Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching

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Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching

by

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To Charlie and Quinn

May you always pursue your academic, artistic, or athletic endeavors with a fierce passion; may that passion permeate your personal and professional lives.

And may you always know how much I love you, my Buddy Boy and my Champ, and how much I thank God every day for your presence in my life.
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the discourse of preservice teacher candidates in order to better identify those practices and experiences by which they shape their identity and conceptualize their role in teaching. The study’s purpose was to find out (a) how secondary preservice teacher candidates conceptualize the practice of their teaching, (b) what relevant experiences frame the context of their conceptualization of teaching, and (c) how they engage with one another through classroom discourse to collectively shape their developing conceptualization of teaching?

Data consisting of in-class recorded discourse (with accompanying field notes), online discourse, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups were collected from 24 pre-service secondary teacher candidates who were enrolled in an intact reading methods course at a large Midwestern university. Using Gee’s (2005) integrated approach to discourse analysis helped extract several inter-related themes (e.g., connecting with texts read, using prior knowledge and experiences, negotiating conceptualization of teaching through discourse), which shed light into those personal and professional experiences that help shape their identity and conceptualization of their role in teaching.

The findings underscore the importance of examining classroom discourse as a powerful lens for understanding teacher learning and development. These findings are discussed in light of existing research on teacher identity formation with implications for pedagogical research and instruction.

Keywords: Discourse, discourse analysis, literacy, identity, preservice teachers, teacher preparation
CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

Introduction To the Problem

Preservice teacher candidates in secondary level reading exist in a world rich in content knowledge and growing in pedagogical knowledge. Depending on the timing and the structure of their preservice teaching program of study, they may or may not have experienced teaching in the field prior to (perhaps concurrently) methods courses. Cohen (2010) suggests “that professional identity itself is an ongoing, dynamic process” where preservice teacher candidates “work to make sense of themselves and their work as teachers” (p. 473-474). Hall (2010), Kwan and Lopez-Real (2010), and McDougall (2010) respectively support views of: a constructed process through the enacting of literate identities, the synthesized quality of learning outcomes, and the exploration of dilemmas that preservice teacher candidates face. Taken as a whole, these preservice teacher candidates exist in a growing professional world where they share and mediate their experiences with teaching that contribute to this growing identity and conceptualization of teaching.

Particularly relevant to this study is the discourse by which they bond and grow, a force that Gee (1990) says “is always spoken (and written, for that matter) out of a particular social identity (or social role)” (p. 140). This permeating force, this language, is Discourse—which he offers with a capital “D”—and it exists among a shared community of participants to help them self-conceptualize and further build meaning along their own lines. To better understand what happens to a group of preservice
teacher candidates, using their Discourse as a guide, is to better understand their identities and how they grown and shape their conceptualization of teaching.

This chapter will situate this dissertation study within the context of the problem the study seeks to address. Following the shaping of the context and background for this particular problem to be addressed in research, this chapter will move more specifically into the general problem area that the research questions of this study seek to address. This chapter will overview the purpose of this dissertation study, as well as identify three specific research questions. Following a brief overview of the methods of the study and key terms used throughout, this chapter will further describe the significance of this problem as it relates to the profession of education and the field of research—specifically, how this study will contribute to the field of education and address any problematic areas in the research. Following a brief discussion of possible limitations in the study, this chapter will finally overview the forthcoming chapters of this dissertation study as they review relevant literature, build the study’s methodology, examine the data, and generate useful conclusions with which to inform the field.

Context and Background of the Problem

This dissertation study is situated against the complex variety of contexts in which the preservice teacher candidates serving as research subjects exist. First, this study impacts the field of literacy where preservice teacher candidates train for service as secondary level reading teachers. It is in this arena of teaching that they will focus upon the many connections and strategies that make reading comprehension the backbone of secondary level literacy. Additionally, this study is more directly situated among the
background of secondary level preservice teacher preparation. The methods of their preparation, in what manner they are trained to enter the field of teaching, and what pedagogical skills they are given is a significant factor; however, it is the construction and conceptualization of their identity as preservice teacher candidates that is of greater interest and importance to this study. Additionally, this study is further situated among the background of discourse and discourse-driven identity knowledge, also impacting this study’s methodology. Further insight on all these factors will be further developed in detail in the following chapters, specifically the review of the literature and methodology, and will be arranged in sections that begin by building a larger understanding of literacy, moving more specifically toward those areas of literacy that impact these preservice teacher candidates, and arriving at such insight that directly informs this study’s methodology.

The Need To Understand Preservice Teacher Candidate Identity and Conceptualization Of Teaching

The most general area of this study is certainly the preservice teacher candidates, themselves. This study is not an experiment in the instruction of preservice teacher candidates to investigate the impact of pedagogical changes in their preparation for the classroom. Rather, this study is an examination of the preservice teacher candidates, themselves, and the various factors they bring to their role as preservice teacher candidates. What factors influence the ways in which they conceptualize their role in teaching and how to they work through discourse to further shape this? A whole host of pedagogical decisions could guide the course structure, training, and mentorship of these
preservice teacher candidates; however, this study places greater interest on their own identities, their own construction of identity, and the factors that they natively use within their own “community of practice.” The rationale of this study is highly based on the following: as pedagogical participants in a teaching practice that emphasizes reading comprehension, the building of connections, and synthesized thinking, these preservice teacher candidates are already heavily invested in those processes that allow them to grow pedagogically, plan for instruction, and maintain an active, willing, self-regulated literate process (Absersold and Field, 1997; Block and Pressley, 2003; Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2002).

Furthermore, this study is also deeply invested in the discourse theories and discourse analysis models of the linguist and literacy theorist, James P. Gee, both as an informative background of literature and a model of data analysis. It is, after all, Gee’s work that makes possible the movement of this dissertation study from a theoretical grounding to an active stage of data analysis—Gee’s thinking is the vehicle that makes this study move forward. He distinguishes between discourse and Discourse (with the capital “D”): discourse is mere communication and common conversation; Discourse is (when couched in his famous bird watching example) something that prevents birders from getting “out of line,” lest they become “marginal to the Discourse;” they will either be disciplined back in line with the Discourse of birding, or “cease to be a birder” (1992, p. 88). Gee’s Discourse differs from common communication in that it is what builds, shapes, and binds a Discourse community (e.g. the birders). Only within a context of Discourse (with the capital “D”) does Gee feel “we can achieve a viable definition of ‘literacy’” (1990, p. 150). Gee’s Discourse “is a form of life, a way of being in the world,
a way of being a ‘person like us,’ in terms of action, interaction, values, thought and language” (1990, p. 174-175). It is Gee’s thinking that makes this dissertation study able to address the identified problem—Gee’s thinking makes this dissertation study able to do something with data that otherwise would be a mere collection of transcribed conversations. Discourse is, in the context of this dissertation study, as much about the backdrop of the preservice teacher candidates’ group identity as it is the source of data informing the study. Ideally, this dissertation study’s successful use of a discourse analysis model to address its research questions will subsequently further validate such a background of thinking on discourse and its analysis.

**Purpose Of the Study and Research Questions**

This study, in a broad sense, aims to expand the understanding of the ways in which preservice teachers in secondary reading build a conceptualization of their teaching and their shared identity as professionals. Through the collection of discourse data sets analyzed in concordance with Gee’s theories, this study aims to make meaning from transcribed data sets capturing various forms of discourse of the preservice teacher candidates. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to gain additional insight into the ways in which preservice teacher candidates conceptualize their practice of teaching, how they frame this process within their teacher education environment, and how they work collectively through discourse to shape this conceptualization. Therefore, I seek here to investigate the following research questions:

a) How do preservice teacher candidates conceptualize the practice of their teaching?
b) What relevant experiences frame the context of their conceptualization?

c) How do they engage with one another through classroom discourse to collectively shape a developing conceptualization of teaching?

**Definitions of Key Terms**

*Discourse (with a capital “D”):* Gee’s benchmark concept informs his theories on language, discourse, and social identity. Throughout this dissertation Discourse (with the capital “D”) is best defined as:

> A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network,” or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful “role.” (p. 143)

*Literacy:* Grounded in Rosenblatt’s (1978, 1995, 2005) and Durkin’s (1966, 1982, 1987) views, literacy itself is a constructed form of comprehension that goes beyond decoding and fluency and merely reading words. As will appear in the following chapter, this perspective on reading implies a complex process, an active process requiring eventual connections with additional knowledge and higher order skills for building knowledge. Literacy is as much an ultimate goal as a process for these authors, and this dissertation study appropriately considers literacy as a constructed, connected process in line with this dissertation study’s epistemological foundation. Further building upon this in the following chapter, literacy will also become something more specifically
aimed at adolescents, situated in a sociocultural context, and critically aimed to empower learners as agents of social change.

*Comprehension and Connections/Making Connections:* Reading comprehension, for the preservice teacher candidates in this study, is a traditional focus of adolescent literacy, as well as the focus of preservice reading teachers at the secondary level. Represented in this study as a process of selecting and using multiple strategies and techniques to connect bodies of knowledge, comprehension involves “readers’ social, economic, and cultural backgrounds” as an impacting factor, where “each reader brings to each reading experience”; this “schemata” of individual reader experiences is “rooted in present and earlier experiences” at both school and home (Devine, 1986, p. 59).

*Making connections* is the act, the action, this process in motion, and, where this study is concerned, reflected in the discourse data as the preservice teacher candidates connect bodies of knowledge in their growing Discourse—in the very same way that readers make connections to grow the meaning they make from a text.

*Identity (of preservice teacher candidates):* As mentioned earlier in this chapter and the chapter to follow, identity is a constructed process in line with Gee’s thinking on Discourse. Additionally, it is a dynamic process in which the preservice teacher candidates in this study “negotiate external and internal expectations as they work to make sense of themselves and their work as teachers” (Cohen, 2010, p. 473-474). Identity is not something given, inherited, or transmitted; rather, identity is a construction (in epistemological agreement with this study) that is subject to constant refinement, negotiation, and mediation among the group of preservice teacher candidates.
Data: This dissertation study considers its data, qualitative in nature, to be transcribed forms of discourse collected in various settings (further described in the coming chapters): observational data, in-class discourse data, online discourse data, interview discourse data, and focus group discourse data. It has, for the purposes of this study, not been changed in any way; it has been collected in its native environment and transcribed by hand from audio recording using a simple word processor. Relevant examples of the data exist throughout the fourth chapter in order to illustrate various themes or trends that emerged as part of the analysis process.

Discourse Analysis: Although the grammatical structure of language certainly holds functional purpose, Gee (2005) reminds us that “all approaches to discourse analysis, in their consideration of form, go beyond grammatical structures” and consider “patterns across sentences” (p. 55). An analysis of discourse, according to the reviewed literature in the following chapter, and in line with the views of this dissertation study, is at its core a search for patterns, and the recursive look back at those patterns in the analysis process to make them valid or reject them. Further described in the following chapters, Gee’s “seven building tasks” form the backbone of this dissertation study’s analysis, with identified themes and trends recursively validated by his “four tools of inquiry” (2005, p. 10-13, 20-30). Additionally, this dissertation study values the view of Cazden (2001), where discourse analysis is a tool for improved learning in the classroom, and Rogers (2004a, 2004b), where discourse analysis offers qualitative research a suitable tool to address the need to better understand the nature of teaching, the classroom, and its role in the social world.
Methods of the Study

This study employs a variety of qualitative methods to collect the necessary data to fuel a Gee model of discourse analysis. Described in more detail in the following chapters, this study makes use of observational methodology to better understand its research environment, and collects both in-class and online discourse from the preservice teacher candidates. These forms of data collection began early in the study, collected throughout the duration of the study, and formed both the context for better understanding the research environment and also for understanding the preservice teacher candidates’ interaction on the larger scale. Additional methods used to collect data yielded interviews and focus groups, both of which provided a greater amount of individual context, as well as smaller opportunities for the preservice teacher candidates to engage with their “community of practice” through discourse. When fed into the analysis model of this study, the various discourse data sets yielded a number of themes or trends within and across the various discourse data sets.

Significance of Preservice Teacher Candidate Identity and Conceptualization of Teaching

Secondary level teachers of reading and literacy are, after all, the final stage in the literacy development of K-12 students. Every effort should be made to insure that the preparation of preservice teacher candidates for this area is appropriate to the task. This not only ensures that future educators are adequately prepared to teach at the secondary level, but also ensures that their students at the secondary level will receive the quality instruction in the later stages of literacy learning that they deserve. Yet, more directly to
the point of this study, is an understanding of these preservice teacher candidates themselves. Their nature, how they grow and shape their conceptualization of their place in teaching and their group identity, represents those to whom preservice teacher education must be tailored. These preservice teacher candidates offer a literary talent in their preparation for the classroom, are able to make significant connections to various bodies of knowledge, and infuse the group identity with their own rich individual identities. Insight gained into this aspect of their preservice teacher candidacy can greatly inform the pedagogical decisions that shape their coursework and their mentorship into their own classrooms. Ultimately, as the reviewed body of literature in this study will indicate, these preservice teacher candidates draw on the very skills of making connections to build knowledge that are native to the reading comprehension process they will teach. And it is this link between the connections formed in reading comprehension and the connections formed in their identity construction that is pedagogically relevant. Furthermore, this research draws attention to their identity as preservice teacher candidates—as well as calls for greater strides to understand their preservice teacher identity conceptually and pedagogically.

**Limitations of the Study**

Several factors may limit the ability of this study to synthesize knowledge and make claims from the available data. The first is most likely found within the structure of the data analysis model, itself, which (like any model of data analysis) is limited by what it can accomplish without employing additional methods, additional forms of data collection, or additional analyses. Though greatly expanded from the pilot study
originally informing this line of inquiry—including additional methods of data collection to substantially enrich the available body of data—this study still functions with a firm qualitative process of discourse analysis at the end of its data collection. This study acknowledges that there are other forms of discourse analysis models available; however, Gee’s model has been selected as the best fit for this dissertation study’s framework.

This Gee discourse analysis model is an appropriate fit for the epistemological framework of the study and the methods gathering the data. This dissertation study fully acknowledges the existence of the quantitative paradigm of inquiry, and it is reasonable to assume that with different models of study design may come different conclusions from the data. Though there is validity in quantitative study design, the qualitative paradigm of inquiry is the best fit for the research questions of this study and the data collected. It is much more likely that quantitative inquiry (perhaps a mixed-methods framework) would have a more appropriate place in research to follow-up on the results of this dissertation study.

Furthermore, the number of and composition of the 24 preservice teachers candidates serving as the subjects of the study also may limit what this study can accomplish. To employ the data collection methods of this study with a much greater number of subjects would be highly problematic, and may have radically changed the framework of the study; under the current study design, the analysis of the data may be limited by what its data collection tools can gather and by the methodological structure of the study itself.
Overview of the Dissertation Chapters

The forthcoming chapters will build on this context and identification of the problem, using the stated research questions to guide the dissertation study. The following chapter reviews literature that examines various bodies of content knowledge impacting the background, setting, and preservice teacher candidates in this study. Additionally, the review of the literature will examine in detail discourse, discourse analysis practices, and the further methodological tools to be used in the design of the study. Following a full description of the methodology used in the design of this study is found in the third chapter. The fourth chapter examines the findings and results of the study represented by various themes or trends organized under the study’s research questions. The final chapter attempts to synthesize thinking suitable for inclusion in the field’s available body of knowledge on preservice teacher education, how preservice teacher candidates conceptualize their identity, and how they use discourse to build and modify this conceptualization.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This study stands on a foundation of content knowledge in the areas of literacy, critical literacy, the comprehension portion of the literacy spectrum, the teaching of preservice teachers in reading, and the use of classroom discourse in research and teaching. The following review of the literature spans these categories, further examined among theoretical foundation and research practice, and then arrives more specifically at epistemological and methodological literature informing the study design, itself. Although many common threads will weave through the theoretical insight on literacy, critical literacy, and the nature of reading comprehension—and will resonate directly with the implications and suggestions for preservice teachers—they are important conceptual founding blocks of the teaching practice in line with the views in this study. As Jim Gee tells us, “There is no such thing as ‘reading’ or ‘writing,’ only reading or writing something” and that “all school activities, and thus all literacy activities, are bound to particular Discourses” (1990, xviii). It is in that spirit that this study’s vehicle of Discourse will move into literature offering methodological insight for this study and, finally, connect the body of this dissertation study’s reviewed literature with the methodology, analysis, and discussion that will follow.

The Context of the Research Problem

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this dissertation study exists within a complex variety of contexts in which the preservice teacher candidates serving as
research subjects exist. Grounding this study’s understanding of literacy in Rosenblatt, for example, makes literacy into a process valuing connections made by the reader, not just focusing upon the symbols and sounds in the text. Additionally considering Durkin further refines the direction in which to begin viewing literacy: a constructed process. Arriving at the solid implications for preservice teachers found in Pressley’s work not only validates the Durkin foundation of literacy, but also appropriately builds off of it toward a suitable teaching practice. Moving from a broader concept of literacy into critical literacy is to begin understanding identity, the construction of identity, and the function of identity within the social world. Yet, it is classroom discourse and the understanding of its analysis that is this study’s vehicle between theory and practice, and a most crucial part of this literature review. These various factors, which intersect the very problem this dissertation study seeks to address, are all necessary elements in a review of the literature in that they serve to better inform the backdrop of the study, offer guiding insight in the design of the study, and ultimately function in a sense as an additional set of guiding data.

Furthermore, the context of the problem this study seeks to address makes it clear that understanding preservice teacher candidate identity is to better understand how to approach preservice teacher candidates pedagogically. As Gee’s notion of Discourse is heavily infused with an understanding of identity, the methodology of this study is very apt to approach the data and seek useful conclusions. With this in mind, this review of the literature will examine a large amount of Gee’s work as it impacts this construction of identity through discourse—as well as how Gee’s work helps build a useful analytical model. And finally, this review of the literature will examine the methodological tools
that will enable this study to move from an identification of the problem, with an available body of content knowledge guiding the way, to a data collection mode that appropriately gathers viable data suitable for its model of discourse analysis. As the context of the problem to be addressed ultimately calls for a better understanding of these preservice teacher candidates, the following review of the literature is ultimately designed to guide this growing understanding and put in place the methodological tools to facilitate an analysis of data able to synthesize useful conclusions with which to inform the field.

**Toward a Working Concept of Literacy**

**Toward a Working Concept of Literacy: An Overview**

Grounding this study’s view of literacy in a manner consistent with the study’s epistemological roots is essential. Rosenblatt’s work begins to value the connections readers make in the literacy process. Durkin’s work considers literacy from a standpoint of factors of readiness and makes the core of literacy a constructed form of comprehension. In much the same way, this study recognizes reading comprehension as a series of constructed connections. Likewise, identity and a discourse community are constructed concepts. This section of literature will further move into literacy at the adolescent level, examining Guthrie and others, and will situate discourse among the adolescent level; it is at this level that the preservice teacher candidates in this study are theoretically situated. Additionally, at the traditional approach to teaching reading for these preservice teacher candidates is reading comprehension. Multiple perspectives on comprehension exist, of course, but this literature review will consider a number of views.
that come together to provide a cohesive view of a process that, at its core, involves the making of connections (knowledge) between the reader and the surrounding world.

**A Foundation in Rosenblatt and Durkin**

This review of the literature begins by grounding an understanding of the literacy process in the works of Rosenblatt and Durkin. Rosenblatt (1978) selects “transactional” terminology from John Dewey and Arthur Bently to best capture the dynamic process she suggests occurs at the heart of the literacy process (p. 16-17). This terminology, which Rosenblatt’s sources apply to life and its moments of learning, suggests a *process* that is a great deal more learner-centered than traditional views of learning at the time. Rosenblatt calls the transactional view of reading “simply and exemplification, with highly rarified complications, of the basic transactional character of all human activity, and especially linguistic activity” (p. 20). In this literacy process inherent to basic human learning, Rosenblatt suggests that “the boundary between inner and outer world breaks down” and reading “becomes part of the experience which we bring to our future encounters in literature and in life (p. 21). Rosenblatt identifies a danger in this process: “focusing too narrowly on ‘the mind’ of the reader isolated from anything outside himself” (p. 22). Ultimately, it is this “lived-through relationship with the text” which “should be maintained, and any knowledge supporting this relationship is valuable (p. 125).

This view of transaction is heavily born out of the interpretation of literature and poetry. In her work with students and poetry, Rosenblatt sought to discover the pathway where “students approached even a tentative first interpretation” of the work (1978, p. 7). Rosenblatt states, “meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the
things symbolized as he senses them” (p. 11). Rosenblatt also states, “that the text is not simply the inked marks on the page or even the uttered vibrations in the air” (p. 12).

Here is a view of literacy that is more than just the signs and sounds associated with a text. To make reading of a literary work powerful, Rosenblatt suggests, “the reader must turn his attention as fully as possible toward the transaction between himself and the text” (p. 28). This process “emphasizes the relationship with, and continuing awareness of, the text” (p. 29). And, when describing the “total literary transaction,” Rosenblatt suggests recognizing that “the reader brings to or adds to the nonverbal or socio-physical setting his whole past experience of life and literature” (p. 81).

Further insight into this transaction process exists in Rosenblatt’s work. Though language certainly consists of signs and sounds, the author again reminds us of the human being as the third element in the transactional process (1995, p. 25). Furthermore (as the work of Gee will appropriately also illustrate), “language is socially evolved, but is always constituted by individuals, with their particular histories” (p. 25). Rosenblatt here defends life experiences as “the raw materials” that shape a reader’s experience with a text. Transaction in Rosenblatt’s work implies a process where “the elements are aspects of phases of a total situation” (p. 26). Previously considered “an interaction,” reading for Rosenblatt is actually “a constructive, selective process or time and in a particular context” (p. 26). Reading any text “at a particular moment by a particular reader will be a highly complex process” (p. 75). Reading will also involve “past experience and present preoccupations” impacting a “primary spontaneous response” where reactions to a text may be “full and balanced” or limited and distorted (p. 75).
Rosenblatt’s later collection of selected essays (2005) yields still further insight into transaction. Making “meaning” from a text is what “happens during the transaction; hence the fallacy of thinking of [text and reader] as separate and distinct entities instead of factors in a total situation (p. 7). In the teaching of both reading and writing, Rosenblatt defends transaction as essentially in the process of literacy because “enriching the individual’s linguistic-experiential reservoir” is a broader, greater goal (p. 27). Additionally, Rosenblatt reminds the reader that understanding transaction helps to “correct the tendency of adults to look only at the text and the author’s presumed intention, and to ignore as irrelevant what the child actually does make of it” (p. 79). Thus, it is Rosenblatt’s body of work that literacy becomes a complex process, not bound by the text, and valuing the connections made by the reader.

Following and complementing Rosenblatt is Durkin’s body of work. It offers a strong source of insight into a cornerstone of literacy learning, and an equally critical part of the path leading students to the classrooms of secondary level teachers. Durkin (1987) calls reading an “interactive process in which readers use what is printed on the page in conjunction with what is in their heads in order to construct meaning” (p. 8). Durkin’s perspective on reading implies an equally complex process, an active process requiring eventual connections with additional knowledge and higher order skills for building knowledge. Durkin questions the objectivity of earlier reading instruction, emphasizing that these differences in constructed meaning may be “different for different people” (p. 8). Her initial thoughts on reading point toward such constructed comprehension as the ultimate goal of the literacy path; she urges teachers to keep this in mind when instructing
students and building an instructional process that directs them to a constructed form of comprehension.

With this in mind, she offers “reading vocabulary” as an early step on this path toward a constructed comprehension. Her concept of reading vocabulary is what a person “is able to identify in their written form,” and identifying a word consists of “knowing what a written word says and means” (p. 156). Durkin’s process of decoding, making use of the reading vocabulary, suggests a sign and symbol approach; a word spelled out on paper is both a collection of sounds to express and a represented or conceptualized meaning to unpack. She cautions that teachers remember that “reading (comprehending) only requires an understanding of meaning” and that pronunciation limitations will not necessarily restrict deriving meaning—but not knowing word meaning will restrict understanding of sentence content (p. 156). She, therefore, stresses that meanings are more critical than pronunciation and urges teachers to build this philosophy into their reading instruction. Fundamentally, Durkin’s notion of “reading vocabulary” supports her view that eventual comprehension is a constructed form of meaning.

To better shape an understanding of the beginning of this literacy process, Durkin (1966, 1982, 1987) offers the concept of readiness put forth by Gates in the 1930’s and since refined by others, specifically David Susubel in 1959, which she explores in depth to further build her definition of reading readiness (1987, p. 70-71). Succinctly, this definition of readiness requires ability in the emerging to meet the immediate demands of the learning task at hand (p. 71). Remaining true to her views of a constructed process, Durkin asserts that genes alone do not account for capacity and that “for now, it seems
correct to say that a child’s attained capacity at any given time is something he or she has inherited, grown into, and acquired” (p. 71). Here is evidence of an active process requiring the presence of the educator to help shape what this capacity has not inherited from the genes. She further confirms this by adding that the early stages of learning to read depend on “the type of instruction offered, its quality, and its pace” (p. 71).

Durkin’s emerging definition of a constructed readiness is still consistent with her eventual destiny of reading: a constructed comprehension. Though assessments for a student’s adequacy for the task will vary with scholars and educational programs, Durkin stresses that they should consist of “meaningful ways to assess readiness” that provide more than just mere diagnostic instruction; furthermore, teachers should bear in mind that assessment results will depend on reading ability—for some, readiness assessment will point to further preparation for reading instruction (p. 81).

A further perspective on the foundations of literacy, as it enters the social realm, makes an excellent complement to the Durkin perspective. Kalman (2004) refers to the Bakhtinian perspective, one with greater roots in the world of social interaction, noting that the “vitality” of language and literacy exists “precisely in its use” and this perspective allows for meaning to emerge “in the intersection of multiple voices and contextual conditions” that can be public discourse, previous interaction, and varying social voices (p. 254). The Bakhtinian perspective requires that discourse and social interaction be a vital component in literacy, enabling the interaction of persons, and supporting facets of the process, such as the Durkin view of a constructed comprehension of a text. Kalman further adds that “in this sense being literate, reading and writing independently, resorting to literacy mediators to confront societal and personal literacy
need are dialogically construed possibilities and marked participations in that they are social identifiers” (p. 255). In a sense, this social component of literacy serves to build a level of independence in the process, which could, for example, enable the internalization of reading strategies and further ability to comprehend a text.

Freedman and Ball (2004) indicate additional perspective along these lines, noting the experiences of Dorene, a South African teacher in her late 20’s. Dorene shared that after hours of classroom discussion, reading, and implementing numerous strategies, “bridges were formed between the texts [students] read, the teachers’ internally persuasive discourses, and the internally persuasive discourses of others—the diverse perspectives and the new voices that were being represented in the course” (p. 15). Freedman and Ball indicate that this helped to build Dorene’s definition (revealed in her journals) of literacy—evolving from something more than just speaking, reading, and writing—which includes “having insight to extract meaning from a text, read with comprehension and be able to recall information” (p. 15). Dorene also offered to the authors that this view was one that was very heavily influenced by Katheryn Au’s views, as well.

Au’s own work illustrates the thinking so influential to teachers, such as Dorene. Raphael and Au (2005) offer one of the more prominent comprehension-supporting strategies, Question and Answer Relationships (QAR), as a possible option to help build literate connections in hopes of closing a perceived literacy achievement gap. QAR, emphasizing “in the book” questions with answers in the text or requiring a search, and “in my head” questions involving engaging with the author or one’s own knowledge, was developed to make “the invisible visible” aims to provide students and teachers “with a
much-needed common language” for framing textual questions and engaging in discussion meant to boost comprehension of a text (p. 208). They indicate that achieving “high levels of literacy” requires reading for multiple purposes, with comprehension, and the ability to acquire new knowledge, and apply information from a text to appropriate engagement, such as reflection or synthesis of knowledge (p. 206). As a strategy in support of reading comprehension, QAR offers the potential for social interaction along the lines explored by Kalman, as well as Freedman and Ball. Additionally, QAR further represents a strategy that supports the Durkin model of a constructed comprehension. It offers teachers a way to “gain or regain a focus on instruction in comprehension” (p. 213)—a strategy well suited to an identified state of readiness. Ultimately, the authors offer QAR as a means to gain “access to reading comprehension and higher level thinking,” which may struggle to find its place in diverse classrooms where multiple voices and perspectives intersect.

**Moving Into Adolescent Literacy**

How does such a view of literacy differ at the adolescent level—the level at which the preservice teachers in this study will engage with students? Alvermann and Eakle (2003) offer the view that “more recently, the term *content area reading* has given way to *adolescent literacy*” (p. 13). Although they grant that the focus still does and should remain with multiple instructional strategies, they note that it is the current generation’s electronic trends and multiple literacies that has caused need for a redefinition of the term (p. 13-14). They add that adolescent literacy (still including the century-old views inherited from cognitive psychology—refined in the 1980’s) “is today more broadly
concerned with the sociocultural issues that embed such instruction” (p. 14). The authors remind teachers that merely supporting readers with “multiple pathways to comprehending school content” does not equal stronger literacy skills and may actually be “one of the greatest challenges for them as well as for teachers” (p. 23). On the surface this would suggest that a path to adolescent literacy is paved with instructional challenges that might be at risk of derailing the process. These authors grant that it is indeed that great a challenge, but one “that leads to self-initiating actions on the part of the reader and cultivates effective comprehenders” in the end (p. 23).

Guthrie (2008) considers it a solid process of refined comprehension, where students build upon prior knowledge and form new connections. He notes that when “the student lacks prior knowledge, new knowledge cannot be built and reading comprehension is impossible” (p. 11). In order to reach a level of comprehension suitable for the adolescent level and avoid an inability to stack new knowledge on top of prior knowledge, Guthrie advocates setting specific goals for reading that manage student knowledge carefully from the level of the individual lesson to the overall scope of the course or class. He further adds that “reading comprehension improves when depth of understanding is facilitated” in this manner (p. 11). How then can teachers reach students when the stakes of comprehension are so high? He offers that “teachers can reach these students through affording students some choice, input into their learning, and opportunity to connect personal interest to academic topics” (p. 13). He sets a direction of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy in the reading comprehension process; the downward spiral of broken literacy for the adolescent level “can be reversed with support for self-direction and collaborative reading with peers” (p. 13).
Fillman and Guthrie (2008) build upon this thinking further, expanding the scope of possibility for bringing student choice and self-direction to this process. They suggest “a wide spectrum of reading choices” for advanced students and a reduced “menu but still give some options of which text to read” for students reading at their grade level (p. 37). In an effort to continue to meet learners at their own level where they maintain ownership of the reading process, the authors suggest “microchoices” from within the text at hand, selecting whatever fragments of the text help the student maintain a feel of text ownership. They also expand into the realm of classroom management, adding that the typical classroom is one where teachers are “relatively controlling” and this restricts student choice in their reading (p. 40). The authors indicate that adolescents are quite capable of identifying which behaviors of the teacher “do and do not give them more control over a situation” in the classroom—and can translate this insight into their understanding of reader behavior (p. 41). Likewise, the authors grant that management decisions can impact text choice; teachers may be logistically motivated (use of a basal text, availability of classroom novel sets, etc.) in text selection, but can still model student independence toward selecting strategies for use within any text (p. 41-42).

Antonio and Guthrie (2008) further outline teaching practices that can further support student engagement and foster the behaviors of student choice that maximize their comprehension-building connections. They propose six instructional practices: open discussions, student-led discussion groups, collaborative reasoning, arranging partnerships, socially constructed management, and scaffolding social motivation over time (p. 50). A common denominator of social interaction exists in these practices and the authors are clear that these practices require a collaborative classroom, where “the
teacher acts as a mediator for student engagement with reading and literacy” (p. 60). They also caution that this “delicate balance” does require the skill to avoid offering students too many decisions (a cause of anxiety) and avoid offering students too few decisions (a cause of a hostile classroom environment) (p. 60). Though this would suggest difficult classroom management decisions (a source of difficulty to some teachers), it underscores the value of taking such a risk for the payoff existing in student discourse and social interaction.

Gibb and Guthrie map this process still further by attaching the notion of relevance to this process of student choice. From successfully engaging with the process of inquiry, students grow their motivation. Those students “who are adept at asking high-level questions are typically more motivated for reading than students who are less competent in the questioning process” (p. 95). The authors connect the inquiry process with increased student confidence, noting that the end result is a view of text relevance.

Since “achievement in reading responds to motivation for reading, asking encouraging high-level questioning tends to enable students to grow in reading more effectively” (p. 95). With the end goal of the Guthrie view of reading comprehension for adolescents in mind, this efficacy and value of self-motivation to read and make connections is absolutely essential. Filtered through a classroom climate, properly balanced between student and teacher control, the social interactions used to generate their six teacher practices for the classroom make for a very reasonable, plausible picture of the adolescent literacy process.

In their Carnegie Corporation report, Jackson and Davis (2000) advocate advice for reading instruction of adolescents in the middle grades that may help Guthrie’s
approach better permeate content areas. These authors name reading as a “crucial tool” in support of “equity and excellence in society as a whole” and add that this hints that adolescent literacy is inalienable (p. 87). They are very concerned about the assumed mastery of reading at the elementary level, and warn that the middle grades have yet to fully prepare themselves for improvement of adolescent literacy—as are parents and the community no better equipped since they operate from the same misconception, as well.

Who then should be teaching reading in the middle grades, given this state of adolescent literacy? According to these authors, it should ideally be reading specialists—but the authors allow that reading specialists are only part of the answer. They point to a wide body of research that illustrates “when students have many chances to read and write in the content areas—like history, math and science—they become better readers, writers, and critical thinkers” (p. 88). They suggest deploying reading specialists to help content area teachers infuse greater literacy practices within their content, provide support for students with weak reading levels, and develop specific reading strategies consistently across the curriculum. Though this would seem to set up adolescents as a whole for greater success, the authors ultimately remind the reader that “students who enter the middle grades significantly behind their peers in reading ability” will continue to need more intense aid if they are to succeed at comprehending a text (p. 90).

In a later work, Alvermann and Eakle (2007) envision a world of literacy practice where “literacy teaching and learning can be as boundless and fluid” as the presence of wireless internet (p. 66). They feel this is possible due to the engagement of adolescents in literacy practices within and outside of the school that are not bound by the restraints of the classroom’s space and time. Restricting the literacy practices of adolescents to the
classroom would, quite simply, imply that there is no valid literacy connection between the school and the world outside of school. The fact that “we live in times when notions of multiple forms of literacies are the rule, and not the exception, among youth” drives their desire to invest in the outside-of-school literacy practices of adolescents, and even children who are soon to move into adulthood (p. 67). They support research inquiry that investigates the literacy practices of adolescents outside of the school and using it to inform teaching; they firmly defend their view “that studying young people’s literacy practices from the outside can produce new kinds of evidence that are potentially useful to teachers, supervisors, administrators, and other educators working within the school literacy environment” (p. 78).

Lewis (2007) attaches the importance of academic success (successfully moving through the middle and high school grades, while preserving a potential for further academic advancement) to adolescent literacy through ten principles that “serve as a framework for designing instructional opportunities” to this end (p. 148). She notes that students need challenging material to be modeled, as well as learning opportunities rich in critical thinking skills (p. 149-150). Students should experience a process-oriented form of instruction that supports “self-assessment and flexible approaches to comprehending a text” (p. 150) and further opportunities to engage with their own prior knowledge (p. 150-151). Students must better integrate writing and reading; students must collaborate to a greater degree (p. 151). A variety of learning styles should be supported, and students should be encouraged “to assume responsibility for their own learning” (p. 152). Assessment of students should be authentic and in multiple forms, and technology should be “a learning tool, not as an end in itself” (p. 152-153).
Ultimately, it is this framework that the author believes will aid students in advancing “beyond their present knowledge, skills, dispositions, and interactions to new ideas, attitudes and experiences”—what will unlock thinking “critically and compassionately about their lives and those of others” (p. 162).

Perhaps the most solid path to adolescent literacy may lie in the very culture of the school, itself. Guerin and Denti (2008) state that “a schoolwide culture of literacy can increase literacy awareness and support, improve teacher and student skills, increase student motivation, and reward progress” (p. 150). Where one classroom alone may not necessarily inspire a schoolwide change in literacy education without massive systemic support, they point to a needed commitment of “at least one academic department and, at best, the whole school” (p. 150). Subsequently, they identify three levels within the high school climate of adolescent literacy instruction that can work toward this aim: classrooms, departments, and the entire school itself. It is the classroom environment where teachers best understand the available palate of literacy strategies and modify instruction as needed to reach students (p. 151). Within departments, colleagues “can provide both the content expertise and the subject context from which to analyze group results,” as well as “supplement testing” to affirm or better understand areas of interest in their content (p. 165). And, at the schoolwide level, a focus can exist that “is essential to the improvement of literacy” (p. 170). The administrative level can drive the support for standardized testing, community engagement, and a commitment to “the active literacy leadership” that will permeate and benefit the entire school (p. 170).
A Closer Focus on Reading Comprehension

As mentioned, it is reading comprehension that represents the traditional focus of adolescent literacy and the focus of preservice reading teachers at the secondary level, represented in this study. Devine (1986) argues that, although the field lacks a “one-to-one relationship” between specific skills and successful reading comprehension, there exists “some consensus among reading teachers that students’ ability to use these reading skills does influence comprehension” (p. 52). If this is the case, then searching for either the proper structure for an assembled palate of skills, or the process by which to bring skills to students, would seem to be a useful perspective on teaching reading comprehension. Devine does caution that “reading teachers need to be reminded that these ‘skills’ are actually mental constructs postulated by theorists” that represent “higher mental processes (sometimes called cognitive skills), which may—or may not—be involved in the comprehension process but are certainly not synonymous with comprehension” (p. 52-53). If this is the case, then researchers and educators should seek a broad palate of options and techniques for modeling these “skills” for students, rather than search for one particular reading comprehension panacea. Though not quite the same, Devine draws parallels to advanced reasoning and logic processes, as he clearly ranks comprehension among a similar mental process as reasoning and logic (p. 54). And, very much in line with additional literature in this study, this author points to “readers’ social, economic, and cultural backgrounds” as an impacting factor in comprehension, which “each reader brings to each reading experience;” this “schemata” of individual reader experiences is “rooted in present and earlier experiences” at both school and home (p. 59).
In the RAND Reading Study Group Report, Snow introduces the definition of reading comprehension as a “process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (RAND, 2002, p. 11). This choice of “extracting” and “constructing” is meant to highlight the Report’s belief that the text alone is not the factor that determines successful reading comprehension. Snow names three elements, the reader, the text, and the activity, which are three aspects that “define a phenomenon that occurs within a larger sociocultural context” (p. 11). The reader must have a broad experience base with text, and existing fluency (p. 13). Further, regardless of difficulty, the text has an impact on comprehension due to its structure (p. 14-15); and activity “does not occur in a vacuum,” but rather introduces additional “dimension” for making connections (p. 15). Snow additionally points to the very context of reading itself that impacts the importance of research in comprehension: knowing “the readers purpose for reading and operations” and “how short- and long-term consequences are influenced by instruction” in comprehension (p. 16).

