Three planes of practice: Examining intersections of reading identity and pedagogy

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ABSTRACT: *This paper reports on a project that examined teachers' reading identities and explored ways in which those identities were manifested in reading pedagogy and were adopted by students. The paper focuses on one purposively selected teacher and his class. Tom Ziegler's personal and pedagogical practices were deeply aligned, and his students appeared to "take up" many of his literacy practices as their own. In this way, I examine reading identity on three planes: 1) Tom's narrative account of how his reading identity developed over the course of his life; 2) how Tom's reading identity manifested itself in his reading pedagogy; and 3) how students—whose life histories were very different from Toms'—adopted many of his literacy practices.*

KEYWORDS: *Identity, literacy identity, life story, literary traditions, reading, teacher identity.*

> Studying both the doing and representing of identities, as well as studying the narration of identities in action (Georgakopoulou, 2007), is likely to be a productive means of documenting how identities shape the take up or performance of literate practices and vice versa, in large part because people move from space to space, position to position, discourse community to discourse community, interaction to interaction, text to text. As R. Hall (2004) argued, these movements need to be traced and the activity within them better understood… (Moje & Luke, 2009, p. 430)

> Teachers may unconsciously recreate their habitus in the students they teach. (Gennrich & Janks, 2013, p. 458)

LINKING LITERACY IDENTITY AND PEDAGOGY

Examining intersections of literacy and identity has been fruitful for understanding the complexities of teachers' "literate selves" (Gomez, 2009; Muchmore, 2001), yet the ways in which one's literacy identity shapes—and is shaped by—literacy activity is still somewhat unchartered in the research literature (Hall, 2012; Moje & Luke, 2009). If a teacher's literacy identity informs literacy practices, such as teaching, and if, as Gennrich (2013) suggests, teachers may "recreate" their own literacy identity in students, then those of us who attend to students' learning and identity development would do well to examine how teachers' identity and practice intersect and interact in English classrooms.

This paper reports on a project that examined teachers' reading identities and explored ways in which those identities were manifested in reading pedagogy and were adopted by students in classroom discussion and activity. It focuses on one purposively selected teacher and his class. Tom Ziegler's personal reading identity and

pedagogical practices were deeply aligned, and his students appeared to "take up" many of his literacy practices as their own. In this way, I examine reading identity on three planes: 1) Tom's narrative account of how his reading identity developed over the course of his life; 2) how Tom's reading identity manifested itself in his reading pedagogy; and 3) how students—whose life histories were very different from Tom's—adopted many of his literacy practices.

TEACHER IDENTITY

There is a range of ways in which "teacher identity" has been conceived in educational theory and research. In Olsen's introduction to the 2008 special issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly,* devoted to topics relating to identity in teacher education, he acknowledges the diversity of meanings and uses of identity that have evolved from different "intellectual traditions", as well as the ongoing construction of identity across the social sciences (Olsen, 2008a).

Olsen frames teacher identity as teachers' "embedded understandings of and for themselves as teachers, which derive from personal and prior experiences as well as professional and current ones" (Olsen, 2008b). This notion of identity positions the teacher as a dynamic and agentive individual who actively mediates the diversity of input—from students, curricula, standards, administration—through the lens of their lived experience and sense of self. This approach to understanding identity has been echoed in literacy-specific examinations of teacher identity as well. For example, Burnett's study of pre-service teachers' digital literacy identities worked from a conceptualisation of teacher identity as "evidenced socially; multiple and shifting; and located in power relations with others" (Burnett, 2011, p. 435).

I similarly position my work on teacher identity within a sociocultural perspective that recognises "various interdependencies among person, context, history, and others" (Olsen, 2008b) and focuses empirical attention on the interplay between an individual's agency and larger cultural systems. The resulting notion of identity is dynamic. As Zembylas explains, "…one can formulate a teacher-self that is a polysemic product of experience, a product of practices that constitute this self in response to multiple meanings that need not converge upon a stable, unified identity" (2003, p. 107).

While issues of teacher identity have been explored in multiple contexts—in relation to emotions (Zembylas, 2003), curriculum enactment (Vulliamy, Kimonen, Nevalainen, & Webb, 1997), curricular choices (Agee, 2000), race (King, 1991; MacIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993), gender (Dillabough, 1999), and professionalism (Sachs, 2001; Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, & Warne, 2002)—these aspects of identity are most often investigated in the context of participants' professional identities. Less common is the focus on understanding how teachers' personal identities—those that may have been shaped outside of formal educational experiences—may influence approaches to teaching. For example, in Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) seminal work on teachers' professional landscapes and Elbaz's (1981) discussions of personal practical knowledge, the researchers' focus was on teachers' personal, narrative understandings of professional practice. In much the same way as educational research has demonstrated the importance of students' funds

of knowledge—knowledge that takes shape outside the classroom and can be leveraged for academic understanding inside the classroom (e.g., Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992)—my work emphasises teachers' identities as developed from personal experiences, and then explores how personal identity intermingles with professional experience.

TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' IDENTITY

When researchers adopt a construct of teacher identity that is multivalent and co-constituting, the boundaries of any empirical study become porous, ultimately suggesting a research design that captures how teachers have been shaped by experience and practice, as well as how they shape experiences and practice, both their own and their students'. Where much of the existing literature stops short however, is the point at which we might extend our empirical gaze beyond the relationship between a teacher's identity and practice to include students—perhaps amongst those "others" mentioned by Burnett and Olsen—and their literacy practices. In much of the teacher identity literature, there is an implicit assumption that teachers' identity is worth studying because it affects teachers' practice, and students are impacted by the type or approach of teachers' pedagogy. I contend that a fine-grained account of *how* teachers' identity mediates teachers' and students' literacy practice would respond to Moje and Luke's call that we need to better understand "how identities shape the take up or performance of literate practices" (2009, p. 430).

