). Recognizing these alternatives is essential. Not only are these alternatives important for *us* to apply to *them* (i.e. that Others have as much value as the Self), but we could also acknowledge the transitional state we often occupy (i.e. that the Self is the Selves, dynamic and multiple).

Liminality refers to being in between spaces. To be liminal is to be in transition; becoming; at the threshold between. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) initially conceived of liminality in terms of social ritual:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention… As such, their ambiguous and

> indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols… Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (p. 95)

It is a relative concept. *Between* needs frames of reference. Scholarly work *between* research areas is transdisciplinary; diffraction is another frame of reference for reflection and shows us new things *between* our expectations.

In many ways, this project occupies a fluid, uncertain space. I begin as a teacher educator: a teacher of prospective teachers motivated to enact social change through education. As a graduate instructor, I am a student and a teacher; I am not faculty, but I am of the institution. The students I teach are in transition, becoming teachers. Teacher education exists between the academy and the school; more institution than community. Embracing this liminality, I undertook reflexive inquiry into both my own practice (as evidenced in the preceding chapter) and that of the students in my course because inquiry as a stance enriches teaching, schooling, and education (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

Another thread woven throughout my work is that of community engaged scholarship. As I transitioned into an academic in 2013, my doctoral cohort was advised to become involved in teaching, research, and service. The first two were clearly a part of the doctoral program, but the third was more elusive. In my liminal space, I knew too little of the academy to participate in service in any way other than volunteering my time and "expertise." As a result, I volunteered with a language tutoring program.

Over the next few semesters I noticed that the undergraduate students I was teaching had almost no experience with non-native speakers of English. It was clear that I should "volun-tell" my students to participate in the program: they would gain experience in a lesser developed part

of teacher preparation (experience with linguistic diversity), and the volunteer program would be able to fill their ranks to meet demand.

With faculty approval, but no direct involvement with the bureaucratic apparatus of the institution, I undertook this independent service learning project. Language-related teacher preparation, like issues of multiculturalism, needs expansion across teacher education programs. Individual teacher educators can shape projects around a commitment to care about marginalized curriculum—a topic I hoped to elaborate in Chapter II. In response, I asked students to join me in becoming an agent of change, a quality of culturally responsive teachers (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The enactment of this project provided an opportunity for teacher education students to individually engage with the Other outside the institutional program requirements—an instructional decision that I consider creative interference because it blurs the distinction between courses (theory) and teaching (practice), while existing outside institutional requirements. Their interactions were not regimented or supported in ways that reproduce a singular experience, but instead were contingent, dependent on their agency and that of their partner.

This next chapter describes the collaboration and its results but focuses less on what students did (again). Instead, I consider how they position themselves and what that does for community-based service learning in a more theoretical exploration of what it means for teacher educators to enact service learning as creative interference. Larger issues in language education emerge – for instance, how English remains the dominant language with social capital in the context of the project – but I do not address them fully in this article. At one stage, I had wanted to frame this chapter around a successful case in which one of the students and her partner agreed on mutual translanguaging and dividing their time between English and Spanish. I intend to return to her case, but in the chapter, I instead explore the ways community work can

disentangle, re-tangle, and reveal entanglements of power positions in teaching and other social relations. While I do not deconstruct these power positions, I take from this experience insight into how I might in the future.

IV – RECIPROCITY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS INVOLVING EMERGENT TEACHERS

My *purpose* emerges from my alignment with social justice teacher education. This approach toward teaching and teacher education shares similar motivations and purposes with research involving community engagement (for example, that various stakeholders should benefit). I intended to provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to experience the diversity of the world, literature, and likely of their future classrooms. I use this chapter to describe the *process* of working with a community volunteer language tutoring project and asking students (i.e. prospective teachers) to engage the cultural and linguistic diversity of our local community.

Given the importance of dynamic role-taking in community engaged research (i.e. that researchers learn from community partners), I pursued the following questions regarding my project: *What roles are available to students participating in service learning, and which do they take up? How do students in these roles influence the experience of other participants?* My critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015) of the students' reflective writing indicated the importance of social positioning – in this case, how students situate themselves as teachers and learners in their community interactions – in creating possibilities for reciprocity. I conclude my analysis with a discussion about community partnerships, encouraging educators to consider dynamic positioning and learning in service learning.

Theoretical Frame

Although situated as part of a children's literature course, my pedagogical intention was for students to think about teaching (in) English, and therefore I ground this work in sociocultural notions of language and literacy. I begin from the assumption that prospective

teachers benefit from interacting with speakers of other languages, even if the interaction is mainly mediated in English. I also draw upon social justice teacher education to provide a framing for my context.

Language as Social

According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), language acquisition occurs "through a 'process of assimilation' – more or less creative – of others' words (and not the words of a language)" (p. 89). Isolated language learning can be effective, but language is essentially social: it is used for communication. While a language learner may develop grammar and an expansive vocabulary through texts, they may not learn the idiosyncrasies of language unless used in social, communicative contexts. Through interaction with other speakers, learners develop a capacity to communicate with(in) a community. Language socialization through interaction with more experienced users of the target language provides more than the knowledge of words; it also grants a language learner access to the ways of thinking, valuing, and behaving that make language ideological, and ultimately tie language to identities (Gee, 2012). As Jim Gee (2014) and others propose, a central function of language use is the construction, development, and maintenance of identities.

