Storying Our Journey: Conversations about the Literary Canon and Course Development in Secondary English Education

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Abstract: Olan and Richmond present preservice English teachers' stories about having little experience with canonical texts they are asked to teach in their field experiences.

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When we first met in Minneapolis in 2015 at the annual National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) convention, we began discussing our individual stories about our English Education programs, especially regarding struggles reported by alumni in their early careers. Many of their stories focused on not having read (or remembered reading) many of the canonical texts they were being asked to teach. We began to reflect on what we were doing—as English Educators—to help our students prepare to teach canonical texts in addition to young adult literature, writing, grammar, and speech. When we began our dialogic interaction (comparing and contrasting our stories), we realized that our preservice teachers (PTs)—despite being at two geographically disparate universities—needed the same thing: more exposure to teaching literature.

The differences between these two university environments might at first suggest that teacher educators would need to take different approaches to training PTs. However, both programs create and foster opportunities where culturally responsive pedagogy and 21st century strategies are employed and in which PTs (and alumni) feel comfortable expressing difficulties with teaching. Both of our programs follow the NCTE/NCATE Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts (2012) which call for candidates to "plan, implement, assess, and reflect on research-based instruction that increases motivation and active student engagement, builds sustained learning of English language arts, and responds to diverse students' context-based needs."

In this essay, we offer insight into how and why two similar English Education courses focused on literature and pedagogy were developed and adopted at two geographically and socioculturally different universities. What follows is a discussion of our reflections on curriculum development and course adoption in English Education and descriptions of courses created in response to PTs' and alumni's knowledge of canonical and young adult literature texts.

It's important to note that as professors and directors of our English Education programs, we had already begun reflecting on our individual curricula and had started the process of adopting new courses in literary pedagogy when we started our conversation at NCTE and realized we were on the same journey. Like many educators across the nation, we are also engaged in culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) that aligns with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (2017) stance, which points to diversity as "our greatest educational asset" and identifies "understanding students' cultural beliefs and practices" as the responsibility of all educators.

In culturally responsive teaching practices, teacher educators engage in formal and informal conversations with PTs in the classroom and beyond. These conversations focus on the interactions between students (PTs) and teachers (e.g., Mercer, Dawes, & Staarman Kleine, 2009; Smith, Hardman, Wall, & Mroz, 2004). The term dialogic discourse draws from the notion of learning as a dialogue, which Bakhtin (1981) distinguishes from monologic discourse, where, for much of the time, the teacher is in control of the interactions that take place in the classroom. Bakhtin's dialogism helps us "produce and organise social reality by talking and writing" (Lyle, 2008, p. 225). In creating a classroom environment where dialogic interactions are encouraged, a different learning space is created, one which has been discussed by Wegerif (2007). This space is not a physical space, but rather a collaborative space where "learner and teacher engage with each other and, in a sense, learn to see the task through each other's eyes" (p. 3). It was this dialogic stance that we adopted as we entered into both data collection and analysis for our research.

Methodology

Research Questions.

1. How do we better prepare English teachers to teach literature effectively, to engage students in analysis of and appreciation of canonical texts as well as those written specifically for the adolescent reader?

2. How do we better inform our curricular decisions based on programmatic reflection with our students and alumni?

Setting and Population. Two public universities serving undergraduate and graduate populations are the sites for this research. One, the University of Central Florida (UCF), is located in an urban setting and is the second largest university in the United States with an undergraduate enrollment of sixty-four thousand. Demographics for this school are diverse, with almost thirty-five percent of students identifying as Black/African-American or Hispanic/Latino. The other, Northern Michigan University (NMU), is located in a rural Great Lakes region and enrolls approximately nine thousand students, only ten percent of whom identify as Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, or Native American.

Participants. This study included a total of forty-two preservice English teachers, seventeen secondary classroom English teachers, and two teacher educators from the universities.

Data Collection Sources. Specifically, in this essay, we draw on data from dialogic interactions, narratives, vignettes, electronic correspondence, and postings from a free social networking website among English PTs, teacher educators, and secondary English teachers in the field. In addition, we drew on our own classroom observations and experiences with crafting new courses and programmatic design.

Through conversations over a two-year period with PTs and English teachers (alumni), personal narratives surfaced and were shared during discussions and reflections about the English Education programs at our two universities. Narratives were shared via email, social media private messages, telephone conversations, and informal face-to-face discussions. Germain (2016) states that

> those scholars whose work contests dominant representations of space and identity provide tools capable of recovering silenced narratives about the past. The social world is a historically constructed environment, rather than a given one, and our representations of it provide a powerful point of entry into considering how and where its relationships might be challenged. (pp. 69-70)

PTs' narratives depicted their literary journeys as they encountered canonical literature in grade school and then as they entertained the thought of teaching canonical texts as PTs in secondary settings. It is through these silenced narratives that we, as teacher educator researchers, became invited into PTs' lived experiences and literary journeys.

