

## Negotiating Different Conceptions about Reading and Teaching Literature in a Preservice Literature Class<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Teacher educators have recently raised important questions about the content and effectiveness of preservice English language arts courses. For example, Smagorinsky & Whiting (1995), after surveying secondary school English methods courses, asked, "To what extent do the opportunities provided for the students enable them to reflect on and internalize the concepts presented by the course readings and other experiences in order to empower them to make good decisions in the classroom?" (p. 103). This study attempts to answer that question and others by focusing on the perspectives of the preservice students and their professor as they negotiated different ideas about teaching and learning.

I was specifically interested in how college students used prior experiences as readers and students of literature to construct effective pedagogical strategies for the teaching of literature. I also wanted know what role a preservice course and the professor of the course might play in this process. This research focuses on a university preservice course on teaching secondary school literature and the spirited, and often dissonant, dialectic between the professor and preservice students as they negotiated different perspectives on literature instruction. In this article, I focus on how entering beliefs about reading and teaching literature influenced these students' ability to make conceptual changes during the course. I also examine how the professor shaped the interactions and dialectic in this class.

### Resistance to New Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

When students enter preservice programs in the English language arts, many believe they know what it means to teach English (Agee, 1995, 1997; Wilson, 1990). They know a basic script. Beginning English teachers, though, need to possess far more than knowledge of a subject and a basic script to become effective professionals. They must somehow transform their own experiences as readers and students of literature into effective pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). This specialized knowledge allows teachers to transform content through "strategies most likely to be fruitful in organizing the understanding of learners" (Shulman, p. 10). Yet this transformation seems difficult to achieve.

One of the problems in initiating change is that preservice teachers often bring with them conceptions of teaching that conflict with those espoused by their professors and their course readings (Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985; Ritchie &

Wilson, 1993; Wilson, 1990). Wilson describes most of her entering students as believing that "teaching is telling" (p. 206). In contrast, she sees teaching as a process of questioning, reflecting, and sorting out multiple definitions of teaching. She concedes, "My success [in changing students' conceptions] has been sporadic" (p. 208). Feiman-Nemser and Buchman describe their students' familiarity with teacher roles as one of three "pitfalls." Students entering preservice programs, they point out, cannot "be expected to recognize that what they know about classroom life is only part of a universe of possibilities" (p. 63).

The conflict between the familiar and the unfamiliar in preservice courses continues to pose problems for teacher educators and has been the topic of several studies. In a case study of a secondary school preservice methods course, Grossman (1991) reports on the professor's attempts to change students' entering beliefs. To help students break with what Lortie (1975) called an "apprenticeship of observation" informed by years of observing teachers, the professor in Grossman's study used "overcorrection," a method that consists of "providing extreme examples of innovative practices" (p. 350). However, this research focuses primarily on the professor and did not report on the students' entering conceptions and how they changed (or did not change).

Holt-Reynolds (1992) focuses on the types of personal-history lay theories that nine preservice students (six of them English majors) brought with them into their methods course and how those beliefs conflicted with the professor's principles and arguments. Using a survey (a Likert-scale list of principles their professor had addressed) and interviews, Holt-Reynolds found three principal areas of difference between the students' beliefs and what the professor advocated: differences in their definitions of teaching and learning, what they valued, and what data they had available to make decisions. Although Holt-Reynolds presented data from interviews with the students, she reports little about the professor or the course except that it "was, in essence, one extended campaign for the adoption of student-centered, process-focused, constructivist practices in subject-matter secondary classrooms" (p. 330). Nonetheless Holt-Reynolds' findings show that these students' entering beliefs about teaching became significant obstacles to the ideas their professor introduced.

### ***Prior Conceptions: Why They Are Important***

Entering conceptions of preservice students are powerful and can strongly shape students' responses to the ideas they encounter in their teacher preparation program. Strong positive associations with particular approaches or the teachers who practice them are not undesirable in and of themselves. However, these associations can inhibit consideration of other conceptions of teaching that might be more effective with students who may bring experiences to school that are very different from those of the teacher (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Heath, 1983). Meier (1992) describes her preservice teachers' entering conceptions in this way: "Many of those who enter teaching hope to do unto others what the teachers they knew and loved did unto them" (p. 595).

One specific conception that can impede consideration of approaches to teaching literature that are grounded in the social construction of knowledge is that of the

teacher as expert knower (Britzman, 1991; Ritchie & Wilson, 1993). This conception of the teacher may be particularly appealing to preservice English teachers. It represents for them a certainty of tradition. Holt-Reynolds (1992) reports that the preservice English teachers in her study defended lecture-based pedagogy because "lecturing would 'prove' that they are subject-matter experts" (p. 336). How, then, can teacher educators encourage preservice English teachers to consider a broader range of conceptions of teaching and learning than those they often bring with them into preservice courses?

### *Conditions for Conceptual Change*

Those who instruct preservice students face at least two problems: how to approach conceptions that may be unfamiliar to students and how to provide them with an intellectual ecology that fosters change rather than resistance. If new ideas conflict with closely-held values, cognitive dissonance and resistance often result. Wilson (1990) reports that when she pushed her preservice students to "support their answers," they felt "anxious, uncomfortable, and insecure" (p. 207). Attempting to bring about conceptual change may not only be difficult but also a risky proposition for both teachers and students.

Is it possible then to initiate conceptual change in preservice courses? If so, how? A large body of research shows that people cling to their prior beliefs tenaciously, often in the face of discrediting information. In reviewing the studies that examine how and why people hold on to certain conceptions, Nisbett and Ross (1980) explain this phenomenon: "Inferences about matters that touch upon the self have a unique status. They seem to call upon cognitive structures that are less normative and more primitive than those that figure in less personal inferences. Moreover such structures cannot readily be superseded by more logical ones" (p. 289). Strike and Posner (1985) theorize that four conditions must exist for conceptual change to occur. Three are relevant to this discussion of preservice teachers:

1. There must be dissatisfaction with existing conceptions...
2. A new conception must be minimally understood...
3. A new conception must appear initially plausible. (p. 216)

If these conditions are critical to conceptual change in preservice education, an instructor's task is complicated by the probability that those who may be most resistant to unfamiliar ideas about teaching and learning are usually excellent students who are not always dissatisfied with their existing conceptions (Agee, 1995, 1997; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Wilson, 1990).

Establishing initial plausibility, an essential condition for conceptual change according to Strike and Posner (1985), may be especially challenging for a teacher of preservice students. Of the six ways they identify in which the plausibility condition might be met, five of them have to do with presenting new concepts that are consistent with prior beliefs, past experience, or existing knowledge of the world. Only one condition provides another possibility: "One finds the new conception capable of solving problems of which one is aware" (p. 220). How one moves



preservice students to think about what might be problematic with the practices they have previously experienced is central to the issue of plausibility.

Although the subject matter differs, studies from other content areas offer insight into how conceptual changes can occur. Champagne, Gunstone, and Klopfer (1985) look at preservice high school science teachers as they participated in about 30 hours of discussion-based problem-solving in physics. Strategies for initiating conceptual change involved ideational confrontation and discussion. The preservice teachers changed their previous conceptions and learned new ones as a result of the dialogue strategies. Schema theorists have also proposed a challenging dialectic to foster schema change (Anderson, 1977; Riegel, 1973).

In a preservice class discussions that help students explore and question issues are important in at least three ways. First, they help students articulate conceptions they hold about teaching and learning. Second, they provide an environment for the kind of talk that can transform knowledge rather than reproduce it through the questioning of assumptions (Freire, 1993; Gee, 1996; Rubin, 1990). Third, they provide what Nisbett and Ross (1980) call "normative" feedback: "We are often given clues, frequently in the form of questions asked by other people, to the fact that we hold some opinion, or have chosen some course of action, that does not seem reasonable in light of the evidence and arguments we can currently muster" (p. 288). Of course, what is normative for a group of preservice students could present problems, but a large body of research from diverse areas shows that discussion can foster learning (e.g., Barnes, 1992; Cazden, 1988; Champagne et al., 1985; Hynds, 1992; Marshall, 1989; Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995).

In sum, it is important to understand the conceptions that preservice students bring into our preservice English courses. Teacher educators need to analyze the nature of concept formation and change, how prior conceptions intersect with new ideas they encounter, and how their own praxes shape those intersections. To further understanding of these issues, this research considered the following questions: What conceptions did these preservice teachers hold about teaching and reading literature at the beginning and end of the course? How did these students respond to unfamiliar ideas in this course? How did the professor's conceptions about teaching literature and his praxis influence the course? In this paper, I focus on the interactions of the students and their professor in a preservice class and the tensions that emerged as the preservice students grappled with ideas about reading and teaching literature that were often very different.

## Method

The student participants in this study were enrolled in an undergraduate program for secondary school English teachers at a large state university that is ranked as a research one institution. The university operates on a quarter system, so courses tend to be intense. The secondary literature class, which met twice a week, was no



exception. In this paper, I describe three perspectives on the interactions in the class: the professor's, the preservice students', and my own.

### *Procedures*

My initial stance in the secondary literature class was that of an observer. On the first day I introduced myself as a researcher who was interested in their experiences as they made the transition from student to teacher. As the students became accustomed to my presence, I became a participant-observer in a limited way when the students sometimes tried to include me in small-group discussions. Although I occasionally interacted in the small-group situations, my role during class sessions remained primarily that of an observer. I had no responsibility for supervision or evaluation of the participants during the course.

To facilitate triangulation and validity I collected data from multiple sources. Data for this report included fieldnotes from 20 observations of the secondary literature class fall term (they met two times a week for 10 weeks); audiotaped whole-class and small-group discussions; audiotaped interviews with the preservice students; two audiotaped interviews with the university professor; the results from a three-question protocol administered at the beginning and end of the term; documents such as the course syllabus (see Appendix A), handouts, and assignments; and the preservice students' portfolios. To increase the probability that the students' responses to the three-question protocol would not reflect what they thought the professor would want to see, I explained to the students that their professor would not see their responses, and I collected the protocols. I also asked the professor and three preservice participants to read the final report and respond with written comments. All names of participants and places in this report are pseudonyms.

