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## My Readiness and Progression: A Student-Centered Approach

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**My Readiness and Progression: A Student-Centered Approach**

Brady Blatchley

An Action Research Project submitted to Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts, in Teaching

June 2, 2021



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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

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Action Research Project Title:

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Graduate Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in Teaching: Initial Licensure

*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment  
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## Abstract

**My Readiness and Progression: A Student-Centered Approach**

Action research is a self-study conducted by teachers to look at specific areas of their practice to identify potential weaknesses and where they might be able to improve. This research looks at a novice teacher, their readiness to teach, and how they progress during a student teaching experience. This study looks at areas of practice that would complement each other, and that any novice teacher would be able to implement in the classroom. This research identifies inquiry-based instruction as a superior form of learning instead of the typical rote learning method widely used. The readiness to teach through inquiry-based instruction is paramount for creating relevant, engaging, and research-based lessons that will direct student learning. The job of a teacher is to prepare students to be successful participants in society. This means students need to understand how power, privilege, and oppression affect the everyday lives of each citizen; This research identifies criticality as a method of accomplishing that goal. Criticality helps students understand how those three elements work through reading and writing, and how they might impact their surroundings. The last area of focus in this study is differentiation. Differentiation is a crucial component to making content accessible to all students, no matter their ability level. This study posits that inquiry-based instruction, criticality, and differentiation when used in tandem create challenging and engaging lessons that will inform every student, and prepare them to be successful in our ever-changing society.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction: *Philosophy of Education***

As a teacher, one of my goals is to equip my students with the tools necessary to navigate and interpret everyday experiences. I believe a strong foundation in education is important, and that is what I want to provide my students. Our educational backgrounds are integral to who we are, how we see the world, and we understand the people in it. In this chapter I hope to articulate my philosophy of education, why and how I teach, and my beliefs about education. These are important to establish because I am being entrusted with teaching and training young students. I take the responsibility of teaching very serious, and will continue my pursuit of knowledge so that I can continue to teach my students in a relative and appropriate manner. The foundation of my career starts with my education history, and how my history has helped shape my views in my pursuit to become an educator.

### **Education history**

I was educated in a small school in rural Oregon. Unfortunately, I never took school seriously when I was in high school. I say unfortunately because I have since learned the importance of those educational years. I rarely understood what my teachers were talking about, and when I did, I could never connect it to my life. My teachers told me that I was similar to a piece of clay; If I would just listen to their lessons, I would mold into a good student and citizen. This made me feel as if there was something wrong with me, and that I was not capable of learning like the “smart kids.” Due to my lack of understanding, concerns of why I should learn this information filled my head; which in turn, led to me tuning out my teachers. Instead of learning, I spent all my time playing sports. Sports gave me something I could grasp and excel at. My thoughts led me to believe school was not for me. My coaches would perpetuate my view



that school only existed for social interactions and extra curriculars. I had missed the point of school, and my teachers failed to reach me. My teachers were doing their jobs in their own view, presenting the information in the curriculum. I see this as a problem, and I now realize how this held me back in my education.

I served in the military after high school for a few years before continuing my pursuit of education. I attended Western Oregon University where I met wonderful professors who showed me how educators should make a student feel. As a non-traditional student I was uncomfortable in my classes due to a significant age difference, and I was a parent to four children. I was not treated any different, which then made me feel comfortable. This inclusive environment allowed me to open up and really connect with some of my professors. I knew right away I wanted to model that for my students when I became a teacher. One particular instructor I met was an inspiration to me; it was in her class when I realized I was meant to be a teacher. I knew the differences I could make in students' lives, specifically students like myself who did not feel included.

I do not believe that students are pieces of clay waiting to be molded. Moreover, I do not believe most of our students' learning occurs in the classroom. I believe our students come to us as individuals with their own unique perspectives and their own funds of knowledge. It is my job to connect their funds of knowledge to the content I teach. I view the classroom as a place to equip and show students how to use their new, or redefined tools. School is not the only factor shaping our students' perspectives, their perspectives are impacted by everyday experiences in and outside the classroom. These experiences include myriad factors such as, cultural background, socio-economic situation, home life, religion, and learning disabilities. I will

address each of these factors later on in this chapter. In the following section I will address my teaching philosophy.

### **Philosophy**

Through deep reflection into my educational history, and through extensive research into different philosophies of education, I have found I align more with John Dewey in terms of philosophy. Dewey (2015) discusses his perception of education when he said:

The history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is a formation from without; that it is based upon natural endowments and that education is a process of overcoming natural inclinations and substituting in its place habits acquired under external pressure. (p. 39)

I believe that education is developed from within, but shaped and formed from without. I will discuss how Dewey instructs teachers to direct students' internal habits in a worthwhile direction in chapter 2. Lance E. Mason (2019) elaborates on Dewey's views by saying, "The extent of an individual's control, however, depends upon attaining robust habits of inquiry and reflection, which in turn, requires opportunities for transaction within a vibrant community that fosters them" (p. 6). Mason is making the point that school is a vehicle to deliver the skills needed to navigate life, skills such as inquiry (seeking information) and reflection (review and consider information). He also makes clear that these "transactions" need to be done within a community. I agree with Mason's view on Dewey's philosophy, for students learn best by experience.

I believe the environment in which the experience happens has an impact on the individual, as well the individual has an impact on their environment. According to Dewey, "transactions between an individual and their environment are not a one-way imposition upon the individual, as the individual is also able to alter the social conditions" (Lance E. Mason,

2019, p. 6). These interactions in the environment are how students build new knowledge and experiences. This new information based on their interpretation when recalled becomes their prior knowledge (experience) for that specific situation. The content taught in schools, along with prior experiences and knowledge, is what influences the new information coming in. This is why educators stress the importance of incorporating prior knowledge in their lessons; those connections are crucial in forming new knowledge and experiences.

Dewey introduces two key terms, “continuity”, and “interaction” (interaction was later changed to transaction); continuity refers to each experience we encounter, and how it influences each subsequent experience thereafter. The change from “interaction” to “transaction” is due to the individual's interaction with the experience being mutual, which relates closer to a transaction. When we have an experience, we take something with us to our next experience, but we also leave an impact on the previous environment and experience. This is why much of my focus is on student prior knowledge, and using that knowledge to foster an inquiry-based instruction. The only way this can happen is if I have a well-founded knowledge of my students and their prior experiences. Preparing myself with this information will help me form better avenues of conveying the content in a fun and engaging manner that will build upon their prior experiences.

I do not believe every experience is positive, but I do believe every experience is educational. No matter the intention, our students are always learning. Students may have friends who have a negative impact on their education, or even a home life that impacts their education negatively. We cannot control experiences outside the classroom, but I can learn from my students and develop ways to ensure that every experience my students have with me are inclusive and positively educational. This is why equipping our students with education that is

relevant to their current lives and situations is so important. This is the basis for why I believe as a teacher I need to incorporate my student's prior knowledge, cultural heritage, and any other factor that might influence their ability to learn or my ability to teach. I now want to discuss what my teaching would look like when incorporating culture, ethics, and social justice work.

### **Teaching**

Some educators believe learning is synonymous with a change in behavior; I disagree. Sometimes learning causes a change in behavior, but this cannot be a measure of learning as Ormrod (2020) affirms when she writes, "learning can occur without change in behavior" (p. 124). I believe cognition plays a major role in learning. Students form beliefs about themselves based on their ability to perform tasks; if as teachers we create unexpected outcomes, it could cause anxiety in our students and in turn our students might miss out on learning experiences. This can be mitigated by making sure every learning activity is relevant to our students and modeled; along with modeling how to perform the task, we should model how to be a voice for the voiceless and marginalized. I will discuss further how I plan to incorporate criticality, which will teach students how to use their voices through various means. Research says students learn new behaviors and knowledge through a competent model. As Tomlinson & McTighe (2006) contends, "The use of models helps make the 'invisible visible' through tangible examples." (p.79) I believe as a teacher I am a model, and because of this, I need to ensure I am competent in my content area. I need to maintain a good reputation among my students and the community to model a good citizen (Ormrod, 2020, p. 132-133).

I believe in "reciprocal causation," which says "both the outside environment and a learner's cognitive processes influence behavior. But the influences go in the opposite direction as well" (Ormrod, 2020, p. 130). This means that individuals, their behavior, and the

environment interact in a way where each impacts each other. Modeling is a form of reciprocal causation. The model's behavior influences the individual and the environment; in the reverse, the student impacts the model and the environment through their interactions and this is what makes the modeling reciprocal. According to Ormrod (2020) "a learner's perception of the environment also affects behavior" (p. 131). In turn, that behavior would impact the environment of the classroom, this is evidence of the need for effective classroom management strategies. Students learn as much if not more modeled behavior from peers as they do from their teachers. This can be harnessed and utilized to maximize the potential in each student through group work and teacher guided inquiry-based instruction.

### **Culture**

I believe an individual's culture and their cultural heritage is something that should be valued and celebrated. I believe my classroom and my school should create a welcoming environment that makes every individual feel welcomed for who they are, and empowered to learn through the lens of their cultural heritage. Soltero (2011) quotes Nancy Commins and Ofelia Miramontes (2005) argument that, "the responsibility of education is to maximize the academic achievement of every child who arrives at school, whatever it takes" (p. 38). This is the lens I use when approaching the diversity of my classroom and as classroom management strategy. Soltero (2011) goes on to identify a two-step approach to dispel common assumptions about ELL's:

first to recognize that the education of ELL's must be a schoolwide effort, and then to develop core knowledge among all teachers and administrators on what it takes to acquire a second language as well as to understand the many sociopolitical factors that are linked to learning English in the United States (p. 38).

This asserts the same notion I proposed of a schoolwide approach, but this starts with each teacher in their own classrooms. Learning incorporates lived experiences and histories, as I have shown through Dewey's work. For a student to learn, they need to understand and utilize their own cultural heritage. This quote also emphasizes the demand it takes to develop a second language; until teachers can understand the rigorous coursework these ELL's undertake while learning a second language, we need to incorporate a schoolwide approach to get the help where it is needed.

I believe differentiated instruction is a necessary strategy which offers a great framework for addressing; differences between learning styles, assisting English language learners, differences in cognitive abilities, and many other variances in learning. Tomlinson (2017) quotes Hattie (2009) which reminds us, "just asking the question 'what works?' is a dead end. To keep moving forward, we need to ask three questions: what works best? Compared to what alternatives? And for whom?" (p. 35). This highlights that teaching with the intent to differentiate involves criticality, which means considering issues from multiple perspectives through reading, writing, and thinking. I need to consider what works best in a specific situation for a specific student, and generate alternative learning activities to compensate for one or more strategies that may not be successful. The reason the question of what works is insufficient on its own is because the answer to that question is different depending on the student's abilities, culture, and knowledge, among other factors.

This concept of teaching a differentiated instruction to meet my diverse learners in their comfortability zone is beneficial for all students. Mason (2019) discusses how Dewey asserts that we should always be trying to locate opportunities for a more culturally inclusive interaction in a diverse environment; "The resulting habits would make individuals more flexible, refine their

degree of perception and reflection, and subsequently increase their ability to connect local, personal experience to macro-level social conditions” (p. 10). This relates back to the section in my philosophy where I reference school as a vehicle to create habits of inquiry and reflection to navigate life. Students developing a more flexible, refined degree of perception, according to Dewey, increases the students’ ability for connection between personal experiences and related societal experiences. The benefits my students all receive from a diverse classroom community, where instruction is differentiated based on cultural, cognitive, and other differences is insurmountable. This is evidence of the need to differentiate and include all the differences our students display, no matter if it is external or internal differences.

### **Ethics**

I believe as teachers we have ethical standards and commitments we must uphold because of the nature of our work. I have stressed this point before, but the power entrusted in us as educators is life-altering to our students, and for that reason, it must be addressed in my philosophy of education. When I look for an ethical approach to my classroom, I look to the National Education Association (NEA) for my guidance in how to ethically handle the students I work with. The N.E.A. mentions a two-principle approach when addressing teacher ethics. First, “commitment to the students.” This is a promise to ensure equitable access to education for all students inside and outside the classroom. Second, “commitment to the profession.” This is the integrity and the laws I am charged with as a teacher, and my promise to uphold and promote those ethics and laws in every aspect of my life.

It is important to collaborate with parents, my colleagues, and administrators when it comes to ethical questions. The reason I stress the importance of these relationships is because I see myself as an advocate. The best way to advocate is to create a group of like-minded teachers

and parents to advocate for our students when needed. Relationships with administrators are important to create a culture of inclusivity schoolwide, which in turn makes developing an inclusive classroom that much easier. It also creates a more innovative environment where teachers and administrators are willing to try new research strategies to better their students and the culture of the school. We as educators need to be conscious of societal trends or changes in dangerous laws that could impact our students in a negative way.

### **Social justice**

The definition of social justice I will use throughout this research is from Dover (2009), “the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action” (p. 509). This definition says that I am responsible for blending the content I am required to teach, as in the standards and curriculum I may be assigned; with the tools and processes intended to enhance the equitable social identity of each social group and student. This is effective for two reasons, one is the obvious in that it empowers and ensures equitable learning experiences for everyone; the other allows students who may have never experienced another culture or social identity that might not match their own to build new perspectives based on factual experiences.

The National Council of Teachers of English (N.C.T.E.) has addressed the topic of social justice when they released a statement that says in part:

English teacher preparation are political activities that mediate relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions and meaning-making processes. Such relationships, we believe, have direct implications for how we achieve equity and access



in English classrooms. We feel it impossible to prepare English teachers or to engage in serious English study without meeting these goals.

This statement was agreed upon and released by a group of English teachers who speak for the N.C.T.E, and this statement lead to a policy change in 2012 which said in part, “knowledge of how theories and research about social justice, diversity, equity, student identities, and schools as institutions can enhance students’ opportunities to learn in English language arts” (NCTE, 2012). This means I am charged to carry out this policy as an English language arts teacher, and it is a charge I take seriously as a member of the education community.