Theoretical Framework

After our English PTs and alumni shared their thoughts about their academic internships and first jobs in the field, we compared and analyzed the data using a constructivist design (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 116). This research methodology emphasizes "the role of the researcher as an active participant who interacts with the field being explored" (p. 116). Researchers coming from a constructivist approach are "interested in the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participant and embrace and explore the inherent biases within this interaction [... and acknowledge] that knowledge emerging from data is not only 'discovered' but also created" (p. 116).

Daisey (2009) writes, "According to constructivist theory, knowledge is constructed from experience through reflection (Merrill, 1992). Additionally, Carter (1993) argues that teaching decisions are always framed within the context of a teacher's life histories,

personal experiences with reading form an important basis for their attitudes toward infusing reading activities into their instruction (Bean, 1994; Manna & Misheff, 1987). This is because "teachers don't just appear out of thin air. They are product—as well as active agents—of the worlds from which they came" (Greenleaf, Jimenez & Roller, 2002, p. 487)" (p. 168).

Research Design

We employed as our research design a constructivist case study methodology. As Creswell (2013) notes, a case study design "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a **case**) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information ...* and reports a *case description* and *case themes*" (p. 97). Additionally, Yin (2009) states that "the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (p. 4). A case study helps readers develop an "in-depth understanding" of the case by using multiple forms of qualitative data (e.g., interviews, observations, journals and other documents) which are then analyzed through a specific theoretical lens (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

Data Analysis

After our initial conversation at NCTE in 2015, we collected stories, narratives, and other data through formal and informal dialogues with PTs and alumni from both the Midwestern and Southern universities. We then created a table designed to allow for comparisons between participants' statements. Researchers identified key points and repeated themes and substantive experiences, which provided insight into problems that PTs and alumni were having in their early years in the secondary English classroom. Researchers also shared syllabi for the new courses on literature and pedagogy and discussed the process of course development at our institutions. Moving back and forth between the recurrent themes in participants' statements, the syllabi from both newly constructed courses, and dialogues with each other and with the

participants, we revisited our data, identified important patterns, and noted important themes within data. Our data analysis was rooted in the dialogic nature of our relationships with participants and each other as researchers. During the content analysis, we analyzed data based on what it meant to the PTs, to us as teacher educator researchers, and to our programs.

Elsie Olan's Story. After being hired as a tenure-seeking teacher educator and track coordinator for the secondary English Education program at UCF in 2013, I reviewed syllabi from instructors in the program. However, syllabi don't tell the whole story of what PTs and novice teachers experience in the field. It was only when I was teaching the methods course (the single methods course focused on literature) in which PTs were actively reflecting on their field placements that they shared the disconnect they experienced between what they were learning in their English Education courses and what was happening in the secondary English classrooms in which they were placed for internships.

PTs dialogued with me about their struggles with teaching literary lessons using classical texts they had not previously read (e.g., *The Scarlet Letter, Jane Eyre, The Great Gatsby, Romeo and Juliet, Wuthering Heights,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*). For example, one said, "I remember the first time I looked at the curriculum blueprints from my county, and I was surprised at how scripted the lesson plans were regarding priority [literary] texts. Straying away from these texts would feel as if my team and I were ignoring what is expected of us." Another noted, "As experts in our field, it is crucial that we develop fundamental knowledge of young adult literature and that we are prepared to advocate it as a viable alternative to the canonical texts that we are currently obliged to use in English Language Arts." PTs' feelings of discomfort with scripted curricula and/or required texts were triggered by their sense of awareness of how far removed they were from high school experiences with literature. Concerns about preparedness (as well as doubt) in preservice in-service teachers have been taken up in studies on teacher identity, which Alsup (2004, 2006) has discussed in detail with regard to English Education.

Thus, I initiated conversations with my colleagues in the program, who reported that their students shared similar concerns. All of us were surprised at the news because the research used to inform our programmatic decisions (e.g., Applebee's 1989 study about texts commonly taught in American high schools) was not completely accurate when compared with PTs' own secondary school experiences. Their lack of exposure to (or difficulty remembering having exposure to) what English Educators commonly assume they have read was part of the impetus for our program revision. Therefore, we acknowledged that we needed to enhance our curriculum through lessons, assignments, and assessments that would give PTs more exposure to a variety of canonical texts used in high school classrooms. Moreover, we realized that our program needed a new course to provide them with a background in canonical literary texts appropriate for the secondary English classroom and the knowledge of how to teach those texts while incorporating culturally relevant literature, such as by including young adult literature and digital texts.