Snow and Sweet (2003) further build on this definition of comprehension (“the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning”) (p. 1). They also state that the printed text relatively unimportant compared to the newly constructed meaning as a result of the text. They point to their two words, “extracting and constructing” in order to highlight “both the importance and the insufficiency of the text” as a key factor in reading comprehension (p. 1). How then can teachers resolve this conundrum and more specifically map the process within their terms? The authors construct a heuristic for conceptualizing reading comprehension—a three-slice pie composed of the presence of
the reader, the text itself, and the activity facilitating comprehension—all three surrounded by the social context in which these three factors exist. It is this socio-cultural context where “the effects of contextual factors, including economic resources, class membership, ethnicity, neighborhood, and school culture, can be seen in oral language practices, in students’ self-concepts, in the types of literacy activities in which individuals engage, in instructional history, and of course, in the likelihood of successful outcomes” (p. 9). Although complex context, it is very much in sync with other literature emphasizing that reading comprehension exists within a multitude of overlapping spheres on the reader’s side of the equation. These authors also caution that research on reading comprehension is off track unless this socio-cultural context is “constantly” in mind (p. 2).

Gaskins (2003) calls “good comprehension” a “hallmark of proficient reading,” which “develops over many years, is manifested [differently] at different phases of development, and is greatly influenced by the quality of classroom instruction” (p. 141). Gaskins certainly underscores the constant challenge for classroom instruction, as the other literature has suggested. Reminiscent of Durkin’s notion of readiness, Gaskins says that instruction in reading comprehension must be tailored to meet students at their current level and at a rate in which they can successfully engage with the process (p. 142). Yet, it is the transfer of strategies for reading comprehension that is at the core of this classroom-level challenge, according to this author. Gaskins reminds the reader that good comprehension comes from a palate of available strategies, equipping students to deal with a variety of texts, but “good comprehension means teaching students how to take charge of the various elements of reading comprehension throughout the day, across
the curriculum, and for accomplishing a variety of activities” (p. 142). An all-permeating view of reading comprehension is only further underscored by Gaskins’ opinion that struggles with comprehension are not just due to a single factor breaking down, but an overall lack of cohesion in bringing all these angles on comprehension together in the classroom (p. 143-144).

Examining a “vintage” perspective on reading comprehension, Anders and Spitler (2007), and then move into their own “reinvention” of the process. They call this vintage process, heavily influenced by metacognition and schema theory, one of activating or building prior knowledge before reading a text, organizing information when reading a text, and rearranging/revising schemata or engaging in metacognition after reading a text (p. 170-171). They don’t question the value of this process, but indicate that it lacks the proper presence of the social and cultural worlds in the reading process. Thus, the authors deliver a model of classroom instruction where “the organization and activity are designed to create a space” for the convergence of “student, teacher, text, activities, and context” and the formation of a “dynamic relationship” that builds “new understandings and metacognitive growth” (p. 177). The authors’ attempt at fusing the “vintage” perspective with a greater presence of the socio-culture context is something they hope will help “prepare young people to actively participate in the world, able to think critically within and across multiple contexts” (p. 186). Their final reminder resonates with others, such as Snow and Sweet, or Gaskins: this “reinvention” should not be about selecting one theoretical approach over another, or taking on comprehension strategies that exist in extremis from the social world, but “rather it must be taken on as a crucially
important instructional responsibility across curriculum and throughout the school” (p. 188).

Similarly, Pressley (2002a) calls comprehension strategies instruction a “very active teaching, with teachers engaging students in using strategies to understand and interpret texts” and they further add that good readers are very active readers, “using a number of strategies as they proceed through a text” (p. 14). Delving into Keene and Zimmerman’s (1997) text, *Mosaic of Thought*, Pressley identifies useful elements of the Keene and Zimmerman process, active elements of reading, very similar to the “vintage” breakdown by Anders and Spitler. Pressley is, however, quite critical of Keene and Zimmerman’s text, in his call for a greater awareness of teacher implementation and modeling of strategies in their teaching, noting that “it is unlikely that [teachers] will change their classroom teaching much in the direction of encouraging their students to use comprehension strategies” if they do not buy into the instructional models of the strategies at all (p. 19). Pressley further calls for teacher coaching of the use of modeled strategies to encourage “the kind of reading done by proficient readers,” in addition to merely maintaining or perhaps boosting the reading comprehension level. Pressley finally adds that strong readers “have extensive knowledge of the world that they relate to ideas in text in order to understand what they are reading” (p. 22)—and this is the direction in which he encourages professionals to take reading comprehension.

Strongly favoring a cognitive flavor for reading comprehension, Trabasso and Bouchard (2002) call reading comprehension strategies “specific, learned procedures that foster active, competent, self-regulated, and intentional reading” (p. 177). They call this process one that requires explicit modeling by a teacher to the extent that students can
internalize the task and conduct it independently. They urge that readers who lack explicit instruction to this end may not use reading comprehension strategies independently (may not fully comprehend a text). Though it is certainly not easy to prepare teachers for the task of delivering strategy instruction and maintaining it at a level so as to facilitate the internalization of explicitly modeled strategies, these authors suggest that “helping teachers become good strategy teachers…will help their students better confront the complexities of learning and living” (p. 187). These complexities are the very cognitive demands with which the palate of strategies they recommend is heavily endowed. Reading comprehension strategy instruction, to them, requires more than just a trivial glimpse at strategies with little time to experience and master them. The bottom line, as these authors say “is that readers who are given cognitive strategy instruction make significant gains on comprehension compared with students who are trained with conventional instruction” (p. 177).

Continuing, Narvaez (2002) indicates regarding reading comprehension, that five factors about the reader matter according to constructivist-based reading research: “reader skills, reader knowledge, reader cognitive development, reader culture, and reader purpose” (p. 158). Navarez, more specifically, aims to explore existing reader knowledge in the process, and the reader’s “sociomoral cognitive development” (p. 158). Narvaez further elaborates on the value of prior knowledge, stating that “when readers read, they apply prior knowledge in order to build a coherent mental model (overall meaning structure) for the text” (p. 161)—this is successful reading comprehension at work. Perhaps more interesting, when considering the degree to which this “sociomoral” aspect intersects with the importance of the role of socio-cultural domains in current thinking on
reading comprehension, is when the author shares that “those with more moral judgment expertise exhibited superior performance” in the task of reading comprehension; those “with less expertise, on the other hand, did not recall as much from the moral texts, especially with the high-stage reasoning” demands present in moral judgment (p. 162). Still further, Narvaez adds that this exists in parallel to cultural practice: “as readers read or view a text, they seem to impose a culturally based cognitive field on the text as well” (p. 163).

As a common and often ideal target of secondary education, reading comprehension is an important part of the literacy process that plays a key role in the preparation of the preservice teacher candidates in this study. Additionally, reading comprehension’s nature of connecting individuals with outside knowledge and prior experience will play a key role in the data analysis model to follow.

**Critical Literacy and the Preparation of Reading Teachers**

**Critical Literacy and the Preparation of Reading Teachers: An Overview**

At what point does a foundational understanding of literacy more specifically impact approaches and trends current in the preparation of preservice teachers—and what theoretical foundations underscore their preparation? This section will examine the emergence of a critical form of literacy, which is especially important when situating a view of literacy among a constructivist paradigm. The views in this section will share a common thread: literacy takes place amidst the backdrop of the cultural world—family literacy, community literacy, larger cultural circles of literacy—and it is the literate practice of students to engage with these circles as they construct their literate identities.
With particular consideration of Pressley’s work, this section will help shape an understanding of what preservice teaching and the preparation of preservice teachers should look like with this earlier understanding of literacy and this additional understanding of critical literacy in mind. Additionally, it is this insight that further directs the perspective of this literature review into the field’s extent literature on the construction preservice teacher identity and the use of discourse practices by preservice teacher candidates.

**A Critical Form of Literacy in the Classroom**

Dozier, Johnston and Rogers (2006a) warn that “teaching from a narrow cultural perspective seriously limits teaching, particularly, but not only, in classrooms in which children do not share the teacher’s culture” (p. 9). These authors further acknowledge the concessions of power and privilege that may come with sacrificing the centrality of the teacher’s position. Thus, they believe in “uncomfortably changing” the identities of teachers and students by fundamentally involving “social and affective dimensions” in the learning process (p. 10). To this end they encourage their preservice teachers to recognize the fact that their teaching practice can indeed impact more than just students and their schools, but “society more generally”—to which they refer to as agency, or the notion that “by acting thoughtfully, one might actually effect change” on the social level (p. 12). Teachers must be collaborators in the process of developing opportunities for agency in their teaching practice and “must similarly bring this agency to children” (p. 13). Incorporating this social goal of agency into their approach to teaching, the authors arrive at their understanding of critical literacy, which includes “ways in which language
and literacy are used to accomplish social ends” and develops “a sense that literacy is for taking social action” (p. 18). Doing so may very well be the ideally active form of a socio-cultural view of the literacy and reading comprehension process—building knowledge by directly engaging with the social world as agents of social change. The authors add that critical literacy involves teachers fostering their own critical literacy, stepping outside themselves and their own worlds, and believing that literacy can “be a tool for social action”—and also “understanding the ways in which that tool works” (p. 18-19).

To further accomplish this, these three authors (2006b) place language at the center of “literacy, learning, and teaching,” because it is indeed language that “both represents and constructs our understandings of the social world” (p. 21). These authors make no secret that their conceptualization of literacy is very much infused with the intention of “expanding an agency of literacy and teaching for social justice and democracy” (p. 28). For them, there is nothing passive about the literacy process and the literacy practices of teachers and students. And, considering the infusion of the social world into theoretical understandings of literacy—and reading comprehension, more specifically—the time may be right for just such an active approach to using literacy as a hands-on approach to constructing knowledge with the world surrounding the classroom, perhaps effecting change upon that social world in the process. These authors are rather passionately interested in understanding “the cultural and social implications of teaching critical literacy and critical teaching in a cross-cultural environment” and how “changes in learning relate to changes in identity” for both teachers and students (p. 28-29). So, if indeed the time is right for not merely considering a socio-cultural context of the literacy
process, but making it a more active process (infusing it with agency), then these authors’ conceptualization of critical literacy is important to consider in any research study involving preservice reading teachers in the current age of literacy theory.

In her reading program, Collisson’s (2006) goals are “to develop a self-extending system, promoting strategic reading behaviors among [her] students” (p. 82). An ideal place to begin on the road to a more critical form of literacy, Collisson notes that her students “open up to [her] and share with [her] their uncertainties, their worries, and their celebrations” in time together that “is flexible and safe” (p. 83). These literate moments of discourse and connection between text and the world allow Collison moments of conversation meant to boost student comprehension of the text. Through these conversations she views student prior knowledge at work, supporting the emerging understanding of the text and the connections students make between that text and themselves. As a teacher working in remediation and sometimes providing one-on-one instruction, she has also come to know the parents and families of students, learning a great deal “about developing partnerships, not programs” (p. 83). Like the very reading comprehension of her students, Collison has extended her own communication and connections into the literate world around her, “learning the importance of the students’ lives and literary experiences outside of school” (p. 84). She offers this as a model for the critical literacy process—one enriched by active cultural agency and direct social engagement with students and text.

Additionally, Shor (1999) helps further refine an understanding of critical literacy, calling it something that “challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for social and self-development” with an “attitude toward history that sees language
as symbolic action” (p. 1). From this perspective, literacy is social action via language that impacts the reader, while critical literacy involves becoming literate as part of a process of impacting a social world. Shor further calls critical literacy a “reflective and reflexive” process of using language to “critically study all social practices” and globally situate learners “in the larger cultural context of any specific situation” (p. 10). Not only does this approach to literacy make it a highly active and constructive process, but also makes students able agents to question “received knowledge and immediate experience” with the end goal of challenging society’s inequality and becoming part of an “activist citizenry” (p. 11). With a centralized discourse, critical literacy ultimately “foregrounds and questions power relations” and asks students “to take critical postures toward their own language uses” and society’s dominant discourse” (p. 18-19).

Further developing this centralized position of discourse in the critical literacy environment Caroline Pari (1999), who makes use of her own working-class Italian American background and actively engaging with it and her surrounding culture. She notes that while undergoing her doctoral program, she “constantly imitated literacy ‘academic discourse’ as [she] struggled to find [her] own language,” and because she wanted to be a good student, she “was complicit in assimilating the language of the academy” (p. 105). Though this helped her move upward through the academy, the price was the depreciation of her “Italian and ‘New Yawk’ English flavor” (p. 105-106). Following the reunion of her life and heritage, she set out to design a writing course with critical literacy practices to reflect the “lives, languages, interests, and conflicts” of her students (p. 109). “As a pedagogical practice” in her diverse classroom of working-class and immigrant students, Pari asks students “to reflect critically on their cultural conflicts
and to examine their class and ethnic identities” (p. 110). Her larger aim in the classroom of critical pedagogy is to accomplish academic discourse’s aims—“giving reasons and evidence while acknowledging one’s interest and identity”—through non-traditional (nonacademic) forms of discourse. Doing so has, ultimately, fueled her belief that critical literacy, at its best should reaffirm identity and stem from community engagement. As Pari, herself, states: “I do not believe that academic success should depend on breaking our students’ ties with their communities, nor do I encourage the denial of working-class roots as the price to pay for upward mobility” (p. 125). Pari, and others in this area, set the stage for making literacy an active process, critically responsive in nature, and ready for the teacher’s modeling in the classroom.

Preservice Teachers in Reading

What then should preservice teachers know, what should they incorporate into their emerging understanding of the teaching of reading—specifically, what must they be able to do for their students in order to begin living the practice of these theories of larger literacy, reading comprehension, and even critical literacy? Abersold and Field (1997) offer an important reminder of planning: “a reading curriculum is a written plan for the entire instructional curriculum” that “enables the teacher to see the goals and objectives of each individual course in the perspective of the whole program” (p. 192). The planning task forces the teacher to bear in the mind the needs of students and promote a degree of quality in instruction that will, ideally, trickle down to the individual lesson as a result of the larger plan. They note the reality that new teachers are often not a part of the curricular development phase. But, regardless of authorship, the reading curriculum
“should leave room for the individual teacher to interpret its methodology while striving to help students meet the overall goals and objectives of the courses and the program” (p. 193). Before reading begins, the authors strongly encourage establishing purpose via “taking into account the students’ language and proficiency levels and determining the appropriate tasks for them to complete” (p. 66). They name the activation of background and prior knowledge as beneficial in helping students recall information from their own experiences or earlier reading, helping the students begin thinking about the upcoming topic and generating interest, and to “review or introduce the relevant vocabulary” for the upcoming reading (p. 67-68). They lastly encourage teachers to conduct prereading activities that enable “students to establish their own expectations about what information they will find in the text and the way that information will be organized” (p. 73). Though different texts match up with different prereading activities in various ways, the authors consider this a critical job of the reading teacher. It is ultimately this conscious practice of planning that creates “a foundation to work from in planning activities for students” (p. 76).

The Pressley and Wharton-McDonald (2002) contribution to Reading Instruction That Works, illustrates observations from his research that he found “very disturbing” (p. 241). Specifically, they speak of observing explicit comprehension instruction on a very rare basis, despite twenty years of research to support explicit instruction. They liken this to the frustrations of Durkin, whom the authors note saw “a great deal of testing of comprehension but very little teaching of it” (p. 241). Yes, Pressley and Wharton-McDonald did observe students answering and responding to questions in ways consistent with cognitive process of comprehension, but saw “little evidence that students
were being taught to self-regulate comprehension process *as they read*”—some classrooms revealed no evidence of any teaching of the “active comprehension process validated in the last two decades” (p. 241). For a scholar and researcher, such as Pressley, this is a particularly disturbing turn in that it suggests both a setback in the preparation of teachers who should be mindful of two decades of current research trends, and it appears equally disturbing that two decades of research on reading comprehension instruction (triggered by those like Durkin) is perhaps being ignored. Fortunately, in an affirmation of Pressley’s views, the pair do speak of some explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, citing the 1992 work of Valerie Anderson as an example: “strategies instruction increased students’ willingness to read and attempt to understand material, collaborate with classmates to discover meanings in text, and react to and elaborate upon text” (Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, 2002, p. 262).

Adding further body to the movement to make reading comprehension an active, willing, self-regulated process is the work of Block and Pressley (2003). They note that the word-level is important to comprehension, but “making meaning from the text involves much more than just the processing of individual words” (p. 114). They further the call for teachers to remain mindful of that which follows decoding, readers being active, being strategic—and to remain mindful that this is not a brief process of educating. They note that, “although the teacher’s goal is to develop readers who are active, who use a repertoire of comprehension processes…[a teacher] typically begins with instructing one process at a time” (p. 115). A common example of a “first” strategy is predicting based on prior knowledge. Eventually, successive strategies come into the mix; it may take most of the year to introduce this “repertoire.” They arrive at the
recommendation that “comprehension process instruction is about encouraging young readers to be cognitively active as they read, just the way that mature, excellent readers are active cognitively”—and this involves the thought process of actively selecting from this “repertoire” while reading (p. 117). These authors are ultimately convinced that readers become active and self-regulated in this regard “through opportunities and demands that they use comprehension processes on their own” (p. 120). Their view suggests that a possible missing link has been the relevant opportunities for students to actively select from this “repertoire” and engage with their text on their own. In order to accomplish this, they suggest nothing less than increasing the cognitive demands on students as the number of text and strategies in their “repertoire” also increases (p. 123).

Also in Reading Instruction That Works, Pressley (2002c) firmly defends the “essential” necessity of understanding skilled reading practices in order to glean insight into the ultimate goal of reading instruction (p. 48). Though deriving this insight from the primary levels, Pressley offers this insight in a manner consistent with any educator seeking to support reading comprehension, at any level. Pressley makes interesting points about reading rate, citing connections between reading and eye-motion research, and indicating that “a skilled adult reader who is reading material carefully” will fixate “for about a quarter of a second” on a word; and “the less the reader is concentrating on learning the ideas in the text, the faster the reading rate” (p. 50). Thus, Pressley illustrates that a high rate of reading words per minute does not precisely translate into a high rate of reading comprehension—in other words, expert decoders are not necessarily expert comprehenders (skilled readers). Coupled with the fact that readers typically do not remember a text verbatim, Pressley concludes that summarization and inference are
primary behaviors that help readers navigate a text in the moment (p. 53). The more difficult the text, the more the skilled reader must connect to other knowledge in order to generate meaning. Pressley says that this knowledge creation for skilled readers “occurs automatically as a function of reading and gistifying [summarizing and inferring] text” (p. 54). Another factor that Pressley identified that played a strong role in the level of comprehension was a literal passion for the subject, noting that “reading was anything but an affectively neutral experience” for readers who “were extremely passionate as they read” (p. 55-56). Though he defends “a broad base of agreement” that comprehension is about “constructing meaning,” Pressley reflects upon the lack of focus among the earlier factors of reading rate and summarization/inference. He ultimately suggests that “those wishing to teach reading well need to understand just what good reading is,” as he has outlined in these examples (p. 62).

Pressley (2002b) also finds disturbing “the fact that by the middle-grade-school years, some children are really down on reading” (p. 292). Further unfortunate is Pressley’s comment that trends in developmental and education psychology indicate that a “declining academic motivation with advancing grade level is inevitable for many students” in the current climate of our educational system (p. 292). It is particularly relevant to any secondary level reading teacher who might encounter students entering their realm in “down on reading” state. What should preservice teachers bear in mind in terms to motivating students and how to identify students who are “down on reading”? Pressley points to a profound belief among student culture that effort at reading pays off in success at comprehending a text—failure to comprehend may cause a complete turnaround in confidence at reading ability. Thus, he recommends that both parents and
teachers can “help to develop in children an understanding of intelligence” that does not make intelligence synonymous with successful comprehension, that “ability is not a fixed entity,” and people “get smarter by trying hard” when it comes to reading and “bouncing back from failures” (p. 297-298). Along these same lines, Pressley suggests that classrooms avoid a culture of competitiveness where, “rather than rewarding students for being better than one another, students [should be] rewarded for doing better” than before; thus, his belief in “task-oriented classrooms” over “ego-oriented classrooms” (p. 300). Finally, he attaches a serious caveat to teachers’ rewarding accomplishments in reading that come with their own intrinsic rewards—doing so “may undermine students’ interest in those activities in the future when rewards are not available” (p. 302).

In a shift from Pressley, Stevens and Bean (2003) remind the reader of two typical forms of secondary level literacy instruction: the “remedial classes, with strict attention to direct instruction and guided practice” of various word skills, and those classes with content area literacy (p. 189-190). Amidst significant initial resistance, content area literacy rattled the “social, political, and historically situated” cage of content-separated education (p. 191). With the rise in qualitative research on various strategies situated among content area literacy, the view that “literacy learning and instruction are intertwined with the cultural, epistemological, and historical background of the participants of the classroom as a discourse community” has emerged (p. 192). These authors also add that this new version of adolescent literacy “has the ability to transcend the text-centered privilege…that content area textbooks” have long monopolized (p. 197). To this end, the authors advocate “critical framing to position the texts within the local contexts of the adolescents’ lives…and the larger social, historical, economic, and
political realms of the world” (p. 198). Making use of a critical approach to teaching literacy is nothing less than what these authors ultimately recommend, that teachers seek and promote ways to help students develop “a sense of advocacy, power, and identify as consumers and creators of text” rarely seen in a more traditional classroom (p. 192).

Similarly, Reutzel (2003) suggests that teachers pay close attention to how they group students. The author indicates that teachers “consciously or unconsciously” make their classrooms more complex based on the grouping decisions they make. Implications for student success follow these decisions very closely, and Reutzel therefore suggests “a variety of small-group strategies” that are “workable and effective alternatives” to the traditional modes of both whole-class instruction and ability grouping (p. 244). Whole-class instruction can engage teacher and students in a community-like fashion, but also can fail to “meet the needs of additional children” (p. 245). Ability grouping, as Reutzel puts it, “has often been characterized by some of its critics as running a three-ring reading circus” (p. 245). Reutzel eventually rejects ability grouping “to promote effective literacy instruction” (p. 247) and offers alternatives. One category, flexible-grouping strategies, “can be used to accommodate student interests, learning styles, and social needs, such as friendship groups, in addition to meeting instructional needs and goals”—assuming that the teacher has made the rationale behind the groups transparent to students (p. 248). In addition to literature circles, and heterogeneous cooperative learning groups “working together to accomplish a team task” (p. 250-251, 252-253), needs grouping “to achieve specific learning outcomes formulated through careful observation and assessment by the classroom teacher” (p. 256), and “dynamic grouping
to provide guided reading instruction” are “an essential part of an effective reading program” (p. 256).

The implications of Reutzel’s thinking should be both encouraging and comforting to preservice teachers: more options than the traditional pairing of whole-class and ability grouping exist. And, as the other authors in this area suggest, there is great pedagogical potential to be found in the secondary level classroom for preservice teachers of reading. It is here that they will model and support the connections that represent a great deal of this dissertation study’s epistemology and method of discourse analysis.

**Preservice Teacher Candidate Identity**

Preservice teacher candidate identity in the extent literature, its development and growth and change, is a particularly relevant topic for this dissertation study’s review of literature. Rex, et al (2010), review the current ten years of literature on discourse analysis in literacy research, and pay close attention to distinctions between “discourse processes and studies employing discourse analysis” (p. 94). They draw this distinction between those studies employing “a wide range of perspectives and methods,” which they call “studies of discourse processes” (p. 94). They reserve the term “discourse analysis” for those studies that focus more specifically on the analytical methodology, which for these authors focuses more on the process of analysis than the practice creating the data. They divert somewhat from the scope of Gee’s Discourse, calling discourse “instances of communication through language” and interestingly return to Gee when calling its analysis “a theoretical conceptualization of a phenomenon, an epistemological
approach to understanding and representing it as well as a methodology, or logic of inquiry, for answering a wide variety of literacy-related questions” (p. 95).

It is the section on the construction of literate identities in Rex, et al (2010), which is of particular interest to this review of the extent literature. The note that “scholars have called on discourse analysis to illuminate the ways social identities were shaped and tied to literacy practices” (p. 101). They indicate the field has strived to “reconceptualize educational discourses about literacy and identity (also called literate identities),” and have “called on discourse analysis to interrogate the relationship between literacy and identity” (p. 101). In agreement with this dissertation study, these authors indicate that it is the field of literacy research that is attempting to, essentially, do more with discourse analysis than ever before in order to examine the construction of identity. They indicate that, “when considered collectively,” this collection of research represents work “to understand the intricate layering and lamination of literacy and identity” (p. 102). The authors further show that “academic literacy practices were not a fixed set of skills to acquire,” but rather are “constructed and situationally defined, marking concurrent membership in multiple discourse communities” (p. 103). This current insight is equally interesting to this dissertation study, which very much considers such identity socially constructed.

Currently, Cohen (2010) rigorously defends the importance of recognizing teacher professional identity. Working from the literature, which she says, “demonstrated the need to account for teachers’ professional identity experiences,” she suggests “that professional identity itself is an ongoing, dynamic process in which individuals negotiate external and internal expectations as they work to make sense of themselves and their
work as teachers” (p. 473-474). Her ethnographic study, focusing on teacher talk, aimed to better understand teacher professional identity in an urban middle/high school (p. 474). Making use of participant observation, field notes, and focus groups, she examined how they worked “through talk to negotiate local significances for teacher professional identity” (p. 479). Reflective talk, heavily infused with personal narrative fueled her analysis, which also revealed that their talk demonstrated “that accomplishing shared significance for the identity of teacher involved contextualizing professional identity in terms of related identities” (p. 480). Essentially, her use of discourse analysis (which she defends as “an approach to understanding teacher professional identity” and “an important to complement to the range of other methods currently employed” (p. 480)) showed that teachers worked collectively through their talk, building their identity together, and building upon “their willingness to implement innovations in teaching” (p. 480).

More specifically, Hall, et al (2010) examined social functions of language, specifically “how identities are developed and enacted by literacy learners and teachers within the U.S.” (p. 235). They authors examine three case studies with various processes at the micro and macro levels that impact literate identities of teachers. Their first study showed “teachers can use language to position themselves in classrooms and develop their identities with their students” (p. 238). Similarly, the second study helped them understand the different “reading identities” and how teachers “worked with texts and each other based on the identities they adopted” to make decisions in their teaching (p. 238). The third focused upon “how narratives of literacy learning shape who people are as literacy learners and users” (p. 240). They concluded collectively that their studies
indicated “teachers do not construct identities for themselves and their students haphazardly; it is with intent that identities are created” (p. 241). In each study they defend the richness with which teachers infuse their language, and how they position themselves and their students in the classroom, how they reflect critically, and how they “enforce a particular literacy practice” (p. 242).

Utilizing a somewhat different direction—learning outcome—Kwan and Lopez-Real (2010) also seek to understand preservice teachers. They note that they “are not simply concerned with describing learning and identity formation using social learning theory, but rather with the quality of learning and identities that emerge” (p. 723).

Focusing on the mentorship structure in Hong Kong schools, the authors explore the teacher identity traits developed through school-university mentorship pairings in two case studies of teachers working with assigned student teachers (preservice teachers). Favoring interview methodology, their pair of case studies revealed that, in the first case, a lack of strong mentoring support led the subject to seek greater professional support for identity development in her own M.Ed cohort, in order to work with her preservice teacher more effectively. The other case, however, revealed a rich professional environment where the subject “was able to work with a team of collaborative colleagues to strengthen his teacher-mentor image further my mentoring a very self motivated student-teacher” (p. 729). The authors found it interesting that mentoring teachers not only played a vital role in supporting the preservice teacher identity development process, but “they themselves also undergo a process of professional development and learning” that further supported their own identity (p. 730).
Finally, McDougall (2010) “explores the dilemmas for teachers and they negotiate ongoing educational reform and shifting definitions of knowledge in the twenty-first century” (p. 679). Centered on Gee’s notions of discourse-based identity, the author makes “new times” the rich context influencing primary teacher identity development. Further in line with Gee and central to the view on identity construction in this author’s paper, is the acknowledgement “that the discourses teachers use in describing their teaching role are influenced by their understandings of institutional expectations, as well as the ways in which they identify with others” (p. 682). Interviewing 26 teachers, the author used a critical discourse analysis to identify and categorize patterns in the data: *traditionalism* (preference for traditional teaching priorities), *survival* (need for self-preservation), and *futures* (recognition of changing priorities)” (p. 683). She defends her results and how “they show that traditionalist discourses dominated some teachers’ responses to changing notions of literacy, and, in effect, the values, attitudes and beliefs that underpinned the notions of professional identity” (p. 685). Among further concerns in their identity development were inadequacies with media-based learning and an unwillingness to take on additional professional duties that might interfere with their teaching (p. 686-687).

Existing in a setting similar to the preservice teacher education of this dissertation study, Alger (2009) teaches “a course for secondary content area preservice teachers” and shares “concerns about the transferability of what [her] students learn in [her] classroom” (p. 60). She gathered a variety of data to “gain a richer, more accurate picture” of the teaching practices of her two biology and two English teachers in their first year of in-service teaching (p. 62). Employing a mixed methods approach, she employed interview
discourse data, which “were analyzed qualitatively through a process of identification of patterns and themes across cases”—and coded by an additional graduate student (p. 62). Her findings suggest that participants employed multiple strategies but “missed the big point” in their preservice training in content literacy: “along with teaching their students the content, they are also teachers of reading as it pertains to their discipline” (p. 67). She points to a significant shift in preservice teacher identity when entering the first job: “new teachers are often overwhelmed in their first ‘real’ job and quickly adapt to the culture and climate of their new school, often leaving learned practices and the discourse of the preservice program behind” (p. 68). If this is the case, then a great deal of what the preservice teacher candidates in this dissertation study are engaged in constructing may soon be in danger.

As sources of current insight into preservice teacher candidate, these authors could not be more relevant to this study as extent literature in the field. Rex, et al, effectively summarize the growing cohesion of the field in the previous ten years in a direction consistent with this dissertation study. The others’ research, some using similar methodology, some examining discourse practices, and many investigating preservice teacher identity, lends momentum to this dissertation study, and gives hope to this study’s methodology to further generate conclusions. Additional discussion of this section of the reviewed literature, as it impacts the results and conclusions to follow, will appear in the fifth chapter.
Classroom Discourse and Learning

Classroom Discourse and Learning: An Overview

Of great value to this study, both from a standpoint of foundational knowledge represented in this literature review, and also from a methodological standpoint, is an understanding of discourse and its analysis. James P. Gee has made the greatest impact on this dissertation study and it is his perspective on discourse that informs and empowers this research study in a number of ways. First, this section will examine how Gee’s conceptualization of discourse maintains close ties to both a constructed form of knowledge and identity, and closely links them both with the social world—an appropriate fit to the views of literacy, critical literacy, and the preparation of preservice teachers already outlined in this literature review. Second, Gee’s view of discourse enables the researcher to view the discourse participant as a vital element in the discourse data, helping to shape the analysis model emerging from the data. And, finally, Gee’s perspective on discourse analysis (along with others) allows the researcher to develop a recursive analytical perspective on the discourse, making the process a valid one through the constant revisiting and reshaping of the analysis model where the discourse analyst makes meaning out of the available trends in the discourse.

A Gee Perspective on Discourse and Discourse Analysis

An early Gee conceptualization of discourse comes in a “five sub-systems” model that situates both speaker and text “within the status and solidarity of social networks within which language functions” (1990, p. 104). The model includes prosody (the manner in which words are spoken), cohesion (the ways sentences are connected),
discourse organization (the higher order organization of multiple sentences), contextualization signals (what a speaker “takes to the context” and how the speaker wants the hearer to receive it), and the thematic organization (the subtle clues in a text that reveal thematic connection of all material) (p. 104-106). Gee’s model is interesting in that it reveals a linguistic root to Gee’s understanding and moves that root (the first three sub-systems) into a social context of discourse. Gee cautions, however, that this system requires “a note on interpretation”—namely, that the meaning derived from a text and shared via discourse is always open to interpretation and that a “multiplicity of interpretation” exists in this system that is very much in line with “the very way sense making functions and the way human beings are constituted” (p. 111). In other words, this model seems to explain how discourse occurs as a rest of decoding a text, but this model is far from perfect due to the multiple directions in which human thinking (and discourse) can move the meaning derived from the text. It is from this point that Gee encourages us to think “overtly…the tacit social theories that underlie our very use of language in our social…lives” in order to supplement this model (p. 130).

Gee continues to shape this understanding in the same text, moving into what was considered by many at the time to be an new field, one he defines as: “the emergence of a set of assumptions and methodologies that can constitute both a core curriculum for all future teachers and educators and a ‘discipline’ to serve as the heart of a renewed, socioculturally situated ‘educational studies’” (p. 137). Gee even adds his own label of “literacy studies” to this emerging area. To better define his new field, Gee adds some linguistic insight about grammar and the fact that knowing the words and their usage is not necessarily as important as saying them at the right time and place. Gee likens this to
entering the local bar to meet a drinking buddy, commonly asking for a match (“Gime a match, wouldya?”) to light a cigarette while “placing a napkin on the bar stool to avoid getting [his] newly pressed designer jeans dirty” (p. 140). In this situation, Gee’s words fit the setting and may be spoken correctly, but his actions with the napkin do not match. Here he clarifies that “language is always spoken (and written, for that matter) out of a particular social identity (or social role)” (p. 140). It accompanies people, in addition to actions; at this point in Gee’s literature it is his goal to inject a much greater awareness of the people that accompany language, and not just their actions. To accomplish this he reminds the reader of “discourse” (which he notes has been defined technically in many ways throughout literacy and linguistics) and offers his own renowned definition of Discourse (“with a capital ‘D’”), which is of particular relevance to this dissertation study:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network,” or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful “role.” (p. 143).

Gee (1992) aptly expands on this definition in The Social Mind by adding that he uses the term “to make clear that [he is] talking about something that means (discourses) though it is not in any one person’s head, but rather an amalgam of language, bodies, heads, and various props in the world (like birds and books)” (p. 87). He then appropriately offers his famous bird watching example here, that the Discourse of birding apprentices new bird watchers, helps form “folk theories” about birds and bird watching,
and synchronizes thinking among birders along similar lines (p. 87-88). In a sense, the Discourse of birding prevents birders from getting “out of line,” lest they become “marginal to the Discourse;” they will either be disciplined back in line with the Discourse of birding, or “cease to be a birder” (p. 88). Perhaps a lengthy example, it is one that very much mirrors the Discourse process of any activity or any circle. Be it birding or any other social group, topic, or structure, a Discourse will permeate that group, topic, or structure, and help it to self-conceptualize and further build meaning along its own lines. And Discourse groups “apprentice new members” just as bird watching does, all to solidify the very existence of the Discourse community within its primary circle.

Gee also reminds the reader that “you cannot overtly teach anyone a Discourse, in a classroom or anywhere else” and clarifies that, though one can acquire a place in a Discourse group in a classroom, it will be through the process of apprenticing into it and not through explicit teaching (p. 115). Apprenticing further underscores his view that Discourses are born, exist, and mutate as necessary in the social world. But this does not mean that learning and literacy exist in a realm separate from his thinking on Discourses. Gee reminds the reader of the heated debate over phonics education—a Discourse group, to be sure. Though passionate about it as a perceived approach to education meant to solve problems with reading ability, Gee indicates that “most of these parents couldn’t remember more than two phonics rules even if you paid them” and few teach them to their children, yet none fail “to make a big deal out of the sound and the form of the language” and (most importantly) none of these parents think that “sounds and letters are the beginning or the end of literacy” (p. 121). He offers this point to illustrate how this
Discourse group of phonics-passionate parents seems to have answered their phonics question “without carrying out any research whatsoever” (p. 122). He reiterates his views here that “being literate is not primarily a mental ability, but rather a social one” (p. 122). Linguists—or a passion for phonics—are not enough, and it is the “Big D” perspective that helps sort it out. Gee also offers the reminder that far before children can decode print they are apprenticed into “one or more school-based literacy Discourses—ways of thinking, acting, valuing with words and objects—that undergird school-based and mainstream literacy practices” (p. 123).

If this is the case, then how does the prior existence of Discourse in students impact their learning when they begin formal schooling? In Social Linguistics and Literacies Gee further clarifies how an understanding of Discourse enters the realm of literacy studies in a problematic way, making murky the waters of acquiring Discourse as a child before learning to read and learning the more formal discourse while learning to read (1990, p. 149-150). Gee feels that “it is only within the context of the notion of Discourse that we can achieve a viable definition of ‘literacy’” (p. 150). This definition centers around becoming members of a Discourse community, a Discourse that “serves as a ‘framework’ or ‘base’” for the “acquisition and learning of other Discourses later in life”—including what Gee calls the “secondary Discourse” beyond the family or immediate social sphere, which may extend from the community to the global level (p. 151). It is here that he outright states his “socially useful” definition of literacy: something that “must be couched in terms of these notions of primary and secondary Discourse” and, more specifically, “mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary Discourse” (p. 153). “Ultimately, by developing a pair of theorems stemming from this
conceptualization of literacy—first, that “Discourses are connected with displays of identity,” and second, that the secondary Discourse is very much separate from the primary (Gee’s “socially accepted association”)—Gee identifies the tension that exists among us all and the larger world around us (and four our students) (p. 152). Gee’s tension, brought about by so many students adopting the dominant discourse of their school (the secondary Discourse surrounding them) has overwritten their primary Discourses, and this has imperiled literacy education.

Gee (1990) even further refines this social identity view of Discourse by stating each form of Discourse “is a form of life, a way of being in the world, a way of being a ‘person like us,’ in terms of action, interaction, values, thought and language” (p. 174-175). He notes that persons are actors within their Discourse, fulfilling certain roles to remain within, or failing to apprentice into the group and therefore being cast out. He also adds, “each of us is the subject of our Discourses” in three ways: as actors in that theater, as subjects of that Discourse’s limitations, and as theorists of meaning within that Discourse (p. 175). He even describes a “balancing act” between multiple Discourses in which individuals may claim membership. Sometimes this is simple and sometimes it is disastrous; sometimes these “conflicting Discourses may not be so easy to label” (p. 180). He leaves reader and scholar with a final thought in this text, that “most of what a Discourse does with us, and most of what we do with a Discourse, is unconscious, unreflective, uncritical,” but also “dominant Discourses in our society, and, in particular, school-based Discourses, privilege us who have mastered them and do significant harm to others” (p. 191). Here is a call to both continue to experience and examine Discourses,
to seek ways to better identify how they bind together the social world, and investigate how they act as a function of the social world.

Another conceptualization of this Discourse community (which he does directly connect to Discourses “with a capital ‘D’”) relative to learning, which is of particular relevance to this study, is the notion of a “community of practice” articulated by Gee (2004). When considering Discourse and learning within the realm of social identity construction, it is important to remember that “people’s activities are often part of larger communities of practice—that is, groups of people ongoingly engaged in (partially) shared tasks or work of a certain sort” that are educational in nature or otherwise (p. 38). These “communities of practice” continue to maintain and replicate themselves (e.g., birders) “through the creation of a variety of characteristic social practices, and within these they apprentice new members” (p. 39). Gee notes that such communities are institutional in nature. And that any solid discourse analysis model must understand how its unique “community of practice” is built out of a context of social engagement, and how “patterns of participation systematically change across time” for those involved (p. 39). Thus, it is within any institutionalized Discourse community that Gee recommends that the discourse analyst pay close attention to the “community of practice” formed by the Discourse participants and coming to understand the constructed identity that they share.