When it comes to a framework for teaching for social justice, Dover (2009) has six principles that guide the classroom:

1. Assume all students are participants in knowledge construction, have high expectations for students and themselves, and foster learning communities,
2. Acknowledge, value, and build upon students existing knowledge, interests, cultural and linguistic resources,
3. Teach specific academic skills and bridge gaps in students learning,
4. Work in reciprocal partnership with students’ families and communities,
5. Critique and employ multiple forms of assessment, and
6. Explicitly teach about activism, power, and inequity in schools and society (p. 510).

I felt obligated to add this section on social justice to my research because of the charge I feel called to fill as a teacher. I wanted to find a definition and framework I could see myself using and living my life by, and this framework encapsulates my vision of the inclusive classroom I want to promote. It is important to understand a teacher’s perspectives and actions as they pertain to social justice.

## Chapter 2

### **Literature Review:**

Chapter 1 explained my philosophy of education. This chapter I will review the literature I have discovered in my research of three specific questions. I am not a teacher as of yet, but I am pursuing my teaching credentials. I say that to imply that the three research questions are based on my readiness to perform the way I want to as a teacher. The research I conducted will be used as a baseline to evaluate my knowledge and readiness. As I work through my career I will build upon these baselines in an attempt at becoming a better teacher.

### **Criteria**

I broke my three questions into themes, and each theme has sub-questions that I explore to better understand and support the main themed question. There were five main terms I used to gather my research. First, I searched “John Dewey.” I searched Dewey because most of my philosophy aligns with his views. I will admit, most of the other terms I searched eventually led me back to John Dewey in one way or another. I used Western Oregon University’s resources when searching for literature, they draw on various journals and search engines. The *Sage Journals* search engine was the most commonly drawn from, and the most common journal drawn from was the *Journal of Literacy Research*. After my initial search, I did not search in any particular order. I searched self-efficacy, inquiry-based (which led to inquiry and various variations of the term), criticality (which led to critical and like terms), and critical pedagogy. These were the main terms I searched; I tried to refer back to and keep in line with these terms as I conducted my research. I tried to keep my research as relevant as possible, my earliest literature used was from 2005, and continue as recently as articles written in 2020. A common theme that

arose throughout my research was self-efficacy. I decided to devote a section separate from my themes to discuss the importance of self-efficacy in a novice teacher.

The first theme I will be addressing pertains to the content area I will be teaching. The second theme addresses the diverse students I currently work with, and the future students I will work with throughout my career. The last theme I will discuss is differentiation. Differentiation allows teachers to plan and respond to differences in students or situations. The main question I am addressing in theme 1 is, *how have I grown in my readiness to use inquiry-based instruction in my content area?* I chose this area of my practice to research because I believe inquiry-based instruction is the most effective way to equip my students for their futures. Each sub-question relates directly to the question and is meant to help define or expand on the purpose of the research. Theme 1 sub-questions are; what is the definition of inquiry, what does inquiry look like in an ELA classroom, and how does inquiry-based instruction empower students to use inquiry outside the classroom. The question I address in theme 2 is, *how have I grown in my readiness to plan for criticality in my classroom?* I chose this area of my practice to research because I want to consider all perspectives when planning and teaching, and when needed, be critical of my own teaching and practice. I also want to ensure my students are being taught through a criticality lens, which means to, “read, write, and think in the context of understanding power, privilege, and oppression.” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 234) I think the ability to see events through multiple perspectives allows me to better adapt to any uncertainty that could arise throughout my teaching career. The sub-questions I address pertaining to the theme 2 question are; what is criticality, what does criticality look like in an ELA classroom, and what does it look like outside the classroom. The last of those is relating to how criticality can influence student action in terms of social justice. The third and final question addressed in theme 3 is, *how have I*

*grown in my readiness to differentiate within my classroom?* I chose this area of my practice to research because teaching an inquiry-based classroom, and viewing my classroom through a criticality lens requires me to be proficient in differentiation. The sub-questions pertaining to theme 3 questions are; what is differentiation, and what does differentiation look like in an ELA classroom. I have elected to not follow the sequential order of questioning when it comes to the final sub-question in theme 3. Instead, I focused a section on self-efficacy because of its value to aspiring teachers, as well as its value to our students.

**Self-efficacy:**

Chichekian and Shore (2016) define self-efficacy as, “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 2). I can see how having belief in my own capabilities and in what I am doing as a teacher will empower me to excel. Having a strong sense of self-efficacy is crucial for what follows in this literature review. Bandura (2000) says, “self-efficacy impacts the amount of perseverance and effort an individual undertakes when working toward achieving an objective.” I cannot work in this field without perseverance and effort toward achieving your objective. Now that I have established what self-efficacy is and why it is important, I want to identify four major forms of influence on self-efficacy.

Bandura (1995) talks about, “mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social experiences, and physiological and emotional states.” Out of the four Bandura says “mastery experiences provide the most authentic evidence of one’s success.” Self-efficacy is built on success, which builds mastery of that experience. Vicarious experiences refer to the experience I am receiving currently through my student teaching at my clinical site. Seeing the theory that I learned put into practice by an experienced teacher builds toward my overall self-efficacy. Social

experiences are the supports in place to promote success and the pressures of peers to continue successful practices. Lastly, how I interpret emotional and physical reactions, my perception can cause energy or bring down energy. These four factors when working together create a confident, self-efficacious teacher who is able to teach using inquiry, and plan for criticality in the classroom using differentiation. Self-efficacy and a teachers perceived readiness is a strong combination as noticed by Hammond et al. (2002), when they compared teachers from traditional graduate programs to teachers without formal training, they asserted, “Although acknowledging that linking preparation to direct measures of effectiveness would be preferable, the authors defended their emphasis on self-perceived preparedness because it was associated with teacher efficacy which, in prior work, predicted student achievement.” (p. 57) I will now look at each of my questions as they pertain to my readiness and the literature that I found relevant to my research.

**Theme 1:** How have I grown in my readiness to use inquiry-based instruction in my content area?

With the research I have conducted I will show why inquiry-based instruction is not only important, but necessary for 21st century students. I have decided to adopt inquiry-based instruction into my teaching because of its effectiveness. I will show through the research I have gathered how effective inquiry can be. I wanted to expand my knowledge of various strategies to ensure my students are reaching their full potential in and outside of the classroom. To understand my own growth in inquiry-based instruction I needed to understand a few concepts of the instruction style. I will explore where this particular style of instruction originated from, and how different researchers define inquiry-based instruction. I will also explore what research says

the instruction style should look like in an ELA classroom. Finally, I will discuss what inquiry-based instruction looks like in action in society.

### **What is inquiry-based instruction?**

According to Philip W. Jackson (1998) the psychological premise of John Dewey's educational theories relies heavily on the fact that children possess a small number of instincts. In April 1899, Dewey expanded on those instincts in his second of three lectures which were delivered that day. In reference to the, "small number of instincts" Dewey said, "it is the teacher's job to direct toward worthwhile (i.e., educative) ends" (p. 420). This is a charge I do not take lightly, for Dewey is considered the "godfather" of the progressive movement that has revolutionized our field (Labaree, 2005, p. 280). For a teacher to be able to direct the education of our children, they must understand the instincts referenced by Dewey. Jackson (1998) continued by naming the four natural inclinations coined by Dewey:

"They are 'the social instinct' (i.e., the wish to communicate with others), 'the constructive impulse' (i.e., the wish to make things), 'the instinct of investigation' (i.e., the wish to find out about things), and 'the expressive impulse' (i.e., the wish to create things) (p. 420).

Each of these instincts needs to be fostered and nurtured, and inquiry-based instruction fulfills the charge put forth by Dewey that April day in 1899 to, "direct toward worthwhile ends." Inquiry-based instruction fosters the instincts through group work, projects that allow students to learn about a relevant topic in a creative way, research on topics that enhance knowledge of cultures and differences encountered in society, and many other ways to express how the students feel about different perspective compared to their own in a safe and controlled manner. Jackson (1998) elaborates further on Dewey's perspective of the teacher fostering these instincts,

“Her job is not to humor and indulge those native tendencies. Rather, it is to discover how each might be used to lead students toward greater knowledge and more disciplined skills” (p. 420).

This passage points out how Dewey acknowledged that students will come to us with “native tendencies,” opposed to “indulging” these tendencies; we are to use them in an attempt to expand student knowledge and skills. This is accomplished through effective inquiry-based instruction.

Many scholars have defined inquiry over the years since Dewey gave his lectures, and each discipline has their own interpretation of inquiry. When searching for the definition I wanted to use, I considered a few factors: first, it must incorporate a reflective practice, and second which theorists have used the definition in their work? I believe reflection is important to learning as Lance Mason (2019) quotes Dewey’s discussion on the “habitual self”:

Dewey (1964) Through the influence of the social environment each person becomes saturated with customs, the beliefs, purposes, skills, hopes and fears of the cultural group to which he belongs’ (p. 10). Individuals learn about the world through these transactions, which modify their impulses and help from what Dewey calls habits. Dewey (1922) defines habits as ‘that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired’ (p. 5).

Mason (2019) elaborates on this by saying “The extent of an individual’s control, however, depends upon attaining robust habits of inquiry and reflection, which in turn, requires opportunities for transactions within a vibrant community that fosters them” (p. 6). As a teacher that is exactly what I should be doing, developing robust habits of inquiry, and ensuring my students understand reflection. This is all practiced in the classroom, or as Mason puts it, “a vibrant community”; the practice done in the classroom when reflected upon builds skills for societal encounters and success.

The definition of inquiry I will use embodies all of the above definitions and skills. Another factor that I considered when searching for a definition was theorists who the definition is grounded in. According to Steven Athanases et al. (2015) “this conception of inquiry is rooted in a Dewey-inspired paradigm of reflective practice” (p. 89). Here I was able to find the reflection aspect that is so important and grounded in Dewey’s theory; Athanases et al. also draws on work from Aristotle and of Freire to form this definition. The definition I will use is “inquiry promotes praxis, practice that is part of a system of critical reflection on action, generating new knowledge and theory to shape transformed action” (p. 89). Praxis, as used here by Athanases et al., is defined as practice of theory. When I refer to inquiry for the remainder of the review, this is the framework I will be using for the inquiry-based instruction section.

### **What does inquiry-based instruction look like in an ELA classroom?**

When reading studies and articles on inquiry-based instruction, a common theme was how little the practice was used in ELA classrooms. Inquiry-based instruction is primarily used in a Science classroom when compared to other K-12 disciplines. One particular study referenced by Chichekian et al. (2016) claims after science, “Social studies (e.g., history) have been the next most frequent discipline implementing forms of inquiry instruction, followed by mathematics (inquiry as problem solving), then English Language Arts (ELA) emphasizing inquiry instruction the least” (p.2). Reading this made me question how that could be possible when we as ELA teachers are responsible for literacy, writing, and language skills. These are the basic forms of communication in our society, and how we understand what is going on around us. How can we educate students to be informed citizens without teaching students to learn how the world works and how to interpret their surroundings? Inquiry-based instruction does just that,



it teaches students how to be informed through various forms of research and inferences, which I will discuss more in depth over the next few paragraphs.

Mirra et al. (2018) makes an excellent point when she says, “literary reasoning offers a model for public deliberation about civic and political issues that is aspirational and creative. These are some of the qualities necessary for challenging entrenched inequalities” (p. 441). Mirra et al. highlights the importance of inquiry within a discipline that teaches students how to read, write, and speak; as well as interpreting what is heard, and what is written on the various platforms. It also puts into perspective how someone who misses out on inquiry-based instruction in an ELA classroom will have a difficult time participating in societal discourse, not to mention any other form of Discourse; as differentiated by Gee (2015):

The notion of “Big ‘D’ Discourse” (“Discourse” spelled with a capital “D”) is meant to capture the ways in which people enact and recognize socially and historically significant identities or “kinds of people” through well-integrated combinations of language, actions, interactions, objects, tools, technologies, beliefs, and values. The notion stresses how “discourse” (language in use among people) is always also a “conversation” among different historically formed Discourses (that is, a “conversation” among different socially and historically significant kinds of people or social groups). The notion of “Big ‘D’ Discourse” sets a larger context for the analysis of “discourse” (with a little “d”), that is, the analysis of language in use.

I believe when discussing context that may include both types, big “D” Discourse, and small “d” discourse, it is important to differentiate between the two. Understanding both of these is crucial when implementing inquiry-based instruction in an ELA classroom; particularly when there is an emphasis on social justice education and criticality.

According to the National Council of Teachers of English, “ELA standards asserted that evaluating and interpreting findings from various information sources was ‘one of the most vital skills that students can acquire (IRA & NCTE, 1996, p. 28)’ (Chickekian et al., 2016, p. 2; see also Levy et al., 2013, p. 387). With inquiry being so important in ELA, what should ELA teachers be doing to incorporate inquiry-based instruction? Well, according to Chickekian et al. (2016), “Teaching ELA with inquiry should foster critical consumption, production, and interpretation of written, visual, and audio text” (p. 2). As a prospective teacher in the field of ELA, my classroom needs to foster critical consumption of written, visual, and audio text. This reflects on my personal teaching, and what I instill in my students on a daily basis; and according to the Chickekian et al. (2016), “I need to incorporate multimodal platforms for distribution of text.” I also need to teach my students how to interpret text on multimodal platforms, this includes a deep understanding of what the authors are trying to say. Lastly, I am charged with ensuring my students can produce text on each of the platforms, and understand at a deep conceptual level.