### *The Participants*

Bill Reed, an assistant professor, taught the secondary school literature class which I observed. He was in his second year of teaching at the university. We had worked together with preservice teachers in the field, and he readily agreed to participate in the study to learn more about his teaching. The preservice students' participation was completely voluntary; several said they were interested in participating not only to have a voice but also to have someone with whom they could talk during this time of transition. Only one student of the 25 enrolled in the course chose not to participate.

The 24 participants included 13 white females, seven white males, an African-American female, an African-American male, a Hispanic-American female, and an Asian-American female. Most of the students were undergraduates in their early twenties; however two female students were in their late thirties and had adolescent children, and one male student, 31, had decided to go to college after years of rough manual labor.

### *Analysis of Data*

I analyzed data using the constant comparison method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), a method of analysis widely used in naturalistic studies. The analysis requires constantly comparing previous data and coding as the researcher collects

new data. As the comparison process progresses, the researcher refines codes and constructs tentative categories.

Before coding fieldnotes or interview transcripts, I read through hard copies and made marginal notes. The next step involved coding all interviews and fieldnotes. I began with a process described as open coding (Strauss, 1990) which involved arriving at tentative descriptive statements to "produce concepts that seem to fit the data" (p. 28). The purpose, as Strauss described the process, is to "break the data apart analytically" (p. 29).

Two general types of codes emerged through open coding: R-coded statements and S-coded statements. The R-coded statements described participants as readers and students of literature (i.e., R02=relates literature to personal history, knowledge, or biases). The S-coded statements described the student participants' socialization into teaching in general and teaching literature in particular (i.e., S21=reflects on own reading process, responses, stances, or ways of learning as a guide for teaching future students). I also developed P-coded statements to describe the professor's stance on teaching literature and his goals for the course (i.e., P04=expects "serious commitment" and willingness "to wrestle with" issues from preservice students).

Then I transferred fieldnotes and interviews to files on a computer database program that allowed me to refine codes and to examine changing perspectives across contexts and time. Individual database records maintained a speaker-turn format to preserve context. Each record could be coded with multiple codes and sorted by one or more codes. This system allowed me to see units of meaning embedded within a speaker turn and to further refine codes. If two codes kept occurring together, their proximity indicated either overlapping codes that needed to be collapsed into one or a relationship between them. For example, two codes, one describing concerns about control and the other describing strategies for teaching literature, kept occurring together. This repeated occurrence suggested a relationship between these two areas.

Clustering similarly coded statements, a process called axial coding (Strauss, 1990), helped to generate larger, more refined categories. Strauss described axial coding as an "intense analysis done around one category at a time" (p. 32). For example, three descriptive S-coded statements described the participants' reflections on their own experiences as readers and how they were using those to formulate their ideas about teaching literature:

1. Reflects on high school English teachers' methodologies or own experiences with literature in high school English courses in reference to ideas about teaching literature.
2. Reflects on college English teachers' roles and methodologies and own experiences with literature in college English courses in reference to ideas about teaching literature.
3. Reflects on own reading patterns, responses, or stances as a guide for teaching future students.

Using the axial coding process, I developed from these three categories one overarching category: Reflecting on previous experiences as a student of literature to develop ideas about approaches to literature. The relationships among the data in this category illustrate how the preservice students' prior experiences intersected with the unfamiliar ideas about teaching and reading literature that they encountered in this class.

The coding process also allowed me to trace qualitative changes across time. With the three-question protocol, given to the students on the first day of class and again on the last day of the term, and triangulation with other data, I was able to see whether or not their perspectives changed. If there were changes in their conceptions, I analyzed how they were manifested in protocol results and what general kinds of changes were occurring across the data. In the first-day responses, several themes became apparent concerning their entering conceptions of English teachers, of literary texts, and of their future pupils. Their final responses to this protocol in December offer some interesting contrasts. Below I discuss the themes that emerged from these data on entering preservice students and the various ways in which changes in their conceptions occurred as well as which conceptions remained stable (see Table 1 for information in summary form). To emphasize the diversity of the preservice class and the complexity of the interactions that occurred, I include data from a variety of sources to amplify the protocol results.

## Results

The results are organized into sections that trace both the chronology of the course and the larger issues that surfaced as the students and their professor negotiated different ideas about teaching and reading literature. The first section focuses on the results of a protocol that I gave them on the first day of class that asked about their entering conceptions about teaching and reading literature. Next I describe the professor's goals for the course. The third section describes the students' concerns and expectations early in the course, and the fourth, what happened when the professor deliberately challenged the students to articulate and defend their conceptions of teaching literature. Next I describe the role of small-group discussions that took place throughout the course. The I focus on how student resistance and doubt was manifested during the course. The final section addresses the complexity of conceptual change and describes the students responses to the same protocol I had given them on the first day of class.

In reporting the results, I use the voices of the preservice students and their professor to illustrate significant themes that emerged across data sources and to represent their perspectives. The excerpts from discussions, interviews, and written documents during the course do not necessarily represent all the students' perspectives on a given issue. Rather the goal is to represent the complex processes of teaching and learning.



### *Entering Conceptions about Teaching and Literature*

The majority of these preservice students had gone to middle-class public urban or suburban high schools, and a few to private schools. Their descriptions of high school English classes, across multiple sources of data, were of college-preparatory English classes where literary analyses and tests formed the core of the curriculum. With few exceptions, these students were heavily invested their own achievement in traditional classrooms and on standardized tests. To have better understanding of some of their entering conceptions, I asked them to answer three questions on the first day of class. I describe some of their individual responses below to illustrate the themes that became apparent. The percentages are based on the responses of 24 participants.

### *Early Purposes for Teaching English*

The first question asked, "Why do you want to teach English?" Fifteen of the 24 students (63%) cited their own love of literature as a driving force for their decision to enter the profession. Ten students (42%) described a desire to create in their future students a love/appreciation of literature similar to their own. Eight students (33%) said they wanted to recreate in their future classrooms the kinds of experiences they had enjoyed. For example, one said: "Teaching English would be an enjoyable career for me because I would be passing something on to students that I truly enjoy." These data and others reveal the powerful influence of experiences with former English teachers in these students decisions to become English teachers. One student wrote: "I loved my English courses in high school and thought my English teachers were the most interesting and dynamic people alive; I'd like to make that kind of impact on a student one day." Another acknowledged the constraints of teaching, but felt a strong desire to make a difference in students' lives:

My mom, my aunt, and my grandmother are teachers and I realize I'm not going to make tons of money or have lots of leisure time. I don't want to write an answer here that sounds corny or typical. I just want to help students realize how much they can learn and grow from literature. Too many people hate to read. I want to change their minds.

At this point in time, some of the preservice students had a general, uncomplicated conception of teaching: The teacher transmits knowledge to students. Moreover, their imaginary future students were not particularized: They have no identity. A bilingual student confessed that she had chosen to become a teacher because of practical reasons like "benefits and steady pay with many paid holidays" but also had "more noble reasons": "The desire to impart and share my knowledge of literature with my students has become a compelling motivator for me. ... I want to infuse my students with the critical idea that language can empower them, not only in succeeding in school, but also in succeeding later in the real world." Her rhetoric suggested dual, possibly conflicting, approaches. Words like "impart" and "infuse" suggested an approach to literature with which she was already familiar, yet she felt the need to "empower" students through language to prepare them for adult life. Ten other

students used a similar rhetoric with words like “offer,” “share,” “instill,” and “passing on” appearing in their answers. Two of these students expressed their desires even more forcefully. One said, “I would like to make my students discover a love for reading and writing the way I did.” Another wrote, “Students are impressionable, and I think I can make them interested in English” [emphases added]. Overall, the preservice students’ own positive experiences with literature were a touchstone for them, affirming the idea that their future students should love literature “the way I did.”

### **Early Beliefs about What an English Teacher Needs to Know**

Although the preservice students had well-elaborated conceptions about the role of the teacher, those conceptions were drawn from their own experiences as students. They were uncertain about the specifics of what a teacher of literature might think about, plan for, or do with students. The protocol they responded to on the first day of class included a question about teacher knowledge, “What does a teacher need to know to teach literature at the secondary level?” Eighteen students (75%) emphasized the importance of a teacher’s content knowledge. Judy began, “A teacher needs to have a good working knowledge of the language and of the ‘accepted’ works of literature.” Lily wrote, “The teacher should be able to read a book for the first time and be able to pick out the theme and the minor topics discussed that help to pull the work together.” Ruth tried to temper her description with what was possible, but she echoed the general consensus on teacher knowledge: “Although it is unrealistic to expect a teacher to be familiar with all works of literature, a teacher should be familiar with exemplary literature from all genres, cultures, and time periods.”

Developing general pedagogical knowledge was another characteristic that emerged across these data. Eighteen students (75%) specifically referred to the importance of knowing how to teach and knowing one’s students. For example, Janice wrote: “The most important thing for a teacher to know is how to teach. Knowledge is very important but if a teacher doesn’t have the skills for conveying meaning and explaining, it doesn’t really matter how much she knows.” Two underlying assumptions in their answers were important factors in the dissonance that developed later: that Bill Reed’s class would teach them how to achieve the expertise they needed to teach English, and that they would learn to teach as they had been taught.

### **Prior Conceptions of Literature**

Another of the questions that I asked the students was, “What is good literature?” The criteria they described fell into three general categories. It is important to note that one student might have mentioned criteria in more than one category. The first category focused on cultural criteria for selection of texts; seven students (29%) defined “good” literature as texts that are accepted as significant by others. For example, Zoe described good literature as “a combination of the study of the classics as well as a study of more contemporary, significant authors.” Sandra said, “‘Good’

literature would include the accepted books on 'classics' list, but in a broader sense it would also include works which draw people into deeper understandings."