Identities are entangled with social, political, and economic forces, not just linguistic. In Fendler's (2006) critique of *community*, she notes, "When constructions of identity are problematized, constructions of community, Otherness, and inclusion are also disrupted" (p. 320). Teachers might explore the ways in which identity, language, and community intersect—especially when developing community partnerships for service learning. Norman Fairclough (2015) applies a critical perspective to understanding language in use in the world, adding

"language varies according to the social identities of people in interactions, their socially defined purposes, social setting, and so on" (p. 54). The context and purposes of language use impact the users of the language. As a result, language is powerful. Those with knowledge of valued forms of language have social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and can wield power. That capital translates into authority in that context.

When the students in my course become teachers, they will – like me – have language and context supporting the authority they wield over students. The power that underlies language can create opportunity as well as disparity; language is not neutral. The way that language is perceived in education is often shaped around an ideal native speaker, not a capacity for communication. Suresh Canagarajah (2007) illuminates the incongruence between linguistic practices and teaching goals: "language learning involves an alignment of one's language resources to the needs of a situation, rather than reaching a target level of competence" (p. 928). As a result, a social understanding of language (stressing language-in-use), like I hold, believes that the narrow understanding of language operationalized in many educational contexts (namely, following a standards-of-competence model) is disconnected from lived experience. Teacher educators could examine the power they have to shape language practices and learning to better account for non-school communication.

Considering the increasing cultural and linguistic disparity between teachers and students as a result of broader demographic shifts in the US, teacher education would do well to include preparation for navigating difference. Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) respond to the need for future teachers to be prepared to teach the increasing population of students who speak a language other than English (they use the term English language learner, or ELL; I use this acronym due to its ubiquity, but prefer the descriptor *culturally and linguistically diverse*, or

CLD students). They describe the importance of active social interaction in developing both academic and conversational ELL students. However, the authors note that most prospective teachers have little or no professional development or coursework to support their teaching ELLs, and few have shared the experience of becoming proficient in an additional language. Teacher education programs could require prospective teachers to have contact with ELLs:

> Without such contact, ELLs will remain an abstraction, defined by their lack of proficiency in English and likely to be perceived through prevalent media stereotypes of immigrants. Direct contact allows future teachers to see ELLs as individuals, and it gives the teachers-to-be a sense of the diversity among ELLs. (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008, p. 370)

While not all students learning English are immigrants (and vice versa), the concern regarding stereotypical narratives is vital to address in the contemporary social context. Homi Bhabha (2012) describes stereotyping as when the image replaces the identity. Accessing multiple narratives through interactions could presumably work against stereotyping by challenging the image through an increasing knowledge of identities.

As a part of collaborative teacher education projects, communities can contribute to preparing teachers for language diversity. Teachers would do well to recognize language is vital to our communities, and linguistic diversity is an integral part of society.

Diversity and Social Teacher Education

There are many visions for the future of teacher education, one of which is broadly *social justice teacher education*. Taking a stance toward social justice establishes a purpose for education that extends beyond academic achievement and competence development models. This position acknowledges and works to change oppressive social power structures. According to Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2010), teacher education is a political act, and social justice is a

political position. Social justice teacher educators embrace this political stance rather than a "neutral objectivity" that maintains the *status quo*, but for teacher educators to translate this position into a coherent trajectory for the preparation of teachers presents a challenge.

A social justice approach to teacher education centers society's diversity and the inequitable distribution of material and intangible goods across diverse demographic groups. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), teacher educators need to "articulate a vision of teaching and learning within the diverse society we have become... [to infuse] multicultural issues throughout the teacher education curriculum…and revise it as needed to make issues of diversity central rather than peripheral" (p. 21). These curricular notions are intended to produce specific results among prospective teachers. Ken Zeichner (2006) explains "advocates for teacher education for social justice have emphasized the development of sociocultural consciousness and intercultural teaching competence among prospective teachers so that they will be prepared to teach...increasingly diverse students" (p. 328). In this approach to teacher education, a central purpose is to develop capacities and dispositions among prospective teachers, particularly regarding how they navigate intercultural interactions.

In her elaboration of a theory of teacher education for social justice, Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2010) explains, "From the perspective of social justice, teacher preparation also includes parents, families, and community groups as collaborators" (p. 460). Community voices are vital to teacher education because schools are often community projects; yet teacher education is often academic, at a distance from communities. Zeichner (2006) believes the future of teacher education relies, in part, on increasing the influence of communities in the education of teachers, noting "there is growing empirical evidence that novice teachers are helped to acquire in some forms of community field experiences the kind of knowledge, skills, and dispositions teachers

need to be successful" (p. 334). While policy-level changes should be implemented, considering the individual teacher educator's (lack of) agency in such changes – especially for those less visible adjunct and graduate teacher educators like myself (see Cochran-Smith, 2003) – collaborations with community partners offer pedagogical opportunities to enact social and individual change.