With such a hefty understanding of Discourse articulated, how then can discourse data be analyzed in order to glean such insight into the social world and the learning process that exists within it? Gee (2005) builds his own insight into the development of useful models to guide the process. He notes that an interesting paradox of discourse
analysis results from this view of Discourse: which comes first, the “situation” in which the Discourse occurs, or the language used in the Discourse? (p. 10). Fortunately, language and situations “‘bootstrap’ each other into existence in a reciprocal process through time” (p. 10). With this in mind, Gee offers a set of seven “building tasks” to bear in mind that occur in Discourse, be they the result of the situation or the language: significance, how discourse participants add value or weight to Discourse events; activities, the use of language for recognition as a participant in specific activity; identities, using language to build “an identity here-and-now;” relationships, language signals that reveal the relationship we have or crave with others; politics, how language reveals one’s perspective on social goods; connections, the use of language to make relevant connections among ideas; and sign systems and knowledge, the use of forms of communication within a common language that help make “knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not” (p. 11-13). Given the reflexivity of the language and situation paradox, these seven “building tasks” make an excellent initial framework to begin analyzing discourse.

Gee offers four more specific “tools of inquiry” to use when weighing the significance of Discourse events within his “building tasks” (p. 20). The first involves separating the various styles or types of language used for varying purposes—analogous to resolving differences between common language and technical jargon. To this end, Gee points out that “investigating how different social languages are used and mixed is one tool of inquiry for engaging in discourse analysis” (p. 20). The second tool is nothing less than a critical eye for use of his Discourse with a “D” and “thinking about the different Discourses a piece of language is part of” (p. 21). Thirdly, he offers
intertextuality, the attention to how “one spoken or written text alludes to, quotes, or otherwise relates to, another one” and how this fuels and shapes Discourse. Lastly, he offers the tool of conversations (a great deal like taking the allusion out of intertextuality), and the suggestion that “thinking about different conversations a piece of language impinges on or relates to is another tool for engaging in discourse analysis” (p. 22) from a standpoint of interwoven and ever-evolving Discourse. With his tools, he cautions that “Discourses have no discrete boundaries” since people are constantly in a state of discourse flux; we need not count Discourses, but rather remember the “recognition work that goes into creating, sustaining, and transforming them” (p. 30).

Regarding form and function of Discourse, Gee suggests that discourse analysts engage in two types in the search for meaning: one, a search for “general correlations between form (structure) and function (meaning)”—which he dubs “form-function analysis”—and the other, an eye for “more specific interactions between language and context” or “language-context analysis” (p. 54). Although structure in language itself does carry functional purpose, Gee reminds the reader “all approaches to discourse analysis, in their consideration of form, go beyond grammatical structures” and consider “patterns across sentences” (p. 55). Thus, it is critical, when examining language structure, to continue to examine language structure on a large scale. But, he also encourages the search for patterns on other levels, such as patterns that help the analyst “make sense within some kind of cause-effect model” when looking at Discourse (p. 60). It may very well be prudent, he concedes, to consider Discourse models as “cultural models,” though he does not prefer the term (p. 61). Another way of looking at this type of model means consideration of what Gee more specifically refers to as “Discourse
models,” which, when taken into consideration, reveal “simplifications about the world” that leave out the complexities that would make identification of a pattern difficult, highlight the “exclusions” from the Discourse group, or help define a “simulation” of what that Discourse says and how it prepares participations for action in the social world (p. 72-73). Ultimately, Gee reassures that “Discourse models are complexly, though flexibly, organized” and trigger associations with other models in different ways (p. 83).

Bringing his various models into focus, Gee adds that his models of Discourse are meant to “‘explain’ relative to the standards of the group, why words have the various situated meanings they do and fuel their ability to grow” (p. 95). It is the sum impact of what the discourse analyst discovers that helps develop a larger picture of the Discourse at work, and what the smaller units identified in his models mean on a larger scale. They interconnect, “create bigger and bigger storylines,” (p. 96) and “network like connected threads; if you pull on one you get all the others” (p. 102). Any discourse analysis should not rest solely on “all the physical features present,” but rather should rest on the “details of speech…or writing that are arguably deemed relevant in the situation and that are relevant to the arguments the analysis is attempting to make” (p. 106). Gee (2004) also reminds the analyst that “contemporary approaches to discourse analysis” take a reflexive position between the context of language and the language itself; further clarifying that “reflexive here means that, at one and the same time, an utterance influences what we take the context to be, and context influences what we take the utterance to mean” (p. 29). Additional discussion of Gee-based models of discourse analysis, and their validity as they specifically impact the methodology of this dissertation study, will appear in the methodology chapter.
Further Identifying Discourse, Critical Discourse, and Discourse Analysis of the Classroom

How have others built upon this solid foundation outlined by Gee? Cazden’s (2001) work makes an excellent complement to Gee’s thinking. She aims her focus more at the resulting change brought about by classroom discourse, or linked to the discourse—learning. Cazden notes “classroom discourse happens among students and teacher” but is much more concerned with “change within each student that we call learning,” which she calls “the most important goal” in education (p. 60). Cazden uses the metaphor of discourse as a scaffold, in that discourse events foster further growth and change—what Gee might call membership in additional Discourses, or further apprenticeship in a Discourse—and clarifies that teachers “need to induct [students] into new perspectives and new ways of thinking about, reconceptualizing, or recontextualizing whatever phenomena (referents) are being discussed” (p. 71-72). And, since much of teaching in Cazden’s opinion centers around teaching students to see things in new ways, a teacher’s response “can offer ‘something like a worldview’” via discourse that fuels the learning process (p. 72). She issues a call for further understanding of how discourse can help fuel student learning; simply changing the name of a classroom group to a “‘community of learners’ doesn’t make it happen,” as she says, but a better understanding of their use of discourse may make it happen.

In a further attempt to sort out possible incongruities in classroom discourse, Cazden offers the concept of “speaking rights” which refer to “the ways by which students get the right to talk—to be legitimate speakers—during teacher-led” discourse and activities (p. 82). Thin ice for some teachers and discourse situations, Cazden notes,
“deregulating” the discourse may offer more opportunities for turn-taking within the discourse, as students self-select as participants in discourse, but it may also “lead to new forms of inequality” (p. 83). And, “with older students, achieving more equitable speaking rights can be more difficult” (p. 84). With such older students Cazden indicates that long-held habits in discourse behavior, “especially those literally embodied, as in hand raising, are hard to set aside” (p. 84). Cazden’s view here would be equivalent to the struggle between Gee’s primary and secondary Discourses. Cazden encourages paying attention to how the rules for “speaking rights” are laid out in the discourse patterns, but looking “beyond the sequence of speakers to the sequence of ideas” (p. 87).

A high degree of management exists in Cazden’s views, yet there is also a high degree of discourse analysis woven into teaching moments in Cazden’s world. Students have to learn from a teacher and each other, she indicates, and besides “careful listening,” a teacher must “help peer listening happen”—paying close attention to discourse patterns and how they fuel the learning process can make this possible (p. 89).

Additionally, Rogers (2004a) notes that the more critical form of discourse analysis “holds much promise” for educational research and how this approach to discourse analysis is “amply prepared to handle” the political, social, and economical contradictions that exist in the world by handling them “as they emerge and [demonstrating] how they are enacted and transformed through linguistic practices in ways of interacting, representing, and being” (p. 1). She notes that critical discourse analysis is both “a theory and a method” and contrasts with other discourse analysis methods in that “it included not only a description of other discourses in context, but also offers an explanation of why and how discourses work” (p. 2). The “critical” part of this
branch of discourse analysis can extend well into the exploration of power relationships and the social construction, representation, and inequity in society (p. 3-7). She also notes that, despite conflict in the field about how much of the social world should be reflected in the “critical” and how much of the linguistic world should be reflected in the “discourse analysis,” she clarifies (of particular relevance to this study) that “critical can also mean a set of choices within a linguistic system that has vast meaning-making potential” (p. 15).

With this in mind, Rogers (2004b) subsequently argues “for the study of socially situated identities” in education via “empirical and theoretical tools” of critical discourse analysis (p. 53). Her approach has allowed her to move between student discourse practices in school, among the family, and within the history of the school (e.g., Gee’s secondary level of Discourse), and show in her research “how discursive positions are held together, which has everything to do with learning” (p. 69). Furthermore, though she argues for continued attention to the social theory reflected in the “critical” portion of the name, she also advocates for “an articulation of a flexible system” and articulated relationships between systems of discourse as “essential for the study of literacy” (p. 71). Allowing discourse to exist in its natural state—the social world—allows the researcher to ground its study in solid methodological guidelines.

Also articulated well in her work with family literacy practices, Rogers (2003) shares that critical discourse analysis helped her “illuminate how people make sense of their reality and understand their social positions” (p. 30). She engaged in multiple readings of her various data sets, developed “broad analytic categories” that “enabled [her] to talk about the shape of the interactions between the participants” and their
institutional context, and then examined cases or instances (what she called “critical vignettes” of Discourse instances) for which she judged the larger context of the event, and a critical discourse analysis of the event (p. 31). She additionally coded her texts on the “local level of analysis” (linguistic) and searched for linguistic signal patterns of “knowledge production, consumption, distribution, negotiation, and transformation” relative to the institutional context (p. 32). Rogers reiterates here that as these domains overlap in the theoretical understanding, they should overlap in the analysis as well, and that it is “the job of the analyst to study the relationship” in order to “explain the way of interacting, ways of representing, and ways of being connected with social practices” (p. 32). There is, indeed, a hint of ethnographic methodology in critical discourse analysis, which Rogers acknowledges provides “a more fine-grained analysis of the intersection of the individual and the larger context of texts, institutions, and subjectivities” called for in, for example, Gee’s Discourse relationships (p. 33). And it is this ethnographic context of description of the context in which the discourse occurs that Rogers claims helps the researcher gain “maximal leverage from [critical discourse analysis]” (p. 33).

Rowe (2004) complements the views and work of Rogers (and Gee, as well), yet seeks to add additional insight into the need for greater inclusion of a learning theory in critical discourse analysis, and greater consideration of activity accompanying the discourse (p. 80). He adds that such consideration of “language, psychology, and activity is a crucial, but often neglected, addition to any sociocultural project” that seeks to build and add knowledge to the greater understanding of events within the social world (p. 82). Within his analysis, Rowe interchanges this activity with what has typically been considered the utterance; this has helped him come to define “learning as the
appropriation of culturally valued meditational means or members’ resources as part of participation in active, distributed meaning making” via a critical discourse analysis (p. 91). Lewis and Ketter (2004) take a similar approach in their work, examining the interaction of identities in the (often conflicting) discourses between teachers and researchers (p. 120). To do so, they “combine a view of learning grounded in the literature on communities of practice within social and critical theories of language” in order to understand how such interactions both “produce and at times disrupt” such discourses (p. 121-122). They found that differences in views on “status, power, affiliation, and ideologies” shaped the discourse in ways that “made them tense at times”—affirming the presence of the “critical” in critical discourse analysis—while illuminating these interactions in a way that better inform both research on teacher preparation and the professional development practices in which teachers engage (p. 138-139).

Where does discourse analysis intersect with the constructivist epistemology of this study and further insight complementing that which has already appeared in this dissertation study’s review of the literature? Nikander suggests that discourse-based approaches in any discipline share “a strong social constructionist epistemology—the idea of language as much more than a mere mirror of the world and phenomena ‘out there’ and the conviction that discourse is of central importance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our social world” (p. 413). The author does, however, add that “there is no one method in the sense of some formally specified set of procedures or calculations, and constructionist theory does not directly guide [discourse analysis] in particular ways” (p. 416). Nikander also allows for the
dependence of discourse analysis on newcomers to the field, “adopting existing versions and traditions” and “how they add to, transform, and further extend the body of analytic findings and agendas” and seek new means to analyze discourse (p. 426). Thus, for the qualitative researcher opting for discourse analysis in a study, is therefore necessary to select a model of analysis best suited to the study, or perhaps adopt a fluid system allowing the study itself to design its own model for recursive validation. Or, perhaps, compare the results of multiple discourse analyses. For this study, building a model of discourse analysis from the growing and emerging data, guided by the insight of an established discourse analyst, is the preferred approach.

Additional useful insight extists in Marshall (1994), who helps select the backdrop for the preferred model of discourse analysis. Speaking from a psychological background, she aims in the direction of Gee when saying, “discourse analysts make the argument that any person, policy or event can be described in many different ways and that speakers draw on varying characterizations of ‘reality’ according to what they are doing” (p. 92). When viewing language as something constructive, Marshall offers that discourse analysts are able to use “linguistic resources available to a speaker to set certain parameters on our understanding and action” and via “denaturalizing the linguistic constructions” the analyst can “examine the parameters in terms of the possibilities and constraints set by one particular construction over another” (p. 92). In other words, the analyst can step from language itself into a socially constructed realm, where discourse builds and rebuilds the knowledge and identities of Discourse participants. It is a task of examining “constructions and meanings of phenomena in society that are available and drawn on by people as they make sense of various aspect of their lives” at the level of
“shared meanings and conceptualizations” (p. 93). Not only does the analyst pay attention to the use of language in context, but also the consequences and outcomes of discourse actions; this leads to the argument “for the importance of working with extended segments of discourse, rather than short decontextualized extracts, as with questionnaires” (p. 93).

Interestingly, Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005) offer what may be perhaps the most vague conceptualization of discourse analysis, and yet at the very same time, the most academically ready canvass upon which to paint research:

We take it as a given that any definition of discourse and any approach to discourse analysis are historically located (and similarly so with other concepts and approaches to research). By this we do not mean that there is an authorized history that provides the definition of discourse analysis. Similarly, there is no given set of traditions that define the boundaries of what counts as discourse and discourse analysis. This is not to suggest that the prior experiences, endeavors, and arguments of researchers are not useful to people seeking to define discourse analysis but rather that a history or a set of traditions must be claimed, argued, and labored for by the present; that is, the task of locating discourse analysis (or any approach to research) historically is not predetermined by the past but is acted on by the present as it looks to the future. (p. 1)

The authors seem to mean that discourse and discourse analysis are so in flux that they have not—and may never—be captured so well as Kepler’s Laws of Planetary Motion. They would seem to mean that discourse and discourse analysis must be constantly
shaped in the moment, with predictions for the future, yes, but only in as much as such
“looks to the future” offer a framework with which to examine future discourse (that will
also be highly in flux). Teachers and students together “address the circumstances in
which they find themselves, and together they construct their classroom worlds” (p. 2).
And this process implies a constructed Discourse along the lines of Gee. The authors
further note that “researchers must decide what it is they are studying when they claim to
study classroom language and literacy” (p. 3), that they must have a model in mind with
which to approach the discourse they find. In their approach to discourse analysis in
classrooms, these authors operate from the perspective that “boundaries are constructed at
many different levels” which “are socially constructed by participants in an event” (p.
18). Again, this is very much in line with Gee’s views. For these authors, like Gee,
“what count as data and what data mean must be grounded in how people act and react to
each other” (p. 40). They also subscribe to the notion of intertextuality in similar fashion
to Gee. They ultimately lay value on academic discourse “because of the role academic
discourses play” (p. 48-49) in transmitting and continuing what Gee would call a
secondary Discourse to which students are exposed in schools. They ultimately ground
their thinking on discourse and discourse analysis in the humanities and social sciences—
making discourse a social function within a social world (p. 49).

Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris also examine “how
microethnographic analysis can contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of
social identity in and through classroom and language and literacy events,” or how
microethnographic analysis reveals social identity, social dynamics, and how these events
connect with literacy practices (p. 101). Through this type of analysis, these authors seek
to identify construction of identity and how that identity opens or closes the door to participation in classroom discourse. They note that microethnographic analysis is a very “recursive process” requiring grounding in theory, microethnographically analyzing a classroom discourse event, and then revisiting that theory to “identify new questions and issues to explore” or “lead to reinterpretations of data” (p. 102). It is this recursive aspect to microethnographic analysis that, in their opinion, makes it such a powerful option in the world of discourse analysis of classroom literacy and language. They justify this perspective due to the strong ties between identity and language; since individuals (Discourse participants) use language to construct identity, examining identity requires examining language (analyzing discourse). Ultimately, they defend this approach in the sense that “it insists on material data interpreted through the frameworks established by the people who are themselves in interaction with each other” (p. 157).

Also in line with Gee and Cazden are Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) identify discourse knowledge, one of the seven areas named by the RAND Reading Study Group as impacting reading comprehension, as a factor that matters “a great deal for reading comprehension” since “skilled readers are more sensitive to discourse structure than less skilled readers are” (p. 29). They further describe discourse knowledge in this context as something, for those with a high degree of familiarity with school-discourse, as “almost invisible so the academics come to the front; those less familiar have two tasks—school discourse and academic topics—sometimes at a cost to academic success” (p. 29). They also note, equally in line with Gee’s notions of primary and secondary Discourses, that some students find “discourse patterns at home and in their community differ greatly from those used in school” (p. 29). The implications of this resonating so clearly with the
previous literature are too great to ignore. The authors further describe the myriad of academic abilities students with discourse knowledge possess: recognition of persuasive and logical techniques in writing, the incorporation of reference text into their thinking, access to digital information, and greater ease with elements of text structure (p. 30). These academic abilities suggest that students who have experienced multiple discourse forms—have been apprenticed in Discourses—are better able to move between them, as required in an educational reality of primary and secondary Discourses, and have directed this ability toward their reading comprehension.

A last, interesting connection, more distant in the literature, further affirms this reality of the primary and secondary discourses—and further necessitating their existence on the discourse analyst’s radar. Bourdieu, Passerson and de Saint Martin’s 1965 text (translated by Teese, 1995), hinted at this when they identified that “success in literary studies is very closely linked with the ability to manipulate the scholastic language, which is a mother tongue only for children born into the cultivated classes” (p. 38, 40). They note the view that the language spoken in the family, which students bring with them to schools, are an obstacle for teachers to surmount; “comprehension and manipulation of language are the first points of teacher judgment” (p. 40). And though the “influence of the child’s original setting never ceases to operate,” and language is “not simply a vehicle of thought,” it is still up to the school to contend with this outside language (Discourse) that “is the most active part of the cultural heritage” (p. 40). Though these authors clearly consider the primary and secondary discourses to be oppositional forces requiring resolution—or, more specifically, the school language (Discourse) to either accept the problematic presence of the family language (Discourse)
or overwrite it with the school language (Discourse)—they do add weight to the need to consider these areas as multiple forms of discourse, originating from difference circles, and serving different functions. It should, however, be noted that Gee, himself, described Bordieu’s work as “an internalization of the structures of the social world, and it can be built upon contradiction, tension, and instability, whence the need for the secular ministry of psychotherapists” (1992, p. 89). Gee’s wit non-withstanding, this clearly calls attention to this piece of thought as an influence in Gee’s work, and the resulting concern over the conflict between these very primary and secondary Discourses, which Gee himself further articulated.

### Online Discourse and the Changing Form of Digital Discourse

What modifies an understanding of classroom discourse to include changing digital formats? T. Millis Kelly (2006), a history scholar and researcher, offers an interesting insight on the changing nature of communication and discourse on the digitally motivated campus that touches directly upon that very medium used by the participants in this dissertation study. Kelly offers as a plausible reason for transformed student learning the transformational nature of “networked information” upon the “exploratory aspect of learning from instructor to the student;” when students explore their own lines of thinking, “it is possible that they will arrive at new insights that neither they nor [instructors/researchers] anticipate” (p. 217). T. M. Kelly offers WebCT and Blackboard as specific examples that are “transforming the way students write about the past and participate in collective knowledge production” (p. 222). Furthermore, he notes that though these forms are new, they are already being considered “old” and falling
aside to blogs and wikis. Regardless, T. M. Kelly notes that such examples demonstrate “how comfortable our students are expressing themselves and exposing their lives online” and using online forums as a transformative location for their writing (p. 222). T. M. Kelly also asks a very pertinent question: if these forums help students learn better or just differently—“is there some sort of measurable beneficial outcome from all the time and money invested in ramping up a course” in an online format, or including an online discourse? (p. 222). T. M. Kelly does believe that “we are on the brink of something genuinely different” in education at the college level and that the digital avenues have tremendous promise “because they are so rapidly adopted” by students (p. 223). Yet, T. M. Kelly also seems to question whether institutions will continue to put the digital infrastructure in place that makes such a communication and discourse possible, and thus create the opportunity for inquiry into the impact of it.

Some seek a more profound impact caused by alternate discourse. Goodfellow (2006) offers that digital learning has impacted pedagogical considerations of education in rather profound ways. Participation has become the active metaphor for constructivist learning—in contrast to acquiring or transmitting knowledge—and this participatory construction of knowledge “has long been a central feature in the discourse of computer-mediated communication in education” where the online learner “is usually idealized as independent and autonomous, participating fully in, and benefitting from, online discussion with peers and in unthreatening collaborative environment” (p. 67). Here the instructor, facilitator, or tutor is an ally, not an authority figure, and learning in this form “is seen as a function of participation in the social construction of knowledge” (p. 68). Though this author’s work is situated within economic contexts, and Goodfellow
seriously questions the degree to which online learning and discourse homogenize what might in a traditional classroom be more heterogeneous, the author still favors the benefit of the format over its potential to marginalize (p. 68-69). Goodfellow does note that the potential of this forum to construct knowledge “is dependent on the personal skills of information access, location, analysis, and evaluation” skills of students, and this may be the reason that such forms are widespread and not yet pervasive in the United States (p. 69-70). Ultimately, Goodfellow does offer hope that “widening participation through e-learning…adds a strong implication of social responsibility” where learners can “participate ‘in’ a social process”—with the caveat that such participation in an electronic discourse must also include the marginalized, lest only those with access to this newer form of discourse will completely dominate it (p. 73-74).

Kibby (2006) offers still more promise for an online discourse, one that makes the learning environment a hybrid one. Though there may be a number of stated disadvantages to such an approach in the field (online access, bandwidth limitations in some areas, the need for self-motivation in students, lack of the instructor’s presence, etc.), she defends it “at its best” for combining “the connectedness of the classroom with the content richness and the flexibility of the virtual learning environment”—and doing this creates a situation where students are constructing meaning together, rather than learning “in individual isolation” or “passively absorbing mass-oriented content” (p. 87-88). A large quantity of the change to this format has been economically motivated to meet changing student needs while maximizing use of institutional resources, and this overriding presence of the economic influence has impacted the pedagogical, placing the pedagogical aspect at risk (p. 95). She even warns that forums such as Blackboard or
WebCT make it easy “to upload old lecture notes and PowerPoint presentations than to design creative learning experiences” (p. 96). Instructors interested in this form of learning should continue to push through administrative barriers, and remain mindful of such risks in order to continue to develop ways that it can support exposure to “a range of viewpoints” and “opportunity to critique and debate these viewpoints and recognize the ways that ‘truth’ is socially determined” (p. 104). Additionally, Kibby suggests that instructors advocate for a mediation of the cost-benefit view of the institution and the pedagogical view of the instructor, perhaps in the hybridized learning situation (p. 104).

Hayden, et al (2008) further define the “blended” learning environment or “hybrid learning” as “situations where significant learning activities are put online, reducing but not eliminating the amount of time student spend in face-to-face environments” (p. 112). They further emphasize that it should not simply add additional online elements to the learning environment in order to qualify as a blended or hybrid environment; tasks suitable for the online environment must be moved online, enhanced via an online approach, and tasks more efficiently accomplished in class (such as lecture delivery) be moved online in favor of more constructivist approaches entering the classroom itself (p. 112). In fact, they recommend four basic steps to move part or all of a course into an online environment: the movement of lecture material online, moving homework into the classroom for faculty mentorship or tutoring, use freed classroom time for greater “discussion, application and practice,” and—of particular interest to the research subjects in this dissertation study—“extend conversation out of class through threaded discussion” (p. 112). And, as further impacting this dissertation study’s subjects, the online discussion environment can serve as a further platform of “inquiry-based learning” where
students can “interpret information they find, and use it to gain deeper understanding, create new knowledge, or provide innovative solutions” to questions or problems in class (p. 113). While this would seem applicable to many content areas, at its core this notion of “blended” or “hybrid” learning is ideally suited to further support and solidify constructivist approaches to learning and better weave them into the classroom environment.

An additionally strong complement to this understanding of the role of digital discourse is the practice of Wickstrom (2003), who says that “using language for inquiry allows the teacher and the students to be problem solvers who generate an idea,” reshape the idea, qualify what they know, and “judge what might happen next” (p. 414). With this in mind, she builds her work around the concept that learning is shaped by context—not just by quality of discourse composing the attempt at learning. Citing the limitations of written journals as a form of students constructing knowledge for the teacher or instructor to view, she uses an online forum “to investigate the effects that a discussion board (forum) created on a website would have on the discourse and reflection of preservice teachers” (p. 415). Wickstrom hoped that a forum that was more authentic to her course than individual journals would be viewed by her preservice teachers as a professional dialogue, would serve as a reflection about the nature of their teaching, and what she hoped would make students who were “more proactive about their learning,” and also more collegially engaged (p. 415). Wickstrom identified several problematic factors, such as a lack of student engagement with her responses to their online postings, a lack of translation of their insights into an equally confident participation in class, sometimes a decrease in the depth of responses in such a public forum (the forum
creating shorter responses and posts), and sometimes her aims producing collegial conversations online only when students had “real concerns” and not participating consistently (p. 421).

Her work shows great promise, however, in the way it informs thinking on the use of an online discourse to add increased depth to the classroom—and what that extra layer of discourse can accomplish. Wickstrom, and others invested in online and hybrid learning, bring immediacy and plausibility to their work. And, thanks to the further triangulation in this dissertation study that is made possible due to online discourse, these authors play an important role in the reviewed literature.

Research Framework and Methodology

Research Framework and Methodology: An Overview

A final element in the literature critical to laying the foundation for this study is an understanding of this study’s research framework, from it’s foundation in a constructivist epistemology to the very methodological tools used to gather the data itself. And it is, in light of the previous literature reviewed from Durkin to Gee, appropriate to structure such a framework within the constructivist paradigm. This section, examining this constructivist paradigm of inquiry, will also examine qualitative research more specifically, and further examine views on qualitative inquiry informing the epistemological foundation of this study. Following this epistemological overview, this section will turn its attention to the various methods yielding this study’s data: observational methodology, as well as those of interviews and focus groups existing within a qualitative paradigm. Finally, this section will examine ways found in the
literature to navigate multiple methods of data collection within a qualitative study, including a constant comparative method of analyzing the data—ultimately, ways to facilitate a search for patterns within and among multiple forms of data.

**Within a Constructivist Epistemology**

This dissertation study is situated within a constructionist or constructivist (I will use the term “constructivist;” however, I believe them to be interchangeable.) epistemology, situating the research within and its subjects as participants in the social world, constructing meaning and knowledge as they interact and engage socially. Best (2008) indicates that an analogous term, “social construction” has “established a beachhead in the larger culture” of the academy but “has become one of those terms—like role model, significant other, or charisma—that originated in sociology but have diffused far beyond” and has “morphed to take on whole new meanings” (p. 56). Best further notes that this type of research allows scholars to “emphasize the contingent nature of social activity” and adopting this epistemological stance “makes it easier for analysts to penetrate those assumptions and to recognize and study these processes” (p. 57). It is an epistemological stance that allows for a constructed meaning of the world around the researcher and does not necessarily assume or take for granted any given knowledge when entering the study—aside from the view that knowledge will be constructed therein. Best even offers insight on the future of this epistemological view, now widely considered viable: “the future of constructionism will depend on scholars finding additional ways to extend the approach and to make contributions that their colleagues can recognize as valuable” (p. 61).
Weinberg (2008) adds, “indeed, many constructionists not only cast questions of objective truth as ancillary to questions of human benefit but also cast aspersions on the very idea that objective truth is a proper goal of inquiry” (p. 15). In other words, the qualitative researcher, under a constructivist umbrella, sees humans socially constructing their own truth, for the researcher to capture; the proper goal of inquiry should not be to discover “the truth,” but rather contribute to an ongoing draft of what “truth” might be. And a search to contribute to the ongoing understanding of “truth” in the field of education is the larger goal of this very study. Wortham and Jackson (2008) better connect education to constructivism, noting that such an approach to education is “important because [it] can help educators understand and change the highly enabling and constraining outcomes that educational processes have” while illuminating “how learners’ identities and competence, distinctions between valued and devalued subject matter, and the social organization of schooling are constructed” in order to “better achieve its transformative potential” (p. 107). This dissertation study, like any other with a constructivist epistemology, aims to do just that—inject its insight into the existing field for whatever amount of transformative potential exists in the study, and whatever amount of knowledge the field may be willing to receive. But, regardless of the outcome, as a constructivist inquiry, this study ultimately seeks to build knowledge, rather than validate or test existing knowledge within a qualitative paradigm.

**The Use of a Qualitative Approach to Research**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defend qualitative research as “a field of inquiry in its own right” with connections across multiple areas of knowledge and many
epistemological traditions, such as “positivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, or methods, connected to cultural and interpretive studies (p. 1). They also offer an excellent guiding framework for qualitative inquiry, calling it “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” where researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2). Furthermore, they note how qualitative research requires a variety of empirical data, “deploy a wide range of interconnected methods” in search of a better grasp of their subject matter (p. 2). Qualitative methodology does not privilege any specific methodology over another, yet, it does, however, experience difficulty in definition, due to the vast array of methodological options underneath it. A difficulty in definition only illustrates the large number of methodological contributions to the discipline and options available to the researcher to construct the framework suitable for the study in mind. The authors also note that the qualitative researcher emphasizes “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studies, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 4).

Regarding the act or art of shaping a qualitative study, Janesick (1994) says that the qualitative researcher is indeed “very much like an artist at various stages in the design process, in terms of situation and recontextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study” (p. 210). Such inquiry does, in fact, begin with a question, “with real individuals in mind, and with the intent of living in that setting over time” (p. 2). She also emphasizes the importance of triangulation—the “use of several kinds of methods or data” as a “heuristic tool” to make
meaning from the data (p. 214). Janesick likens qualitative inquiry to the art of dance from the framing of the study to data collection to analysis. She also hints at a passion for research that has been lost over time, revived by qualitative inquiry, and the ability of qualitative research to “decentralize space and stretch out time” just like dance (p. 217).

A metaphor of qualitative inquiry as the art of dance is well founded; like dance, qualitative inquiry warms up, engages in exercise or performance, and cools down, all the while maintaining “an elastic quality” and adapting to and mirroring life itself (p. 218).

The qualitative researcher is one who “prefers to capture the lived experience of participants in order to understand their meaning perspectives,” and, like the choreographer telling a story in the dance routine, so does the qualitative researcher identify an unfolding narrative.

Cassell and Symon (1994) remind the qualitative researcher that this form of inquiry is “less likely to impose restrictive a priori classifications on the collection of data” and therefore the research is “less driven by a very specific hypothesis and categorical frameworks and more concerned with emergent themes and idiographic descriptions” (p. 4). A “cornerstone” that they clarify about qualitative inquiry is that it is a subjective form of research, that allows for flexibility, and the “willingness to formulate new hypotheses and alter old ones as the research progresses, in the light of emerging insights” (p. 4). These authors’ view is entirely consistent with the methodology of this study complementing this study’s epistemological foundation, Gee’s discourse analysis models most specifically. It is also interesting how the authors note the “expectation” that qualitative researchers account for their methodologies, whereas positivists do not commonly feel the need to explain such entrenched methodological
traditions (p. 8). And, ultimately, a “richness” exists in qualitative data and insight “impossible to access through other means” (p. 9). Not only is this an area of research inquiry that these authors defend as a viable alternative to the limitations of quantitative inquiry, but one with the flexibility to adapt to the multiplicity and ever-changing nature of something as complex as the social world.

Additionally, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) offer perspective on qualitative research from the standpoint that it also can satisfy a need to conduct research differently. The authors note, through examples in their work with psychological research subjects, that “they achieved new insights through trial and error” with “many theoretical and methodological developments” (p. 26). They add that qualitative analysis demands a high level of description and that, “faced with a mass of unstructured data,” the researcher should feel an urge to “break these down using some kind of system” (p. 68). They also add that “objectivity” and “reliability” are something constantly debated and questioned in qualitative research, considering the traditional stance of the quantitative realm (p. 78-79); yet, it is the very flexibility, the ability of qualitative inquiry to investigate and re-investigate, and subject findings to others in order to consider the results “methodologically, rhetorically and clinically convincing” (p. 79). It is ultimately this method of research these authors advocate due to its potential to make “a difference to the knowledge that social science is capable of producing” (p. 155). Though idealistic perhaps, they further advocate qualitative inquiry for it’s potential to have an enormous impact on the social world when “layers of meaning and experience to which research (and hence policy-makers) have rarely had access” (p. 156).
Indeed, there is a responsibility of qualitative inquiry to do research differently, as the above authors suggest. Yet, this need to do research differently need not necessarily be out of rejection of other paradigms, but rather in search of those most appropriate to the study framework. And it is in that spirit that this dissertation study seeks to unlock educational knowledge that might, on some level, impact policy (administrative or structural decisions) guiding the experiences of preservice teachers in reading via the qualitative paradigm.

**Observational Methodology**

Though collection of observational data in this dissertation was, quite simply, a necessary step (in concert with the in-class discourse data collection) to understanding how the classroom environment of a new instructor differed from my own (and likely would have been equally necessary under other methodological designs), as I will further describe. Adler and Adler (1994) offer a perspective on this type of data collection that affirms its place quite well within this dissertation study. They remind the researcher that, “not only is observation one of the earliest and most basic forms of research,” but it is the most likely to be used in conjunction with others, such as participant observation, experimental design, and interviewing” (p. 377). It is, after all, the methodological origin of sociology, itself. They add that the hallmark of “observation has traditionally been its noninterventionism” and the behavior of an observer to “neither manipulate nor stimulate their subjects” in an uninterrupted pattern as it would be without the observer’s presence; furthermore, “qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic” and “occurs in the natural context of occurrence” (p. 378). They note the common steps of observation:
selecting a setting, gaining access, refining unobtrusiveness, training additional observers (if necessary), and continuing with data collection until “researchers achieve theoretical saturation…that is, when the generic features of their new findings consistently replicate earlier ones” (p. 380-381). Building theory may vary in formality and intensity, but it is the context of the discovery that matters most and the attention to the natural patterns at hand. Observational methodology alone has been subject to criticism; suggesting it lacks reliability without additional data to triangulate findings or confirm significance of identified trends or patterns (p. 381). Thus, their advice that “observation produces especially great rigor when combined with other methods”—especially with interviews—is advice that offers the researcher guidance in seeking alternate data that is useful in crosschecking or triangulation (p. 382). These authors attempt to forecast the uncertain “wax and wane of social science research methods” and note the continued skepticism of observation alone, and the popularity of it in concert—a likely prediction of it’s usefulness as an additional tool, but unlikelihood to “ascend swiftly in acclaim” alone (p. 389).

Particularly strong insight into field study exists in Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater’s *FieldWorking* (2007). The authors offer ethnographically-derived methodological insight, further speaking toward the importance of including observational data in a qualitative study. They mention anthropologist Paul Stoller’s notion of “the spatial gaze” which represents a qualitative researcher’s “stance and worldview” while observing in the field (p. 175). A researcher’s spatial gaze impacts the observation process, and the self-impact, the authors note, is crucial to “understanding insiders’ perceptions of their own landscapes” (p. 184). They indicate that researchers cannot rely merely on visual
details, but rather as rich a context of the environment as possible—a “selective perception” of deciding what details to note in observation and why (p. 187). They suggest the approach of “mapping space” as a way to engage in observation, a series of steps (following access to the research site) that means: recording assumptions before observing, taking specific notes on the setting, mapping the space visually or in narrative, describing the activities in sequence, recording conversation (electronically or by hand), talking with a research partner or colleague about observations, and writing up the data in narrative fashion (p. 195-196). Sunstein’s and Chiseri-Strater’s approach may help locate a “focal point in the space” due thematic consideration (p. 201). They encourage the researcher to not shy away from observing and somehow record moments of tension (p. 205). Ultimately, they advise that observation is as much about the researcher as the research subjects. They strongly encourage the researcher to bear in mind that “recording [the researcher’s] observations, impressions, images, and reactions will provide [the researcher] with data” (p. 219).

Considering the importance of observational data to work in concert with other forms, as this methodology chapter will further describe, this is a useful portion of advice to fuel a useful methodological category within this dissertation study’s data collection. Though observational methodology existed in concert with the in-class discourse data collection, it was necessary to understand the difference rendered on the research environment by another instructor. Reminding mindful of this insight into observational methodology is not only a useful asset, but also helps make the collection of in-class discourse data in the research environment all the more reliable.
Interview Methodology

A significant methodological asset enabling this dissertation study to reach beyond the limits of inquiry in the pilot study is interview methodology. Though a great deal of perspective on interview methodology exists—as deMarrais (2004) aptly notes: “there is no one ‘right way’ to engage in qualitative interview studies” (p. 68)—a consensus among the literature suggests a flexible form that is neither a shapeless, unstructured conversation, nor a rigidly scripted interrogation. Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990) make an interesting starting point when they indicate that initially, the primary purpose of a focused interview aimed toward “some basis for interpreting statistically significant effects of mass communications” but now “experimental studies of effects, and inquiries into patterned definitions of social situation” now benefit from the methodology (p. 5). They recommend making “a major objective of the focused interview” the process of “lessening and ideally of closing the gap between interviewees’ perceptions of a situation and their reports of what they have perceived” (p. 65). Doing so would seem to suggest the potential for triangulation of existing or additional data, using the revealed perspective in the interview as a connecting thread. The authors also identify another major task of the interviewer: to “diagnose the level of depth” of the unfolding interview and maintain its focus toward the appropriately selected level of depth (p. 95). Furthermore, remaining mindful of this depth allows an interviewer to remain sensitive to both the interviewee and the atmosphere of the interview producing the responses (p. 97). Finally, they identify as a larger objective of the interview, the need to “discover what each person has imported into the situation” and the “social
statuses and roles” that comprise the interviewee’s “personal context of [his or her] responses” (p. 115).

How else can the qualitative paradigm include interview methodology? McCracken (1988) suggests that qualitative inquiry employ “a lens that permits a much less precise vision of a much broader strip” (p. 16). McCracken also advocates for a flexible system of interview within a qualitative framework, and characterizes the researcher as a “self-instrument” that uses one’s own “experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the patterns evidenced by the data” (p. 19). As McCracken feels that “qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world,” interview methodology makes an excellent fit for qualitative inquiry (p. 21). Ultimately, this author paints a picture of preparation and execution very similar to Merton, Fiske and Kendall, and McCraken also adds that the final objective of the resulting interview analysis (whatever the analysis model may be) is “to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that informs the respondent’s view of the world in general and the topic in particular” (p. 42). Rubin and Rubin (2005) follow a matching thread in that they seek a flexible method to the same end: understanding the interviewee’s perspective. They offer that qualitative interviews are a “focused, more in-depth, and more detailed” conversation, and yet “also less balanced” due to the departure of the roles of interviewer and interviewee from average conversationalists (p. 108). The pair, as the others herein, suggest that focus remain on the interview plan, “without aggressively controlling the conversation,” and only employing the amount of follow-up questioning appropriate to remain in pursuit of the research (p. 112). And, as with the other authors, Rubin and Rubin suggest the overall
aim in a “responsive interviewing motel” is to seek “depth and detail, vivid and nuanced, answers, rich with thematic material” as suitable data for rich analysis.

