

Reading as a Tool for Self-Reflection

Exploring Text and Self-Identities in a 10th Grade English Classroom

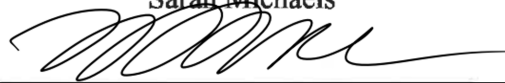
**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,
and Education Studies Major at Clark University**

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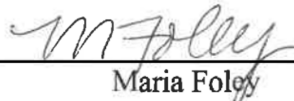
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Abstract:

I have always seen a personal benefit in reading; when I read, I place myself in the situations of characters, evaluate myself alongside these characters, and interact with the text in such a way that I'm thinking reflectively. My reading practice has helped me to further understand myself and others, and I began this project because I was curious about the benefit of encouraging such practices with students. Reading current literature confirmed that I was not alone in this line of thought; many authors contend that classroom practices that include self-reflection alongside reading literature is personally and academically beneficial for students. Working with a 10th grade English class, I set out to learn what this currently could look like in a classroom setting, and how I might incorporate self-reflection in my future classes as a way to help students better understand themselves and others. I found, among other things, that self-reflection is often limited to the individual sphere in classroom settings, although students are interested in collective, collaborative work as well. Catalysts for self-reflection alongside literature include proper representation, strong prompting questions, and a space in which students feel comfortable speaking and engaging.

Acknowledgements:

Before I go any further, I also want to recognize my many different thought partners throughout this project that have helped me get to my answers. Most prominently, my advisor, Sarah Michaels, who has introduced me to many of my favorite academic authors and heroes, who has shown excitement for my every idea since Freshman year, who has challenged and supported my thinking on many an occasion and who has never failed to give me so much to think about, has also been an invaluable resource in shaping this project. I'd also like to acknowledge my English advisor, Meredith Neuman, whose thoughts, feedback, and support during my English capstone has found its way into this project as well.¹ Many thanks are due to Maria Foley, the tenth-grade English teacher who had agreed to work with me even months before I even knew what this project was going to be, and who helped me

¹ My English capstone is an essay on the ways that Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X* (a book that I first read with the 10th graders in Mrs. Foley's class, and one that you'll hear more about later), and have in many ways considered it a companion to this project. While the focus of my English capstone is reader-response theory and the ways that a text can lend itself well to reflective work, this project is instead about the ways in which a teacher's curriculum and classroom practice can lend well to reflective work. Much of the literature that I explored in my English capstone has found their way into the literature review of this project. In many ways, the two have influenced and were influenced by each other.

with collecting my research throughout the process. I of course owe thanks to the students of Mrs. Foley's class, who I appreciate greatly for allowing me into the classroom community, and for allowing me the pleasure of working with them, talking with them and learning from them. I would like to also thank the rest of my Community Youth and Education Studies cohort for all of their continuing support, as well as the support of various professors, peers and friends throughout this project.

Introduction: So Why Am I Doing This?

Late September, 2019. Observation of a 9th grade class in Worcester Public Schools:

*When I first joined the 9th grade English class that I was to be assisting for the whole semester, they were reading *Of Mice and Men*. The central exercise with the class for several weeks was a form of flipbook, where students would cut and paste pieces of paper onto other pieces of paper so that a character's name would be on the top, and underneath would be a quote that represented the character in some way. As I went around the classroom for that week, offering students my help where I could, I mostly found confusion on what the directions to the scrapbook were. Very little about the actual book was discussed, and instead so much attention was paid to the physical cutting and pasting of the flaps on the scrapbook. Students would be confused as to how to pick which quote from the text, and I would watch the teacher help the student through the text and engage with a quick "There. That one. You could say something about this." The student would quickly copy down the quote, and then return to the class activity of cutting and pasting.*

As an observer, I could see how disengaged the students were, and I don't blame them: I would hate assignments like these in my high school, would view them as busywork, would drag my feet through the book and the week. I know from talking with the teacher that the exercise was supposed to help teach how to pull evidence from a text, and how to cite those quotes. This is important when it comes to writing, of course, but I felt that teaching this exercise in this way ran counter to the benefit of reading as an art form. If we want students to meaningfully engage with texts, rather than just follow out assigned steps, why weren't we actually having conversations about these characters? Why weren't we starting with looking at how we feel about these characters, how we relate to them, and how they impact us? Then, we could look at where that happens in the text and why, pulling quotes

with intentionality versus just to fill out a box on a table. I saw in this class that their sort of reading-only-for-the-task took away from the student's opportunity to meaningfully reflect.

I want to teach literature because I view it as a powerful and important art that teaches me about myself and about others. With each new book, I am able to reflect on what the characters make me feel, what I think the author wants me to feel, where I see the events of the text in my own life, and let my reactions and engagement teach me more about how I see myself and the world. When I first read Dr. Ghouldy Muhammad's book *Cultivating Genius*, I was immediately gripped by her definition of "literacy as identity meaning-making" and her echo of historic Black literary communities as they "defined literacy as the ability to read and write their lives" (Muhammad 2020 p. 57). I felt that her words spoke to me as a reader, and spoke to my criticisms of what I saw in the classrooms that I had observed. I believed that it was rare for teachers to encourage self-reflection in regards to literature, instead focusing on the more technical aspects of literary analysis. I did (and still do) believe that a merging between authentic literary responses from students and the instruction of content, while difficult to achieve due to the demands of standardized testing and school districts, is important to strive for wherever possible. This line of thinking caused me to consider how I might instead center self-reflection with my work, and focus on the more personally meaningful aspects of literary analysis.

My praxis project has been an extension on this impulse and these thoughts. I went into this project recognizing the benefit that reading has had for my own self-reflection and self-actualization, and wondering what ways I could effectively and appropriately bring this benefit to high school students. It's a cliched and overdramatic claim, but I do believe that reading (including, but not limited to, some of the reading that I did for high school) has helped me understand my emotions and situations, as well as the emotions and situations of others, and not only do I believe that I am a more fulfilled person for it, but I think that high school English classes have the opportunity to bring that fulfillment to students. Of course, I don't believe that this should be the sole focus of any English teacher, but I do believe that it can be beneficial for English teachers to take into account their ability to bolster students' self-identities and aid in student self-reflection with their curriculum, and I am not alone in this opinion.

Part of my thinking in this project has been to clarify for myself what I mean when I say the words identity, self-identity and self-reflection. I use the word “identity” to refer generally to any quality that an individual might identify with or see themselves as. Often, identity is used to connote racial or ethnic identity, gender identity, religious identity or sexual orientation, but when I use the term I am also referring to names, places (I am from...), communities (I am part of...) occupations, hobbies or interests (I am a student, I am a musician, I am a fan of...), since I believe that these are also qualities that someone might identify with or see themselves as. More specifically, you will see me use self-identity to specify identification that comes from one’s own self-perception, qualities that people view themselves as or describe themselves as. I specify self-identity because individuals can have identities ascribed to them by others that they might not necessarily identify with themselves. I want my future curriculum to support specifically my students’ self-identities, rather than the identities that anyone else in their lives, including myself, would ascribe to them. You’ll see me pluralize and use “identities” or “self-identities,” a practice that I borrow from Muhammad to emphasize that individuals are not made up of one identity, nor do they solely identify with one quality. Instead, individuals are made up of multiple self-identities. Muhammad uses the term “multiple self-identities” in contrast with a one-dimensional attitude on a singular “identity,” and specifies that in the texts that are chosen as well as in discussion/reflection on those texts with students, it is not the teacher’s place to focus on one aspect of a student’s identity. Instead, it is important to recognize that students are multifaceted and dynamic. Self-reflection is a term that I use often when I want to refer to instances where an individual is thinking about their self-identities in some way. They could be celebrating those identities, questioning those identities, and thinking about those identities in relationship to others. When it comes to reading, this might look like comparing oneself to a character, putting themselves in the situation of a text, or questioning the ways that a text might change or support the ways that the reader self-identifies.

For the past three semesters, I have used this project to explore what I think this could or should look like for me in my future teaching. I have done this exploration through reading the works of other teacher researchers, through writing, and through reflecting on my own thoughts and assumptions. More than all of these, however, I have explored the topic of self-reflection in English classes mostly through my time observing and assisting in a 10th

grade English class at Claremont Academy. It is within this class that I was able to view what ways self-reflection is already present in the classroom, think about how I interact in the classroom as an individual, challenge my own assumptions about what might be effective practice when it comes to working with students' self-identities in the classroom, and talk to the students of the class in order to better understand their thoughts on self-reflection.

Specifically, I entered the classroom space in order to explore the answer to these questions:

- When do I see students bringing their self-identities into the classroom? Are those identities supported when they do?
- How do I navigate 'knowing' students? When do they feel most comfortable with me, and when do I feel most comfortable with them?
- Is there anything to suggest that students are learning more about themselves and their self-identities through their work in the classroom? Do they feel validated in this work?
- "How will my [future] instruction help students to learn something about themselves and/or about others?" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 70)²

Before I continue with exploring these questions, I'd like to clarify that my answers to these questions are simply the best answers that I can provide at this time. My stance on the answers to these questions has changed often throughout my project, and I expect that they will change again and again throughout my experiences as an educator. I would also like to say that my answers are based on a limited experience; because I only look at the work and words of a couple of students in one class of a relatively-small school in one city, it may be inappropriate to make any sweeping general claims about how students are and what teachers should do in their classes. I want to explicitly state all of this so that you take my words only for what they are: my words, my thoughts, my assumptions, my ideas, and only my answers.

A Little About Me:

Some people believe that it is important within a research paper for the author to disclose some information about who they are, and I of course agree with this. I think it is important for readers to have the ability to see what lens the author is seeing through as they

² The direct wording of the question comes from Ghouldy Muhammad in *Cultivating Genius*. I take it directly from her text because I value and feel legitimized by her framing, and also because I cannot think of a better way to put it myself.

navigate their research space and their writing. While I wholeheartedly believe this, I also know that this is the part of a paper where, as a reader, my eyes glaze over, I lose focus, I get distracted, and I get bogged down by details and terminology that I do not fully understand. I'll admit that this is the part of a paper that I will often skim through to get to the findings, perhaps to return if I want to engage further with the author's ideas. Perhaps this says something negative about me as a reader of research, but if you are anything like me, then I give you my full permission (not that you need it) to jump around my paper and read sections out of order based on where your interest takes you. Of course, I have laid out an order for my paper, so you might find yourself confused if you see the name of an author come up with my findings that you missed because you brushed past the literature review. In any case, feel free to read this paper in any way you like. The only thing I ask is this: If you find an idea in this paper that you want to engage with deeper, come back here and read through any information you might have skipped over before so that you have a better understanding of the person that is making those claims.

Before I discuss my positionality in my praxis site, here is some general information about me, my identities and the position that I come from: My name is Willow, and I'm a white woman of transgender experience who has lived in Massachusetts all her life. Though I have recently been living openly as a transwoman, I have lived most of my life as male-presenting and have historically received the treatment and privileges of a white male. I also was in the classroom as male-presenting for the duration of my research. Though I have lived in Worcester for two years, most of my life has been spent in the small town of Lee on the Massachusetts-New York border, a middle-class local in the white, wealthy, touristy, arts-focused community of Berkshire County. My high school was small, and my teachers were kind to me as an honors student, though they did not always show the same kindness to my non-honors friends. This is the educational experience that I bring with me into most spaces, including the space of this research project.

Positionality:

Throughout my time thinking about my project and participating in the classroom, I have grappled with my position as a classroom assistant, which has brought about a host of assumptions on my end. Paramount in this is my grappling with how much agency I have in

the classroom to discuss topics with the students and act as a participant in the class. Early in my work in the site, I often felt that I could not get to know the students better because of the current classroom culture (built around reading with the class with little discussion that I could jump into, rightly focused on the relationship between the teacher and the student, leaving my position of an in-between individual out). Accompanying this is an assumption of intrusion, that whenever I speak up in class it is getting in the way of the students and the teacher, and that I should not interrupt this since the class is not about me, nor should it be. Some conversation with Mrs. Foley has helped to clarify my position in this space somewhat, as I found that she was very open and welcoming to my intervention and discussion, as well as taking on more responsibility in this class. Throughout my time in class, however, I have never taken her up on her offer to let me run discussions in class. Early on, this was due to the fact that I was at the site without the necessary approval to start data collection, and because I wanted to record these hypothetical discussions, I thought it best to wait until I received the approval. As the year went on, I became wrapped up in the other demands of academic life and work. Additionally, on the times where I did sit down to think about how to run a class discussion on what we read, I realized that I had no idea how to run such a discussion. With topics like gun violence and abuse, I doubted my qualifications to lead talk about our texts.

To touch on the assumptions I bring into the classroom, I would like to share the following passage from a piece on assumptions and trust that I wrote last spring. This vignette is based off of my experiences in a 9th grade English class that I was observing in as a Sophomore in college:

It's around the fourth week of observing in their class at this point, and I still don't know everyone's names yet. While some students do engage with me when I ask them if they need help with any of their work, and while some like to talk with me, the vast majority do not. I can't blame them. To them, I'm probably just a white dude that sits in the back of the class, someone that doesn't know them or their lives, someone who just sits and watches and every once in a while does a round of "can I help you with anything?" I know from seeing these students that they're a close-knit group. I know from their teacher that the group is wary of outsiders and slow to trust, and that many do not like to talk, especially many of the Spanish-speaking students, out of fear of being judged... "I know that you guys don't think I care, I know that you guys are wary of me, and that's okay. I don't want any of you to feel like you have to talk to me more if you don't want to or anything like that. But I want to tell you that I see you and I hear you and I respect you, and while I'm here for a class, I'm also here because I really

want to be, because it makes me really happy to see you guys in class. I care about you guys.”... I don’t say it. Would they have believed me if I did? And if I did say that, would it really be for their benefit or for mine?

In my work writing this vignette and analyzing it last year, I realized: if I had assumed that I did not care about them, then I had also assumed that they did not care about me. I assumed that many of them would not appreciate engaging with me because of my position as an outsider, and I let that assumption stop me from engaging with many of them. I was always excited when a student made the effort to engage with me, when they wanted to know how my day was or wanted to ask for my opinion on something. I was always excited to hear the students share these things too. Alternatively, I was always scared to talk to the ones that did not engage with me that same way.