To meet academic content goals, community collaboration needs to be structured in ways that allow prospective teachers to develop skills and dispositions, or to learn something meaningful. Zeichner (2006) believes more teacher education needs to be situated "outside of the college and university campus in schools and communities, but we need to do much more than just send [prospective teachers] out there to pick up what they need to learn by a process of osmosis" (p. 334). Teacher educators' roles may become fluid to respond to the contingent nature of each student's experience, but they will continue to be concerned with learning outcomes. Balancing this concern with principles of reciprocity is a primary challenge for teacher-researchers: they need to navigate power relations as community and institutional roles shift. Meeting learning outcomes could be intertwined with respecting community agency and voices. Zeichner (2006) connects prospective teacher learning to the seriousness with which teacher educators regard community partners:

> unless these partnerships are expanded to embrace communities as full partners in the education of teachers, the partnership movement in teacher education will fail to develop the cultural competencies that teachers need to successfully teach everyone's children. (p. 334)

Developing the capacities and dispositions to teach diverse groups of students is less likely when community partners are excluded from or marginalized in the preparation of teachers.

In addition, *community* can manifest in educational scholarship in harmful ways. Teacher educators seeking to collaborate with communities would do well to consider Fendler's (2006)

critique of *community* as a discursive construction in educational scholarship; her focus is not on its application to *a place* as applied here. Fendler (2006) notes that "assumptions about community may have undesirable effects like assimilation and homogenization" (p. 304). She explains:

> Assumptions about community are not necessarily bad, but these assumptions may be dangerous if we are unaware of them. Community in educational literature is a construct that both embodies and constitutes what it is possible to think about who we can be and what we can (and cannot) belong to. (p. 305)

As a result, teacher educators and educational researchers need to be mindful of "the ways community constructs inclusions and exclusions simultaneously" (Fendler, 2006, p. 315). While inclusions and exclusions may be inescapable, I use this product to share my inquiry into the assumptions underlying some of these constructions.

While the work of individual social justice teacher educators may be an isolated endeavor in academia, community partnerships offer collaborative networks that contribute to teacher education for social justice when carefully undertaken.

Context and Researcher Position

In Fall 2016, the US presidential election was nearing its apex. It brought heightened xenophobia, and its normalization in public discourse; often emotional, political divisiveness at personal levels. Within this broader social context, I incorporated a service learning component in a children's literature course for undergraduate prospective teachers. The purpose for the assignment, as I explained to students, was that they interact with non-native speakers of English that would help them better develop their ability to teach in schools in which there was linguistic diversity. I tried to position them as learners: this project was an opportunity to learn how they adapted to unfamiliar language varieties to effectively communicate. While I expected students

would engage course themes through this project, children's literature played a limited role in the tasks I required. I wanted students to have new experiences with people that might challenge stereotypical narratives, especially given the need for them to engage cultural and linguistic diversity as teachers.

The course section I taught was designed to serve a cohort of global-educators-in-training. The service learning assignment asked students to interact with international members of our local community, most of whom were affiliated with the university as well. The project was intended for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders (namely, community members, students, and myself); however, I suggest that teacher-researchers like myself might facilitate such projects by supporting students' navigation of power relations. I argue that students situated as partners may be more likely to take a stance of reciprocity with community partners.

After having taught English language and US culture courses abroad for seven years, I struggled with English hegemony, yet I benefited from it greatly. English was often an asset for me. English as a *lingua franca* is integral to the world, for better or worse, and teaching provides access to the political, social, and economic capital of a language (Bourdieu, 1986); however, I view English and neoliberal globalization as descendants of colonialism. As a White, anglophone, middle class, cis-hetero male from the US, I am granted a privileged position in the system's hierarchy. Recognizing the system's inherent injustice creates an ethical struggle: I acknowledge my complicity and strive to minimize my negative impact while considering others (as I mention in Chapter III).

Returning to the US in 2013, I volunteered to lead English discussion classes as part of a community tutoring program. I was motivated to participate in some form of service, and to maintain a connection to people from outside the US. Volunteering helped me feel like I was not

exploiting the participants. The program was designed to provide "free English conversation practice for [the university's] international students, scholars, and [adult] family members" (VETP, 2017). My class was an informal weekly discussion with some regular participants and various sporadic attendees. I tended to take more turns speaking, but participants frequently steered the conversation toward their interests. My hope was to provide a context that felt relatively equal and comfortable.

I am unsure what other classes were like. Unlike me, most of the English-speaking volunteers in the program were from the community around the university—often well-traveled retirees. The director of the program, Mary, was a retired librarian who devoted a few days a week to organizing the various classes and projects of the program. She and I had conversations about language learning, literature, and the community throughout the next two years, and she described a one-on-one version of the program called Conversation Partners (CP) that was hoping to recruit more volunteers.

Meanwhile, my doctoral work in teacher education led me toward community engaged scholarship. The University encourages researchers to engage in outreach scholarship: "outreach and engagement activities should reflect a scholarly or knowledge-based approach to teaching, research, and service for the direct benefit of external audiences" (Provost, 2009). Such work is meant to "*cut across the mission* of teaching, research, and service" (Provost, 2009, original emphasis). This intersectionality appealed to me because my growing understanding of education and social issues.

I wanted to question the normalization of mainstream cultural experience that occurs in schools despite attempts at multicultural education (see Haddix, 2008). Prospective teachers could critically examine the erasure of identity through normalization and how it affects CLD

students. I encouraged prospective teachers to experience unfamiliar nuances of English as valid as those spoken in the Anglo world – what Canagarajah (1999) refers to as World Englishes – and to reflect on their own language and culture. I approached Mary about involving students in my class in the CP program.