Now that we understand inquiry in terms of how it is framed to be used in an ELA classroom, and what that looks like from my perspective as the teacher. Now, we need to look at what this should look like when used in an ELA classroom. I chose Chickekian et al. (2016) to give us their interpretation of how this should look when in action:

Teachers must distinguish between practicing a discipline (authentic learning processes) and practicing discipline-based activities (e.g., interactive, hands-on classroom activities; Chickekian et al., 2011; Syer, Chickekian, Shore, & Aulls, 2012). Highly self-efficacious teachers might persist and be more ambitious in implementing inquiry-instruction strategies, but confidence alone insufficiently contributes to effective practices (3).

This tells me as a teacher that it is not sufficient to teach authentic disciplinary inquiry or learning processes; I am charged with integrating interactive hands-on classroom activities to foster and practice what's been learned, which in turn creates authentic inquiry. I do not want to discount the importance of posing traditional disciplinary questions, but without the practice of hands-on activities, the learning is not connected to practice. According to Konstantinos (2015), "Authentic inquiry is about learning, changing, developing, and implementing practices that contribute to learning and teaching" (41). The teaching of authentic inquiry, and practicing through hands-on activities are the core concepts of what inquiry looks like in an ELA classroom.

### **What inquiry-based instruction looks like in action?**

My search for literature in the last two sections has focused on Dewey's philosophies on education and how they can be applied in my own classroom. This last section focuses on the self, and how we are always evolving based on new knowledge as referenced by Dewey. Mason (2019) discusses Dewey's conception of self when he writes:

Dewey's conception of the self-formed through habits is a social self that is relatively fluid. This self is continually changing, but not easily mailable, and can only be changed by modifying existing habits. This is a largely linear conception of the self with a past that is in continuity with its present, as an individual achieves character growth not by destroying past habits but transforming them into something useful for present action. Dewey's self is continuously growing as it is constantly being shaped and reshaped through transactional relations, through the particulars of such growth are predicated on the details of an individual's experiences within social environments (p. 9).

The first part of this quote relates to the previous sections about forming and modifying “habits,” which is done inside the classroom. Dewey elaborates more on how the habits are modified and not destroyed, which is why the emphasis of lived experience will show up throughout my research. The latter part of the quote relates to the “transformation” of the habits, being turned into “present action”; which is exactly what those two words are defined as, “action now.” It then talks about that present action taking place within an individual’s social environments, as in the world outside of the schoolhouse. Our social environment in America is divisive and chaotic, which makes for a difficult transition from high school for students. This part of Dewey’s philosophy is more important now than ever before.

In my quest of how to create a classroom environment that helps students interpret and communicate within our society; and how to empower students to make the changes needed to create a more inclusive society. I turn to Rahimi and Sajed (2014) who bring up my role in critical pedagogy which is relevant when they claim, “Therefore, it is incumbent on critical pedagogues to bring it to people’s awareness and inform them of their rights and abilities as social agents who can bring about change” (p. 42). I will discuss critical pedagogy in more detail later on in this chapter. In the process of forming and shaping my students’ habits, I am charged with instilling an awareness of their rights and abilities. As Rahimi and Sajed put it, “social agents who can bring about change.” If I teach a curriculum that promotes inclusiveness, and practice the philosophical views I am grounded in, my students will be ready to confront society with the tools to enact positive and lasting change.

After all my research on inquiry-based instruction, I feel as if I have enough knowledge to assess my own readiness to enact inquiry-based instruction in my classroom. I have reviewed what the scholars say inquiry-based instruction is, and the path it has taken from Dewey to

scholars of today. I have explicated the definition and broken down each section to see what it takes to teach using this strategy. I provided evidence-based research to support my assertions that my students will learn the state mandated standards while being more effective in society; this is done by understanding themselves, and the perspectives needed to be productive and successful. I have backed up my decision to use this method through research on why it is preferred over other methods such as rote learning and standardized tests. To teach my students using inquiry, I must plan for criticality in my classroom; I will differentiate criticality from critical pedagogy, and critical thinking.

**Theme 2:** How have I grown in my readiness to plan for criticality in my classroom?

In this section I will review the literature and studies I have found in my pursuit of understanding criticality. I believe criticality is important to supplement a classroom geared toward inquiry, and crucial for understanding and navigating our divisive political climate. I will define and explain why I will practice criticality in the classroom that I plan on teaching. The research question I plan to answer for this theme is how have I grown in my readiness to plan for criticality. To accomplish this, I will need a firm grasp and understanding of the word criticality as used in an ELA classroom and the nuances that separate criticality from similar but crucial practices. Once I have established the definition and how it is used, I will then look at what criticality will look like inside an EA classroom. Lastly, I will explore how criticality can prepare my students for action and critical analysis of the society in which they reside. I will intertwine theme 1 at times with theme 2 showing the interconnectedness and how criticality works together to support inquiry-based instruction, and to support students develop themselves in a healthy and equitable way.

**What is criticality?**

As a teacher I want to ensure I teach my students to think critically about literature, writing, or society in general. I want to teach my students how to analyze information before making decisions that affect people, like how to properly research a political issue in order to become a more informed voter. Criticality is not the same as critical pedagogy or critical thinking, although it encompasses both. According to Mary Breunig (2005):

While pedagogy is most simply conceived of as the study of teaching and learning, the term critical pedagogy embodies notions of how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns. Freire is regarded as the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy for his work on recognizing the relationships among education, politics, imperialism, and liberation (109).

I agree with Freire that teaching should incorporate how education, politics, imperialism, and liberation tie into criticality. When I use “critical thinking” I refer to Amy Shaw et. al. (2020) when they contend, “Critical thinkers are able to search, comprehend, and evaluate relevant statements logically and rationally during problem-solving or decision-making processes.” So, criticality contains teaching in a way that informs students on how to function in society, and ensures students can comprehend and evaluate what is being taught. What does this have to do with criticality then, and how does this apply to me and my research to be a better teacher. In my research I found a definition that I believe is applicable to what I plan on doing in my ELA classroom.

For my definition I turn to Banegas and Castro (2016) definition and I combine it with Muhammad (2020) definition used for her framework in her book on “culturally and historically responsive literacy.” Banegas & Castro (2016) deduce from their discussion on critical thinking

and critical pedagogy that, “in this regard, criticality refers to the practice of socially situated reflection and evaluation. It means considering an issue from multiple perspectives, even when these involve self-critique” (p. 455). Consideration of others perspectives is something that is not done often these days, but it is something that should be taught in secondary education. The reason I did not feel as though this was a sufficient definition is because it focuses primarily on the perspective of society. When I add Muhammad’s (2020) definition of, “criticality is the capacity to read, write, and think in the context of understanding power, privilege, and oppression (p. 234). Not only does criticality address perspective and reflection based on what I teach; it contends that I must teach how to “read, write, and think” to truly ensure there is an understanding of the power dynamics in this country. Muhammad’s (2020) definition goes even further by articulating that:

Criticality is also related to seeing, naming, and interrogating the world to not only make sense of injustice, but also work toward social transformation. Thus, students need spaces to name and critique injustice to help them ultimately develop the agency to build a better world. As long as oppression is present in the world, young people need pedagogy that nurtures criticality (p. 234).

Muhammad’s definition incorporates a strong social justice perspective, which fits right in line with the direction I plan on taking my classroom. I like the addition of Bangegas & Castro’s definition because it emphasizes the importance of situational or contextual reflection and evaluation, but Muhammad adds the action aspect that I want to incorporate in my inquiry-based classroom.

I do not need to include research on how our society and education system has been shaped and still is shaped by oppressive laws and policies; on top of toxic rhetoric spewed from

politicians aimed at preserving a hegemonic tradition that dates back to before imperialism. I will assume these are agreed upon as fact, which illustrates the necessity for Muhammad's definition of criticality in an ELA classroom. She points out that we not only have to see, name, and interrogate the injustices, but try in every way to transform the world. As Rahimi and Sajed (2014) described it as "social agents who can bring about change," similarly Muhammad is asking us to equip students to transform society. To enable our students to become agents of change, we need to first provide safe-spaces for our students to critique injustices. Doing this will help build their confidence and knowledge of who they are as a person and how to use that information to confront the injustices seen in society.

The thought of society is somewhat complex when trying to teach a student to understand how and why our society reacts to certain events or tragedies. This becomes even more complex when one can only think inside their own perspective, as in not able to relate, or see someone else's point of view. This kind of thought creates narrow minded individuals who cannot think empathetically, which in turn perpetuates our hegemonic narrative and racial funding of our society. Ho (2020) introduces an interesting concept in her pursuit to plan for criticality, she says:

I have become increasingly interested in my own form of performance education, one that involves creating educational spaces where our students' brains can work through the complexities of our everyday human condition; essentially, within my class, I aim for students to perform society (152).

She is suggesting allowing students to digest their complex issues in class, which in turn exposes students to multiple perspectives of a specific situation or event. This does not solve any long-term problem with education or society, but it allows students a safe-place to talk, hear each



other, and value each person's perspective. According to Nieto & Bode (2018), "People of color, now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2043" (p. 16). This is because of immigration, refugees, and natural increase as Neil Foley asserts in his book *Mexicans in the Making of America*:

In 2010 the census counted 50.5 million Hispanics or Latinos, making up 16.3 percent of the U.S. population, compared to 4.5 percent in 1970. Most of the increase after 2000 has been due to natural increase rather than immigration, as recent birth rates confirm: in 2010 one of every four babies born in the United States was born to a Latina mother (p.7)

This highlights the importance for criticality now more than ever, although it has always been of importance. This statistic supports the rationale behind Ho's performance education model, treating the classroom as a performance of society; This is also just one example I found that promotes criticality in the classroom as defined by Muhammad (2020) & Banegas & Castro (2016).

### **What does criticality look like in an ELA classroom?**

Now that we have our definition and have discussed the importance of perspective in terms of criticality, we need to shift and discuss lived experiences. Mason (2019) posits in regard to Dewey's view on lived experiences, "individuals are biologically rooted, and in continuous transaction with their lived environments. He rejects the transcendental self, seeing humans as inherently social and deriving their sense of individuality from environmental engagements" (p. 5). I highlight the importance of this because in an ELA classroom the transactions between peers are important, especially if I want to plan for criticality. This Deweyan quote supports the "perform society" in the classroom I looked at in Ho (2020), and fits into my inquiry-based classroom. Pierre Bourdieu (1973) expands on this further when he discusses his three modes of

theoretical knowledge, which are all in contrast with practical knowledge. He named them as perceptual knowledge, objectivist knowledge, and praxeological knowledge. When these are combined a student will be able to view situations through the lens of various perceptions, with an objective view and the intent to create a plan of action (p. 53-54). This expands Dewey's thought of transactions between individuals, and the individuals impact on their environment as well as the environmental impact on the individual. This connection of inquiry and criticality is what I am aiming for in my ELA classroom. Understanding how student environmental interactions shape their societal understandings highlights and puts an emphasis on the importance of criticality. In particular how to express their learned understanding of society, which is encapsulated in our criticality definition.

Moving from the environmental transaction thought, I want to shift to empowering students of minorities; this can be done by creating counternarratives to our dominant societal narratives. Dallacqua and Sheahan (2020) postulate that, "critical theory advocates transparent teaching of language of dominant texts to challenge such ideologies and create counter narratives that uphold minority voices and experiences" (p. 68). This supports criticality through developing one's own self, and empowering our students to be who they are, not who society tells them they should be. As an ELA teacher I am responsible for exposing my students to various perspectives, even if that perspective is not shared by individuals in my classroom; experiencing another's perspective is not only enlightening, but educational in a sense of creating a more informed society. This can be done through Ho's performance of society. Students should be able to not only understand their own cultural traditions as experienced throughout their life, and learned about in class through authors who mirror my students and the various cultures of the world, but they should be able to advocate through reading and writing among other forms of

communication for themselves and other people who relate to them. I will expand further on social justice in the classroom later in the chapter, but this empowerment section is a key concept to teaching for social justice.

Dallacqua and Sheahan (2020) were reflecting on a study centered around Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and a nontraditional text that they paired with it when they said:

Pairing nontraditional and canonical texts lent itself to unconventional responses showing the synthesis of multiple texts in relation to larger unit questions surrounding privilege and power. We felt that responding to texts in this way could support the criticality and empowerment that we want to cultivate (p. 70).

I like how they accept the canonical text prescribed by their school, instead of complaining about the outdated problem set and vernacular of it; they adapt the old story to a modern text that uplifts the voices of minorities, and focuses on themes such as a dominant narrative put forth in the text such as privilege and power. This allows us as ELA teachers to break down stereotypes, and empower our students instead of deeming them a deficit because society says they are. This also allows students to acknowledge the power structure in society and perhaps see life through a multi-perspective lens. Understanding how the structures in America have been founded through and influenced by imperialism, and continues to oppress in new ways can put in perspective the challenges we face. In particular when referencing societal change and creating agents of change in my students. This method really helps breakdown the historical context and helps empower students to critically think about how to disrupt the current system and structures.

### **What does criticality look like in action?**

Criticality is one aspect that is more important when practiced in society, but foundations are definitely laid in secondary education. Dallacqua and Sheahan (2020) assert, “the exploration

of both traditional and nontraditional texts as a way for teachers and students to investigate power, identity, and differences in their reading of the real world” (p. 68). This builds off what I discussed in the previous section in regards to comparative texts interpretation, and describes how those studies impact views on power, identity, and differences encountered in the real world. Rahimi and Sajed (2014) connect what is done in class to how it should translate to action in society:

Critical thinking is about avoiding foolish opinions, is about questioning all the assumptions about what is true, is to view arguments as open to debate rather than the last word, to infer carefully and draw appropriate conclusions and is one’s ability to distinguish between fact and opinion (p. 43).