If they weren’t excited to talk to me, then what would they think of me if I was always in their faces? Would they see me as someone pestering them while they were just trying to do their work or talk to their friends? Would they be annoyed that this stranger was trying to talk to them when they might not be comfortable talking? No matter what the thought was, it made me cautious to approach, and that meant that, in times where I could have made a deeper relationship with the students, I didn’t. No matter whether the assumption was true or not, I had made it. I don’t think I realized it at the time, but I had fully put the burden of building a relationship onto the students.

Trust, as a concept that must go both ways, is something that I thought about a lot when I began this project. Trust, in my personal experiences, has been thought of within the context of coming from students (i.e. how can I help my students to trust me?), and has not been framed enough as something that should come from myself or from teachers (i.e. how can I build my trust of these students, so that I am always believing and centering their experiences, as well as trust them enough to take risks in the classroom?). I think this trust is foundational for all educational work, but is especially crucial within the context of this research project, as it deals with inherently personal topics of self-identities. When it comes to self-identities, I am also in a vastly different place than many of my students: not only am I a white, only-English-speaking individual from a rural area working with majority nonwhite, multilingual individuals from an urban area, I am also a college-aged student working with high school-aged students, and thus I recognize that there may be aspects of my own identities that I have thought about and solidified in comparison to students in a very

formative time of their lives. Of course, this is exactly also why I see my project as important: I believe literature can help figure out many questions of identity that high school-aged students may be grappling with, as it has for me. I think it is important for me to keep in mind when I interact with the class, however, that I am in a different place than they may be in.

Conceptual Framework:

Much of my thinking is based in Gholdy Muhammad's framing of literacy as identity meaning-making, as discussed in her book *Cultivating Genius*. I have felt that Muhammad has put words to my personal experience as a reader, as I have throughout my life placed great importance on my own practice of identity meaning-making through literature. Whether through reading characters that I strongly empathize with, finding a poem that describes a thought or an emotion in a new and profound way, through reading about others and using this experience to further understand those around me, or through writing and reflecting on significant thoughts, emotions, or moments that come up in a text or in my life, I view literacy, and more significantly literature, as an integral aspect of my own self-discovery. I come into this project viewing a blank page to write on or a written work to think on as a safe space for me to interrogate myself, talk to myself about my thoughts and emotions, and ultimately feeling more fulfilled, confident and at peace with myself by the time I reach the end of that page. This is my personal process of reading and reflecting, and I bring this with me into any book, poem, essay or other text.

I am not alone in seeing literature in this way nor in seeing the value that this can bring to students, as Gholdy Muhammad suggests that a personal and reflective relationship with literature is something important to encourage within a classroom (Muhammad, 2020;; Given et. al. 2006). I went into the classroom with Muhammad's framework of "Culturally and Historically-Responsive Literacy" (Muhammad 2020) in mind, meaning that I intended to look into how a reflective relationship with literature is engaged with, discussed and encouraged within a Claremont Academy 10th grade English classroom. More specifically, this falls under what Muhammad calls "The Pursuit of Identity" (Muhammad 2020) in mind. As teachers, this involves selecting texts and holding discussions in such a way that students' self-identities are explored, encouraged and supported. In the chapter "Towards the Pursuit

of Identity” Muhammad includes within her framework this key question: “How will my instruction help students to learn something about themselves and/or about others?” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 70). It is this question that situates my thinking, as my goal is to explore if and how the 10th-graders in my Claremont Academy classroom are doing this, and use this information to inform my own answer to Muhammad’s question.

When it comes to literature, I tend to read within the lens of Reader-Response Theory, which “maintains that the interpretive activities of readers, rather than the author’s intention or the text’s structure, explain a text’s significance and aesthetic value” (Goldstein, 2005, p.1). While I personally see some issues with imposing theory onto texts, as I feel that can sometimes get in the way of how a text speaks to us, I have found that the way I read texts closely aligns with Reader-Response Theory, and I fall into the belief that the most important aspect of literature is how it is interpreted. When I first read John Gardner’s *Grendel*, for example, I was able to reflect on my tendency to see the world through a position of nihilism similar to how Grendel reacts to his world, and yet I also reflected on how this was unfulfilling and harmful for both Grendel and me. This led me to reflect on the ways that the Shaper and Beowulf provide a way of seeing how we shape our own senses of meaning in the world through our interpretations and actions. There is, of course, much more to gain from *Grendel* than just this reading, but I personally see great value in the way that my own personal response to *Grendel* has helped me to learn about myself. This closely aligns with Reader-Response Theory, as I believe that the most powerful benefit of engaging with literature is its ability to serve as a reflective tool where I can critically view myself and review my world.

I also entered this project with the notion that trust is necessary in this pursuit of bolstering students’ self-identities. Much of my thinking on trust and my framework for developing trust within this classroom is based on Eric DeMulenaere’s article *Towards a Pedagogy of Trust*. I view the components of a pedagogy of trust as an effective method of forming trust-based relationships with students, however I recognize that my position within the classroom makes it difficult to build trust using some of these components. I may be able to take some risks with the students, or perhaps find some ways to show that I am aligned with the students, but the fact that I am entering an existing classroom culture in which I am not the teacher makes it so that I cannot accomplish other components of DeMulenaere’s

framework. I am not positioned to implement community rituals, developing shared experiences may be difficult as someone stepping into the class versus designing the class, the teacher is positioned to resolve conflicts in the classroom where perhaps I am not, and I have no control over the curriculum of the class. Thus, while I am thinking a lot about trust building, I discovered earlier in my process that I needed to adapt this framework or otherwise think differently about how to form trust in order to fit my role as a classroom assistant.

Literature review:

In reviewing the literature on reading and self-reflection in the classroom, I have discovered that most research on the topic uses the language and the framework of reader-response theory, which generally places a text's value in the interpretations of readers, versus an author's intention or a text's structure. More specifically, transactional reader-response theory (a more specific term for the form of reader-response theory that the rest of this literature review will focus on) structures the act of reading as a transaction between the reader and the text: the reader brings their own life experiences and context into interaction with the text, and then comes out of the text with a greater understanding of their own situation, or perhaps the situations of others (Davis 1992). While this project is in no way centered around reader-response theory (my English advisor first introduced the term to me a couple of months into this project), I have found in reviewing the literature that my goals of using literature as a tool of self-reflection within the classroom closely aligns with the goals of reader-response pedagogy, and thus I have come to see reader-response practices as an important tool in my toolbelt when it comes to my future work.

In her work *Reconsidering Readers: Louise Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Pedagogy*, Professor Judith Rae Davis, after providing an overview of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, goes into detail about the adoption of reader response journals into the classroom. This compositional exercise involves students taking a quote from their reading that particularly stood out to them, and then writing a journal entry where they elaborate on why that quote stood out to them. This leaves lots of room for self-reflective work. Davis explains that "This format encourages students to write what they

find interesting or important in their reading... and to explain the connections and reasons for the importance” (Davis 1992, p. 75), elaborates by saying that “Response journals encourage students to become active readers who find meaning by making connections to their own experiences” (Davis 1992, p. 76), and adds on to point out how “The journal is a place to “talk back” to the character, who has been very real” (Davis 1992, p. 76). Woodruff and Griffin, in their review of literature on reader-response practices, further discuss other reader response practices that could help with identity formation and self-reflective work. A reading workshop method that they suggest “encourages students to assume ownership of their reading. A great strength of this instructional methodology is that students have the power to select books that fit their personal interests as opposed to reading texts chosen by their teachers” (Woodruff and Griffin 2017, p. 114). Literature circles, where “a group of students read and respond to the same text, generally a novel selected by the students and not the teacher” (Woodruff and Griffin 2017, p. 114) is also encouraged, with the two educators stating that “While literature circles are fluid in their structure, their outcomes are consistent: students learn to become passionate and critical readers” (Woodruff and Griffin 2017, p. 115). All of these methods encourage reader autonomy and provide students a space where they can relate to texts on personal levels, and perhaps engage with identity work.

In *Snapshots: Transcending Bias through Reader Response Theory* by Theoni Soublis, this teacher speaks to the powerful and transformative work that reader response practices can contribute to, not just in identity formation but in communication as well. Soublis tells the story of a student named Erik Winkler as he uses his own reader response work as a way to open up and come out to his class. Soublis expresses her own mistrust of and bias towards Scott, a student who she expects to make a snide remark to Erik, though she finds herself proven wrong as Scott shakes Erik’s hand and says that that was the bravest thing he had ever seen. Erik’s story here, told by Soublis, not only reveals how reflection on literature can help one understand and shape their own identity, but also reveals how literature becomes a common language for how these students understand each other. Since Erik frames his own experiences through the lens of a character by saying “ Like Sarah, I know what it is like to wake up and not be happy with what is in the mirror”, and “Like Eric, I put all of my pain into the water. Swimming has literally saved my life... No matter my sexuality, the water has always seen me indifferently. In a world that feels so wrong for me

sometimes, the water always feels so right,” (Winkler Qtd. Soublis 2021, p. 12), other students like Scott can then understand Erik’s experiences through their own understanding of this character. Identification with these characters becomes a common language that helps these students understand and communicate with one another. On how this was possible within her classroom, Soublis writes:

One of my objectives as a teacher educator is to generate a classroom atmosphere that can transcend bias and create opportunities for such intimate situations. Part of that objective includes building honesty, trust, loyalty, and respect between the students and me and among the students themselves. Literature discussions open a door for students to discuss their personal lives and experiences in such a way that any threat of ridicule is erased (Soublis 2021, p.13).

Soublis demonstrates here the ways in which literature can be transformative for the individual as well as be used to communicate deep ideas regarding identity within the classroom, and asserts the importance of building deep trust in order to do this work. However, she reveals little beyond literature discussion as to how she had built and maintained that trust throughout this class. One of my hopes for my project was that, in observing and interacting with students, I would learn more about how such a relationship might be built.

Alsup, in her introduction to *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms*, establishes how she plans to discuss the inclusion of young adult literature in the classroom for the purposes of identity formation. In this introduction, Alsup expresses the importance of working with students in such a way that they recognize both the similarities that exist between themselves and the texts, as well as the gaps that exist between the students and the text. “Without this gap, and without the study of the gap, it is difficult to create the so-called educated imagination of the holistic reader -- the reader who is able both to *Experience* a textual world and *view* it with distant aesthetic awareness as a creation of the author’s imagination” (Alsup 2010, p. 11). Alsup also provides a small counterargument to Muhammad’s emphasis on the importance of identity work. Though Alsup ultimately comes down on the side of encouraging identity work within the classroom, she also states that “Some teachers I’ve taught in graduate courses argue that they are not qualified to act as ‘therapists’” and asks, “Is this type of approach inappropriate, ineffective or even

dangerous?” (Alsup 2010, p. 8). In regards to this question, Alsup later clarifies that “I don’t believe that the emotionally driven process of identification can be our main pedagogical impulse... In order to promote real growth, the cognitive and emotive must be tapped in tandem. The reading of literature is a combination of direct experience and distanced analysis; a merging of emotional, personal response and socio-cultural criticism” (Alsup 2010, p. 12). Ultimately, Alsup’s introduction asks important questions, and her words on gaps and teaching for personal experience and direct analysis in tandem are compelling, however little is said here on how to put this into practice. Woodruff, Griffin and Davis’ recommendations on reader response teaching practices may fill this gap.

Similar to Davis, Woodruff and Griffin, Given et al. (2007) provide four pedagogical approaches to promoting positive identity work with literature in the form of composition. All four authors attest to the effectiveness of their approaches in their respective teaching settings (all of which take place in collegiate English courses). If these practices were applied to high school level English classes, however, one might question how ethical or dangerous they might be, as Alsup asks her readers to reflect. Given et al.’s recommendations on compositional practices involve peer reviewing and editing of reflective essays with personal prompts. While college students might generally feel comfortable sharing themselves and their writing in this way, high school students might be made to feel more uncomfortable or embarrassed by such practices. Given et. al. also highlight a general gap in research regarding identity work or reflective work in the classroom: while much is said on writing exercises, little is said on how teachers should go about discussion on this topic in the class. As previously discussed, Woodruff, Griffin and Soublis fill this gap somewhat, however these works orient towards overall goals (such as creating a trust-filled environment, or centering students’ autonomy) rather than suggest the implementation of more specific practice. I hoped to learn more about potential specific practices during my time in the classroom, so that I might have a stronger idea of what I should do with a class when taking over my own class as a teacher.

In *Resisting Readers’ Identity (Re)Construction across English and Young Adult Literature Course Contents*, researchers Wendy Glenn and Ricki Ginsburg interview students in a Young Adult Literature classroom about their experience in this classroom versus their typical English classroom, and found that most of the qualities that made the Young Adult

Literature class more personally impactful surrounded student autonomy. Glenn and Ginsburg suggest that students' control over choosing texts had a deeply positive impact, noting that "[in their typical English classes], these readers appear limited in their ability to imagine who they could become in the abstract, as they were bound by the decisions made by their teachers; participants seemed to feel powerless amid the established hierarchy in the social and cultural reality of the traditional classroom" (Glenn and Ginsburg 2016, p. 93). Outside of text selection, students expressed that autonomy within the operation of the class, from deciding reading deadlines to being allowed to think about their own bigger analyses of the texts, all helped students feel that they were not reading for one right answer, and instead were reading for themselves. Glenn and Ginsburg also note that "Participants repeatedly discussed the positive, safe, flexible environment created by the teacher... the teacher invited participants to explore their reading selves in a low-risk environment, thus increasing the likelihood that students would try on the identities that resonated most strongly with who they wanted to be" (Glenn and Ginsburg 2016, p. 98). Glenn and Ginsburg use the term "teacher-partner" in describing this. Ultimately, Glenn and Ginsburg emphasize student autonomy, teacher flexibility and a low-risk, comfortable environment as best suited to allowing identity work to occur strongest and healthiest.