Mary and I developed an instructional project that could help meet the demand for CP volunteers. We both desired to provide meaningful experiences for the international members of the community. Mary already had an online volunteer application in place, and she met with potential volunteers to match them with international community members. It was logistically uncomplicated to have students apply, but it created additional work for Mary to provide orientation for the influx of volunteers from my course. While we later discussed ways to lessen her workload, at this stage in our collaboration she had perhaps the least to gain. The design of the project was driven by my pedagogical purposes, though not to the exclusion of community needs.

Methods

Research into teaching can take many forms, including participatory action research (e.g. Whyte, 1991) and self-study (e.g. Loughran, 2005). Pedagogical scholarship is reflexive and recursive: I am both teacher and researcher, and the implications of this research informs my future teaching while hopefully resonating with other teacher educators.

Teachers inquire into their own practice, resolving problems while finding new ones. Teaching a course is similar from one iteration to the next, but participants change and the nuances of the content, time, and place shift. Schön (1995) describes *new scholarship* in terms of the relationship between researcher, research, and context:

> The inquirer is in, and in transaction with, the problematic situation. He or she must construct the meaning and frame the problem of the situation, thereby setting the stage for problem-solving, which, in combination with changes in the external context, brings a new problematic situation into being. (n.p.)

The teacher-researcher elaborates inquiry into teaching and learning, materializing it; however, this work is subjective, not conducive to controlled experiments, randomization, or other generally accepted standards of scientific rigor. Teacher-researchers "change the rules that govern what counts both as legitimate knowledge and as appropriately rigorous research into teaching and learning" (Schön, 1995, n.p.). This project is one of reflective practice: of my own teaching, and as a researcher examining the reflective practices of students engaged in service learning.

Power in Research

I asked students to participate in service learning, but their participation was a demand made by an instructor. To acknowledge my use of power over them, I returned to the data only after the term had concluded so my authority would not be a conflict of interest. Students had the opportunity to shape the research process through feedback that contributed to my inquiry into my own teaching practice. To better give voice to other stakeholders, Mary had the opportunity to read and review this manuscript. I encouraged her – as her time permitted – to read and comment as much as she liked. I revised this product to incorporate her feedback throughout.

Participants

The two groups of participants were students and partners. While students in my class were required to participate as part of a course project, the partners had some motivation to use English: most were students and visiting scholars who self-selected to participate in CP. A major

motivation for the partners was a desire to improve their English. As a result, I justify much of this work through its potential benefit to these partners in terms of their desire to have meaningful interactions with English speakers in the US. The intentional public purpose (Stanton, 2008) shared in the assignment description was

> to provide...students with exposure to and interaction with non-native English speakers that will help them gain experience working with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

While partners benefited from language interaction, students developed their repertoire as teachers of CLD students. My intention was intended as mutually beneficial for stakeholders.

Students in my course section were undergraduate, elementary education majors in their first or second year of a five-year teacher preparation program. There were nineteen females (18 White, 1 White/Latina) and three males (2 White, 1 Asian-American). They were all 18-20 years old.

Partners were from many different countries, including China, Japan, and Colombia to name a few. They were often spouses of visiting scholars or of graduate students who wanted the chance to practice English. The partners tended to be older by at least a few years, but the range was anywhere from mid-twenties to forties.

Students and partners arranged their own meetings. These often occurred in public spaces on campus like the library or student union, or in local coffee shops or restaurants.

The age difference was an issue: the partners often wanted more mature members of the community who would commit to longer than a single semester; and students were sometimes uncomfortable with spending time with older adults outside of their family or acquaintances.

The only access I had to the partners was mediated through Mary or students. This remains a major limitation of this study, and one I would like to address by communicating with all stakeholders more in the future.

Data Sources

Like Thomson, Dumlao, and Howard (2016), I used community engagement along with reflective writing, which they found "led students to develop and engage in flexible thinking and communication with members of their community" (p. 46). As Bowen (2010) found in his review of pedagogical scholarship involving service learning, empirical materials were generated "typically through student reflections, pre- and post-service surveys, or course evaluations" (p. 4). I examined reflective writing completed by students in my course during the Fall 2016 semester.

I assigned reflective writing through written prompts as part of the students' course requirements. Bowen (2010) found reflection "was most effective when it was structured and guided in such a way that it helped students link their service experiences to course goals and concepts" (p. 7). The reflective paper I focus on here followed their first meeting, and used this prompt:

> Following your initial meeting, write a 300-word reflection in which you consider some of the following questions (or your own): What did you talk about? Who initiated the conversation topics? What surprised you? What problems or confusion arose? How did you respond? What worked well? What did you notice about body language, eye contact, etc.? What do you think you'll do differently next time? What questions have arisen for you regarding working with CLD individuals?

The project positions students as teachers: the context of CP; and framing their experience as "working with."

I supplement these formal, graded reflections with other reflective writing the students complete each week in ungraded journals—specifically, a final reflection journal entry at the end of the semester:

(1) Where were you at the start of the course? Thinking about teaching, children, children's literature, global educator-ness, etc.
(2) There were a number of different ways we engaged in thinking in this course. What was an important moment in class for you? Describe what it was and why it mattered to you?
(3) What's an idea or takeaway from class that you imagine will matter to you in the future?

Throughout the term, students wrote in a Google Doc for about ten minutes each week. This additional set of informal writing served to (dis)confirm some of the themes I found in my analysis of the reflective paper.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough (2015) provides guidance for reading, interpreting, and analyzing discourse, especially with a critical perspective attuned to power dynamics and social relations. Discourse is social practice, and Fairclough's (2015) notions informed my reading and analysis of the texts produced as a part of this course assignment. Fairclough (2015) explains the relationship between *texts, interactions,* and *contexts* are central to understanding how power is enacted through and is perceptible in discourse.