The second category included criteria that specified intellectual development. Thirteen students (54%) thought good literature should "make a person think." Kim thought good literature should "broaden the mind and senses and leave some kind of lasting impression on the reader." Ted said good literature "stimulates the intellect" and is "complex enough to elicit discussion ... that is considered intelligent." Janice wrote:

In the past I believed "good" literature was what I liked. Later on as I got farther along in college, I began to think "good" literature was everything I didn't like. Now I think "good" literature is anything that makes a person think, anything that makes a person take another look at the world in a different light, and anything that makes a person feel like he/she has experienced a part of the author's life.

The third category of criteria focused on enjoyment and escape as important qualities, but this category was the smallest. Five students (21%) mentioned enjoyment, engagement, or escape as part of their definition of good literature. Sam wrote, "Good literature is exciting." Susan saw it as "something that allows me to escape reality ... that I don't want to put down." However, it was clear that "good" literature, as many students defined it on the first day of class, had little to do with enjoyment.

Only three students (13%) questioned the idea of "good" literature as a generic list of readings for everyone. One of those students, Ruth, was no longer certain about criteria for good literature:

Until two quarters ago, I thought great literature was written by dead white men. A special topics class on twentieth century women writers blew my theory. I am still trying to discover for myself what constitutes good literature.

Bert attacked the traditional ideas about what is good: "Good literature, in the academic sense of the word, excludes much artistic expression." LaTasha, an African-American student, questioned the narrow definition that most people used to describe "good" literature. She argued, "Some say African authors' novels, such as Ngugi, are not great literature, but I disagree because I find that his novels are important chronicles of life." At this point, though, most of these students had not questioned their assumptions about criteria for good literature, much less what criteria a teacher might use for selecting texts for a curriculum.

***Professor Reed: "There Is So Much That I Think They Should Know"***

Professor Bill Reed approached his third year of college teaching with a fervor that, according to his own description, students sometimes found too "confrontational." His strong stance, or what he called his "agenda," on teaching literature and his



insistence on pushing students to question their entering assumptions influenced in critical ways the interactions that took place in the class.

Bill's stance on teaching literature was informed in part by his own experiences as a reader. He told the preservice students: "When I think back to my own experiences as a reader, I never felt that there was any connection between what I read on my own and what I read at school." He blamed his alienation from school literature on both the kinds of texts that were chosen for the curriculum and on the ways in which literature was taught.

His experience as a high school English teacher in a large inner-city high school increased his negative view of traditional strategies. He told the preservice class that he began as a very traditional teacher but that his students' resistance brought about his transformation. He said his high school pupils "felt like I was imposing an agenda on them, one that I was interested in, but they weren't." Eventually he revised his strategies: "I started to let kids generate their own questions. ... The whole atmosphere of my classes changed."

Bill's prior experiences, as a student and as a high school teacher, were important in shaping his bias against a New Critical approach, or what he called the "transmission paradigm." He described this paradigm as one in which the teacher follows a curriculum guide, uses traditional selections of literature, and administers fact-based assessment instruments. He rejected the New Critical idea that meaning resides in the work and that the role of the teacher is to lead students to an understanding of that meaning. He wanted teachers to allow students "to become meaning-makers" and critical thinkers.

When I interviewed Bill early in the term, he talked about his goals for the secondary school literature course. He had started the course with a common reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). His purpose was to create community before considering theory, a decision that came out of his unsettling experience with a class the year before: "I hit them [the previous students] with all this theoretical stuff and just staked out all this transmission, transactional ... by then there was a certain amount of resistance." He envisioned moving this group of preservice students from their reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* toward understanding response-centered approaches to teaching literature: "I'm hoping that the thing will evolve and that by the time it's the fourth, fifth, sixth week that we are really going to be hitting that issue of meaning making."

When I asked Bill to talk about his larger goals, he said he hoped that the students would begin to engage in critical reflection on their roles as teachers of literature:

I'm concerned that they begin to see themselves less as purveyors of knowledge about literature and more as experienced readers who are capable of orchestrating and structuring experiences that will help young readers gain confidence and gain power as readers. ... I would like to help them be articulate about their own reading processes and the reading processes of others so they realize that there are variety of purposes and other ways of being engaged.

After his negative experience with a previous class, he wanted to try some new strategies:

I guess one of the reasons why I set up this course the way I have this year is both to be a little more sensitive to that [the needs of the students], and so that I'm really practicing what I'm preaching in a way. But I still feel that tension. ... I do have a predetermined sense of what they need to think about, but I'm going to try to be a lot less confrontational about what they make of these issues.

However, Bill still felt constrained in the realization of his goals for the course: "The paradox I find with this course is there is so much that I think they should know and experience to be prepared to be teachers of literature that there is some dissonance there."

As he noted, he had difficulty moving away from the role of "purveyor." He wanted to open up a dialogue about issues of ownership and meaning-making, but he had yet to develop a "comfortable" strategy for accomplishing his goals. He also wanted to model an approach to teaching that matched the theories of reading he advocated:

I guess I'm modeling an approach which sees the reading process in different terms, and I would like to see as many students as possible connect to ... at least to begin to question some of those assumptions, whether or not they ultimately agree with my shtick. At least they question that and are able to resist the pressures to conform that all teachers encounter.

His central problem, as he defined it, was striking a balance between presenting his shtick and giving the preservice students more voice and control.

### *Assessing Early Concerns and Expectations*

The preservice students' early conceptions about teaching literature became evident in small group discussions two weeks into the course. Bill asked each group to come up with written plans for discussing the young adult novels they had chosen to read, and they began to talk about what teachers need to do to prepare for teaching literature. My fieldnotes from one group recorded their conceptions of the role of the teacher at this point. (Note: Direct quotations in fieldnote dialogue in this paper are set off with quotation marks; other dialogue is paraphrased)

Lily: Our purpose is "not to read for enjoyment but to read like teachers."

Susan: Teachers need to be able to look for "things" in literature, like "themes and important passages," so they can show these things to the students. [They decide to add characterization to the list.]

Lily: Teachers need to learn how to "dissect" literature to see all of the hidden things that students should know about. Does someone have a better word than "dissect"?

Reading "like teachers," for this group, meant dissecting literature, searching for "hidden things," and transmitting them to the students.

The subsequent written plans of all the groups reflected similar conceptions of the role of the teacher. In their plans, Bert, Lily, and Susan reiterated previous goals they had discussed: "We want to read these books from a different perspective than we are used to. We normally read for pleasure, and now we want to read so that we are able to present the books with specifics in mind." One group listed as a goal, "To learn to read to teach rather than to just be a reader." Their plans revealed only vague notions about how teachers translated their personal experiences with literature into goals and strategies for teaching. Another group wrote that they wanted, "To become accustom[ed] to finding interesting ideas for discussion," a phrasing that suggests how far removed they feel from their future roles.

In a class discussion several days later, one student announced, "If we're going to be teachers, no one is going to tell us the answers." No statement more clearly described these students' identification with a "banking concept of education" (Freire, 1993). At this stage, several data sources revealed that the majority of these students did not associate teaching literature with pleasurable activities or sharing ideas. Instead teaching was defined as an isolated activity with the inescapable burdens that such a role entails: the "teacher knows everything and the students know nothing" (Freire, p. 54).

To have a better sense of the students' concerns, Bill invited the students to write letters to him a couple of weeks into the term. In their letters one theme that emerged was their fear or doubt about their ability to teach. Kim wrote: "I am scared that I won't be a good teacher. I know that everyone in this room is probably hesitant, but I am petrified." Ronnie asked, "Will I be successful? Can I make it interesting enough for them?" Mary confessed, "The most important thing that I can tell you about me is that I feel inadequate." Ruth, who had done a practicum at a local high school in late August, wrote: "I also discovered ... that the job of teaching is a lot harder than I anticipated." Her concern echoed across several data sources: the students' were beginning to realize that they will need to know far more, especially about pedagogy, than they do to become an English teacher.

The students asked many questions in their letters to Bill, and they wanted answers right away. Janice's letter expressed her frustration on this point:

I don't feel like I'll ever know enough of whatever it is I am supposed to know to teach English. ... I really enjoy reading so this class remains "an interesting one." I don't feel like I am getting anywhere though. The books we read don't seem any different now that I've decided to be an English teacher. Should they? Why aren't all these wonderful ideas springing from my brain? ... What do I say to my father, who wants me to be a lawyer, when he asks "What have you learned so far?" Honestly, right now I can't say too much. Is anyone ever going to teach me how to teach or am I not suppose[d] to teach because I don't already know?



Her desire for some concrete “how-to” knowledge was repeated by other students in their letters and in their questions during class discussions.

Throughout the students’ letters three basic concerns were evident: motivating students, selecting appropriate literature, and developing effective teaching strategies. Lily’s comments illustrated these issues and the gap she felt between herself and her constructed image of the teacher:

My main concerns are 1) How do I get my students as motivated to read as I am? and 2) How am I supposed to pick apart a novel to find things in it adolescents would be interested in? Teachers I have come in contact with seem to have an infinite supply of activities that correspond with materials students are reading. I need help getting started with my own “infinite” supply, though I realize there is really no such thing.

Her letter made explicit her entering perceptions of the role of English teachers: they “pick apart” literature to deliver knowledge to the students. Her comments indicated, too, that she thought her students would be (or should be) similar to her in their desire to read. Her final comment suggested the dissonance she was already feeling. She wanted to gain expertise but already felt the burden of finding “things” in literary works interesting to adolescents. She also wanted to develop her own “infinite supply” of tools for praxis but was frustrated in her acknowledgment that this conception is a myth.

### *Demythologizing: Challenging Prior Conceptions*

Bill Reed cited as one of his goals having the students “stake out a stance.” He used a process, described by Freire (1993) as “problem-posing education” which “sets itself the task of demythologizing” (p. 64). The process, by its very nature, produced tensions for the participants.