While the authors above define and clarify reader-response theory, suggest certain reader-response practices and highlight areas of emphasis and importance for teachers to keep in mind, I found myself seeking more precision. I was made aware of reader-response practices in regards to how a student might navigate a text individually, but what were the implications for classroom discussion and collaborative practice? Would students even want to have discussions surrounding self reflection, since such discussion would verge into a personal space? Soublis provides inspiration and a goal, but how would I get there? I understood that a low-risk, comfortable environment was important for allowing room for the students to interpret, but what would that actually look like, and how could I create it? How would I navigate the classroom in an attempt to create such a space? I read this literature alongside most of my time in the classroom, and would often ask myself these questions as I observed and navigated the classroom space, and now that I have analyzed my data, I believe that I have found answers to some of these questions.

Methodology:

Since starting my conceptual work with this project in the spring of 2021, my project has gone through various stages of working and reworking, with numerous changes to my position in the site as well as my research methods. The following description is one that, in a sense, comes out of trial and error within my site, though I will omit much of this here and focus on the parts of my process that most directly contributed to the data that appears in this paper.

I would describe my methodology as ethnographic, fitting my constructivist stance of how meaning is made. I believe that meaning and truth are concepts that are fundamentally interpretive, and that different people construct what is true for them and their lives, rather than take the more positivist idea that there is one universal truth. I chose to take an ethnographic stance, as opposed to any sort of quantitative analysis, since I found difficulty in quantifying the sort of identity work that I am looking into. My methods are designed to work as an extension of my role as a teacher's assistant. This means that while I worked with students on classwork and participated in discussion, I took field notes and recorded some class conversation, paying specific attention to how the students engaged with the texts while they read. Most of my data collection coincided directly with my work in the classroom, as well as students' participation in the classroom.

My field notes in the classroom come from smaller interactions between myself and students as I participated in the class, as well as general observations of the classroom. While I sometimes featured more detailed field notes on my interactions with consenting students, I sometimes made very general observations about the classroom. Most prominently, I used my field notes as a space to note my own thoughts, feelings, ideas and assumptions as I navigated the classroom. By including details such as this into the field notes, interpretive details that would not be included in the transcript of a recording, I can then re-visit and interrogate this interaction, and ask myself why I made a certain assumption or responded in a specific way. This reflection helps me to understand my own behavior and presence in the classroom better, and allows me to see how I might more effectively talk with students about literature and identity in a way that is comfortable and generative.

The interpretive nature of field notes is also precisely why I use recordings as data. As much as I believe in the interpretive and reflective power of field notes, I also strongly value the inclusion of students' direct, own words. I was in the classroom to discover how students explored their identities through literature and how to best facilitate this process, and thus I view students' direct perspective, i.e. their direct words, as crucial to answering my questions. Mrs. Foley selects her texts with the goal of having those texts relate to their students' current lives, and thus classroom texts focus on young characters going through adolescence, finding their voice and learning more about themselves. This means that conversations around racial identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, grappling with parental expectations, and finding new modes of self expression have all come up at different points. Due to the personal nature of such topics, I feel that it is especially important to keep the integrity of the students' own words as much as I can, lest I misquote or mistake a student's statement in an important discussion. While field notes are important ways of remembering and interpreting class discussions, recordings keep the students' authentic voices intact.

Since I learned after being in the classroom for a short time that Mrs. Foley includes individual self-reflection in her assignments, I made it a point to include the assignments of consenting students in this project. By including these assignments, I have gotten a better grasp on if and when students are self-reflecting as part of their classwork. I also knew from the outset of this project that I wanted to feature student interviews as data. While I might be able to gather how some students might reflect on literature throughout my time in their class, I was lucky to have the opportunity to ask students questions directly, not only so that I could value in their direct experience and voice, but also because doing so leaves me no room to simply assume or gather my students' thoughts about reading indirectly and inaccurately. I place a lot of value on my interview as the most direct way for me to view how they think about their own self-reflection as they read.

Ethnographic Background:

My research takes place within Claremont Academy, a Worcester public high school located in the Main South area of Worcester. This larger brick building is divided in two, one half is utilized as an elementary school called "Woodland Academy," the other half is a

middle and high school named “Claremont Academy.” Claremont Academy is home to around 581 high school students. This means that most of the students in their respective grades have been together since elementary school at Woodland Academy. After a year of remote learning last year, the fall of 2021 was the first semester that the students were fully back in person with masks.

My research took place in specifically one classroom, a 10th grade English class taught by Maria Foley (who goes by Mrs. Foley in the classroom), an English teacher new to Claremont, though not new to teaching, who started teaching remotely with the school last year. I worked with her second period class, which runs from 8:35-9:25 each day at Claremont. During my time in the classroom, I was present for three days of the week: Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays in the Fall semester, and Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays in the Spring. The classroom itself has an atmosphere that I would describe as comfortable: the large fluorescent classroom lights are rarely on, instead replaced by string lights and softer-light lamps, lighting up tapestries that hang along the wall (one of which I actually have a copy of hanging in my own room, Mrs. Foley and I found out). Rows of young adult books populate the shelves at the back of the class, where I usually sit in a chair that I turn around each day so that I can face the rest of the class.

The class consists of 24 students, the majority of whom are Latinx. Most of the class are native Spanish speakers, though I have found that most of the students in the class are also comfortable speaking English with me. In the classroom there are 9 students who are level 1-3 ELLs, some of whom very recently came to the United States and have had little to no schooling in the English language. Overall, Claremont Academy has a 94% minority enrollment, with 73.1% of students identifying as Latinx, and the English classroom that I worked with reflects this. The class also consisted of Asian American students, Black students, Middle Eastern students and White students. The class thus brings in a wide variety of lived cultural experiences and perspectives, allowing for the numerous contexts of students’ lives to potentially create a range of different, unique interpretations of a text.

A typical day in the classroom starts out with an opening exercise that takes around five minutes. On free-write Fridays, this exercise could be either some free writing on a self-reflective topic, but on most days the opening activity consisted of what Mrs. Foley calls a "gist." For the gist exercise, Mrs. Foley reads out a short story or a passage, and then –

together with the students – types out the passage's main idea. After this opening exercise is over, the class will usually read a text together. This involves Mrs. Foley reads aloud through our book, usually with some of her own commentary added in, but very rarely is there much class dialogue or discussion about the book at this stage. During this time when we read together, there is usually not much of a chance for me to discuss the text with the students or for the students to talk about the text with each other. Mrs. Foley, however, chooses the texts that the students read in hopes that students will relate to the central characters.

On some days, Mrs. Foley assigns a writing assignment or a project for the students to work on instead. In these moments, students tend to do their work independently on their own laptops, working alongside their deskmates or socializing with their friends throughout. These days are the moments where I tend to interact most with students, as it allows me to go around the room and ask if students need help with their assignments, hear from the students what they think of the book or the assignment, or otherwise talk with the students. Such conversations are usually short as I make my way around the room, and I have found that I am often doing more talking than the students, as students get to know me, as I make more attempts to show the students that I want to get to know them, and as more opportunities for conversation come up in our class.

Though I will sometimes speak generally about the class in my analysis, I will also heavily incorporate the words and work of four students. These four students volunteered to be part of my research after reading through and signing my IRB consent forms. They were not specifically chosen by me, though I did notice that out of the four students who consented to be part of my research, three of them were students that had more regularly worked with and spoke with me than the rest of the students in the class. Thus, this smaller, more specific group of individuals is more representative of the students that felt most comfortable around me than the students that did not talk with me or work with me as much. For the purposes of this paper, they have been given the pseudonyms Estelle, Kevin, Emilia and Caleb. They have given me permission to record their words and include their assignments in my analysis, as well as permission for me to interview them. Though all four gave me permission to conduct interviews with them, I was only able to complete three of the interviews during my time in the classroom, as one student was absent during the days that I conducted the interviews. I am deeply grateful for these four students, as their permission for me to look

deeply into their work, as well as the perspective they brought me in their interviews, have informed my project and my future teaching goals greatly.

Organizing my Findings

I have organized the following collections of data, as well as my analysis of this data, into four main headings, each attached to one of my four research questions to serve as a guide to that section. For these sections, I have also included data directly taken from field notes and transcripts, and I have in some cases included images as data. Rather than quote specific small sections of the data, I have included chunks of data that perhaps include excess information, more than I might need to make my point. I do this so that I can present my data with as much context as I can. Though this goes against the common writing advice that states that one should only quote what one needs to in order to explicate a point, I write this way intentionally. Usually, I take such advice to heart as a writer, however in this instance I worry that, if I do not provide enough context for a student's statement, I might fall into accidentally misrepresenting a student's words. I would feel most comfortable providing you with not just my claims, but a window into the context of how I arrived at these claims. Quoted sections of my data will be indented, single-spaced and in a slightly different Serif font, to indicate that those words are not my writing but instead pulled from my data. If I am quoting dialogue, you will see different letters corresponding to different speakers in that context at the beginning of each dialogue line (for example, if I were quoting an interview with Estelle, you would see "W:" for "Willow" and "E:" for Estelle).

In the following sections, I will often use the words "overt" or "implicit" when talking about the sorts of reflections that I see from the students. When I use the word "overt," I am referring to a clear "I can relate to a character or a situation in this way" statement. When I use the word "implicit," I am referring to a space where I believe that a student is engaging in some sort of reflection, though not stating it clearly. Though I do not use the words "low inference" and "high inference" in the following discussion, my use of the words "overt" and "implicit" could be thought of as potentially synonymous (where "overt" refers to what I can see directly in students' work and words, while "implicit" refers

to sections that I can infer and interpret as moments of self-reflection). My noticings of “implicit” engagement are both subjective and limited by my own personal perception. I have no doubt that there were spaces during my time in the class where self-reflection was happening for students, but I simply was not able to see it. My own lens inhibits my ability to notice more implicit forms of reflection in this way, since I cannot make inferences on what I do not notice as I move through the classroom space.

Key Thoughts As I Write My Findings

As I write about my data, I am looking to answer my research questions, but I am also looking deeper into a single question that I believe all of my other research questions point to: How can I bring literature as a tool for self-reflection to my future students in a way that is both effective and enriching for them? I believe that by exploring my research questions, each has brought a facet of an answer to this larger question.

Overt Reflections in Individual Reflective Assignments

Guiding Research Question: When do I see students bringing their identities into the classroom? Are those identities supported when they do?

Within the first two weeks of my presence in the classroom, the students participated in one classroom activity where they did bring their identities into the classroom overtly. Students gave presentations on their names, where they discussed where their names come from, what their names mean and if they liked their names. According to Muhammad, “Names are not just names... Our names carry our cultures, values, traditions, and past” (Muhammad 2020 75). Thus, present in the name presentations were ethnic identities, cultural backgrounds, and even individual identities reflected in a student’s reflection on how they feel about their own name. Since this was early on in my work, and I had not yet received approval of my research, I could not take data at this time, however I noted it as an overt expression of students’ identities, and used this activity as an opportunity to get to know each of these students as they introduced themselves to myself, Mrs. Foley and the rest of the class.

The name presentations were the most overt expression of identities that I saw from students during my time in the classroom, as well as the only exercise I saw where students were explicitly asked to communicate something about how they identify to their classmates. The rest of the self-reflective work that I saw in the classroom were done within individual work and reflective assignments. During my time in the class I saw Mrs. Foley administer assignments that strongly aligned themselves with Muhammad's pursuit of identity, though these assignments would be done individually. Free-write Fridays often included optional reflective prompts that would be inspired by the texts that students were reading in class. One reflection question, "What was your most impactful day?" was pulled right from *The Poet X*, where within the book we see the central character Xiomara go through several drafts of reflecting on the question.³ While free-write Fridays do not necessarily motivate students to use the texts that they read for self-reflection, Mrs. Foley also assigns work that calls on students to relate to and interpret texts themselves. Later on in the unit on *The Poet X*, students created one-pagers that asked students to not only create art based on the book and to include quotes of interest, but also to include the ways that they might relate or not-relate to Xiomara as a character. Though students chatted while working on their one-pagers, the core of the assignment was individual; each student created their own reflection separately.⁴ From my time in the class, the self-reflective work that I saw was done specifically through assignments where students worked and reflected individually.

³ By using writing prompts from *The Poet X*, students can also see Xiomara as a model for how they might reflect through writing. In the book, readers see Xiomara draft out multiple different responses to the question "what was your most impactful day?" before finally deciding to turn one in. Seeing Xiomara do this might potentially communicate to students that it is okay to use such prompts as a reflective space without necessarily turning in a product that feels overly personal, just in the same way that Xiomara does. This is just my thought, however, and I made no attempt to see if students picked up on this message.

⁴ This is not to say that all work in the classroom had an individual focus, however. In one class that I sat in for, I saw students participate in a jamboard gallery walk, where they were asked to interpret and respond in writing (using the jamboard sticky note feature) to images that carried themes of racism, violence and policing. This is not an assignment where students were overtly asked to reflect on themselves. Neither were any of the other group conversations that I saw in the class. This is not to say that I don't think that students' identities weren't present in the gallery walk, nor that I don't believe that students were making reflections and connections with themselves. Instead, I am saying that this is not a moment where I see this reflection happening. I would also like to add that I have declined to further analyze the gallery walk in this paper, both because I do not have consent from most of the students to talk about their reflections and because I do not feel I can draw on the gallery walk as data without making unsupported assumptions on what students might have been thinking and reflecting on during this process.

Individual Work: Best Area for Self-Reflection?