Fairclough (2015) describes three stages of critical discourse analysis: description (of a text), interpretation (of text and of interaction, text as product of a process of production), and explanation (interaction and social context). I analyzed the data for positions taken up in the students' reflections, reading the data multiple times to code and organize responses according to power relations. In my first reading, I looked across their reflection papers to get a sense of what students were choosing to include: cultural differences, strategies to overcome a language

barrier, etc. I categorized responses along a spectrum of how students positioned themselves as teachers or learners. I further developed the theme of positioning as teacher or learner in light of the trends in their informal final reflection.

Analysis was interpretative; in the latter stages of analysis, "the analyst is in the position of offering (in a broad sense) interpretations of complex and invisible relationships" (p. 59). The nuances of their responses indicated the importance of power relations in partnerships, and this theme was particularly salient given my intention of sharing power in my pedagogical scholarship. I present my interpretation and explanation in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

To reiterate, the pedagogical purpose of the service learning project was for students to learn how to interact with people who may not speak the common Midwestern English with which the students were most familiar. The purpose of the volunteer program was to provide language instruction. Ultimately, these two purposes could compete with one another by respectively positioning students as learners or teachers. In addition to this uncertainty, many students had little experience with the international community and thus entered unfamiliar territory. Student reflections indicate different approaches to their partnerships; positions I believe teacher educators can influence to improve the outcomes of service learning—namely, to make these projects mutually beneficial to all stakeholders by embracing dynamic role-taking.

Following their initial meeting with partners, more than half of the students expressed nervousness (five of twenty-one), awkwardness (two), worry (two), or a sense of unpreparedness (two). While most retrospectively described the project as beneficial, their initial uncertainty indicated a need for greater experience—three students wrote about having had similar

experiences, and as a result were not nervous or uncomfortable. The lack of experience with language diversity among prospective teachers is a problem teacher education programs have yet to overcome (e.g. Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008).

My work as a teacher-researcher inclined me toward community engagement, yet I never clearly partnered with students in ways that provided conditions for intrinsic motivation, nor did I express the foundational elements of community engagement. As a result, the outcome of my teaching choices was that students entered partnerships unclear regarding their position. I will next describe how positioning emerged in my analysis as the students negotiated uncertainty. First, I elaborate the ways power and authority were taken up through discursive positioning; I then juxtapose participants desire for authenticity in these experiences. Finally, I offer some thoughts regarding community collaboration.

Teacher and Learner as Power Positions

In their reflections, students positioned themselves as teacher and/or learner. While the CP program staged their interactions to position them as teachers, I also stressed the importance of being a learner as well. Taking up a teacher position does not require erasure of the learner position—I wanted students to embrace both. These roles set the tone for how they interacted and influenced their expectations.

The role of teacher, in some cases, emerged from a view of language competence development—not a social approach. Students wrote about correcting pronunciation or adjusting speech patterns (five of twenty-one). This is unsurprising since the project inclines students toward being a teacher: they are working with partners who expect to improve their language

skills. While navigating imperfect communication is necessary, *correcting* can be troublesome. For example, one student commented:

> The only problems that arose were in minor grammatical errors (pluralization, syntax, etc.) in conversation, which were solved by my correction and patience.

Here, language is less about communication, and more about knowledge the teacher has and can provide to the student. There is less room to be a learner when taking a stance toward language that implies a native speaker ideal. Similarly, another student wrote:

> In order to correct and give advice on her pronunciation, we resorted to writing down undetectable phrases on paper, and from there continued to alter the text to a better alternative to say the given phrase.

While this comment indicates working together to solve communication issues, correcting "undetectable phrases" frames the teacher (i.e., native speaker) as linguistic gatekeeper.

Alternatively, students could position themselves as learners who are responsible for meeting their partners halfway, as in this response:

> I couldn't understand her at first, but I just paid closer attention and asked her questions if I didn't understand.

This student saw their role in communication as learner, and also framed the exchange around a shared desire for understanding. The onus is shared, not the responsibility of the non-native speaker to overcome a deficit. The teacher position allowed various degrees of the learner position, though sometimes students did not take up the learner role at all.

I would like for students to develop their sense of self as a teacher through inquiry and critical reflection. For example, positioned as a teacher, another student considered the results of simplifying language:

> As I tried to simplify things I was explaining...I was troubled by the fact that I was creating generalizations. I tried to avoid creating stereotypes, but this is difficult when I had to put things in simpler terms…

Her knowledge is a work in progress. While this student takes on the challenges of being a teacher (i.e., explaining), she also struggles to justify that which she explains. Teaching choices are complex and considering the impact of language use indicates her developing position.

In addition to how students positioned themselves, the partners had agency as well. Students perhaps imagine partners as learners, but partners do not always need a teacher. One student was surprised to find that her expectations of being a teacher were inaccurate. Her partner's

> ...willingness and persistence in wanting to help me with Chinese surprised me because Mary had previously informed us [this was] for native English speakers to help CLD individuals…

Students needed to negotiate their role in these new interactions, and some found partners' motivations were not what they expected given the initial framing of the project. The competing goals of the CP program (to teach partners) and our course assignment (to learn from partners) may have been confusing for students – especially when partners had their own ideas of what positions were available – but part of the project was for them to learn to navigate the fluid roles of community.