Bill often pushed the students to question and defend their ideas, both in class discussions and in written reflections. These strategies often created a high level of dissonance. For example, in early October, after the students read the first chapter of *How Porcupines Make Love II* (Purves, Rogers, & Soter, 1990), Bill asked the class to decide what constituted good literature and what kinds of literature were appropriate for a secondary English class. At this point, many of the students’ ideas about teaching literature and selecting texts were largely unexamined and implicit. The following excerpt from fieldnotes recorded the tension that emerged in the discussion:

Paul: “Who decides what’s great?”

Loni: I had a Southern Literature course where I was forced to read people like Erskine Caldwell who is “sexist and racist” but in spite of these things, “I got something out of it.”

Ted: Great literature is chosen by “scholars who know what they’re doing.”

Paul: “Who’s a scholar? Is it a university professor who sits in his office and makes \$60,000 a year telling people what to think?”

- Ben: Great literature is great because “people all over the world read it.” I wouldn’t make a high school class read *Moby Dick*, but I think it’s a great book. I’d choose books the students would enjoy.
- Paul: [To Ben] Why do you think *Moby Dick* is a great book?
- Ben: Even though I had to “trudge through it,” I could see why it was great.
- Paul: “Who says it’s great?”
- Ben: [Mumbles] “A lot of people.”
- Prof Reed: [Interrupts at this point] “Greatness is obviously a matter of opinion.”

This debate initiated a line of inquiry that continued throughout the term. The dissonant perspectives of Paul and Ben opened up questions about the value of particular texts and who decided what texts deserved a place in the English curriculum. It also forced the students to begin formulating their own stances on these issues. For some students, the consideration of such questions was a series of revelations. One student later confessed in a written reflection that she did not know what “the canon” was until coming to this class.

### **The Debate on Literary Terms**

Resistance and tensions were especially evident when Bill challenged the students to think about how valuable or effective it was to teach literary terms. He prodded them to think critically about the purpose for teaching literary terms within a broader context: “Literary terms give us a language to talk about literature but as soon as the terms become disconnected from experiences with literature, they become useless information.”

Bill’s insistence that meaningful experiences with literature could occur without teaching literary terms challenged the students to examine and articulate their stances. Fieldnotes from their first class discussion on the teaching of literary terms offer insight into the tensions that the students felt as they encountered ideas about teaching literature that were radically different from what they had experienced in school:

- Prof Reed: “It just doesn’t work. It’s disempowering.” Kids already know some of the terms, and they don’t need to know long lists of them to talk about literature.
- Ronnie: What about a sonnet? What about kids who’ll go to college and will be expected to know these things?
- Prof Reed: You have to use your own judgment. It would depend on the class. I’m trying to give you options so you’re not “locked into textbooks.”
- Ben: I think it’s important to know all of this. If a student asks you about rhymed couplets, a teacher should be able to tell him.

Ben and Ronnie were voicing concerns reflected in other data from their peers. They had dual conceptions of the teacher as expert and students as recipients of the teacher’s knowledge. They were uncomfortable with considering another approach.

Any approach other than the traditional one, they implied, would victimize students, especially those who were college-bound. Their rhetoric suggested that larger cultural expectations about what should be taught in a secondary English classroom drove their assumptions. As the discussion progressed, other students indicated they, too, were uncomfortable with departing from what they had experienced. Bill ended class by saying he wanted them to develop their "own agenda" and that their discussion was "a dry run" for their next meeting.

After this class discussion, LaTasha, an African-American student, reflected on the issues raised by her peers in her learning log. She had not enjoyed her high school literature curriculum with its heavy focus on canonical literature and analysis and found the student-centered approach Bill Reed advocated very appealing. However, she had a hard time reconciling what she had experienced in high school with a response-centered approach to literature.

I am very concerned with promoting personal experience with literature; however, I do believe that I would be doing my students a disservice if I do not expose them to literary devices. ... If we ignore these aspects of English, how will our students be prepared for other classes? What about those standardized tests that are not just representations of students' abilities? These areas of literature are indeed on these tests.

Thus, even those students who found attractive some of the approaches Bill Reed advocated were acutely aware of what LaTasha called "the realities of teaching." Although he had deliberately challenged them to think about what might be required for engagement with a text, the students interpreted his challenge in ways that he had not anticipated. For example, those "realities," especially standardized tests, made choosing between two approaches a moral issue for LaTasha.

In the next class session, Bill asked the small groups to assign various literary terms to one of three categories he had written on the chalkboard:

*Necessary*

*Useful but not necessary*

*Literary specialists only*

I taped one group as they tried to decide how they would classify various literary terms. The following excerpt is from their discussion on the usefulness of teaching symbols/symbolism:

Anne: I think it [symbolism] is necessary.

Kim: Well, why would it be necessary?

Anne: Well, I don't know. That's a hard one because you're getting into the abstract things now, with that.



- Wendy: I mean, if you want people to be just readers, none of these terms are necessary. Just let them talk about what they read. It depends on what kind of readers you want them to be.
- Kim: I just remember when I was a freshman and sophomore in high school and we used to get paper topics. You know, in such and such books, find the symbolism or whatever. That used to make me just freak out, whenever I had symbolism.
- Ben: For me it's not the word I want them to know, it's the concept. ...
- Kim: Well, I'll put it under "necessary." If you all ... well, I don't care.
- Anne: But then, if you look at it, is this something that they have to know to appreciate, or be able to have a good learning experience?
- Ben: They wouldn't have to know any of these.
- Kim: I think they'd have to know the words to talk about these things.
- Anne: But I don't think they'd have to know the word "symbolism."

The discussion above was noteworthy for several reasons. Their earlier debate had focused almost entirely on a teacher's responsibility to prepare students for a future that was similar to their own. However, in this discussion two days later, they began to consider how adolescent readers might respond to studying literary terms. Kim's revelation of her own difficulties with literary terms compelled her group to consider experiences of less confident readers. Anne, who initially felt knowing the term "symbolism" was necessary, began to see the question from another perspective after hearing Kim's statement.

### **"What Are You Saying?": The Debate on Culture and Praxis**

By December the students had engaged in several debates about teaching literature in their groups and in whole-class discussions. They had also read books and articles on response-centered strategies, written regular reflections in learning logs, and interviewed an adolescent reader. Bill felt they were ready for a serious debate on teaching literature. He gave the students a handout that he admitted had a very strong orientation, but he felt they were prepared to deal with it. A brief excerpt from this controversial handout follows (see Appendix B for full text):

I think the subject of English as we know it ought to be completely revised or else eliminated from secondary school curriculums. ...The practice of making high school English classes revolve around "literary" texts is antiquated and elitist. Let's put "literature" in its proper place and get on with the important work of educating our children.

This deliberately inflammatory piece (Bill admitted to authoring the piece during the subsequent discussion) provoked a heated debate about the purposes for teaching literature and what kinds of literature should be taught.

The following excerpts from my fieldnotes describe some of the topics of the class discussion as it developed:

- Sam: Maybe all 15-year-olds don't need to read Dickens.
- Wendy: We are too caught up in earning money. We need emphasis on "creation of beauty."
- Prof Reed: Why not provide these experiences as options?
- Wendy: "Our culture is founded on Thoreau and Locke. That's what we read."
- Prof Reed: Classics often "get in the way" of kids' experiences with literature. Time magazine offers a broader range of experience to kids.
- Wendy: "What are you saying? Are you saying that courses on literature should be optional?"
- Loni: "Most kids don't know what they want!"
- Mary: "If you deprive them from the classics, they won't know what their choices are! It's the teacher's duty to expose them to classics." Using Time without exposure to classics is "a grave injustice."
- Wanda: I would have liked to have read more classics in high school. "I'm going to be an English teacher and I don't know where to go to read what I need to know." Giving students choice in the curriculum is a disservice.

At this point, Paul brought the issue of social class into the discussion:

- Paul: "Most students hate English. What does *The Scarlet Letter* have to do with what they are doing?"
- Ben: "If you don't expect your students to succeed, they're not going to."
- Paul: "That's not what I'm saying."
- Ben: You can find literature on inner-city life, things they can relate to. If you just read the newspapers and magazines, you're limiting them.

Then Bert, usually quiet in whole-class discussions, brought race into the discussion. He recalled sitting in on "low level" high school English class which was "about 80% black and 20% white."

- Bert: These students were studying Hamlet and "they didn't care." The teacher should have used another piece of literature.
- LaTasha: [To Bert] You couldn't tell whether students were interested. I believe kids should be given an opportunity to be "exposed to classics."
- Bert: "Why should you teach something they're not interested in?"
- LaTasha: I believe the teacher should take a different approach, and that some kids might be interested.
- Lee: If a low-level class has to read Chaucer or Shakespeare, it's just a foreign language.
- Sam: It's easy to make assumptions about black students.
- Paul: I'm acquainted with the realities of inner-city classrooms. "These guys in tweed jackets shouldn't legislate what's good and what's a classic." I think the "practical value" of reading is most important.

- Susan: I believe in exposing all kids to the classics. It's good, too, that kids don't like books. Then they can talk about why they don't like it and develop their critical thinking.
- Mary: I believe in exposing kids, too. "There may be an Einstein in your class" [students laugh].
- Ronnie: You don't know where you are going until you know where you've been. Classics made a big difference in my life.
- Peter: [Sarcastically] If Paul is right, why teach anything to inner-city kids?

Bill's handout created more than an exchange of ideas; it evoked passionate and diverse responses. The students realized that not everyone in the class shared a single point of view about purposes for teaching literature or about the kinds of texts a teacher might select. Sam and LaTasha, both African-Americans, challenged the idea that students' socioeconomic status or race should determine what kinds of literature they have access to in school. They wanted all students to have equal access to "classic" literature. LaTasha saw the teacher in the class Bert described as the problem. Paul, always the iconoclast in these discussions, challenged the idea that teachers should allow "guys in tweed jackets" to decide what kinds of literature are worth reading in schools.