A few months into my research, I began to see the trend of assignment-based individual reflection in the classroom, and noticed the ways in which this matched my own perception⁵ of what I considered to be “effective practice” when it comes to self-reflective engagement with a text. As one’s identity and perspective can be quite personal, I felt that self-reflection might be better suited for an individual assignment, which brings privacy with this individuality. My preconceptions align with much of the suggested practice on reader-response theory that I saw within the literature: that with the exception of Soublis’ story, discussed exercises that were mostly individual and writing-based. Alsup frames reading for the pursuit of self-identity and self-reflection as “a very personal act – perhaps even a type of therapeutic experience” (Alsup 2010 8), and I am inclined to agree with this sentiment. This then begs the question of how I as a future teacher can reconcile the importance that I see in reflective reading practices with the fact that this work is personal in nature. Alsup continues to state that:

Not all teachers see literature and literature teachers as assistance for young readers in coming to terms with their fledgeling identities through personal response. Some teachers I’ve taught in graduate courses argue that they are not qualified to act as “therapists,” and that they really don’t want to know all the deepest secrets of their students’ personal development, details which sometimes arise in class discussions or in response journal writings if students are encouraged to read YA books and respond personally to them” (Alsup 2010, p. 8).

The pushback that Alsup highlights here, that teachers are not qualified to act as therapists, ask teachers to find and set boundaries between using text as a tool for self-reflection in the class and creating situations where classroom discourse becomes too personal and verges on discussion that would be better suited for therapy. If teachers wish to maintain a healthy distance between their work as teachers and the deep personal elements of students’ development, while still also giving students room to think reflectively in their classroom, then it seems like including the reflective work on individual writing assignments can be a

⁵ When I say this, I mean my own perception at the time. Interviews with students have changed my perspective, as will be seen in later sections.

happy medium. Personal details perhaps would not be likely to arise in wholesale class discussion if those details were instead left to individual assignments, where students might not feel any social pressure to share aspects of themselves that they may not be comfortable with. In addition, the individualized nature of writing assignments with reflective questions allows students to explore their identities on the page. Given et. al. emphasize writing for this purpose: “As we write, we select a mask, don it, and express its representational persona. Through review and revision of our writing, we attempt to examine aspects of that mask, and to define our worlds, our thoughts, and our selves [sic]” (Given et. al. 2007, p. 1). There are two aspects to this writing: the donning of the mask, where students take a certain identity and explore it on the page, and the revision, where students can examine this identity and interrogate their thoughts. Given et al. view writing assignments as a way to enact “a non-directive pedagogy so as not to shape students’ ideas regarding self-identity, but rather try to foster their awareness and discovery” (Given et al., 2007, p. 1). This is non-directive in the sense that teachers are not shaping students’ identities, but instead giving students the individual space to explore their own ideas, however this medium also holds the benefit of privacy. If students are exploring their identities on the page, then they have a chance to think about themselves without necessarily sharing their whole selves to a classroom. This benefit, however, is lessened by the fact that Given et al.’s suggested practice involves group revisions, and while I saw the benefit of group revision for their audience (Given et al. were specifically writing for college creative writing classes), I interpreted such work as perhaps too personal for the comfort of many high school students. My interpretation of Given et al.’s work led me to believe that the individual assignments that prompted self-reflection from Mrs. Foley’s class, as opposed to any potential class discussion or collaboration, might be more effective practice for including self-reflective work than any activity that involved sharing personal reflections publicly. After reading the perspectives that the literature had to offer and noticing that reflective work was mostly kept individual in Mrs. Foley’s class, I carried with me the takeaway that self-reflective work should be kept individual, and I carried this takeaway throughout most of my project before it was somewhat challenged by the students that I interviewed.

Are Students Supported?

To return to my first research question for a moment, it is clear to me that I see students bringing their identities into the classroom most clearly and overtly when prompted to reflect in their individual assignments. In looking at my data, however, it is not clear if students feel that their identities are supported through such individual reflection. Looking over my data, I do not have anything that clearly suggests that the students do feel that their identities are supported through this individual work. I have, however, seen positive affirmations from Mrs. Foley during my time in the classroom that suggest that she is trying to express support to her students. I note the following interaction with one of the students on the day that students were making the one-pager:⁶

[a student is cleaning up writing that was drawn on their desk

Mrs. Foley: “XXX Stop Writing on my desk! (joking tone) Do you need a wipe?”

[The student declines the offer, states that the writing was there before they got there]

Mrs. Foley: “Okay, I trust you”

This moment demonstrates to me that Mrs. Foley makes efforts to overtly state that she trusts her students, and makes attempts to show that she supports them. I can thus claim that Mrs. Foley expresses support for her students, but it is not clear from what students write whether or not students feel supported through the individual assignments in which they engage in their own self-reflection.

Expression and Comfort

Guiding Research Question: How do I navigate ‘knowing’ students? When do they feel most comfortable with me, and when do I feel most comfortable with them?

On the day that students worked on their one-pagers, I remember feeling glad that I could go around the room and have the opportunity to express my interest in what students were doing creatively. In my field notes for that day, I noted a couple of small interactions that I had with students where I complimented students both on their artistic expression on

⁶ The following is taken from my field notes on October 12th, 2021

their one-pagers as well as their expression with clothing, keychains, stickers or other items that expressed their various interests. I immediately noticed a “change from usual”⁷ in a couple of students who appeared to me to be slightly more excited than I had noticed something about their expression.⁸ While this did not result in any dramatic change in the ways in which these students interacted with me for the rest of my time in the classroom, I assumed that some of the students became slightly more comfortable interacting with me. While this did not mean that students were immediately ready and comfortable to casually talk to me, I did notice more students responding to me when I would ask if they needed a hand with any part of their assignment, or would ask me a question when they might have earlier wanted to specifically ask Mrs. Foley. I went on to make an active effort to search for some sort of expression or icon that I could positively comment on in many of the students.

Early in my reflections on the class, I interpreted those moments where I could identify some form of expression from students as potential conversational “in”s where I could then further a conversation and from there develop a relationship with a student. Looking back now more fully on my time in the classroom, I now question this interpretation, since these moments in actuality rarely lead to a full conversation with a student. Instead, looking at my interaction with students in the class, I think it would be more accurate to frame these moments as expressions of interest. When I say this, I suggest that by acknowledging some form of a student’s expression positively, I am demonstrating that I am showing some form of interest and investment in the student. I further suggest that this demonstration provided the students some level of improved comfort with my presence in their space, even if minimal.

Though I expressed interest in students’ interests and lives through finding moments of student expression and affirming that expression, it did not occur to me that students might navigate their interactions with me in the same way. In early November of 2021, I had a chance to talk with my CYES 2022 cohort regarding my concerns about not knowing the students very well. Much of their advice asked me to look at the ways that I can give

⁷ Taken from my 10/12 field notes

⁸ I will not speak specifically on these students, since they did not consent to participate in my research. Thus, I will not share their words or any key identifiers, and will only share my own personal noticings and feelings in regards to our interactions.

students the opportunity to know me more. In retrospect, I realize looking back on my time in the classroom, I provided students with few opportunities to get to know me, and very rarely did I ever express myself through anything that I was wearing or might have had with me. I often entered the classroom with nondescript jeans and a sweatshirt, and simply carried my blank laptop. If I had seen myself in the classroom, then I would not have been able to gauge anything about who I was. In retrospect, I think that this made it more difficult for many students to see me, to get to know me and in turn get to feel comfortable with me. I make this assumption also based on the student interactions I've had on the few moments where I did break my normal presentation. One day, I wore painted nails to class, and I received a number of compliments from students who noticed this break from my norm.⁹ These students essentially were doing what I had been doing in their class: pointing out some aspect of someone's expression positively to show an interest in or support of that person. Despite this positive response, however, I often did not express much of myself in the classes. As I felt that students were more comfortable interacting with me, I in turn became more comfortable interacting with them. I think this then led to a sort-of feedback loop, where I caught myself interacting more with the students that were most comfortable around me, which potentially could have communicated to the students that seemed less comfortable interacting with me that I was not personally interested in them, their identities or their lives.

I also identified some students who seemed immediately comfortable with me in the classroom. Early in my time with the class, I noted interactions with Kevin that suggested to me that he was comfortable with my presence in the class:¹⁰

Kevin: "We're all good, but if there's anything I need I'll let you know" with a thumbs-up.

assumption I make: This student is talking for his cluster of desks, the way that he engages while the rest of the students look down/away from me tells me that the rest of these students don't want me at their desks.

...

⁹ I draw this moment from my field notes from October 29, 2021.

¹⁰ The following is reconstructed from memory immediately after our interaction, since I did not have the ability to record at this time.

As the students are leaving, Kevin shouts to me “Have a good one Will!” I responded with “Thanks, you too!” As students leave, I say “have a good rest of your day/ see you Friday” (field notes, October 12, 2021)

While I now recognize that students looking away from me or not making eye contact can be rooted in cultural differences, at this moment I saw Kevin as someone who was more comfortable talking with me than his peers were. I felt this dynamic continue throughout my time in the class as Kevin continued to seemingly be very comfortable working with me and talking with me. In almost all of my interactions with students in the class, I tended to be the one to go up to students to ask if they needed anything, but I noticed one day that Kevin was first to come up to me to ask for help:

K: Hey, I do need help with something actually, but could you help me with my physics homework?

W: Ooof, maybe... it's been a while, but I'll take a look at it, sure. What you got? [I stoop down and take a look at the student's laptop and start reading the problem]

W: Yeah I haven't seen this in ages

K: Really? You're a college student!

W: Yeah, but I haven't taken a math class since high school, and... did I ever actually take physics?

K: What!?

W: I'm pretty sure I only ever took a half a year of physics actually.

K: How do you even do that?

W: My school had a thing that I could choose, and I mostly just chose to do Bio stuff

K: Ah, gotcha

W: But lemme see if I can help anyway!... So did the professor give you a formula or anything?

K: No, just this example.

W: really? I always had formulas on hand when I did this stuff... Okay, so you've got this here, and we need to find the velocity... Can I see that example?

K: Sure.

W: So we need to find this value... yeah, this might be beyond me.

K: Nooo! You're supposed to be smart!

W: I don't know what to tell ya man... oh, are you doing sine and cosine work?

K: Yeah.

W: Wow, I didn't touch that till senior year of high school, and I barely even got it then! Yeah, sorry dude but this is definitely beyond me.

K: (laughing) Alright, but thanks for trying to take a look anyway.

W: No problem, I'd definitely ask your teacher though. Good luck with this! (field notes, October 29th 2021)

With this interaction, I saw that Kevin placed some level of trust in me as a resource in his class, perhaps given due to my status of "college student." I would not quantify Kevin's trust as a deep or personal trust in any way, though even simply with the level of trust that states "I trust that you have some knowledge to offer, and am fine with sharing my work with you," I read from this point on in the classroom that Kevin was someone who is comfortable with my presence in his space.

Kevin's comfort with me made me feel more comfortable interacting with Kevin than some other students throughout my time in the classroom. During a unit on poetry, I remember coming into the classroom without a strong sense of what students were working on. I was curious if Mrs. Foley selected the poems that the students were working on herself, or if students found and selected the poems. My clarifying question was simple, and I could have asked anyone in the class what was going on, but I chose to ask Kevin. After doing so, I wrote the following in my field notes:

I also am feeling now that I gravitate towards talking to Kevin more than any other student, since he is the one that engages the most with me and now has thus become the student that A) I know the best and B) I am most familiar with. I can't even say that there's particular parts of his personality that I identify with (whereas I can say that for some of the other students that I talk less with), but just on the merit of him engaging with me more/feeling more comfortable with me than the other students, I am now more likely to feel comfortable about engaging with him than with the other students. (field notes, January 24th, 2021)

Despite the fact that "I can't even say that there's a particular part of his personality that I identify with," Kevin still becomes the primary informant for me. I wonder if, for my own practice, my relationships with students are determined not by the ways in which I relate to a

student, but instead by how much I perceive their own comfort with me. Despite not truly feeling like I “know” Kevin, despite the fact that I see myself and my own interests in some other students much more strongly than I do in Kevin, Kevin is still the student that I felt most comfortable with during my time in the classroom, simply on the merit that I judged him to be most comfortable with me.

Looking back on my time in the classroom, I see myself replicating a tendency that I have to shy away from interacting with students that already seem, from my perspective, to be less comfortable with me. If I view a student as someone who feels uncomfortable or awkward interacting with me, then I will (perhaps not consciously or not purposefully) end up feeling less comfortable talking with them. I will not want to invade their space, or encroach on them in a way that they might not wish. In contrast, I found myself interacting most with Kevin, a student who I instantly identified as being comfortable with my presence. This tendency that I have is something that I knew about myself going into this project, and yet I found that, beyond my practice of trying to notice and complement students' expression of self-interest, I did very little to actively change. I recognize this as a personal failing in regards to this project, and a quality of my practice that I hope to challenge and change when I am the sole teacher of a classroom.

Identifying and Reflecting, Not Identifying and Not Reflecting

Guiding Research Question: Is there anything to suggest that students are learning more about themselves and their identities through their work in the classroom? Do they feel validated in this work?

As I stated within the first section of my findings, Mrs. Foley tends to allow for student self-reflection to take place within a number of student assignments. Though I was not able to look at all students' assignments, the assignments that I did look at reflect some forms of student identification with characters and themes from their texts. I often saw students show that they related to a text, either overtly or implicitly, which reflects the potential for students to be learning about themselves through their interactions with the texts. I also found myself surprised when, just after seeing this evidence, I had interviews with Estelle, Kevin and Emilia that suggested either that they did not identify with a

character or did not see the personal importance of self-reflection for themselves. I find myself answering my third research question with a sort of yes-and-no; there is evidence to suggest that students can be learning more about their identities through their work in this classroom, but not all necessarily feel validated by this work, or even view this work as important.