Overall, students' reflection on their experience was positive, but there was uncertainty. Uncertainty can be the source of confusion, in which case it might be easier to revert to comfortable roles; it can also provide the impetus for learning. In developing teachers, I embrace uncertainty as the space where questions arise, and contingency is expected.

Desiring Equal Power

Retrospectively, most of the prospective teachers found involvement in the CP program to be beneficial. I asked them to reflect on what could be done differently, and many of them felt

it was a project that should continue. For instance, one student claimed, “I have no regrets about what we talked about and what I learned.” Some mentioned a desire to have built a better relationship, as one student commented: “If there is anything I could do differently it would maybe be to meet with her more often.” The overall response from students was positive.

A common issue noted across responses (whether they found it beneficial or not) was that such a project is inorganic: the relationships feel forced and therefore inauthentic. One student explained: “I would have changed the fact that we were put together with a partner instead of being able to pick one. I felt as though the friendship was sort of forced upon us and was a little bit awkward.” While this inauthenticity is perhaps inherent to educational projects more generally, students came to view these relationships as personal—one student invited her partner to have Thanksgiving with her family. Once they became friends with partners, the origin of their relationship seemed inauthentic, though this was only mentioned by a few students.

However, many students had never had such an experience with someone from another country, or perhaps that they never would have if not for my assigning it. While they would not have experienced this relationship without the assignment, the assignment made it less authentic than was desirable—a paradox.

Critical Reflections on/with Collaboration

I learned that Mary wanted to take a break from our project after Fall 2016—she had run out of partners to pair with students. I had a feeling that other factors contributed: that students ended their participation after the semester and were unable to meet their partners consistently enough throughout the semester. Additionally, the capacity of the CP program couldn't meet the demand from my class.

I brought these ideas to Mary to discuss in the context of researching and writing up the project in this chapter. She said our collaboration worked well to reduce her waiting list of international community members desiring a partner; however, my inclination that the prospective teachers' commitment may not continue beyond the semester was accurate for some. Despite what students may have written in their reflections about developing a friendship, many of them did not continue their friendship outside the minimum course requirements. I required students in my class complete three tasks at separate meetings with a partner. As a result, many students met with partners only long enough to fulfill class requirements. On the other hand, the CP program intended for weekly meetings, and that was what most partners desired. As a result, Mary would have preferred to pair other CP volunteers with partners. I did not effectively negotiate with students to align what was required and what was desired in consideration of all stakeholders.

This is not to say all the students would not commit to the partnership. Some of the prospective teachers stayed on for more than the semester. One participated beyond the Fall 2016 semester with the same partner. Then, when her partner left, she continued to meet with a new partner (a friend of the original partner). This was a non-traditional teacher education student, and an exception. Regardless, I would evaluate her experience as successful for all stakeholders. Other students also had successful experiences. In one case, a student learning Spanish was paired with a partner from Colombia, and they agreed to alternate languages at their meetings and engaged in translanguaging practices that attend to the deeper issues of language and power in teaching and schooling in the US. I intend to return to these cases in future research.

Conclusion

I believe service learning projects can be an enactment of creative interference. In teacher education, community might serve as a backdrop upon which teacher educators and prospective teachers justify and practice instructional and curricular choices. Community has agency in the preparation of teachers and deserves partnership. The academy is not the purveyor of knowledge to an uninformed community; rather, a symbiotic relationship emerges between community and academy.

Central to the work of community engaged scholarship is the notion of partnership. The researcher is meant to avoid marginalizing the community, and power relations are foregrounded. Teacher-researchers introducing their students to community members as part of service learning would do well to similarly highlight partnership; however, the position of prospective teachers is in flux: still students, transitioning into teachers. Service learning projects are often spaces in which they are encouraged to act as teachers, which carries with it roles and relationships that can contradict a notion of partnership and learning.

In learning to become a teacher, interactions centered on language diversity could include members of the community who represent its variety. Experience solely with children, especially given the ways that these interactions will carry some evaluative stance toward language, maintains prospective teachers' position of authority. Interactions with older adults or peers, on the other hand, can contribute to working against notions of people as abstract images, or stereotypes – or simply provide nuance to our understanding of human diversity – by shifting power relations. With a goal of community involvement across teacher preparation, prospective teachers will need to have experience with communities outside of their university-based teacher

education program. These experiences could offer a variety of positions from which prospective teachers can interact with community members.

Flexibility is crucial to these interactions. Flexibility was necessary for participants to engage in dynamic role-taking across multiple identity positions. To provide experiences that encourage such multiplicity, teachers (in this case teacher educators specifically) can develop community partnerships to have students engage cultural and linguistic diversity. While interweaving course content is central, such projects are not exclusively possible in the context of children's literature as a part of teacher education. Teachers can adapt pedagogical scholarship to include communities in almost any context.

However, because teacher educators can effectively meet curricular goals through community partnerships, such instructional projects are not necessarily beneficial to all involved. Perhaps positioning student-participants in ways that motivate them to foreground partnership and reciprocity can increase the likelihood that these experiences will be meaningful for everyone.