Hall's work on the construction of students' reading identities begins to fill this empirical gap. She found that students felt it was "their teachers who assigned their reading identities, often based on test scores, and that these identities came with positive and negative consequences" (Hall, 2012, p. 371). The students in this study identified themselves as "good" or "bad reader[s]," and Hall detailed the context in which teachers' authoritative practice shaped those identities, finding that students "believed they had little control over how they read and used texts and how they were identified as readers in school" (Hall, 2012, p. 371).

LITERARY TRADITIONS AND READING IDENTITY

This particular framing of readers' lack of authority in the reading experience is consistent with formalist literary theories, which focus interpretive attention on the text itself, with little regard for the reader's experience of the text. New Criticism, a formalist literary tradition that is often espoused and enacted in classrooms (Appleman, 2000), posits that all meaning is inherent in the text, and thus the text is the only input needed for literary interpretation, which should be unaided by external factors, such as a reader's personal understanding or an author's intention. Some suggest that students experience text-centred approaches pervasively in schooling, "from first grade to graduate school" (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, & Goetz, 1977).

> …it is simply assumed that knowledge can be expressed in printed language, and that a skilled reader can acquire knowledge from reading. On this view, each word, each well-formed sentence, and every satisfactory text passage "has" a meaning. The meaning is conceived to be "in" the language, to have a status independent from the speaker and hearer, or author and reader. (Anderson et al., 1977, p. 368)

Probst (1987) critiques the New Critical approach in classrooms, suggesting that this "assures that [students] will fail". While New Criticism appears to undergird pedagogy in many American English Language Arts classrooms (Applebee, 1993), alternative approaches to teaching reading, such as reader response models (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978; Brown & Palincsar, 1987), promote a more agentive reader, and many of these models are promoted in English Education research (Probst, 1987; Hines & Appleman, 2000). Rosenblatt underscores the relative importance of the reader's experience:

> Let us not brush aside [the child's interpretation] in our eagerness to do justice to the total text or to put that part into its proper perspective in the study. It is more important that we reinforce the child's discovery that texts can make possible such intense personal experience. (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 272)

In part, this paper examines how elements of literary theory are entangled in teachers' reading identities and influence how teachers position students as readers through classroom practice.

Similar to how I position identity in this work, I frame literary knowledge, like all academic knowledge, not as a static, constant force, but as an embodiment of active practice. As Applebee suggests, "all traditions that surround us – those of architecture, agriculture, the arts, religion, history, science, mathematics, literature…they are traditions of knowledge-in-action, deeply contextualised ways of participating in the world of the present" (1996, p. 2). My contention in this work is that not only is there a range of ways to reason about literature (Culler, 2000; Grossman & Schoenfeld, 2005; Lee 2007; Purves, 1972), but that along with these varying literary perspectives come different practices, and that these perspectives and practices may be embedded in reading identity. Culler (2000) suggests that we can conceive of "literary theory [not as a] disembodied set of ideas but a force in institutions, theory exists in communities of readers and writers, as a discursive practice, inextricably entangled with educational and cultural institutions" (p. 135). Teachers are brought up in these different communities and institutions, engage in different literary discourses, and may ultimately, my work suggests, pass on some of their literary selves to their students as teachers become authoritative agents within educational institutions.

While identities formed by literary traditions will be more complicated than the students in Hall's (2012) study, notions of "good" and "bad" readers, the suggestion that reading identities are bestowed upon students by teachers and academic institutions is consistent with conceptions of how literary theories are assumed by readers.

TEACHERS' "LITERATE LIVES"

Two notable studies examine the possible seepage between teachers' personal reading experiences—those outside the classroom—and their reading identity and practice (Gomez, 2009; Muchmore, 2001). In both cases, the authors examined teachers' personal beliefs and feelings about literacy or their "literate lives."

Gomez's (2009) work with twelve teachers detailed the extent to which the teachers valued literacy in their personal lives and how much they shared their personal literacy experience with their students. She found that many teachers associated "a personal sense of self as a literate person" with good literacy pedagogy. The study relied on surveys, interviews and diaries, so, while Gomez painted a detailed portrait of the teachers' understandings of themselves in personal and pedagogical spaces, she did not observe them teaching. Indeed, she urges researchers to pursue this work, suggesting that "deeper and richer explorations of connections between teachers' personal and public literate lives are needed and may be essential to more fully understand how teachers embody literacy in their practice" (Gomez, 2009, p. 40). The current study examines precisely this active interplay between teachers' reading identities and their practice in the classroom, and extends empirical attention to include students' "take up" of these practices.

In a detailed, longitudinal case study, Muchmore (2001) drew a multi-layered portrait of "Anna," an English Language Arts teacher, through ongoing interviews with her, her colleagues, her friends, and her family; classroom observations; analysis of classroom artefacts and her own college papers. The rigorous and comprehensive nature of his methods allowed him to capture how Anna's beliefs were developed across her life history and activated in the classroom. He found that certain beliefs about literacy, those that developed in college and pre-service education, were at odds with her teaching experience, and were therefore dropped once she began teaching. Beliefs that developed more longitudinally, over the course of her life, appeared to hold more traction in the classroom. This is consistent with Burnett's (2011) findings that the influence of a teacher's literacy identity on her practice was "contingent" on alignment between identity and classroom climate. Where there was friction between her teacher participants' classroom conditions and their literacy identities, those elements of their identities that were not aligned were not enacted in practice.