Identifying (and Not-Identifying) in the One-Pagers

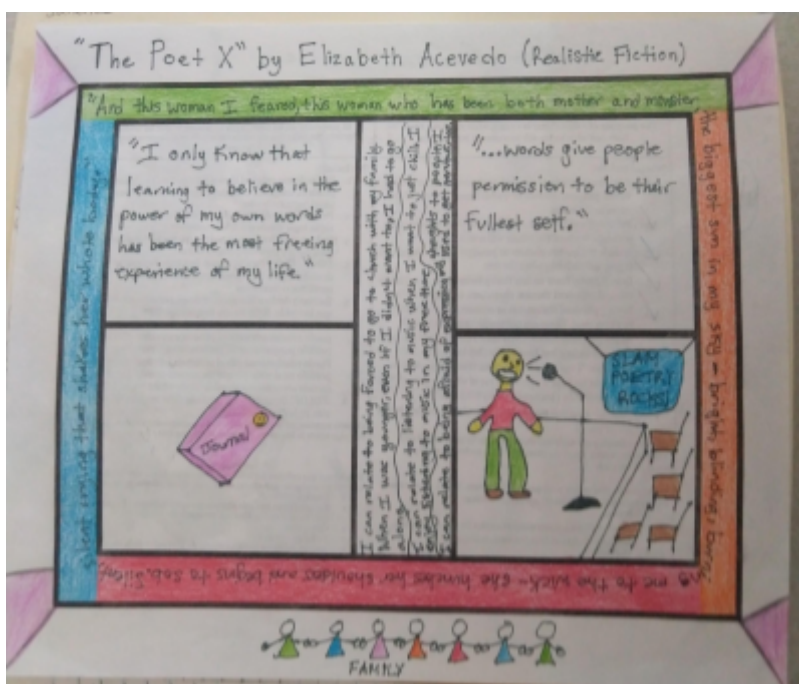
Perhaps the strongest indicator of student identification with texts is the one-pager assignment based around Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X*. While not all of the students use the one-pager to specifically find ways that they do or do not relate to Xiomara as a character, it is clear when looking at the one-pagers that students' selves were present in their work. The story itself follows the 15-year-old Xiomara Batista as she journals her way through her sophomore year of high school. We read through her numerous journal entries as she documents her experiences in school; she shares her feelings about her mother, her father, her twin brother and a boy named Aman, grapples with her own philosophy and her mother's

fervent Catholicism, and discovers poetry as a way to feel seen and heard. For the one-page assignment, students were asked to draw moments in or images that represent the themes of the book, including quotes from the book that they felt were meaningful and their own personal observations. Emilia and Estelle both included very direct and overt forms of relation to an aspect of Xiomara's life. On her one-pager, Emilia wrote the following:

I can relate to being forced to go to church with my family. When I was younger, even if I didn't want to, I had to go along.

I can relate to listening to music when I

want to just chill. I enjoy listening to music in my free time.



Emilia's One-Pager

I can relate to being afraid of expressing my thoughts to people. I used to get nervous too.

Emilia picks out specific aspects of Xiomara's life that she "can relate to."

She takes certain situations (being forced to go to church, listening to music, expressing one's thoughts) and compares Xiomara's thoughts, feelings and situations to her own, whether they be past or present. Such strong comparisons suggest to me that there is the potential for Emilia to reflect on her own identities in relation to Xiomara as a character in similar

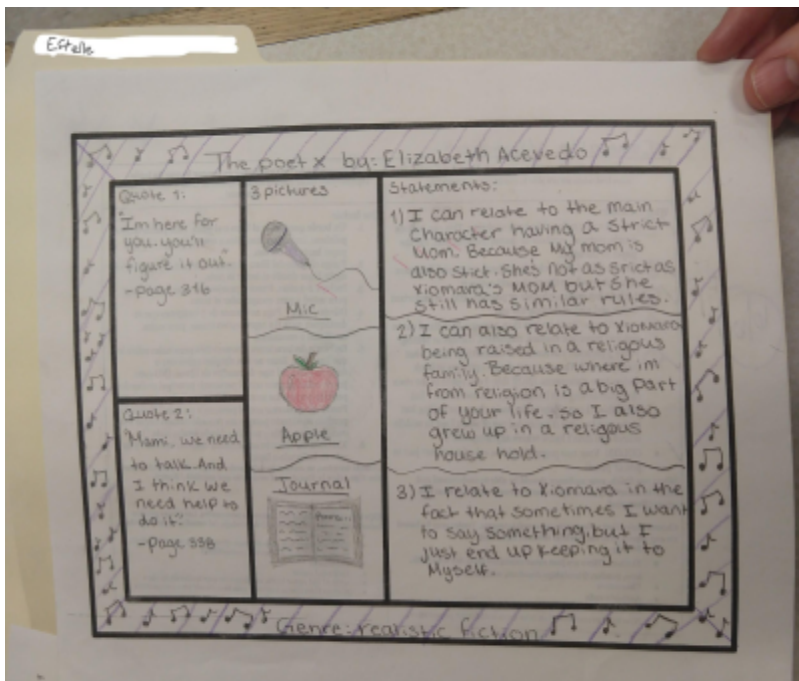
situations to her.

Estelle made statements that follow a very similar pattern as Emilia's; she too identified specific situations in which she can relate to Xiomara.

1) I can relate to the main character having a strict mom. Because my mom is also strict. She's not as strict as Xiomara's mom but she still has similar rules.

2) I can also relate to Xiomara being raised in a religious family. Because where I'm from religion is a big part of your life. So I also grew up in a religious household.

3) I relate to Xiomara in the fact that sometimes I want to say something, but I just end up keeping it to myself.



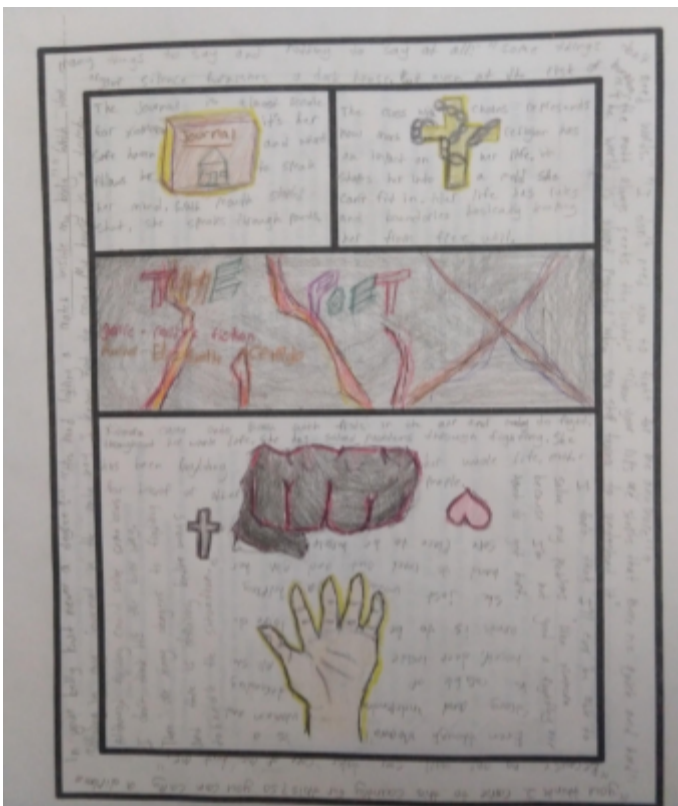
Estelle's One-Pager

Estelle finds a commonality that she shares with Xiomara, but then elaborates on her own situation; she shares that her mother is not as strict as Xiomara's but still "has similar rules," and that religion is a "big part of your life" in her household. Estelle is taking the ways in which she sees herself as similar to Xiomara and using them in order to explain her own life.

Beyond the overt “I can relate...” statements that Estelle and Emilia make, much of the students’ remaining work on the assignments are more related to interpretive work than specifically identification, although I would argue that aspects of this interpretive work still involve students bringing themselves to the text. In the art of the one-pager, Estelle drew music notes in the margins of her page, and also drew an apple to include prominently on the page. When I started looking at these one-pagers, both of these choices stood out greatly to me. In my reading of the book, I viewed music in the book simply as a way that Xiomara and Aman connected, and did not think much of it. It is clear to me that Estelle, however, resonated with this aspect of the book enough to include it prominently within her one-pager. I found myself surprised when I saw the apple on the page, since at first I didn’t even remember an apple coming up in the book at all. Only later did I remember that apples are one of Xiomara’s favorite snacks, and are featured prominently in one poem where, amidst a conflict between Xiomara and Twin, Twin cuts up an apple for her. Though Estelle does not

overtly tie this depiction of an apple towards any statements on identity and reflection, the presence of the apple on her one-pager perhaps suggests that there is something about this moment between Xiomara and Twin with the apple that Estelle might be reflecting on. Since an apple does not appear much outside of this scene, the presence of the apple on Estelle’s one-pager suggests to me that this moment held some sort of significance for Estelle.

Kevin did not make any specific identification with the character of Xiomara in the way that Estelle and Emilia did, however he did express the ways in which he felt he was different from Xiomara. Encircled behind a drawing of a fist, Kevin writes:



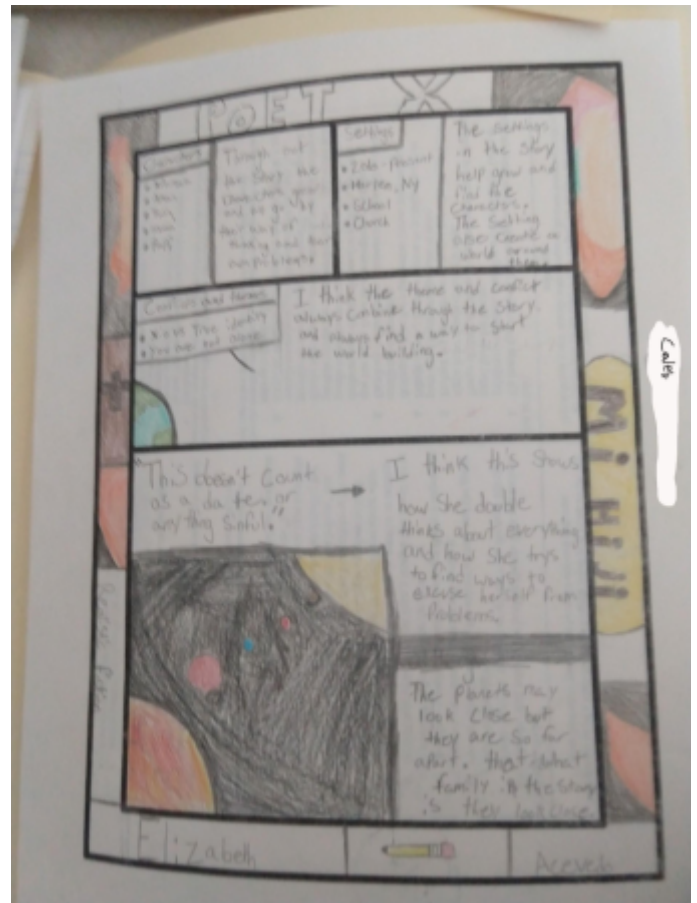
Kevin’s One-Pager

Xiomara came into earth with fists in the air and ready to fight. Throughout her whole life, she has solved problems through fighting. She has been fighting her whole life, either for herself or for other people.

I don't think I'll ever be able to solve my problems like Xiomara because I'm not good at fighting nor want to get hurt... Although fighting could solve some issues, I don't think it's the best way. There are many dangers to fighting and there is definitely better ways to handle the situation.

Here, Kevin might not be identifying with the character of Xiomara, but instead is comparing himself with her and reflecting on himself by overtly identifying with not being like Xiomara. Kevin is still understanding and communicating something about himself through looking at the character of Xiomara, though it is from the lens of specifically not identifying with her.

Caleb creates a planet metaphor on his one-pager, and while there is not enough information on his one-pager to say whether or not he is reflecting on himself as he reads and completes his assignment, it is nonetheless clear that Caleb is thinking deeply about the dynamics of Xiomara's family by creating his metaphor. The one-pagers alone do not suggest that students are necessarily learning about themselves through engagement with their text, but they demonstrate that students' selves are present in their interpretations as they read and think about Xiomara.



Caleb's One-Pager

“Does Reading Fiction Make You A Better Person?”

Some time before the students began their work with *The Poet X*, I briefly had the opportunity to see the class speak collaboratively about fiction, including the topic of using literature as a reflective tool, when I watched the students read through an article together and write a collaborative essay with Mrs. Foley. Due to my schedule, however, I was only present for the day that the students read the article and that the assignment was introduced, as well as the day that the class was finishing their concluding thoughts. Thus, I cannot comment on how the discussions on the body parts of their essay went. On the introductory day, the class read an article titled “Does Reading Fiction Make You A Better Person?” Written by Sarah Kaplan, the article introduces the work of Keith Oatley, a cognitive psychologist whose work suggests that reading and reflecting on fiction helps individuals with empathy and other social skills. The logic presented in the article is that, by putting oneself in the point of view of a character, people are able to imagine themselves in those situations from the book, and through this gain understanding of other people’s perspective. In order to show students the structure of how to write an essay, Mrs. Foley used this article as a topic for the students to write a group essay together. Together as a class, they developed an outline for the group essay. The next day that I came into the classroom was the day where the class was wrapping up their collaborative essay. I note in my observations from that day that:

Mrs. Foley asks [while at the front of the classroom, typing out the conclusion of the group essay], “Come on, give me one more sentence. How we can incorporate this into our lives, what’s the ‘now what?’ Did this change your perspective on fiction?”

There’s a pretty long silence before a student answers. (Field notes, 29 October 2021).

This silence could point to a certain discomfort or unfamiliarity with larger group discussions. Alternatively, other conditions in the class could have led to this hesitancy to speak. Within my field notes for that day, I consider the following:

I wonder: is it just because it’s early Friday morning that nobody is engaged, or is this how the rest of the essay was written?

When I ask this question in my observation notes, I am wondering how much of the essay was based on the students' thinking versus how much was prompted by the teacher. If students did not engage during the writing of the group essay, then is the group essay accurate to how the students interpreted this article?

When I conducted interviews with a few of the students, I specifically asked about the Kaplan piece and this day in class:

Do you think that reading helps you better understand yourself, or other people, like in the Sarah Kaplan article we read about "Does Reading Fiction Make You A Better Person"? How does (or doesn't) it do that?

I had multiple reasons for asking this question. For one, I felt that many of the points raised in the Kaplan article aligned with my curiosities about what the students think about as they read fiction. I was also curious to ask about this activity because I wanted to know if the contents of the group essay were reflective of what the interviewed students felt about fiction. I interviewed three students: Estelle, Emilia and Kevin, with this question as part of the interview. Estelle initially outright disagreed with the notion that reading fiction can help someone understand themselves or others, although she did say that characters from movies can help with this.

