

THE IMPACT OF FEMALE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS'  
INTERSECTIONALITY ON PEDAGOGY

by

Jillian Berson

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Doctor of Philosophy

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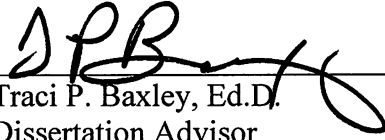
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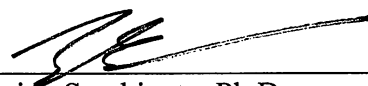
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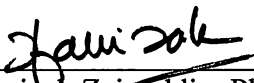
This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Traci P. Baxley, Department of Curriculum, Culture, and Educational Inquiry, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

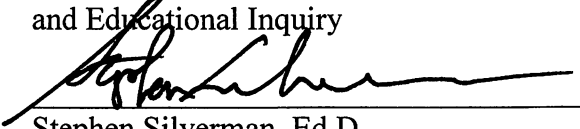
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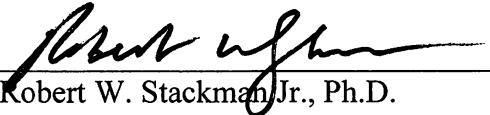
  
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When looking back on my experience as a doctoral student, I did not realize the influence this program would have on me personally and professionally. With school being something that has always come easily to me, this experience has pushed me to be a more thorough and critical scholar, which carries over into how I view myself as an educator and a person as a whole. But as the old adage says, it takes a village, and I am certainly no exception. I am luckier than most for the incredible support provided by my friends and family, and, without them, none of this would have been possible.

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## ABSTRACT

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This mixed-methods phenomenological bounded case study sought to uncover how who teachers are as people impacts what they do in their classrooms. The study examined how teachers' personal lives (e.g., backgrounds and prior knowledge), their experiences with intersectionality (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation), and professional lives (e.g., pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices) influence one another. The sample for this student consisted of seven high school female English Language Arts teachers who were teaching the required text, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Lee (1960). Through the use of survey questionnaires, interviews, document analysis of unit lesson plans, and a focus group, a portrait of the relationship between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and curriculum design choices emerged. Four key themes emerged in relation to the research questions for this study: (a) whether teachers are teaching with the students in mind, (b) uncovering the power structure of the teaching experience, (c) the

role of teaching versus facilitating, and (d) curriculum design focusing on the process of learning versus end products.



## DEDICATION

The completion of this dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Rosa Obdulia Acosta O'Brien. For as long as I can remember, Nanama, what we have always referred to her as, has instilled in me the understanding that my siblings and I are extraordinary and destined for greatness. It was not until later in my life that I realized the extraordinary legacy that I am becoming a part of. Growing up in Puerto Rico and graduating from high school as valedictorian at sixteen, after college my grandmother became a teacher, a profession that apparently runs in the family as her father was a well-known principal in Puerto Rico with a street named after him. To this day, she still shares stories with me of how her students would send her letters decades after she had taught them, sharing photographs of her sitting under a tree with her students gathered around her. Going against the gender norms of the time, my grandmother joined the military during World War II as a translator. Following her teaching and military career, my grandmother attended Simmons College in Massachusetts to get her graduate degree in Social Work, continuing her work to help those in need in any capacity she is able to.

Nanama's life has served as an inspiration to me. I went into teaching as a job until I figured out what I wanted to do. I have come to realize through my experiences, both professionally and academically, that what I want to do is make a difference in the world, and serve to amplify those voices not being heard. Her reassurance that everything I do is wonderful and her excitement at hearing about my teaching and academic studies has kept me going through this arduous journey. With her now being 96 years old, I feel

extremely lucky to be able to show her that her legacy will live on and I am forever grateful for having such a strong, intelligent female role model in my life.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1947, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote a piece for the Morehouse College student paper, *The Maroon Tiger*, titled “The Purpose of Education.” King’s English professor was the faculty advisor for the publication at the time. King and his father had gone to hear the former governor of Georgia, Eugene Talmadge, speak and left frustrated at the former governor’s complete disregard for the concerns expressed by the people he was hoping to represent during his campaign for re-election. King’s father later recalled in his unofficial autobiography that his son was outraged at Talmadge for being a Phi Beta Kappa key, but not using any of that knowledge for the betterment of the community (King, Carson, Holloran, Luker, & Russell, 1992). In his editorial, King (1947) asserted that reasoning ability is not sufficient as the sole purpose for education:

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. (p. 15)

When questioning the purpose of education, one must also call into question the role of the educator. For some, an educator’s job is to teach students how to be contributing members of society. For an English Language Arts teacher, this would also include imparting the wisdom of past generations through language and literature to promote a level of cultural literacy. The means in which to meet these aims differs from

teacher to teacher, classroom to classroom, based on the individual teacher's experiences and intersectionality.