Gomez's, Muchmore's, and Burnett's studies detail important connections between personal literacy identity and pedagogical literacy practice, and they establish that this intersection is fruitful for better understanding how and why teachers engage with literacy in the classroom in the ways they do. Attention to students in these students is limited. Gomez did not collect student data or observe teachers' pedagogy, and Muchmore's attention in the classroom was focused primarily on Anna's teaching practice. My study builds on this existing work by extending attention in the classroom to students' practice. In this way, we can begin to understand how teachers' practice—embedded in personal reading identity—may shape students' practice.

It is possible that much of the existing research that examines teachers' literacy identity and its relationship to practice has been limited by the study participants' experience. Many of the studies that have deepened our knowledge of teachers' identity have focused on pre-service teachers (e.g. Alsup, 2006; Burnett, 2011; Haworth, 2006) or novice teachers (Graham, 2008). While these studies have helped deepen our understanding of how teachers' literacy identities take shape, they are necessarily limited in what they can tell us about the relationship between teachers' identities and their practice. The current study focuses on a veteran teacher, which may allow for a more complex understanding of teaching pedagogy and identity.

Further, by purposively selecting a participant whose reading identity and practice were deeply aligned, the focus of this work can be to detail the ways in which that alignment is manifested in the classroom, rather than to identify what components of the personal and pedagogical approaches are or are not aligned. Alsup (2006) developed important work that used narrative to help pre-service teachers articulate—and overcome—discordant elements of their personal and professional identities. Considerable work has explored disconnects between teachers' professed identities and their practice (e.g. Burnett, 2011; Cohen, 1990; Zancanella, 1992), and there is an abundance of research that details teachers' practices that are not consistent with empirically supported "best practices". My work begins with a purposive sample of a teacher whose practice echoes suggestions made by educational research, and whose personal reading identity appears to undergird his practice.

It is important to make clear that the work of this paper is not to draw large-scale correlations between identity, teaching, and student learning. I recognise that a range of factors mediate the connection between identity and practice. The claim of this paper is that identity is one central component within a complex mix of factors in teachers' practice, and that a core element of English teachers' identity is their reading identity. By purposively selecting a teacher for whom there was a strong alignment across his reading identity, his teaching and his students' take-up, we can better understand the role of identity in literacy practice and the processes by which such an identity—or elements of that identity—is passed onto students.

METHODS OF INQUIRY, DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

Traditionally, teachers have been studied within the context of the classrooms in which they teach, and in a small number of studies, their own educations. As my study took a more ecological and historical perspective on teachers' lives, recognising the multitude of ways in which one's relationships to texts and to reading is shaped over the course of one's life, it was appropriate to employ exploratory methods, allowing the participants to guide the inquiry in directions that would uncover what was most relevant to them, rather than limit the scope of the inquiry to typically examined areas of meaning-making. Over the course of fourteen months, I used life story interviews, teacher and student questionnaires, classroom observations, and video-based stimulated recall interviews to better understand the full scope of teachers' personal and pedagogical approaches to reading, as well as to understand students' evolving reading practices.

Data collection

Life story interviews
The research programme began by conducting reading life story interviews, as adapted from McAdams' (1996) instrument. As I sought to understand teachers' personal reading identity, the life story approach was particularly appropriate. McAdams asserts that "identity is a life story", as "people living in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalised and evolving narratives of the self" (McAdams, 2001, p. 100). The interview asks subjects to act as "storytellers" of their lives, and in so doing, to recount different moments and influences, spanning their life course, with attention to particular high and low points,

earliest memories, significant turning points, vision of the future, among others. I modified the life story interview to be specifically about reading lives; rather than asking about the highest point in the subject's life, for example, I asked about the highest point related to reading. In telling stories of their reading lives, teachers described the most significant moments, characters, and spaces related to their literary meaning-making, thereby drawing their reading landscape and history. Each interview included anywhere from eight to twelve different episodes depending on the storyteller. I used each distinct episode as a separate unit of analysis.

While narrative has been used extensively in teacher research, most of the narratives elicited in this body of research explore the realm of teachers' experiences teaching, such as Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) work on teachers' "professional landscapes". I selected a life story approach in large part to purposefully extend teachers' attention outside of their classroom experiences, to capture the myriad of spaces and experiences, school-related and otherwise that contributed to their reading identity. Thus, the emerging construct of reading identity comes from the reading life story: how teachers retrospectively made meaning of their reading experiences, as well as how that retrospective understanding served as a lens for how they understood themselves in the moment and how they projected themselves into the future.

Classroom observations

Next, I examined how and when the teachers' personal orientations to reading were manifested in their reading instruction, or—at times—at odds with their pedagogical approaches. Further, I wanted to understand student practices and to what extent they mirrored or differed from teachers' practices. To this end, I observed six classes of each teacher participant over the course of a year. In addition to taking field notes during each observation, which allowed me to follow the complex and unique path of each lesson, I later viewed the video of the observed classes using an observation log that focused my attention to certain key elements that I had identified through analysing the life story interviews. As I watched a video of the class, I referenced my notes from the day of the observation and examined artefacts from the class, such as handouts and quizzes.