When I discussed what criticality would look like in an ELA classroom, these are the ultimate desired outcomes. If I have taught through a criticality lens my students will be able to avoid foolish societal opinions. Particularly ones associated with power and privilege in our society and the oppressive history that supports those pillars. This is done by questioning assumptions put forth by stereotypes in an attempt to stop the perpetuation of those assumptions. Critically analyzing each individual situation as isolated to infer and draw appropriate conclusions and actions; this minimizes unnecessary judgements and prejudices and this helps disrupt or at least challenge the oppressive structures. As we have witnessed and read about years of heroic individuals attempting to create change, one person alone is not capable of creating the size of disruption to enact lasting change. This is why teaching using our definition of criticality should create classrooms of change agents ready to change America to an equitable society.

So far, I have talked a lot about learning how to think critically, and how we can analyze each situation in a way not to perpetuate already negative situations. This is not enough though,

knowing about the problem without trying to fix it is still perpetuating the problem. Burbules and Berk (1999) expand on this idea of “moral agents” when they said:

Since critical thinking allows us to overcome the sway of our egocentric and sociocultural beliefs, as moral agents and potential shapers of our own nature and destiny we should foster dialogue in which thinking from the perspective of others is also relevant to the assessment of truth claims (p. 50).

This takes the critical thinking taught in class and translated in a way to make a change in one’s own life, but when taught how, also makes efforts toward societal changes. Fowler-Amato et al. (2019) quotes Lamar Johnson associate professor at Michigan State University, “Johnson argues that the field of English education must ‘take action to eradicate a system that blocks the chances of creating the impossible, in this case, a more just and equitable world’” (p. 160). As other charges I stated I take seriously, this charge I take as serious as any other. To do my part in creating a more just and equitable world, I teach my students to view the world with criticality and act when necessary to enable others to equitable proportions.

**Theme 3:** How have I grown in my readiness to differentiate within my classroom?

Our students come to us in many different forms and at various knowledge levels, for this reason it is imperative that we are proficient at differentiation as teachers. Students' differences in learning cause a broad range of skill levels when I am assessing my students. To meet each and every student where they are, I need to develop skills to ensure each student is capable of learning what is presented. If the student is not learning, it does not mean there is a deficit in the student, it means I need to adjust my approach to ensure my students can learn what I teach. This can look different depending on the student's needs. I will discuss the various strategies used for differentiation in the classroom. To assess my growth in differentiation, I need

to comprehend the definition and what planning for differentiation looks like inside an ELA classroom.

### **Definition of differentiation**

Before I discuss the actual definition, I want to discuss why I feel it necessary to incorporate differentiation in my teaching, let alone why I want to research the topic. Labaree (2005) discusses two important components of naturalism which is part of Dewey's progressive pedagogy. First, learning is natural:

If learning is natural, then teaching needs to adapt itself to the natural development capacities of the learner, which requires a careful effort to provide particular subject matters and skills only when they are appropriate for the student's stage of development.

Developmentally appropriate practices and curricula are central to this progressive vision (p. 281).

This quote does a great job at describing why differentiation is needed in the classroom; if learning is natural, then I need to adjust my teaching to meet students where they are naturally at. Staying in line with my progressive view on education, planning for differentiation in my curriculum is central to that vision. Second, learning is holistic, Labaree (2005) says, "learning is most natural when it takes place in a holistic form, where multiple domains of skill and knowledge are integrated into thematic units and projects instead of being taught as separate subjects" (p. 281). It is not feasible in a traditional school to teach multiple disciplines in one classroom, but I can ensure I am integrating interdisciplinary skills and knowledge into my lesson plans. Ensuring my students know the ultimate end goal is the key here, as teaching various skills can lead to confusion.

Now that we have covered a few reasons to rationalize differentiation and established why it is necessary to differentiate in the classroom; let's look at what definition I will be using throughout this section of my literature review. My definition is from Athanases et al. (2015) when they state, "Effective teachers adjust, modify, adapt, and invent in response to instructional results. They know how to learn about learners and how to adapt lessons to individuals and groups" (p. 84). I addressed the first part of this quote already when I discussed naturalism, the latter is an important skill that needs to be acquired. Learning how learners learn is crucial to adapting lessons to meet individuals and groups where they are naturally at. Now that I have the definition, I can review my research of differentiation and assess my readiness to differentiate in my classroom.

### **What does differentiation look like in an ELA classroom?**

Now that we have established our definition of differentiation, I want to look at what this strategy looks like in an ELA classroom. As I have alluded to in a previous section, inquiry-based study is least often used in ELA classrooms. This is significant because this implies a strong reliance on core curriculum as the standard teachers use. Most core curriculum is not in line with the progressive view that I and most Deweyan teachers strive to implement. Differentiation is necessary no matter the curricular standard used, but when following a non-progressive rot curriculum, major differentiation is needed to ensure learning and interest are fostered. Mason (2019) says:

This implores schools and educators to channel the creative energy of students in positive ways that foster their curiosity, imagination, and social engagement with others. From this perspective, the extent that one is encouraged to explore, observe and reflect carefully about situations, confer with others, ask questions and refine their own

understandings will in no small part determine an individual's character and disposition, making the classroom environment a key site for the rearing selves (p. 6).

There is a lot to unpack in this quote in regards to my discussion on differentiation. The first sentence speaks directly to what is needed in a classroom, no matter the curriculum or the material. I am to differentiate the material in a way that channels a creative energy, through that energy I want to foster their curiosity, imagination, and social engagement with their peers.

Imploring my students to act in these ways looks different to each individual student.

Differentiation is meeting them where they are and ensuring they accomplish things such as curiosity, imagination, and social engagement. The latter part of the quote references how engaging in learning in this way reinforces good individual qualities, such as character and disposition. When differentiation is done right, the classroom is a wonderful place to foster and grow these qualities in our students.

When looking at an ELA classroom in specific, sometimes the reading and writing can really take a toll on students, and can be boring. As teachers know, when you start to lose the interest of students, they do not learn much and it is hard to regain their attention. Levitt (2017) says, "When students are interacting with literature on a subject that interests them, they benefit from the synergistic nature of the interdependencies of engagement, interest, and motivations" (p. 9). This is one major form of differentiation in an ELA classroom: choice of what to read. Recalling my philosophy of education in chapter 1, reading was not fun for me, and that was because I never found anything that I enjoyed reading. Levitt (2017) goes on to say, "In fact, the interest level is often more powerful than the readability of the material when it comes to comprehension and recall" (p. 9). This is a great example of how powerful of a motivator differentiation can be. Research supports the assertion that motivation is enough to entice a



student to begin reading a more difficult book, this strategy is a form of differentiation. as articulated by Hidi & Harackiewicz (2000), “when students are interested in an academic topic, they are more likely to go to class, pay attention, become engaged, take more courses, as well as process information effectively and ultimately perform well” Worthy and Sailors (2001) elaborate more when they said, “Additionally, students may also read texts that are otherwise too difficult for them if the texts interest them.” This quote highlights the importance of choice, and keeping the materials presented to students interesting. Ensuring the curriculum is interesting will garner more participation and more learning in the students.

As an ELA teacher my goal is to interest my students, this in turn promotes learning, as Ormrod (2020) says, “In general, interest promotes more effective cognitive processing. People who are interested in a topic devote more attention to it and become more behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally engaged in it” (p. 515). So, if the research says students learn more effectively when they are interested, I need to ensure all my students are interested. Ormrod discusses many types of interest, two in particular stand out to me as important for my research. Situational interest Ormrod (2020) says, “is evoked by something in the environment, something that’s perhaps new, unusual, or surprising” (p. 514). This is the kind we would encounter in the classroom, but she goes on to say, “Many longer-term, personal interests probably come from people’s prior experience with various topics and activities. For example, objects or events that initially invoke situational interest may provide the seed from which a sustained personal interest gradually emerges” (p. 515). That ultimately is our goal, personal interest in subjects we teach. Ormrod (2020) claims that personal interests are, “relatively stable and manifest themselves in consistent patterns in choice making over time” (p. 514). This is what differentiation looks like in an ELA classroom, choices to draw interest, and ranges in difficulty to accommodate all

learning styles. Now that I have reviewed the literature, I need to plan how I will collect data to conduct my research.

## Chapter 3

**Methodology****Research Design:**

As teachers, we need a way to continue learning in our field. We need to learn new approaches and keep up on relevant research that pertains to our students. Qualitative research works better here because I am building a conceptual framework for my future work in the classroom, and for further research that might move into quantitative research someday. I have identified action research as a way to study myself and my practice as a novice teacher. According to Bullough & Pinnegar (2001), “Self-study is a methodology characterized by examination of the role of the self in the research project and ‘the space between self and the practice engaged in’” (p. 15) Burns (2010) elaborates further on this by saying, “AR involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systemic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts.” (p. 2) Action research allows the teacher to take control of their research, and decide where they want to improve or learn new strategies. Mathew Gould (2008) discusses three different approaches to conducting an action research project; a schoolwide approach, a collaborative model that focuses on a department or a few classrooms, and individual teacher research. This study utilizes the latter of the three, and focuses on three specific readiness questions in regard to my practice.

**Research Question:**

I am a teacher candidate, and have not worked independently in a classroom as of yet. My research questions are grounded in the thought of how I can ensure equity for all my students, and how I can prepare my students for the world in which they will eventually contribute. I selected questions that align with InTASC core teaching standards, along with

questions that are based on my readiness to enter the classroom. My first question, *how I have grown in my readiness to differentiate in my classroom*; aligns with the InTASC standard #3 (learning environment), which says, “The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 21) Question two, *How I have grown in my readiness to plan for criticality in the classroom*; aligns with the InTASC standard #5 (Application of content), which says, “The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 27) Finally, question three, *how have I grown in my readiness to use inquiry-based instruction in my classroom*; aligns with the InTASC standard #6 (Assessment), which says, “The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making.” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 30)

### **Participants and Setting:**

I conducted my research in the Spring of 2021 at Judson Middle School in Salem Oregon. As of right now, I have only seen students in a virtual format in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Judson uses Zoom to conduct their meetings for class. Mondays have been dedicated to teachers planning days and any other staff meetings. I see students four days a week, the same students twice a week; either Tuesday and Thursday or Wednesday and Friday. When they are not in class, they have what is called an “applied learning day.” Students use applied learning days as workdays; they receive and do homework that supports what the teacher is teaching on

their two in class days. My study consists of 91 students spread over six classes within two cohorts. 43 of those 91 students identify as female, only one class had more females than males. White is the most prominent race making up 73%, Latinx was the second most prominent race making up 26% of my students. These statistics are not too far off from the city's demographics as a whole. 18 of my students are on individualized education programs (IEP), 15 of which are not writing at grade level, 9 are not reading at grade level, and 1 who cannot read on their own. 8 of my students are emergent bilingual, 5 are transitioning bilingual, and 3 are active bilingual.

**Table 1**

*Data Collection Procedures and Time Frame:*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Procedure/Timeline</b>
How I have grown in my readiness to use inquiry-based instruction?	Journal	Inform myself on student interactions that pertain to inquiry.	I take notes in my journal about all interactions, and I collected 20 weeks of journal notes.
	Lesson plans	Inform myself on how my instruction is fulfilling my inquiry desire.	I fill out a lesson plan for each lesson I plan on teaching, and will finish these by April 28, 2021.
	Student artifacts	These inform my future instruction and	I collect these for my edTPA, and will reflect on them to assess my

		allow me to assess my progress.	readiness; these will be collected by May 4, 2021.
How I have grown in my readiness to plan for criticality?	Interviews	These interviews will assess my readiness to plan with criticality.	I have/will conduct interviews with my mentor teacher, and University supervisor. I will finish collecting these by May 1, 2021.
	Journal	These will assist in my reflection on my ability to plan for criticality.	I record various aspects of the lesson and day as I encounter them, these will be done by May 1, 2021.
	Mentor assessments	These will help me reflect on my ability to plan for criticality throughout my lessons.	I meet with my mentor and supervisor multiple times per term, I use these as a way to assess my ability to plan for criticality. These should be collected by May 1, 2021.
How I have grown in my readiness to differentiate?	Lesson plans	My lesson plans will help me reflect on my readiness to differentiate my	I fill out a lesson plan for each lesson I plan on teaching, and will finish these by April 28, 2021.

		lessons to fit my student’s needs.	
	Mentor assessment	These will help me reflect on my ability to differentiate throughout my lessons.	I meet with my mentor and supervisor multiple times per term, I use these as a way to assess my ability to differentiate. These should be collected by May 1, 2021.
	Student artifacts	These inform my future instruction and allow me to assess my progress in terms of differentiation.	I collect these for my edTPA, and will reflect on them to assess my readiness; these will be collected by May 4, 2021.

In this section I will describe the procedures that I used to evaluate not only my readiness, but my actual reflections on the work I did within the classroom. The method I used as I mentioned previously is action research, which is a form of self-study. I will use this self-study to assess the research questions and my readiness to practice as a teacher without supervision. I have planned for various methods of data collection to use as my own assessment of my teaching. Over the course of my student teaching I have collected data for my edTPA and reflected on that to gage my progress from the beginning to the end of my research. Once I have all the data collected I will analyze the data and chart the progress. I will have built in support (interviews and assessments with my mentor teacher and my university adviser) to allow me to

assess my progress throughout my research, and to ensure I am progressing toward my desired goals. Now I will discuss the various methods of data collection and time frames I will follow.

I started working with my students in September 2020, I did not start my data collection until January 4th, 2021. I used the earlier part of the year to form relationships and to get to know the students. I wanted to focus most of my time early on learning as much as I could about the students. When I started documenting the data I was receiving during each of my interactions, it was deeper conversations, this is because I had already formed relationships, and gathered necessary background data in the first half of the year. I taught my first four edTPA lessons January 12th-January 15th, this equated to two in person lessons, and three applied learning lessons. I had a debriefing with my mentor teaching following the lessons and discussed what I did well and where I could improve. After I taught these lessons I felt as if the students started seeing me as a classroom teacher instead of a student teacher. I believed this because my communication with the students really picked up, and it was mostly prompted by them. The more comfortable the students got with me, I got more comfortable teaching in front of them. I started taking attendance daily, this involved discussion over “the question of the day”; these questions ranged from favorite music to the most despised chore you’ve been required to complete. These discussions allowed me to build authentic relationships while learning likes and dislikes of my students.