W: Do you agree with that? [Kaplan's thesis, i.e. that reading fiction fosters empathy and helps readers better understand themselves and others] Do you think that that was right, or—

E: I actually— I don't agree with that, I feel like reading fiction doesn't make you a better person, I feel like nonfiction makes you a better person cause it's more realistic.

W: Mmm

E: It's like, nonfiction actually tells you like what happens in real life, and then fiction is more like, they sugar coat stuff.

W: Gotcha, gotcha. Do you think that other art forms, like movies, music, do you think that makes people like, quote unquote become a better person, like help them reflect on themselves and stuff like that?

E: I feel like yeah, movies help because sometimes when I watch a movie, and I see that a person is like, let's say from the beginning they're like a really bad person

W: yeah

E: And then they start realizing things throughout the movie and then they start changing the way they act, and the character changes as well, I think that helps, because like as the viewer of the movie you realize like “oh, what he’s doing is correct, I should do that.

W: Ok gotcha

E: That really helps

Estelle seems to be saying that seeing a character go through changes can help a viewer to reflect on themselves and how they act. Her example is specific to movies; her focus on characters’ abilities to change is perhaps something she sees and finds valuable in movies but not in fictional literature. I perhaps could have done more to ask Estelle to elaborate on what she means when she says this, but the fact that Estelle specifically says that she “Actually do[esn’t] agree” when it comes to written fiction suggests to me that she does not see value in using written fiction as a tool for self-reflection. In contrast, Kevin agrees with Kaplan’s central principle, however he does not see the benefit for himself personally.

W: Would you agree that reading fiction helps people understand themselves better, like kinda what the article was saying, would you agree with that?

K: um, it depends. Yes I do agree to some extent, yeah.

W: Mmm, so what’s the extent then?

K: The extent? I think it does help with people who are more like, needs to connect with things, so like, like an empathetic person that needs a base or surface to go off of

W: Gotcha, gotcha

K: I don’t know how to say this, but... an example!

W: Okay, sure

K: An efficient story can help a lot, since it can be written and edited to any liking, I think, that could help someone become a better person, but you have to put that in to real use and real-world problems, to actually, um, put that into effect

W: Okay gotcha, so, like, it has the potential, but you have to really focus on it, that’s what I’m hearing?

K: Yeah, you can’t just become a better person just by reading or seeing fiction stuff, but uh, you go into the real world and apply that, yes

...

W: Cool! Going back to reading and like English classes, do you think the stuff that you're assigned in school helps you do that, or not so much?

K: Um, do, what?

W: So like the books that you're assigned to read in class, um, the different poems and stuff, um, do you think that – so you were just saying that having a good character that someone can relate to can kinda like, help view yourself, do you think that the stuff assigned in school helps you do that?

K: Not for me personally, but I could see it happening to some students, yes.

W: Gotcha, gotcha. Um, is there any particular reason why you think it's not quite for you personally, or is it just like it's not really how you think or read?

K: Well it comes down to, some of the stories I read, the characters, I don't act like them or talk like them, I don't relate to them at all.

W: Gotcha.

K: Maybe some parts a little bit, but yeah not much.

W: So like relating to the characters is big?

K: Yeah.

On the one hand, Kevin's perspective seems to align with that of Kaplan for the most part. Kevin clarifies that just simply reading will not change a person, and that individuals must "go into the real world and apply" what they read into their lives, which aligns with Kaplan's rationale (Kaplan also placed importance on the real-world application of the empathy skills developed through reading fiction). While Kevin takes this perspective, he also clearly states that the books that he reads fall short of allowing him to fully feel that he can reflect on himself while reading, and he cites a lack of seeing himself in his books as a reason why he cannot. I do not fully believe that this stops Kevin from fully self-reflecting; his one-pager contained a form of self-reflection that involved him clarifying what he was not versus what he was. While I could have asked Kevin to further elaborate during our interview, I did not make the connection between his lack of identification with characters and his not-identifying in his one-pager at the time. In any case, it seems to me that based on how "I don't act like [the characters in his books] or talk like them, I don't relate to them at all,"

even though he can relate to “Maybe some parts a little bit,” Kevin does not necessarily feel supported in self-reflecting with these texts.

Emilia reflects a very similar perspective in her interview; she does not see the benefit of self-reflection for herself, but sees how books can help others reflect on themselves. Despite relating to the characters of books that she reads in school, Emilia says that she does not understand herself better from reading about these characters.

W: So you mentioned that you liked most of the books that you read in school – first off do you have any favorites?

E: From the books I’ve read at school?

W: Yeah!

E: Um, last year we read *of mice and men*, but this year, I liked *The Poet X*.

W: Gotcha, gotcha. Yeah I was a big fan of the *Poet X* too, after we read it in class I wrote a paper about it for college.

E: Oh, and I think in 8th grade, I think it was in spanish class we read *The House On Mango Street*

W: Ooo, that’s a good one! Do you think that those have like– do you think that reading those have helped you understand yourself a little bit when it comes to thinking about the character and relating to yourself, or is that something that you’re not thinking about as much when you read?

E: Umm, not really, but I feel like, whenever I read, I think maybe it can help like other kids who maybe don’t know much about themselves figure out stuff about themselves, I kind of relate, but, yeah I don’t know if that answers your question

W: No, no, you did! So what I’m hearing is kind of, like, you can see how that can work for other people but that isn’t something you think about when you read?

E: Yeah, yeah.

Similar to how Kevin feels, Emilia agrees with Kaplan’s central point, yet also states that she does not personally feel that the reading she has done in school has helped her reflect.

Emilia’s answer in particular surprised me; as someone who stated she enjoyed reading and read often outside of school, I assumed that she would have taken some personal reflective benefit in reading as well. Of course, we do see in Emilia’s one-pager that she does find places that she identifies with and relates to a character, however since Emilia does “not really” feel like reading has helped her understand herself, perhaps simply identifying with

the situations of a character is not enough for Emilia to feel that reflection is personally beneficial to her.

Other sections of Emilia and Kevin's interviews further suggest that they do not feel validated or supported by reflecting on their reading. Though Kevin originally cites specifically an inability to relate to characters as a barrier to his own personal reflection, he elaborates more on his perspective later in our interview.

W: Do you think that's something that, as schools, as teachers, do you think that's something that English teachers should have as one of their goals? Like, um, characters that people can relate to and think about themselves with?

K: Mhm, when you have books that students can relate with, it allows them to find themselves better, and doesn't make them feel as lonely, and therefore they do better in classes and feel better about themselves knowing they aren't facing this thing alone.

W: Um, so what I'm hearing is you generally think that that's important, but like it hasn't really happened all that much to you?

K: no cause um, I'm doing fine on my own, and I don't really need [laughs] these books as much

W: [laughs]

K: But I do see the possibility of these books.

Kevin shares that good books that students relate to can make students ultimately feel better about themselves, but even if Kevin related to his books more, he still would not see books as a reflective tool for himself personally since he is "doing fine on my own." Emilia also shares that she does not see literature as a reflective tool for herself, but believes that "maybe it can help like other kids who maybe don't know much about themselves." I wonder if Kevin and Emilia feel that self-reflection using literature is not useful for them since they already have a strong sense of self, as these two pieces of their interviews might suggest. With this in mind, I need to understand as a future educator that not all students will view reflection work as important to them, and that reflection work does not blatantly mean that students will immediately see the relevance of literature to their own lives.

My conclusion is based only on the information that I have been given by the students, and thus is limited by the trust that they have placed in me, or the amount of trust

they have placed in the act of reading in general. I come into this project feeling very comfortable interacting personally with texts, and with the philosophy that a page is a safe space for me to interact with myself and think through my own ideas. The students that I work with might not share that same philosophy or that same comfort with text. Interacting with text in this way motivates one to be vulnerable with themselves, and it likely takes a great amount of trust to discuss this vulnerability with another person. I posit above, based on the evidence that I can see, that Kevin and Emilia feel a certain sense of self-assuredness and thus do not feel that literature can bring a personal benefit to them, though this conclusion is limited by the amount of trust that they may place in me.

“Discussion Questions:” The Potential for Reflection in Collaboration

Guiding Research Question: “How will my future instruction help students to learn something about themselves and/or about others?” (Muhammad, 2020, 70)

Though my interview pool was rather small in relation to the amount of students in Mrs. Foley’s class, and I could have done more to open up the conversations in places, I was struck by the commonality of ideas expressed in regards to the importance of good quality reflective questions and the importance of collaboration to these students in thinking through their reflections. Estelle expressed in her interview that for her, peer work on a poetry assignment was especially significant:

W: Um, yeah, so going back to reading a bit, do you think that the readings or like the assignments or the conversations you have in class, do you think that that has like helped you kinda view yourself in any way, like, kinda what you were saying about movies, do you think that talking in class or like the assignments that you do in class help in any way?

E: Yeah, because most importantly when it’s like work that we have to collaborate on, it helps people understand the different points of view of other people, and then you realize that “oh yeah, that’s right!”

W: mmm

E: like “Yeah I should do that” or ‘I shouldn’t” – “I should improve on this,” for example, when we were doing the poetic devices project, when we were um, when they were giving us feedback it was really helpful for– to realize like, “oh yeah I should do that.”

W: Gotcha, gotcha. So um, like a big part of that is collaborating with other people?

E: Mmm

W: Would you say that any of the assignment's that you've been given that don't involve that collaboration, are they still able to do that, or is it more so just like it's the collaboration that makes that happen?

E: It depends on the work that's given, because sometimes, when it's like – sometimes we get work that is just work, like schoolwork, because sometimes they give you work that, while doing your work you can reflect on it, because you're trying to improve on how you do your work, and then there's sometimes where that's just – just work!

Estelle makes the distinction between what she states as “work that is just work” and work that allows her to reflect and improve. The idea of improvement that Estelle introduces suggests that, for her, collaboration is helpful since others' points of view help her realize what she might be doing wrong, or help her see a perspective she might not have had before. The language of improvement also suggests to me that Estelle is very focused on improving her ability to succeed in her assignments rather than a more personal self-reflection, however Kevin's interview suggests that reflection can be prompted through reflective questions and assignments.

W: So what about, like, do you think the assignments that you're given and the conversations that you have in class, do you think that that is helpful in any way towards reflecting on it and thinking about yourself, or not so much?

K: It does a little bit. When you're given questions, it forces us to go back into what we read and think about what just happened, and summarize what we read.

W: Gotcha, gotcha.

K: So it does help understand, yeah.

W: Gotcha. Um, so you say that that helps you understand the book, um, does it help you understand yourself in any way? What I'm asking is do those sorts of questions make you not only think about the character but also think about yourself a little bit in relation to the character? Is that something that happens?

K: Yes it does. When I see characters – When I see questions asking how the character reacts to problems or situations, it also puts me in the situation to, I put myself in that situation, and see how I react to the problem.

While Kevin expressed in another section of this interview that he often did not relate to characters that he read in school, he expressed here that reflective questions helped him to self-reflect nonetheless. He thus suggests that quality self-reflective questions can allow students to use text as a tool of self-reflection, even when it does not come naturally to them. Emilia echoed this sentiment at the close of our interview. After I had finished my questions, I gave each interviewee a chance to state any additional comments. Emilia took this time not only to emphasize the importance of prompting questions but the importance of group work.

W: Solid! Well that's about all the questions I have, is there anything else you'd want to say on the topic of reading and self reflection, or have you kind of covered everything you'd want to say?

E: Umm, I – one thing I like about reading in school is that teachers always come up with discussion questions and it helps help me reflect on what I read

W: Mhm

E: Like there's a difference between me reading a book when I want to and reading a book with other students because when I just read at home, I don't really – not have time, but I don't spend time on it but when we read in school, I have time to have discussion questions and debate about what I think

W: Gotcha. So the different questions and assignments are what helps you reflect and think?

E: Yeah.

While Emilia stated earlier that she does not tend to self-reflect while she reads, she states here that discussion questions do allow her to think more about how literature can relate to herself and others. I find it interesting that Emilia specifically frames these as “discussion questions” and emphasizes “debate,” both of which involve collective activities rather than individual thinking.

The emphasis that the students placed on collaboration calls me to question my earlier assumptions about the merits of individual reflection when it comes to identity work. Whereas before I assumed that identity work might belong best in the individual sphere so as to avoid student embarrassment or topics that students might consider to be too personal to share in class, these three students instead express that talking and collaborating with their peers is important to them. With this in mind, it is important to consider how to run collaborative and generative discussions about self-reflective topics if I am to consider how best to help students learn about themselves and others through their work. Though not explicitly about student identity, or even about how students relate to characters at all, the two Socratic seminars that students participated in could lend insight into how I as a future educator might run such a discussion. As the two most prominent moments of student-run class discussion on a particular topic, the two Socratic seminars that occurred within Mrs. Foley's class are the most valuable talk-based experiences that I can draw on.

Classroom Talk in the Socratic Seminars: What Is A Socratic Seminar?

During my time in Mrs. Foley's classroom, students participated in what were called "Socratic Seminars," activities designed to promote the discussion and speaking skills of a class. While I was present in the class, students participated in two of these seminars, both related to the novel *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds. In this story, a teenager named Will, who just lost his brother Shawn to gun violence, grabs his brother's gun and sets out to take revenge. He takes the elevator of his apartment complex to go down to the ground floor, where he can leave and take his revenge, but along the way Will sees the ghosts of all of the people in his life who have died from gun violence. This culminates in Will meeting the ghost of Shawn, and once the elevator reaches the bottom floor, the book ends, leaving it ambiguous as to whether or not Will chooses to get his revenge, continuing the cycle of gun violence, or to break this cycle by not taking revenge on his brother's killer.

The first Socratic seminar was centered around an interview of Jason Reynolds that the students watched before reading the book, while the second Socratic seminar was focused entirely around the ambiguous ending of the book. These seminars in general were highly structured, with different phases of conversations and criteria for how many times a student should talk in order to receive a good grade. When I came into the classroom on days where

Socratic seminars would be taking place, I would see two circles of desks: an inner circle, where students would sit and actively participate in a Socratic seminar, and an outer circle, where students would listen to the inner circle and take notes. There would be 10 minutes for the first group to go through discussion questions and talk with each other, a section of time for the outer circle to ask the inner circle questions about what they spoke about, and then the outer circle and the inner circle would switch and repeat the process.