Another contextually important consideration is my position as a doctoral student. As a graduate course instructor, I do not have much power or agency in the department hierarchy—nor longevity for that matter. Developing long-lasting, strong partnerships may require more institutional involvement. There certainly are conditions of this particular service learning project that could have been more formally developed, especially regarding the curriculum, that may have better positioned students to effectively participate, and for partners to reach their goals as well.

In highly structured teacher education programs, service learning experiences that situate prospective teachers in uncertainty can offer creative interference. Students navigate the possible

to determine their position and thinking. With reflective practices that center social, pedagogical, and power issues, these prospective teachers may be able to determine their own ethical position relative to the various stakeholders in these projects and education more widely.

V – CONCLUSION

From the research and writing of these three articles, I learned that interference with ideas is not enough to produce teachers who challenge the normative project of schooling. Disturbances can challenge certainty and ways of thinking about the world, but such interference can also emerge from limiting perspectives. For instance, I made assumptions about what my students needed, and introduced disturbances intended to reach particular outcomes, often framed around dispositions. These assumptions were grounded in the closed thinking I now hope to avoid: prescriptive teaching that desires to bring students into the teacher's way of thinking. As a result, I now strive to open possibility through interference that creates new spaces to think and act. This creative interference looks to pose questions where previously I might have provided answers. Creative interference involves inquiry into the otherness that lies beyond everyday experience, about choices in consideration of multiple selves and perspectives that are inherently limited, and about caring for multiple stakeholders in a shared material world shaped in part through social and discursive constructions.

What comes to matter – materially and what we value (Barad, 2007) – in this project draws from a number of transdisciplinary sources and follows Sandra Mitchell's (2009) three strands of inquiry: "how we *conceptualize* the world, *investigate* the world, and *act* in the world" (original emphasis, p. 18). These foci append to the positions I diffract from myself: the teacher conceptualizing curriculum, the researcher investigating what it means to do educational research, and the philosophical self existing between, across, and in the margins that informs my work as teacher and researcher. It is in this third, more liminal, dynamic space that I come up against power relations, and despite unintentionally participating in and reproducing them at

times, hope to shape my actions around an ethical stance. For instance, I hope to bring together community and classroom, and through doing so intend to dismantle unjust power relations—yet if I succeed, I still find myself in the center of another power structure. I conclude that the work of creative interference is dynamic and unending.

Like Karen Barad's (2007) notion of *agential realism*, I see the need for "an epistemological-ontological-ethical framework that provides an understanding of the role of the human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices" (p. 26). However, Mitchell (2009) notes,

> Historical contingency conspires with episodes of randomness to create the actual forms and behaviors that populate life on our planet. Life is not simple, and our representations of life, our explanations of life, our theories of how life works, will not be simple either. (p. 13)

Here, I intend to foreground uncertainty and the importance of the improbable in my exploration of complex systems of life and education. I make claims about my various selves that I live in the material world and discursively compose here – not about others – and even these are uncertain.

A complexity theory view of reality is both, as Mitchell (2009) says, "frustrating" (p. 7) in that it is less simple than many narrow disciplinary reductivist approaches, but simultaneously necessary for us to make choices and act in ways that perpetrate the least amount of harm on the cohabitants of our world. Knowing that our own context and perspective are insufficient for extrapolating all levels of complexity encourages collaboration and new experiences to take on other perspectives and gain a fuller understanding, which I attempt to instigate through creative interference.

In attempting to shape a better world, despite my good intentions for others, it is possible that I have/am the problem. I think this is true of others who share my position as a teacher, a

researcher, and a White person. We often impose deficit models and take up the mission to save others, but without addressing how we might need to be the locus of change. Our narrative of self and society, as a result, excludes the possibility that the authority (namely, teachers, researchers, and White people) is the source of inequity. Interfering with the narratives that frame me and (prospective) teachers as a solution can create new possibilities—especially for marginalized populations. Therefore, I strive to counter normalizing discourses in my children's literature course for prospective teachers. I hope to change the dominant culture through my work as a teacher educator, believing "formal education does not play a deterministic role in the unfolding of society, but does play an important orienting role that profoundly affects culture" (Davis, 2008, p. 63). Our culture, at times deeply ignorant and exclusionary, can be unethical. I'm concerned about the ways these beliefs are concealed when these discourses are rationalized.

The largely White context for discussing issues of diversity clearly presents a challenge for teacher educators, but a benefit of our contemporary world is that information is accessible. Globalization is the human condition, so nearly everyone is confronted with translocal information, including the knowledge that others exist, and our respective existences are entangled. People have developed awareness of global travel, shipping, and communications networks, economies, and ideas; that we are interconnected with others in the world. The flows that emerge from these "scapes" (Appadurai, 1990) are a manifestation of globalization, but we are slower to adapt than our technologies to the realization that distances appear smaller and Others appear closer.

In my attempt to reconcile my cultural heritage with my narrative of self in this complex, social world, I consider the equivalent of culturally sustaining pedagogies for the teacher of White American students to be creative interference. Interference may block or alter an intended

course, but in doing so it opens the possibility of new routes. Instead of changing how we feel about difference by objectifying Others through observation, I propose we change how we feel about us by investigating ourselves, and thus have the possibility to change how we can feel about others. This project elaborates my concept of creative interference as a pedagogical practice and how it might appear in curriculum (drawing upon Pinar's *currere*, 2004), how I investigate its effects, and how I act as a teacher and researcher in ethically-motivated revision of self and culture.