Intersecting facets of a person's race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation create the whole of a person—this whole person is then deciding what content will be emphasized or omitted in their classrooms, the way he or she interacts with others, and the way they conduct his or her classroom. Aside from the way the teacher identifies himself or herself, relationships with others is also an influence on teaching practices. Drawing from Foucault's (1984) theory of power relations, power is not a fixed state—the fluidity of power relations between teachers, administrators, parents, and students is also a factor to be taken into consideration when studying power relations in curriculum and instruction in the classroom. The aim of this study was to find the link between how a teacher's intersectionality, shaped by personal knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, enhances or inhibits the learning experience in the classroom.

### **Background of the Problem**

In current times of standardized tests and mandated curricula, there is a direct command given to teachers indicating which concepts and texts are required to be taught in their classrooms. However, in most cases, the instructional practices and curriculum design employed by teachers for the required standards and texts are left up to the interpretation of the teachers. Due to the individuality of each teacher, students experience varied quality of instruction, including emphasized and omitted content as well as methods of instruction. One area in which teachers have historically been able to exercise autonomy is in the manner in which they evaluate student knowledge acquisition. With the current educational climate entrenched in high stakes testing as the

only indicator of successful teaching and learning, teacher autonomy is weakened by a drive to increase student test scores. Abramova (2012) argued that No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) had unintentional consequences including lowering the standards of teacher quality by requiring teachers to become simply deliverers of content knowledge (Apple, 1979).

According to the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE, n.d.), NCLB, which was signed into a law in 2002, operated on the notion that every child can learn. It called for:

A highly qualified teacher in the core subjects in every classroom; the use of proven, research-based instructional methods; and timely information and options for parents. Schools that under-performed were held accountable, needing to provide their students with free tutoring or a transfer to a better performing public school.

The question was raised as to how schools would be held accountable in regard to student performance. This is where the system for school grades was developed. The purpose of a school's grade was to gauge whether students were learning a year's worth of knowledge in a year's time. According to FLDOE (n.d.), this indicator is the leading indicator of a quality education. While the creators of NCLB touted its development was in the best interest of the students, connecting financial incentive to student performance impacted the classroom practices for many K-12 public school teachers (Chakrabarti, 2014). The financial incentive for increased standardized test scores took form as The Florida School Recognition Program (FLDOE, n.d.), created by the Florida Legislature in 1997. The Florida School Recognition Program provides public recognition and financial awards to

schools that have sustained high student performance through the A+ Plan for Education standardized program (FLDOE, n.d.). The schools that have sustained high student performance and received financial awards have been well-performing schools even prior to the induction of NCLB. The schools that have historically struggled with student performance and would benefit from additional funding have not met the requirements of the A+ Plan for Education, thus perpetuating the economic divide affecting school performance.

The intellectual aspect of the teaching profession has been de-emphasized as much of the focus has been placed on accountability measures for student learning, with current education policies at federal, state, and district levels calling for direct, explicit, systematic teaching (Moats & Foorman, 2003). NCLB legislation stated that each state shall establish a timeline for adequate yearly progress. The timeline shall ensure that no later than 12 years after the 2001-2002 school year, all students will meet or exceed the state's proficient level of academic achievements on the state assessments (FLDOE, n.d.).

This goal did not, however, come to fruition. By the early 2000s, every state had developed its own learning standards that specified what students in grades K-12 should be able to do. Every state also had its own definition of proficiency, which is the level at which a student is determined to be sufficiently educated at each grade level and upon graduation (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], n.d.). This lack of standardization, compounded by the states' lack of meeting the national proficiency goal set by NCLB, led to the development of CCSSI (n.d.).