An unusual feature of this discussion is the number of student speakers who entered the discussion. The force of the debate and the participation of almost everyone in the class indicated a level of engagement and a willingness to wrestle with problematic issues that had not been evident earlier in the course. Previous exchanges in their reading groups had primed them to consider some of the critical issues involved in teaching literature.

### *The Role of Small-Group Discussions in Conceptual Change*

Even though Bill had reservations about giving the reading groups so much class time and autonomy, the small groups became important forums for exploring the roles of readers and teachers. Cazden (1988) described four "potential cognitive benefits of discourse among peers": "as catalyst, as the enactment of complementary roles, as relationship with an audience, and as exploratory talk" (p. 126). Having an audience of peers provided the catalyst for these preservice teachers to explore multiple perspectives issues on reading and teaching literature.

An excerpt from my fieldnotes on one group's discussion of *Z For Zachariah* (O'Brien, 1975), a young adult science fiction novel that deals with the experiences of a teenage girl who survives a nuclear attack, shows how these students were beginning to make important conceptual changes: They gradually moved from their roles as readers, with a focus on their own interpretive strategies and intertextual connections, to their potential roles as teachers of literature:

- Ben: I had trouble with the book because I couldn't believe it. It never rained. "If it had, rain would've been radioactive and polluted everything"
- Wendy: It did rain. [She finds reference to it.] It's not believable if you look at it literally. "What's the point if you can't fantasize?"



- Kim: Look at The Wizard of Oz. You know that would never happen but you still enjoy it.
- Ben: In Lord of the Rings and other stories, even though it was fantasy, it was consistent with the world that was created.
- Anne: It didn't bother me at all.
- Kim: It didn't bother me either. You're really into science fiction. You're really into whether it rained or whether the rain was radioactive. I don't care. I just enjoyed the story.
- Anne: "I just suspend my disbelief and go on."
- Wendy: Maybe the author is inconsistent to make a point that science isn't as reliable as it's supposed to be, that human relationships are more important.
- Ben: If I were teaching this, should I mention something I notice like the rain?
- Wendy: Maybe with an AP class. Maybe you should focus on relationships.
- Kim: I'd be reluctant to teach the book because nuclear war was too real for many young students.
- Anne: But it would let them talk about their imaginary fears.

Even Ben, who felt that the novel did not meet the standards he expected in a literary work, began to think about how he might teach a piece of literature to students who might, like his group members, enjoy the story. In this discussion and others that followed, these group members began to move from their own responses to literary works to possible responses of future students. The small-group dialogue gave them an opportunity to explore differing values, interpretations, and potential strategies for teaching a literary work.

At the end of the term, Bill Reed asked the reading groups to meet outside class to talk about what they had accomplished within their groups and to turn in a written summary. I taped one group as they focused on their changing conceptions of young adult literature:

- Anne: Before I was in this class I would not have considered using these kinds of books in a high school class. After doing the group discussion, I see now that we can use them in connection with so many other things that will work in a high school classroom.
- Wendy: Yeah. I thought they may have been too young. I mean I read most of these in middle school, but I realized that I didn't get nearly as much out of it then as I did when I reread them.
- Anne: I would definitely use them now.
- Researcher: Why wouldn't you have used them before?
- Anne: I just thought they ...
- Ben: I had this big concept that literature ...
- Anne: Yeah, these are books you read in junior high and ...
- Ben: And if it is not in the anthology ... [laughter].

By the end of the term, these students had begun to rethink their assumptions about young adult literature and what kind of texts are worthy of being included in a high school English curriculum. Ben's references to "this big concept" and "if it's not in the anthology" reflected a prior conception that appeared across early data: that only a narrow range of texts is appropriate for secondary English classrooms. Their comments, though, indicated that this change emerged after much resistance. Moreover, in separate interviews at the end of the term, it became apparent that these students had yet to sort out their views. Encountering unfamiliar conceptions about literary texts and approaches to those texts created not just dissonance but genuine confusion about how those ideas fit with what they had experienced in school and what they expected to do as a teacher.

### ***Resistance: The Unknown Versus the Familiar***

In spite of the professor's efforts to change these students' perceptions about literature, resistance and doubt flowed ideas that he introduced like a constant undercurrent during the term. Resistance often surfaced in ways that seemed incongruent or contradictory. Someone could disagree with an idea one week, and agree with it the next. Moreover, not every student approached unfamiliar ideas about teaching and learning in the same way. The least resistant students in this class were interested in being changemakers. For example, Paul, LaTasha, and Sam talked about doing something different for their future students than what they had experienced in secondary English classes. Their perspectives were important in another way, too. They often provided for their peers alternative ways of viewing literature instruction. LaTasha described in a taped interview at the end of the term what happened when some of her classmates questioned whether white students would be interested in a book with African-American protagonists:

I said, "How do you think we as African Americans feel, or any other minority feels, when we have been reading literature all throughout school and never reading about ourselves? How do you think we feel? If we decided not to read a book just because there were no black protagonists, because we're portrayed in stereotypical roles in some of the literature ... we'd never read any of the greats because we're not there." When I said that, the person who made the statement said, "Well, I never thought of it that way."

Ben, one of the most openly resistant students in the class, found Professor Reed's perspectives on literature instruction too extreme. In our interview at the end of the course, he defined his dissonance in terms of his own experiences as a successful student. He argued that it is crucial to "expose" students to certain texts and to critical analysis (see his comments in earlier excerpts of class discussions). His view on this issue had not changed much at the end of the term. He held a very different view from that of Professor Reed on what the literature curriculum should include and the purpose for teaching particular content:

I know we can't teach them everything, but we need to be aware of what they're going to need to know in the future, what they're going to be tested on later or the information they need to know. I disagree with him on that. But as far as the way he handles literature, I think it's *wonderful*.

Thus, Ben left the course with a basic philosophy that had changed little but with ideas about pedagogy that were a reflection of parts of what he had learned about teaching literature:

I thought I was going to teach like my high school teacher did, the one I learned a lot from. She gave the multiple choice tests and the essay. ... I got a lot out of that, but I think for average students ... they would get more out of the self-directed approach.

Ben was able to separate his philosophical differences into two kinds of pedagogical approaches, one for average students and another for above-average students, with no apparent sense of the conflict in praxis that this might pose. He seemed to see a student-centered approach as something viable for those students who might not be as capable as he and his honors level peers were in high school when he said, "I got a lot out of that."

Anne, too, resisted many of the ideas she encountered in the course. In our interview at the end of the term, she said Professor Reed "is kind of promoting the whole, you know, this is the way, and it's the only way. ... I think what I do is going to be a combination of everything that I'm learning and everything that I've experienced that's going to form the way I approach it." Like Ben, she strongly disagreed with the idea that engaging adolescent readers with texts was more important than teaching them literary analysis: "The things I didn't like or didn't agree with ... let's see, um, the literary terminology. That whole discussion. I still think that's very important." Like Ben, her own experiences in honors classes shaped her resistance to unfamiliar perspectives on literature instruction:

The whole idea about our role in preparing kids for the future. I think that's really important. That's something I'm kind of holding on to. I see that's where my high school English teachers helped me the most as far as being in college now. ... I think they need to know how to do those things ... so they can pass those tests, and like I took the AP [Advanced Placement] Exam in high school, and ... the people who grade those exams are not really looking for personal experiences that you're having with literature [laughs]."

Anne's resistance to the idea that students should primarily be encouraged to have "personal experiences" with literature was tied to her own success with a test-based curriculum that focused on literary analysis. Her solution to the conflicting ideas she had been grappling with was to use "a combination of everything that I'm learning."



In contrast, Wendy seemed to have shifted from a resistant stance to one that more fully integrated her experiences in the course with her prior beliefs. In an interview at the end of the term, she talked about her perspective on the course and Professor Reed's approach:

Wendy: It's good that he and other people in the class, um, he sometimes plays devil's advocate because that's what we're going to face when we get out there.

Researcher: You like that?

Wendy: I do and I don't [laughs]. I mean, I like it and I know it's helpful but it's frustrating when you don't believe the same thing he does, what he's saying or everyone else is saying. Like when he got into that discussion on the classics. ... I was uncomfortable with it because I don't like arguments. But at the same time, I realize that helps people to really think about stuff. You know, when people are a little bit uncomfortable with what they're hearing, I think they tend to think more about it.

Wendy understood the value of hearing multiple perspectives even if she found them "uncomfortable." She acknowledged that the small group discussions on young adult novels they had read together had changed some of her ideas, especially about the value of young adult and using small-group discussions rather than teacher-led discussions:

It was really helpful to be able to talk with other people about what we were reading ... and what they thought about the book in general. Coming from a bunch of English majors, you sometimes think that literature is the classics and all the great authors that you've always heard about. It was interesting that we all got into the books. I mean we all had a lot to say about them. More than I thought at first.

Wendy also discovered, through some of her experiences in the course, that "reading is a process." Before the course, she said, "I just assumed that it [the ability to read] was something I was born with. I never realized how many steps are involved and how slowly the steps really go." She had also begun to rethink her position about what texts should be included in the curriculum:

I always thought I was open-minded, but after examining some of the things that we did in here, I'm like, well, you know, I never would have thought of doing that just because I would have thought that they would have to read Thoreau and Wordsworth and Shakespeare instead of other authors who aren't as well known just because that's the way I was taught.

Like Ben, though, she saw young adult literature as a very compartmentalized genre that was inappropriate for "an honors or an AP class." Although Wendy changed

many of her perspectives on teaching, like many of her peers, she was still caught up in a formative process where there was no coherent overarching stance that informed her ideas about curricular matters or praxis. However, she was beginning to reflect on her own experiences as a reader and to evaluate all the conflicting ideas she had encountered during the course.