I taught my second set of lessons on March 8th-March 19th; these were on a persuasive writing unit. I have body paragraphs, transitions, and conclusions. While I am conducting my research, I am also trying to satisfy the edTPA for my licensure. I mention this because I will be tasked with adding a reading aspect to the lesson to satisfy a specific section of the edTPA. Another thing considered in my next lesson planning effort is the potential to start in person



education before, or while I am actually teaching my lessons. I plan on teaching my lessons for my edTPA starting April 20, these lessons will be based on the book, *The Outsiders*. K-5 has started back in school already, and we are scheduled to return starting April 15. I believe these kinds of situations such as online and now switching to in person learning has been a good learning experience opposed to a hindrance. I feel better prepared for any uncertainties that may come our way.

I started my data collection in a daily journal for my edTPA where I recorded various interactions ranging from hearing what specific students say they like during attendance, to interview questions in one-on-one breakout rooms. Each situation was different and dictated what kind of field note I would record. I would refer to my field notes often to ensure I knew specific details about my students during interactions. These interactions felt authentic, and the relationships built felt real.

Each lesson I taught in these classes were developed using a lesson plan template, these lesson plans were used as guides during instruction. Based on my lesson plans I built a PowerPoint presentation to teach a mini-lesson on whatever the specific standard I was aiming to fulfill. Each lesson contained some kind of engagement interaction, this was things like Padlet, Jam board, or verbal exercises. As I mentioned, each lesson is followed by an applied learning lesson. This lesson needs to be descriptive because I am not there to teach them a lesson or tell them what is expected. Applied learning lessons typically require a submission to me and my mentor teacher, which we review on the following virtual school day. My lesson plans will be used in my data collection, along with engagement activities and assessments that accompany the lesson plans; to assess my progression and my readiness in accordance with each of my research questions.

Whenever I teach, I am assessed by my mentor teacher. Human resources of the Salem Keizer School District will randomly assess me, along with check-ins with my program mentor. I have debriefings and discussions with my mentor often, I keep field notes on our conversations. All these assessments, debriefings, and discussion notes will assist in evaluating my progression toward being ready to assume my own classroom, and my progression toward my research goals.

The last piece of evidence I will use are student artifacts and assessment samples to support my understanding of how my teaching is affecting student learning. These artifacts include papers written, Padlet mini-lesson exit tickets, quizzes, and various other forms of assessment. These artifacts should give me data that will help me understand how effective my teaching is, and another way to assess my readiness in accordance with my research questions.

### **Instrument and Apparatus:**

I worked with a great mentor teacher; hand in hand she taught me the approaches she uses in her classroom. She helped me really understand her philosophy through watching her teach, and one-on-one interviews. I mention this because I built my lessons based on her guidelines and procedures. There are three main instruments I used when collecting data. First, I reflected on specific situations to assess my readiness. I formed relationships with students over the past year and noted these interactions in my reflective journal. I recorded many of the interactions I had with the students, along with the information I learned in conversation or from attendance questions. I used/will use this data when building my lessons. I have collected valuable information for my edTPA that pertains to my students' backgrounds and cultural habits that may impact their learning. These reflections also gave me insight into various engaging and

non-engaging activities based on student participation; this information allows me to produce activities that would encourage more participation from students.

The second instrument I used to gather data was non-directive interviews. I used this method with my mentor teacher and university supervisor. I learned a lot about my students' family composition, favorite subjects in school and what makes them their favorite subjects, reading likes and dislikes, who likes to write and what they enjoy writing about including genre and style, and many other important factors that I used to tailor my edTPA lessons to fit their classroom through casual conversation. The reflections of my edTPA data will be used to inform me on my readiness in differentiated instruction to fit my student's needs. My interviews with my mentor teacher were more targeted on what has worked and not worked in her experience. She has over 20 years of experience, pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and she plans to continue after the pandemic. She teaches with an emphasis on reading, and admittedly is not as well at teaching writing. Observing her will allow me to embody the parts of her reading instruction I want to emulate, and learn where she struggles when it comes to writing instruction. She also was able to share valuable data about her students that I could not learn from interactions, such as childhood traumas or any other factor that could impact behavior or learning.

The last instrument I will use is content analysis; I used this method to assess information gathered for my edTPA. I have not created my surveys yet, but I plan on gathering information related to academic and student reactions to my lesson/instruction for the purpose of informing my lesson planning in my future edTPA tasks. I will use survey research before my lesson, then an after-lesson survey, and one more before I depart from the class; these three sets of data will

be compared and then I will reflect on them to better inform my teaching, and to answer my three research questions.

Because of the pandemic, the apparatuses I used to complete my research all revolves around technology. There are good and bad repercussions of this change in the learning environment, one of the good things is having to use so much technology. Many teachers struggle early and often throughout their careers at incorporating technology enough and in an engaging way, as stated by Tondeur et. al. (2011), “Unfortunately, research findings suggest that technology is significantly under-used by pre-service teachers and beginning teachers.” All of the apparatus I used are technological, and will be beneficial when I move into my own classroom next school year. Due to the environment all students are using computers and Zoom to receive their lessons and communicate with teachers and peers. Zoom and their lesson units are embedded in the Canvas on instucture.com website. I also used Jam boards and Padlet for free writes and different assignments, they allowed students to write in one place where I could see and give feedback. These were also embedded in the Canvas site easily found in their assignment. The final apparatus I used was Google doc, and Google slides; I used Google-Slides often to present a mini-lesson and it was available for the students to return to if they needed, and I used Google-docs for students to submit various assignments, they would share right to my email. These tools allowed me to review and send feedback immediately for revisions to students as needed.

### **Data Analysis Plan:**

#### **Table 2**

##### *Data Analysis Steps*

	Format this column to fit your study
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<b>Phase 1 Familiarize myself with data</b>	Journal entries, lesson plans, videos of myself teaching, student artifacts and assessments from mentors.  Read journal entries to find similar data, viewed lesson plans to see how well I used information from my journals, watched videos to see if I taught according to the lesson plans; to see what I did well; and where I needed work, read assessments from mentors and reviewed artifacts from students to see if they comprehended the content.
<b>Phase 2 Generate initial codes</b>	After reviewing my data from all my sources; I categorized them based on similarities. I then determined a code to identify all the data that was in each group. The codes were a way for me to easily access my data and see how I can associate the data to each of my research questions. I ended up with too many codes for me to analyze and fit into my project.
<b>Phase 3 Search for themes</b>	I found many of my codes could be combined, and I could create a theme that would incorporate more than one or two codes. Once I started connecting codes to my research question, the search for themes became a bit more manageable.
<b>Phase 4 Review themes</b>	I started then to match my themes to each research question. This allowed me to see how the data would help me assess my readiness and progression according to each question.
<b>Phase 5 Define &amp; name themes</b>	Once I identified which themes were supporting each of my questions, I decided to put all my codes and themes into a table. I made a table for each source that I used to collect data (these tables are in chapter 4). This was an easy way for me to organize my data, and a way to show the reader how I made my connections between data, code, and theme
<b>Phase 6 Write the thematic report</b>	Once I had my data collection completed and sorted by codes and themes, I wrote my analysis of how I interpreted this data. The data was used to tell me how ready I am to address each area of my practice, and tell me how I am progressing as I conducted my student teaching.

My approach to analyzing my data is to read through my field notes, interviews, and journal entries; I will then create codes that will help me identify themes within my data. These themes will be used in conjunction with my research questions to assess my readiness and progression toward my goals. The data I collected will primarily be used to assess baselines and progression of my readiness for my edTPA and reflected up throughout the duration of the study.

**Limitations, Delineations, and Biases/Assumptions:**

**Limitations:**

Action research is not an objective or experimental form of research. Because of this, my findings should not be generalized, and because of my time restraints, have not been replicated. Action research is a cyclical process, and should be replicated multiple times to show the results are indicative of whatever methods were used. After my completion of this program I will continue my research and the repeating processes to solidify my findings. I plan on teaching in my own classroom in the fall of next school year, and will continue researching my practice in regard to these same research questions. In doing so will allow me to finish my research in full, with time to reflect and make necessary changes.

**Delimitations:**

- **Spring term 2021:** I started this research journey in September, at the beginning of Fall quarter. I had set timelines for specific parts of the research, and the end of Spring 2021 was my goal to have my research completed and turned into the graduate office. Other benefits to completing the research this quarter are that I am done with my Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) classes, and have more time to dedicate to the research of my practice; also this term, I am required to participate in distance learning as my students are learning from home; this allows me to strengthen my online teaching ability and use of technology, which was an area of need for me. I feel more confident in my technology abilities, and learned valuable techniques that can be used online or in a classroom setting.
- **8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA:** My research is solely with one teacher, and her six 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA classrooms. I selected this narrow scope because it fit within the timeframe and personal time-restraints I have. This classroom worked perfect because I am following a teacher as

part of my exit practicum. As I stated in the previous bullet, I plan on continuing this research in my own classroom; which will add various new variables and findings in terms of my research questions.

- **Virtual learning environment:** I applied for this MAT program before the Covid-19 pandemic, but by the time we started it was Summer 2020. This posed many challenges and unknowns when it comes to how to conduct this research. As time drew near to start my student teaching and my research, it appeared clear this year would at least start virtual. This was an adjustment due to my experience only ever being in an actual classroom. I adjusted quickly, learning many new strategies and technology techniques. Because of this pandemic, my entire research is conducted through a virtual learning environment.

**Biases/Assumptions:**

- I assume my participants will answer questions on the survey, or in interviews as honestly as they can. I am aware that each student's situation is different, and they may not feel comfortable revealing specifics about their home life. My research questions do not ask anything that would put my students in a position where they might feel the need to mislead me, my questions are based on reflections of my teaching and interactions.
- I assume that each student has the same opportunity while in class. I cannot control what happens at my students' homes, but I can ensure that every student has access to materials. All of my students have Chromebooks, and I know of a few that got a second because the first was lost. I make the reading material accessible to anyone and have emailed parents about issues that may arise.

- I provide an inclusive environment as I can. I ensure to identify stereotypes; this way I can ensure they do not affect my teaching. One way I try to check my own bias before I present a lesson is by reviewing my lesson for any, “hidden” messages in my curriculum. I use the word, “hidden” as Kumashiro (2015) uses it when he says, “These unintentional lessons make up the ‘hidden’ curriculum of oppression that permeates our schools and complicates any movement to reform curriculum and teach toward social justice.” He said this in reference to things such as; lining up for separate restrooms, more resources for boys’ athletics opposed to girls, or asking boys to lift heavy items. I would also include racial and cultural biases. As inclusive as I believe I am, I need to be aware of the “hidden” lessons in my curriculum.



## Chapter 4

**Data Analysis****Introduction:**

I have spent the past five months collecting data pertaining to research on questions that I have identified as areas I want to grow or exhibit as a novice teacher. I narrowed my research questions down to three: research question number 1 is *how have I grown in my readiness to use inquiry-based instruction in my classroom?*, question number 2 is *how I have grown in my readiness to plan for criticality in the classroom?*, and question number 3 is *how I have grown in my readiness to differentiate in my classroom?*. I selected these questions specifically to build upon each other and support my first year in the profession as an English Language Arts teacher. I think inquiry is important, and using inquiry-based instruction in my classroom will promote learning that differs from traditional rote learning. It will add a variety of perspectives and voices to the classroom, as well as show my students how to use inquiry outside of the classroom. I need to understand and use differentiation to ensure I am reaching each of my students academically and getting the most out of them when they are in my classroom. My ultimate goal is for my students to use the information received in class to understand the society they will be entering, how it works, and how to impact it. In this chapter I will analyze the data I collected and explain how it pertains to each of my research questions.

I used various forms of data collection over the past five months to collect relevant data that I believe will help me answer and explain my research questions. These forms included journaling, lesson plans, student artifacts, videos of me teaching, and mentor assessments. During my research I was also completing my edTPA for my teaching license. I mention this because I assessed a lot of the data from my edTPA and used the same information in my action

research. I analyzed my data by applying codes. The data I assessed was: vocabulary and how it was used; questions posed in class including closed and opened ended questions; preparation for class including notes; PowerPoints; student materials; and any other materials I might need for class, my speech as in clarity and flow, my actual teaching of the content, documents such as lesson plans; assignments; edTPA documents; and assessments, supports such as word walls; attachments pertaining to assignments; and supporting texts, and engagement opportunities. I collected this data while teaching under the supervision of my mentor teacher, and while observing my mentor teaching when I was not. The majority of my time in the classroom has been conducted on Zoom due to the pandemic, while on Zoom I worked in small groups with my students as well as taught. I taught two consecutive weeks in the classroom for my edTPA, and I recorded these lessons so I could assess myself. I have met with students one-on-one virtually, conducted help sessions outside of class, and have participated in one-on-one sessions with my mentor to assess my work.

I analyzed my data using thematic analysis from (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis “is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (p. 57). The six steps include applying codes to label features of the data. I coded this data as part of a thematic analysis to address my research questions. I narrowed the data into five themes: preparation, questions, teaching, and social justice. I will address these themes and how they pertain to each of my research questions later in this chapter.