According to the official website for CCSSI (n.d.), the Common Core is defined as "a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language

arts/literacy...created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.” The initiative is hosted and maintained by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. In a “collaborative effort among teachers, school chiefs, administrators, and other experts” (CCSSI, n.d.), a consistent framework was developed for educators. By providing a framework rather than a scripted, mandated curriculum, teachers are given the potential to make decisions within the structure of their classrooms. The standards for the framework were created through the following criteria: (a) research- and evidence-based; (b) clear, understandable, and consistent; (c) aligned with college and career expectations; (d) based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills; (e) built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards; and (f) informed by other top performing countries in order to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society (CCSSI, n.d.). However, as of the completion of this study, only 42 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), with Florida not being one of them (CCSSI, n.d.). Instead, the Florida State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Florida Standards (FLDOE, n.d.). However, there are only marginal differences between the CCSS and the Florida Standards verbiage. With a new governor in office, the state standards resurfaced as a point of contention. Governor DeSantis has expressed his desire to be rid of the last vestiges of Common Core and make a bigger break with the national standards than Florida has made in the past (Bland, 2019). This research study looked at how teachers’ intersectionality impacts the choices they make in their classroom regarding English

Language Arts content and instructional practices, even though all teachers are expected to teach the grade-appropriate standards for their subject area.

In an effort to move forward in the field of education, former President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA, 2015), reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, 1965). ESEA was signed into a law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, who believed that “full educational opportunity should be our first national goal” (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], n.d.). From its beginning, ESEA was seen as a civil rights law, offering grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income college students (USDOE, n.d.). The Obama administration and U.S. Department of Education were becoming aware of how the prescriptive requirements of NCLB had become increasingly unworkable for schools and educators (USDOE, n.d.). While still a federally controlled initiative, the states have much more control with ESSA and work with the USDOE for specific accountability measures (Darrow, 2016). With the move towards standardizing education, many state and local policies have narrowed the curriculum, targeting specific curricular materials and pedagogical choices for teachers. The need has been expressed for such mandates to reconceptualize the notion of accountability by focusing more on the desired outcomes and allowing more flexibility with the means of instruction (Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006). The English Language Arts content area is no exception. The expectation is set that students will gain proficiency as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, but the means in which to achieve that proficiency are not consistently expressed.

## Statement of the Problem

There are numerous facets that go into being an educator. Unlike many other professions, it is nearly impossible to remove one's personal self from his or her professional self in the realm of education. Teaching is a craft that individuals hone and refine overtime, not a vocation that can be mass produced in uniformity (Pinar, 2012). While education systems vary greatly throughout the world, the current corporatization of the education system in the United States has commodified the role of the teacher, looking to run schools and school districts as businesses in efforts to gain the most output with the least amount of input (Pinar, 2012). An example of this would be Governor DeSantis's proposal to redefine public education in Florida. Among the proposal's many points, two points that support the idea of the corporatization of the education system are proposing performance-based bonuses rather than an increase in salary for teachers as well as creating a new private school voucher program funded by tax money that previously went to public school funding ("DeSantis redefines," 2019).

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1976) declared that knowledge is always an exercise of power and power always a function of knowledge. The power/knowledge relationship not only limits what we can do, but also opens new ways of acting and thinking about ourselves (Foucault, 1976). This idea influenced Foucault's work on governmentality. During his 1969 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault defined governmentality as the art of government, not confined to state politics but also as a means of controlling the general population (Foucault, 1970). Mayhew (2009) explained that governmentality represents the way governments try to produce the citizen best suited to fulfill government policy as well as the organized practices (e.g., mentalities,



rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed. Apple (1979) applied both the power/knowledge relationship and governmentality to the realm of schools and education. In his book, *Ideology and Curriculum*, Apple claimed that schools do not only control people, they also help control meaning. Since schools “preserve and distribute what is perceived to be legitimate knowledge, or the knowledge that we all must have, schools grant cultural legitimacy on the knowledge of specific groups” (Apple, 1979, p. 63).