### ***The Process of Change: A Complex Picture***

"Confrontation with alternative ideas," Cazden (1988) pointed out, "cannot be expected to produce immediate change" (p. 128). However, she reasoned, "we have to assume that exposure to alternatives plays a part" (p.128). Many of the changes in these preservice students' conceptions about the teaching of literature became apparent in the multiple sources of data that I collected during the course, but I wanted to see how their experiences in this course would affect their answers to the same three-question protocol they responded to on the first day of class. At the end of the course, I asked them to answer the three questions again to see how, or if, their responses had changed (see Table One for a summary of both protocols). Three of the 24 participants were absent on the last day of class, so the responses below are from the 21 students who were present.

### **Changes in Conceptions of Teacher Knowledge**

Answers to the question about teacher knowledge became more specific by the end of the term. There was a shift from a vague, idealistic conception of the role of the teacher to more clearly articulated ideas about strategies that would meet adolescents' interests and developmental needs. Fourteen of the preservice students (67%) still mentioned knowledge of content as important in December, but not in and of itself; by the end of the course, the data showed that they had begun to believe that teaching literature involved far more. Content knowledge had been reconceived as a pedagogical tool that could enhance their interactions with adolescent readers. Seventeen of the preservice students (81%) said that understanding adolescents' needs and interests was as important as content knowledge, a significant contrast to the earlier protocol data on this question. For example, in September Lily wrote, "The teacher should be able to read a book for the first time and be able to pick out the theme and the minor topics discussed that help to pull the work together." In December, she wrote the following:

A teacher ... needs to know which books will engage the students and which won't. He needs to know the students themselves and be involved in their community and activities. He needs to have a great deal of knowledge about books and needs to realize that all students are entitled to their own ideas, thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of a novel.

Ruth now believed more was necessary than knowledge of "exemplary literature":

A teacher should be well read. However, a teacher must also understand how children learn their learning process. Most importantly, however, a teacher

must have respect for her students and be willing to let them take control of their own learning.

Bert, who initially thought a teacher of literature needed to know "analysis techniques, elements of literature" had very different orientation at the end of the term: "The main thing ... is understanding how adolescents work and knowing how to get to know them and bring them to enjoy literature and writing." In September, Kim thought that "a teacher needs to have a well-rounded knowledge of the subject." In December, she wrote, "If teachers go into the classroom expecting all the kids to have the same love of literature they do, they are in for a rude awakening! Kids need freedom to choose what they read. ... Forcing them to read the 'classics' if they hate what they are reading isn't going to help." Marian initially wrote a brief answer, "More than anything else, she needs to know where to look to find answers and information because there's no way to read what everyone else has." By December, she had come to a different understanding of what a teacher needs to know:

At first, I thought I needed to have read everything. I know now that's not possible. ... A teacher must be open to growth and change ... and read, read, read. She must be familiar with the many genres of literature in order to share, recommend, and make intelligent selections about what to teach.

Although she was still concerned about content knowledge, her focus was now on personal growth and pedagogical knowledge which would enhance her teaching of literature. Zoe had moved from the idea that a "teacher needs to be well versed in ... literature" to acknowledging that "a high school English teacher needs to be aware of where his/her students are in their developmental stage of learning ... to provide students with materials that will appeal to them." These responses showed that the preservice students saw their future students in more particular, more complex terms. These students were moving toward Goodlad's conception of good teaching, a pedagogy that "builds bridges to individuals" (1984, p. 248).

### **Changes in Conceptions of Good Literature**

Their answers to the question, "What is good literature?" had shifted from vague notions about "accepted" criteria for literature toward consideration of adolescent readers who might have very different ideas about what represents good literature and/or toward understanding that the term "good" is relative, perhaps even problematic. By December, these students had an understanding of reader response processes through their course readings and their group discussions. These experiences helped Ruth, who came into the course uncertain about what constituted good literature after courses in feminist theory, to formulate her own theory. She decided by December that good literature "is something that elicits a response ... whether positive or negative. [It] helps me to understand the world around me better, and it challenges my current conceptions of the world." Although Ruth and five other



students (29%) mentioned intellectual development or independent thinking, it was not a major consideration for most students at this point.

The theme most apparent in the December responses to this question was that the students were less certain about what constitutes good literature; the term “good” had become problematic. After so many challenges to their assumptions about reading and teaching literature, fifteen students (71%) said they were less certain about what “good” literature might be or questioned the idea that one kind of text could appeal to everyone. For example, Lily’s answer in September was straightforward: “Good literature captures the reader’s interest while allowing their minds to think for themselves. Good literature doesn’t tell, it shows and allows the readers to draw their own conclusions.” By the end of the course, Lily was less sure about specific criteria:

Examples of good literature cannot be listed out because “good” means something different to everyone. Good literature can be anything that any person likes and doesn’t necessarily have to be in the canon.

For Susan, the issue of what constitutes good literature had also become problematic. In September she wrote: “Good literature to me is something that allows me to escape reality” At the end of the term, she was not making statements but asking questions:

I really don’t know how to answer this question after all the time I’ve spent thinking about it. I’ve just gotten more confused. Is it something that stirs emotions? Is it what is on a reading list? Is it books that have been around a long time and liked by most people?

In spite of her frustration, her questions reflected her attempt to sort through a range of issues.

Kim also ended up with a questioning stance. She had begun the course with some interest in the experiences of the reader, but her early response indicated some tension as well: “‘Good’ literature is anything that can be enjoyed by its reader. It should be correct English, unless in dialect or poems, and should be seen as art and valuable in the area of literature.” The reader, in this early response, was cast in a passive construction, and Kim made no connection between the reader and her criteria. In December, she was able to make a stronger case for a reader’s preferences and criteria: “[Good literature] isn’t only the ‘classics’ or what is on the best-seller lists. ... What I as a teacher might find as good literature might be seen as awful to my students. I don’t enjoy reading things I don’t like, so why should I make my students?”

Even though the question (What is “good” literature?) did not ask about teaching or students, eight students (38%) saw “good” literature in terms of what might interest future students. These responses reflected the way conceptual change had transformed these students’ perspectives. “Good” literature, for these students, was no longer limited to what they regard as good, but included what future students

children learn their learning process. Most importantly, however, a teacher

might find entertaining or relevant to their lives. Anne had begun the course with a general appreciation for the individual reader in terms of what texts were good: "A piece of good literature would be one that will inspire a particular reader as well as have significance for the reader." By the end of the course, though, she had situated her response in terms of adolescents as readers:

What I may consider as good may not be good to someone else. If a book creates a powerful or meaningful experience for a reader the book can be said to be 'good' by that reader. I want my students to feel comfortable enough in their reading that they can eventually move from finding personal meaning in works to finding academic meaning as well.

She was concerned with "academic meaning" but made two important points: that what she might perceive as good might not be perceived in the same way by her adolescent students and that they needed to experience a "comfortable" engagement with literature before they moved into "finding academic meaning."

Bert also began the course thinking of "good" literature as a prescriptive body of works that omitted much of what he liked. His initial response was tinged with sarcasm: "Good literature, in the academic sense of the word, excludes much artistic expression. As long as what is written ... communicates some point the author is trying to tell us, even in the most subtle way, that's good literature." By the end of the course, he acknowledged that "good literature could be things that have been accepted in the past and still hold some sort of significance for those who read them," but he asserted, "Good literature to me, however, is not necessarily contained in any 'canon'."

For LaTasha, the course readings and discussions had affirmed her sense of what might be possible in selecting diverse texts for future students. In September she was already concerned, after taking a course on African literature, about how authors such as Ngugi might be received in schools. By the end of the course she still had questions and uncertainties, but she was able to articulate her stance on the issue in terms of multiple views:

Who am I to determine what is good literature? I believe that constant exposure to all types of literature helps people to determine that for themselves. What a cop-out answer! I guess "good literature" is anything that can be discussed and causes people to think. It's hard for me to try and categorize "good literature" simply because what I deem good literature may not be the same for someone else.

Ronnie's responses echoed this sentiment. In September, he acknowledged that good literature "is strictly a personal matter," but turned to an academic definition to elaborate his definition: "Certain characteristics, however, are evident in much of what the academic community perceived to be good literature." He went on to list

those criteria. In December, he was less certain about how, or even if, he could define good literature:

What is good for me may not be good for my students. If I absolutely had to define good literature, I would have to define it as something which the individual reader can personally connect with. Even this definition is shady, however.

Apparent across these responses, as well as other data, was a sense that these students had struggled with conflicting ideas about what kinds of literature were "good" and who should make those decisions. They were asking hard questions and rethinking earlier assumptions. The word "good" had become problematic and no longer represented "accepted" or "great" works or even something that was just enjoyable.

### **Changes in Conceptions of Purpose.**

Their answers to the question, "Why do you want to teach English?" remained fairly stable. The strongest theme that emerged was a love of literature (or reading and writing) as a primary incentive to teach English; thirteen students (62%) still cited this factor at the end of the term as one of the reasons they wanted to teach English. The most significant changes across the responses to this question were the realizations of twelve students (57%) that future students would have needs or interests that differed from their own and that many adolescents might not like reading. Their awareness was important in terms of establishing plausibility for conceptual change (Strike & Posner, 1985). In their first responses in September, the preservice students often described their goals for their future secondary students in terms of aesthetic appreciation for literature or in terms of practical preparation for "real life."

In the December responses, six students (29%) still mentioned appreciation for literature as important and 12 (57%) said that literature could prepare students for life by teaching them various skills, but they had a more complex view of teaching English and teaching literature. Eleven of them (52%) indicated that they had reconceived their roles. Kim's answer on the first day of class illustrated an early response to the question, "Why do you want to teach English?":

I want to teach English because I enjoy writing and reading literature and I want to get high school students to at least appreciate its value and quality. I also want to make sure that these students are literate and will be able to survive in the business world.

By the end of the course, she was integrating her personal reasons for wanting to teach with what she had learned:



I have learned ... that so many kids dislike reading and writing because either they had bad experiences or because they have never really been exposed to it. It will kind of be a challenge for me. I want to apply all of the new methods--like the writing process, choice of books, group discussions, and in-role writing--to help kids learn to appreciate literature and help them become more confident writers.