### **Analysis of question #1:**

#### **Step #1:**

Step one of the Braun and Clark thematic analysis refers to familiarizing myself with my data. I evaluated data based on each particular research question. I assessed my data based on specific criteria, then I immersed myself in the data to really understand how it pertains to question number 1 and how I can use it to answer or inform myself in regards to my question. The data I gathered came from data sources such as my journal, my lesson plans created for my edTPA, video recordings of my teaching, and student artifacts that were collected for my edTPA. I used my journal to record interactions between myself, my students, my university mentor, and my student teaching mentor. These interactions included recording student natural instinct that I noticed when reviewing my videos/lesson plans, and how my teaching mentor and myself directed these instincts in a constructive inquisitive manner. I recorded weaknesses and strengths I noticed, and considered how I could potentially support weaknesses with lifelong tools, and how I can expand on students strengths. I took note of student cultural, background, and beliefs that may be useful when creating inquiry-based lessons. I recorded meetings with both my university mentor and my student teacher mentor. Their advice about inquiry and how I can get the most out of my students was invaluable. I reread these notes from my journal and extracted data that I felt was relevant to my research questions, and put them on a list that I planned on adding other data from my other sources. The idea was to create a list of data and occurrences from all my sources to create themes; I will talk more on this when I discuss steps 2 and 3 of the Brauns & Clark model.

I taught my edTPA lessons over a two-week period, and collected the majority of my data during these lessons. The notes in my journal had been an ongoing process through the entire five months of data collection, and I used these notes to inform my instruction in a way to ensure I was teaching through inquiry as I described in my literature review. I continued

recording in my journal throughout the process, and adjusted instruction as new data arose regarding student needs and abilities. I reviewed my edTPA lesson plans to assess how I enacted the data from my notes that I had collected. When planning, I assessed my lesson plans, had my student teaching mentor assessments, and then made changes as needed. I took all the data I mentioned above from my journal and applied the thinking and data to my lesson plans. The idea was this would help me stay true to my plan of inquiry-based instruction while teaching my edTPA lessons and assist in my effort to assess my readiness to teach inquiry-based instruction in my own classroom someday.

After using my journal to inform myself on the best ways to plan for my specific students, and planning my instruction through my edTPA lesson plans; I assessed the video recordings of me teaching my two weeks of lessons, and student artifacts used to satisfy task 3 (assessment of student work, including written feedback) of my edTPA. This provided me with data related to how my actual teaching promoted inquiry-based learning, or where I needed to work on areas to strengthen my teaching in an inquisitive manner. I received valuable data that will be used in my future studies of my teaching, particularly regarding inquiry-based instruction; as I mentioned in a previous chapter, the time restraints on this study were not conducive to maximize my readiness. This study will serve as a baseline, and knowledge building on how to conduct a study to further assess my readiness in my own classroom. The student artifacts I collected for my edTPA assessment task showed me strengths and weaknesses I developed during this process, and will serve as a guide for what I did right and wrong in terms of supporting an optimal learning environment, and how I can improve. I have learned through this process that not everything planned or envisioned always works the way it is intended, and

seeing results to assignments I created to foster inquiry was a great tool for me as I adjust my lesson planning strategies.

The thought process was to understand the culture, backgrounds, and specific beliefs my students possessed, and use that to plan inquiry-based instruction that would promote the optimal learning environment. I gathered information through my journaling each day, then used that information to inform my planning process and how I taught my lessons. I then watched the videos of me teaching and reviewed student artifacts that I collected for my edTPA to assess how well the method I used promoted the inquiry-based instruction I want in my classroom. When this process was done, I had meetings with my university mentor and my student teacher mentor. My university mentor saw me teach on two separate occasions and gave me feedback as to what he observed. He suggested I focus less time in the future on vocabulary when discussing text, and more time on conceptual information. He praised my abilities as a novice teacher, and gave me high marks in regard to scores through my schooling. The feedback was intended to only elevate my abilities and ensure students are ready for inquiry related to concepts. Although, my edTPA artifacts revealed my student's ability to interpret and respond to complex text in an inquisitive manner was impeccable. My student teaching mentor observed all my lessons and gave me outstanding remarks. This process allowed me to learn a lot about myself, how I teach, and how I want to operate in the future.

### **Steps #2 & #3:**

Step two of the thematic analysis is generating codes based on the collected data that is relevant to my research questions. Next, step three is condensing those codes into themes, according to Braun and Clark (2006), "A theme 'captures' something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning

within the data set.” (p.82) I will first talk about how I coded the data I collected and how the patterns lead me to use them in my research and how they are connected to my questions. Next, I will describe how I narrowed those codes, or as Braun and Clark put it, the “building blocks” of my analysis into themes. Lastly, I will explain how these themes will inform me about my current research in regard to my questions, and how I will use them in my future research when I continue the work I have started here.

I used my journal to gather information about how I can foster inquiry with my students. The first half of the year I was primarily used in class as a small group leader, and assisted students one-on-one in breakout rooms. I took notes in my journal during these interactions. The patterns I noticed that pertains to inquiry were: questions about how to research and what information they should look for; wanting to know and look into social issues, such as police brutality, LGBTQ+ issues and discrimination, women’s pay, and equal rights; students expressed boredom with none inquiry-based instruction; I took notes on students background and beliefs as they pertain to social issues and various other issues that may arise in class; vocabulary needs; and students expressed where to go next after specific learning objectives, as in they learned how to research the benefits of Xbox compared to PlayStation, now how do they apply those research skills to other research ideas. I used this information to help me plan for my instruction and to build my lesson plans that I used to guide my instruction. I took all this data and tried to find areas of commonality to combine my codes into themes; the theme I constructed from these codes led to five different themes which I will discuss in the conclusion of this chapter. The first, questions because of my students' inquiries about research, what to do next, and social issues. Second, preparation because the information I gathered needs to be synthesized and used in future lessons.

The information in the chart that follows came from my journal that I recorded and produced in my preparation for my edTPA. I reviewed this data and added some of what I recorded to show how I came up with my codes and then my themes.

**Table 3**

*Journal coding/theme table*

Quote or discussion about...	Coded as...	Theme aligns with...
Discussion about abusive father because after reading one students poem	Background information/home life.	Preparation
“I feel scared inside, and I feel my teachers look right through me”	Doesn’t connect to school or teachers.	Preparation
Helped students find research on Xbox and Playstation, the student asked. “How did you find that information?”	Wanting to learn more about how to research.	Questions
Poems about religion, and religion came up in many discussions.	Background information/homelife.	Preparation
Quite a few discussions about the death of parents or other family members.	Background information/questions about coping.	Preparation/Questions
Almost every student wanted to know about re-entry into class after Covid-19.	Wanting to know more information.	Questions

I have included the themes I came up with from my journal; I will go into more detail when I get to steps 4 & 5 about why I chose the themes I did and how I can use them.

Next, I want to look at the data I collected from my edTPA lesson plans. I taught my edTPA lessons on *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton. I used the information I gathered from my journal and other interactions to help inform my lesson planning. The data I collected led me to focus on perception, figurative language, first person point-of-view, stereotypes, battle of the classes, acceptance, vocabulary, and heroes. The data from my lesson plans were associated with

me trying to meet the needs my students expressed in my journal notes. The data I collected included my ability to address social issues that I can connect to my students; ensure that my lessons are relevant, this was a focus because the *The Outsiders* was written in 1960s; I incorporated research; made sure my lessons were engaging; include talking about issues some of my students are dealing with in their home lives, or that they can connect to because of their backgrounds; supports for vocabulary, because the language in the book was quite different than we use today in the Northwest; and direction on where to go next with the knowledge we gained from the book. The following table will describe how I used the data to create codes, and then what theme I associated those codes with.

**Table 4**

*Lesson plan coding/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
Research topics such as perspective, stereotypes, and how the lack of understanding these can be harmful.	Research	Questions/Social justice
Lessons are engaging, this was to mitigate boredom and typical rote learning experiences.	Presentation of information	Preparation
Lessons are connected to students backgrounds and home life.	Background/home life	Preparation
Adding support for students in regard to language and vocabulary.	Wanting to know more information.	Questions
Direction on where to go next with information from the book.	Connection to their personal lives.	Social justice

I will expand more on “direction on where to go next” when I get to theme two, this theme is focusing on inquiry-based instruction.



The next piece I looked at when collecting data were my edTPA videos. I recorded each of my lessons to evaluate myself and my teaching practice. I was able to watch myself teach and gather some data from those in regard to my research questions. My main focus in this section was to evaluate how successful I was in accomplishing my goals in my lesson plans, and to incorporate the information I gathered from my journaling. The data I gathered from my videos was my presentation; did I make connections, such as to home lives/backgrounds, stereotypes we are seeing today, and how lack of understanding each other can lead to stereotypes; vocabulary supports; were the lessons engaging; and where to go next with the information they are receiving. I organized this data in the chart that follows to show how I coded my data, and then how I connected these codes into themes.

**Table 5**

*Video coding/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
My presentation, my articulation, and my presence as I teach.	Adequate instruction	Teaching
Did I make connections to the home lives and backgrounds of my students.	Connections to their personal lives.	Teaching
Stereotypes and perspective taught in a way that connects to daily life.	Connections made to society	Social Justice
Vocabulary and language	Supports	Teaching
Were my lessons engaging	Supports/connections	Teaching/Preparation
Where to go next with information students received.	Teaching	Teaching/Social justice

A lot of my data overlaps, but I view it and use it differently depending on the purpose of the data. For instance, how I plan to help students make connections between the information I am

planning to teach, and the actual connections I help them make after I teach are different pieces of data.

The last pieces I want to talk about are the artifacts I collected for my edTPA lessons, and assessments I received from my mentor teacher and university mentor. I am combining these two data sources because they both pertain to how well I actually did in teaching. The artifacts include assignments I assigned for my edTPA; these will help identify potential weaknesses in my teaching and where I did well. I found sufficient data to support my research questions, and the assessments from both my mentors will provide me feedback on how well I taught my lessons as well. These data sources provided me data such as students definition of perception, before I taught they could not tell me how to define the word; students use and understanding of vocabulary associated with the book; did I make connections between stereotypes from the book and stereotypes in today's society; how well I incorporated students backgrounds/home lives; supports for understanding concepts of the book; incorporate research, and support for students who need help with research; did my students understand where to go next with the information from the book. Following is a table that connects the data I collected, how I coded it, and what theme I identified according to the data.

**Table 6**

*Assessment and artifact coding/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
Could my students identify and understand perception?	Adequate instruction	Teaching
Vocabulary	Supports	Teaching
Connections between stereotypes from the book and stereotypes in today's society.	Adequate instruction	Preparation/Social justice

Incorporate students' backgrounds and home lives.	background/homelife connection	Preparation/Teaching
Did my students understand important concepts of the book?	Supports	Teaching
Research and assistance as needed with research.	Support/research	Question/teaching

The next section will walk through my thought process of how I generated my themes and how they connect directly to my research questions.

#### **Steps #4 & #5:**

All the themes and codes I generated are associated with creating a classroom that is based on inquiry. The theme, “preparation” incorporates any preparation I did for my lessons, or ideas/concepts that I would need to be prepared for in my lessons. I included anything to do with my students background/home lives, meeting specific needs of my students that have been identified before the lesson, or ensuring that my lessons are engaging to my students. All of these things need to be planned out and incorporated in strategic ways, hence them all identifying as preparation. The theme, “questions” pertains to research related data; my students needed a lot of support when conducting research. It also incorporates curiosities my students have about vocabulary, questions about the context of the book, and conceptual questions. I included data pertaining to my students' curiosity about perspective and other stereotypes. The theme, “social justice” includes teaching perspective and stereotypes, any connections to society and the book, and what to do next with information from the book. The theme, “teaching” involves any part of my instruction that has to do with inquiry, such as support provided, teaching on issues such as perspective, and connections I make in my teaching to students' backgrounds. I will look at each theme more in depth in the conclusion of this chapter, and summarize my themes and how they pertain to the data and the codes.

**Analysis of question #2:****Step #1:**

The data sources I am using for question #2 are the same data sources I used for question #1. The only difference is how I look at the data and how it relates to my research question. The way I immersed myself in the data is the same. Question #2 looks at my readiness to teach through a criticality lens, which I defined in chapter 2 of this action research. Criticality is important to prepare my students for society, and how to use the information my students learn in school to work for them and their goals in life. As I have mentioned, I taught *The Outsiders* for my edTPA, and I made sure to incorporate relevant social issues that my students encounter on a daily basis. *The Outsiders* addresses the fault lines of socioeconomic class, but it was my goal to relate that to not only oppression of the lower class, but oppression we see in different cultures, races, and within different systems throughout our government. It was important for me to not only focus on addressing these issues through text, but also through writing. My data in this section incorporates issues my students and myself discussed during class and in casual conversation; recognizing and using proper student pronouns; conversations about power structures and how police brutality affects society; in particular, George Floyd; stereotypes and how to see others perspectives to mitigate stereotypes; and power and privilege.

In step #2 and #3 I will look at a lot of the same data as I did in question #1, but through the criticality lens. I will create a table of some of my data I collected and identify the code I assigned the data, then I connect those codes to one or two of five different themes I developed. In step #4 and #5, I will describe my thinking between the data I collected and my research question #2 and they are associated.

**Step #2 & #3:**

Step #2 of the Braun and Clarke model is identifying the data I will use to answer or apply to my specific research questions. Then, taking that data creates codes to organize my data. These codes are connected in some way to each other, and as I stated previously, are the “building blocks” of my research. Step #3, is then combining like codes into themes that I can use in my final assessment of my research questions. These themes make my data easier to utilize in a meaningful way for answering my specific questions. This particular research question addresses my readiness to teach through the lens of criticality. Like the previous question, I will discuss the data that I collected from each of my data sources. Next, I will create tables to connect the data to the code I came up with, then identify the theme I associate the codes with. I will then in steps #4 and #5 discuss the thought process behind why I selected the specific themes based on the codes I came up with.