For each class, I measured each analytical element for the teachers' comments and questions, as well as the students' comments and questions. This dual-focus of the analysis comes in part from Probst's (1988) observations that teachers sometimes engage a text in a text-centred way, while students make personal comments about how the texts relate to themselves. The dual focus also helped me understand possible paths of how students adopted certain teacher practices. To understand Tom's classroom practice, I coded each distinct classroom activity (that he had organised or designed), each comment, and question for its text or reader-centredness, and interpretive complexity. To understand student practice, I analysed each student comment and question using to the same codes (Figure 1).

Teacher, Date, Class Level	Unit of Analysis/ Short Descrip-tion of Activity	Teacher Q & Com-ments: Text-Centred	Teacher Q & Com-ments: Reader-Centred	Student Q & Com-ments: Text-Centred	Student Q & Com-ments: Reader-Centred	Teacher: Hier-archy Levels	Student: Hier-archy Levels	Number of texts discussed	Number of students taking part

Figure 1. Observation log

Stimulated recall interviews

Further, as both a way to buttress my understanding of teachers' pedagogical approaches in the classroom, as well as to "member check" my analysis of participants' pedagogical moves and knowledge, I conducted video-based stimulated recall interviews (Calderhead, 1981) with participants after the six observations were completed. I selected video excerpts of lessons that displayed pedagogical approaches to reading that seemed consonant or dissonant with the personal approaches described in the life story interviews. I used these clips as anchors for our interviews, during which I asked teachers to retrospectively describe the selected clip of teaching and learning in their own words. In this way, I was able to confirm or disconfirm my initial interpretations. Further, I came to understand how other factors—such as departmental expectations, standardised testing pressures, teachers' content knowledge or beliefs about students—may have limited the influence of a teacher's reading identity on her instruction.

Data analysis

I developed two sets of codes with which to analyse the life story and classroom observation data. The first set of analytical codes focused on the literary content of the interviews and observations; these were largely informed by existing research and theory. The second set of codes emerged from the data and focused on how texts functioned in the context of the teachers' lives.

Literary analysis: text- and reader-centredness

To analyse teachers' reading identities and practice, I looked to both literary theory and educational research on literary theory as enacted by teachers. While literary scholars may detail a range of ways to reason about literature (Culler, 2000), educational researchers have suggested that theories of reading literature are enacted dichotomously in classrooms, most often in line with a New Critical approach to reading texts (Hines & Appleman, 2000; Probst, 1988), and with reader response approaches to reading (Rosenblatt, 1978). Of course, a variety of literary theories abound, some in stark contrast to one another, and others that share central components. Scholes (1982) (borrowing from Roman Jakobson) suggests that six elements can contribute to the reading of a text. Grossman (1991) describes these as "the author, the text itself, the context in which the text was written, the medium in which the author wrote, the codes which govern the production of a literary text, and the reader of the text" (p. 246).
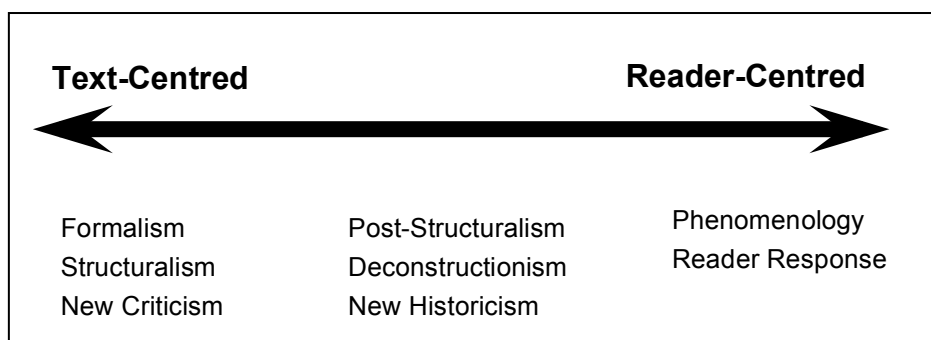

Figure 2. Spectrum of traditions of literacy interpretation

Each theory privileges one or some of these elements over the others. In response to my data and supported by research on teachers' literary orientations, I found it useful to think about these elements along a spectrum, with the text on one side, with increasing attention to context in which the text was created as we move towards the centre, and ultimately with a greater focus on the context in which the text is read at the other extreme (Figure 2).

Thus, in my analysis of both the reading life-story interviews and the classroom observations, I analysed the extent to which the teachers' identity and classroom practice and the students' classroom practice were more text- or reader-cantred. This included attending to teacher and student talk, as well as how they organised themselves in classroom activities. Further, I used the organisation of classroom activities to help me understand the extent to which the teacher ceded interpretive authority to the individual reader or maintained authoritative control over the interpretive experience. I categorised four activity types as student-centred in their meaning-making focus: students leading the activity; students working individually, either writing or reading; and students working in small groups. Teacher-centred activities included the teacher providing instructions, lecturing, directing discussion, providing something for the students to watch, such as a movie, and administering assessment.

Finally, as some literary theories explicitly privilege certain texts over others for intellectual rigour, I examined the range of kinds of texts that teachers and students introduced in their interview or during classroom practice.