Interview methodology should also focus on the researcher, not just the researcher’s plan. deMarrais (2004) reminds the interviewer that “the researcher tends to have a much greater stake” in the interview process—and it is this greater stake (as opposed to an average conversationalist) that necessitates the attention an interviewer must pay to flexibility within a qualitative framework (p. 54). deMarrais also adds that it is both “researchers and participants” who “tend to filter each interview experience through unique sets of experiences, beliefs, and assumptions about the topic of the research” (p. 55). With this in mind, she recommends constructing an interview guide with several guidelines in mind: constructing “short, clear questions” meant to elicit “detailed responses;” seeking recall of “specific events or experiences in detail” in order to encourage a greater narrative; and favoring a few open-ended questions over a larger number of close-ended questions (p. 61-62). When executing the interview she offers further advice that makes an excellent complement to information already under consideration here: “participants take cues from interviewers as to how to converse within the context of the interview” (p. 68). Vestigial elements of the average conversation is unavoidable in the more structured arena of the interview; nevertheless, deMarrais is quite helpful when compensating for this—while adding additional insight to the follow-up element, as well—saying, “if the interviewer moves from one question to another without follow-up, the participant will learn to use more succinct, focused responses” and may not elaborate to the extent that the data will remain rich (p. 68).
Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007) add additional methodological insight towards interviews as well as observation, reiterating what many of the authors have noted but drawing their interesting insight from the ethnographic realm. They suggest that “interviewing involves an ironic contradiction” where one “must be both structured and flexible at the same time” but it is actually the energy of “expecting the unexpected” that drives a good interview (p. 238). Where some fear their assumptions and gut feelings, these authors encourage the interviewer to form questions “around them, follow them through” and see where they go (p. 239). They suggest informal research ahead of time about research subjects and the issues and topics they represent and bring with them to an interview (p. 239). They strongly favor open-ended questions and the taking of notes, theorizing in the moment, sharing written accounts of the interview with the subjects, and reflecting heavily upon the process (p. 241). They also maintain that good interviewers “guide the direction of thought” by using body language to tell interviewees their insight is important, and maintaining strong eye contact; solid interviewers “encourage response with verbal acknowledgements and follow-up questions, with embellishments and examples” of what the subject said (p. 244). And they, additionally, advocate for “posing questions from your informants’ point of view, inviting them to answer from their perspective, from their own worldview” (p. 245). With such thickly ethnographic insight, these authors make a strong case for the interview that is light on structure, heavy on interviewee social background, and part of an unfolding narrative.

Kvale’s (1996) insight into interview methodology makes it a methodology where “the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal” and one where the interviewer is “a traveler on a journey that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home”
Kvale’s overarching view of interviewing is a good fit for a discourse rich study; Kvale calls conversation human interaction’s most basic mode and notes “the research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation,” further defined by the author as “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described interview” (p. 5-6). This dissertation study builds its interview approach upon Kvale’s view that “the qualitative research interview is semistructured: it is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire” and “is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes that may include suggested questions” to be transcribed (p. 27). The author’s work outlines twelve “modes of understanding” (named in italics) permeating an interview in qualitative research: the life world of subjects, a “lived world” and their connected relationship; the meaning of themes at the center of the life world; “nuanced descriptions” of the qualitative portions of the subject’s world; uninterpreted descriptive elements showing what subjects “feel, and how they act;” a specificity instead of general options or descriptions; a deliberate naïveté about “the interviewee’s life world that are as rich and presuppositionless as possible;” a focus on certain themes; flexibility for and understanding of a certain ambiguity; change which may occur in meaning, as subjects extend descriptions of their lives and events, a sensitivity to ideas and topics in the interviewee’s world; and interpersonal situation between interviewer and interviewee; and an ultimately positive experience for the interviewee (p. 29-36).

Kvale offers several additional elements of the interview framework that make this author’s perspective on the methodology of particular interest and particularly
informative to the design of this dissertation study. The author outlines seven key stages of an interview investigation designed to “assist the interviewer through the hardships of the research process and help to contribute to retaining the initial vision and engagement throughout the investigation” (p. 87): thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting (p. 88). These stages outline a flexible yet focused methodological process designed to remain true to elements, such as the twelve modes the author has earlier identified. When constructing the interview plan, Kvale recommends the interview bear in mind “thematically the questions relate to the topic of the interview” and how “dynamically the questions should promote a positive interaction” (p. 129-130). Essentially, Kvale offers that the more spontaneous the questions, the more spontaneous the responses; yet, the more thoughtfully constructed the questions, the deeper the responses. Again, remaining mindful of the data or “raw material for the later process of meaning analysis” that results from an interview, Kvale also offers “six quality criteria for an interview” with the last three aiming for a more ideal interview (p. 144-145). These criteria aim for an interview that includes a relevant amount of spontaneity, offers short questions to promote longer answers, and manages follow-up question time; furthermore, aiming towards the more ideal interview, quality control should assume that an ideal interview may be “to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview” and requiring attempts by the interviewer to verify interviewee’s responses, and that ultimately it is the interview itself that is “a story contained in itself” with ample description and perspective (p. 145).
Focus Group Methodology

More complex than individual interviews, Knodel (1993) suggest a variety of “practical and substantive” considerations in selecting the number of focus group sessions; he suggests consideration of transcription time, budget of the research project, and time needed for analysis (p. 41). Also, Knodel suggests consideration of characteristics such as homogeneity or allowing for control characteristics when investigating particular population subsets. More specifically, Vaughn, Shumm. and Sinagub (1996) say that they differ from other small group settings as they are “better organized, more formal, and yield findings that result from analysis;” it is also not “an explicit goal in focus groups to reach a consensus” in problem solving (though it can happen) (p. 5). Focus groups fall within qualitative research where “the nature of reality is viewed as phenomenological, and multiple views of reality can exist”—what they call a “fundamental tenet” of focus group methodology (p. 15). Additionally, the interactions between moderator and participants adds depth to the data and truth is viewed as a matter of perspective (p. 16). Another overriding assumption of focus groups is that “people are valuable sources of information about themselves” and it is very possible that “focus group interviews yield more accurate information about what participants actually think than do other research methods” (p. 17). Ultimately, this is a qualitative methodology “highly consistent with current trends in education and psychology,” seeking to better understand “what key stakeholders think and feel” about the research topic at hand; despite misconceptions that focus groups are all about consumer product research, they are in reality “a versatile tool that can be used alone or with other methods (qualitative or
Some suggest avoiding the use of focus groups as a sole methodology. Michell (1999) “sounds a warning against using focus groups as the *sole* method of enquiry in all circumstances” (p. 36), which makes her thinking of particular interest to this dissertation study, employing both interviews and focus groups in concert. With a certain social tendency of some voices to be silent, or be silenced, in a larger group dynamic, focus groups may afford greater ability of participants to speak (when at least some degree of group dynamic is desired). In her research on teenage girls’ perceptions of the role popularity played in their social circles, Michell found that data from interviews and focus groups differed in a variety of ways (p. 40). Indeed, she found some participants were hesitant to speak in larger settings (often the “lower” popularity group), and in individual interview settings, many participants centered on how they felt, as opposed to doing so within a focus group. Participation in focus groups often exposed topics or feelings of which participants had come to feel comfortable, no longer hesitant to express such thoughts or feelings publically (p. 44). She acknowledges that not every study needs to “combine focus groups and interviews to achieve their goals” (p. 45). But, considering that she worked with participants in social research, examining constructed identity and the conceptualizations built by these girls within their circles of popularity, “group sessions can certainly help” (p. 45). The connected interplay of both methodologies is too great to ignore, and, thanks to the boost Michell’s work offers qualitative inquiry of the social world, this perspective on combining both methodologies is important to consider in the framework of this dissertation study.
Mitchell’s view exists in parallel with the corporate world, where Greenbaum (2000) notes they will certainly survive “because there are advantages to both and because individual clients or researchers will always have reasons to prefer one over the other” (p. 20-21). Greenbaum calls the strength of this methodology one that “enables a group of individuals to share their views in a nonthreatening environment, with the goal of learning about the factors that dictate a particular action or attitude” (p. 6)—and, hence, a place in action research; and, “with qualitative research, and focus groups specifically, it is possible to generate a significant amount of very useful research information” in a much shorter time (p. 14). Greenbaum notes there exists no standard of behavior or structure for a focus group moderator, and that it is a highly dynamic process, yet one with an expectation of guidance (p. 25-26). Though certainly having an impact on the group dynamic or constructed product, Greenbaum does advocate pre- and post-discussion briefings to introduce information and reiterate discussion points (p. 73). Fern (2001) grappled with similar structural issues of focus groups, noting that moderation is a “learned skill” and “a little creativity” is necessary for procedures “that guide the group discussion” (e.g. Greenbumann’s pre- and post-discussion briefings (p. 78-79). Most importantly, however, is Fern’s view that the moderator is ultimately “in charge of the discussion, both as a facilitator and as an analyst”—perhaps even selecting the analytical model, where (if qualitative in nature) the following should be considered important: order of issues or topics, “intensity or strength of feelings,” reasoning behind the group’s meeting, possible deception, and “generalizability” (p. 92).

An important question asked by Baker and Hinton (1999) is the degree to which focus groups elicit “meaningful participation” in settings of social research. The authors
(via several anthropological inquiries in Nepal) caution that the setting can have a profound impact on the focus group nature; and, regarding educational research, they offer that “by locating the research in schools, participation was viewed as an educational process and this reduced material expectations. They found that “participatory activities,” where participants engage in constructive or analytical tasks, “actively engaged people in the process” (p. 89). The authors also encourage the researcher, if well-known to participants, to consider the impact of social situations and conversation about topics of existing knowledge among the group and facilitator—perception of a repeated conversation or the moderator acting as if knowledge revealed among the group is new (when it is already known), might impact the group dynamic or data (p. 92).

Another of Fern’s points necessitates due consideration among their caveats, namely the presence of mirrors or a visible camera which may have the “potential for causing self-focused attention” that pulls away from the group dynamic (p. 109). Perhaps the largest concern that Fern raises is the traditional view that focus groups are “limited in terms of legitimate uses, the types of data they can generate, and the types of analyses that can be performed on focus group data” (p. 122). Thus, it is the burden that he places on the researcher to select the appropriate approach and possible complement to the focus group methodology to make the research more valid and the data richer.

Similarly work exists to situate focus groups among other available methodology. Kleiber (2004) calls focus group inquiry “immensely popular and influential in contemporary culture,” and regardless of the various corporate spinoffs—and even satire in the media—a methodology with a secure place within “the repertoire of alternatives for basic and applied qualitative research” (p. 88). She recommends a somewhat larger
structure than the design of this dissertation study—“7 to 12 people for an average of an hour to an hour and a half”—but does, however, recommend participants with common characteristics and remember that the more structured the moderator’s approach, the more restricted the group’s ability to respond (p. 91). Additionally, “five to six questions” are the goal to “ensure that the themes common across groups emerge and that data idiosyncratic to one group can be indentified” (p. 91). She points out, of relevance to this dissertation study, that “focus groups may be used alone or in combination with other methods of data collection” (p. 92). And, of equal relevance to this dissertation study, Kleiber prefers “to use a method of constant comparison in identifying emerging themes and issues after the first group and before each subsequent group” in the case of multiple focus groups (p. 93). Among the caveats she identifies in focus group methodology are the mindfulness of the moderator as an influential factor in the group’s dynamic (p. 98) and not hesitating to ask participants if anything additional has come to mind during the course of the conversation—a step often overlooked or neglected due to a time constraints at the end, sacrificing additional participant response and insight (p. 101). Ultimately, she sees the implications of focus groups in action research “in a wide variety of settings” as a methodology that will continue to be “paradigm-challenging” and a process of inquiry “well worth watching” (p. 102).

Regarding the use of questions within the focus group, Krueger (1994) believes that “quality answers are directly related to quality questions” and devotes an entire chapter of this work to the asking of questions—“the heart of the focus group interview” be they selected in advance or spontaneous (p. 53). He identifies five types of questions: opening question (centralize the group), introductory questions (activate the topic),
transition questions (move toward the primary topic), key questions (centered on the primary topic and “drive the study”), and ending questions (bring closure) (p. 54-55). Krueger sees advantage in either the use of a topic guide or more formally planned sequence of questions; at the heart of either is skill at asking the questions. Krueger favors open-ended questions due to their advantage of better revealing “what is on the interviewee’s mind” (p. 57). If necessary, Krueger suggests closed ended questions toward the later end of the focus group. He also strongly cautions against “why” questions, which have “a sharpness or pointedness to it that reminds one of interrogations” (p. 59). Additionally, Krueger suggests being mindful of the placement of “uncued questions” which are open-ended but “also so all-encompassing that participants may have difficulty in providing lengthy commentary; cues may aid in follow-up questions but should avoid directing the conversation (p. 60). Finally, this author is adamant that focus group questions be arranged “in a focused sequence that seems logical to participants” (p. 67). By establishing context before growing more specific, participants feel the flow of the questioning is more logical, and thus, more comfortable. Ultimately, Kruger insists “without questions there is no focus group interview” (1993, p. 76).

Departing from such careful consideration of the questions themselves, Albrecht, Johnson and Walther (1993) favor “the process of communication that occurs in the focus group and how this process impacts the validity of the data obtained” (p. 51). More so than the focused question, which aims to elicit more specific responses within a focused inquiry, these authors favor discussion and the goal of “a unified voice in presenting [the group] opinions to the researcher” (p. 53). It is both at the core of persuasion and
influence—at work in any conversation—and a potential challenge for the focus group researcher. To this end, they note that “research on group discussion has found that the group idea-generation process benefits when it begins as a parallel, individual process” and eventually moves toward a group brainstorming or collective dynamic that “results in the group connecting and mutually developing some kind of substantive ‘story’” (p. 57-58). Though a discrepancy exists between a preference for questions and management approaches, Krueger (1993) offers quality control as a way to help focus groups remain “the methodology of choice in some situations” (p. 67). Where these earlier authors favor the process, Krueger remains mindful of “the sociopolitical environment” in which the focus group takes place—focused upon questions, or the process of questioning. Ultimately, Krueger points back to the moderator (in addition to questions themselves) and how the role “might seem easy, but it requires mental discipline, careful preparation, and group interaction skills” (p. 73); likewise, the role is “jeopardized when the moderator lacks warmth, energy and diplomacy” or even “telegraphs the wrong verbal and nonverbal cues to participants” (p. 75).

How then does the researcher make sense of focus group data in the analysis process—and how does such insight feed into the data analysis model in this dissertation study? Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) note that “like most types of research, the amount of analysis required with focus groups will vary with the purpose of the research, the complexity of the research design, and the extent to which conclusions can be reached” (p. 102). They note that “all analytic techniques for focus group data require transcription as a first step” with the amount of editing of transcribed interviews being “a matter of preference” (p. 103). They offer the “cut-and-paste technique” of coding and
reassembling the data, but rely “heavily on the judgment of a single analyst” (p. 104-105). Content analysis, with a “long and rich history in the social sciences” relies on language, symbolism, balance of attributes, frequency of associations, or measures of beliefs or values (p. 108). Knodel offers complementary perspective on analysis of focus group data: “a considerable amount of subjective judgment is necessarily involved in their interpretation and analysis” (1993, p. 43). Where marketing research often aims “to arrive at some practical recommendations without carefully documenting their basis” (p. 44), qualitative analysis “is equivalent in essence to cutting and pasting” and coding, mapping, graphically organizing focus group conversation, or use of discourse analysis tools, as well as making comparisons between focus groups (p. 44-49). Ultimately, since focus group methodology “inherently involves conducting a number of sessions, it is possible to assess the reliability of the data (in contrast to the analysis) by comparing statements within and, more important, across sessions” (p. 50).

Navigating Multimethods Data Via a Constant Comparative Method

As this dissertation study employs multiple methods of data collection, it is essential to identify how they will coalesce within the study’s larger qualitative paradigm. Schutz, Chambless, and DeCuir (2004) offer an excellent picture of multimethods research. At its core, they define multimethods inquiry as “(1) two or more quantitative approaches, (2) two or more qualitative approaches, or (3) inquiry that involves a combination” of at least one of each (p. 269). They favor the label “multimethods” over “mixed methods,” which they feel has dominated the mixing of qualitative and quantitative inquiry, yet also consider “mixed methods” inadequate for the possibility of
multiple methods within either paradigm. It may appear something of a semantic digression to further emphasize this point within this dissertation study’s methodology, however it is a necessary clarification due to the fact that this study employs multiple methods within only the qualitative paradigm (and, therefore, prefers the term “multimethods,” as well). By contrast, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) define this approach when bridging qualitative and quantitative inquiry as “between-strategies mixed methods data collection” where “qualitative and quantitative data are gathered using multiple modes of collection;” they also call it “intermethod mixing” and “data triangulation/methodological triangulation” and situate it among “any of the sequential or parallel research designs” available in either qualitative or quantitative inquiry (p. 299).

Though this would seem to make “mixed” or “multimethod” inquiry most popular when melding qualitative and quantitative inquiry, Schutz, Chambless, and DeCuir also further identify the usefulness of multimethods research within a single study, a sequential program of research, or within a larger unified academic area or series of larger studies. Though multimethods inquiry certainly has its place in studies that mix the qualitative and the quantitative, paradigm disputes often depreciate the usefulness of the approach over multimethods inquiry within either the qualitative or quantitative worlds. They note the multifaceted, multilayered nature of reality in qualitative inquiry and, thus, “inquiry at a single level may be misleading” (p. 271). Along those same lines, locating “truth” as it may exist within a qualitative study “is probably an illusion;” therefore, qualitative inquiry should not necessarily seek one means to locate truthfulness, but additional depth or layers of truth (p. 272-273). Since reality and identity are often viewed as socially constructed in qualitative inquiry, “many useful
versions of ‘reality,’ or ways of looking at the world” can add validity to a study’s overall data (p. 273). Additionally, these authors suggest that “multimethod inquiry is not an end in itself,” but rather an approach to two “distinct ends: confirmation or completeness,” and the “corroboration in the results from different methods” (p. 277). Lastly, the trio offers an interesting insight that may point back to the very research questions of a study: “the use of multiple methods also provides the opportunity to investigate potential paradoxes and contradictions that emerge from the data” by “recasting” questions from one method within another, or among each other (p. 278-279).

Constant comparative methodology has played a role in several local dissertation studies, spanning a number of qualitative inquiries in a number of fields. Franzen (1998), for example, conducted analysis of the classroom documents of nursing students in gerontology coursework to support her primary interview analysis. Her “constant analysis of the documents proceeded in a manner similar to the analysis of the in-depth interviews” (p. 13); it was also supplemented by focus group data from an earlier pilot study on the same topic. It is interesting to note that this methodology, in addition to offering her valuable practice in inquiry, “affirmed [her] decision that a qualitative approach to inquiry was essential to the nature” of her particular study (p. 14). In another study in the nursing field, focused on critical thinking skills, Drake (1998) called this process one consisting of “unitization and categorization of data” where, more specifically, “unitizing is a process of coding that reduces the data into manageable chunks of information that serve as the basis for categorization” (p. 28). Thin (2001), also investigating critical thinking skills, this time with hospitality management students, used this method of analysis in the “identification, categorization, and search for patterns
and themes from transcripts of classroom interactions and interviews as well as written documents” (p. 38). Thin’s work produced clearly defined themes from the various multiple method data sets suitable for validation by engaging in discussion and a sharing of the data with additional colleagues.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) indicate that the constant comparative method is well suited to research design in qualitative inquiry and analysis. Their process of collecting data, “while listening for emergent themes that will direct and shape the subsequent data gathering,” injects insight back into the research process with every step (p. 189). They further offer this methodology as useful studies in social settings rich with the engagement of human relationships and seeking insight that parallels “the dynamic quality of human interaction and experience” (p. 189). They offer the usefulness of constant comparative methodology in triangulation, where “the researcher employs various strategies and tools of data collection, looking for the points of convergence among them” that yield themes “out of this layering of data, when different lenses frame similar findings” (p. 204). Their approach to research is one that, as constant comparative methodology would ask of the researcher, requires “with each stage of data collection” that the researcher “gathers, scrutinizes, and organizes the data, and tries to make sense of what [he or she] has witnessed” (p. 187). Theirs is an apt approach for the qualitative researcher, who Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis say “comes to the field with an intellectual framework and a set of guiding questions” and seeks a framework that emerges from “a review of the relevant literature, prior experience in similar settings, and a general knowledge of the field of inquiry”—plus, elements of “the researcher’s own autobiographical journey” (p. 185).
Concluding Thoughts

A review of this body of literature is a necessary step in understanding the forms of background knowledge intersecting the study, as well how they help create the context of the problem the study seeks to address. It was the intention of this literature review to synthesize an understanding literacy, critical literacy, the comprehension portion of the literacy spectrum, the teaching of preservice teachers in reading, preservice teacher candidate identity, and the use of classroom discourse in research and teaching. Additionally, it was the intention of this literature review to engage relevant literature informing the methodological choice of this study. In as much as a researcher must decide what type of inquiry to pursue, a researcher must also seek to understand the background of knowledge directly impacting the context and framework of the study, itself. Reviewing this literature has attempted just that—an understanding of the ways in which the topic of inquiry, the very problem and very research questions asked, deserves a place within its field. With an emerging understanding of the areas literature reviewed, it is possible to move into this dissertation’s methodology able to consider those steps and choices specifically selected to work among this conceptual backdrop. The following chapter is a description of the methodology, describing how the study was constructed in detail suitable for replication. It will stand upon this literature review, using it as a foundation from which to specifically build this study’s framework and more specifically inform its methodological choices and model of data analysis.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The description of methodology that follows represents the collective energy of this dissertation study to move beyond a pilot study and expand into a larger framework with a more complex data analysis model. This chapter describes in detail the setting of the current study and the preservice teacher candidates recruited as its subjects. Following an overview of the multiple forms of discourse data collection in the current study (in-class discourse with classroom observation, online discourse, interviews, and focus groups), this chapter then describes their nature in more detail and subsequently expands upon the collection process of each form of data. Next, this chapter describes the rationale and framework of its Gee-based model of discourse analysis and how it will be applied to the data collected. Including the description of the role of a second reviewer, this chapter further describes this aspect of the analysis and how we worked together in the final stages of the analysis process. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a description of the pilot study where the origins of the current study began. In summary, moving from study design and recruitment, to data collection and its analysis model, this methodology section will ultimately overview the steps taken to bring shape to this inquiry, and offer relevant literature supporting the methodological decisions in the process.

As Gee indicated in his own “socially useful” definition of literacy, the concept “must be couched” in forms of discourse (1990, p. 153). Appropriately, the rationale behind this current study seeks to contribute to an understanding of literacy where it
impacts the preparation of preservice teacher candidate in reading at the secondary level. And, further in line with Gee’s definition, discourse is the preferred vehicle to drive this study forward. Insights gained in this process may speak to the value of a rich presence of discourse in the classroom and its use in understanding preservice teacher candidate identity. Insights gained from such inquiry may also have important implications with respect to teaching in general and to the preparation of teachers in particular, teachers who represent the secondary level of education where critical steps in the literacy process take place for learners. With Gee’s own definition of literacy in mind, the methodology of this dissertation study will ultimately collect discourse—analyzed along those lines identified by Gee—in an attempt to glean “socially useful” information (conclusions from the research) about how secondary level preservice teachers in reading conceptualize their teaching practice, use experiences to frame their conceptualization, and engage with one another to collectively shape this conceptualization.

Again, this current study is guided by specific research questions, derived from the pilot study, which offer unique channels that interact in support of one another. They guide the study’s greater desire to make meaning from data, and reflect the inherent need to build a substantial, tangible amount of knowledge from an analysis of the data. Specifically, this current study seeks to investigate the following research questions via the framework of the study and its procedures, which will follow in greater detail:

a) How do pre-service teacher candidates conceptualize the practice of their teaching?
b) What relevant experiences frame the context of their conceptualization of teaching?

c) How do they engage with one another through classroom discourse to collectively shape a developing conceptualization of teaching?

Setting for the Current Study

The setting of this dissertation study was an undergraduate reading methods course for preservice secondary education teacher candidates enrolled in a large Midwestern university. The course was comprised almost entirely of undergraduate English majors seeking teacher licensure for secondary level reading and language arts education. This course seeks to engage English majors—most of whom for the first time—with teaching methodology suitable for secondary level reading and language arts instruction. Students come to this course with little or no classroom field experience (but often have volunteer or work experience that is educational in nature, such as tutoring, camp counseling, etc.). A small number of students, due to difficulties in scheduling, or unique scheduling situations, are concurrently enrolled in their first practicum course; however, this field experience does not begin until the eighth week of the semester. Though consisting almost entirely of English majors, this course is taught within the teacher education department of the university. This course, which is designed for middle and secondary school teachers, focuses on the analysis and application of strategies for enhancing students’ literacy development in middle and secondary school settings. Practicum and student teaching field experiences typically follow this course in succeeding semesters.
Where primary level preservice teachers come to their methods courses with a great deal of insight and enthusiasm for child development, these secondary level preservice teachers come to this methods courses with a great deal of insight and enthusiasm for literature and literary analysis. In essence, they are typical English majors who have extensive content knowledge in literature and writing, but are new to the pedagogical side of teaching. They are eager to take their growing knowledge of literature and writing to adolescent students, eager to learn a methodology base to bridge the span between their literary interest and their teaching interest. Objectives of the course include items such as describing literacy curriculum issues in middle/secondary schools, analysis and selection of reading material for classroom use, description and application of various research-based strategies for improving student learning and assessing student growth, evaluation of instructional approaches that address diverse student reading needs, and the demonstration of reflection, self-monitoring, and collaboration. The course meets throughout the fall semester on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00-9:20 A.M. time slots. As with the Fall 2008 pilot study group (described at the end of this chapter), the Fall 2009 class held a full enrollment of 25 students. Although teaching style varies by instructor, course content typically involves discussion, synthesis of knowledge from course materials, and various presentation on, exploration of, and reaction to relevant topics of secondary level reading instruction. Assessment of course objectives also will vary by instructor, spanning various forms of quizzes, exams, papers, or creative projects.

One very significant factor of the current study, as compared with the pilot study, is that I was no longer serving as the instructor of the course. This offered a number of
fortunate impacts to the research. It allowed me to step outside the role of course instructor and focus on the data collection to a greater degree. Going into the study there were no preset expectations of what the instructor’s online component would look like, be structured, or how she would moderate or encourage the online discourse. Her structure was similar to mine in some ways: unique discussion threads per topic, with topics often reflective of the weekly in-class topic, and the ability of students to respond to peers and continue to expand discussion threads. She also assessed online discussion for course credit, as I did. When I taught the course, I made use of various current research articles to offer multiple examples of a variety of reading comprehension strategies. Her syllabus centered on Tovani’s (2000) *I Read It, But I Don’t Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*. Where I made use of half of the course meetings to allow students the chance to demonstrate lessons using these strategies, she employed the practice of strategies on a much more limited scale, toward the final three weeks of the semester.

One key difference was that her online discourse did not offer the same degree of flexibility as my own when I was the course instructor; this instructor structured the online discussion topics to a greater extent. Where I required an open discussion thread every week where each student posted their thoughts and reactions to the course reading, and responded directly to a peer’s post, she structured her topics more specifically. For example, her Week 2 discussion thread requested the following:

Describe a reading you needed to do and had no prior knowledge. How did you feel? What age were you? What did you do to help yourself understand the information?
It also specified, as a peer response, that students respond to “the person who was sitting on [their] right” in class, that particular day. Her Week 5 discussion thread asked a similarly structured question without the peer response:

Describe a favorite strategy-past or present. Was it modeled by a teacher?
Was it explicitly taught? Why does it work for you?

Each of her 10 discussion threads essentially paralleled one week of class material with the remaining weeks existing in overlap or not including an online complement. Additionally, thought it did present the challenge of needing to understand the difference in the learning environment caused by the new instructor, it allowed me to remove myself as a variable in their classroom experience. And, not serving as the instructor of the course freed a great deal of my personal time to focus on the research without the necessity of preparing for the classroom instruction. The new course instructor graciously offered me access to the course, her teaching materials, and allowed permission to include her discourse in the data collection, as well.

**Study Participants**

The study’s participants consisted of a total of 24 preservice teacher candidates who were enrolled in the fall 2009 section of this course. Twenty-four of 25 students agreed to participate in classroom observational and discourse data collection. Among them were 5 males and 19 females. Two of the females are considered “non-traditional” (for the purpose of this study, “non-traditional” is defined as an undergraduate student who did not enter the freshman year of college following high school graduation at the approximate age of 18) undergraduate students, and identified as White. One of the
males was taking the course under the non-degree seeking graduate student status. Of the 24 preservice teacher candidates, 22 identified as White; one male identified as Asian American, and another male identified as Hispanic/Latino. Maintaining the pseudonym pattern from the pilot study, these 24 preservice teacher candidates were referred to as “S26” through “S49” with the instructor referred to as “S50.” Table 3.1 describes simple demographic data on the participants gathered during interviews and focus groups:
Table 3.1

Preservice Teacher Candidate Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender/Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Interview/Focus Group?</th>
<th>Other Info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S26</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S27</td>
<td>F/40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S28</td>
<td>F/21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S29</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S30</td>
<td>F/25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S31</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S32</td>
<td>M/22</td>
<td>Asian-Amer.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S33</td>
<td>F/21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S34</td>
<td>F/39</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S35</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S36</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S37</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S38</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S39</td>
<td>M/26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S40</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S41</td>
<td>M/22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S42</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S43</td>
<td>F/21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S44</td>
<td>M/22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S45</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S46</td>
<td>F/20</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S47</td>
<td>F/21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S48</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S49</td>
<td>M/20</td>
<td>Hisp./Latino</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S50 †</td>
<td>F/ *</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data not available
† Course instructor
One of the three trends identified in the pilot study data involved those experiences of students in a concurrent teaching practicum. Specifically, it suggested that students concurrently enrolled in a practicum teaching experience made specific use of this experience in the connections they formed while building and shaping their identity as preservice teacher candidates. Where I knew of six participants in the pilot study specifically enrolled in their teaching practicum, I made a concerted effort to not ask which students (if any) were involved in a practicum in this dissertation study. I sought to avoid “seeking out” this trend, or any instance where I might somehow cause this trend from the pilot study to appear. Though I did spot anecdotal evidence indicating some were enrolled in a practicum, I was not certain of the precise number, as I was in the pilot study. I hoped that, if it did exist, it would present itself naturally through this dissertation study’s model of discourse analysis.

Consent for the study involved two consent forms with different objectives (see Appendix B and Appendix C). The rationale of the two consent forms was not to recruit additional subjects later in the study, but rather to separate data collection consent into those forms requiring an additional time commitment from those consenting, and those forms not requiring additional time. As the in-class and online discourse data collection did not require an additional time commitment by the preservice teacher candidates, the first consent form at the onset of the semester requested this of those agreeing to participate. Halfway through the semester I requested the additional time commitment of the preservice teacher candidates for interviews and focus groups, taking place toward the end of the semester. This second consent form requested permission to contact preservice teacher candidates via email to request an individual interview (lasting 15 to
30 minutes, depending on responses), either in person or over the phone, to be recorded on a digital audio recorder for transcription. Additionally, the second consent form requested permission to participate in a focus group with additional members of the class (with configuration depending on participation). Separating the two forms of consent appeared to maximize participation in the in-class and online discourse collection.

At this point, it is crucial to bear in mind the importance of conducting and analyzing the resulting data from both of these environments that I envisioned, with interviews revealing a stronger level of individual background and context with classroom discourse, and focus groups revealing a more immediate reflection of the “community of practice” at work with their concepts of discourse, and themselves as preservice reading teachers. In order to maximize the logistical possibility of the focus groups toward the end of the semester (without simply favoring the interviews and merely adding one focus group at the end), the course instructor agreed to allow the researcher to pull focus group participants from the later half hour of the final four class meetings over the final two weeks of the semester. The consent form clarified that preservice teacher candidates were free to select one of the two active forms of data collection if they wished. Of the 24 students who agreed to initially participate in the classroom discourse data collection, 16 agreed to participate in both interviews and focus groups with two others agreeing to participate in a focus group but no interview commitment. Of the students declining interview and/or focus group participation, all were female, one of which was one of the “non-traditional” students in the class.
Data Collection

Introduction and Timeline

As hoped, the initiation of the current study’s data collection began almost as anticipated, in the third week of the Fall 2009 semester with almost no delay in the IRB approval of the modified data collection procedures (see Appendix A). The data supporting this dissertation study and its research questions comes from four primary sources including: in-class discourse with observational field notes, online discourse interviews, and focus groups. All data collection instruments appear in the appendix section. The various forms of data collection within this dissertation study are outlined in Table 3.2 below, with a more detailed description of the data collection procedures to follow:

Table 3.2
Dissertation Study Data Collection, Fall 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>Weeks Collected</th>
<th>Days Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Discourse</td>
<td>Weeks 3-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Classroom Observation)</td>
<td>Weeks 1-15</td>
<td>2 (Weeks 1-2, 14-15); 1 (Weeks 3-13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discourse</td>
<td>Weeks 3-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Weeks 12-15</td>
<td>As Needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>Weeks 14-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-Class Discourse with Classroom Observation

Also as mentioned, discourse data collection in the pilot study was limited to roughly eight weeks of the semester, yielding classroom discourse and online discourse...
only. The model for classroom discourse data collection is consistent with the pilot study’s use of a digital audio recorder to capture classroom discourse for later transcription. In-class discourse collection stemmed from the first informed consent document mentioned earlier that sought permission to gather in-class and online discourse data. At its best, in-class discourse collection captured the large group very well, and the digital audio recorder was easily moved to accommodate various small group discussions. Transcription of classroom discourse was done by hand, consisting of an initial review step to make sure time codes on the field notes accurately reflected the recording, and reviewing conversation on the recorder when it was not possible to glean the gist of it in observation. As with all forms of discourse to transcribe in this study, transcription was done with two computers: one for playback of audio data with a wireless keyboard on the floor for pausing/un-pausing of the recording (e.g. a foot pedal), and another for transcribing by hand with a word processor.

While stepping outside the role of the instructor has tremendous advantages from a standpoint of triangulation—as speculated in the pilot study findings—it also creates a noticeable burden of coming to understand the change that a different instructor has rendered upon the research setting. Since the class environment is the context within which the events of discourse take place, it is crucial to understand the nature of this environment. This required immediate implementation of a consent form to gain access to the research environment and begin collecting observational and in-class discourse data. As this form of data collection was relatively passive—and I had hopes of a large number of preservice teacher candidates during a more active phase of interview and focus group data collection—the study employed a consent form at the beginning of the
semester requesting permission to a) gather daily classroom observational and discourse data via a digital audio recorder for transcription, and b) monitor and archive online discourse data (with access granted to the online site as a “Teaching Assistant” in a “read-only” mode and with permission to post a PDF version of the consent form for student reference).

Concurrent permission of the course instructor, as well as coordination and verification of the researcher’s presence was sought throughout the semester. Ideally, the majority of the 24 students in the course consenting to allow collection of their discourse would also consent to interview and focus group participation. I did, however, consider 20% of the 24 students participating in discourse collection to be an initial minimum goal. Of the five or six students represented by that initial minimum goal, I considered it additionally ideal to construct two focus groups of three preservice teacher candidates each.

Class observation consisted of documentation of detailed field notes from a corner of the room as unobtrusively as possible. It was here that I attempted to fill the role of a participant observer. As noted in the timeline of data collection, the first two weeks of class consisted of observation of the class on both class meetings of the week. This made possible to know the new environment very quickly and grow familiar with the new instructor’s style. Class observation was possible under the existing IRB approval. This also had the added benefit of allowing the preservice teacher candidates to grow accustomed to my presence prior to the beginning of discourse collection in the third week. In hindsight, I came to greatly appreciate this ability to synthesize my own thoughts, ideas, observations, and questions that permeated the research. Additionally,
they offered a raw material for the synthesizing of ethnographic field memos—a more
articulated version of my observations—done within the field notes on later review, when
I felt compelled to do so.

**Online Discourse**

As with the pilot study, I was granted access to the course WebCT online section
as a teaching assistant with no ability to build or shape the environment (although I did
post a PDF version of informed consent document and other information relative to my
study for students to access). This online discourse was available to archive in a number
of formats: plain text, PDF, screen captures, etc. The preferred method of archiving the
data was to convert the plain text to a Word document, adjusting the font to a user-
friendly look. A PDF version of a screen capture represented what the preservice teacher
candidates would naturally see, for comparison. As with the in-class discourse, the
student not granting consent for this part of the study was easily eliminated from the
archive of the data by selecting all messages in the thread, de-selecting that student’s
postings, and creating a “printable view” of the selected postings to archive. From a
standpoint of only attending one of the pair of class meetings each week to observe,
access to the online discourse was also a tremendous asset in continuing to understand the
classroom environment. And, when brought together with the classroom discourse and
field notes, it was an indeed useful means to understand the difference between this
instructor’s environment and my own in the pilot study—a necessary and validating step
of the study.
Interviews

A significant question guiding the development of both interviews and focus groups was the appropriate sequence. Considering the constructivist nature of this study, and the interest in the preservice teacher candidates’ conceptualization of their teaching, it seemed logical to have individual interviews precede the focus groups so that participant responses could help subsequently inform the focus group environment, while allowing me to come to know the preservice teacher candidates better going into the focus group interviews. Sixteen individual interviews included questions intended to probe their perceptions and understanding of discourse and prior experience with class discourse (delaying even, mention of the word “discourse” before offering a definition from Gee for their consideration), specific questions about the use of discourse in the course, additional questions meant to synthesize ideas about the role discourse will play in further shaping student experiences as preservice teachers, and how they imagine such discourse will impact their future teaching practice (see Appendix D). These interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the preservice teacher candidate (most by phone or following class meetings). The ultimate hope was that individual interviews would reveal a great deal about individual student context—the very context they bring to bear in their role as a participants in discourse—a context that may not necessarily be revealed in the discourse itself. This context, when mixed with the shaping and understanding of their community of practice, could better exist in a subsequent focus group setting where members of a shared community of practice interact and synthesize together.

Development of the interview questions required several rounds of revision and consideration of a variety of factors. The first intention of the interview protocol was to
create a series of questions that would offer the potential for in-depth response, and several “back up” questions to further draw out responses in the event of shorter responses to similar, earlier questions. Another goal of the interview protocol was to move through a process of establishing greater context of the subject’s background, establish or build prior knowledge on discourse, apply thinking to the course in progress, and attempt to synthesize thinking about future teaching and identity as a teacher. The same goal applied to the focus group interview protocol, in parallel development. Each of these four categories included two or three questions, all open-ended questions with the flexibility to allow a substantial narrative, if necessary.

The other aspect of the interview protocol requiring consideration was at what point to introduce a definition of discourse as pertaining to this study. In order to not lead the questioning and contaminate initial questions meant to probe participant knowledge of or background with discourse, the definition from *Social Linguistics and Literacies* appeared midway through the interview protocol:

…A socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network.” (Gee, 1990, p. 143)

Including this definition midway through the interview allowed the participant to apply some degree of understanding of discourse (when none may have previously existed) or consider this in addition to their context of it established in the earlier phase of the interview. Following revision of the interview protocol to streamline the questions and remove redundancy, the final protocol consisted of the four categories with 10 questions.
The final question, a closed question, asked preservice teacher candidates to sum up the value of discourse in a learning environment in one word. A final element of the interview (and focus group) was the collection of simple demographic data from the preservice teacher candidates (see Table 3.1).

**Focus Groups**

Where individual interviews offered one participant the opportunity to inject their own personal context into the data and synthesize thinking, focus group interviews allowed preservice teacher candidates to immediately make use of their “community of practice” and collectively synthesize thinking on classroom discourse—to even respond to excerpts of class discourse they experienced. The focus group environment, more so than individual interviews, developed in parallel to the individual interviews, aimed to allow three or four students to use their “community of practice” to impact the environment and, from a research standpoint, to gather discourse data in a setting larger than the interviews but smaller than the common large group format of the classroom discourse. As with the individual interviews, the five focus group interviews (four consisting of four students and one consisting of three) aimed to activate and create knowledge of discourse practices. Focus groups took place during the final half our of the last four class meetings of the semester (the final day consisting of two focus groups). Additionally, it sought to offer preservice teacher candidates the opportunity to apply such knowledge to further shape their views on the role of classroom discourse.