Kia Richmond's Story. As a tenured full professor and director of the English Education program at NMU, I began reflecting on our program in 2013 after various alumni revealed in conversations that they were struggling with teaching canonical literature while in their early teaching years. In social media messages and emails, they shared frustrations with being asked to teach classic (but unfamiliar) texts by Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, and both Charlotte and Emily Bronte. Moreover, the same kinds of narratives were shared with me by English PTs during their student teaching internships, where they were asked to teach *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Of Mice and Men* (Richmond, 2014, p. 20). Their concerns were two-fold: first, that they had not read many of the classic texts that they were being asked to teach, and second, that their secondary students were not connecting personally or culturally with the literature. One student noted that when she met with her supervisor before starting student teaching, she learned that she would be teaching *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Jane Eyre*, *Frankenstein*, *A Room of One's Own*, an excerpt from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, *The Story of Prometheus* and other myths, and Joyce Carol Oates' short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Overwhelmed by the idea of

having to plan lessons for so many unfamiliar but canonical texts, this PT asked why we hadn't discussed these texts in our English methods course. What she might not have understood is that she was far removed from the memory and /or experience of reading these types of texts during high school.

As Daisey (2009) notes, there are two types of readers: "those who read to remember and those who read to forget" (p. 178). She goes on to explain that PTs who have high reading enjoyment (HRE) tend to read for "escape and therapy" while those with low reading enjoyment (LRE) "read for information" (p. 178). Her arguments are similar to those found by Rosenblatt (1978), who identified aesthetic and efferent approaches to reading. The types of readers mentioned by Daisey and Rosenblatt are significant when we consider that our PTs themselves represent both types of readers. Frequently, they move back and forth between the two stances because they read some texts for school purposes and others for individual satisfaction.

Through dialogic interactions with students via social media, PTs also shared their literacy stories, memories of their lives as readers and as teachers-in-training in the English classroom. Daisey (2009) notes that these types of histories are valuable "because they allow pre-service teachers to understand themselves and confront prior assumptions that will help them to be open to new ideas about literacy and the teaching of reading." (p. 169). Additionally, Lortie (1975) thinks that "unless teachers-to-be are aware of their preconceptions and internalizations, the varieties of instructional methods they study may be wasted" (cited in Daisey, 2009, p.169).

Obviously, no one methods course can prepare PTs to know or recall all literary texts; however, the PTs' frustrations highlighted for me that a change needed to occur in the program at NMU, which heretofore had only one methods course focused on teaching all of the English Language Arts content and pedagogy. After discussing the issue with colleagues and evaluating existing courses, we decided to develop a course that would help students explore theoretical and pedagogical issues related to teaching literary texts, with an emphasis on classic and contemporary canonical and young adult texts, including works by women and writers of color and/or ethnic diversity. It was our hope

that doing so would help future PTs feel more prepared to teach literature at the secondary level.

Our Story: The Power of Dialogue

The two-year journey of creating both our new courses and completing their adoption was complex, tedious at times, and, frankly, a bit frightening. Course adoption at both universities is a complex process that requires the program coordinator to produce a completed course syllabus, rationale, and course resource list. These documents go through a plethora of revisions before the syllabus is presented to various university committees and departmental units for their feedback. (This practice is recommended because when a course is submitted, one needs to be conscientious of the programmatic, college, and university impacts.) What made the process intimidating was the fact that while the course was being approved at UCF, the program coordinator was required to meet with committee members and present a rationale for the course while responding to questions about the English Education program, PT outcomes and learning processes, and how the course would prepare them to teach successfully. While the adoption of the new course at NMU was equally rigorous, the process did not seem as intimidating because its program coordinator was already tenured and held the rank of full professor.

When we discovered at NCTE that we were both preparing to teach the new courses we had developed, what helped us was our willingness to engage in regular, sustained conversations and reflections via phone, email, Skype, and, when possible, in person. Our conversations began by talking about the reality of the educational settings in which our PTs and alumni found themselves working. For example, many acknowledge that they are teaching in a world in which a prescriptive curriculum is holding teachers hostage and limiting what they can and cannot teach. PTs placed in urban districts, where funding is not dispersed equitably across all schools, claim that limited access to quality literature and library resources reinforces their feelings of inadequacy. Learning and teaching in a world in which there are not enough textbooks or computers for all

students perpetuates the idea that diversity is not as highly valued as test scores (Ravich, 2013).