In alignment with Pinar’s (2012) elucidations on the commodification of teachers, Apple (1979) stated that the ability of a group to make its knowledge into “knowledge for all” is related to that group’s power in the larger political and economic arena (p. 64). Power and culture, then, need to be seen not as static entities with no connection to each other, but as attributes of existing economic relations in a society. Apple avowed that schools exist through their relations to other more powerful institutions, institutions that are combined in such a way as to generate structural inequalities of power and access to resources. Through their curricular, pedagogical, and evaluative activities in day-to-day life in classrooms, schools play a significant role in preserving if not generating these inequalities. This raised concerns that while schools embody ideological rules that both preserve and enhance the existing structural relations, not all educators are part of a conscious conspiracy to keep those deemed of a lower social class in their place (Apple, 1979). Apple continued that many of the arguments about curriculum and the community put forth by educators are “generated out of many educators’ commonsense assumptions about teaching and learning, normal and abnormal behavior, important and unimportant knowledge, and so forth are conditions and forms of interaction [that reproduce structures

of inequality]” (p. 64). This study sought to explore how teacher intersectionality contributes to this social structure.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to uncover how who teachers are as people impacts what they do in their classrooms. The study examined how teachers’ personal lives (e.g., backgrounds and prior knowledge), their experiences with intersectionality (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation), and professional lives (e.g., pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices) influence one another. Specifically, this study explored the experience of high school English Language Arts teachers in a large school district in South Florida with the teaching of the required text, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Lee (1960). This novel was chosen due to its rich perspectival potentialities. With the issues of race, gender, and social class predominant throughout the novel, opportunities for the influence of the teachers’ intersectionalities on their curriculum choices were more prevalent than in other required grade level texts. Through the use of survey questionnaires, interviews, document analysis of unit lesson plans, and a focus group, a portrait of the relationship between teachers’ personal lives and professional lives was developed through a mixed-method phenomenological bounded case study, exploring the teachers’ perceptions of how they taught the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

### **Research Questions**

There were three research questions that served as the basis of this mixed-method phenomenological bounded case study:

RQ1: How does female English Language Arts teachers’ intersectionality impact their pedagogical beliefs?

RQ2: How does female English Language Arts teachers' intersectionality impact their curriculum design choices for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

RQ3: How do female English Language Arts teachers' pedagogical beliefs manifest themselves in the curriculum design for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

The first research question was answered through a survey questionnaire with support from the interviews and focus group. The first portion of the questionnaire addressed general demographic information, education background, and teaching background. Participants then had a series of 20 Likert-type questions addressing the level of importance regarding pedagogical beliefs with the aim of uncovering how their intersectionalities impacted them. A survey questionnaire was chosen to be administered as the first method of data collection to allow for participants to independently contemplate their pedagogical beliefs without outside influence or interference.

The second research question was answered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each of the participants, one focus group session with six of the seven participants, and a follow-up interview with these same six participants. The interviews looked to uncover the choices teachers made in the development and design of the curriculum unit for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method of data collection to allow the participants and researcher to have a more conversational exchange regarding the topic of education and curriculum choices. The focus group was used to allow for interaction between the participants regarding the relevance of the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The follow-up interviews were implemented to allow the researcher to discuss questions that arose or needed

clarification based on the participants' responses during the interviews, focus group, and/or survey questionnaire.

The third research question looked at how the pedagogical beliefs discovered through the survey questionnaire manifested themselves in the participants' curriculum design through the submission of unit lesson plans for the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The conclusions drawn from the analysis were based on the assumption that the unit lesson plans submitted for the research study had been or would be used for the novel unit in the participants' classrooms. The information from the survey questionnaire responses and unit lessons plans was triangulated with the data from the interviews and focus group.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the key assumptions of the poststructural movement. In May of 1968, students conducted protests in Paris due to the civil unrest caused by the ideologies and power structures being enforced at that time. During this period of crisis, an emergence of what started out as literary criticism evolved into an intellectual movement that has come to be known as poststructuralism. Due to the nature of the poststructuralist movement and thought, it is difficult to cultivate one clearly defined explanation of what poststructuralism means. Even within the movement itself, key figures such as Derrida and Foucault did not refer to themselves as poststructural theorists; rather, it is a distinction made about them by others. Both individuals started out as, until they reached the point, as many others did, of finding fault in the rigidity of the premises of structuralism (Brizee, Tompkins, Chernouski, & Boyle, 2017). At its root, the issue arose from structuralism's use of absolute truths as well as fixed binary

oppositions. Binary opposition is the means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined against what it is not (Fogarty, 2005). This term is derived from Saussure's (1959) structuralist theory, with examples such as hot/cold, good/bad, man/woman, absence/presence (Fogarty, 2005). Where poststructuralism found fault was with the rigidity of these fixed relationships—if something is not hot, it does not automatically mean it has to be cold.