What she learned in the course affected her perspective on students. Even though her goals were similar, her rhetoric was qualitatively different. She had begun to understand that teaching English might be more difficult than she first envisioned, and she realized that she could not "get" future pupils to appreciate literature or "make sure" that they gained skills. Instead she saw herself as helping them to become "confident" learners. She could also talk about specific ways in which she would accomplish her goals.

Anne, who wrote in September that she wanted "to share my love for literature and the written language with others and also be a motivator like those teachers I had in school," focused entirely on her future students in December

I think my main reason that I want to teach English is that the study of this subject gives kids so many opportunities to discover who they are and what they believe. ... The whole discovery process that occurs each time a reader approaches a text is something with which I want to help kids become confident.

By December, Kim, Anne, LaTasha, and others had begun to reposition themselves and to redefine their future roles.

For two students the course forced a re-examination of their career choices. Their answers to the question about why they wanted to teach English turned into confessions. Sandra, an Asian-American, initially wanted to teach English because of her own "enjoyment" of the subject. She also admitted to wanting to "graduate with a degree that could make me immediately employable upon graduation." By December she was uncertain about being able to teach literature or to teach at all: "I've learned to revise my expectations and goals a bit. I realize that many kids in my classroom will not come in enjoying to read." She concluded, "Having said all this, I'm not sure if I'm going to become a teacher at all (gasp!)." She explained that she had been taking pre-med courses and thought she would become a physician instead of a teacher. Ted, a student who had entered the course in September saying that his "first choice for a career is in film," also concluded that teaching was not for him, not even as a second choice. He had participated in the course in a perfunctory way and said in his final response, "I still have dreams of going to Hollywood. ... Teaching English is my parachute." For these two students, who were uncertain from the beginning, confronting the complexities of teaching helped them decide to pursue other careers.

<b>Why Do You Want to Teach English?</b>			
FIRST DAY OF TERM		LAST DAY OF TERM	
	N=24		N=21
1. Love of literature	15 (63%)	1. Love of literature	13 (62%)
2. To inspire in students an appreciation for literature and language	10 (42%)	2. To inspire in students an appreciation for literature and language	6 (29%)
3. To prepare students for "real life"	8 (33%)	3. To prepare students for "real life"	12 (57%)
4. To provide experiences for future students that will be similar to their own experiences	8 (33%)	4. Realization that students may not enjoy reading or will have interests/needs that are different from those of the teacher	12 (57%)
5. To be able to "impart" knowledge to students (also used terms like "instill," "pass on," "share," or "infuse")	11 (46%)	5. To provide experiences that will encourage adolescent readers to enjoy literature	12 (52%)
<b>What is good literature?</b>			
1. Should promote intellectual development and independent thinking	13 (54%)	1. Should promote intellectual development and independent thinking	6 (29%)
2. Not certain about criteria or questions the idea of "good" being used to define certain texts	3 (13%)	2. Not certain about criteria or questions the idea of "good" being used to define certain texts	15 (71%)
3. Should meet cultural and aesthetic standards	7 (29%)	3. Should be interesting to adolescent readers	8 (38%)
4. Should provide enjoyment and escape	5 (21%)		
<b>What does a teacher need to know to teach literature at the secondary level?</b>			
1. Should have broad content knowledge	18 (75%)	1. Should have broad content knowledge	14 (67%)
2. Should have pedagogical knowledge	18 (75%)	2. Should understand adolescents' interests and developmental needs to make pedagogical decisions	17 (81%)

Note: A single student may be represented in more than one area. The percentages (roundedup) indicate how many students addressed these issues in the protocol).

*Table 1: Themes in Responses to Three-Question Protocol*

### ***Bill Reed: "I Wanted Them to Struggle in the Small Groups"***

In our final interview in January, Bill Reed reflected on what had happened during the course and the things he found difficult as a teacher. He thought he had tried "to do more than is possible" in a ten-week quarter and admitted he found it difficult to choose "what are the most important things and what can be left out." He did feel that the students had accomplished some of what he wanted to happen:

My sense is that most of them really did question themselves in terms of their assumptions about readers and reading. Certainly there were a variety of opinions and a variety of responses, and that's okay. The goal is just to think about those and move toward a coherent stance.

But he also voiced reservations about the effectiveness of the small groups and his own discomfort with giving up so much power:

I wanted them to struggle in the small groups and get the ... kind of combining the goal of encountering young adult literature and having a direct experience with that. I guess I feel as though I left it more in their hands than I was comfortable with.

Bill's disappointment was based on what the groups reported in their written summaries; he did not feel what they wrote justified the time he had allowed for small-group discussions. What he could not see in the obligatory written reports were the rich interactions that took place; my data reveal a crucial dialectic during these discussions as the members of the small groups explored a variety of issues about teaching literature. More importantly, the groups encouraged individuals to participate in interpretive and problem-solving strategies as they encountered unfamiliar approaches for teaching literature and questions for which there were no easy answers or perhaps no definitive answers at all.

### **Discussion**

Conceptual change and the construction of knowledge in this preservice class, as the data show, are complex processes that include resistance, dissonance, questioning, and reflection. The students exhibited disbelief and tension as they negotiated with each other and their professor very different ideas about reading and teaching literature. Many of the preservice students, especially early in the course, often relied on what was familiar to determine what was right. They debated and reflected on the role of a teacher, not just in terms of effective pedagogy but also in terms of duty and responsibility.

Early data show an intense concern with the fulfillment of an idealized teacher role, one largely defined by prior experiences in school. These preservice teachers saw their future students as an amorphous group; they had no problems, needs, or different ideas about what kinds of literature were engaging. Only a few were



concerned at the beginning of the course with social justice or meeting the needs of diverse learners. Their early conceptions of teaching, in many instances, simply meant transmitting the knowledge and traditions that they valued and thereby maintaining the status quo.

Bill Reed began the course wanting to change the status quo by challenging students' entering conceptions. An important dimension of the interactions in this class revolved around his struggle to strike a balance between his "agenda" and to allow the preservice students to have some ownership. As he indicated in our first interview, presenting what he felt they needed to know would make him a "purveyor" of knowledge, a role he eschewed in theory. He wanted to encourage a dialectic with the preservice students; however, he experienced much self-doubt about the time and autonomy he was giving to them in their reading groups. The students were unaware of his dilemma, but the context of the course was ultimately shaped by this conflict. His "agenda," which included a strong bias against a "transmission" approach and an insistence on questioning assumptions, set resistance and dissonance in motion. On the other hand his commitment to model student-centered approaches to literature created situations where students could work through their distrust of unfamiliar ideas and to hear other points of view.

In some cases Bill's bias threatened to undermine what he attempted to model. He often represented the approaches he advocated as being, according to Anne, "the only way." The former teachers that Anne and others admired and the ideas these preservice students brought with them about how they would teach were, in essence, discredited by Bill. Their prior experiences in English classes made it difficult for some of them to see alternative ideas for teaching literature as credible in the culture of school as they knew it. Even LaTasha, who often questioned teaching from a narrow range of canonical texts, was sometimes skeptical about actually being able to implement student-centered approaches or read non-traditional texts in her own classroom. She made clear in her journal response that standardized tests and other "realities" presented her with a dilemma: If she does something different with her future students, she may jeopardize their success with traditional assessments. By the end of the course, in spite of some students' reservations about actually using the approaches they had encountered in this class in their future classrooms, most of the preservice students had begun to believe that teaching literature was a more complex undertaking than they had previously thought.

It is important to note that even when conceptual change did occur, the process was not linear, nor did it occur at particular times or for everyone. Conceptual change occurred slowly in convoluted and recursive patterns that were particular to individuals. The process was also saturated with skepticism. Resistance sprang up everywhere when Bill Reed introduced ideas about reading or teaching literature that were new to these students. Resistance, both overt and covert, initially seemed to sabotage the efforts that he made to move these students toward conceptions about teaching and reading literature that might differ from those with which they are familiar.

However, the dissonance that these students experienced as they grappled with unfamiliar ideas seemed to be important in two ways: it played both a limiting and a generative role in the process of conceptual change. Dissonance that grew out of strong resistance consistently limited some students such as Ben. He was highly resistant and defensive during the entire term. Although he participated in both whole-class and small-group discussions, he usually positioned himself to make or defend a point, not to consider other ideas. In contrast some dissonance pushed other students to defend their ideas and to consider those of others, especially in their small-group discussions. Time to talk with peers about issues such as the value of teaching literary terms and what kinds of texts are worthy of being included in a secondary curriculum prove valuable, as the data above show. Initially, though, the students had to evaluate unfamiliar ideas based on their prior experiences.

Prior experiences, these data show, can operate in two ways. Positive, deeply valued prior experiences caused many of these students to resist unfamiliar ideas, especially if they appear to discredit or be incompatible with their prior experiences. In contrast, unpleasant prior experiences in English classes were valuable in facilitating conceptual changes, findings consistent with the conditions for conceptual change cited by Strike and Posner (1985).

Sharing prior negative experiences in English classes was also important in helping others consider alternative approaches to teaching literature. Sam and LaTasha, African-American students who had been outsiders in high school English curricula that focused almost exclusively on literature by white European and American authors, helped their peers to understand another perspective. Kim, who had experienced difficulty with literary analysis, helped Anne and other members of her group understand that not everyone enjoyed this approach. Paul, who had worked with inner-city students in summer programs, openly challenged other students' assumptions about such issues as what constitutes classic literature and who should make such decisions. These alternative views from Paul, Sam, LaTasha and others provided opportunities in discussions like those on texts or those on literary terms for their peers to reflect on their own assumptions and to at least consider other perspectives.