Literary analysis: Taxonomy of text-based interpretation
I recognised that no matter what the literary orientation, teachers may have more or less rigorous approaches to interpreting texts in that tradition. Thus, in unpacking teachers' text-based approaches to reading and teaching, I built from Hillocks and Ludlow's (1984) "taxonomy of skills in reading and interpreting fiction" (p. 7) They outline a hierarchy of complexity in interpretation, which begins with "basic stated information", which is drawn directly from the text, and "key details", which isolate important information, but still requires little inferencing. The hierarchy then moves into a more interpretive realm, encompassing both "simple" and "complex implied relationships" which require either local or global inferencing (p. 11). Towards the top of the taxonomy, Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) place "author's generalisation" which requires the reader to glean the author's larger point from the text as a whole. Finally, a "structural generalisation… require[s] that a reader explains how parts of the work operate together to achieve certain effects" (p. 12). Through my analysis, I found several other interpretive practices worthy of note. On multiple occasions, participants spoke about issues of intertextuality, either relating two different works to one another, or speaking in larger terms about an entire genre, literary period, geographical literary community, or an author's body of work. Generally, these discussions encompassed many of the same higher-order inferencing attributes involved in structural generalisation or authors' generalisation, so I placed these at the top of the taxonomy as well.

Thus, I coded the reading life-story interviews, teachers' classroom talk, and students' classroom talk according to its level of interpretive rigour—no matter the text under discussion—on the taxonomy.

Analysis: Agentive and communal orientations

I initially approached the data using the literary theories described above, looking first to describe the literary orientations of each teacher as evidenced in the life stories, then to uncover the ways in which teachers' literature pedagogy was consistent or inconsistent with their personal approach to reading as captured in the observations. As I worked through the data, a second line of analysis emerged, in line with McAdams' themes of agency and communion, as borrowed from Bakan (1966). McAdams explains,

> Agency refers to the separation of the individual from and mastery of the individual over the environment, subsuming such overlapping motifs as power…Agency denotes story material in which characters assert, expand, or protect themselves as autonomous and active "agents". Communion refers to union of the individual with the environment and the surrender of the individual to a larger whole, covering such motifs as intimacy, love...Life stories may be compared and contrasted, therefore, with respect to the degree to which the thematic lines of agency and communion dominate the text. (McAdams, 1996, p. 308)

Communion sub-codes include themes such as caring and help and unity and togetherness; agency sub-codes include themes such as achievement and impact. Analysis of the life-story interview data revealed ways in which teachers' told stories about reading experiences that were communal in nature, such as feeling close to a family member or teacher with whom they read, or agentive in nature, for example when they received a high grade on an English paper in college or read a difficult book that others could not understand as expertly. I also analysed the classroom data to help me understand how teachers were agency- and communion-orientated by identifying the extent to which activities fostered more individual- or group-oriented, meaning-making experiences.

Purposive sample

The original study included nine participants. For the purpose of this report, I detail the case of one teacher, Tom, who was particularly well positioned to inform researchers about the intersections of reading identity and practice, as these were deeply aligned in his case. By showcasing Tom, I do not wish to suggest that all teachers had a clear alignment between their identity and their practice; that was not the case. Rather I want to begin the work of detailing how a teachers' reading identity relates to—and may inform—teachers' and students' literacy practices. Furthermore, according to all his colleagues and through my observations of practice, he was a particularly effective teacher who regularly taught in ways that have been suggested by education and literacy research. In this respect, he was a useful teacher to investigate, as he could help us understand how elements of personal reading identities may undergird effective practice. Finally, a detailed, fine-grained study of one case can provide insight into the processes through which Tom's identity was manifested in practice and taken up by students, processes that may be obscured by attending to larger trends across participants. The majority of existing research on literacy identity and practice does not capture how students may begin to take up practices modelled or suggested by their teachers; the focused approach of a case study allows for this. The complete study of all nine participants is reported on in Bernstein (2009).

At the time of the study, Tom served as department chair of the English department in a charter school in an urban, financially under-resourced neighbourhood that was predominantly African American. The school was both a neighbourhood school, as it served only the students in its catchment area, but was also a college-preparatory charter school that required application for admission. Tom, who is white, had taught for eight years, both in Chicago and in Boston, where he attended college. As an undergraduate, he had triple-majored in English, education and psychology, with a minor in history, and he held two Master of Arts degrees, one in liberal studies and one in educational administration. Tom came to teaching after several years of working in various jobs in other fields, including non-for-profit work, college admissions, and bartending. He was wholly committed to the college preparation mission of the school and taught all Advanced Placement or honours classes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents analysis from each of the three planes, then traces and details connections across planes. Analysis of Tom's reading identity and pedagogy both reveal he prioritised reader-centred (as opposed to text-centred) approaches to reading, communal reading experiences, and subjectivity and multiple interpretative stances. Analysis of student talk and activity show consistency with Tom's reading identity and pedagogy.

Tom's reading identity

A major communal theme of Tom's life story was *unity and togetherness.* Tom made the point on several occasions that he was different from those with whom he grew up. He mentioned throughout the interview that his family was "not all that academic" and "there weren't a lot of books in the house". His family regularly attended church, which Tom felt was "absolutely ridiculous" and "offensive". Being gay and atheist, he never felt completely comfortable in "conservative Indiana". Through books and education, Tom described finding communities that did not materially exist for him throughout his childhood but with which he felt at home. Once he began reading, he explained that, "there was this whole world that had been opened up to me. You know, all this hidden meaning." As a result of reading, he became "fascinated with European culture and its seeming liberal ideas, that things that were sort of commonplace in Europe were not in the United States, and I guess, like then personally, it obviously was relating to my being gay." He discovered books, like *The Sun Also Rises*, that had existential and "atheistic sensibilities" and explained that reading Hemingway, "was my first real experience outside of very conservative Indiana, that you know you don't have to go to church and you don't have to believe in a particular religion, in order to be a human being. And, it sort of validated that." Later he described discovering gay fiction, which was, "my real exposure to other stories being told by people like me for people like me so they didn't have to explain why the two men were hanging out together; it was a given, you know?" The sexual, academic, and religious elements of his identity had made him feel like an outsider in his home environment, and literature had been a vehicle for discovering communities in the world that were more aligned with his "sensibilities". He seemed to have felt unity and togetherness with those characters, settings and ideas presented in literature,

in opposition to the isolation and difference he felt with his family and home environment.