Poststructuralism has a set of key assumptions under which it operates. For poststructuralists, the concept of “self” is a fictional construct (Mastin, 2008). This is not a concept that exists in the world, but rather it is constructed through an individual's views of herself or himself based on their cultural and social interactions. This lays the foundation for how text is understood and interpreted. When examining a text, whatever the author's intent was with his/her work, that intention is secondary to the reader's interpretation and perception of the text. It is through this fictionally constructed concept of self that the reader determines their interpretation and understanding of the text (Mastin, 2008). With the idea of there being no universal truths, there is not a right or wrong interpretation of a text. Therefore, there is a push to examine text from various perspectives. This allows for a more fleshed out, multi-faceted interpretation. Conflicting viewpoints and perspectives may pose a challenge that readers may shy away from, but it is through the exploration of those contradictions that an even richer experience may emerge from the interaction with the text. For English Language Arts teachers looking to embrace a poststructuralist approach in their classrooms, it is important to examine other sources for meaning when dealing with a text. Sources of meaning can include the

students [readers], cultural norms, and other texts. Therefore, meaning is never authoritative and it promises no consistency (Mastin, 2008).

Traditionally in school, students have been taught in a way that they are always seeking the *right answer*, meaning that they may in fact be coming up with the *wrong answers*. If a teacher employs a poststructuralist perspective to the curriculum, students who have traditionally been marginalized or felt like outsiders will be afforded the same opportunities to draw connections to the text. The key to this comes from Baudrillard's (1968) sentiment that an object only has meaning based on its relations to others from his book, *The System of Objects*. For this example, the object would be a piece of literature. There is not one right way to understand a novel. For instance, with the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a student's construction of his/her *self* will determine how he/she interprets the novel. It could be a story dealing with race, or gender norms, or social class inequities, depending on the reader's interpretation and perspective. For poststructuralists, having these various perspectives being viewed and discussed and questioned at the same time allows for a much richer, more critical understanding of the text, rather than the teacher telling students how they should be interpreting the text (Tisdell, 1998).

Baudrillard (1968) makes the distinction that objects have varying types of value. Kellner (2007) explained that functional value would refer to the object's instrumental purpose, meaning its value is in its use (e.g., a pen writes). Exchange value is the economic value of an object (e.g., one pen may be worth three pencils). Symbolic value is the value that a subject (person) assigns to an object in relation to another subject (e.g., a pen might symbolize a student's school graduation gift or a commencement speaker's

gift). Sign value is the object's value within a system of objects (e.g., a particular pen, while having no added functional benefit, may signify prestige relative to another pen). This is something for a teacher to keep in mind when approaching secondary English Language Arts curriculum from a poststructuralist lens.

It is understanding the different level of values that can affect the way a text resonates with students. For example, the novel can be viewed as the object, with *To Kill a Mockingbird* being considered a classic in current Western society; it is a text with which most people are familiar. This gives the book not only symbolic value, a rite of passage that students experience their freshmen year of high school, but also sign value (i.e., while having no additional functional benefit, it signifies cultural prestige) that these students are participating at a level of cultural literacy within the system they currently reside. Once value is given to a text, students can focus on the nuances of language, begin to question and form opinions, rather than just accept what they are being told is right. By removing the imposing idea that there is a universal truth, the ideas of poststructuralism are championed inclusively for all students to make connections and meaning for themselves, regardless of the author's intent or the teacher's interpretation (Tisdell, 1998).

Drawing from poststructuralism and two of its key theorists, Derrida and Foucault, this research study made the connection to feminist theory and the concept of intersectionality through the lens of Butler and Collins. In her seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) argued that gender is not an idea that exists biologically but rather a performance that perpetuates discursive norms. In Collins's (1990) key piece, *Black Feminist Thought*, the matrix of domination is introduced to explain how intersecting

oppression such as race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation are structurally organized. A concept map displaying the conceptual framework for the study can be referenced in Figure 1.