For PTs at NMU, in general, there were few limitations in terms of curriculum. Most were placed in field experiences or found jobs in rural or suburban schools, where English teachers are frequently given more freedom in determining which texts to teach and how to teach them (while still adhering to required standards). For instance, several alumni recently asked for suggestions on new texts to order for their high school classrooms. In some cases, they received funding from the schools, while in others they used sources such as Donors Choose or non-profit grant programs to fund their purchases. It seems that English teachers in settings where they are given more curricular freedom have more of a sense of agency with regard to accessing funds for literary texts, including those not typical of the traditional canon.

However, the majority of the texts being taught across the U.S. is still canonical. This understanding triggered our reflective stance, an examination of the recent research on literature being taught in the public secondary schools in both rural and urban settings. Stallworth & Gibbons (2012) report that in a recent study of secondary schools in nine southeastern states, the following books were most commonly taught: *The Great Gatsby, Romeo and Juliet, The Crucible, The Odyssey, To Kill a Mockingbird, Night,* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (p. 3). Their list is almost identical to Applebee's (1989) research completed twenty-three years earlier. Despite the reports from scholars that these canonical texts are the norm in secondary classrooms, our alumni and PTs state that their personal experience in their own high schools did not adequately expose them to the most commonly taught texts. Many of them were enrolled in AP or Honors English courses, which often required college-level reading and not typical high school canonical literature. Others realized that they remembered books read for enjoyment (mostly outside of school) but not those read in conjunction with high school assignments and assessments (typically for efferent purposes). Beyond this situation, PTs are often held responsible for teaching classic texts that are not on the most commonly taught lists (such as those mentioned previously in this essay). Thus, English Educators are left in a conundrum: there is no way to teach all texts, and with a

commitment to a culturally responsive pedagogy, there is no way to address students' cultural needs while also covering commonly taught secondary canonical texts and young adult literature texts. Thus, we recommend English Educators revisit their courses and discuss curriculum development as we have done to determine where changes or additions are needed.

Eckert (2013) calls for English teachers and those who prepare them to "take control of their curricula" and to use their expertise to choose appropriate literary texts rather than waiting for "a panel of non-educators to determine what texts will be 'approved' for inclusion in CCSS aligned curricula" (p. 40). As English Educators, we don't have a panel of non-educators choosing our texts for our university courses; nevertheless, by tapping into our PTs' and alumni's experiences, we are listening to the voices of those who are often left out of the process. Moreover, because we have shared our own experiences, discussed the process, problematized our curricular expectations, and critically examined notions associated with the status quo, we as English Educators grew personally and professionally. Both of us felt empowered because we were invited into the silent narrative of PTs and alumni (Brooks & Edwards, 1997, p. 5). Moreover, we were better informed about students' needs and those of our programs because PTs and alumni shared their limited experiences with canonical texts and the expectations of secondary English teachers they worked with in public schools.

For instance, a PT from UCF expressed frustration with her high school English preparation in an email to the program coordinator, stating, "I can honestly say that I have never studied or heard about these canonical texts in high school, and I am worried that I will not be prepared to teach such texts." Another discussed her lack of knowledge of "canonical texts, the era novels were written in, authors of specific genres." PTs from NMU shared similar concerns. In particular, one reported that she was expected to teach *The Bluest Eye*, *Jane Eyre,* and *Frankenstein*, along with *A Streetcar Named Desire*, none of which she had previously read in secondary or college classes. In many cases, PTs and alumni from both universities discussed having been exposed to canonical texts in their college literature courses but not having delved into pedagogical and instructional practices connected with teaching such literature.

Co-Labouring: Self-Realization and Growth

As we considered the reports from our PTs and alumni, we realized that interacting with each other helped us make sense of our students' experiences in a programmatic context. Additionally, reflecting regularly through conversation allowed us to see the bigger picture involved, the intricate symbiotic relationships between curriculum development, course offerings, and effective teacher preparation. As English Educators at very differently positioned colleges, we might not have come to this understanding independently. But because of our willingness to share the process as well as the product (considering student input/data, thinking about relationships between courses, wondering about students' preparedness, selecting texts and creating assignments, discussing the politics of getting a course adopted, etc.), we created a space for our own professional growth. This happened simultaneously while meeting our PTs' needs, which might have gone unnoticed if we hadn't collaborated and, as Cook (2016) says, "co-laboured." Co-labouring "allows us to reconceptualise partnerships as a place where partners expect to do some hard, reflexive work together to mutually challenge common understandings and expectations" (p. 90). Working through the process of co-labouring "disturbs the 'studium,' the common 'rules' through which we frame our seeing and understanding" (p. 90). Because of these interactions with each other, we now have a sense of awareness that helps us reflect on PTs' positionalities and agency within the larger landscape of the educational systems that cross our country.