**Table 7**

*Journal coding/theme table*

Quote or discussion...	Coded as...	Theme aligns with...
Conversation about current society and the way Asian Americans are being treated.	Hate	Social Justice
I made a note to ensure I am using the proper pronouns, or using non-gender terms when addressing the class as a whole.	Inclusivity	Inclusive environment
The power structure and privilege in <i>The Outsiders</i> .	Privilege	Social Justice
Conversations about George Floyd, one student visited where he took his last breath.	Privilege	Social Justice
Conversations about police brutality.	Hate	Social Justice
Stereotypes from the <i>Outsiders</i> , and relating to stereotypes leading to hate.	Hate	Social Justice
Perception/perspective, trying to understand other people.	Inclusivity	Social Justice

Because criticality deals with understanding power, privilege, and oppression, most of the topics that come up in question #2 deal with social justice. Our society today is dealing with deep seated issues of race, hate, and political discord among many other issues. My students come to class with thoughts and feelings regarding these issues, and want to, at times, discuss some very difficult issues such as these. Fortunately, this book is easily relatable to some of these issues using themes and stereotypes established in *The Outsiders*.

As I have alluded to previously, these notes helped inform my lesson planning. I will now discuss the some of the data I collected when reviewing my edTPA lesson plans in regard to question #2, and my readiness to teach through the lens of criticality. We had many discussions about race, hate, the protests (some in class would classify as riots), and police brutality. specifically, when discussing police brutality, we talked a lot about the George Floyd case, the trial concluded just before I taught my edTPA lessons; we connected this to issues of power and privilege from *The Outsiders*; we discussed cause and effect; perspectives leading to stereotypes; and the power of persuasive writing in terms of making change. I used my notes and some of the questions that came up to inform how I would approach teaching *The Outsiders*. In assessing my lesson plans for data I could use to answer my research question about my readiness, I looked for data that told me I was prepared to teach in an engaging, relevant manner.

**Table 8**

*Lesson plan coding/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
Power and privilege in <i>The Outsiders</i> .	Privilege, who has it, and who does not.	Social justice/Teaching

Cause and effect/problem and solution. (in regard to <i>The Outsiders</i> )	Societal issues and where they might stem from.	Teaching
Persuasive writing, how can we make a change using our writing.	Writing	Teaching
Perspective and that leading to stereotypes, which leads to misguided judgements.	Judgment	Social justice
Police brutality, how the police viewed the Greasers compared to the Socs, and how that relates today.	Judgment	Social justice

Next I will discuss data I collected from my edTPA videos of me teaching. My goal in reviewing my videos is to assess if I was able to accomplish my goals in teaching with a focus on criticality. As I said, I used my lesson plans to build my actual lessons, and to include the information my students and myself discussed from the chart above. The next chart will look at data I collected from the videos about how well I did, and various topics and ideas we discussed.

**Table 9**

*Video coding/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
My presentation, my articulation, and my presence	Adequate instruction	Teaching
How well I was at making connections of what I was teaching to society and students' lives.	Connections to personal lives	Social justice
Disrupting stereotypes, and helping students understand various perspectives.	Social justice	Social justice
Were my lessons engaging	Supports and connections	Teaching/questions
Did I provide reading and writing opportunities to allow students to understand power and privilege.	Social justice	Teaching/social justice
Did I connect what we are doing in class to what students need to do next with the information.	Teaching	Questions

My goal in assessing my videos was to ensure I am accomplishing my goals as a novice teacher. I have my research questions that I am answering, and I have goals such as; state standards I am trying to satisfy, concepts set out in my lesson plans, and incorporating criticality through providing writing and reading opportunities in a way that my students will understand power and privilege in society. Next, I will discuss my data from student artifacts I collected from my edTPA, assessments my mentor teaching has provided me, and assessments provided to me from my university mentor.

**Table 10**

*Assessment and artifact coding/theme table*

Topic	Codes	Themes
Students comprehension of stereotypes and perspectives.	Social justice	Social justice
Were students able to make connections to society in regard to stereotypes.	Social justice	Social justice
Did my students understand the concepts of the text, and could they provide written answers to show me.	Comprehension	Teaching
Were students able to connect research to understanding power and privilege.	Research and criticality	Questions/Social justice

Most of my data from this section came from student artifacts. My data in this section was an assessment of how well I implemented planning through student responses to questions. I had multiple meetings and assessments from my two mentor teachers, but their main focus is on how I teach, not necessarily on my research questions. They did not provide me much feedback in terms of my question about my readiness to teach with a focus on criticality. Next, I will go in to steps #4 & #5 of the Braun and Clarke model in regard to my second research question.



### **Steps #4 & #5**

The themes and codes I generated based on my data for my second research question are more in the category of social justice. This is something that stood out to me after dissecting my data sources. I think the topic of social justice kept coming up because of the idea of criticality, and its impact on my teaching. When looking for power, privilege, and oppression within various texts and media, it's easy to start to notice it everywhere. This is one of the reasons I chose this research question, and wanted myself to be able to address these issues with my students. I also believe the component of the definition which includes writing in a way to understand the context of these situations is crucial, especially in our current situation with misinformation everywhere you look. In my teaching, I went out of my way to identify power, privilege, and oppression in the text, and tried to incorporate some writing pieces to help with the comprehension. For instance, when teaching *The Outsiders* for my edTPA, I identified the power, privilege, and who seemed to be more oppressed. I then made connections to our current society, and identified where the poor, powerless, and oppressed individuals are, and who is represented in our government, who has less representation, who are populating our prisons at a higher rate per capita, and various other systemic problems we have within our society.

I have heard in various echoing chambers that teachers are pursuing and pushing specific political agendas. I would argue that as police departments might have a "bad apple," there might be a few teachers who take this upon themselves; but for the most part, teachers are teaching students facts to inform them to make well informed decisions as contributing members of society. This is what teaching through the lens of criticality is, ensuring students understand the systems and powers at play within them, and how to navigate or change them if they feel so inclined.

**Analysis of question #3:****Step #1**

Question #3 addresses differentiation, and ensures my lessons reach each of my students and meets their needs; this is done through maximizing their strengths that I have identified, and supporting students where needed based on academic weaknesses. I used my journal to record the strengths and weaknesses of each of my students, and notes of various strategies that I noticed worked and did not work. My mentor teacher is very effective with our students, and I learned a lot about how to help particular students who might be struggling with specific goals. I studied students' various IEP's, 504 plans, and other documents pertaining to learning abilities and needs. This data, along with personal relationships I had developed over the course of the year allowed me to understand different needs and the range of abilities in my classroom. I then used this data that I recorded about my students to help build my lessons that would be most effective with all my students.

**Step #2 & #3**

As I stated, the data related to this question that I recorded in my journal pertains to students' likes, dislikes, and varying levels of abilities. This information was important for me to document because it has a lot to do with student learning. My goal as a teacher is to ensure that all my students are learning as much as possible about the content, themselves, and society, like how to interact, interpret, and thrive. Creating lessons that can effectively reach students and keep them engaged is an important aspect of ensuring all students are receiving something valuable. Following is a table that details some of the data I used from my journal in answering my research question. Like the other questions, my journal was a critical part of my planning, maybe most crucial with this research question. I say that because understanding my students

and their abilities is very important for designing lessons and assignments that are engaging and all encompassing, or differentiated in a way that all students receive some kind of learning. From my journal I had data such as: students weaknesses and strengths; issues my students are having at home that may impact their learning, and various supports they have or lack at home; students interest, such as hobbies and other aspects of their life that I could use to make my lessons more engaging; approaches used or suggested from my mentor; and assessments to assess my students readiness for different aspects of my lessons.

**Table 11**

*Journal coding/theme table*

Quote or discussion...	Code	Theme
Students strengths and their weaknesses.	Informing myself about my students	Preparation/Relationships
Home life and supports provided at home.	Personal relationships with my students.	Relationships
Students' interests and hobbies.	Personal relationships with my students.	Relationships
Various approaches I observed my mentor use, and that I read about.	Observation and learning from experienced prationeer.	Preparation
Planned assessments to evaluate student readiness.	Information gathering to inform my instruction.	Preparation

My journal included a lot of information I learned from relationship building, conversations, and reading different documents pertaining to my students. I used these journal notes and data to inform my lesson planning. These notes as I stated previously were crucial in trying to ensure I can reach each of my students with quality instruction that is engaging. Next, I will put a table that shows data I received from my lesson plans that I created based on data I collected from notes in my journal. The data I included from my lesson plans pertain to: planned supports I have

in place to differentiate my instruction; various ways that I planned to address students weaknesses, and maximizing student strengths; ways to connect my lessons to students personal lives; and ensuring I am teaching all the content in a way that every student has access to it.

**Table 12**

*Lesson plan coding/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
Planned supports to differentiate.	Support	Preparation
Planning to address student weaknesses.	Planning using student data	Preparation
Planning to maximize student strengths.	Planning using student data	Preparation
Planned connections to students' lives to make lessons relevant.	Planning for relevant connections	Preparation/Relationships
Planning for complete content coverage.	Content planning	Preparation

I use my lesson plans as a guide for when I am teaching. I include things that I want to address and plans I have for supporting the content I am teaching. My goal was to ensure I am teaching in a way that I can reach all students, no matter their abilities. I do this by adding specific supports to enhance my lesson for struggling students. Sometimes I add harder questions on assignments for students I see are more advanced than other students, this allows them to gain a deeper understanding in the same content area I am teaching all my students. At other times I have to amend assignments with more support to assist where I have identified weaknesses in my students'. These supports include but are not limited to audio recording of the reading, spanish version of readings, vocabulary words attached to assignments, and reworded questions to ensure students are understanding what is being asked. I recorded my lessons to assess my teaching, and my next table will look at data I collected from these videos. This data includes: How well did I

implement the support I planned for students? did I mitigate areas that will hinder student learning?, this is associated with weakness and strengths I found during data collection; Was I successful in connecting the content to the students' lives?, was it relevant?; and was my the content accessible for all my students?

**Table 13**

*Video coding/theme table*

Topic	Codes	Themes
How well did I implement support for struggling students?	Support and implementation of planning.	Preparation
How well did I mitigate student's weaknesses?	Support and implementation of planning.	Preparation
How well did I maximize student's strengths?	Support and implementation of planning.	Preparation
Did I connect lessons to relevant issues that my students encounter?	Connections to students' lives.	Relationships
Did I make the content accessible to all my students?	Planning and student knowledge..	Preparation

The data I collected from my videos is informative for future lessons, but does not always tell me how effective I was in reaching each of my students. The next table I added looks at how each of my students responded to questions about the content I am teaching. This data will help me understand if my differentiation strategies were successful or where I might need work. I added supports that I thought might help mitigate where specific students displayed weaknesses, and differentiated assignments based on need. The data I collected from my artifacts and assessments are: how well did the supports I implemented help my students; was I able to support where my students were weak, and maximize where they were strong; did the artifacts display an understanding of the content; and did my planned assessments meet all my students' needs.

**Table 14***Assessment and artifact codes/theme table*

Topic	Code	Theme
Did students use implemented supports as intended?	Supports added from teaching	Teaching
Were students strengths directed in a way to maximize them?	Effective planning	Teaching
Did student weaknesses hinder their ability to learn?	Effective planning	Teaching
Did all my students understand and grasp the content?	Effective planning	Teaching
Did planned assessments meet all students' needs?	Effective assessments and varied questions	Questions

**Step #4 & #5**

The majority of the themes from question #3 pertain to preparation and teaching. The theme of preparation came up quite often because differentiation includes lots of planning. I took data from other sources and used it to plan ways to differentiate my instruction in a way that would maximize my students strengths and abilities. I also planned ways to support my students so that their weaknesses do not hinder their ability to learn or have access to the content. The theme of teaching came up often because after planning, I tried to teach in a way that would support my students and ensure my students have access to the full breadth of the content. Differentiation is an important skill that every teacher needs to master so that all students are able to receive what they need from the content.

**Conclusion:**

The Braun and Clarke model of thematic analysis allowed me to look at my data in a way that makes it easier to interpret. When I was done with my research, I ended up with so much

data, and did not necessarily know how to interpret it or what to do with it. Using the Braun and Clarke model I highlighted all my data to identify what I wanted to use, or what I thought was useful in terms of my research. After doing this highlighting, I ended up with so much data, but grouping this data into specific codes allowed me to take a step towards organization. Once I had codes, this process seemed much more simple, and I started to see themes before I ever started to separate them into themes. This immersion into my data allowed me to see patterns and connect pieces of data as I read through notes in my journal, and when I assessed my lesson plans (which I used my notes to help construct my lesson plans), and then watching videos of myself teaching the planned lessons, and then finally, assessing my students work that they answered based on the lessons I created.

The first theme I will discuss is preparation. This theme came up a lot when looking at journal data, assessments intended to inform me about my students, and any other planning tool I used to prepare for my lessons. Preparation is a very important aspect of teaching. One of my first lessons I was not very prepared and I had to ask my mentor teacher for help in the middle of the lesson. After that incident I ensure that I am prepared and know exactly what I am going to teach, and what I am going to ask of my students.

Next theme is questions. This theme is related to questions posed in class, or to my students, or questions posed to me from my students. I ensure I make myself available for students to ask questions as needed, this also allows me to learn more about my students, and build relationships. Speaking of relationships, that is the next theme I will discuss. I have been told over and over by every teacher I have talked to that the most important part of teaching is relationship building. I have found this to be true. I have also found that the best way to build these relationships is through authentic conversations and listening. My students want to talk and

tell me about their lives, I just need to be open, listening, receptive and inclusive. My relationship theme includes these conversations where I gather very authentic, quality data about my students.