Development of the focus group interview protocol did not require as much revision as
the individual interview per se, as lessons learned in development of the interview protocol could immediately be applied to the focus group protocol.

Additionally, the focus group protocol was a great deal simpler, consisting of four broad questions in their own categories (paralleling the categories of the individual interviews) to allow preservice teacher candidates a generous amount of freedom to respond (see Appendix E). Following the aspects of the protocol designed to activate/create prior knowledge of discourse, as with the individual interview, the focus group protocol included reiteration of the Gee definition of discourse (new to only the two preservice teacher candidates who took part in focus groups, but not individual interviews). The final topic on the focus group protocol involved showing the preservice teacher candidates a transcribed clip of discourse from their class, and the subsequent chance to react to the discourse they found in the clip (see Appendix F). To do so required selection of a “middle of the road” example from class discourse preceding the two weeks of focus groups. The focus group discourse clip was selected due to its nature of not so obviously revealing within the discourse who the discourse participants were (to hopefully avoid focus group participants recognizing and reminiscing about their peers), but not lacking in substance to the degree that it would fail to generate conversation about the discourse. It is also important to note that the discourse clip was an unedited one (no segments of discourse had been removed from within it), and all references to names in the discourse were replaced with pseudonyms, as with all discourse transcriptions in the study.
Data Collection Procedures

Classroom discourse data was collected via one MP3 audio recorder (a second was available as a backup) for essentially three purposes: a) isolation of useful segments of classroom discourse for transcription by hand, b) verification of events described in field notes (if necessary), and c) verification of proper elimination of data from the student not granting consent for discourse and observational data collection. Most often the recorder was placed passively in the center of the room. This successfully captured large group discussion whenever present and only required minor adjustment of position of the recorder to capture a nearby small group when discussion condensed to a smaller scale. In this case, avoiding the student who declined participation was the first consideration; subsequent consideration attempted to diversify collection from preservice teacher candidates whose discourse was not yet collected in a smaller discussion (possible to identify upon review of the field notes). Twenty-four total recordings of classroom discourse took place with attempts to identify and make use of segments of discourse in each recording.

Field notes from class observation initially consisted of the following elements: documentation of minor events in class (in the sense of a detailed timeline), documentation of major events (in the sense of a more vague timeline), indication within these events of possible elements of useful discourse for transcription (this was done in the first two weeks in a general sense, in order to grow comfortable with the note-taking practice), time coding of these events (to correlate with the time count on the MP3 recorder), and a description or indication of my own thoughts and feeling and reactions within the moment. Existing as a participant observer allowed me the freedom to note
some of my own thoughts and reactions in my observations. Many times this description of my own thoughts and reactions took the form of questions, things to look for in the future, or ways in which I was still struggling to understand an environment different from my own version of teaching this class. Ultimately, doing so allowed me to understand the setting for a course I had once taught, but was now under the care of a new instructor with a different style.

One additional element existed at the start of the field notes: a copy of the instructor’s “agenda” from the overhead projector that represented her plan for the class on a particular day (I subsequently acquired these from days I did not observe, as well). I found noting this to be an excellent way of capturing the substance of the class at a glance, as experienced by instructor and students, and a further useful way of coming to understand the instructor. Following the approval of revised procedures by the IRB office, I observed only on the first class meeting of each week, with the instructor starting my MP3 recorder for me and leaving it passively on the middle table of the room in my absence on the second meeting each week. I did observe both days of class the final two weeks of the course while focus group interviews took place. Overall, the study generated 19 sets of observational field notes in order to come to understand the research environment.

Collection of online discourse was simplest of all data collection procedures. It was possible to archive the online discourse in multiple formats (word processor, PDF, etc.) using access granted to the class WebCT (Blackboard) online section, and select the most convenient interface. For the purpose of the current study’s analysis, the “Export to Text File” option was the easiest method, supporting removal of the non-consenting
student’s postings, and the text file was converted to the word processor format. Though doing so did render the online postings visually problematic, the “Find and Replace” option in the word processor restored proper line spacing and visual format within the online environment. Though a PDF version of the true online environment might have been sufficient, the step of exporting online discourse to the word processor also made possible the removal of names and identifying language via the “Find and Replace” feature. Archiving of online discourse was updated weekly to reflect new discussion threads and late additions to existing ones. All told, it was possible to archive 10 sets of online discourse data from 10 separate online discussion threads.

Interviews took place toward the later half of the semester, prior to the focus groups, after implementation of the second consent form. Sixteen preservice teacher candidates elected to partake in interviews, with interviews lasting approximately 15 minutes, on average. All interviews were recorded on the same type of MP3 audio recorder used in classroom discourse collection, for transcription by hand in the same manner. More than half of the interviews took place over the phone (with a cellular phone on speaker mode) and the rest in person, typically following the meeting of the class in the morning, and taking place in a quiet corner of a public study area with suitable acoustics for the audio recorder. Recording interviews by phone simply required holding phone and recorder one foot apart; interviews in person allowed the recorder to sit on a table between participant and interviewer. All 16 interviews yielded suitable transcription for injection into the analysis process.

The next type of discourse data, focus groups, took place over the final two weeks of the semester, at the later half hour of class meetings (four classes), with two focus
groups on one of those four days. Thanks to the flexibility of the instructor and time allocated in class for independent work on final projects, it was possible to schedule focus group interviews in class. Due to the number agreeing to participate, it was possible to structure five focus groups consisting of three groups of four, and two groups of three. In an effort to maximize the available options for diversity of focus group composition and to take advantage of all five males in the class agreeing to participate in a focus group interview, one male was assigned to each focus group with the remainder of available female preservice teacher candidates selected (assigned numbers drawn at random) to fill the remaining slots. As this dissertation study is not specifically designed to investigate the impact of gender, focus groups were structured for a consistent gender makeup. Additionally, placing one of the five males in each of the five focus groups approximated the gender makeup of the entire class.

A number of logistical steps were taken to ensure preservice teacher candidates would not be absent on the day of their assigned focus group, including email reminders and personal reminders at the class meeting preceding their scheduled focus group. Three instances of the absence of a female focus group participant occurred among the earlier groups; random selection of a female participant from an upcoming group filled the immediate slot (and preservice teacher candidates were warned of this possibility ahead of time). Focus group interviews themselves took place in a nearby vacant graduate student office room. This room offered enough space for three or four chairs in the middle of the room with enough distance to allow video recording (to help visually account for any discrepancies in audio recordings, as well as serve as another audio
recording), yet not quarters so close as to make the preservice teacher candidates feel uncomfortable.

Focus group interviews, lasting an average of 20 minutes, were captured via the same MP3 audio recorders (in this case, both recorders running in parallel as a backup), and an additional video collection method to better capture those elements of discourse in a group setting that an audio recorder alone cannot capture. To accomplish this a “Flip Video” camera was used, offering the tremendous logistical bonus of an instant USB connection to download video data for immediate use, with no need to convert, render, or copy any video from a camcorder to the computer or burn to DVD. As a facilitator, I minimized my presence and my own speech, asking each question and allowing the preservice teacher candidates the time to respond until they naturally paused and looked to me for the next topic. In total, focus groups yielded five interviews, transcribed by hand in the same manner as classroom discourse and individual interviews, with all five focus group transcripts suitable for inclusion into this dissertation study’s discourse analysis process.

Data Analyses

Rationale and Framework

This dissertation study identifies the value of discourse analysis where the preservice teacher candidates work collectively to build and shape knowledge and identity together. This study also believes in the importance of both a rich quantity of data and also the flexibility in selecting the analysis model best for the study. This model is well suited to the task of addressing the current study’s research questions in a number
of ways. Where the current study’s first research question seeks to identify how preservice teacher candidates conceptualize their practice of teaching, in-class discourse, as well as both interview and focus groups, will serve the analysis model well. As the analysis model seeks discourse highly infused with the construction of identity, and the research question seeks insight into an identity-driven conceptualization, it may be the most productive of research questions. The second research question, seeking greater background on the factors preservice teacher candidates use in this conceptualization, will likely be served best by the individual interview questions (probing individual history and experiences) and perhaps by some segments of class discourse. The third question, investigating how preservice teacher candidates engage with one another in this conceptualization, will be ideally suited by the online discourse and focus group data, where preservice teacher candidates make use of their “community of practice.”

With this in mind, this description of methodology now returns to the discourse analysis model of Jim Gee. This dissertation’s literature review identified and explained Gee’s “seven building tasks” (2005, p. 11-13), as well as his four more specific “tools of inquiry” (p. 20-22) to use when weighing the significance of Discourse events within his “seven building tasks.” A great potential exists in these “seven building tasks” and “tools of inquiry” to aid the discourse analysis process within the various discourse data sets in this study. And, while it was useful to include this aspect of Gee’s insight in a review of various perspectives on discourse analysis, it is to this particular model that this dissertation study will rely upon as its primary model of discourse analysis. Gee’s “seven building tasks” are well-suited to the task of identifying emergent trends and patterns in the data, as called for within this dissertation study’s qualitative paradigm; Gee’s “tools
of inquiry” offer the additional reflexive touch with which to revisit unfolding trends and patterns within the “seven building tasks” and further evaluate and validate those trends and patterns.

**A Gee Model**

Gee’s “seven building tasks” (2005) are: *significance* of Discourse events, *activities* that accompany Discourse, *identities* constructed via Discourse, *relationships* that signal connections to others in Discourse, *politics* that reveal a social goods perspective in Discourse, *connections* made among ideas in Discourse, and *sign systems and knowledge* within Discourse that make it socially relevant (p. 11-13). Gee further links these seven “language-in-use” tools to reality itself—seven things used by Discourse participants to construct their reality (p. 11). He includes a “Discourse analysis question” with each, serving as an example to the analyst to guide how the “building task” might guide the discourse analysis process, compiled herein (with the “building task” indicated in **bold**):

**Significance**  How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways? (p. 11)

**Activities**  What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as going on)? (p. 11)

**Identities**  What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as operative)? (p. 12)
Relationships  What sort of relationship or relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)? (p. 12)

Politics  What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be “normal,” “right,” “good,” “correct,” “proper,” “appropriate,” “valuable,” “the ways things are,” “the way things ought to be,” “high status or low status,” “like me or not like me,” and so forth? (p. 12)

Connections  How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another? (p. 13)

Sign Systems and Knowledge  How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical language vs. everyday language, words vs. images, words vs. equations) or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief? (p. 13)

Rendered more succinctly for this dissertation study, this discourse analysis will ask the questions associated with Gee’s “seven building tasks” in the following manner (with the “building task” indicated in bold):

Significance  How or in what ways do the research subjects make discourse significant?

Activities  What activity or activities do the research subjects initiate in their discourse?
Identities  What identity or identities do the research subjects build in their discourse?

Relationships  What relationship or relationships do the research subjects initiate and/or support in their discourse?

Politics  What sociopolitical perspective do the research subjects communicate with their discourse?

Connections  How do the research subjects make meaningful connections between ideas in their discourse?

Sign Systems and Knowledge  How do the research subjects privilege or disprivilege various sign systems in their discourse?

Additionally, again, Gee’s four more specific “tools of inquiry” as he names them are: the social languages that represent stylized language tailored to purpose, Discourses with a capital “D,” the intertextuality that allude or interrelate Discourses, and the conversations about commonly familiar Discourse elements or topics (p. 20-22). He reminds the researcher that emerging trends in a discourse analysis are mere hypotheses, which “would need to be confirmed further by looking at more data and, perhaps, engaging in the collection of additional data” (p. 13). It is with this in mind that this dissertation study’s discourse analysis model also turns to Gee’s “tools of inquiry” which he indicates “are primarily relevant to how people build identities and activities and recognize identities and activities that others are building around them,” but “are most certainly caught up with all the other building tasks” (p. 20). Noting this, this dissertation
study’s discourse analysis model will not necessarily consider Gee’s “tools of inquiry” linked with any specific “building task” (e.g., Activities or Identities), but rather applicable to any of the seven “building tasks.” When examining a theme or trend emerging along the lines of any of Gee’s “building tasks,” this discourse analysis model will have available the following questions (derived from the “tool of inquiry” with the “tool of inquiry” in bold) to a) add further depth of understanding to the theme or trend emerging from the building task, and b) to use such depth of understanding to attempt confirmation of the hypothesized existence of the theme or trend as revealed by the “building task.” Thus, the “tool of inquiry” rendered more succinctly in the form of a question (with the “tool of inquiry” indicated in bold)

**Social Languages**  What are the, or are there one or more social languages at work in the trend or theme identified in the building task, and how are they “used and mixed” (p. 20)?

**Discourses**  What are the, or are there Discourses (with a capital “D”) at work in the trend or theme identified in the building task?

**Intertextuality**  What are the, or are there connections between “texts” (p. 21) of discourse in the trend or theme identified in the building task?

**Conversations**  What are the, or are there conversational references in the trend or theme identified in the building task?

This dissertation study’s discourse analysis will apply a coding system (the names of the “seven building tasks”) to indicate the presence of the applicable “seven building
tasks” in transcripts generated from relevant transcribed segments of classroom discourse data, WebCT discussion data, transcripts of individual interviews, and transcripts of focus group interviews. When present, identified, and substantiated (as well as hypothesized to exist) within multiple selections of discourse within one of these data sets, this analysis will then make use of the “tools of inquiry” to further substantiate the existence of the trend of the “building task” and draw meaningful conclusions about the nature of the “building task” and what function it represents within the discourse. When any such meaningful conclusions are generated, the discourse data will be reflexively revisited with that conclusion in mind, acting as a refined lens with which to view the data. This will accomplish, as Gee indicates, continuing to inject insight into the analytical model and continuing to maintain the analyst’s role of using the data to render the data meaningful and the analysis valid. When the discourse analysis process (from the coding of transcriptions via the “seven building tasks” to the use of “tools of inquiry” to further illuminate conclusions within the data sets) reaches a process of saturation or diminishing returns, conclusions will be compared across data sets, seeking a larger existence of trends or themes (seeking triangulation), and given a greater, final consideration.

**Second Reviewer**

As is necessary with any study such as this, one final step of independent review and analysis of the data is necessary. This is made all the more necessary due to the potential bias that may exist from the known presence of the three findings from the pilot study. Even Gee’s models of discourse analysis, operating on a recursive path between data and researcher, would suggest the additional recursive path between data and
another researcher would only create more insight with which to reinvest into the analysis model. In the pilot study, additional reviewers (classmates) assisted the data analysis process in a number of ways: sharing of raw data (usually audio data) in meetings of the doctoral level course, examination of transcribed discourse data during meetings of the doctoral level course, and sharing of transcribed data and drafts of the course paper over course’s online forum. This took place more formally with assigned research “partners” and less formally with the large group of classmates during class meetings.

With this in mind, I recruited a fellow doctoral student with a similar background and interest in qualitative research methodology, as well as a background in Gee’s theories and discourse analysis. I have known this colleague for a number of years, have worked with her on several research projects, and have conducted data analysis with her before (both in the doctoral level course where the pilot study began, and within the research project where we both worked as graduate assistants). Fortunately, this colleague was a classmate of mine in the graduate course where I first explored Gee’s An Introduction to Discourse Analysis (2005) in detail and conducted the pilot study (this existing familiarity with Gee from a common course experience aided us greatly). I trusted her judgment both as a fellow graduate student and also as an accomplished researcher. Additionally, her experience teaching in a K-12 public school setting, as well as teaching preservice teacher candidates at our university, was a good match for my own and I knew I could count on her depth of understanding of the research setting.

Training of the independent reviewer began with the initial step of preparing a parallel data set for her in a well-organized binder. Included in this package of data was additional information about the dissertation study, drafts of dissertation chapters,
condensed summaries of those chapters, and one-page “quick reference” guides (checklists, breakdown of Gee’s “seven building tasks” and “tools of inquiry,” tips for transcription coding, etc.). The binder included a log sheet for the independent reviewer to track her time spent on analysis for the purpose of compensation commensurate with the hourly rate of our graduate stipend. Various sections of the binder represented various data sets collected in the study. Our first meeting consisted of an overview of the data, of the study, and an opportunity for her to ask questions and come to know the study. After a few days to review an initial impression of the data and reference material included in the binder, we met a second time to conduct a trial analysis in parallel of one of the individual interviews. Working in separate corners of the room without interaction, we read through the transcript of the interview, coding it as per the analysis model for the “seven building tasks” and each took the time to review our coding to identify trends. Likewise, any trends identified were subsequently analyzed along the lines of the “tools of inquiry.”

In this trial analysis we both identified two very similar trends, one of which we named almost identically and coded the supporting elements in the discourse almost identically. We each identified a third trend without as strong a consensus, and did agree that it was a harder trend to identify and that support of the trend via the “tools of inquiry” was weak. This trial run made clear to us that there would, understandably, be some amount of discrepancy in our separate analyses and that coming together in conversation, or being able to review her notes during my own analysis, would help us mediate the degree of consistency that would exist in our analyses. Though this one trial is not necessarily representative of each transcript in each data set, we found that we were
able to commonly use the language of this analysis model, effectively code and relate our coding to another analyst, successfully identify trends in the discourse as per the analysis model, and effectively discuss and mediate any exposed digressions in our degree of consistency. Part of this step required the agreement of a common language for trends identified in the discourse—we found it possible and natural to identify matching trends in the discourse but use different language in our articulation of it. One additional aspect of this training that proved useful was that it exposed some minor variation in our understanding of Gee’s analysis model, at which point we turned our attention to Gee’s literature, and unified our understanding of the model. Figure 3.1 is an example of an excerpt from a transcript (S27’s interview) analyzed in parallel as part of our training (with my coding [indicated in bold italics], the second reviewer’s coding [indicated in italics], and underlining indicating what triggered the coding):

Figure 3.1
Coding Example From Second Reviewer Training Using S27’s Interview

What experiences with discourse in [this course] stand out in your mind? (Pause) As it pertains to the definition you said? Not necessarily. Whatever [R] stands out in your mind. Okay. Well, I think, I think the modeling has been very valuable. Um (Pause), see now I’m trying to get into your definition. (Laughter) Well, what sticks out in your mind as you think of discourse? I think the modeling has been the most valuable for me to get up and, you know, actually teach. And show how, you know, we thought our way through a [C C] process. And, you know, to see everyone else’s modeling and all the different strategies. I think that has been the most valuable to me.

Within your WebCT discourse?
Oh, um… (Pause) I think when I had to research, um, oh geez, what was it I had to research? I think it was some sort of strategy. A lesson plan strategy? I mean, not a strategy, but something for a lesson plan, where I had to do some research. Um, it’s slipping my mind what I had to research for. That was valuable [S S] to me because I had to do my own digging. And then reading other peoples’ postings, you know, finding out what other people are thinking. That’s [C C] pretty valuable for me to do.
As this example illustrates, our training gave us a very early look at our close interpretation of the coding and our ability to use it in parallel. Disregarding the second reviewer’s coding of my own question relative to the preservice teacher being interviewed, the second reviewer and I were in agreement in this particular passage, noting “C” for “Connections” and “S” for “Significance. Ultimately, we both identified similar themes or trends in the entire transcript of S27 expressing a great deal of non-traditional student identity (reflected in coding of the Identity building task, and a strong presence of the Connections building task). We both agreed that the “Intertextuality” tool of inquiry heavily validated the “Connections” building task.

With this training complete, the second reviewer was able to work without my invasive presence, examining and coding copies of my transcribed data at her own pace. In addition to her own coding of the data, she also included several written notations allowing me to see the language (and style) of her description of themes or trends that she identified in the data, and subsequently compare her language to my own. Following completion of our separate analyses, we met to share our results and mediate gaps in our consistency (see following chapter). After focusing a great deal on the in-class and interview data, it became possible to understand each other’s thought process (more specifically, for me to understand the second reviewer’s thought process) and place our resulting conclusions side by side, in both the frequency/identification of themes or trends in the coding data, and the language of written notation.
The Pilot Study

Pilot Study Design

This pilot study owes its roots to a doctoral level literacy course for graduate students in the process of using qualitative research in studies. The course focused heavily on classroom discourse as both an instructional tool and methodological framework, and drew heavily upon the works of Gee (2005) and Cazden (2001). Work in this course initially focused on making its graduate students more aware of the presence of academic and social discourse, developing ways to capture discourse, and identifying specific research avenues where discourse can play a critical role. As the course project, my goal in this qualitative inquiry was to explore the nature and type of discourse that reading teacher candidates at the secondary level engage in during this phase of their teacher preparation journey. The pilot study sought to answer the following three research questions, which were nearly identical to the questions posed in the current study:

a) How do students conceptualize their upcoming practice of teaching?

b) What relevant factors and experiences do they bring to bear in their conceptualization of their teaching?

c) And how do they engage with one another through classroom discourse to collectively shape this growing conceptualization?

In the fall of 2008, I conducted the pilot study (Kelly, R. R., 2008) with a group of 25 students who were enrolled in a secondary level reading methods course for English
education majors at a large Midwestern university. Of the 25 students in the class (21 female, 4 male), all were undergraduates (21 as English majors, either accepted or with imminent application to the secondary education program); one female student identified as non-White (multiracial: White/Asian) and one female student considered herself to be in the “non-traditional student” category. All 25 students in the course agreed to participate and it was made known to them, at the time of granting consent, that the consent forms would remain in the hands of another party until their course grades were completed. From a standpoint of pseudonyms, the pilot study subjects were referred to as “S1” through “S25.”

Following IRB approval of the pilot study, preservice teacher candidates granted permission to collect two forms of data. The first was the in-class discourse, using a digital audio recorder to capture the entire class meeting—gathered in one of two class meetings for seven weeks. Data were reviewed for isolation of relevant segments for later transcription by hand using a simple word processing program and multiple computers. Collection of in-class audio and its transcription took place over the remainder of the semester, with transcription conducted as data were collected. The second form of data collection was an archiving of online WebCT (Blackboard) discussion board postings, which took place in parallel to class discussion. Though WebCT data existed for the sum of the course; only those final seven weeks following IRB approval were viable for the pilot study. The following illustrates the pilot study data collection:
Table 3.3

_Pilot Study Data Collection, Fall 2008_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>Weeks Collected</th>
<th>Days Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Discourse</td>
<td>Weeks 8-15</td>
<td>1 (Tuesday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Classroom Observation)</td>
<td>Weeks 8-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discourse</td>
<td>Weeks 8-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study drew upon methods of analysis suggested by Gee (2005) and his seven “building tasks” of significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge (p. 20-22), noted in the current study’s literature review and further developed for use in the following chapter. Key to the pilot study’s analysis was Gee’s encouragement of conducting an “ideal” discourse analysis within the study, using his framework only as a loose guide (p. 133). The pilot study’s method of analysis was very consistent with Gee’s discussion of discourse analysis, which utilizes the emerging understanding of the analyst, who reads and identifies the cues, clues or trends in language as they occur. Likewise, the discourse analyst must render the task meaningful and not simply buy into the misnomer that the study’s analysis very immediately and completely “reflects reality” (p. 113). Using the available data, the pilot study sought trends in the discourse, in line with Gee’s model, attempting to build an understanding of nature of the discourse as relating to the research questions. Ultimately, Gee measures validity in the act of revisiting the original framework with the meaning made by the analysis—likewise, the pilot study remained open to debate, discussion, and fundamental changes in knowledge that may emerge throughout the process of its analysis.
Pilot Study Results

Analysis of the pilot study data revealed three predominant trends influencing the class discourse that appeared to play a critical role in student conceptualization of their role as preservice teacher candidates. The first was a reliance on the teaching practicum experience. Of those students in the class who were current English majors either in the secondary education program currently or with plans to soon apply, six were concurrently engaged in their teaching practicum from weeks six through twelve of the semester. The amount of connection to this practicum experience was very strong in the classroom discourse with numerous references to “my students” and “my teacher” and “in my classroom,” etc. Those not involved in a practicum experience heavily questioned those who were and often synthesized thinking in anticipation of their practicum experience in the following semester. The language of the discourse suggested both a sense of ownership of the experience and a change of identity toward a more “practiced” educator. The second, a draw from earlier personal experience as high school students, saw the prior knowledge of their experience as high school students surface as an influencing factor in a number of ideas and decisions and perspectives about their upcoming teaching. Lastly, the third was a synthesis of what students considered useful ideas for their teaching, from course materials and their current academic area as English majors. To that end it was very clear that “when topics in the course brought the students in contact with areas of reading and language arts education that interested them most, areas that allowed them opportunities for creativity in their approach to teaching, they were often very actively engaged in discussion from a standpoint of generating useful ideas to take to their own classrooms” (Kelly, R. R., 2008, p. 17).
The implications of these results, though somewhat restricted due to the limited available data, have the potential to impact preservice teaching course design in a number of ways: the epistemological foundation upon which the course is designed and conducted, the logistical level of student organization—perhaps with a greater sensitivity to the value of using cohorts, or concurrent coursework, and the impact of the practicum experience. Furthermore, on a level more personal to the student perspective, these results speak to the need and desire students have to make meaning of the complex experience that is preservice teacher training, and the imminent magnitude of the teaching experience that lies before them. Yet, I felt limited by what I could accomplish in the pilot study with the two forms of data collected over the later half of the semester. However, as with many pilot studies, their conclusions suggested a need for expansion of the study, expanded data collection, and a revision of the data analysis model.

Here began the seeds of a rationale for an expanded study, one collecting more forms of data, and taking advantage of existing IRB, avoiding delay in data collection. The pilot study was, ultimately, a “dry run” that allowed me to begin thinking about the implications of the research questions and the implications they might have on the learning environment. The pilot study gave me valuable initial experience with Gee’s methodology and hinted at what I could further accomplish in the analysis process with more available data. Since the pilot study employed two means of collecting data, an expanded version of the study might move in the direction of multiple methods of data collection and, thus, further basis for triangulating conclusions in the analysis process. The pilot study opened my eyes to the fact that there was, indeed, a great deal happening
in these preservice teacher candidates’ discourse, seeded my desire to learn a great deal more, and built my hopes for an expanded study suitable for my doctoral dissertation.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OR RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the analysis of the various bodies of discourse data consisted of coding the transcripts according to Gee’s “Seven Building Tasks” and recursively examining any identified theme or trend (both terms are used interchangeably) within a transcript in the context of Gee’s “Four Tools of Inquiry” in order to validate or disregard the trend. Yet, it is the constant comparative examination of trends across the various data sets—seeking evidence of the trend throughout the bulk of the discourse data—that lends credence both to the trend’s larger existence, and the meaning revealed in the trend. Remaining constantly mindful of this study’s research questions, various themes or trends lent more plausible support to one research question, as opposed to others, and have, therefore, been organized accordingly. Ultimately, three trends emerged in support of each of the three research questions.

What follows is an illustrated glance at specific evidence from the discourse data sets—often with the accompanying coding—that supports the existence of the themes or trends under each of the three research question categories. Additionally, the exploration of an additional theme or trend identified by the second reviewer of the data follows this study’s primary themes or trends. An unexpected and interesting theme or trend, what the second reviewer uncovered was as equal in intensity as the other nine themes or trends and, while still unresolved as to which research question it best supports, was too great to ignore.
To facilitate the presentation of the results, the following two figures (Figure 4.1, p. 46; Figure 4.2) illustrate the identified themes or trends. The first (Figure 4.1, p. 146) maps the three categories of three themes or trends into sections representing this study’s three research questions; the second maps the unresolved theme or trend identified by the second reviewer (Figure 4.2) in the same manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question with Accompanying Theme or Trend</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driven from Science or Math by Science or Math Texts</td>
<td>Negative statements made about science and/or math</td>
<td>More detailed statements than classroom discourse; connected with prior learning experience</td>
<td>More anecdotal, connected to experience as a student</td>
<td>Unclear in focus groups; SS coding favored the “activity” of their content over a “lack” of the activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.2. Mapping of the second reviewer’s unresolved theme or trend. This figure illustrates how the second reviewer’s identified theme or trend maps into the study’s data sets.*

This unresolved theme or trend identified by the second reviewer will be discussed, along with it’s implications for further inquiry, following the discussion of the primarily themes or trends identified in the analysis of the data.

**Conceptualizing Teaching Practice**

**Conceptualizing Teaching Practice: Overview**

This first section of the findings or results of the study responds to the first research question:

a) How do preservice teacher candidates conceptualize the practice of their teaching?
### Research Question with Accompanying Theme or Trend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connections to Texts/Other Courses</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Highly Connected with Personal Experience (e.g. “Fake Reader”)</td>
<td>More First Person Centered</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Pushing the Discourse, Despite Limitations</th>
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<td>Some critique of classroom limitations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Experiences Framing the Context of Conceptualization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Traditional Student Identity</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Personal Background in the Identity</th>
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<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occurs in most significant discourse events</td>
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<td>Significant part of interview format</td>
<td>Often a reference when substantiating (I) Synthesis</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

#### Engaging Through Discourse to Collectively Shape Conceptualization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building “D” Via Identity Synthesis with Interwoven Elements</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More common in small group discourse; very rare in responses to S50</td>
<td>Present, depending on discussion thread, but often not possible.</td>
<td>Used when interviewee is comfortable thinking aloud</td>
<td>Used by the more dynamic focus groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Languages that Agree and Probe/Question the Discourse</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similar to focus group discourse; strongest in small group discourse (or for S50 to suggest revision)</td>
<td>Used to seek reply in the online forum</td>
<td>Basically non-existent in the individual interview format</td>
<td>Used to continue a line of thinking, continue synthesizing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connections Leading to Synthesizing or Hypothesizing</th>
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<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often quicker, less synthesizing time prior to hypothesizing (if possible at all)</td>
<td>Present, depending on discussion thread, but often not possible.</td>
<td>Common part of responses to later interview questions (after Gee quote)</td>
<td>Present in focus groups after Gee quote, when responding to clip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 4.1. Mapping of themes or trends into the three research questions. This figure illustrates how various identified themes or trends map into the study’s research questions and data sets.
As mapped in Figure 4.1, the following figure isolates the themes or trends of this particular section only:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Question with Accompanying Theme or Trend</th>
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Figure 4.3. Isolated mapping of the themes or trends associated with the first research question. This figure illustrates how various identified themes or trends map into the study's first research question and data sets.

Connections To Other Texts and Courses

One of the most prominent factors supporting the preservice teacher candidates’ conceptualization of their teaching practice were the connections they made to concurrent or recent coursework and other texts. Though interesting from a standpoint of reading comprehension—the premier activity in the teaching pedagogy of these secondary level teachers—this trend may very well be a natural outflow of these students’ pedagogical direction. Yet, it is the use of these connections in the conceptualization of their teaching practice that is of interest to the results of this study. Highly supported by the structure of the “Building Task” of Connections, this element was one of the clearest to identify in the
coding and one where the second reviewer and I showed agreement among the coding of the building tasks. Typical of the type of connection to another course setting occurring in the classroom discourse is a statement by S34:

S34: This happens to me all the time. Not when we’re open, but I mean, um, I thought about [another professor’s] class…and, um, the thing that saved her, I think, is that she always preached about how you don’t force someone to contribute, like make sure they have the option. And so that way they can be kind of incognito. The only time I only felt like that was when we had activities where we had to stand up and had to meet in the middle.

In connections such as these, the students linked what they were saying in the moment with another course—often one that many of them have commonly taken—and apply the additional pedagogical insight into the setting of their current course.

This trend continued into the online discourse, as well, when the structure of the discourse did not seek a specific answer to a question, but rather offered a broader opportunity to synthesize thinking. For one particular online discussion topic about the notion of “fake reading” from the Cris Tovani’s text, where a more open response was possible, the preservice teacher candidates connected their own reading practice in the context of Tovani with another course, such as S33:

Though I like to think of myself as a good reader—one who makes an effort to understand what she is reading—I have had the problem in which something I am reading is very complex and difficult to understand. This is perhaps best evidenced in the literary theory and criticism class I took
last semester as one of the required courses for my major. In this class, we
read countless essays from The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism
- these essays spanned anywhere between 20-50 pages (in tiny print) and
were sometimes so in-depth and complex that they took me hours to
read… fake reading was nearly impossible if a good grade was desired.

She also notes, in connecting to this course text that “as Tovani states on page seven,
some students believe ‘good readers are created in the womb; but though I consider
myself to be a good reader, it is not something that just ‘happens’—I have to work at it.”

Further instances of connecting this example to other course work or learning
experiences existed in the online discourse. S31 took the connection farther back into her
own past as a secondary level student, stating:

I found chapter one in Tovani’s book to be very interesting because it
called me out as a fake reader. In junior high and high school, I did not
feel much temptation to “fake read.” The books we read were more or less
interesting to me. I enjoyed reading Shakespeare and American authors.
But with a bit more thought about my reading now, I find that I am doing
more fake reading as a college student than I did as a secondary student.

This example is particularly interesting, considering that her connection made targets the
same age in her own background as she is preparing to teach. She further added, now
connecting more broadly to her college coursework en masse:

With all of the reading assignments in college I make the excuse that I
don’t have the time to read everything. I wish that excuse could work, but
I am really just hurting myself. I have done what Tovani’s students did, fallen asleep, daydreamed, etc, just to get out of reading for class.

Interviews more commonly favored connections to other student ideas, however, within the context of the course, as opposed to other courses or course texts. Likely due to the structure of the interview protocol, placing class discourse at the center of the questions, this trend still offers encouraging insight in that it suggests connections to the ideas of other students are viewed as connections as equally valid as other courses or texts. S46’s interview, for example, yielded comments coded for connections such as: “we group together and give each other ideas, or share our ideas, and it definitely puts in your mind different things you wouldn’t have thought of by yourself.” Additionally, she noted that class discourse “allows you to talk to people maybe you wouldn’t otherwise talk to” with “opinions you wouldn’t otherwise be able to hear.” Very similar statements exist in other interviews, such as S49, where class discourse allowed, “hearing other people’s thoughts and other people’s views. Just because everybody has an initial reaction to an idea or statement, but they’re never, they’re never the same or linear. And hearing other voices I can come to a better understanding, just find a better way to understand an idea or concept.”

Connections to other texts and courses took on a very different form in the focus group discourse. Exploration of connections to other material, such as the current course, other courses, or other texts was often anecdotally linked to the discourse-centered topics of the focus group. In the first focus group, for example, S32 made the online posting itself a vital source of social connection, noting that “if you read through a few of the postings and get an idea of what people are thinking, so, it’s kind of a connection to a
social aspect, I suppose.” Later in the first focus group, when debating the risk in connecting students to controversial topics they may have experienced personally (in this case, child abuse), S36 offered that, “I feel like that may be hard to read, but still the fact that you can empathize with that character it, you become more engulfed in the story just to see how this situation turns out, as opposed to yours, or something like that.” Focus groups most commonly connected with texts of experience in their past as high schools students, such as S30 in the second focus group:

S30: I remember reading To Kill a Mockingbird and I don’t’ remember anything about it, honestly, the plot at all, except our teacher stood up and wrote on the board for like twenty minutes and drew a map of the neighborhood from the description in the book. Like, where this house was and that’s all I remember about the book.

Further anecdotal connections to experiences in other courses exist throughout the focus groups, such as S28 asking the others if they were in another course with another professor on the day they talked about bullying. She said, “We had a day about bullying and we had to go around and say a time when we were bullied and one girl talked about how she and her brother brought a gun to school.” Though somewhat extreme, points such as this elevated the intensity of the discourse and gave it further fuel to frame their discussion on (in the case of this connection) the provided sample of their own classroom discourse to examine. Overall this trend was most clearly supported by the Intertextuality “tool of inquiry” validating the trend nearly every time (due to the direct relationship of that tool of inquiry to the connections building task).
Synthesizing Teaching Identity In the First Person

An overwhelmingly common trend among students in all four forms of discourse data was the use of first person language to synthesize their growing identity as teachers. Though I coded this building task more heavily than the second reviewer as my most prominent building task, she still ranked it as her third highest (with her first two building tasks essentially tied), and we both clearly identified this theme or trend. S34 illustrated this well when responding to the instructor’s (S50’s) prompt to turn to a partner and discuss common strategies they use to help understand a text. S34 offered:

S34: I have to look at it two different ways. I read, like I have to know, am I reading for details? or am I reading for understanding? Like that that (other professor) test, I totally bombed it. I mean, I read for a whole bit, but if I had read for details, then I couldn’t tell you what it was about, but I could tell you a whole lot of details. I have to make up my mind what I’m reading for, but I can’t do both. I don’t know why.

She further added, after brief turn taking with her partner for agreement:

S34: If I read for fun, then I’m not reading for “did the flower open up,” I mean I, not what color was it, I’m reading to find out what the story’s about and the characters and stuff. But I know that some people get help when they read. I’m not one of those people.

Statements such as this, run throughout the classroom discourse and are rich with first person language, placing the speaker forefront in the synthesis of teacher identity, directly conceptualizing teaching practice from their own perspective and through their own ideas.
Several of the online discourse threads offered students the opportunity to synthesize this identity from their own perspective at length. S45, for example, when discussing how they use any type of schema to understand their reading, said:

Like many English majors, math is not my forte. In just about any class I am accustomed to picking up a book and being able to read and understand it with little effort. Math is a different story. I took calculus my senior year of high school, and although I would spend three or four hours on the homework, I would make little or no progress. Although I had passed all the prerequisite classes with a B’s, I realize now that I had very little comprehension for those classes. I couldn’t remember much from year to year because I never went past decoding math processes. I could parrot the problems, but I saw no meaning or purpose to tie it all together. That’s why my homework grades were stellar (I could follow examples in the book), but my test scores were painful.

As further discussion in the unresolved trends from the second reviewer will illustrate, this was something that the second reviewer more clearly coded for “sign systems and knowledge,” placing one sign system above another (English/literature over math or science). Likely influenced by my own perspective as a fellow English major, I coded instances like this very heavily as the synthesis of identity within the major, which fed into the preservice teacher role. For these students, their identity as English major and literature scholars is one of their most vital elements factoring into their construction of their preservice teacher identity.
Interview discourse saw a great deal of first person more prominently identified by the second reviewer as factoring into her views on the unresolved trend of students being pushed from science or math into English/literature. She and I did, however, identify numerous instances where interviewees synthesized views or positions on identity (as a class or as teachers) directly from their own perspective. S41, for example pointed to the diversity of backgrounds in the class:

Um, I guess the biggest strength I see is the diversity of the class. We all come from different backgrounds and because it’s a class that’s supposed to be teaching on how to become teachers, I guess it’s really important to see where different people are coming from and their different backgrounds and how that, how that colors their response to the stimulus we’re given within the class.

Here she synthesizes directly from her position, focusing directly on the merging of identities within the group. S45 offers another example, merging the various backgrounds of her classmates into a larger synthesized identity:

Um, mostly just, I mean, we are all going to be future educators, so I think that’s the social group that we identify with. And I mean, I don’t even think about it like that. These are my friends, these are people who have been in other classes with me. So I think that makes this class a little different. Sure, there may be a handful that I don’t know as well. But, by and large, English Education is a very small major, so we know each other from different contexts and I think that helps us relate what we know of
the material, from our relationships with these people, and it makes
discourse very easy.