Our concerns about our PTs' struggles with literature and our possible programmatic solutions had very little to do with our geographical, socio-political, and economic positionings. In fact, the struggles appear to be systemic across English Education programs. There is a common misconception that most secondary schools and teacher preparation programs expose students to literature mentioned by Applebee (1989) and echoed by Stallworth & Gibbons (2012). Reports from our PTs and alumni demonstrate, however, that there seems to be no consistency in the classic texts that students are exposed to prior to taking up their role as teachers in the English secondary classroom. Learning this has helped alleviate some of the pressure that we felt as teacher educators. The feelings of inadequacy expressed by our graduates in their early teaching positions were not directly related to something that we did or didn't do in our programs (which

was, at first, what we independently thought). Instead, we discovered that acknowledging our PTs' lack of experiences with canonical texts, combined with our own experiences during programmatic review, helped us frame the problem and revisit possible solutions that would better prepare them to teach literature to all types of students.

Additionally, we honed our skills in course development, research, and advising. We also developed a more keen sense of awareness about the issues our alumni face in their early careers in the secondary schools. Moreover, we learned that the problems of urban and rural English teachers (and teacher educators) are not as different as originally thought.

Our Courses: Continuing the Story

Our new courses were designed to help PTs build an appreciation of canonical texts and young adult literature and strategies for using literature to encourage critical thinking across the curriculum. (See Appendix for a list of materials used in the new courses.) Assignments in both courses invite PTs to read, analyze, and evaluate texts while simultaneously working with curriculum, assignments, class activities, research, and integration of technology. Thanks to the introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), English Education faculty have even more impetus to consider the configuration of their courses along with students' cultural needs. The CCSS doesn't "represent a curriculum" but serves as "a framework around which curriculum can be built" (Michigan Department of Education). Despite the warning that the list of texts identified in Appendix B of the CCSS is *not* required for inclusion in the secondary English curriculum, some teachers and districts adopt them as such nonetheless.

Additionally, Goering & Connors (2014) posit that this list will likely "solidify the stronghold that canonical literature has historically had on the secondary literature curriculum" (p. 18). Therefore, we have learned that English Educators should include more variety in canonical texts and add young adult literature in their courses to help balance out the texts which are over-taught and over-tested. Moreover, we should help

PTs to consider critically *why* they choose specific texts, *how* those texts are relevant to students' lives and cultures, and *how* the literature they teach is connected to standards identified by the CCSS. Finally, as Low and Campano (2013) state, "The canon is not solely a mechanism to be reproduced; it is also critically reinvented by our students" (p. 30). We would add, the canon is also reinvented by their English education courses.

Finally, our new courses were created to allow PTs to explore canonical texts, young adult literature, and strategies for incorporating literature into the goals/objectives of the secondary English classroom. During the development of the assignments for our courses, we purposefully reflected on the following:

- PTs' needs and concerns shared with us

- Reports and conversations from alumni about what they were expected to teach

- Literature taught in other English and/or Education courses already included in our programs

- Pedagogical and instructional practices for the teaching and implementation of canonical texts in teaching scenarios

In the chart below, we highlight course assignments at each university. These assignments, though developed independently, mirror each other quite well. Our conversation about the assignments is ongoing. We have consistently and intentionally reflected on how our assignments are connected to scholarly research in English Education, reports from current students and those who have graduated from our programs, and discussions with English teachers in the field. Following the chart, we continue our discussion, including an update on when the courses will be taught and benefits to PTs and their future English students.

Course Assignments

The Teaching of Literature. Northern Michigan University	Canon, YA Literature and the English Language Arts Curriculum. University of Central Florida
Written discussion of how a film version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" could be used in a lesson for middle school students.	Written discussion of how a film clip of "The Tell-Tale Heart" could be used to adapt an existing lesson plan typically used with 8th and 9th grade students.
Short presentation on theoretical lens/literary criticism. Must include a visual aid (e.g., PowerPoint, film clip, Prezi, etc.). Apply the lens to a teacher-selected text (e.g., Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise").	Presentation of research based on literary criticism with question-and-answer session. Must include visual in the form of PowerPoint, Prezi, or other digital media. Apply the lens to a teacher-selected text (e.g., Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*)
An analysis of a controversial literary text (using a specific critical lens) as well as a research-based rationale for teaching the text at a specific grade level.	A researcher-based analysis of a literary text (using a specific critical lens) as well as a lesson-plan for teaching that text at a specific grade level. An annotated bibliography will also be required.
Multigenre and multicultural mid-term reflection on what has been learned during the first half of the semester; must be organized around a common theme and address the teaching of literature to grades six through twelve.	Resource unit plan about a young adult literary text and a canonical literary text that share a theme/issue connected to diversity (e.g. age, racial, gender, sexuality, religious, class, linguistic, disability and or exceptionalities)