Below, I speak on the differences in engagement between the first Socratic seminar and the second Socratic seminar. I talk about what seemed to work, what seemed to not work, and conclude based on these two talks what might be effective practice for facilitating a communal discussion.

In on the Joke: The use of Humor in the First Socratic Seminar

In this iteration of the Socratic Seminar, students were meant to discuss an interview with Jason Reynolds. Though I was not present for the day that the students watched the interview together, I was present for the two days of class time that students had to prepare for their discussion. In order to help guide the students in their discussion and give the students prompts to speak on, Mrs. Foley wrote up a table of 10 questions for the students to write out responses to, taking evidence from what Reynolds says in the interviews. For Thursday and Friday of one week, students wrote down their responses to these questions in these tables, so that when the day of the Socratic Seminar arrived, they would have a reference sheet to ask each other questions about the interviews and thus, ideally, be able to create conversation from this. As I went around the room, and even worked specifically with one student, I could see that many students had a lot to write down, and would have a lot that they could say for the upcoming Socratic Seminar.

The day of the Socratic Seminar came, and I could see that many students were stressed. After Mrs. Foley set some participation guidelines, she said that it was time for the first group to begin their section. The first group was mostly silent. Even though Mrs. Foley attempted to separate herself from the role of conversation-leader (so that students might take up that role instead), I noted that she would step in and try to prompt students to ask each other questions. This had little effect on starting up a conversation within a group, and I wrote in my field notes that "Students are shy. The student I spoke with Friday had a lot to

say, but in the circle she's now quiet, along with everyone else. Can't blame them, this seems intimidating" (Field Notes, 1 November 2021).

The second group started out in a similar way, until one classmate began to jokingly press another about the questions on their reference sheet. The first student answered a question, while the second student jumped in with "well would you agree with..." or "why do you think that?" or "Can you give me an example?" in the tone of a teacher. The first student would answer these questions as they were thrown at him by the second with a chuckle, seemingly in on the joke of being put in the hot seat by his classmate. From an outside observer's perspective, it seemed like the two were having fun with this, and the other students in their circle started to join in, throwing in their own questions and answers. I noted in my observation of this exercise that "Students are kinda jokingly saying 'why do you think that' and grilling each other but despite this being joking, they're saying some serious and really profound stuff in response." I left class curious about the implications for such discussions when it comes to more reflective work. While not an inherently self-reflective exercise, students did relate Reynolds' words back to themselves in this conversation, and I was curious as to the environment that allowed such conversation to take place among students.

In a study on high school student engagement done by professor Kristy S. Cooper, humor is noted as a tool with which teachers can use to help "engage students through both personal connection and entertainment" (Cooper 2014, p. 268). Cooper notes, in her focus on interviews in Mr. Knowles' physics class, that "'Student interviews revealed that the most engaging of Knowles's practices were his use of humor, his ability to make physics relevant, and his respectful treatment of students'" (Cooper 2014, p. 385)." In addition, Cooper specifies that this humor was effective when delivered "in a laidback classroom climate that engendered high levels of self-expression from much of the class" (Cooper 2014, p. 391). Thus, Cooper's findings imply that, at least with a teacher's use of humor, joking around can be effective when in conjunction with respect and a relaxed classroom setting, though students do this too. In *Puzzling Moments, Teachable Moments*, Ballenger states that "Conversations in which many children participate may sound like playground conversation... The playground quality has to do with a number of features: There is more joking, more storytelling, more argument in conversations where many children participate"

(Ballenger 2007, p. 31). The expression of humor during this section of the Socratic Seminar may have been a way to insert some aspect of play into the structure of the Socratic Seminar, thus making what might otherwise be an intimidating setting a much more comfortable environment to talk in.

In looking at why joking around worked for the students in group 2 of the first Socratic Seminar, it may be important to consider the importance of respect -- a tenet which Cooper's research participants note as a crucial aspect that goes along with humor in regards to their engagement in Mr. Knowles' physics class. The generative environment created by the second group in the Socratic Seminar was perhaps only possible because their humor hinged on a certain level of friendliness and respect. Proceeding the Socratic Seminar, I had seen those first two students sit together in the class, talk together, and joke together. From an observer's standpoint, it was clear that they are friends with each other. The first student who was jokingly put on the spot by the second student was in on the joke. If the second student did not know the first, if the two did not already have an established friendly relationship, then the playfulness of the second student might have come across as intimidating or even mean-spirited to the first. "As useful as humor may be," Mayo provides, "understanding a variety of ways of laughter, jokes, and humor have been considered in a relationship to power can provide not only openings for educational uses of humor, but also cautions on its risk" (Mayo 2010, p. 511). Mayo continues on to identify different functions of humor: "Humor as superiority, humor as aggression and relief, and humor as a way to highlight and think about incongruity" (Mayo 2010, p. 116). The humor of the students in the second group acted as humor as relief, however without the context of students as friends, the students could have misread each other's humor as humor as aggression. Their humor could also potentially be read as humor as a way to highlight incongruity, as the students mocking the sorts of questions that their assignment or teacher is trying to get them to ask each other, however the genuine responses of the students complicates this outlook on their humor. In any case, since the students in the Socratic Seminar did not view each other's humor as aggression, and instead engaged lightheartedly with genuine and profound responses, humor was successfully generative within this context in the classroom. Thus, this moment reveals that humor, when employed right in the correct context, can make students feel comfortable in their

environments, leading to a space where students can feel comfortable asking each other questions and reflecting on their answers.

When Ideas Clash: Talk in the Second Socratic Seminar

When it was time for students to participate in the second Socratic seminar, I was surprised to find that students engaged much more with the second Socratic Seminar than the first. This time around, the topic was about the conclusion of the book, a topic I knew to be somewhat divisive and frustrating since I was there the day the students read the end of the book. Reading along, I shared in students' shock as I turned the last page only to find nothing on the other side. The ending was sudden, and it garnered reactions from many of the students. With this topic, students were immediately talking as soon as their time in the circle started. Whereas I noticed Mrs. Foley stepped in to prompt students to speak A LOT during the first Socratic Seminar, I did not see this happen at all during either group's turn in the inner circle. Students were perfectly capable of asking each other questions, answering each other's questions, sharing their different ideas and even arguing with each other at times. Since I came away from the last Socratic seminar with the notion that such heavily-structured talk sections simply did not work with this group, if they worked at all, I was taken aback by the massive change that I saw between the first and second Socratic seminar.

At the end of the class, I asked Mrs. Foley if she had ideas on why this Socratic seminar was such a resounding success compared to the previous one.

Maria: I think practice, so, the second time around, and I also think because it was more of their thinking, they could elaborate. I feel like sometimes they get stuck when they have to base it on a text because they feel like they don't get that they can bring in the analysis part, where they're then building connections, making connections, sharing their own experiences, to what the text is saying. So because this is more their thinking based, I think they were able to then elaborate more. So that's why I think it went a little bit more smoothly.

Willow: Gotcha.

Maria: and there was a lot less questions too

Willow: Oh!

Maria: There were only four rather than, what was it 10 last time?

Willow: yeah yeah yeah

Maria: So it was easier for them to focus just on the four rather than trying to get through all ten

While I might have asserted that the structure of the Socratic Seminar does not work after viewing the first one, Mrs. Foley suggests familiarity with the framework first. While I noted in my observations during the first Socratic Seminar that there was discomfort and stress, I made no such observation regarding the second Socratic Seminar. To me, students seemed more relaxed. Perhaps familiarity made the experience less intimidating for some. Furthermore, Mrs. Foley suggests that the difference in questions, both the quantity and the focus, might have contributed to more participation. While I would agree on both accounts, I would also argue that the different goals of the questions had a strong part to play in student engagement. Many of the questions from the first Socratic seminar tend to focus mainly on the author, with questions such as “What role did hip-hop play in helping Reynolds become a writer?” and “Reynolds outlines three approaches that may help students connect with literature. What are they?” These right-or-wrong answer questions stand in contrast to the second Socratic Seminar, where the prompting questions are more directly centered around what students are thinking. Two questions directly ask “How did you react...” and “Why do you think...” while the other two are reflective on other subjects while still asking the students to share their opinions, such as “How might Will [the main character from Long Way Down] answer this question?” or “Why do writers sometimes write endings that do not end?” Such questions ask students to potentially pull from the text to support their thinking, but ultimately require students to do reflective work. I believe that this had more of an impact on student engagement than the quantity of questions, since in all of the student assignments that I looked at, students wrote a significant amount in their answers to the questions from the first Socratic seminar, certainly enough to speak about if they wanted to. While I do think that having less questions allows for students to go into more depth with their answers, it is clear to me that students had answers that they could discuss during the first Socratic Seminar; however this did not translate into students’ willingness to engage in the actual talking portion of the seminar. The interpretive focus of the questions, however, likely aided in student engagement.

For the second Socratic seminar, I was able to record an interaction that played out regarding Kevin's interpretation of the book, and a moment of disagreement between Caleb and Kevin suggests to me a potential benefit of talk protocol. While my transcript includes Caleb and Kevin as two consenting students, it should be noted that this conversation occurred in a group setting, where others were viewing and participating.

Kevin: Well I had a completely different theory. My theory is that [the main character] killed himself. [snickers from other students] ... and the whole thing was just a hallucination, and that the elevator was an elevator to hell. So basically, like a metaphor. [student stops him to clarify] No, he kills himself and then his spirit imagines himself going into the elevator, which is why there's only one bullet in the chamber. And the elevator symbolizes hell, cause he's meeting like all of these people, and when his brother Shawn says "Are you coming?" It's like are you coming...[A couple of students push back asking why certain characters would be in hell]

Caleb: I wanna know, so what stages of hell is each person...

[Kevin says something that the recording can't make out]

Caleb: Okay that didn't answer my question.

Kevin: I don't care.

[timer goes off to signal a shift to the next protocol, but this conversation does not stop. Multiple people speak up at the same time to ask questions and push back on Kevin's theory]

[Students move to the next step of the Socratic Seminar: asking questions about what they heard in the first section of the talk. Multiple students ask why a 9 year old little girl who died to gun violence would be in hell]

[Mrs. Foley reminds students that we are discussing ideas, not people]

Kevin: I guess it's not hell [explanation is garbled in recording but Kevin keeps the stance that even if it's not hell it's some form of the afterlife. Some students voice that this makes sense]

Caleb: It makes sense, but it makes you ask questions, and it gets to the point where you ask too many questions and then you have to answer them yourself, and then you realize...

[Kevin says something that the recording cannot pick up]

Caleb: I just told you that it doesn't work.

[Mrs. Foley interrupts to ask for final thoughts before moving to the next group, nobody voices any other thoughts, and then they switch over]

While this conversation is not about an interpretation that Kevin has overtly tied to any aspect of identity, I am still interested in the implications of what this conversation shows for the ways that in which classroom talk happens, and what this could mean for discussing an interpretation that is tied to some form of self-reflection. After Kevin shares his theory, Caleb's first response is a curiosity of how this interpretation can be tied to the different characters in the book. By asking about connections to the characters, Caleb reinforces points made by Woodruff and Griffin; interpretations cannot be anything-goes and must be rooted in textual analysis. Kevin's answer seems to be unsatisfying to Caleb and to the rest of the class, and he voices "I don't care" in response to Caleb's (and their) pushback. Kevin seems not ready to let go of his theory just yet, but in this environment his voicing of not caring does not stop the conversation. Their conversation is interrupted by the next stage in the protocol. This is perhaps a benefit that structure holds: without it, Kevin might have had a moment where he felt ganged-up on by the class. As Mrs. Foley de-escalates the situation by reminding students to comment on ideas not people, Kevin tweaks his interpretation to more closely match an interpretation that could be justified in the text, however this could be the result of social pressure instead of a reflection on what would be justified within the text. Caleb continues to push back on Kevin's idea before the protocol forces the group to move on. I see value in Caleb's pushback, since I think that this sort of criticism motivates students to keep their reflections grounded in the text, and yet I'd worry about the ways in which social pressure can play a role in this situation. With an idea as controversial as Kevin's I view it likely that many students will push back against another student's interpretation. It seems to me that Kevin was not personally tied to him, and he did not seem hurt or intimidated by the controversy that he started, but what if this was a student who had a personal connection to their theory and was hurt by the amount of social pressure that they might be placed under in such a situation? It is in this case where I think a talk protocol might be helpful. In this Socratic Seminar, I think it was helpful for groups to be kept under a time constraint with next steps to move to, since this forced the students to move away from Kevin's idea and towards a new conversation. Not only would this ensure that one student

does not dominate a conversation, it also mitigates the potential for continuing social pressure. If the group did not move on to a next phase, how long would they have remained on the topic of Kevin's theory? By keeping the conversation moving, the talk protocol ensured that, while Kevin was in the hot seat long enough to be motivated to think critically about his interpretation, he was not in the hot seat for too long.

Protocol also brings with it constraints, however. Just as timing assisted in the case of the second Socratic seminar, so too could it force closure on a conversation that might be important to continue. Time might be necessary to dig deeply into an interpretation of a text, and I think this is where the expertise of the facilitator must come into play. McDonald et al.'s *The Power of Protocols* suggests that the main purpose of protocols is to "force transparency by segmenting elements of a conversation whose boundaries blur: talking and listening, describing and judging, proposing and giving feedback... In forcing transparency, protocols again teach us habits that we wish we already had: to take the time to listen and notice, to take the time to think about what we want to say, to work without rushing, to speak less (or speak up more)" (McDonald et al. 2007, p. 7). It is thus the facilitator's responsibility to make sure that the segmenting of conversation is actually achieving the goal of helping students to listen, to think and to speak up. In the instance of the second Socratic seminar, I judge the segmentation of time to be beneficial in the sense that it helped the conversation to be less centered around Kevin's thoughts – inviting both other students to speak up and for Kevin to take a step back and listen. If a teacher deems that a conversation needs to continue and deepen, however, then I would posit that it might be better to avoid switching over to a new phase of a given protocol, if doing so would allow for a more equitable treatment of all involved where students are given the time to think, talk and listen. Looking at the second Socratic seminar has highlighted for me that I want to do more thinking about talk protocols when considering what I might wish to do in my own classroom – both looking at the benefits and constraints of protocol, and how I might enhance conversation in my class by using talk protocols.