Focus groups, especially when the group dynamic was strong—I did not code
very heavily for the identity building task in the third focus group, possibly due to the
very weak social dynamic of the group—offered numerous chances for speakers to put
their own experiences and perspective forefront in the identity synthesizing task. When
discussing why teachers give quizzes over reading assignments, S45 offered a great deal
of her own aspect of this identity as a student and a reader:

S45: I think it’s a lot with the scare factor of teaching. Like, how teachers
try to, like, they won’t, they don’t really try to entice you with how much
you love it, they try to entice you with how much you are going to be
tested over it. And, like, just, I don’t know, I was thinking about that and
how I grew up with that kind of stuff. And I still have pretty high test
anxiety. I just, I hate tests. I hate the feeling of not knowing what they
want me to know. But still, I could like, sit down and tell them pretty
much everything that happened, and they would be able to tell that I get it,
but then when they sit down and it’s on paper, and maybe I just don’t
know, like, the fact question.

S31 offered additional personal perspective that was helpful ammunition for
conceptualizing the teaching practice:

S31: I was going to say that, um, that, like, personal experiences or
whatever that (the instructor) shared and, and, the way that she used
discussion and discourse so much, and that, like, you know, at least once a
day, it was like, turn to your partner, and— (S41: Mm-hmm
(Affirmative))—it wakes you up and you’re like, oh, okay, and so I think
that’s really helpful, and I think whether you’re teaching middle school or
high school or whatever that’s going to be an important thing to like, as
teachers, like, you’re going to know the material— (S41: Mm-hmm
(Affirmative))—and you’re going to know it, hopefully backwards and
forwards and it’s so easy to, like, what most of our, some of our professors
here do just lecture and not bring in everybody else. But I think it’s
important to stop and like, dipstick, and see where everyone else is— (S41:
Yeah, yeah.)—with discussion.

It is interesting to note that, in addition to S41’s supportive interruptions of the “Mm-
hmm” affirmative or other agreement, she concludes this line of discourse with an
interesting point (which I coded as a connection) that it is important to subsequently take
this very form of synthesized identity and compare it to the very same task undertaken by
one’s classmates—the stop and “dipstick” connection that further supports this very
important process of identity construction as preservice teacher candidates.

**Pushing the Discourse, Despite Limitations**

On several instances, students attempted to challenge what seemed to be
limitations to their possible discourse—such as time constraints or topic guidelines in the
online forum, as well as the classroom. This trend very directly intersected the data sets
when considering the interviews and focus groups; the second reviewer and I noted this
especially in those data sets, considering how much critiquing language stands out. Since
any limitations in those two forms of discourse are likely the result of their structure (a direct result of this study) they are somewhat difficult to define; however, comments on this perceived limitation of the discourse are more easily considered in the context of that other trend. Yet, it is the classroom and online discourse that illustrates this much more clearly. Cases in the classroom discourse where students were attempting to assert themselves in otherwise lecture-dominated time most clearly illustrated this attempt to break what felt like limitations in the discourse. S31 made an attempt at this, on one particular day. While brainstorming aloud and on the board about what they considered to be an “authentic test,” S31 hesitantly raised her hand and attempted to elevate the discourse to a level greater than sentence fragment responses by members of the class:

S31: I…I have a question.
S50: Okay.
S31: Okay, I do agree—
S50: Thank you.
S31: —that it’s not a good thing to do. So yes, we—
S50: We’re going to put that under school aren’t we? (Writing on board)
S31: But…In some form aren’t those…aren’t kids going to know how to do that to succeed in further grades, and possibly in other jobs?
S50: Okay, now, if you say for the grades, no. But we need to change the grades. But if you say there’s a job out there that you need to know the skill, yes. If I have people who might go into this job, I’m going to teach them how to do it…
S31’s attempt to engage the instructor (S50) in more lengthy discourse here did not succeed in slowing the pace of the rapid brainstorming aloud and on the board, and also marked a somewhat tense moment of mutual interruption as both S31 and S50 fought for control of the floor. It is also interesting to note that S31 was even initially hesitant to do this at all.

During a more teacher-centered moment following discussion of rubrics and study guides and other forms of content organizers, S34 made very clear attempts at raising her hand to get the instructor’s attention. While lecturing about possibly looking at rubrics and study guides as an opportunity to enjoy the process of innovation in their teaching, rather than viewing it as a restriction—the harder route than simple fill-in-the-blank study guides—S34 makes a very clear interjection without the same hesitation shown by S31 earlier:

S50: …But the ones who said, look at, look at this blank canvass. I always think of art. Okay, here’s this blank canvass, all you have to do is use acrylics, give me something. Wow, is that an open. But what if our artist said, just give me a template to fill in. Tell me exactly what this portrait should be. Tell me exactly what this should look like when I’m done. I mean, we’ve wiped out the whole concept of art, haven’t we?

S34:

S34: Here’s my problem with what we’re talking about. It’s cause I hear this a lot, and I really would like to do it, but the teachers that I’ve had that won’t give study guides, they say we want you to use your thinking, but
then when we do, there’s a certain thing that they’re looking for, and if we
don’t put that certain thing, they count it wrong—

S50: And that’s the poor teaching. It’s not the poor concept behind it that,
yeah, if I say you have to have an anticipitation [pronounced “antici-pi-
tation” to the chuckle of a few students] guide, by golly it’s going to be in
the rubric…

It is interesting to note that S34 jumps in (after being called on quickly, only by name,
without a larger invitation into the discourse) by stating her “problem with what we’re
talking about,” a phrasing that clearly indicates that she has a point to make. And yet, not
even entirely into her track of thinking, the instructor jumps back in and resumes
lecturing. Examples such as these, where students attempted to break through the
lecture-centered teacher discourse to reach greater participation are, additionally, a likely
cause of the critique that some students had about the classroom discourse overall.

Online discourse, however, took this trend in a very different direction. Many of
the online discussion topics were heavily structured and did not necessarily allow for a
great deal of synthesizing and sharing of personal identity, background, or connections.
Yet, those heavily structured online topics showed an interesting effect when students
pushed past those limitations—limitations that are, of course, not manageable in the same
way as classroom discourse. When students challenged those rigid limits, some
interesting connections occurred. S42, for example, offers an interesting example:

After reflecting on the text today through discussion in class, many of us
spoke of previous college courses that we have taken. This discussion
brought me to think about my first semester here at [the University] when
I was a Kinesiology major. I was put into the human anatomy class, in which I really didn’t have enough background knowledge to participate in. Yes, I read the text, but (as the common theme seems to be throughout this course) it just didn’t make sense. There were pictures and a lab course to look at body parts up close, but still no such luck. I believe this is a prime example for decoding. I had no real background in anatomy, besides basic biology, therefore I defaulted to assuming everything was important and didn’t comprehend 75 percent of what I had “learned.”

This example makes clear the connection to class, makes clear the connection to another course taken by the student, and very clearly weaves it into the discussion topic—“a prime example for decoding.” This example stands out from its contemporaries, of which the majority read more like a report on decoding.

S29 offers an additional example along these lines—also of interest due to a potential intersection with her non-traditional student identity:

I wonder if we don’t all find ourselves at times decoding or “word calling” and not really comprehending. When I read the newspaper, after some articles or even just a paragraph I stop and ask myself what I just read. To comprehend we find some connection, even before we begin sometimes. For example if I’m reading the paper and I see an article from Mississippi, a state I lived in for 15 years suddenly my interested is piqued, my mind more focused. During reading, again say a newspaper editorial or even Tovani, we can question on whether we share that point of view, does that seem true from our experiences?
Here, she makes the same types of connections to the course content and personal background and, additionally, to the course text. It is interesting to note the reference to living in Mississippi “for 15 years;” however, in this case, does not make those 15 years of life as clearly linked to her non-traditional identity as her earlier example from the previous section. Overall, examples such as this, injected into otherwise formal and factual retelling of information in the decoding postings, allowed for a greater degree of depth in the responses when students challenged those standards in the posting and offered more in their responses.

**Experiences Framing the Context of Conceptualization**

**Experiences Framing the Context of Conceptualization: Overview**

This second section responds to the second research question:

b) What relevant experiences frame the context of their conceptualization?

The following figure isolates the themes or trends of this particular section only:

<table>
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*Figure 4.4.* Isolated mapping of the themes or trends associated with the second research question. This figure illustrates how various identified themes or trends map into the study's second research question.
Non-Traditional Student Identity

An interesting and somewhat unexpected trend in the discourse data centered around the identity of the non-traditional students in the course, and their expression of this identity within the discourse. Though identified by the second reviewer as well, she more commonly identified this trend as a “Relationships” building task—relationships among classmates. Resolving this inconsistency involved reaching the understanding that though she and I coded such instances differently, we agreed that there was indeed an apparent trend involving the non-traditional students. She agreed that such instances were viable examples for coding as identity and I agreed that in some cases they did impact the relationships of those participating in the discourse. It was in this fashion that a definition of the theme became possible, especially when considering the upcoming examples from the focus group, including the fifth group group’s example. Of four non-traditional students in the course, three (each female, mothers, and outside the typical age of undergraduates in this course) showed a great deal more evidence of this aspect of their identity, and were a great deal more willing to inject it in the discourse, in the online postings, as well as interviews and focus groups, as opposed to the classroom discourse. Examples of this in the classroom discourse were rare and not necessarily as prominently expressed as they were in the other discourse forms. At one point in class, in a large group recap following small group discussion on learning styles, S34 stated:

S34: This is a big issue for me because it took me 35 years to figure out how I learned. In high school when I had to take notes, I could memorize and I could take tests, I could do really good, but after the semester’s over, I couldn’t remember anything. And I’ve just now figured out that I can’t
multitask in the classroom. Like, I can’t, I either have to listen or I take notes, but I won’t retain what I do if I take notes, or vice versa. So highlight doesn’t distract me, so I can highlight because I don’t have to pay attention, and later I can go back and study what I highlighted and I can retain, but I can’t write. If I write, I focus on what I’m writing and I don’t hear.

Though very much couched in a description of her own identity as a learner, the “it took me 35 years” reference, indicating her non-traditional age compared to the rest of the class is quite clear. It is also interesting to note that comments such as this, subtly referring to her age, do not also reference her status as a mother.

This subtly extended to one of the other non-traditional students, S29 (who consented to classroom discourse collection only), who noted in class when discussing the risk some teachers may face covering both feminist and race-related issues, that “You can’t discuss it in the south. I lived in Mississippi—” (S50 attempts to interrupt with “Okay—”) “—for fifteen years and you can’t discuss it in the south without people getting upset.” In this instance, it was her reference to living in the south for fifteen years following her formal education. Further statements in the online discourse mirrored this age-centered hint at the non-traditional identity, such as S35 stating in her online post about developing her schema for learning, “At 38 years old I knew [math] was a subject I would have to have a decoder ring to succeed so I gave up.” Somewhat different in that comments like this more specifically state the age, as compared to the classroom discourse, the online discourse did not require “inferring” the age of non-traditional students to the same degree as classroom discourse.
Where the non-traditional student identity appeared clearly was within the interviews and focus groups. S27 injected a number of comments into her interview responses, such as: “You know, I’m a returning student” and “when I was in college my first time, you know, back in several years ago” and “since I’ve been back in school.” This was unusual in that S27 did not appear to reflect this at all in the classroom discourse. S34, however, embraced this identity entirely in her interview, offering even further insight into how this discourse identity has melded her identity with her fellow preservice teachers:

Oh, wow, it’s everything. ‘Cause, I’m, I’m very much an open person and very comfortable with my life and my choices, and stuff I’ve been through. So, I’m real quick to share and, uh, I have really, the thing that’s been really surprising for me is that I didn’t expect to make friends, ‘cause I knew there was such an age difference, and I’ve never viewed, this thing. I have this big thing about boundaries between children and adults and I have never viewed myself as a friend of a younger person. And I actually have made, I have about 25 really good friends that actually come to the house, study, I cook for them. Matter of fact, we’re doing that tomorrow. And so, it started with discussions in class, and, so it’s just really weird how it’s all worked out. But the discussions is what, um, allowed us all to share, and that’s been, like, the best thing about coming here which is totally shocking.

Here she specifically shares not only a vital part of her identity, but her comfort and confidence in engaging with her peers—she doesn’t hide this aspect of her identity at all.
Several examples in the discourse exist where members of the class (presumably those who have visited her home and socialized with her) briefly ask about or comment about her children. S34 also, as illustrated in the upcoming section on the use of personal background in the building of student conceptualization of their identity as preservice teachers, shared more in the online discourse than any other format.

Several additional elements support this trend in the focus groups. Where S27 maintained a similar level of engagement with this identity in the focus groups, S34 made it very forefront in her comments about how discourse helps her build her view on teaching reading and high school students. In response to some critique of the classroom environment of the course, she stated:

Like, I look around and I see the zoning. Like, for me it’s different, because, probably you could say the class is more geared towards me, I feel, than everybody. I feel, I really get a lot out of it ‘cause I can see, like, like, she’s given, I mean she’s all the time giving me ideas of stuff to do, ‘cause I haven’t experienced it. So I’m, it just hit me. That’s where the breakdown is, I think. ‘Cause I hear a lot of you saying stuff like that.

Here, she makes clear that her place and perspective as a non-traditional student requires “catch-up” assistance, things S34 claims to not have experienced, as she is not a recent high school student and current undergraduate.

Further focus group discourse from the fifth group offered one very interesting additional element on this trend. The fifth group, containing no non-traditional students, demonstrated that it was very much aware of this identity and its presence in the large group discourse. S31 took the lead in this line of thinking, saying:
S31: I think it’s really interesting to have, I was going to say, the different generations. But, the fact that we have three, at least, non-traditional students. I’ve never really had that before in such a small class and, particularly, one of them who’s very open and chatty and, like, it’s nice because I think we see 18 to 22 year-olds all the time. (S43: Yeah) And, you know, we just have that, like, we’re in our own little microcosm of, like, what’s important to us, but then when we can open up and see that, I don’t know, and then like the other two ladies in back that had the courage to come back and get more—I just think it’s really cool.

This was particularly unusual in that it very clearly contextualized the presence of the traditional students relative to the non-traditional students and very clearly illustrated the value of the non-traditional student perspective—as well as the respect traditional students appear to have for them. It is, however, interesting to note that the comment about “the other two ladies in the back” is in reference to S27 and S29—not S34, who is the more outspoken about her non-traditional identity and has invited classmates into her home. This may very well mean she is simply more accepted, socially, because of this.

**Looking Back On Class Discourse and Critique**

Classroom discourse, itself, appeared to be a vital experience contributing to student conceptualization of their identity as teachers. The second reviewer and I most commonly coded instances of this as “Activities” or “Relationships” (where instances of this impacted preservice teacher candidate interactions as classmates). A great deal of discrepancy exists among the level of critique the preservice teachers consider
appropriate to the discourse, or even the very level, quantity, or structure of the classroom discourse. It is likely reasonable to assume that any class, outside of a true lecture-based setting, would boast a spectrum of opinions on what that environment should be like. Multiple instances exist where student discourse in small groups is productive and on task, but reveals frustration with the overall structure of the class discourse; S29, S32, S30, and S43 offer this example from a small group conversation (the initial “group grounding” about what they think about students who teachers may feel “can’t learn”):

S29: I think when she say, what are you not hearing, you won’t be hearing kids saying, I can’t do it, necessarily. Or it’s too hard. So…you might want to.

S32: I think a lot of kids say the teacher teaches, er, acts like they’re dumber or something. Like you won’t have kids, if you teach at a really good school, say that he just talks down to me or something.

S30: A little more confident. Yeah. I don’t know. I’m sorry, guys, I don’t feel good. (Laughter). I think that they would ask each other questions. You know how there’s always the kid in the room that’s like, how do you do this?

S32: So they might work together if they know, if they’re all doing the same and they’re all the same? (Pause)

S29: There are kids who think they’re all stupid in things and they’ll say, I can’t do that, or, I’m not good in this. But they all believe that they’re A students, they’ll believe that they can, perhaps, and maybe they’ll challenge each other.

This example yields elements discussed in other trends (e.g. the social language of agreement, first person perspective, etc.) but at the end offers a clear statement wondering about the structure of the discourse that exemplifies the greater need for structure felt by others.

Another example typical of shorter moments of classroom discourse criticized by students was a “turn to your partner” moment where S42 and S45 did not take the topic of possible connections to ideas about Admiral Byrd and the South Pole seriously:

S45: I didn’t see how it was spelled.
S42: Uh…daydreaming. Everything makes sense when you daydream.
S45: (Chuckle) Yes.
S42: That’s my opinion. My answer. If she’d written it on the board I would have been like, that’s not how you spell it.
S45: (Chuckle) Anyone could get confused about it since it’s not spelled the same way.

Though making an attempt at working with the discussion topic, both students reveal that they weren’t entirely paying attention. Along the same lines, another instance of the instructor asking the class large group what they thought of the “Say Anything” strategy yielded legitimate responses, connections, and student responses directly from their own synthesizing perspective, yet is typical of an instance where students felt they did not have enough time to respond:
S50: As far as the strategy goes, did you like it? Why? And did it help?

(Pause) Okay, S41.

S41: I thought it was, it was really, really unique. I’d never heard of anything like this before.

S50: Where you stop and say something?

S41: Yeah. And it worked, I think it worked a lot with us. I see this as something, like, with younger students. It could evolve really, really quickly. So, I think it would be really important to hammer, like you said, this is what we’re going to do.

S50: And I never once had trouble, but I was always good about what do I see, what do I hear, on every strategy and they were pretty good about it. What else about the strategy?

S34: As soon as forget what I read, and I think this is a really good strategy to keep remembering the different details and the different things that are going on.

S50: (Pause) Can it be used with informational text? I think it’s almost better for informational texts. Okay, S29.

S29: I was thinking how middle schoolers always like to comment and it’s not always appropriate, so you’ve given them an opportunity to have their comment and then go on.

These short responses, though rich in their own right with opportunities (though not as rich as longer moments of discourse) to synthesize thinking, were limited by the large
group format of the discourse, and teacher-centered time that followed immediately after this segment of classroom discourse.

Where this perceived limitation in the discourse became clearly problematic was in the interview and focus groups. In S35’s interview, showed a great deal of criticism of this structure and environment. She stated, when asked about class discourse events that stood out in her mind that:

I don’t know. I… (Pause) Again, the talking at, and not the talking with really stands out, because I feel like, especially with your definition of discourse there, there was some level of, of caring or feeling. Even when talking with the teacher about, another student asked her to look over something and it just seemed very distant. So I think that I’ve kind of distanced myself in [this course] as well, so the discourse. I don’t, I don’t know. I don’t feel like it goes with that definition at all, or even my definition of discourse, experienced I’ve had with it. I don’t know. She was both very hesitant to embrace the classroom discourse, as were several others, and felt distant from it. In the focus group that S35 shared with S34, it was S34 who actually responded to S35 about this very topic. S35 expressed this criticism of the class environment, saying:

It’s kind of taught me how I’m not going to do it, to be honest. (S34 nodding) ‘Cause, like I said, she just talks the whole time and then she asks us one random question, it seems like, and we’re, I don’t know, I tune out a lot, to be honest. And… So I don’t know. It definitely hasn’t been the discussion in (this course) that’s gotten me—
Yet, at this point it is S34 who interrupted her, in defense of the classroom environment and its discourse:

I see that, I see everybody doing that. Like, I look around and I see the zoning. Like, for me it’s different, because, probably you could say the class is more geared towards me, I feel, than everybody. I feel, I really get a lot out of it ‘cause I can see, like, like, she’s given, I mean she’s all the time giving me ideas of stuff to do, ‘cause I haven’t experienced it. So I’m, it just hit me. That’s where the breakdown is, I think. ‘Cause I hear a lot of you saying stuff like that.

Despite this perceived limitation, S34 continues to glean value from a structure that S35 criticizes. S35 even mentions this very focus group comment in her interview, made by S34, seemingly acknowledging the value of the class’ structure, but still asserting her critique of its limitations, when discussing where she felt the classroom discourse could have been stronger (after an assurance from me that her response would be confidential, no less):

I think if she would stop talking more, and maybe presented, how to put it nicely, I guess. Well, like S34 said, she related more to, um, what the instructor was saying than some of us younger folk, um, but I think if she would have just stopped talking when she said she was going to stop talking and let us, like, even just working on our lesson plan. She said she was going to give us time for that and she just talked the whole time. Um, even for just discussions when she wanted us to discuss stuff, we were so used to talking and even at times I felt like she even talked over us, it
seemed like. Issues, questions we had weren’t addressed, so then we didn’t have that, that connection with her for, to have a good discussion or even have, I don’t know, any reasonable discourse. I feel like, I don’t know.

While it is not immediately clear to what degree this critique of the classroom discourse is legitimate, its presence is indeed real, and the second reviewer and I located evidence of this theme or trend across the data sets. It suggests a disconnect between what the instructor and the preservice teacher candidates each consider to be a reasonable or useful amount of discourse in which to build and explore their content and identity as preservice teachers. Regardless of the extent to which the critique of the discourse may or may not be legitimate, it does reveal that students without this critique find value in the discourse, and students with this critique would like to have more discourse in order to find more value in the class.

Injecting Personal Background Into Identity

One of the easiest formats for students to inject their own personal background into the growing conceptualization of their preservice teacher identity was during the individual interviews, which included a number of questions probing their personal background and experiences with discourse. Clearly, the structure of the interview and focus groups makes this a likely theme or trend, but the second reviewer and I shared the view that it existed in the in-class and online discourse, as well (perhaps our sensitivity to it was cultivated in the interviews and focus groups). Two students (seen by both myself and the second reviewer) in particular exemplified this very well, demonstrating a high
degree of willingness to share about their background, making it viable ammunition with which to synthesize thinking on the role of discourse later in the interviews. S45 shares a great deal about her background as a student in a very small, Christian, parochial school:

Um, well, my school is very small. So we had small class sizes, so we were always encouraged to ask questions if we didn’t understand things. And, so, I mean with such a small teacher and student ratio it was always really easy to ask questions. And as I got older I figured out that students who didn’t understand things, didn’t understand them because they weren’t as willing to ask questions. And I was the obnoxious kid with fifty questions, so I mean, I don’t know, I learn from personal experience and I learned that if students aren’t asking those questions, they aren’t going to learn. So I would say discourse is very important. You shouldn’t just teach at students, they need to be free to interact with you.

She later shared more about her own views of the use of discourse, when discussing how it has facilitated her engagement with her classmates, very much in line with this background from her small school:

And so I think discourse, like, we’re all in the same group of people, like, preteachers, so we all have this mindset of wanting to instruct others or wanting to facilitate discussion and learning. So I think we’re a lot more open. Generally teachers are good communicators, so I love being in classes with teachers because they all want to talk about things. They’re generally very open people and they like to communicate new thoughts and ideas and I love that. I mean, I’m in some classes where students have
a hard time articulating their thoughts and it just, it can be kind of frustrating, but it makes me wonder, how prepared are they to go into the world if they were never even taught the way we want to teach others.

As someone who is very confident in her schooling background—something students from more “traditional” high schools might look down upon—S45 clearly sees value in discourse-rich learning, including questions, and has further built that conceptualization of teaching accordingly.

S41 felt that individual background was the backbone of the class discourse and even the very class environment.

Um, I guess the biggest strength I see is the diversity of the class. We all come from different backgrounds and because it’s a class that’s supposed to be teaching on how to become teachers, I guess it’s really important to see where different people are coming from and their different backgrounds and how that, how that colors their response to the stimulus we’re given within the class.

Both the second reviewer and I felt that it was particularly interesting that he not only notes that it is this background identity merging into the larger dynamic is important, but that it is connected to “how to become teachers.” This is even further interesting when considering that S41 was one of few students to share information about his personal family background in class in a way that directly connected it to the teaching of reading and the discussion at hand. He shared in class, rather passionately:

S41: One thing I’ve been wondering a lot is, especially with this motivational stuff, is that every time I read this stuff I think of my little
brother. He, he has hearing problems. So his reading, he thinks a lot slower than he should. He hates reading. Like, with the passion of the sun he hates reading more than anything. (Laughter) And I don’t know, like, when he does sit down to read, he does it really well. And I just sit and wonder as I read this, what can I do with this to help him and make that little brat read something. (Lots of laughter)

Though he made use of some levity when approaching this topic in the large group discussion response to what they “wondered” about reading, when beginning Chapter 7 of the Tovani text, (something he had “been wondering a lot”), he here raises a very valid question about motivating struggling readers, yet grounds it entirely in his own family and personal background. Without the use of his own background he likely could have approached the topic with quite the same degree of insight and personal passion.

S34, in her online posting on fake reading, becomes “really personal really quick” when offering her personal background into a topic meant to further shape their thinking as teachers. She says:

Well, I am going to get really personal really quick. I feel comfortable with the class and most people in the class I would tell anything to and trust my children with. Having said that, my childhood was filled with violence and abuse from my father who was a violent alcoholic. My afternoons after school were spent at my mother’s gymnastics gym and my evenings were spent at home filled with violence. My hands were full just trying to survive through violent episodes that always ended with either my brother, my mother or myself being beaten. Considering the
home life I had, there was absolutely no time for homework so I had to get to school early to do homework. You can imagine that I rarely read complex assignments all the way through. I did not have access to Cliff Notes so I had to skim through the rest that I did not finish. I managed to make all A’s until high school when the homework load increased drastically. My grades totally reflected the homework load. If it was a class with lots of reading I would come out with a B or C. If it was a class that did not have a lot of outside reading I would get an A. I guess in summary I was not a good fake reader.

If ever there were a riskier offering of personal background into the mix of the classroom dynamic, this would be the case. Yet, it is important to note the comfort in sharing that she reveals (again, S34 is the non-traditional student who has invited her peers into her home) and also the references to her non-traditional student identity, as well (e.g. “…I would tell anything to and trust my children with”).

Focus groups made this factor problematic. Personal background often intertwined with the first person synthesis of the teacher’s role, and even helped to substantiate it. Yet, it was done so without the depth shown already—or the extreme depth demonstrated by S34. S30 noted in her focus group:

S30: Yeah, I would say that there’s definitely more of a connection in classes where it’s like, not even like (one particular course), but when I took (another particular course) with (another professor) there was only five people in it and it was, like, majorly, all we did was talk to each other.
Here, her connections to her personal background, as well as other coursework, is brief. Likewise, S39 said that “I just know from being in classes and being a student, like, those things kind of mattered very little to me as compared to having a personal connection with a teacher, like, the teacher enjoying what they are doing, having, you know, knowledge, not being afraid to kind of go off topic a little bit and stray into, like, the conversational and somewhere else, but kind of deal with it, and engage people in it.”

Here, S39 merely refers to just “being in classes and being a student” without going into the greater depth.

It was actually S45, with her small parochial school experience, that offered the greatest degree of personal background depth, much in line with her individual interview. In her focus group she shares a great deal of her personal background when she and her peers were in the thick of discussion how class discourse is helping them conceptualize teaching:

S45: My teacher had grading rubrics, my lit teacher, and that is what I miss desperately at college. Because it was, it was very spelled out for us to see and she’d, like, she graded and she’d let us see the rubric so that we knew we’re not just getting, like, a paper grade on that. Like, I just got a paper back where it said, you have a solid understanding of the poem, and you did a really good job breaking it down, but, you lack cohesion and clarity. And I’m like, those are really vague statements. (S30, also in the group, laughs) And then he’s like scribbled, like, all over my three or four pages of writing, and I’m just like, this isn’t even coherent to me. And,
actually I get to go have a meeting with him after this class because I’m like, all right, this has to end.

There is richness in her anecdote here, but also a depth that illustrates the experience personally and also pedagogically on behalf of her literature teacher. And it was in sharing a personal experience like this, to this degree of depth, that allowed for a much greater injection of her personal background into the larger task of synthesizing things on teaching than many of the more common, briefer, elements.

**Engaging Through Discourse to Collectively Shape Conceptualization**

**Engaging Through Discourse to Collectively Shape Conceptualization: Overview**

This third section of the findings or results of the study responds to this dissertation study’s third research question; following a discussion of the third research question, this chapter’s discussion will shift to an examination of the unresolved theme or trend identified by the second reviewer of students being driven from science or math by science or math texts. Again, this dissertation study’s third research question:

\[
\text{c) How do they engage with one another through classroom discourse to collectively shape a developing conceptualization of teaching?}
\]

As mapped in Figure 4.1, the following figure isolates the themes or trends of this particular section only:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question with Accompanying Theme or Trend</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building &quot;D&quot; Via Identity Synthesis with Interwoven Elements</td>
<td>More common in small group discourse; very rare in responses to S50</td>
<td>Present, depending on discussion thread, but often not possible.</td>
<td>Used when interviewee is comfortable thinking aloud</td>
<td>Used by the more dynamic focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Languages that Agree and Probe/Question the Discourse</td>
<td>Similar to focus group discourse; strongest in small group discourse</td>
<td>Used to seek reply in the online forum (or for S50 to suggest revision)</td>
<td>Basically non-existent in the individual interview format</td>
<td>Used to continue a line of thinking, continue synthesizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections Leading to Synthesizing or Hypothesizing</td>
<td>Often quicker, less synthesizing time prior to hypothesizing (if possible at all)</td>
<td>Present, depending on discussion thread, but often not possible.</td>
<td>Common part of responses to later interview questions (after Gee quote)</td>
<td>If present, used in focus groups most commonly after Gee quote, when responding to clip</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.5. Isolated mapping of the themes or trends associated with the third research question. This figure illustrates how various identified themes or trends map into the study’s third research question.*

**Building “D” Via Identity Synthesis (And Interwoven Building Tasks)**

Most heavily resonant with Gee’s four tools of inquiry were three sets of themes and trends that appeared to allow students to engage more heavily through discourse, working collectively, to continue to build this growing conceptualization of their identities as teachers. The second reviewer and I shared a commonality in the coding that supported these three themes or trends; language from Gee’s tools of inquiry ultimately made possible a common description of these themes or trends. The first involved no less than the very construction of “D” Discourse identity in areas of the discourse data where the coding showed a very clear overlapping of the seven building tasks. This was consistent with Gee’s views (see also the second and third chapters) informing his discourse model that “D” discourses are forms of Discourse that are “a form of life, a way
of being in the world, a way of being a ‘person like us,’ in terms of action, interaction, values, thought and language” (1990, p. 174-175). Often a perplexing point in the data analysis and a source of conversation between myself and the second reviewer, to the end of “sorting out” our common language, these moments of interwoven building revealed the rich complexity consistent with a “D” discourse. One of the richer examples from the classroom discourse was a moment where S34, S41, S44, and S49 (S34 even noted, when joining this group that she was “busing up the boys”). This particular example, partially mentioned already, involved discussion of what to do with students making potentially risky connections among topics in class discussion. The exchange begins with S34 asking a question (coded as an activity), initiating the exchange, moved through a period of first person based synthesis (coded as identity), moved through a period of humor (coded for overlapping relationships and politics) and ending with connecting synthesis (coded for connections):

S34: Does everybody, when you study something or when you read something, do you do that? Do you make connections while you read?
S41: No. That was one of my wondered things. I didn’t think about, all the lit classes I have, I never thought about trying to make connections between the different stories.
S34: I mean, I do that with everything.
S41: I just try to do it through straight memorization.
S34: But people know that. I mean, how many times do you have to hear stories about my family?
S41: Right. I just didn’t think about it before. I suppose.
S44: See, I don’t think I do any of this stuff other than consciously.

S49: I think it’s subconsciously. I do it.

S34: I wonder if it’s a boy-girl thing.

S41: It must be a boy-girl thing.

S44: [S41] is right here.

S41: Hey, [S34], maybe it’s an age thing.

S49: Yeah. (Laughter)

S34: I don’t know. An age thing has made my brain so small.

S41: I was joking.

S34: I don’t think we should talk with that.

S41: So I agree. (Longer pause) I don’t know. It feel like there’s also an issue, like, that was one of my wonder questions. If you get into too many, trying to make too many personal connections to what you’re doing in class, especially if you’re doing something like overcoming adversity, where do you draw the line to like the realm of inappropriate? Like, oh, my dad used to hit me when I was little, and that might stir up, making connections to your life, yeah, yeah right.

S34’s initial question followed a topic-shifting pause. The first person centered synthesizing of their identity as teachers here is very consistent with other descriptions of the trend. What is interesting is the shift from this point into the gender- and age-centered humor, which begins with S34 (the female in the group of four, and the non-traditional student in the group of four) asking if it’s “a boy-girl thing” in order to open the line of thinking—essentially putting her gender and age (non-traditional student)
identity on the line. Yet, when the flood gates open on the humor, these four take it in stride, allowing the exchange to continue, until S41 brings the group back together to synthesize some final thinking about the topic. It is also worth noting that this was the example shared in the focus group setting.

The online discourse offered several interwoven elements where the interweaving of building tasks yielded the presence of the “Discourses” tool of inquiry. S46 offered an interesting post with several interwoven building tasks:

S35, I’ve definitely felt your pain when it comes to poetry. Last year, I took a class where we constantly had to interpret poems, and most of the time, I was at a loss of words. I felt like I was reading Portuguese or something! It was just ridiculous... And yes, it didn’t make me feel too great either. Like you, I also talked with a friend in an effort to better understand it. So don’t feel too bad, because I’ve been there too! 

Beginning with a direct address, in response to S35’s prior post, S46 initiates the reply (coded for activities), shares personal background as a reader and as a student (coded for identity) and concludes with a direct statement of comfort to a classmate (coded for relationships). This post seemingly accomplished in one paragraph what many others took multiple or larger paragraphs to accomplish in terms supporting the “D” identity shared among members of this group.

In a portion of her post on decoding, S33 also made use of multiple interwoven building tasks to the point of heavily resonating with the Discourses tool of inquiry:

I have always known that some people have more difficulty understanding or retaining read information than others, but I never knew why this was
or what could be done about it. As a future educator, I think it is important to know the answers to both these things.

S33 continues:

In chapter three, Tovani explains that decoding something is not the same thing as comprehending it and that “decoding is just the beginning” (17). I agree with these statements, for although a student may be able to have a “surface” understanding of words written on a page, this doesn’t mean these same students know what the text is actually saying. Tovani explains that though deep structure cuing systems are expected to be used by older students, they are not taught to these students (18). This surprised me at first, but once I thought about it, I agreed—there is a big change in the type and length of reading material once students transition from middle school to high school and then again from high school to college, and though we are told that the next level of schooling will be more difficult and demanding, we are not usually given strategies of how to deal with the situation.

Here, and in what follows in several places below (with coding indicated parenthetically), she begins with her own first person centered view of her perspective and identity as a learner and as a future teacher (coded for identity) and moves into a direct connection with the third chapter of the Tovani text (coded for connections), and then moves into how it “surprised [her] at first, but once [she] thought about it” (coded for activities, in that it began both a critique and also a think-aloud sequence), she was able to complete her synthesizing and reach a conclusion (coded for connections, as well). The richness of
this example is made all the more interesting by the fact that S33 was a notoriously shy individual in class and in her focus group.

In the interviews, this interweaving of building tasks happened commonly when the preservice teacher candidates took the time, or requested the time, to think and organize their thoughts before offering a reply to questions. When asked about her historical background with discourse as a child, S35 offered a lengthy but rich response:

Trying to think. (Pause) I think growing up, well at home we definitely, um, even now we sit around the dinner table for an hour after we’re done eating, and we’ll just be, not only talking about our day, but just anything my brother, he’s a very intellectual guy and he’ll just throw something out that he’s been thinking about all day and we’ll just discuss it for, for like an hour or so. Um, but, I guess in terms of school… We did a lot of, uh, small group work, rather than whole class discussions or, um, I think discourse played a huge role throughout everything. I’m more of an introvert, though, so I didn’t, I guess, participate as much as, um, those around me. But I think discourse has been kind of a huge influence through my life, just listening to, um, I don’t know, everything going on around me. I can’t really think of any instances, especially in the school system until well, maybe, high school. [a teacher], I took a discussion/argumentation class, and I think that’s when I really opened up because it was a teacher who actually cared about what I was thinking. He would read an article in a newspaper and just be like, what do you guys think, and throw out some ideas, but I think it’s just who the dynamic of
the class, too, and you know students so well. S34 was talking earlier when you know the people around you well, then you’re going to open up more and care more about their thoughts and feelings.

Here, she begins with two references to her thinking process (coded for activities) and opens with the sociopolitical perspective of her family unit (coded for politics) and in mentioning school, refers to two distinct discourse activities, “small group work” and “whole class discussions” (coded for activities), moves into her own first person perspective as “an introvert” and the influence of discourse in her life (coded for identity), specifically references a teacher and specific course within her experience (coded for connections) and concludes with a direct statement about S34 and her classmate connections she has built (coded for relationships). Also, considering that this comes from an interview where a great deal was devoted to critique of the class environment, this example is particularly interesting.

S41’s interview offered two additional examples, each shorter, with a variety of complex interwoven building tasks revealing his rich role in the Discourses of his group:

Um…Hmm… Uh, give me a second to think about it. (Me: That’s fine.)

(Pause) I think the one thing that sticks out in my mind was, our, uh, vocabulary activity because that’s the one time where I felt like, um, I had to talk to people about what I saw our assignment as, and I had to use creatively the things I knew that I could put forth and present to other people and it was kind of taking a risk because a lot of people might have seen my activity as not worthwhile or not very good just based on what
they think works for them or what they think would work in their classroom.

Here, he begins by initiating his thinking aloud (coded for activities), and references a specific vocabulary activity from class (coded both as an activity and a connection), comments that he used “things [he] knew that [he] could put forth to other people” (coded for connections) and concluded with the views others may have, personally, on his thinking (coded for classmate relationships). Additionally, a further example from his interview shows equal complexity:

Um… Well, when I talked, when we discuss our stuff in class and we see, like I see a lot of different communication types and I see, um, a lot of different ways that people react. The whole turn to your partner thing, when I sit next to S49, he and I have a lot different discussion than when I talk to S27 on the other side of me, or S29. It’s just based on who I’m talking to at a given time that changes the answer I receive because of, uh, maybe their perceptions they have. So, it’s really helped me see that everybody has a different point of view based on where they are coming from.

In this example he reveals a great deal of classmate connections by name (coded for relationships), and makes specific references to their various points of view (coded for relationships) and “where they are coming from” (coded for identity). The complexity of these examples was entirely consistent with S41’s focus group participation and a number of his classroom discourse examples, and especially clear evidence that the interweaving
of the building tasks was validated by the Discourses tool of inquiry as work done by the discourse to shape student conceptualization of their teaching.

**Social Languages that Agree, Probe, and Question the Discourse**

Another of the four tools of inquiry that validated the coded building tasks was “Social Languages.” This tool of inquiry made clear the practices at work in the discourse that served functions such as agreement, questioning, probing for further responses, facilitating humor, and even driving the very pace of the discourse. This was one in which the second reviewer and I shared a similar fascination and agreed that it offered interesting potential for further research, perhaps more into the linguistic realm. Alone, any of these elements would seem to lack the power and potential of other themes and trends. When viewed more cohesively by the tool of inquiry of Social Languages, however, they become a very powerful binding element in the discourse keeps it energized. One trend under this category, the “thinking aloud” mode of discourse was speculative, sometimes used “I think” quite literally, and made very clear the fact that the discourse was a “work in progress” and very much synthesizing “in the moment.” One exchange between S28 and S27 revealed repeated thinking aloud in the form of “I guess” statements:

S37: I guess, about learning seven to eight words, like something new, but I guess I could figure that out from the numbers. People can memorize seven numbers at the most.

S28: Yeah. I guess what she was saying about prefixes and suffixes. I knew that, but I hadn’t really thought about it.
S37: Yeah, that was interesting. Like those words per texts. Like, um, trace and things like that. I would have just assumed that they knew it. I guess I never really thought about what they might not understand.