Evaluation of a published unit plan focused on middle or high school literature, including reflection on genre, populations represented, types of assignments and assessments.	Evaluation and reflection on resource unit plan.
Analysis of graphic novel (e.g., *My Friend Dahmer)* considering character development; the use of color or shading, size or shape, setting, dialogue or style; theme; symbols; etc.	Blog about a specific classical or young adult literary text (e.g., graphic novel, audiobook, etc.). Discussion of how the text might be taught included. Additionally one-page response discussing content in terms of connections with other course readings, class discussions, or field experiences.
One-day lesson plan on how to teach a poem (student's choice) for grades six through twelve. Reflection on why the pedagogical strategy was selected.	Daily lessons within resource unit plan, pairing of classical literature with young adult texts.
Final multigenre and multicultural project reflection on teaching literature; adding three new pieces to mid-term project to demonstrate learning since that time. Should offer multiple perspectives and include scholarly research.	Series of book talks on literary texts (canonical and young adult literature selected by student from assigned lists). Emphasis on pedagogical and instructional practices needed to teach the texts in grades six through twelve.

When constructing the assignments listed above, we utilized a list of materials that were culturally relevant to our PTs' classroom settings, that is, the academic environments in which they might find themselves working in field experiences or early teaching assignments. We also considered PTs' previous experiences with canonical texts (or their lack of exposure to or memories of those texts) when designing assignments and choosing literature for our courses. Our choices were directly related to our understanding of our students' needs and the cultures from which they came and into which they would most likely be going to teach. For example, I chose to use *My Friend Dahmer* in NMU's course because the setting (Ohio) and population (predominantly White suburban high school students) were familiar to those in my program. With regard to UCF's course, text choice was more complex in order to reflect the diverse populations and settings of the PTs' experiences in a Southern urban area. Our conversations about various assignments were grounded in our choice to teach from a culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010).

Intentional Course Design: Grounding Our Stories in Theory

Specifically, culturally responsive pedagogical practices place as much emphasis on teachers' stances as their classroom practices (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally responsive educators are more than willing to self-examine and to self-reflect upon their own social, educational, and political identities. Gay (2010) states, "Interactions between students and teachers as well as among students in the classroom frequently are identified as the 'actual sites' where learning success or failure is determined. They are prominent among the major attributes of culturally responsive teaching" (p. xix). Moreover, we, as culturally responsive teacher educators, considered the lives of our students outside our classrooms, digging deeper into the political, economic, and social contexts of our students' lives. We examined our students' beliefs about schooling and prior experiences with schooling as well as their demographics and the religious and sociopolitical contexts of the communities in which they learn and teach (Irvine & Armento, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Benefits of Collaboration: The Power of Story

As we prepared to teach these newly developed courses for the first time in 2017, both of us reflected on our story, our interactions and experiences, and our PTs' and alumni's needs. In doing so, we have realized that future English teachers need more time with and exposure to canonical texts to help them better select and integrate historically situated literature without replicating the dominant culture. As we know, reading texts that reflect a "mono-ethnic view of history with sprinklings of works from other groups does not allow students the opportunity to think about other cultures and critically engage in discourse about history, current events, and future events" (Perry & Stallworth, 2013, p. 16). In courses such as those described here, PTs will be invited to reflect on how much literary theory to include in their lesson plans; how to lead discussions about issues of political, cultural, and gender stereotyping; and how to help students to actively read and interrogate stories that might seem far-removed from 21st century experiences like texting and using Snapchat.

Moreover, as much as they need richer, more pedagogy-oriented experiences with canonical literature, PTs need to engage with young adult literature to consider its belletristic and aesthetic value as well (Goering & Connors, 2014). Teacher candidates should be asked to make decisions about not only which young adult novels (or stories or poems) to include in their lessons but also *why* they would incorporate those specific texts and *how* those texts might mirror or complicate ideas from canonical pieces. If we want middle and high school students to engage in critical analysis of their own lives and enable them to recognize "discourses of power" (Delpit, 1992), we must prepare their English teachers to move seamlessly between young adult literature and the canon while attending to issues of cultural relevance, student interest, and text complexity.

Our journey, as collaborative and critical English Education researchers, has been steeped in reflection and scholarly research. Our dialogic interactions have helped us to establish a space in the curriculum for valuing our PTs' and alumni's experiences, both their own stories as secondary students in English classes and those of the students they teach during field experiences and in their first years of teaching. While we frequently alternate between inhabiting the university classroom and visiting secondary English

classrooms (during observation of student teachers, for example), we are *not* as closely connected to our PTs' experiences, our alumni's stories, and those of their secondary students. Though we actively seek out opportunities for dialogue with secondary English teachers and assess our PTs' successes in field experiences and internships, as university professors, we are limited in our scope. When we visit English classrooms, we get only a snapshot of what is happening there: the narratives of our alumni and PTs fill in the gaps for us and allow us to have more perspective as to how our courses connect with real needs.