In spite of the dissonance the students experienced when their views were challenged, at the end of the course most said (in interviews, portfolios, and course evaluations) that several aspects of the course had been very helpful. They especially valued their group discussions of literature and the opportunity to explore different perspectives. The students had come to know each other well and, with few exceptions, established a level of trust within groups which facilitated exploration of ideas and interpretations. The small group provided a safe forum for articulating ideas in a problem-solving dialogue, a strategy that confirmed the findings of Champagne et al. (1985) and Cazden (1988) concerning the value of dialogue in concept development. However, even these strategies were not persuasive enough to change all the conceptions that each student brought into the course. As Anne said in our interview at the end of the course, she believed she would combine the ideas she had brought into the class with some of the ideas she had learned about in the class.

The preservice students' personal histories as readers and students of literature, their beliefs about the purpose for teaching literature and what literature should be included in a school curriculum, and their knowledge of the cultural expectations for English teachers strongly influenced their willingness to make conceptual changes as well as the kinds of changes they make. Even though the context of the course helped some of them question entering assumptions, not all students were willing or able to see the ideas they encountered about teaching and reading literature as valid for them.

The data on Bill Reed confirm that teaching a preservice course that challenges students' prior assumptions about teaching and learning is not easy. Bill found the tensions to be greater than he anticipated. After the course was over he felt many of the issues he had grappled with were unresolved; he was rethinking his approach and moving toward less time for small-group discussions and less student autonomy. He felt that the dual constraints of a ten-week course and "a predetermined sense of what they need to think about" are in opposition to the theoretical ideals he wanted to model. He found himself in a paradox where there were no clear answers.

These data suggest that creating an effective preservice course involves far more than choosing certain readings or advocating a particular approach. To help preservice students make sense of unfamiliar ideas, teacher educators need to be more aware of and tolerant of the kinds of prior experiences and conceptions students bring into their university courses. Part of the transforming process of conceptual change involves inevitable tensions between the known and unknown. Preservice teachers need to understand that conceptual growth, for themselves and for their future students, may include dissonance and even resistance. One of the best ways to encourage conceptual growth, as these data and other research show (Barnes, 1992; Cazden, 1988; & Champagne et al., 1985), is through discussions. Preservice teacher educators need to structure opportunities for everyone to engage in questioning assumptions, their own and others, as they work through multiple perspectives on the values of the familiar and unfamiliar.

Of course, even if one succeeds in providing a context for change, some students will resist those efforts because they are unable to give up prior conceptions. As Freire (1993) said, "no one can ... unveil the world for another" (p. 150). What teacher educators can do is help preservice students learn how to engage in critical conversations to develop their own questions about teaching and learning. These data also suggest that they need help with pulling all their ideas, old and new, together so they can begin to construct a coherent theory of pedagogy. Perhaps, too, it should be acknowledged that some of the larger questions in the profession of teaching have no easy answers and that one of the greatest challenges of teaching, even for experienced teachers, is living with uncertainty as they work toward creating a more effective praxis.



## Note

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## Appendix A

### Course Syllabus for Secondary Literature Course, Fall, 1992

#### Assumptions

This course will operate under the following assumptions:

1. Teachers of literature must themselves read and enjoy literature. We need to reflect upon our experiences as readers and recognize the fact that we probably learn more about the teaching of literature through an introspective, reflective examination of our own and our awareness of others' reading habits, preferences, practices than through any other means.
2. Teachers of literature learn best from other teachers. Despite the fact that good teachers invent their own unique approaches to literature, we can learn a lot by attending to other teachers' experiences-not because we can adopt their successful practices in our classrooms (usually we cannot) but because we can adapt their principles to our own situations and personalities.
- 3 Teachers of literature are engaged in research. All good teaching involves a certain kind of research-trying new techniques, posing questions to ourselves, testing solutions, modifying and refining hypotheses about teaching and learning. The new emphasis on the teacher-as-researcher simply brings that element in our planning to consciousness and, at the same time, makes us more aware of our fellow researchers whose work is increasingly becoming available in professional journals and books.

These main concerns will permeate all the activities for this course:

\* Exploration. You will be exploring reading processes-your own and others'. What is empowering for us as readers? What makes some reading experiences especially valuable and memorable? How have we evolved as readers? How can we help young people become life-long readers?

\* Community. Reading, writing, and learning are not activities for isolated individuals in lonely garrets (though, for most of us, there is a certain amount of that involved), but a communal activity in which we are supported by interaction with our peers.

\* Vision. Throughout the course, we will formulate and reformulate aspects of our own unique visions of the literature curriculum. We will consider the role of "young adult" literature as well as that of more "traditional" selections. We will continually seek to identify and examine our personal beliefs about teaching and learn. We will



seek to connect our voices with those of others as we develop individual models of literature instruction.

### **Required Texts**

Carlson and Sherrill. *Voices of Readers.*

Lee. *To Kill A Mockingbird.*

Purves, Soter, and Rogers. *How Porcupines Make Love II*

Sebestyen. *Words By Heart.*

Smith. *Understanding Unreliable Narrators*

### **Young-Adult Literature:**

Cormier. *I Am the Cheese.*

Hinton. *The Outsiders.*

O'Brien. *Z For Zachariah.*

O'Neal. *In Summer Light.*

Staples. *Shabanu.*

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

Yolen. *The Devil's Arithmetic.*

### **Major Assignments**

1. **Learning Log.** Throughout the quarter, you will have opportunities to engage in various types of informal writing to help you respond and reflect upon your responses to ideas and information presented in class. In addition, I expect you to write on your own to explore and learn from your responses to all required reading. Date and collect writings for inclusion in your portfolio. Once during the quarter I will ask you to submit to me selected, edited highlights from your log. We will determine criteria for evaluating these highlights together.

2. **Reader's Notebook.** Small groups will decide among themselves how to approach reading and discussing the seven novels listed above as "young-adult literature." The specific format and content of your reader's notebook will reflect the outcomes of this negotiation process. Each of you individually must date and collect any writing (or other evidence of your participation) for inclusion in your portfolio.

3. **"In-Role Writing."** A powerful way of responding to our experience with a literary work is to engage in composing monologues or dialogues "in role." We will conclude our discussion of *To Kill A Mockingbird* by experimenting with this way of writing. These writings will not be graded but may appear in your portfolio.

4. **"Two-Level Response."** Reflect on your life-history as a reader and select one book you read before the age of 18 that you remember as especially powerful and memorable. Obtain a copy of that book. **Level One:** Without re-reading, explain what you think made your experience with this particular book so memorable. **Level Two:** After re-reading the book, describe your present thoughts and feelings about it. We will determine criteria for evaluating these responses together.

5. **Listening to Students' Voices: An Interview.** Locate a high school or middle school student and interview that student to find out about his/her reading habits

(what, when, where, and how often does this student read?), preferences (what kinds of reading experiences does this student enjoy?), and practices (How does this student go about finding things to read? What are his/her perceptions about the reading process?). Your product here will be a profile of this student as a reader, and you will draw conclusions concerning your own "vision" of the literature curriculum this student and others need in our schools. We will determine criteria for evaluating these projects together.

6. Portfolios. As we move through the quarter, each of you will prepare to assemble two portfolios, a "process portfolio" and a "showcase portfolio," which will serve to represent you as a reader, learner, and teacher-candidate as well as to model alternative approaches to assessment. Your "process portfolio" will contain your learning log and your reader's notebook plus a summative/reflective evaluation of your growth as a teacher-candidate during this course. Your "showcase portfolio" will contain a selection of items drawn from everything you did during the quarter and/or new items created for your portfolio that give some indication of your ability as a reader and a teacher-candidate. You are free to organize this part of your portfolio as you wish with one exception: each item you select must be accompanied by a written reflection that explains how it is connected with your learning process and your potential as a teacher and learner. (The audience for this second part of your portfolio may be a prospective employers, department head, or administrator.) Both portfolios will be due on the last day of class and will be returned on the day scheduled for the final exam. We will determine criteria for evaluating these portfolios together.

Finally, each of our endeavors is important, but if you're worried about percentages of importance, note the following:

Learning Log Highlights	10%
Interview Project	15%
In-Role Writing Expected	
Process Portfolio	30%
Two-Level Response	15%
Showcase Portfolio	30%

### **Class Participation**

Because this course involves a great deal of student-teacher and small-group interaction, class participation and regular attendance is important to your progress. Working as a group of readers and writers, our class will become a special kind of literate community. Your membership in our community is valued and essential. Please note: You will be allowed one excused (in advance) absence to cover illness or emergency; any other absence will result in grade reduction. Class time will not be devoted to discussion of absences or excuses or grades. Please see me during office hours. I appreciate written notes about absences. You should probably be aware that I have little sympathy for excessive absence. This is a professional education course;

you are expected to make the transition here from thinking like a student ("How will this affect my grade?") to thinking like a teacher ("How can I help my students?").

### **Readings and Course Schedule**

Please come prepared to discuss what you read for each class period. Ask lots of questions as you read. Make connections to your own experience. Mark passages-words, phrases, details, images-that strike you and begin to speculate about them. Identify the author's point of view and seek to situate yourself among the voices you hear as you read. Play the "believing/doubting game." That is, think of all the things you can say to support the writer's ideas-or try arguing with the writer and/or any of the other voices brought to life as you read.

### **Appendix B**

#### **Text of Professor Reed's Handout**

I think the subject of English as we know it ought to be completely revised or else eliminated from secondary school curriculums.

Neither the study of classical music nor that of classical painting and other arts is compulsory in our schools. Why shouldn't classical literature be offered on a voluntary basis as well? If a young person demonstrates an inclination to read Shakespeare, Dickens, Faulkner, etc. by all means the opportunity ought to be there. ... However, forcing all 15-year-olds to plod through Dickens (or whoever) is as silly (and unfair) as forcing them all to play a musical instrument or learn about "abstract expressionism."

To take this argument one step further, why place so much emphasis on reading printed texts when our culture is so rich with other modes of communication? Why not teach kids how to "read" film, TV, music, and other forms of mass media, such as advertising?

The practice of making high school English classes revolve around "literary" texts is antiquated and elitist. Let's put "literature" in its proper place and get on with the important work of educating our children.