S28: Yeah. Little words and directions and do they understand. Yeah.

Another exchange, between S31 and S39, revealed an intense degree of questioning—somewhat more pronounced than common instances, but an excellent example for the purpose of illustrating the questioning—during an activity of rewriting Shakespearean passages. Naturally, as English majors, these students dove right into the activity and some of Shakespeare’s notoriously popular scenes. For these two, it was the Hamlet graveyard scene:

S39: So, this is right after the graveyard, isn’t it?

S31: No, it’s before the graveyard, isn’t it? See, in the graveyard he’s already dead.

S39: And he’s digging in the grave?

S31: Cause they’re digging a grave. (Pause to listen to S50 announce something)

S39: (Reading aloud softly, hard to make out). Oh, because then he does his to be or not to be.

S31: (Listening to S50 still) So, don’t read chapter 5?

S39: We can just write, like…

S31: I’m just going, it’s not a big deal, line-by-line, right?

S39: We don’t have to write line by line, just a large scale about, kind of a summary.
S31: I don’t know. It’s a play. Maybe we should keep it as a play.

S39: No way.

S31: Yeah way. Can we go fast enough? (Pause; listening) Okay, so I’m down where the queen’s like, did you receive him well, I mean, did he receive you well? And Rosencrantz says, mostly a gentleman. So I think she was trying to say did he talk to you. And he would say, yeah. And then his other, Guildenstern, adds, yeah, but it wasn’t easy. (Pause) Isn’t there a play or a book called *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*?

S50: Yes. Well,

S31: Is that right?

S50: It’s a play.

In addition to the obvious intensity of the constant questions by both S31 and S39 that fuel and further the discourse, there are several other interesting aspects to this selection where the questioning does a bit more than meets the eye. At one point they attempt to discern an announcement by the instructor, working the same questioning into that tangent; additionally, they use the same questioning to make the connection to the play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. This behavior is a particularly interesting aspect of the discourse validated by the Social Languages tool of inquiry because, had these two made the conscious choice to use different language (e.g. avoid asking questions, or speak in more direct statements only), they might not have fueled their own discourse with the same energy and focus.

In their online post assessing the readability of selected texts, a number of students made responses to their texts indicating how surprised they were with the results
of their readability scoring. While this might seem cliché on the surface in that it happened in enough of the posts in this topic to seem almost overly typical, it appeared to directly fuel the response that followed to a degree that it made a more substantial connection with the assessed text than those posts that were a great deal more “cut and dry” about the readability assessment (and lacking the connections and placement of the readability assessment task within their conceptualization of teaching). Examples of reaction statements from 13 of the 24 consenting students’ posts:

S33: The results of this readability test surprised me…

S45: I was actually surprised

S43: I was a little surprised at the results of my readability test…

S34: Wow! I was so surprised when I saw the reading level for my book…

S46: I guess this sort of surprised me…

S42: I was really surprised because I’m pretty sure this book isn’t introduced to students until their senior year in high school…

S31: I was surprised at the low reading level for this book…

S49: I supposed I was initially shocked to see that Ernest Hemingway read only at a high 4th grade level…

S41: That surprised me a bit because based on the themes and moral dilemmas talked about in the book, I wouldn’t’ve pegged the book for early high school…

S30: The results of the readability test on this book REALLY surprised me!
S35: This was not a huge shock to me, but at the same time was rather surprising.

S37: As I was doing the readability for this text, I was surprised at the results.

S28: I was surprised to see that it was at a 10th grade level…

Another very interesting aspect of these Social Languages in the online discourse came from the instructor (S50). While the student posts in this discussion topic were very heavily structured (they summarized texts and generated questions suitable for students), it was the instructor’s responses that offered many examples of the praising (coded for significance, in that such elements make another’s discourse significant), offered feedback or critique on the student’s post (coded for relationships—between teacher and student in the course) and asked questions in order to probe for further student thinking (coded for activities, in that such elements attempted to initiate an additional discourse event or activity). Examples of S50’s responses:

To S31: Thanks-really like Q3 connections to today. (coded for connections and significance)

To S29: Excellent-good for visualization. (coded for significance)

To S48: Short, but powerful. Do not capitalize soldier-not a proper noun in this case. (coded for significance and relationships)

To S32: Be sure to tie this into a good unit on hate. Excellent piece! (Coded for both relationships and activities, and also significance)

To S33: Capitalize open. A good question on vocab! (Encoded for relationships and significance)
To S45: Excellent questions-especially about their titles. (Coded for significance)  
To S37: Does the reader have enough detail for Q1? (Coded for activities)  
To S40: You reached higher thinking with Q3. This is a broad, issue question-fun to debate over days. Great job! (Coded for significance)  
To S27: Good expressions within the context—“a tired town.” Good questions with support. (Twice coded for significance)  
To S31: Love the passage-great deep-thinking questions! (Coded for significance)  
To S38: good prompt-classic! Might want to add to Q1, “and how do you know?” (Coded for significance and activities)  
To S28: All questions are great-really like #3-makes them go back to the period controversy and how today, we have social controversies that may look “silly” in 20 years! (Coded for significance and, interesting as the only example in this particular set of discussions, politics)  

Numerous student examples of this social language of praising and prompting for questions exist throughout the online discourse, when permitted with the topical structure, and were typically the opening statement in a posting. S40 offered this response, addressed directly to S27, beginning with a statement of agreement (coded for significance), making S27’s prior post significant, continues with a first person synthesis (coded for identities), and concluded with an “If only there was a way” statement, a probe for reply (coded for activities):
S27, I had similar feelings after reading the chapter. It was somewhat of an eye opener to read that students indulge in fake reading because they did not understand the material. Like you, I always thought that students did not care or did not want to try when reading. As a teacher, I am glad to have realized this fact now instead of realizing it in the classroom. I also liked all the reading methods you used to get a better understanding of the material. If only there was a way to encourage/teach that to my future students.

Similarly, S26 offered a post in response to S31. Thought not responding directly to S31, S26 opens with a similar praising and validating statement (coded for significance), followed by a personal and first person series of ideas (coded for identities), and concluding with a “Now I know who to come to” statement reinforcing the classmate relationship (coded for relationships):

I know exactly how you feel, the high school-college jump took me awhile to adjust as well. My first psych class in college was a complete disaster, you’re really lucky you were able to work it out and make it work for you.

Now I know who to come to for help!

S43 offered a particularly rich insight into the dynamic of these social languages in action. A notoriously shy individual, rarely speaking aloud in class, she was an avid participant. It was, indeed, these social language aspects in the discourse that helped students make “in roads” into the various forms of discourse and, where the access to the discourse was not as impacted by S43’s shyness, she was more able to participate. Two particular moments from her interview discourse clearly reveal her feelings on this
shyness and, interestingly enough, are each followed with a matching question; a third is also included (discussed in the section of unresolved trends from the second reviewer) because it contains the same follow-up question:

When asked about the role of discussion in a course like this: “I’m not always good about putting in my thoughts, I’m kind of shy. I don’t know. I think it’s important. Does that answer your question?”

When asked about her experiences with discourse as a high school student: “I guess that kind of improved when I got a job and said I had to interact with people more and, I don’t know, I’ve always been more of a naturally shy person, so my discussion and my things like school or, like, class, wasn’t a lot, I guess. Does that make sense?”

And when asked about a prominent learning environment in her memory where discourse was important: “I think any, like, science class, like, I needed something explained to me and talked through with me. Does that make sense?”

A reflection of the shyness in her personality, it here helps her navigate the one on one discourse of the interview a bit more carefully; in the online discourse it served a vital function as a social language of probing for a reply or response.

Several other moments from her further illustrate her view that these social languages may potentially be a means to enter into the discourse. When speaking on the strengths or accomplishments in the class discourse she noted that “other people really, are really open and talk about, like their experiences or, like, their opinions are a big deal.” It here is interesting to note that she calls “other people” the ones who are open
about their thoughts in the discourse, and not herself. Yet, it is the online discourse to which she specifically refers when speaking about how discourse allowed her to access the course content: “Um, I feel, like, with the postings and stuff, like, I’ve been able to put my, how I feel, and my ideas down for everyone to see.” Though not as equal a participant in her focus groups, S43 had several moments where she appeared to crack out of her shyness and make use of several building tasks validated by the social languages tool of inquiry. One particular example (discussing the provided clip of discourse from their class) with S41, S31, and S43, indicates a few of these coded building tasks and how S43 entered the discourse, despite her shyness:

S43: I was surprised, like I said, this was something that I said always intrigues me. Like, not really that I try to consciously do it, but, sometimes you just think that those are things to go with or whatever.

S41: I don’t know. Whoever it is that’s talking here it seem like they’re comfortable talking together.

S43: Yeah.

S31: Mm-hmm (Affirmative).

S41: There are different points of view here. I don’t know.

S43: Yeah, I just don’t know what I would say. Like, she said, like, if you said, if a student was like, oh, my dad used to hit me when I was little. How do you respond to that? You don’t know these kids’ background at all, and how do you prepare? Like you, I don’t know, I don’t think you can.
S43’s initial comment of surprise (coded for activities, initiating a response to a prior point) begins some first person thinking (coded for identities). S41, as well, was coded for activities with the “I don’t know” statement—perhaps an offer of a “hand off” of the discourse to another—and his own addition to the first person thinking (coded for identities). Two agreeing statements by S43 and S31 (coded for significance) follow, leading to another “I don’t know” statement. But it is this second “I don’t know” invitation of a handoff that is seized by S43 as she begins a longer statement of first person thinking (coded for identities), multiple questions (coded for activities, a question or probe for response, a peer connection in the first person of “Like you” (coded for both relationships and identities), and a final first person statement. Considering that the majority of her turns in the discourse of this focus group were agreement statements, this contribution is significant, and some of these social languages appear to have aided her in the process.

Another moment from a different focus group illustrates well how the social languages of agreement and probing questions can drive the pace of the discourse to a rapid rate. Here S44, S34, and S35 are discussing how class discourse might help them conceptualize their teaching and, following a critique of the class discourse by S34, S44 spins the view of class discourse in a more positive light and a total of nine coded instances of agreement (significance) appear with four probing questions and one “I don’t know” handover in the discourse (coded for activities):

S44: I do think the concepts that we’re learning are applicable. Um, as far as, uh, teaching ideas, that’s a good idea. Um, but the way she them—
S35: Right, right.
S44: —versus how we need them to be presented. I think that there’s stuff like teaching ideas that I can apply to my teaching.

S35: No, I definitely agree with that.

S34: (Directed at S35) What about the strategies? Are you getting—?

S35: I love the strategies—

S34: ‘Cause I’ve got a lot out of that.

S35: —I wish they would have been presented better, I guess.

S34: More interactive?

S35: Yeah, or just, just different ways more authentic, I guess, to me. I didn’t, I don’t know. I want to see other, like, examples from actual schools going into it and discussing that, or how could this teacher have done this differently—

S44: Yeah.

S35: —or, what do you notice about this? I think that would have gotten a whole lot more discussion going out of us—

S34: Yeah, I could see that.

S35: I don’t know. Especially the talking at us—

S34: Yeah.

S44: Yeah.

S35: —to us, with us, I feel like I’m being talked at.

S34: Yeah.

S35: So there’s no—

S34: Yeah, I can see that. There, there is a lot of that. (Pause)
Ultimately, the presence of these building tasks was too great to ignore, especially when recursively examined in the context of the social languages tool of inquiry. Regardless of the form of discourse, these somewhat smaller discourse elements played a vital role in the pacing, access, and facilitation of turns in the discourse. And, ironically, it was the student in the class most hesitant to participate in the discourse that helped illustrate this.

**Connections Leading to Synthesizing or Hypothesizing**

A final and surprising trend in the data, supporting engagement through discourse to shape the conceptualization of teaching, was the act of concluding a series of connections (coded for connections) with a concluding, hypothesizing statement (coded for activities). It was this concluding statement that the second reviewer and I felt marked a distinction between a more “average” act of connecting “texts” of ideas (as described by the building task), and the connecting done in the act of pursuing a focused synthesis of thinking. This trend varied in structure and depth across the various forms of data; however, the synthesizing at the end of the connecting drew it visibly to the surface. This happened much more rapidly in the classroom discourse, perhaps due to less available time to synthesize thinking (compared to the online discourse). In a class discussion on using incentives to read, S29 makes a number of connections leading to a synthesizing/hypothesizing statement about her daughter’s reading habits and reading outcome:

S29 (in background): We always had this kind of argument about this.

After 7th grade she [S29’s daughter] didn’t want to read a book again. Because she was cool. (Laughter) And she came to (The Local High
School) here and she was finishing out her senior year and had an option of not taking a traditional English class, but taking one where you got to read 14 or 15 books and she didn’t want the traditional and she ended up reading and just loving it and read, I think she started with the Twilight series, but it was just amazing how, and I think she was reading all these books that she’d loved since 7th grade and she just loved it. It was because she had the choice to read.

This passage is also particularly interesting in that it marks a major event of S29 expressing her non-traditional student identity. Additionally, it also factors into the upcoming discussion of the second reviewer’s trend of students being pushed away from science by science texts.

An additional example from class—a later point in the activity where S34 joins the three male students, S41, S44, and S49—shows S44 connecting a number of elements from class (directly quoting class with “air quotation marks”), an earlier moment in their discourse, and concluding with a synthesizing/hypothesizing statement about what connections in reading can do for a reader:

S44: Um, you must (“air quotation marks”) make the students see what they have in common with the text (ending “air quotation marks”), but I think that doesn’t have to be as specific as we think. I think that’s one of the main points that I got, was that, when kids think they don’t know about a topic, because they’re probably thinking too specific, but I mean, like when we talked about bowling. When you know about bowling, you can figure out through those connections what you know about the topic.
Depending on the online discussion topic, this trend revealed itself very clearly. In her online post about decoding, S31 made some connections to the course text followed by a very well-articulated synthesizing/hypothesizing statement about the meaning of the text, within the framework of her conceptualization of teaching:

Since the Traxoline activity in class, I believe that decoding is not the same as comprehending. While reading the Traxoline passage I could break words apart, “sound them out,” and read punctuation accordingly. But I had no idea what I had read! I could decode, but not comprehend. Before that activity, I assumed decoding and comprehending were synonymous and perhaps this assumption gets teachers and parents into trouble. Simply teaching a child to read the words on the page is not enough. I agree with Tovani in that the child must know how to make connections, predict, and interact with the text.

S33 did this, as well, infusing hers with an additional first person element, before arriving at an equally well-articulated synthesizing/hypothesizing statement about the meaning of the text:

In chapter three, Tovani explains that decoding something is not the same thing as comprehending it and that “decoding is just the beginning” (17). I agree with these statements, for although a student may be able to have a “surface” understanding of words written on a page, this doesn’t mean these same students know what the text is actually saying. Tovani explains that though deep structure cuing systems are expected to be used by older students, they are not taught to these students (18). This surprised me at
first, but once I thought about it, I agreed—there is a big change in the type and length of reading material once students transition from middle school to high school and then again from high school to college, and though we are told that the next level of schooling will be more difficult and demanding, we are not usually given strategies of how to deal with the situation. This is unfair to students and a major cause of why some may not comprehend their reading assignments—they just don’t know how to read them.

This trend was a part of interview discourse during moments of synthesizing thinking about experience with discourse, or thinking in response to the discourse sample—yet, apparently only when students invested greater time in their responses, thought about their response, and avoided answering or responding quickly, or from memory alone. When asked about a point in her education where her views on discourse may have changed, S30 said:

Probably during taking education classes and realizing that people need to talk together to solve problems and think, rather than have people lecture to them, because I learned through that way. It doesn’t bother me to sit through a lecture because I like to sit and absorb information and then go by it. But some people can’t learn that way. And just taking education classes has taught me that, that I need to think of different activities for my future students than just talking.

Though not as deeply articulated as in the online discourse, S30 still arrives at a synthesizing/ hypothesizing statement about what education courses have taught her.
Likewise, S31 makes some connections—including Shakespearean connections for which she has already been shown working with in another trend—and also connects with her on, possibly changing, teaching identity; she concludes with a synthesizing/hypothesizing statement about the possibilities the class has opened up to her:

Yeah, well, this class is kind of, it’s rather, it’s experiences lately, I have kind of looked at moving from the elementary age, the younger age, to fifth, sixth grade, junior high area, um, and so, cause I can see so much more, um… So much more deeper conversations going on in a literature class or an English class with an seventh grader than a third grader, teaching sums or addition. And I feel like I can, at least right, now, I’m looking at more, more becoming a middle school English teacher, just because I can feel more passionate about it. And they may not be able to get the super, super deep meaning of a Shakespeare, Shakespearean passage or something, but trying to show a middle schooler how, you know, poetry relates to their life now and their problems they’re dealing with. I think this class has really helped me see that that could be a possibility.

In the focus group discourse, this trend was present most commonly after responding to Gee’s statement on discourse or when responding to the discourse clip—both moments where each of the focus groups had to work together to make meaning of these examples of discourse insight. When the first focus group (S27, S32, S36, S40) examined the discourse clip, S32 attempts to synthesize a number of connections,
bringing together a great deal of course content, and arriving at a rather terminal synthesizing/hypothesizing statement (“it’s hard”) before an “I don’t know” hand-off in the discourse.

S32: It seems like, the main part is like at the end where they are talking about that. Like, um, I suppose, because they’re talking about trying to make personal connections. So, if it’s bringing the things, like, we’re doing for another class, we’re reading a story that kind of has to do with a mother dying, but it’s more of a satire, so it’s like jokingly, but the author like, of it, or in the book that tells you how to teach it, and the author knows, like, if a student connects to this too personally and they’re not allowed to leave the room and they lose out on that, it’s hard to, like, you don’t want to make them read it, because it’s personal, but it’s also hard to, you’re not going to be able to find something that, and you’re not going to find information that’s not going to offend anybody, but it’s hard, I don’t know.

S34 did, incidentally, pick up the hand-off, but shifted the discourse in a more first person centered direction. When considering the examples that follow, it is possible that the strength of the synthesizing/hypothesizing statement was not as great due to S32 taking on this task in the discourse alone.

Sometimes this process happened collaboratively. Two instances revealed this in some interesting turn taking. The first shows two members of the third focus group (S33, S46, S47, S49)—the least active of the focus groups, incidentally—making connections
among aspects of the class discourse clip and attempting to synthesize or hypothesize on
the ultimate ending of the connecting process (slowly coming “to a conclusion):

S46: Well, I feel like the students are kind of feeding off each other, like,
b: building off ideas, like, um, “I wonder if it’s a boy/girl thing, it must be a
boy/girl thing, oh, they’re right.” I don’t know. But then it’s funny,
‘cause there’s just some random things like “can you go to lunch.”
(Laughter) And… Yeah. (Pause)

S49: But there’s like, a… (Cough) There’s like a success—or a
succession. It builds on itself. Like, one student will say one thing and
then a student will say another thing and then they, like, slowly come to a
conclusion by thinking with each other. (Pause)

In this case, the collaboration in this process seems to have come from the handoff
moment in the discourse (“And…Yeah,” with a pause), where S49 continues the thinking
to fruition. Similarly, S34 and S35 engaged in this process during the fourth focus group
(S34, S35, S44) in a more active form of turn-taking, including three moments of
agreement (coded for significance) among the connections, ultimately
synthesizing/hypothesizing about the biggest aspect of their major (also coded for
identities):

S34: Yeah, and connections, I think, making connections is like a huge
part of it. Because you want to make connections with them, you want
them to make connections with your lessons, you want them to make
connections with what you’re learning.

S35: Mm-hmm (Affirmative).
S34: I mean, I think connections is, like, the biggest part of—

S35: Right.

S34: —our major.

Though a somewhat difficult trend to code and examine, this particular act of connecting before synthesizing or hypothesizing is a theme or trend of significant interest. The second reviewer and I felt that there was a pedagogical implication in this theme or trend. If anything, it illustrates what the connections building task can do, if allowed to continue without interference: arrive at a focused chunk of original thinking that may very well open the door to legitimate inquiry in the discourse process, or accurately and succinctly focus the preceding discourse in a manageable way.

An Unresolved Trend from the Second Reviewer: Driven from Science or Math by Science or Math Texts

A remarkably interesting trend uncovered by the second reviewer, primarily yielded through her greater scrutiny of the sign systems and knowledge (SS) coding, was a clear trend in the discourse that students in this particular major were driven from science (and perhaps also math) by science texts. Though I did code several minor instances of this trend in my own analysis, I did not uncover it to the same degree as the second reviewer; I certainly did not see it clearly enough to consider it a trend, alone. Upon review of the second reviewer’s analysis I came to agree with her identification of the trend and began to see it more clearly in my own analysis. Considering the second reviewer’s experience with a research project investigating a merging of science and literacy learning (and my trust in her experience and knowledge base), it is possible that
her unique insight made location of this trend possible. Essentially, this trend
distinguished itself across the various data sets by instances in the discourse where one
sign or discourse system is viewed as clearly unequal to another. In each case, the second
reviewer (and myself, in a few select cases) assigned some form of negativity, struggle,
resentment, or avoidance to the science or math sign or discourse system and the more
positive view to the students’ native major. In every case, the two sign systems were not
made to seem equal in the discourse. Figure 4.6 reiterates this unresolved theme or trend
from the second reviewer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question with Accompanying Theme or Trend</th>
<th>Classroom Discourse</th>
<th>Online Discourse</th>
<th>Interview Discourse</th>
<th>Focus Group Discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driven from Science or Math by Science or Math Texts</td>
<td>Negative statements made about science and/or math</td>
<td>More detailed statements than classroom discourse; connected with prior learning experience</td>
<td>More anecdotal, connected to experience as a student</td>
<td>Unclear in focus groups; SS coding favored the “activity” of their content over a “lack” of the activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.6.* Mapping of the second reviewer’s unresolved theme or trend. This figure reiterates how the second reviewer’s identified theme or trend maps into the study’s data sets.

Instances of this trend from the classroom discourse took the form of negative
statements made against science or math. One particular instance from the classroom
discourse came when S37 and S40 were discussing science vocabulary; on the social
level S37 clearly makes the science body of discourse less attractive than her preferred
body of discourse in two distinct comments:

S40: Plasma and serum. And imuno-
S37: Imuno… My friends were studying physics yesterday and I was like you guys need to go away and talk about that somewhere else, it’s stressing me out. (Laughter) Captions.

S40: Captions?

S37: For sections and subsections.

S40: Yeah.

S37: Don’t you think this is kind of the same thing as like doing a study guide?

S40: I think she hates study guides.

S37: Illustrations.

S40: Oh, this looks fun.

S37: Oh my god, that’s wired. That’s kind of nasty. Charts, diagrams, and maps. Lots of charts and diagrams.

S40: There’s a diagram, a pie chart.

S37: I’m so glad I’m not taking a class like this.

Later, in the very same conversation, while continuing to work with the science vocabulary, and questions based upon it, S40 makes the comment that do not equate her major with the major associated with her vocabulary content:

S37: Establishment of tolerance. That was one of our questions earlier, like how do you build a tolerance?

S40: Eww. If this was my major I would just cry every night.

S37: I know.
Another example from the classroom discourse has S31 and S42 (S41 and S46 are involved in the same conversation but do not appear in the example) making a similarly negative comment about math. Interestingly enough, they do so after making some very valid connections to math content within their discourse:

S42: Um, like, a non-example would be like having the incorrect answer, like having only one set. (Pause)

S31: —answer. I have another one. It would be, you don’t, you can’t infer a math problem. Like, does that make sense?

S42: Math…There’s no inferring in math.

S31: Well, the answer. I mean, like, it’s not as simple as…you can guess what the answer is.

S42: Math is too complicated.

Though their connections to math help them make progress in their activity on Frayer models, they clearly make a negative comment about math.

This inequality of sign systems took on a somewhat different form in another instance from the in-class discourse. In this particular instance, S34, S41, S44, and S49 are near the end of the previously mentioned portion of discourse featuring interwoven building tasks, connecting, first person synthesis, and even the synthesizing/hypothesizing after making connections (also the clip used in the focus group). One moment from this selection, however, makes the question-asking process of the reading teacher, which they are studying now, something they once avoided as literature students (English majors) because it made them appear to be the “nerdy” or “smart” kid associated with science:
S49: I think students, everybody has a perspective and students are smarter than they think they are most of the time. They just don’t take the time to do the simple things that we need to promote them to do, like ask questions.

S44: They take pride in almost not, some of them will be considered smarter—

S34: Yeah, that happens a lot.

S49: They don’t want to be the nerdy kid.

S34: Yeah. (Pause) And I don’t know how it is now, but, um, we were so defined by somebody testing specifics that in push, getting shot down in class, getting embarrassed, you know, you don’t want to say—

S41: Like answering questions on a whim?

S34: Yes, yes. So then it kills your self-esteem and you think you don’t want to be—

S41: Right.

Here, they note that asking questions and answering questions can ultimately kill one’s self-esteem because it equates one with science learning—the negative of the two unequal sign systems.

Several online postings revealed similar insight into this trend. From the first online topic on “fake reading,” S40 makes clear her own love of learning is not equal among the sign systems of literature and the sign systems of science and math texts:

I’ve always been an avid reader, which led to me really enjoying English classes through middle and high school. This enjoyment led to me keeping
up on my literature homework pretty well. I knew people who were really good at fake reading (whether it was good guessing or SparkNotes), but I was never good enough at it to pull it off.

My love for reading does not extend to science and math textbooks, which is where most of my fake reading has occurred. I’ve been quick to give up on these subjects because they have been difficult for me to understand. I usually avoid really reading textbooks by reading anything bold or italicized.

Another example from the online discourse (their postings on decoding) mirrored this example; S42 mentions her first major and makes it unequal to her current major:

After reflecting on the text today through discussion in class, many of us spoke of previous college courses that we have taken. This discussion brought me to think about my first semester here at [the University] when I was a Kinesiology major. I was put into the human anatomy class, in which I really didn’t have enough background knowledge to participate in. Yes, I read the text, but (as the common theme seems to be throughout this course) it just didn’t make sense. There were pictures and a lab course to look at body parts up close, but still no such luck. I believe this is a prime example for decoding. I had no real background in anatomy, besides basic biology, therefore I defaulted to assuming everything was important and didn’t comprehend 75 percent of what I had “learned.”

Though not made as clearly unequal as other examples, two interesting aspects of this example deserve attention. First, S42 indicates that there is a “common theme” that
exists “throughout this course” of looking down upon science texts. Second, she sarcastically refers to her learning in her old major as “learning,” suggesting she did not learn in her old major at all, and favors her current (more desirable) major.

Further supporting this trend are anecdotal examples from the interview discourse. As mentioned earlier, S43 revealed one example indicating that science texts are something she “can’t just read,” something requiring assistance—unlike texts in her current major:

Yeah. Um… I think any like science class, like, I needed something explained to me and talked through with me. Does that make sense? Like, yeah, that was always really important to me. I can’t just read a science book and understand it. I have to have it shown to me and explained to me and I think that was important.

Oddly enough, it was this example that came when she answered the question about a teacher or a teacher’s learning environment where discourse played an important role in her learning. Despite the help with the content that discourse fostered, the sign system of the science text is still inferior to her preferred area of study.

Another rich example from S45’s interview discourse revealed deeper reasoning behind the possibility of her being driven from (both, in this instance) math and science by math and science texts. This response came after the question seeking a point during her education where her view on discourse may have changed:

Um, I think that was probably just my calc class. I ended up dropping senior year because I felt there wasn’t a lot of discourse going on. Um, I’m pretty good about asking questions and wanting to clear up what I
don’t understand, but it was difficult when I had a teacher who wanted to move through the material more quickly than I could handle. And so I was asking questions but not really getting any answers. Or, like my science class where we were given pretty much worksheets to work through. And, you know, I’d ask questions but sometimes he’d get the answers confused and it was just not very helpful.

This example is interesting in that she emphasizes the question-asking process for which her current major is known, and her current preservice reading teacher training values. Unlike other examples in the interviews, S45’s shows this sign system inequality very clearly for both math (specifically, calculus) and science.

Where this trend deviated a bit (yet, the sign systems and knowledge coding persisted) were instances in the focus group where the skills and activities (specifically, making connections while reading) in their classroom discourse and within their chosen major were considered more favorable than an absence of those skills and activities. The second focus group (S29, S30, S39, S45) demonstrated two clear instances of this. The first was when discussing their experiences with discourse in their learning process. In this case, they draw the inequality of sign systems (as reflected in the coding) between knowing how to make connections and not knowing how to make connections—making discourse, itself, the positive result of the stronger of the two unequal sign systems:

S28: I think discourse now is more based on, like, the idea that you’ve already read it.

S30: Yeah.
S28: Like, you have to come to class having read it, and if you haven’t you can’t really participate. But in high school it was more like, if you didn’t read it you could still find your way to participate—

S30: Or the people that participate without having read. Like, just say ridiculous stuff that doesn’t pertain. I don’t know.

Their other example, again, illustrates the inequality of knowing or being able to execute the skill of connecting compared with not being able to make connections—in this case, adding an additional layer of sign system inequality to lecture-based learning over discourse-based learning, since lecture-based learning prevents execution of the connecting skills in the same manner as their preferred learning environment:

S28: Well, I don’t know, I don’t feel like there’s a really strong discourse connection in the class—

S30: No, I don’t either.

S28: z—because we don’t really ever have the opportunity to talk, like our opinions are never asked, there’s never, like, a forum for speaking. I think it’s more lecture-based and more, like, we need to just absorb opinions.

S30: Yeah, I would say that there’s definitely more of a connection in classes where it’s like, not even like (one particular course), but when I took (another particular course) with (another professor) there was only five people in it and it was, like, majorly, all we did was talk to each other.

Though somewhat frustrating in that this trend was not reflected in the focus group discourse in a precisely aligning manner, it is still encouraging because it demonstrates that there are various sign systems that the preservice teacher candidates do consider
unequal to their own, as English majors and reading teachers. Regardless of the nature of this sign system inequality, the very existence of this trend across the discourse data sets necessitates attention in that the positive spin placed on their side of the sign system inequality yields insight into their conceptualization of their identity as teachers; it also seems to flow from the very connections they make within their discourse.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has identified a variety of themes and trends located within the study’s multiple forms of discourse data. In summary, three categories of themes or trends representing the study’s three research questions emerged: the conceptualization of teaching practice (including: the making of connections to other texts/courses, synthesis of teacher identity in the first person, and challenging perceived limitations in the discourse), experiences that frame the context of this conceptualization (including: non-traditional student identity, looking back upon class discourse and critique, and use of personal background in identity), and how preservice teacher candidates engage through discourse to collectively shape this conceptualization (including: building a “D” Discourse through synthesis of identity and a complex structure of “building task” elements, the use of “Social Languages” that agree, probe, and question within the discourse, and connections that lead to synthesizing or hypothesizing). Additionally, this chapter described a theme identified by the second reviewer where preservice teacher candidates appeared to be driven from science or math by science or math texts.

What follows in the final chapter is a practical attempt to apply the results of this data analysis toward suggestions meant to improve the field of literacy by informing
structural and logistical decisions that may guide the design and teaching of courses for preservice teachers of secondary level reading. Beginning with an organized review of this study’s conclusions, situating the various identified themes and trends among the study’s research questions, the final chapter will further discuss such implications in light of reviewed literature. The final chapter of this dissertation study will summarize and offer resulting implications for the field of preservice teacher candidate preparation—perhaps impacting research, policy, and teaching practice—and additionally direct thinking toward future avenues of study. Additionally, conclusions from the analysis of this study’s data may add additional weight to value to the value of a discourse rich environment, both as a useful pedagogical environment and as a further useful research methodology.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Informed by the previous analysis of the various forms of discourse data in this dissertation study, the following discussion will generate conclusions from the analysis results with which to inform the field. Discourse has, ultimately, been this study’s vehicle for constructing knowledge. It is, after all, a social function of the preservice teacher candidates of the study; it is, clearly, the favored form of data with an analysis model suitable to the epistemological construction of the study design. Discourse is, in the grand scheme of this study, a data-driven window into the thinking and social processes shared by the preservice teacher candidates. What follows in this chapter is summarization of the research findings, a synthesized organization of the identified themes or trends in the data around the study’s research questions. Following a discussion of the conclusions in light of some of this study’s reviewed literature, this chapter will more succinctly outline a series of recommendations for improved practice by researchers, policy makers, and teacher educators. Finally, the chapter will conclude with various possible avenues of research to extend this work and continue to move in new and interesting directions of inquiry.

Conclusions

Overview

Any conclusions must bear in mind that these data are a construction by the preservice teacher candidates, and, in theory, is a reflection of the reality of the preservice
teacher candidates’ identity and experience as preservice teachers. With this in mind, the conclusions that follow, synthesized under the organizational structure of the research questions, which capture the appropriate themes and trends, will better explain this reality. More specifically, the conclusions will first address those trends that offer support toward the process of conceptualizing this preservice teacher identity. Second, the conclusions will address more specific experiences in the prior learning and teacher education process that help frame this conceptualization. Lastly, these conclusions will address ways to better tap these experiences and funnel them into this process. Additionally, these conclusions will ultimately move toward articulated implications for the field designed to make this reality a useful pedagogical input and vital factor involving decisions surrounding reading preservice teachers at the secondary level.

**In Support of a Conceptualization of Teaching**

The most clearly utilized of Gee’s building tasks that supported the conceptualization of teaching and the identity of the preservice teacher were connections (C) and identities (I). It is indeed very possible to make the claim that the themes or trends surrounding these building tasks are valid, due to the direct link between the connections building task and the intertextuality tool of inquiry. Likewise, it is equally possible to make such claims because of the direct link between the identities building task and the Discourses tool of inquiry. Perhaps the building tasks with a one-to-one link to a tool of inquiry, these building tasks seem to immediately cycle through the corresponding tool of inquiry to immediately lend credence to a theme or trend identified and validated in this manner. Indeed, Discourses and intertextuality may very well be
mere extensions of their corresponding tool of inquiry in this case. Does this make them any less valid, compared to the common tools of inquiry in the other theme or trend categories? Likely it does quite the opposite, considering the Gee-based view that discourse creates identity and identity expresses Discourse. It may very well be that these are the trends, both initially and when validated by the tool of inquiry, that shine the brightest.

Students rely very heavily on the connections they make and the identities they possess and seek to build when in the process of conceptualizing their role as teachers. For preservice teachers of secondary reading, pedagogically immersed in the connections of reading comprehension, these connections may be second nature. As English and literature majors, being surrounded by multiple texts may be equally natural. These could very well be influential factors making these building tasks the most prominent; the building tasks may be a reflection of the most immediate influences in their discourse (with less common trends/building tasks resulting from that which is further below the surface. At any rate, it was the myriad of connections made between other texts and other courses that allowed these students to synthesize thinking that they applied to their growing conceptualization of teaching. They invested their first-person centered perspective heavily into this conceptualization, as well. Both of these factors, as the most natural of the building tasks, may very well be the most significant, with the implications that to restrict them would limit the product of their discourse, and to offer additional spaces for them to influence the discourse could make it all the more productive.

What stood out among the trends in this category, and in a sense serves to further validate the thinking on the prior two themes or trends in this category, is that there were
attempts made by students to push the discourse to a higher level when they felt it restricted. And, interestingly enough, when they did so, the resulting presence of connections and identities was noted in the coding of the data. If anything in the discourse practices in this category suggests that connecting and identity expression and synthesis are native to this group of students, it may very well be the fact that they seem to find ways to do so in the discourse, when restricted. With this in mind it become all the more plausible to recommend increased opportunities to develop and explore what the making of connections can do and what the continued synthesis of identity can achieve. It may be unavoidable; the most restrictive of online discourse topics still revealed hints of these two building tasks. Yet, unavoidable does not mean merely pedagogically accept some degree of the presence of connecting and identity synthesis. These three trends suggest that, due to the heavily validated presence of the building tasks of connections and identities, processes that support them should be encouraged, allowed to bare discourse fruit, and should not be restricted. Even when restricted, the desire to push against such limitations would only be pedagogically problematic for a learning environment that would seem to be far less student-centered than the one embracing these discourse practices. Students can and will use their connections and their identities as their primary ammunition for conceptualizing their place within teaching, and the pedagogical decisions made in their preservice teacher preparation should recognize and support this, as well as utilize the existing momentum within.
Tapping Experiences that Frame Conceptualization

The background and experiences used by students as they constructed this conceptualization of their preservice teacher identity was an equally rich category of themes and trends. Considering that the very nature of identity shaping a Discourse can involve an number of experiences and associations reaching as far backward as the individual (Gee might perhaps even say beyond), it should come as no surprise that personal background was a major experience that students used when seeking to build this conceptualization of teaching. It is worth noting again that at this point in their preservice teacher journey, the majority of these students still lack any kind of practicum or classroom field experience. Unlike the pilot study, which revealed a clear trend of drawing upon the practicum classroom experience (for those students to whom it applied), there were not sufficient occurrences of this experience in this group to be validated by a tool of inquiry, if even appearing in the coding at all. Though certainly not as simple as “we are guided by what we know,” these students cannot seem to ignore (nor would they) the influence of their experiences. The themes or trends in this category were replete with the coding of identities—almost to the point of exhausting the yellow highlighter I used to make my identities (and Discourses tool of inquiry) more visible to my eye. Students relied heavily on their personal background, injecting it into the discourse whenever possible by the format. The surprising variation in the expression of non-traditional student identity, as I will further discuss, took on its own unique manner of expression. And, perhaps most surprising, was that even when critical of the structure and pace of the classroom discourse, the critiqued classroom discourse was still seen as a useful experience in support of this conceptualization of identity.
Where the expression of personal background as a vital ingredient for the conceptualizing in the discourse seemed (almost nearly) to need only a time and place to occur, it was the non-traditional student identity and experience that seemed to reveal more of a “play book.” Expressions of this aspect of personal background—though clearly known by the large group—were rare in the classroom discourse. It was actually the online discourse that initially made the non-traditional student identity emerge as something of interest, and subsequently the natural presence of it in the individual interviews that drove this particular theme or trend to a level of highest attention. Yet, it was moments in the focus group discourse where non-traditional students either expressed this identity, or a group without one referenced their awareness of and respect for that identity. The question remains if this “sub-set” of student identity in this class is merely a sub-set of possible experiences in the available Discourse palate, or one worthy of particular (even unequal) attention. The existence of this trend would seem to suggest that non-traditional student identity is neither a problem, nor something from which non-traditional students shy away. It may very well be that the classroom discourse only makes expression of this aspect identity difficult; whereas, the other forms of discourse in this study gave the trend greater life. Might it even be apparent at all in a simple classroom observation without a glimpse into online discourse, and added interviews and focus groups? Especially in the case of S34, where her non-traditional student identity was as much a vital part of her social life as it was her discourse, the value of this aspect of student identity and how it factors into the conceptualization of the larger teaching identity should not be ignored.
The implications of these three trends would seem to suggest that personal background, when other more immediate pedagogical connections are absent, is a natural backbone of student conceptualization of teaching and the teacher identity. They do, indeed, seem to synthesize based on what they know, what they can apply from their past, and what these experiences lead them to believe is right or wrong, good or bad, about teaching. Would greater pedagogical emphasis on the field experiences at this point in their preservice teacher journey give them additional experiences to connect with their already common practice of using their personal background? It certainly would, but the larger question would seem to be if the more immediate and useful experience-based connection is the favored one. With this in mind, it may be useful to revisit the pilot study data to see if students undergoing a practicum experience made use of their own personal background experiences as heavily as those not in a practicum. Even the critique of class structure and discourse, seemingly problematic on the surface, provides an interesting litmus test of the student reaction to their current classroom environment and, though still a critique, is useful to some students as a valid experience in this regard. It may be, for those students who embrace this as an experience, due to the immediacy of the current classroom and nothing more. Nevertheless, this trend appeared across the data sets enough to warrant attention in the same way as the other two trends in the category: personal identity and experiences help students frame their conceptualization of teaching. This suggests that anything done to enrich the student view of teaching, and experience in the classroom, would only further fuel this conceptualization. Though not enough evidence exists (as with the pilot study) to suggest that students should be concurrently enrolled in a practicum experience, it is likely that they would connect with
such an experience due to its immediacy and make use of it in much the same manner. At the very least, this category of themes or trends suggests that to deny students the opportunity to bring their background experiences and identity to bear in this process is to deny them the very vital ingredient that helps them construct Discourses.