By listening to our PTs' and alumni's stories, we have been invited into what are often silenced narratives. We learned that English teacher educators should not create their courses in a vacuum; there needs to be dialogue. We need to be informed about what secondary students and their English teachers know and are being taught about literature. Through sharing those stories with each other and disrupting our narratives, we have created a nonthreatening space where reflection is valued and where our stories and those of our stakeholders are central to curriculum and program design.

This research revealed that our PTs needed more exposure to canonical literature used in grades six through twelve as well as engagement with pedagogical practices and implications involved in the teaching of those texts.

Epilogue: Our Stories Enter the Classroom
Our journey together through the process of reflecting on our programs and developing new courses has taught us many lessons. One is that English Educators should examine their curricula, share their findings with each other at professional conferences such as those offered by (NCTE) and its state affiliates, and consider how the changing landscape of secondary English Language Arts is reflected in English Education, where change can be slow and frequently based on a historical precedent rather than cultural need. Certainly, our secondary schools and the public share an expectation for us to prepare secondary English teachers who can enter middle and high schools as teachers with a certain literary competence. However, we need to put that into perspective with

our country's initiatives (such as the CCSS), which also influence curriculum and instructional decisions, and with PTs' varied experiences with literature. We need to be mindful of our students' exposure to and interactions with literature at the secondary and college levels.

In addition, we need to have conversations within our professional communities of practice within and across institutions, sharing not only *why* we want to make changes but *how* the process of reform in English Education takes place, and *how* that process affects our professional and personal growth as English teachers and teacher educators. Often, we find ourselves alone during the decision-making process at the university level. Many English Educators are the only ones in their departments who coordinate programs for secondary English majors and minors. Engaging in dialogic interactions and sharing our stories with other program coordinators as well as colleagues at our home institutions, and elsewhere, helps us feel less isolated while allowing us to inform our decisions about curriculum and course development. Doing so also provides a space for silenced narratives to come to the surface and gives voice to those who are joining the field of English studies and those who already inhabit it as English Educators.

During our extended dialogues over the course of two years, we have grounded our conversations in Rogers' (1961) principles of communication for helping relationships: "congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding" (pp. 60-61). Rogers makes the argument that we are always in the process of becoming, and that with the assistance of a helping relationship, we will successfully become who we can be. As English Educators, we strive to give one another the support and space to problematize our experiences and disrupt our notions, creating a discourse community in which we can both be and become. Constructing a professional community, even of just two individuals, provided us with emotional, pedagogical and theoretical lenses through which we positioned and reinvented ourselves and our teaching.

We also learned to ask difficult but relevant questions. For example, how are we situating canonical texts, not as opposite from but in balance with young adult literature? By crafting assignments that require students to read canonical texts and

consider school/community cultures and secondary students' needs, we provide PTs with opportunities to develop critical understandings of English Language Arts curriculum. Additionally, we encourage them to become more aware of the need for critical consciousness while planning lessons, assignments, and assessments (Freire, 1970).

We embarked on the journey of questioning our own positionalities and practices. We asked, how are we situating ourselves to meet the needs of our PTs who will go into the field and teach secondary students who may have limited opportunities to engage with canonical and young adult literature? To meet their needs, we should know our English Education students' needs more fully. We should create courses in which our students are invited to talk about their diverse experiences in the secondary schools and as university students, and that includes talking about their understandings, conceptions, and misconceptions about diversity and literature relevant to their cultural contexts. Providing a nonthreatening space and relevant assignments in our English Education courses (to acknowledge, reflect on, and share their lived experiences, including any limitations and biases) can help them to better prepare as English teachers. This will also empower PTs to create lessons that balance canonical texts with culturally relevant young adult literature while teaching them how to broaden their understanding of literature through multiple texts and genres.

We invite and challenge our PTs to engage in a literary journey where they will embark on investigations of literary criticism, problematize controversial texts, and research their teaching; also, they will develop units of study grounded in conscientious reflection, evaluate students' needs as individuals and members of communities, and construct multimodal and multigenre projects that reflect their learning and growth as English teachers.