Tom was very reader-centred in his interview. In his reading stories, he emphasised the environment surrounding the text and the context for the reading, rather than the text itself. He often stressed the roles of others in his reading lives, as when his teachers or family helped him read and engage with texts. In addition to his many stories about his teachers, Tom also described how his mother, despite not being a book-lover herself, fetched books from the library for him and eventually got him his own library card.

Another major reader-centred theme in Tom's discussion of reading was his developing understanding of himself through texts. As with the earlier description of Tom realising that he was an atheist, he was often awakened to deeper personal understanding through texts in his story. He described reading *The Primer of Existentialism* as an epiphanic moment: "…as soon as I read it, I was like, I'm an existentialist! That's what it's all about, duh! I'm not Christian or Jewish or anything like that I'm an existentialist. And so that was the philosophy that I jumped on." Later in his story, he described reading a novel by a gay author about a gay couple. He explains,

> The main character was probably about my age and dealing with similar issues that I was dealing with and he had to come out to his family. Oh wow! There's a character that had to go through this, and being in a relationship and do you still want to be in a relationship, and should you be monogamous and all those things that, you know, you deal with… And, I guess what's kind of interesting about that is that when you're gay you don't adopt automatically by forfeit the dominant culture's view of what a relationship is. So, it doesn't always mean, you know, getting married, ring on the finger, monogamous relationship, what does it mean? What should you do? Should you take that model out of people too, or do you want to vary it? So I guess I've always used reading as a way of exploring options without actually having to go through them myself. So I could see, you know, through fiction and through literature, just all the different ways of being. All the, the ways of living your life and the choices that you make and, and pretty much coming up with it all from scratch.

Here, rather than detailing the plot of the book, the characters' lives, or his understanding of the literary themes, rhetorical devices or authorial intention of the book, Tom's focus was how the text helped him understand his own life. In this way, Tom's reading life story was very reader-centred.

While the focus of his reading life story was the context for meaning-making, often the literary interpretation that resulted as a part of that meaning-making was quite sophisticated. Rather than sacrificing literary complexity for personal insight, Tom integrated literary complexity within his personal reflection. Over the course of the life story interview, he discussed fourteen different types of text, ranging from signposts to canonical works, from gay pulp to philosophy. He discussed these texts at all levels of the literary hierarchy; in six of eight episodes he engaged with the texts at the highest levels of the hierarchy, discussing intertextual themes, genre and inference.

Tom relayed the following story about reading Hemingway. Notice how he first discusses a larger thematic point, that characters are "free from the constraints of religion", then he outlined what Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) would label a "key detail", the church visit, which Tom described as being symbolic. Then he came back to a larger inference, that these characters were "valid" without being religious.

> There were instances in *The Sun Also Rises* where I guess they were just, they were so free from the constraints of religion, which I, you know, from my earliest memories, I've been an atheist. I can remember sitting in church and saying "this is such bullshit". I mean four years old and like you're born in original sin, and I'm like "I wasn't, I don't know who you're talking about. But this is just ridiculous, this is absolutely ridiculous." And that gets into the whole, the symbolism cause there. I definitely believe that there are some fundamental truths between various religions. Um, but to call one the truth has always been really, really offensive to me. So with *The Sun Also Rises* I guess that was the first book I read that had sort of atheistic sensibilities in that they're really, you know they go into the church and the characters don't know how to pray. And then they just walk back out and have a cocktail, you know? And so, on that level it was my first real experience outside of very conservative Indiana, that you know you don't have to go to church and you don't have to believe in a particular religion, in order to be a human being.

Also interesting in this story is how Tom interspersed personal exploration within the literary reasoning. His memory of not only the larger "authorial generalisation" but the smaller "key details" was mixed up in his memory of the passage's personal significance to him. His personal experience of living as a gay atheist in Indiana was intimately linked to his reading and understanding of the literary aspects of the novel.

Thus in Tom's reading life story, he emphasised notions of unity with a range of literary characters and communities, as well as real people, such as those who helped him become a reader, like his mother and his teachers. His reading identity was also reader-focused, in that his reading stories focused on the context in which he made meaning of texts, as well as the texts that helped him better understand himself. He discussed a range of texts without emphasis on their merits relative to one another, but rather with a focus on their personal meaning for himself. Further, he privileged his experience as a reader over the correctness of his reading.

Tom's reading identity as manifested in practice

Tom's reading life story was a crowded one, populated by friends, lovers, teachers, parents, sisters, students, fictional and non-fictional characters. Tom's classroom was similarly crowded. The physical room itself was covered exclusively by student-generated work, which he referred to regularly as reminders of lessons previously learned. Authors were very present in his classes; no text was read without some reading assigned about the author. These supplemental texts were not derived from the standard textbook biosketches, but from carefully selected magazine articles and books. In fact, the authors of the biographies themselves were often present in the discussion; in one case, two biographies of Langston Hughes were presented, one which focused on his racial identity and association with other black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, the other focused almost exclusively on his sexual orientation and how it could be interpreted through his writings and personal correspondence. He

asked students to consider the interests of each biographer and whom students thought was more credible and accurate.