The process of teaching, researching, and writing the three central chapters of this dissertation has and will continue to influence future iterations of my teaching. The first article asks teacher educators to consider how they make curricular choices and challenges simplistic binaries to determine what is good. The next troubles the notion that student learning is the only way to think about teaching and opens the study of teaching to possibilities beyond student transformation. It explores the unintended consequences of teaching choices resulting from sociopolitical stance-taking in teaching, and I conclude that the process of inquiry is more valuable than achieving the development of an abstract disposition. Finally, I introduce a pedagogical choice to collaborate with community and to send students to unfamiliar territory where they negotiate uncertain power relations in teaching and learning. With the multiple levels of expectations and requirements, my understanding of community partnerships evolved in ways that incline me toward increasing student agency in their participation. Taken together, these chapters explore points of entry to engage difference. This pedagogy considers the risks and uncertainties inherent to the difficult conversations in teacher education (and the world more broadly), with the intention of deconstructing preconceived notions of multiculturalism that prospective teachers might hold.

This work is meant to give rise to the possible. Fendler (2003) is concerned about teacher education operating as a hall of mirrors in which reflection loses its value. The prescriptive ways in which teacher educators expect students to undertake reflection limits possibilities because that which is reflected remains binary: good or evil, reinforced or in need of change. Diffraction, on the other hand, resists binary understandings because interference creates blurred boundaries *between*—where good and bad can coexist, and other qualities emerge. The creation of possibility results from interference to closed notions of what can be achieved through teacher education: texts that might be evaluated as bad can be used to achieve instructional goals; inquiry into beliefs with the presumption that they need to change may prevent change; partnering with community requires uncertain, dynamic positioning despite the otherwise static roles assumed in teacher preparation (and education). Openness to the marginal spaces between and outside binaries removes the limits teacher education may place on prospective teachers and teacher educators, limits that might prepare teachers to reproduce binary thinking in their future classrooms.

These articles represent rehearsals. This is not to say they are preparation for a distant meaningful performance. They are all meaningful. To frame teaching as a rehearsal is to underscore the recursive aspect of teaching, in which each performance hones my craft. These various chapters rehearse diffraction – where creative interference is an additive process that complements reflective practices – to avoid a devaluation of reflection by losing it in a hall of mirrors.

APPENDIX

Outside sources shared before discussing *Arab*

Spring

Ahtone, T. (2016 February 3). Wyoming town abandons mosque opposition, pivots to anti-refugee rhetoric. *Al Jazeera America*.

Dizard, W. (2016 February 1). Poll: Muslim voters say Islamophobia top issue in primaries. *Al Jazeera America*.

Khalid, W., & Gould, K. (2015 December 24). Don't wait for the next war to rebuild Gaza. *Al Jazeera America*.

Khouri, R. G. (2015 December 27). To defeat ISIL, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved. *Al Jazeera America*.

Fall

Week 1-2
El-Baghdadi, I. (2015 December 23). The story of the Arab Spring is far from over. *Al Jazeera America*.

Gordon, N., & Perugini, N. (2016 August 30). Using human shields as a pretext to kill civilians. *Al Jazeera America*.

The Disappeared
Cook, J. (2016 August 5). The shocking story of Israel's disappeared babies. *Al Jazeera English*.

Fares, E. (2016 August 30). Lebanon's disappeared: 'My father could still be alive'. *Al Jazeera English*.

Fernandez, B. (2016 August 30). In Latin America, people disappear but crimes remain. *Al Jazeera English*.

Khalid, S. (2016 August 30). Nepal: Waiting for the 'disappeared'. *Al Jazeera English*.

Week 3-4
Khalid & Gould (2015): Don't wait for the next war to rebuild Gaza. *Al Jazeera America*.

Khouri (2015): To defeat ISIL, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved. *Al Jazeera America*.

Osuri, G. (2015 August 24). Kashmir and Palestine: The story of two occupations. *Al Jazeera English*.

Puranam, E. (2015 August 30). Kashmir: A story of defiance amid grief. *Al Jazeera English*.

Week 7-8

Cohen, S. (2016 July 11). BDS is a war Israel can't win. *Al Jazeera English*.

LeVine, M. (2016 May 13). The BDS question at US universities. *Al Jazeera English*.

Mitrovica, A. (2016 August 25). Palestinian lives matter. *Al Jazeera English*.

Week 9-10

Berman, M., Larimer, S., & Wootson, Jr., C. R. (2016 October 15). Three Kansas men calling themselves 'Crusaders' charged in terror plot targeting Muslim immigrants. *The Washington Post*.

Beydoun, K. A. (2016 July 11). Structural racism in the US won't diminish with time. *Al Jazeera English*.

Bick, C. (2016 August 29). March for racial equality on Boston's Freedom Trail. *Al Jazeera English*.

Shabi, R. (2016 November 1). Reversing the anti-refugee discourse with art. *Al Jazeera English*.

Taylor, K.-Y. (2015 November 29). Black Lives Matter on campus too. *Al Jazeera America*.

Week 10

Alabdallah, I. (2016 November 6). I live in Aleppo, under siege. *Al Jazeera English*.

Khalel, S. (2016 November 4). Palestinians mourn final Cremisan Valley olive harvest. *Al Jazeera English*.

Strickland, P. (2016 November 2). Life on the Pine Ridge Native American reservation. *Al Jazeera English*.

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