The theme of social justice pertains to issues in society that my students encounter and see on a daily basis. My students posed lots of questions in regard to issues that they see in the media or that they themselves encounter. This ranges from police brutality, LGBTQ+ issues, power (as in who has it and who does not), privilege and what that means, systemic issues we see in schools; department of justice; and in government in general, among other things. This leads me to my last theme of teaching. This theme relates to any data I collected that pertains to how I teach, what I teach, or content in general. My ultimate goal is to be a good teacher who can reach each of my students in an engaging way that makes everyone feel included. Being cognizant of social justice in my teaching is important, so is answering questions my students have in regard to societal issues that are currently ongoing.

In chapter 5, I will look at my data from a distance, and talk about what I learned about myself and my teaching. I will look at the outcomes from my study, where I need to keep working, and what I did well. I will talk about the impact the data had on my research questions and implications for future teaching. I will wrap up the chapter by identifying some goals for my future in teaching.



## Chapter 5

**Conclusion****Significance:**

This research process has been a great experience for and has improved my teaching practice. I selected my three research questions because I believed they were areas I need to either understand the topic and my practice better, or because I wanted to make sure I was as efficient as possible in that particular area. I will address each question briefly and discuss the outcomes based on that particular question, what I learned about myself and my practice, my interpretation of what happened and why I believe it happened a particular way, the success and difficulties I encountered, and finally, what I learned from this study in regard to each question.

**Question #1:** How have I grown in my readiness to use inquiry-based instruction in my content area?

I selected this particular question because I wanted to ensure I was efficient at promoting inquiry-based learning and instruction in my classroom. I also believe that in an era where falsehoods are spewed from the media, social media, and our very own president; it is crucial to learn how to find information out on your own, and that is part of inquiry, finding answers to questions. When it comes to an outcome in terms of this particular question, I have seen myself grow immensely, and feel I have proven to myself that I am ready to create a classroom that is based on inquiry. Not only do I believe I am ready, but I have reaffirmed through my research that this is the best environment for students to learn. When I practiced strategies of inquiry-based lessons, my students wanted to learn more. I deduced this conclusion because our discussions garnered great participation and prompted students to inquire about the topic through questions and answers. This occasionally included after hour emails, and one-on-one Zoom

meetings after class to work on assignments. Further evidence of my readiness is assessments from my mentor teacher and my university mentor, both of whom watched me teach on more than one occasion. I received high marks from both, and was told by the mentor teacher that I excwllled at designing lessons and teaching.

I learned a few things about myself and my practice through researching this specific question; first, I am becoming the teacher I envisioned myself becoming, and second, the more I work at this, the better I will become. The former of the two is one that excites me. As I discussed in my chapter one, philosophy of education, I talked about how I always wanted to be a teacher when I was growing up. When I pictured the kind of teacher I wanted to be, I decided I wanted students to have fun, and learn as much as they can while doing it. When I taught during my student teaching experience, students were interested in what I was teaching, and looked like they were having a good time when learning. I recorded in my journal on more than one occasion when students expressed that they enjoyed my class. The latter of the two is evident by my progress over the year as I worked on my practice and inquiry-based instruction. When I first started, I struggled at finding material and how to present it in a way to encourage participation. I also struggled at encouraging students to inquiry on topics on their own. Over the year, I got better and quicker at creating my lessons, and eventually I got students excited about learning.

When analyzing my data, my interpretation was that inquiry-based instruction promotes a deeper understanding of the content being taught, opposed to other forms of learning such as rote learning. I found that students were much more engaged, and raised some very good questions in regard to connections I made to current societal issues that students see and face. I had many successes during this process. My success was getting students interested and incorporating inclusiveness as soon as we got back to class from online learning. Students arrived to class

nervous and afraid to participate, but through offering engaging lessons, and promoting students to research information they enjoy, they started to enjoy coming and want to do more research to cure their curiosity. Many of our lessons turned into discussion about power, privilege, and understanding what we see in the media and the streets around us. This was encouraging to me in regard to my research because our inquiry prompted students to want to know/learn more about topics that are important to them, and I was able to connect it to our lessons at hand. The only real difficulties I encountered were early on, and that was finding the information to build my lessons. As I continued teaching and building my own lessons, it became easier to build a lesson within a few hours, and sometimes less than an hour.

I learned many valuable lessons during the research of this question. One main goal I learned is that as long as I keep working toward teaching students to promote inquiry, my students will learn and be engaged in the lesson. I also learned that it takes time to create a lesson that really gets students involved. I have to make sure each section of the lesson accomplishes the goals I set out at the beginning of the lesson. Lastly, and most important, my desire to teach and inform students grew stronger throughout this process, and I learned so many new strategies to teach in an inquiry-based classroom. I look forward to learning as many new strategies as I can as I move through my career as a teacher.

**Question #2:** How have I grown in my readiness to plan for criticality in my classroom?

I selected this question to support and expand on the previous question. In the first research question, I wanted to ensure I was proficient at teaching my students how to think in a way that encourages them to find out more about whatever they are inquiring about. As Dewey puts it, “direct their instincts towards worthwhile ends.” Question #2 helps them know what to do with the information once they have gained it. Criticality is “the capacity to read, write, and

think in the context of understanding power, privilege, and oppression” (Muhammad, 2020, p. 234) My goal other than to become a better teacher and more knowledgeable in the field was to select questions that I could build on each other, and could use every day in the classroom in tandem with one another.

The outcome of this particular question came to light especially when I was teaching *The Outsiders* with my class. I did an exceptional job at connecting the novel from the 1960s to real life problems that we currently see and encounter on a daily basis. We connected how the Soc’s had the power and privilege in *The Outsiders* to who has power and privilege in today’s society, and how the Greasers felt oppressed and had to physically fight for everything they had. We connected that to disparities in various police forces across the nation, representatives in our government, teacher to student ratios in terms of race, and many other systemic problems in our institutions. I then allowed students to freely express how they felt about particular issues by writing about them, and had constructive conversations in class. As my data in chapter 4 shows, this was a significant issue to my students. After seeing the protests over the summer in response to the murder of George Floyd, I knew this entire year would be peppered with conversation about race and police brutality. This realization is what persuaded me to study my understanding and readiness of criticality; I wanted to be ready to address these issues, and help my students understand where our country is right now in terms of progress, and how they can impact that progress in a positive way.

I learned some valuable lessons in my pursuit to expand my knowledge and ensure my readiness to teach through a lens of criticality. One thing is for sure, knowing how to explain specific events that happen in our country, and around the world is crucial, and just as crucial is knowing when to let students discuss and write about these events in meaningful ways.

Criticality goes further than just knowing how to talk about these events, you have to understand how they happen, and describe them in a way that students can understand power, privilege, and oppression, while not coming off as trying to “indoctrinate” students. I have seen exponential growth in myself in furthering my understanding of these systems, and how they impact my students, myself, and society as a whole. Reading my students' writing about specific topics has been eye-opening for me as well; hearing how certain events, such as George Floyd’s death has impacted them. This is one of those skills I will continue to work on, and understanding how specific systems have or have not changed over time will be crucial to my practice going forward.

When reviewing my data, I interpret it as students successfully progressing as the year advanced. Early in the year we had discussions about race, police brutality, oppression from the founding and the progress, or lack of progress today. Students saw everything happening, but could not quite understand or articulate why some of these things were happening. As we progressed through the year and discussed various events and wrote about how we feel, and about how others might feel, my students started to gain an understanding of how the power structure in our country works. My students started to understand that privilege was not saying someone did not work hard for what they have, but rather not having to fear every time a police officer pulled them over. These in my eyes were great successes. In terms of this particular research question I did not encounter any difficulties. My students were very respectful and listened to each other during discussions. My fear was that these conversations could easily devolve into arguments that became unproductive, but fortunately, that did not happen.

**Question #3:** How have I grown in my readiness to differentiate within my classroom?

Differentiation emerged as my third pillar in terms of teaching. I explained how inquiry-based instruction implies that the teacher will direct students' learning in worthwhile directions, in specific; social, constructive, investigative, and expressive. With criticality, the teacher helps students understand various power, privilege, and oppression issues through reading and writing. Now, with differentiation, the teacher needs to create assignments that can meet each student's learning needs in a challenging but accessible manner. This includes adjusting, modifying, and adapting assignments to meet students where they are in an educational sense. After reviewing my data, I determined that I still need some work in terms of differentiation. My differentiation strategies were limited, and I need to research how to expand my tools when trying to differentiate. This was an important lesson that I learned about myself and my practice, and I would not have come to this realization if I had not conducted this research. This is for sure an area that I will continue to research my own practice to increase my abilities with differentiation.

Coming into my student teaching experience, I was not very strong when it comes to differentiation. Through the process of working with my mentor teacher, I learned a few strategies and strengthened my abilities. Our classes consisted of a wide range of learners, from students who are at a first grade reading level, all the way through students who are tag and read at a high school level. The need for differentiation was very much needed, but I had many supports in place, such as special education teachers, teacher aides, and other people who supported students as needed. This was good for the students, but this hindered my ability to really help students in need, and to understand where I need to work on my differentiation skills. I had some success in creating assignments that could/were modified for specific students, and adding supports, such as recording for students who do not read as well, and vocabulary lists to

the classroom home page. My difficulties were not seeing what worked and what did not. I say this because the support people would work with students who struggled and adjust assignments that I had created, and I did not always see what they adjusted or why. The reason I call this a difficulty is because I was not able to expand my strategies by seeing other teachers/aides make the adjustments. I learned that I need to research more strategies to give myself a larger variety of tools to use that will help me ensure my students are getting the most out of each assignment.

**Implications:**

As I conducted my research, I continually referenced back to my literature review and how Dewey said that as teachers we need to, “direct student instincts in worthwhile (educative) ends.” The thought of how to best do this is what led me to these specific research questions, and on this journey. I wanted to change how traditional ELA classrooms construct their lessons and go about learning. Chichekian et al. (2016) mentioned how “English Language Arts (ELA) emphasizes inquiry instruction the least” out of all the other disciplines. I believe that ELA classrooms should be utilizing inquiry just as much as any other discipline, and I think this thought would benefit other ELA teachers as well. I think the best way to accomplish both of these goals is to incorporate inquiry-based instruction as much as possible, but not just inquiry about anything. I think incorporating the criticality piece allows students to inquire about societal issues that affect each student, and how to understand them through reading and writing about the issues. This would all be for nothing if I as a teacher did not have strategies to reach each student with the content. Not everyone is at the same level, and learns the same way; this is why building relationships with students is so crucial, and learning how to teach in a way that all of my students are gaining access to in a pleasurable learning environment.

It would behoove any individual who contemplates further research on these topics to conduct said research in tandem with each element (inquiry, criticality, and differentiation) I have posed. As I have stated, I am a novice teacher and am assessing my readiness to teach in this manner, and I concluded that although I am ready, I will definitely need to continue researching these topics to ensure I am the most effective teacher I can be. I believe more teacher teachers should continue to assess these specific areas of their practice, and self-study (action research) should be mandatory for all teachers. I have learned so much about myself, my practice, and what it means to be a good teacher through this process, but it can't stop there. These three pillars, as I call them, are essential, and always changing. What would have been a worthwhile (educative) direction to direct students' intrinsic habits of learning (social, constructive, investigative, and expressive) twenty years ago in an ELA classroom is very different from what students relate to today. This is why this study that I conducted, and teaching in a way that connects to what students encounter on a daily basis through inquiry-based instruction, and understanding through reading and writing about it in a way that is attainable for all students is necessary.

I had a few limitations that impacted this action research. The first, and is the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, the majority of my student teaching experience has been conducted via zoom. Although this has greatly affected my study, I would say I have gained valuable experience and lessons from teaching and working with students through Zoom. I have expanded my knowledge of various technology resources that are at my disposal as a teacher, and would have experience if we had to ever teach online again for whatever reason. I would consider my novice status a limitation, and the fact that I completed my study during my student teaching experience. I say this because the freedom to conduct the classroom how I want was



limited to what I was allowed to do by my mentor teacher. I had a great mentor teacher, and learned so much, but there were specific ways she wanted me to teach and design my lessons. She and the other 8th grader ELA teacher teach the same material, so when I created lessons, it was essentially for both teachers. The last limitation I will mention that greatly affected this study was time constraints. I started my experience, and study in September, and only started to collect data for the study in January, and had to complete my study by the end of May. I would have liked to do an entire year study on myself and these particular topics.

**Goals:**

As I stated in my chapter one, I want to be the best teacher I can be, for many reasons. One, to ensure that the up and coming generations receive a quality education that will prepare them for their role in society, their future, and to be as prosperous as they can. Another, I feel like I can reach students who might think school is not for them, as I did growing up; I wish I had a teacher that took more time to address that issue with me when I was in school. These are just two of the many reasons I became a teacher, and I believe that my research focuses on strengthening my ability to reach those reasons for why I chose the profession.

So, if I were to set two goals for myself moving forward into my first year of teaching; the first, would be to continue my research on myself. I believe the three areas that I have selected for my self-study are integral to reaching all my students with the best education I could provide, and those students who might be like me, and think school was not for them. Another reason I think continuing self-study would be beneficial, not just my first year, but every year is because it reminds me as a teacher why I am doing what I am doing. I want to make sure I do not get complacent with how things are if I could potentially improve my practice.

Second, would be to ensure I am always finding ways to continue my education, and growing personally as a teacher. This may sound more selfish than the first goal, but it is not. I believe that as teachers, we need to stay up to date on the newest technology, newest theories in education, what our students are into and what is out of date or will not work anymore, and to keep our own minds in the education mindset. I see so many teachers pull out their calendar book, and see what they did last year, and do everything the exact same. I believe each group of students is different, each student is different, each year is different, and cookie cutter teaching will not suffice with an ever-changing world. My goal is to always find new ways to provide inquiry-based instruction that is relevant and engaging; in a way that promotes reading and writing that helps students understand the world around them and how power, privilege, and oppression affect our society; and present my lessons in a way that is accessible to every single student in my class, no matter their abilities, or lack of abilities.

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