He often encouraged students to make personal connections to the texts, frequently assigning journal reflections on the themes of upcoming texts. These kinds of personal reflections were clearly valued in the class, as students, often unprompted, related ideas from the texts to their own lives. Tom himself also modelled these personal-textual connections. When discussing Plato's *Symposium* and ideas about love, he referred to his own first reading of this in an English class, and how it was the first and only suggestion in high school that romantic love might occur between two men. When asked by a student whether he believed in Plato's notion, he first asked the student what she believed, then asked students what the Greeks believed, explained how literary critics interpret *The Symposium*, before providing his own subjective meaning of the text. Providing these kinds of multiple subjective interpretations—with no conveyance that some interpretations might be more highly valued than others—was typical of Tom's approach with his students. I contend that it is consistent with Tom's personal orientation to literature, where many voices and characters were present and valued in his reading life story.

In this same class on Plato, he connected a range of authors' views on love, first giving students a text by Margaret Atwood, then *The Symposium*, then asking students to write their own "origin of love" story, and reminded them that the story of Adam and Eve was also such a story. In this way, once again, he underscored the subjectivity of ideas, in this case about love; there were no universal truths in Tom's class, but a range of interpretations. Students were encouraged to disagree with texts, to find them "disturbing" or "confusing". And Greek authors had no more or less authority on the great themes than the students themselves. Even in the driest lessons, ones centred on university placement exams, Tom reminded the students what the assessment scorers were looking for, talking at length about what exam scorers value. This implied that the "eight" that he predicted one answer might get on an assessment was subjective. His own assessment of the answer, or that of his students or a different teacher, might be different.

This constant "subjectifying" in Tom's discussion of interpretation and assessment was also evident in how he structured his lessons. In almost every class period, he included elements of lecture, whole-group discussion, small-group discussion, and individual writing. He also regularly met one-on-one with students to discuss their progress in class. He asked students to read their essays to and solicit feedback from their peers before turning the essays into him, so that they could get multiple perspectives on their work. I interpreted this variety of instructional configurations to be in line with the notion that there were many voices of authority in Tom's class. While he provided mini-lectures in many classes, the majority of class time was devoted to whole-group and small-group discussion. So while he had acknowledged that he had authoritative information to share, he also placed the great bulk of the interpretive work of the class on the students. Even when many possible "answers" had been provided by the whole group, he then asked students to work individually to determine which of the ideas generated by the class they felt could best support their own ideas. In some units, he gave students an overall timeframe for reading a book, but asked them to determine how much they felt they should read each night. He also had students choose which of four different books they would read for a unit on

modernism. This ceding of authority typical to the teacher was common to Tom's practice, and I contend that it aligns with the reader-centred reading identity that privileges an individual reader's interpretation of a text over an authoritative interpretation detached from a particular reader.

Further, the lack of a universally applied hierarchy—for how "good" students' ideas were, for which members of the class, authors, texts and sources should hold the most authority in Tom's classroom—echoed the egalitarian view of texts seen in his life-story interviews. In Tom's reading life story, there was never an implication that the childhood story or street signs or introductory French passage he described were any less significant to him that the *Primer of Existentialism* or *The Sun Also Rises*. In his classes, he regularly mentioned a large number of diverse texts. For example, in his class on love, he discussed interpreting all of the following texts related to love: *The Symposium;* a short story by Margaret Atwood; an Ezra Pound poem; a photograph of a Metro station; the works of "the lost generation"; a Shakespearean sonnet; and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch.*

Similarly, in the same way that Tom's reading life story constantly interwove literary interpretation with personal memory, Tom regularly asked his students to relate their lives to themes in texts. Sometimes this was done over the course of a unit. With the Atwood and Plato texts, Tom asked students to extend a theme that they had explored in literature, in this case the origin of love, to their own personal understanding of the idea. Tom also asked students to relate the personal and the academic within more isolated interpretive moments in class. For example, after reading a Maya Angelou story for homework, students were asked to "first give a summary, then your reaction" to the story. Much like Tom's interwoven tales of personal and literary meaning-making, students easily integrated the two perspectives in their answers. A content summary of Joe Louis' historic fight in Angelou's *Champion of the World* quickly moved to a heated discussion of how some African American figures were publicly viewed as models of the entire African American community, how sports figures were more highly valued than other prominent African Americans, and how Kobe Bryant's rape trial had affected the African American community.

Students' take-up of Tom's practice

While Tom often prompted both reader-centred and communal approaches to reading through his talk and activity structure, students often echoed these approaches without his explicit guidance. The discussion about Joe Louis and Kobe Bryant evolved—mostly through students' steering its direction—into a discussion of students' personal associations with the larger African American community. One student noted that while Maya Angelou cared deeply about whether or not Louis won because there were so few successful African Americans acknowledged by the dominant white culture, she had the privilege to feel indifferent about Kobe Bryant's situation.

> I think it was serious at the time, since [Angelou] was at that time, but now, since black people as a whole have grown so far, if one person fails, you have more people to back you up, so it's not like if one person fails, everybody fails.