Concluding My Discussion of the Socratic Seminars

As I close this project, it is my best understanding that in order to help my students learn something about themselves and others in my future instruction, I must find ways to

incorporate the group discussion and collaborative interaction the interviewed students value. Though the Socratic Seminars do not provide an exact model on how to do this, I hope that I have gained some insight into what is generative or helpful for student group talk. While it seems by my assessment of the second Socratic Seminar that some form of structure is helpful, my assessment of the first Socratic seminar tells me that this structure cannot be overbearing, complicated or intimidating, otherwise students will not feel comfortable engaging. A small number of deep and brief, interpretive questions seem to be more generative than a large number of known-answer questions, and it appears to me that a relaxed, familiar environment with room for humor will allow students to feel more comfortable talking and sharing.

Final Reflections: Where Do I Go From Here?

As much as I feel that I've learned throughout this project, I still find myself questioning the extent to which I can call my claims accurate to wider application. When I am drawing my conclusions based off a small minority of students from only one classroom in a relatively-small school, when I am only relying on the reading that I have found in my limited scope, when I am working through my thoughts, ideas and claims in my own head and through my own limited perspective, I struggle to say with confidence that anything I have found in my research is a correct answer to my research questions in all circumstances. Thus, I won't. I have made many claims about self-reflection in the classroom over the course of this work, but ultimately they are all limited by the researcher.

The only claim that I feel I can make with certainty is that I will be a better teacher now that I have completed my project than I would have been if I had never done this. Where I might have previously gone into the classroom with vague notions about how I like reading for the ability to self-reflect and think it might be helpful for students, I now carry with me my investigations into Transactional Reader-Response Theory, my experience of watching Maria Foley build relationships with her students, a strong understanding of where I need to improve in regards to my own relationship-building with students, and the lessons that the work and words of a few students taught me. I leave this project with a few key insights that I think will improve my practice as I carry them forward into teaching. While I went into this project with the assumption that self-reflective work might be best suited for

private, individual reflections (an assumption that I carried with me throughout the majority of this project), I now see, based on the responses that students gave me in their interviews, that students also want to speak to each other, to work collaboratively and communally even with material that I might deem personal or self-reflective. I see more clearly than ever my tendency to work more with students that seem to be most comfortable with me. I also now understand that when it comes to building trust-filled relationships, “knowing” another is foundational to “trusting” another. This has motivated me to think more about how I can be fully present as myself for my future students, how I can give them more opportunities to know me, so that trust may develop from there. My project has also emphasized to me certain catalysts for self-reflection. The positive effect of representation cannot be left unstated; as Kevin shares in his interview, it is harder to self-reflect using characters when you cannot see yourself in those characters. Along with this is the importance of prompting questions to help students reflect in a way that they might not naturally come to on their own. Open-ended questions based on students’ thoughts and opinions, which motivate students to share their own interpretations, help them to engage personally with literature, rather than search for a correct answer or a correct interpretation. I also see an emphasis on comfort in this project. As seen in the literature, and as is replicated in the comparison between the first and second Socratic seminars, students need to feel comfortable in a physical space and in a community in order to engage. Familiarity helps students to feel more comfortable interacting and I see this comfort as the first step to students sharing their thoughts, opinions, interpretations and selves in the classroom. Foundational to that comfort is the trust and care that a teacher can show to their students, allowing the rest of this work to take place.

My project also highlights for me the areas where I still have questions, areas that I can still grow and learn in order to be the kind of educator that I want to be. Now that I’m aware that students want opportunities to work and discuss together, I’m left wondering what this sort of talk might look like. My look at the Socratic seminars gives me some basic thoughts on the store of questions that students best respond to and modeled one form of talk protocol, but what else does it take for a discussion on self-reflective topics to be generative in the classroom? How do I as a facilitator handle topics that might be difficult and personal in my class? What are the benefits to talk protocols, and what are the drawbacks? Though I have begun to think about these questions towards the end of my project, I am far from

finding answers that I am satisfied with. I do think that this project has given me places to search for these answers, however, as I have potential books to read and other members of my community that I can learn from in this regard.

I am also left at the end of this project questioning the wider implications and applications of self-identity-oriented work. I choose this topic to learn more about because it is where my personal passions lie, however I know I have responsibilities as an educator that reach beyond the topic of identity. Early in my project I use Muhammad's *Cultivating Genius* as a foundational piece of my conceptual framework, though the pursuit of identity is only one of the four pursuits that she highlights in her work (the others being skills, intellect and criticality). As I think about the topic of literature as a tool for helping develop and support multiple self-identities, I also want to continue that line of thinking and consider how those identities might help students to engage in these other pursuits. Perhaps by learning more about themselves and about others, students can become more aware of and critical of the society and world around them. In my own mind I often frame literature as a journey of personal self-discovery, though I know that literature can be so much more for so many students, and I think my next step as an educator and a scholar is to explore what can come from self-reflective interpretive work that is beyond the personal.

It is my genuine hope that you come away from my research having gained some sort of knowledge, but it is also my genuine hope that you take this knowledge, as I have said before, exactly for what it is: my words, my thoughts, my assumptions, my ideas, and only my answers. I take it that, as someone reading this currently, you are an educator, a prospective educator, or someone who holds a deep interest in education. I expect that I will revisit my writing at some point as a future educator, and recognize areas where I might have changed my understanding. Take my ideas into account, but also weigh them against the authors you have read, against your experiences, and judge what you see to be effective practice for your own educational experiences in your own way. Thank you for reading and for thinking along with me.

Works Cited:

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* (1st ed.). Scholastic Teaching Resources (Teaching Strategies).

Drawing on Black literary tradition, Gholdy Muhammad creates a framework for teaching literacy in a way that not only helps students achieve academically but also helps students to connect to who they are and cultivate confidence and emotional well-being. I draw on specifically the chapter “Towards the Pursuit of Identity” to frame my project.

Love, B. (2020). *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (Illustrated ed.). Beacon Press.

Bettina Love shares in this book her views on what is called the educational survival complex, which encompasses the promotion of test-taking skills, character education, and other educational strategies that only ever teach children of color how to survive the educational system rather than personally thrive. She calls on an abolitionist pedagogy that emphasizes teaching with imagination, love and urgency, and teaches students about racial oppression and how to make change in their communities.

Though Love’s work does not provide any data or specific theory that I apply to my project, her writing serves as a foundation piece for how I view education and the American education system in general.

DeMulenaere, E. (2012). Towards a Pedagogy of Trust. In C. Dudley-Marling & S. Michaels (Eds.), *High-Expectation Curricula: Helping All Students Engage in Powerful Learning* (1st ed., pp. 28–41). Teachers College Press.

DeMulenaere draws on critically reflective action research to establish a framework for creating and cultivating trust within a classroom. Using ethnographic methods, DeMulenaere identifies six key components of building a pedagogy of trust within a classroom. I have adopted his framework, though I recognize that in many ways his framework will have to be tweaked to fit my situation, as I am not a teacher as I do this research and instead an assistant within a classroom.

Goldstein, P. (2005). Reader-Response Theory and Criticism. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, 1–5.

https://nanopdf.com/download/reader-response-theory-and-criticism-the-johns-hopkins-guide_pdf#

In this article, Goldstein provides an overview of the basic tenets of Reader-Response Theory, a lens of literature that focuses specifically on the reader’s experience of literary works, as opposed to other theories that focus on a work’s author or its specific content. I include this because this lens closely aligns both with my experience of looking at literature as well as Muhammad’s emphasis on literacy towards the pursuit of identity.

Alsup, J. (2010). Introduction. In J. Alsup, *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity Across Cultures and Classrooms: Contexts for the Literary Lives of Teens* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Alsup argues that, while a number of articles and books have been written about including YA novels in English classes, there has been very little research on the pedagogical effectiveness of YA novels. Alsup, in this book, seeks to fill that gap through analyzing 4 major topics: teenage identity growth, reader-response approaches to teaching, connections between psychological and educational theories of identification, and theory that links literacy to social change. Since the class I work with reads YA literature in the classroom, Alsup's work will help me to see how YA literature can be effectively used in the classroom.

Given, M., Wagner, J. A., Belleau, L., & Smith, M. (2007). "Who, Me?": Four Pedagogical Approaches to Exploring Student Identity through Composition, Literature, and Rhetoric. *The Writing Instructor*, 1–11. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ824628.pdf>
Given et. al. write with a focus on composition and writing within college classrooms, outlining 4 specific approaches on how to use creative writing to explore student identity. Each author discusses their relationship with identity and literature, relationships that I can relate to, yet I feel that the ways that these exercises emphasize peer-reviewing might leave high school students feeling embarrassed about sharing self-reflective writings with their peers.

Glenn, W. J., & Ginsberg, R. (2016). Resisting Readers' Identity: (Re)Construction across English and Young Adult Literature Course Contexts. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 51(1), 84–105.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24889935.pdf?casa_token=S57YsbIXRPAAAAAA:kYu4e87eEvqjZX1RM_33YIDlnQsknGFBIU9deP9UsXLqRXjLa0LW7Dkc2nCdSRoR4G367djtviivjhXIS2ZakGFydnwTGBM5I1keOcdGSi-s3whl4wE

This study of participation in a Young Adult Literature elective class examines both traditional English classroom settings and a Young Adult Literature classroom setting. Centered around the idea of "Inviting students to engage as readers in school," as opposed to "engage in school reading," Glenn and Ginsburg's piece provides guidance on how one might re-structure or reorganize a literature class (wherein more control is given towards students) in order to have a positive impact on the way that students view themselves.

Davis, Judith Rae. "Reconsidering Readers: Louise Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Pedagogy." *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1992, pp. 71–81. *Jstor*; www.jstor.org/stable/42802433. Accessed 11 Oct. 2021.

Davis argues that Louise Rosenblatt's framework for Transactional Reader-Response Theory was overlooked during her time since it was not purely theory work, however it is important for educators, considering Rosenblatt's direct tie to pedagogy in her

work. By structuring classes around Reader-Response Theory and including reader-response journals, educators can demystify the act of reading for students, as well as empower and center themselves. Davis' writing on this topic provides valuable general information on Rosenblatt's work as well as potent examples of how this work is incorporated into a text and a classroom

Woodruff, Amanda, and Robert Griffin. "Reader Response in Secondary Education Settings: Increasing Comprehension through Meaningful Interactions with Texts." *Texas Journal of Literary Education*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2017, pp. 108–116.

Basic tenets of transactional reader response theory are reviewed, with a specific emphasis on the fact that reader response theory is not an "anything goes" approach and must still be rooted in the text. Reader response journals, reading workshops, and literature circles are all emphasized as ways to practice reader response theory effectively in the classroom.

Glenn, Wendy, and Ricki Ginsburg. "Resisting Readers' Identity (Re)Construction across English and Young Adult Literature Course Contexts." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 51, no. 1, Aug. 2016, pp. 84–105. *Jstor*; www.jstor.org/stable/24889935. Accessed 27 Sept. 2021.

This study of participation in a Young Adult Literature elective class examines both traditional English classroom settings and a Young Adult Literature classroom setting. Centered around the idea of "Inviting students to engage as readers in school," as opposed to "engage in school reading," Autonomy in the text and in the classroom is strongly emphasized by interviewed students as what is necessary in order to have a positive impact on the way that students view reading and view themselves.

Soublis, Theoni, and Erik Winkler. "Snapshots: Transcending Bias through Reader-Response Theory." *The English Journal*, vol. 94, no. 2, Nov. 2004, pp. 12–14. *Jstor*, www.jstor.org/stable/4128764. Accessed 13 Oct. 2021.

The story of Erik Winkler, a student who uses his own reader response journal entry to come out to his fellow classmates, is shared, along with the reactions of the teacher and a fellow student called Scott. Winkler's story positions texts not only as tools for understanding ourselves but tools for communicating our selves to each other in such a way that other individuals understand.

Cooper, Kristy S. "Eliciting Engagement in the High School Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Examination of Teaching Practices." *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2, Apr. 2014, pp. 363–402., <https://doi.org/> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24546691>.

Studies of of Mr. Knowles' physics class reveal that key to Mr. Knowles' positive relationships with his students was his use of humor, his respect for his students, his ability to make material relevant for students and the laid-back environment of his classroom. Cooper's work suggests that humor and comfort are important to keep in mind when one wants to motivate student engagement.

Mayo, Cris. "Incongruity and Provisional Safety: Thinking Through Humor." *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, vol. 29, 17 Aug. 2010, pp. 509–521.

Humor serves a variety of functions in social settings, including humor as a way to exert superiority, humor as aggression, humor as a relief, and humor as a way to highlight incongruity. Understanding what is being communicated when humor comes up in a classroom can help one understand class dynamics.

Ballenger, Cindy. "Chapter 2: Expanding the Talk." *Puzzling Moments, Teachable Moments: Practicing Teacher Research in Urban Classrooms*, 2007, pp. 29–40.

Students are always making sense, often through the use of culturally-learned sensemaking tools. In looking at an interaction between Ballenger and one of her classes, it can be seen that joking, humor and other ways of interacting that could be described as "play" allow students to play out and make sense of concepts in a way that is comfortable to them.

McDonald, Joseph P, et al. *The Power of Protocols : An Educator's Guide to Better Practice*. 2nd ed., New York, Teachers College Press, 2007, pp. 1-14

Protocol functions to segment out conversation into elements that otherwise blur (such as talking/listening, proposing/ giving feedback), with the goal for these elements to then balance out. Work with protocol can allow teachers to facilitate conversations where participants must take the time to notice, listen, think and speak.