**Discourse as a Vehicle for Conceptualization**

The final category of themes or trends, stemming from the research questions seeking insight into how students used discourse to engage in this conceptualization process of their teaching identity, proved to be rich with coding and exist in a state of greater complexity that this study could have imagined. Unexpected was the degree to which the Discourses tool of inquiry validated those moments of identity synthesis (coded for identities) that were interwoven in a variety of other building tasks, such as connections and politics. Not that it was expected to be problematic if elements in the building task coding overlapped and intertwined, such complexity initially didn’t seem that it would be present in all of the discourse data sets. Yet, it turned out that even in some of the online discourse opportunities, the discourse revealed a greater complexity of building tasks within some of the larger identities-coded moments to warrant attention. Likewise, the interaction of the social languages that fueled the discourse were expected (they are, after all, familiar elements in conversation), but not expected to so clearly illustrate how they facilitated and drove the pace of the discourse. Yet, most interesting in this category was the synthesizing and hypothesizing activity that followed portions of connections, almost as if allowed to build to some greater fruition, they would arrive at the activities-coded building task at the end of the connections. If anything, these three
themes or trends reveal that Gee is indeed correct: discourse and Discourses are extremely complex things. In the face of such complexity it is entirely possible that these trends emerged because of the structure of the discourse data collection, or because of the assembled group of preservice teacher candidates, or the use of this particular analysis model. However one maps out elements present in discourse to facilitate a data analysis model, these themes or trends suggest complexity. And with complexity, comes pedagogical challenges to better understand or illustrate that complexity, and to make use of it in the learning process.

As mentioned, students did not hesitate and struggle to inject their own identity into their conceptualization process of their preservice teacher identity. These interwoven examples of this phenomenon are somewhat more complex. Other building tasks, such as politics (inclusion of a sociopolitical or cultural perspective) or relationships (interpersonal, professional, or otherwise), and even select uses of connections, when carefully included in the identity sharing and synthesizing process, can take it to a different level. Should this be allowed to simply occur? Should instructors assume that students would naturally do this? Especially considering the potentially “risky” nature of connecting to some sociopolitical perspectives, students may lack certain skills to do this effectively, or even in a manner that doing so doesn’t find such perspectives lost in the din of the larger (even homogenous) identity. The same could be said for connections. As English majors, literature scholars, and reading teachers, these students make connections with confidence. It stands to reason that with such a presence of connections, any specific connection could be at risk of being considered “just another connection” among many, and lost among its own din. What if
students had a schema for identifying the most useful, intense, or promising connections? What if they developed this according to their own understanding and use of connections? Or, how can we pedagogically prevent students from throwing out or disregarding connections they perceive as less interesting or less important—how can we validate all connections, yet best identify those connections in unique categories?

Additionally, synthesizing and hypothesizing that stemmed from a line of connections was too great to ignore. Considering the value placed upon higher order thinking skills among learners in this major and content area, it seems natural that some of them will naturally attempt to “digest” their connections and synthesize some useful, final conclusions within their discourse. Either as an act of tying up a loose end in discourse in order to move on, or build a line of thinking to fruition, this theme or trend is staggering in its implication that to cut off or prevent sustained lines of connecting may very well mean prevention of synthesizing and hypothesizing. In other words, students engage in these sustained lines of connecting in order to generate new knowledge; preventing or ending early such sustained lines of connecting may very well mean denying students the chance to create new knowledge. Thus, these three themes or trends suggest a need to make available pedagogical support structures that can facilitate those building tasks (e.g. politics or relationships) that add further complexity to identity construction. Additionally, a complex arrangement of building tasks that drives the pace of the discourse—that may be extremely familiar elements in common conversation—should be embraced as natural, and useful. But, most importantly, instructors should support and encourage the rich and extended lines of connecting that appear to lead to the synthesizing knowledge or the hypothesizing possible meaning. And, when doing so,
instructors should provide students a way to capture what they generate when this activity occurs.

Discussion

In light of the literature on preservice teacher candidate identity, these conclusions resonate with particular interest. Cohen’s work (2010) in particular, considering her assertion that “professional identity itself is an ongoing, dynamic process in which individual negotiate external and internal expectations as they work to make sense of themselves and their work as teachers” (p. 473-474) lends credence to the conclusions of this study. For Cohen, as with this study, discourse was the vehicle used by preservice teacher candidates to navigate their environment, make significant their own contributions to the group, and contextualize “professional identity in terms of related identities” (p. 480). Additionally, her similar methodological approach makes it plausible to place the results of her study alongside this one. Furthermore, her critical approach to discourse analysis was her preferred vehicle to understand the professional identity of these preservice teachers. McDougal’s work (2010) as well, centered heavily on Gee’s notions of “D” discourse identities, focused upon the “current times” as a context for building this preservice teacher identity. Much like Cohen, McDougall used a critical discourse analysis and, as with this dissertation study, identified and categorized patterns in her data. Where Cohen focused more in the construction process of identity, itself, McDougall centered more on the response of this identity—its adaptation and mediation among “current times”—to changes in the surrounding pedagogical environment. In either case, the work of both of these authors illuminates the conclusions found in this
dissertation study that, indeed, preservice teacher candidate identity is a constructed concept, it is influenced by a variety of factors surrounding the discourse participants, and results in the formation of a very complex and collectively shaped “D” discourse identity.

Two further points, with the extent literature in mind, require attention. The methodological approach of this study is very much in agreement with the current trends in the field, as illustrated by Rex, et al (2010). This dissertation study has employed an epistemologically appropriate model of discourse analysis, which consistent in the view that preservice teacher candidates construct identity, as opposed to learning it. The review of literature by these authors makes it possible to confidently situate this dissertation study as consistent among the extent literature of the field. Alger (2009), however, raises concerns that the findings in this dissertation study may represent that very construction of preservice teacher identity that Alger suggests is in significant danger when preservice teachers move into their first jobs. Her findings suggest that the identity they construct is subject to a radical change once they move away from the Discourse community of the preservice teacher candidate classroom and into their own classrooms. If indeed this is the case, it will be necessary for further research in the field (represented by Rex, et al) to seek ways to better secure this constructed preservice teacher candidate identity before in-service teaching subjects it to a change that may derail its potential to effect positive change among the students these preservice teachers have trained to teach.

Diving further back into the roots of this study’s reviewed literature, the results appear in line with Rosenblatt’s and Durkin’s overall view of literacy, that it is an active
process requiring eventual connections with additional knowledge and higher order skills for building knowledge—in this case, the literate identities of these preservice teacher candidates are built and shaped through discourse by making a variety of useful connections. Where critical literacy is concerned, the Dozier, Johnston, and Rogers (2006a) view of fostering critical literacy would seem to apply as well; these preservice teacher candidates will ideally empower their learners to directly engage with the social world as agents of social change, just as they, themselves, directly engage with it in the construction of their own preservice teacher candidate identity. Where Abersold and Field (1997) suggest that preservice teachers in reading “should leave room for the individual teacher to interpret its methodology while striving to help students meet the overall goals and objectives” of learning (p. 193), they impact the preservice teacher candidates in this study: some of that space, that room for interpreting teaching methodology exists within their very process of preservice teacher candidate identity construction. Additionally, trends in results stemming from the online discourse highlight the points of Alvermann and Eakle (2003) that adolescent literacy is moving substantially in the direction of a culturally embedded form of critical literacy. As with these preservice teacher candidates, online discourse has facilitated expanded inquiry via outside-of-school literacy practices. In all these areas, the preservice teacher candidates of this study demonstrate a reliance on the very making of connections that is the pedagogical core of their future teaching of reading comprehension.

And, finally, Gee’s body of work itself, both as literature reviewed and a model of data analysis, greatly illuminates the conclusions of this study. Gee’s theories center around discourse serving as both a foundation of, and function of, “D” discourse
participants. The preservice teacher candidates in this study are, indeed, members of a significant “D” discourse community, and they use discourse accordingly to build and shape this “D” identity and constantly reshape it as additional factors come to bear in the discourse. This study’s analysis process, a recursive journey from “building tasks” to “tools of inquiry,” in line with Gee’s recursive model of discourse analysis, has labored to identify themes and trends substantiated not just within their native discourse transcripts and data sets, but also across all four major discourse data sets. In doing so, this analysis has produced substantiated themes and trends suitable for drawing conclusions based on the sum of the discourse data, and including contributing factors from all aspects of discourse submitted to the analysis process by the research preservice teacher candidates. Each theme or trend offers unique insight into an aspect of the overall process by which these preservice teacher candidates build and shape their identity as teachers. If not for Gee’s insight, it would have been exceedingly difficult to both shape the framework of this study and justify the resulting conclusions. Appropriately, the next section will direct the conclusions reached by interpreting the themes or trends in the data toward refined pedagogical implications for the field.

**Implications**

In summary, the analysis of the discourse data and its resulting discussion leads to the following nine pedagogical recommendations for preservice teachers of secondary level reading, each derived from the nine identified themes or trends in the analysis of the data:
a) Increased opportunity to make connections between “texts”/bodies of knowledge

b) Validate and offer opportunity for students to synthesize thinking from their own perspective

c) Avoid restricting student discourse in a discourse-centered environment

d) Validate and encourage the incorporation of student background experience in the classroom discourse

e) Seek ways to create additional firsthand pedagogical experience with which students can connect

f) Expect the class discourse to be an equally immediate experience, yet subject to critique

g) Make available pedagogical support structures that can facilitate those building tasks (e.g. politics or relationships) that add further complexity to identity construction

h) Accept and embrace common conversational elements if and when they fuel the pace of the classroom discourse

i) Support and encourage rich and extended lines of connecting in order to lead to synthesizing knowledge and hypothesizing possible meaning—and capture this activity when it occurs

One additional trend identified by the second reviewer requires further attention and consideration in the context of these recommendations. The second reviewer’s trend of English/literature majors being pushed from science and math by science or math texts
was too great to ignore because evidence of its existence was present in the discourse data sets, distinguished nearly every time by the sign systems and knowledge building task. This building task clearly made one set of sign systems or knowledge (that of the English/literature major, or the connections skill of the reading teacher) a more positive reality than the lesser or more negative reality of science or math thinking. Thus the following three pedagogical recommendations, in addition to those noted above, for preservice teachers of secondary level reading:

j) Engage in further inquiry to determine if this is a real problem; remain mindful of the possible occurrence of this in the preservice reading teacher classroom

k) If so, seek ways to “mend the rift” that may exist between these students and science and math

l) Support the development of pedagogical skills in preservice teachers to further prevent students from being pushed away from science or math by science and math texts

These three pedagogical recommendations represent an attempt to give sufficient attention to this trend identified by the second reviewer and stimulate further inquiry into the implications of this trend. What follows, concluding this final dissertation chapter, is a discussion of future directions for the academic field, acting with the above pedagogical recommendations, and possible new avenues of research, in mind
Future Directions

Various additional avenues, in light of the results of this study, would shed greater light on the results, further extend this work in other important areas, or address the weaker areas in this study’s conclusions. Most promising is likely the presence and impact of non-traditional student identity. As a factor or aspect of personal experience fueling their conceptualization of their place as preserve teacher candidate, it offers a potential for understanding something that may very well become marginalized in some settings, yet has demonstrated a clear value in this process. Better understanding what non-traditional students “bring to the table” in this regard, as well as how it is received by traditional preservice teacher candidates, will only enrich this line of inquiry. By the same token, the degree of personal background used by these preservice teacher candidates to further frame the context of their conceptualization reveals the power of background knowledge and experience—and how vital these preservice teacher candidates feel it is to the shaping of their “D” discourse. Personal background, after all, represents what these preservice teacher candidates can apply from their past to this process. If future research indicates that they move in the directions in which they were taught, then personal experience would indeed be a prominent factor. Can additional research, perhaps considering the mixed methods approach to research that I have suggested might follow this dissertation study, better examine how “what students learn impacts how they teach?” Taken together, these findings suggest the need for further examination of personal background and individual identity as it more specifically fuels into the overall collective.
The connections made to other texts and courses, and use of the first person perspective to synthesize teacher identity both possibly point to something these preservice teacher candidates know and do well as learners themselves, and as future classroom teachers: reading comprehension. Reading comprehension, at its core, is a conglomeration of connections linking the text and other bodies of knowledge—with the resulting connections representing new knowledge constructed. These preservice teacher candidates appear to be building and shaping their “D” discourse, their very conceptualization of their identity as preservice teachers, by making connections in much the same way as they, and their future learners, will comprehend a text. This may be coincidental; this may be reflective of natural tendency in the English major, literature scholar, college student, or the reading teacher. Perhaps further examination of interdisciplinary teaching will more explicitly place the connections made by these preservice teacher candidates in their content area side by side with another content areas. Nevertheless, further inquiry placing these factors more directly alongside the reading comprehension process may help reveal of this is a natural tendency of this group, or is a result of the training toward with they are moving. Is it a natural asset, or is it a further result of the preservice reading teacher training process? In either case, due to the apparent congruity to the nature of reading comprehension, it is too great to ignore.

All three themes or trends identified in the analysis of the data supporting how these preservice teacher candidates engage through discourse each make excellent prospects for further inquiry. Where the building of “D” discourse identity involved multiple interwoven elements in the coding of the data, the results suggest the need to better examine complex discourse tasks in the preservice teacher candidate classroom.
Can complex tasks that pedagogically interweave multiple “building tasks” produce the same results? Furthermore, what more specific insight can be gleaned from the “Social Languages” that demonstrated agreement, probing, and questioning within the discourse? These “Social Languages” appear to drive the pace of the discourse, keep it charged and on task, and better “lock” discourse participants together in their mode of collectively shaping their conceptualization as preservice teacher candidates. A closer look at the use of these “Social Languages” may further reveal what they do, what role they play in the discourse, and if they can merely exist naturally in the discourse or be harnessed pedagogically. Finally, further inquiry into the synthesizing and hypothesizing that results from the presence of connections in the discourse is far too great to ignore.

Further inquiry into this aspect of the findings would shed greater light on the potential of preservice teacher candidate to generate new knowledge through connection-making in the discourse. On the flip side, it may also illuminate the danger—the opportunities lost for synthesizing thinking—when the connection making is pedagogically restricted or not allowed to progress to fruition.

Is the theme of preservice teacher candidates being pushed from science or math by a science or math text simply a culturally reflected view (a Discourse) of English majors—the stereotypical assignment of math as the nemesis of the literature scholar? Or is a very real, and very problematic phenomenon reflected in this theme or trend? I trust my second reviewer implicitly and invest heavily in her insight into the connections between science and literacy learning. I do not believe this trend emerged to her because of a bias or greater favor of science over literacy, but rather her greater insight for the spaces in which these areas intersect. Without that same degree of insight, I was not as
equipped to notice this possibly disturbing theme or trend. Yet, where does one go, pedagogically, from this point? First, it would seem reasonable to better discern if this is a very real problem. Are English majors or literature scholars actually pushed away from science and math learning by science or math texts? If it presents itself, instructors should seek ways to better mend this content area rift that has taken root among the Discourse identity of these students. Furthermore, if this is a real problem, instructors should seek increased opportunities to prepare preservice teachers to stem the tide of this phenomenon, perhaps helping their preservice teachers by equipping them with ways to better interweave the content areas and help their own students turn this possible rift between English/literature into a rich stockpile of further available connections.

I cannot underscore my firm belief that discourse has been a vital vehicle for this study. It has not only given life to the very group of preservice teacher candidates that have provided the data, but discourse has also yielded the analytical model with which this study has generated knowledge and useful conclusions. Additionally, it has substantially reaffirmed my own personal belief that classroom discourse is my own window to more insightful and effective teaching. I again return to Gee’s own “socially useful” definition of literacy, that it “must be couched” in forms of discourse (1990, p. 153). If this is the case, then I maintain that periphery elements of literacy—the very preservice teachers whose classrooms will see learners engaged in mastery of reading comprehension skills at the secondary level—must also “be couched” in forms of discourse. And, for our “socially useful” definition of literacy to be so saturated with forms of discourse, so must discourse be fully intertwined in all corners of our literacy process.
These preservice teachers of reading at the secondary level are the ones who will mentor the final steps of our learners’ literacy journey prior to college. There is, indeed, a “socially useful” definition connected to literacy that is to be found in the practice of these teachers; in this case it is at the core of how they conceptualize their art and act, their practice and identity as secondary reading preservice teachers. We owe it to our secondary level reading students to do the very best we can to prepare their teachers, yes. But the payoff in locating a way to glean greater insight into better supporting their preservice teacher learning process, to better support the literacy of their own students, is too great to ignore. Discourse and discourse-related practices do indeed reveal “socially useful” definitions of literacy. In the case of this dissertation study, they reveal these definitions in the form of insight gained via an analysis of rich classroom discourse. It is my sincere hope that this model of discourse analysis, and the discussion stemming from the results of this study, will not only do good in a fascinating and compelling field in which I am personally and professionally invested, but also spark interest in a research methodology that I firmly believe is apt to the task.
APPENDIX A: IRB STUDY APPROVAL DOCUMENT

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DATE: 31 August 2009

TO: Ryan R. Kelly
844 Red Hawk Way SE
Altoona, IA 50009

CC: Dr. Koulde Mokhtari
N131 Lagomarcino

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching

IRB ID: 08-365

Approval Date: 31 August 2009
Date for Continuing Review: 28 September 2010

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has conducted the annual continuing review and approved the modification of this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website [www.compliance.iastate.edu](http://www.compliance.iastate.edu) or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
ISU HUMAN SUBJECTS CONTINUING REVIEW AND/OR MODIFICATION FORM

TYPE OF SUBMISSION:  □ Continuing Review  □ Modification  □ Continuing Review and Modification

Principal Investigator: Ryan B. Kelly  Phone: 515-708-1804
Degree: M.S. (Ph.D. in progress)  Correspondence Address: 844 Red Hawk Way SE; Altoona, IA 50009
Department: Curriculum and Instruction  E-mail Address: rykelly@iastate.edu
Project Title: Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching. (Replaces old title: CI 671 Data Collection and Analysis)
IRB ID: 08-365  Date of Last Continuing Review: 9-28-09

IF STUDENT PROJECT
Name of Major Professor: Dr. Kouider Mokhtari  Phone: 515-294-9138
Department: Curriculum and Instruction  Campus Address: N131 Lagomarcino Hall
E-mail Address: kouiderm@iastate.edu

FUNDING INFORMATION:
□ External Grant/Contract  □ Internal Support (no specific funding source) or Internal Grant (indicate name below)
Name of Funding Source:  OSPA Record ID on Gold Sheet:  Overall IRB ID No.:
□ Part of Training, Center, Program Project Grant – Director:
□ Student Project—No funding or funding provided by student

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The proposed project or relationship with the sponsor require the disclosure of significant financial interests that present an actual or potential conflict of interest for investigators involved with this project. By signing this form, all investigators certify that they have read and understand ISU’s Conflict of Interest policy as addressed by the ISU Faculty Handbook and made all disclosures required by it. (http://www.provost.iastate.edu/faculty)

Do you or any member of your research team have a conflict of interest?  □ Yes  □ No
If yes, has the appropriate disclosure form been completed?  □ Yes  □ No

ASSURANCE
I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies. I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the IRB for review. I agree that modifications to the originally approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the Institutional Review Board, and that all activities will be performed in accordance with state and federal regulations and the Iowa State University Federal Wide Assurance.

_________________________  8/24/09
Signature of Principal Investigator
Date

Student Projects: Faculty signature indicates that this application has been reviewed and is recommended for IRB review.

_________________________  8/24/09  _____________________________  August 31, 2007
Signature of Supervising Faculty
Date
IRB Approval Signature

For IRB Use Only
EXPEDITED per 45 CFR 46.110(b)  □ Category □, I, II, III, Letter □
STUDY REMAINS EXEMPT per 45 CFR 46.101(b)
WAIVER of SIGNED CONSENT per 45 CFR 46.117(c)  □ 0
WAIVER of ELEMENTS of Consent per 45 CFR 46.116  □ 0
VULNERABLE POPULATION per 45 CFR 46.  □ 0
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT 1

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching

Investigators: Ryan R. Kelly, M.S. and Doctoral Student, Principal Investigator (Kouider Mokhtari, PhD, Major Professor of P.I.)

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain additional insight into preservice teacher attitudes and perceptions about their upcoming professional work in the field of education. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your status as a student in a course meant for preservice teachers in the area of language arts/reading education. Data and Data Analysis will be used as part of the Principal Investigator’s doctoral dissertation and may possibly be used for publication outside of Iowa State University, hence the reason for this informed consent document.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for the duration of the current academic semester (Fall 2009) during your enrollment in Curriculum and Instruction 395. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: Data collection on classroom discourse in the form of an MP3 audio recorder capturing classroom conversation on multiple collections, as well as possible use of student WebCT discussion posting discourse to further triangulate student views and understanding of concepts discussed. Audio data of classroom discourse will be transcribed and analyzed, along with possible analysis of WebCT content. It is possible that the Principal Investigator may contact you for clarification of audio data. It is also possible that the Principal Investigator may observe the course or interact with you as a guest instructor. Audio data will be erased two years after the completion of the Fall 2009 semester, following data analysis; WebCT discussions will be archived at the end of the semester and immediately erased from WebCT, then the archived data later erased on the same timetable as audio data. Pseudonyms will be used in place of student names.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this study.

BENEFITS
If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing additional information about preservice teacher perceptions about their upcoming professional work in the field of education.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

If you decline participation in the study, no data originating with you will be used in any possible external publication about the study.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You have any costs to participate in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study. Curriculum and Instruction 395 students will receive no extra credit for participation.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to leave the study early, proper documentation will be made to assure that any data originating with you will not be a part of possible external publication about this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: pseudonyms will be used in place of student names. These informed consent documents will remain in possession of the Principal Investigator (in a locked filing cabinet) and, the Principal Investigator will view the informed consent documents and act in accordance with participants’ wishes before pursuing data collection/analysis and possible external publication. Data will be kept secure and password protected on the investigator’s personal computer and only the investigator and the additional collaborator will have full access to data. Portions of data may be viewed by the Principal Investigator’s current Major Professor during the course of the study; such portions will maintain the study’s established use of pseudonyms. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.
• For further information about this study contact Ryan R. Kelly at rykelly@iastate.edu.
• If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

************************************************************************

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. Your printed name and NO SIGNATURE will imply that you are declining participation. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study to keep.

Participant’s Name (clearly printed) _____________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

(Participant’s Signature) (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

___________________________________________________________________________

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) (Date)
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT 2

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (Interviews and Focus Group Participation)

Title of Study: Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching

Investigators: Ryan R. Kelly, M.S. and Doctoral Student, Principal Investigator (Kouider Mokhtari, PhD, Major Professor of P.I.)

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The extended purpose of this part of the study is to gain further insight into preservice teacher attitudes and perceptions about their upcoming professional work in the field of education. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your status as a student in a course meant for preservice teachers in the area of language arts/reading education. Data and Data Analysis will be used as part of the Principal Investigator’s doctoral dissertation and may possibly be used for publication outside of Iowa State University, hence the reason for this informed consent document.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this phase of the study, your participation will last for the remaining duration of the current academic semester (Fall 2009) during your enrollment in Curriculum and Instruction 395. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: The Principal Investigator will contact you via email or phone to request your participation in an individual interview. This interview will seek your responses to a number of questions meant to learn more about your individual background and your thoughts on the use of student discourse in a course such as Curriculum and Instruction 395. Interviews can take place in person, by appointment, or via phone call. The Principal Investigator will record interview responses with an PP3 audio recorder; interview participants will be free to decline any question(s) they wish.

Additionally, the Principal Investigator will contact you via email or phone to request your further participation in a focus group of three or four of your classmates designed to further investigate your thoughts on the use of student discourse in a course such as C&I 395. The focus group will allow participants to discuss shared elements of the class environment and respond to samples of class discourse. Focus Group interviews will be recorded by MP3 audio recorder and also by video.

Audio/Video data from Interviews and Focus Groups will be transcribed and analyzed. It is possible that the Principal Investigator may contact you for clarification of data. Audio/video data will be erased two years after the completion of the Fall 2009 semester, following data
analysis. Pseudonyms will be used in place of student names. Participants are free to decline participation in either Interviews or a Focus Group; participation in earlier discourse data collection is not required for participation in Interviews and/or a Focus Group.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing additional information about preservice teacher perceptions about their upcoming professional work in the field of education.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

If you decline participation in the study, no data originating with you will be used in any possible external publication about the study.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You have any costs to participate in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study. Curriculum and Instruction 395 students will receive no extra credit for participation.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to leave the study early, proper documentation will be made to assure that any data originating with you will not be a part of possible external publication about this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: pseudonyms will be used in place of student names. These informed consent documents will remain in possession of the Principal Investigator (in a locked filing cabinet) and, the Principal Investigator will view the informed consent documents and act in accordance with participants’ wishes before pursuing data collection/analysis and possible
external publication. Data will be kept secure and password protected on the investigator’s personal computer and only the investigator and the additional collaborator will have full access to data. Portions of data may be viewed by the Principal Investigator’s Major Professor during the course of the study; such portions will maintain the study’s established use of pseudonyms. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. If you have questions:

- For further information about this study, contact Ryan R. Kelly at rykelly@iastate.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

****************************************************************************************************************************************************************************************

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this additional portion of the study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. Your printed name and NO SIGNATURE will imply that you are declining participation. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study to keep.

Participant’s Name (clearly printed) __________________________________________

(Participant’s Signature) ________________________________ (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) ________________________________ (Date)
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching
Ryan R. Kelly, ISU Doctoral Student
October 1, 2009

Iowa State (Curriculum and Instruction 395) Student Interview Protocol

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher will remind the participant that at any point the participant can skip any question during the questionnaire/interview, or request that the interviewer disregard any prior response. The demographic questionnaire precedes the interview. The interviewer will verify permission to record audio.

Initial Questions
How do you view the role of discussion and conversation in a course such as C&I 395?
What does the term “discourse” mean to you?

Historical Questions
What do you remember about the role of discourse in your learning as a child?
As a high school student?
Tell me about a teacher or instructor or a learning environment where you felt discourse played an important role in learning.
Can you identify any point in your education where your views on discourse changed?

Share Gee’s definition of discourse with participant…
A definition of “discourse” as used in this study, which impacts the following questions:
“…a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (Gee, 1990, p. 143).

Questions About the Curriculum and Instruction 395 Discourse
What experiences with discourse in C&I 395 stand out in your mind?
Within your WebCT discourse?
What strengths or accomplishments do you see in the class discourse?
Where do you think it could have been stronger or accomplished more?
How has class discourse specifically impacted your own learning in C&I 395?
Final Synthesis Questions

How has discourse facilitated your engagement with your peers and with course content?
How do you imagine class discussion in C&I 395 impacting your views on teaching? Your future teaching practice?

If you had to sum up what the role of discourse in a class such as this means to you (in as few words as possible), what would it be?

Demographic Questionnaire

What is your...

…name? _____________________________________________ …gender? _______

…age? _________ …racial/ethnic identity? ________________________________

…major? ______________________ …year in school? ______________

…hometown (city, state)? ________________________________
APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Discourse of construction: A look at how secondary reading preservice teachers conceptualize their teaching
Ryan R. Kelly, ISU Doctoral Student
October 1, 2009

Iowa State (Curriculum and Instruction 395) Student Focus Group Protocol

At the beginning of the focus group, the facilitator will remind the participant(s) that at any point the participant(s) can skip any question during the focus group, or request that the interviewer disregard any prior response. The facilitator will verify permission to record audio/video.

Initial Topic
How you have experienced class discussion or discourse in the past?

Share Gee’s definition of discourse with participant…
A definition of “discourse” as used in this study, which impacts the following questions:

“...a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (Gee, 1990, p. 143).

Specific Discourse Topic
How did you experience this connection to your classmates through discourse in C&I 395?

Future Impact Topic
How might discourse from C&I 395 help you shape and conceptualize the way you will teach reading?

Examination and Evaluation of Discourse Topic
Show the participants one to three excerpts from class discourse; for each:

What are your thoughts about this particular moment of discourse?
Demographic Questionnaire

What is your...

…name? ___________________________________ …gender? ______

…age? ________ …racial/ethnic identity? _______________________

...major? ______________________ …year in school? _____________

…hometown (city, state)? _________________________________
APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP DISCOURSE SAMPLE

S49: Well, yeah, uh, you can draw connections to everything and anything. When does that like, have to stop?
S41: You want to go to lunch somewhere?
S49: Yeah. But if it’s just to help students remember what happens in the story, I guess it doesn’t have a limit. Um…
S34: Does everybody, when you study something or when you read something, do you do that? Do you make connections while you read?
S41: No. That was one of my wondered things. I didn’t think about, all the lit classes I have, I never thought about trying to make connections between the different stories.
S34: I mean, I do that with everything.
S41: I just try to do it through straight memorization.
S34: But people know that. I mean, how many times do you have to hear stories about my family?
S41: Right. I just didn’t think about it before. I suppose.
S44: See, I don’t think I do any of this stuff other than consciously.
S49: I think it’s subconsciously. I do it.
S34: I wonder if it’s a boy-girl thing.
S41: It must be a boy-girl thing.
S44: [S41] is right here.
S41: Hey, [S34], maybe it’s an age thing.
S49: Yeah. (Laughter)
S34: I don’t know. An age thing has made my brain so small.
S41: I was joking.
S34: I don’t think we should talk with that.
S41: So I agree. (Longer pause) I don’t know. It feel like there’s also an issue, like, that was one of my wonder questions. If you get into too many, trying to make too many personal connections to what you’re doing in class, especially if you’re doing something like overcoming adversity, where do you draw the line to like the realm of inappropriate? Like, oh, my dad used to hit me when I was little, and that might stir up, making connections to your life, yeah, yeah right. How could you do this and then tell a kid, don’t make that connection. Or if you do, don’t make it in public?
S49: Don’t make it in public.
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A Personal Stake In Secondary Level Reading

I’ve lived my entire life around educators. As the son of two career elementary school teachers, I have literally reached adulthood among pedagogical conversation and discussions on lesson design and the administration of education. My grandparents on my mother’s side of the family were Iowa State graduates, teaching agriculture and home economics among their farming career. My father became the first Kelly to hold a doctorate in 1994, an Iowa State graduate in Curriculum and Instructional Technology. Despite the rigors of elementary school education, he managed to inject a doctorate into his professional palate with the belief that it was important to both set an intense growth goal, and to better oneself professionally in order to benefit the field. A decade and a half later, I have never failed to feel the positive impact of his experience, nor have I ever heard him express regret. As a graduate student I visited his dissertation many times in the Iowa State library, but never felt the full impact of it until I reached this point. My father noted in his methodology that “in the last decade more and more research in fields that typically had quantitative emphasis…have shifted to the paradigm of qualitative analysis” (Kelly, R. O., 1994, 51-52). I consider my father’s influence among the reasons why I am a qualitative researcher. He also noted that triangulation in one’s methodology “is a way to use multiple sources to verify the accuracy of findings” (p. 53). It would seem that I learned this lesson from my father years before my coursework in research methodology—before graduate school, even.
As a professional in education, I come to the fields of teaching practice and research inquiry with a great deal of interest in both what works in education, and what can be done to make education work better. It was my first year of teaching high school language arts, in fact, that exposed me to a more than average intensity of professional development—a content area literacy development program stemming from research-based practices in reading comprehension—and the desire to inject them into the teaching practice. This, in addition to my own personal desire to further my education, strongly pushed me in the direction of graduate school, the direction of a reading endorsement for my teaching license, and even back into a second teaching job where I could apply some of the new theory, the new research driven practice, back into my own improved teaching. Yet, it was one of the more unexpected experiences of graduate school that added a portion to my teaching palate that I never expected: teaching those who would also hold the same teaching license and endorsements as I do. I didn’t expect that part of my academic and professional journey would involve instructing both preservice teachers at the secondary level, and also graduate students seeking an additional reading endorsement. This experience in my educational journey began to shift my sensitivity from the impact of research on the teaching practice of secondary level students, to the teaching practice of preservice teachers of those secondary students.

Various aspects of the elements that literacy academics consider important to the teaching process, which quite simply were not on my radar as an earlier professional, began to cross my mind as the experiences of graduate school began to take hold on the theoretical level. Gone was the high school language arts teacher who thought it was only about discussing literature, about explaining how to write a five-paragraph essay.
New was the educational professional with a greater respect for the knowledge-generating process of research that was, after all, the foundation for my very training, and the fuel that kept it current. Reading comprehension, for example, became something more to me than a notion preached at me in teacher in-service; reading comprehension became a favored aspect of literacy, an aspect of literacy best approached with a well-versed palate of available tools, and a process of meaningful (knowledge-constructing) connections to the world around the reader. Though I clearly had a great deal farther to go (and still do), I began to understand where solutions—or a step in the direction of a solution—came from academically, and how to begin confronting a question, a situation, or a problem from a stance of inquiry. I began to learn how to frame a research question bound for inquiry, a desire to learn or contribute something more to the field of education, from a standpoint of research. It is certainly not a short and easy process, engaging in graduate level research when recently out of an undergraduate education and fresh out of a first teaching job. Yet, I began to learn how to articulate my awareness of these questions, situations, or problems that I saw in front of me, in front of the profession. I began to wonder if there was anything I could do to further the cause of preparing preservice teachers in a manner as substantial or better than the way in which I was prepared.

**Drawn Into Contributing To the Field**

How though to contribute something more than wonder, something more than questions articulated rather poorly from a research standpoint? Though I had read and studied a great deal of research along my path as a graduate student in my area of reading
and literacy, how to begin to more seriously understand the route with which to somehow contribute insight to the field? Appropriately, a great deal of this change took place with the adjustment of my Master’s degree from a Master of Education to a Master of Science track. One additional course in qualitative research methodology entered my plan of study (at this point, still prior to starting a thesis), and gave me more than just a passing understanding of research methodology, which I only briefly surveyed in my first semester of graduate school (I later enjoyed both quantitative and also additional advanced qualitative methodology coursework with my doctoral plan of study). In qualitative methodology I began to learn how to articulate a research framework, how to select the methodological tools appropriate to the questions I wanted to pursue, and I also found greater background and insight from contributors to the field of literacy (and surrounding fields) that gave me a glance at what had worked for them. I took especially strong inspiration from the likes of Jim Gee as I first began to explore the theories that supported classroom discourse, what it was and how it was constructed and maintained, and Courtney Cazden, regarding how it could be used to inform one’s own teaching practice. I saw my thinking grow and my understanding coalesce regarding the social construction of identity, using discourse as a vehicle, and my preference for applying a complementary form of thinking to a knowledge construction model in the classroom where learning is collectively shaped, also fueled by discourse.

Although I can’t pin down a precise moment that would forever define my academic journey as a graduate student, I certainly began to envision an approach to scholarly research in my area that might serve to both address the methodological preferences I was developing, and the areas of professional impact that might occur with
my fledgling inquiry. I did begin to wonder what I could uncover more about the learning process of both high school language arts students, as well as preservice teachers. I also began to wonder, with the right model of discourse analysis, what I could learn about their learning process, about how their teaching was shaped through discourse. I also began to wonder, were I able to even better articulate a question or point of inquiry into the research field, what it would be like to gather the relevant data and if I could be successful in the analysis of such data. While a number of other areas did of course cross my mind—and I while I certainly did well in the Master’s thesis stage of this journey (with a methodological fit for my interests, yes, but not quite the best topical fit for my background)—I never truly encountered the right combination of ideas and circumstances that would allow me the chance to put my research interests side by side with my growing appreciation of working with preservice teachers of the secondary level. I could never quite find the right opportunity to engage in deep and serious inquiry about the learning process of preservice teachers of reading, those with a direct hand in the teaching reading comprehension, those with an in-the-moment experience in the greater process of literacy. I honestly wondered if I could somehow contribute something to preservice teachers so they could enter the same world of high school language arts as I did, knowing more than I did, and being better prepared.

A Pursuit of Inquiry Among Secondary Level Reading

I never originally imagined that I would arrive at the dissertation stage of this journey, but am so exceptionally glad that I have. I am certainly not driven by thoughts or beliefs that the education of preservice teachers is inherently flawed or on the incorrect
path. Quite to the contrary, I rather passionately believe there is more promising potential in the preparation of preservice teachers to enter the field of education than ever before. It seems that the field of literacy continues to move in a direction of understanding that both comprehends current trends in literacy practices, as well as attempts to use those practices to further inform teaching. It also seems that thanks to a wider acceptance of qualitative inquiry in education, more methodological tools are both available and encouraged within that research paradigm. And, there is no denying the urgency surrounding the training of reading teachers, and the resulting successes in reading scores demanded of them, by the current tides of public policy. Though one part of me feels drawn to explore new areas of literacy emerging in the field with a finely honed qualitative approach, another part of me feels drawn to use my preference for qualitative inquiry to further know and understand the corner of teaching practice most near and dear to me. I confess every fascination and interest in New Literacies (like so many literacy scholars), and every interest in exploring their use in schools to better learn what their practices can teach us about student literacy and how to support it (I take comfort in the hopes this will be a part of my future work), but I continue to look fondly in the direction of secondary level reading teachers, and how they grow and shape their concept of teaching. I continue to feel the researcher’s drive at this point to look into the Discourse and the discourse-driven identity of secondary level preservice reading teachers, and see what such inquiry has to tell me about how to best support their preservice journey.

On one hand, I certainly hope that this dissertation study can be the appropriate form of academic apex for a graduate student that it is supposed to be. I hope this has
been the right preparation for the professoriate—and I do believe it has. I hope that the study design, data collection, and process of writing have tested my acquired skills and academic potential, as it should any doctoral candidate. The realist in me genuinely looks at such an objective in all I attempt this project of inquiry. It is, after all, the final step of a doctorate. But I think it is a realistic hope, a healthy hope, that any approach to the inquiry reflected in a dissertation will generate some quantity of knowledge translated into some form of conclusions or implications for the field in question. I hope my own dissertation study, born of a professional immersion in the teaching of secondary language arts, reshaped in the educational crucible of graduate school, and flavored with my own preference for qualitative inquiry, can offer something that will improve the educational practice of reading teachers. I hope that my dissertation study, a research framework that I have shaped in accordance with my academic training, will collect a body of discourse data suitable for examination under the Gee-inspired lenses I have articulated and made ready for use. I hope that my dissertation study, guided by questions with which I tested the waters in a pilot study, will successfully satisfy both the process of qualitative inquiry, and the constant call of the field of literacy to better know and understand who its teachers are and what they should do. I hope that my dissertation study, my attempt to engage with the training of preservice teacher discourse in order to better understand the process by which they come to conceptualize their identities as reading teachers, will unlock some quantity of knowledge with which to inform a field that will on some level better understand the reality of their preservice teacher identity, and their place within the field of literacy.
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