Notable about this conversation was the frequency with which students disagreed with one another. In the seven-minute conversation, there were four student-to-student

exchanges with no interceding or interrupting by Tom. While initially Tom began the discussion with a teacher-generated question, in this same period, three individual students posed questions to the group. Over the course of the discussion, every student in the class voluntarily participated. I believe it was in part the stock placed in personal interpretation that allowed students the confidence to oppose their peers' ideas, develop their own questions, and generally feel confident discussing the text. Rather than working from an understanding that the meaning of the text resides in the text alone—and was therefore best interpreted by literary scholars—these students had been taught that literary interpretation was rooted in personal understanding. Each student was an authority on her own life, and therefore spoke confidently when presenting an opposing view. She was not undermining an interpretation determined by the literary establishment, but a subjective one put forth by her peers with different life experiences and perspectives.

During the lesson where Tom presented contrasting biographies of Langston Hughes, he asked students to consider, "Is it possible for someone to effectively write about the African American experience who isn't African American?" then later, "Could a man write a book from a woman's perspective?" Eight different students contributed answers to these questions, and they cited evidence—unprompted by Tom—from *The Glass Menagerie* and Oprah Winfrey's television show, as well as from their own experience. After several student answers, Tom summarised the collective response so far and added his own take, and then introduced an opposing view. A student spontaneously interrupted him with her own question, to which he responded with another question. She replied, and then two other students added their suggestions:

> **TZ:** So I think it's possible to anyone to write about anything, because we can all connect to each other as human beings. Fundamentally, as human beings, I know what it's like to treat me disrespectfully, whether it's based on race or age or gender or anything like that. I can relate from an emotional level – I think we can all do that…so you can put yourself into someone else's perspective, definitely, but there are some people who say it isn't right for you to do that, so –
> **S1:** *[interrupting TZ]* – How come?
> **TZ:** Yeah, why would that be?
> **S1:** Because if you do it, then you get a better understanding of them.
> **TZ:** So is it legitimate if Steven Spielberg, who's a white director, directs a movie that's primarily about African Americans and written by an African American, *The Color Purple*?
> *[Multiple S]* Yeah.
> **TZ:** There was criticism of that.
> **S1:** I think that's cool. It gives you a better understanding of the person that you're doing this on, so you won't be so critical of them, of what things they're doing, and all that…
> **TZ:** But why were people critical? What was their point?
> *[simultaneously]* **S1:** Because he's white?   **S2:** Well, I'm just thinking…
> **TZ:** *[Student one's name]* I love hearing your voice, but (Student two's name)…
> **S2:** Why's he doing a film about – was it a slave? Was it in the south?
> **TZ:** …You're talking about racism…*[Student three's name]*…
> **S3:** I'd like to say something about another movie…[a critic] gave *Diary of a Mad Woman one* star, and everyone got all mad, but it wasn't to his liking, so he gave it one star, so everyone said, "He's racist, he's racist," and he was saying it was unrealistic…but I think his wife is black, so for people to say that he's racist is out of order…but he didn't even bring that to their attention.

In this discussion, it became clear that students built from a range of different texts—and types of text—to understand larger concepts, in this case, related to identity, politics and empathy. This is consistent with how Tom regularly introduced a range of texts to his students to help them understand a larger concept like love. It was echoed his own reading life story, where he discussed fourteen different types of texts, ranging from signposts to canonical works to gay pulp to philosophy, over eight episodes. This discussion also makes clear that students felt enough confidence and authority in the classroom to generate their own questions and to challenge one another and to challenge the teacher.

Finally, in the same way that Tom regularly juxtaposed texts, like the Hughes' biographies, to help construct a literary argument, student three uses the case of Roger Ebert's interracial marriage as a way to underscore the range of identities—visible and less visible—that an individual may hold on to at one time and that may provide him with certain kinds of critical or artistic authority.

Much as Tom's literary interpretations frequently reached the higher end of Hillock and Ludlow's (1984) hierarchy, in every class I observed, at least a portion of Tom's students made comments and asked questions that included issues of authorial generalisation or structural generalisation, and much like Tom's life story answers, the students' discussion tended to be presented with evidence from their own lives as well as being grounded in texts. For example, the discussion of what Joe Louis represented to the African American community engaged complex discussion of symbolism and period, and such issues were explored both by retellings and interpretations of the story, as well as associations with current cultural norms and personal feelings about race and community.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Research suggests that most teachers teach reading in accordance with New Critical approaches to literature and that these approaches limit opportunities for student meaning-making and privilege certain types of interpretation over others (Appleman, 2000; Probst, 1987). Here, I have presented an alternative case where a teacher's reading identity was closely aligned with his pedagogical approach, which opened up opportunities for students' meaning-making and fostered an environment where students' personal connections to texts were promoted. If schools generally promote conservative approaches to reading and texts, and if teachers often revert back to their "apprenticeship of observation" as students in those schools once they themselves become teachers (Lortie, 1975, p. 61). identity work that focuses exclusively on teachers' development in schools may reinforce those poor practices and miss key moments of literacy meaning making that transcend classroom walls. Life-story interviews open up opportunities for teachers to revisit a range of meaning-making experiences across their life histories. Teacher educators may be able to leverage diverse reading experiences to highlight and encourage a range of approaches to reading and reading instruction.

Ultimately, the outcomes of this study support the underlying claim that teachers' lives matter when it comes to instruction and student learning. Just as students make

meaning for themselves through a range of out-of-school contexts and experiences, English teachers engage with diverse texts outside school. Further, such teachers have long histories with reading, and only by looking longitudinally at teachers' lives can we appreciate the complexity of their current literary understanding and practice. Finally, students pick up on the ways in which teachers are oriented to literacy and if teachers—in part—shape students' literacy practice and, possibly, their identity, then researchers must continue to attend to the complexity of teachers' literacy identity and its manifestation in practice.

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