Because our overarching goal is to prepare English teachers who will create career and college ready lifelong learners, we should consistently reconsider and revise our curricula through meaningful dialogue that invites the questioning of standard practices and that allows space for individual narratives while leaving room for the personal and

professional growth of even those who are in positions of power. Our stories started out as separate but parallel; however, now our stories intertwine and weave across the miles, depicting our intricacies and reflecting the changes we have undergone as part of the process. Engaging in these dialogic interactions has enhanced our pedagogical practices, our development of courses and curricular elements, and our professional and personal identities as program coordinators, English Educators, and educational advocates.

As we venture into teaching the new English Education courses we have created in 2017, we do so with hope; however, we acknowledge that our new courses are only one element within our educational and institutional systems. We must be aware that consistent, ongoing dialogue is essential as teacher educators to equip "our preservice teachers to have the agency to select and implement appropriate literature relevant to varied educational settings, contextual realities, and students' cultural needs" (Olan & Richmond, 2016). In these courses, we are creating opportunities in which "preservice teachers can analyze and formulate their own identities as readers while learning to teach literature in any school to all students." Our goal in both courses is to foster learning environments where content, context, and inquiry are connected and used to expand PTs' knowledge of literary content and the field of English Language Arts.

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Yin, R. K. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). London: Sage.

Appendix: Course Materials for Both New Courses

<u>Teaching of Literature, Northern Michigan University</u>

Alsup, J. (2015). *A case for teaching literature in the secondary school: Why reading fiction matters in an age of scientific objectivity and standardization*. New York: Routledge.

Atwell, N. (2015). *In the middle: A lifetime of learning about writing, reading, and adolescents* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Backderf, D. (2012). *My friend Dahmer: A graphic novel*. New York: Abrams ComicArts.

Carter, J. B. (2007). *Building literacy connections with graphic novels: Page by page, panel by panel*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Mays, K. J. (Ed.). (2016). *The Norton introduction to literature* (12th ed.). New York: Norton.

<u>Canon, YA Literature and the ELA Curriculum, University of Central Florida</u>

Alsup, J. (2015). *A case for teaching literature in the secondary school: Why reading fiction matters in an age of scientific objectivity and standardization*. New York: Routledge.

Appleman, D. (2015). *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Hayn, J. A., Kaplan, J. S., & Clemmons, K. R. (2017). *Teaching young adult literature today: Insights, considerations, and perspectives for the classroom teacher* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mays, K. J. (Ed.). (2016). *The Norton introduction to literature* (12th ed.). New York: Norton.

Materials/ Book Choices. Choose one book from each list.

<u>Classic Young Adult Novels</u>

Hinton, S. E. *The Outsiders*

Lowry, L. *The Giver*

Paulson, G. *Hatchet*

Taylor, M. *The Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*

Voigt, C. *Homecoming*

<u>Banned Books</u> (each individual student will read a different book). See the American Library Association's list of banned/challenged books and ALA's list of banned and challenged classics at http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks

<u>Contemporary Texts</u>

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian.*

Anderson, L. H. *Speak*

Cisneros, S. *The House on Mango Street*

Myers, W.D. *Monster*

Ryan, P.M. *Esperanza Rising* [RH3]

<u>Canonical "Classics" Commonly Taught as YAL</u> (groups)

Orwell, G. *Animal Farm*

Hurston, Z. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Huxley, A. *Brave New World*

Lee, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Steinbeck, J. *Of Mice and Men*

Twain, M. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Graphic Novels

Satrapi, M. *Persepolis*

Spiegelman, A. *Maus*

Thomas, R. & Fiumura, S. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Vaughan, B. & Niko, H. *Pride of Bagdad*

Yang, G.L *American Born Chinese*

Pedagogical / Critical Issue Resource Texts

Allen, J. (2000). *Yellow brick roads: Shared and guided paths to independent reading 4-12*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Andrasick, K. D. (1990). *Opening texts: Using writing to teach literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Atwell, N. (2015). *In the middle: A lifetime of learning about writing, reading, and adolescents* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read, what teachers can do: A guide for teachers, 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Beers, K., Probst, R. E., & Rief, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Adolescent literacy: Turning promise into practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Blau, S. D. (2003). *The literature workshop: Rethinking the classic problems of instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gallagher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Smith, M. W., & Wilhelm, J. D. (2002). *Reading don't fix no Chevys: Literacy in the lives of young men.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wilhelm, J. D. (2016). *"You gotta BE the book": Teaching engaged and reflective reading with adolescents* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Award Winning Books

Newbery Award (awarded to an author who makes the most distinguished contribution to American children's literature)

Pura Belpre Award (awarded to a Latino/Latina writer who affirms and celebrates Latino culture)

National Book Award (note that the award for Young People's Literature began in 1996)

The Printz Award (awarded for a book that exemplifies literary excellence in YAL)

The Coretta Scott King Award (awarded to African American writers and illustrators for significant contributions)