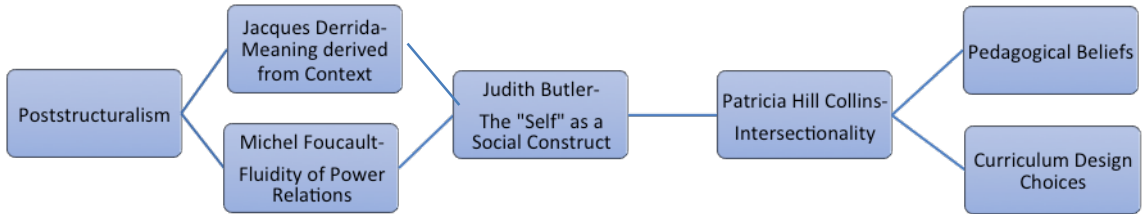


Figure 1. Concept map of conceptual framework.

### Definition of Terms

*Common Core State Standards (CCSS).* A set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade with a goal of college and career readiness (CCSSI, n.d.).

*Curriculum design.* A planned sequence of learning experiences, including the purpose of the curriculum (i.e., goals for student learning), content, instructional methods, instructional resources, evaluation approaches, and how adjustments to the plan will be made based on experience or assessment data (Center for Learning and Teaching, n.d.).

*Discourse.* Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices; ways of thinking and producing meaning (Weedon, 1987).

*Hegemonic.* Ruling or dominant a political or social context (“Hegemonic,” n.d.).



*Intersectionality.* A perspective on inequality that argues oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but instead *intersect* and help mutually reinforce and shape one another (Collins, 1990).

*Pedagogical beliefs.* The attitudes and values about teaching students, and the education process those teachers bring to classrooms; thoughts held by the teacher about the teaching and learning process (Khader, 2012).

*Social construct.* A concept or perception of something based on the collective views developed and maintained within a society or social group; a social phenomenon or convention originating within and cultivated by society or a particular social group, as opposed to existing inherently or naturally (“Social construct,” n.d.).

*Traditional Western canon of literature.* The fixed Western canon has been revered as the body of books, music, and art that are seen as the most important and influential in shaping Western culture, generally perceived as representing the high culture of Europe and North America (Searle, 1990).

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a multicultural course in my Master’s degree program, one assignment we were given was to write our epistemology. At this point in my life, I had been teaching for three years, but I did not have a degree in education, so I had never encountered the term, epistemology. The professor explained to me that, essentially, my epistemology is how I know what I know. I have always felt like I saw the world differently than other people, and that made life difficult sometimes, but I had never thought about the various facets of my life that determined my viewpoint. This assignment was more important than I realized because while I saw teaching as a job until I figured out what I wanted to do, my

viewpoint was no longer mine alone—consciously and unconsciously, I was imparting that viewpoint on my students. This experience served as the foundation for my critical viewpoint moving forward in my academic and professional studies.

When I was in first grade, I started going to Hebrew school at my temple. This is where we learned about Judaism, Jewish culture, and the Hebrew language. I can clearly remember in fifth grade during the holidays explaining to the teacher that I had to make a Christmas tree and a menorah because my mom was Catholic and my dad was Jewish. It was not until I moved to Seattle, Washington in middle school that I truly started to identify as an *Other*, years prior to my understanding of social constructs, or hearing Foucault (1976) defining the concept of being an Other as being in opposition to socially constructed discursive norms.

With or without a formal degree in education, I do not think much could prepare you for what it is like in a classroom. As the new teacher, I was given three different levels of readers. School always came easily to me and I had been in advanced classes, so the type of students who were in my classroom was not anything with which I was familiar. My home life was also very different from many of the students I had—my parents did not physically punish us, but rather they reasoned with us. I realized quickly that if the students had no frame of reference, I could reason with them until they were blue in the face and it would not make a difference. Thankfully, my love of books and reading rubbed off on a few of them. But as I saw in this study, pedagogy does not only address content area. Views on teaching and students are tied in with content when developing your pedagogical beliefs. Another experience I am thankful for in hindsight is having the toughest administrator of my career my first year teaching. I did not appreciate

it at the time, but this woman made me work hard on the menial tasks I thought were a waste of time in the education program, but I am thankful that I learned to do things by the book because it is something I have carried with me in my teaching career.

In my third year, I was given the gifted research classes. Everyone at the school where I taught took reading, but for the high achieving students, it was labeled a research class. Essentially, I got to create the curriculum myself, and I structured my class to be the class that would help the students be successful in all of their other classes. This is really where I hit my stride as a teacher and began to notice the difference between what was happening in my class versus other teachers' classrooms. I gained more confidence in myself because I knew I was good at what I was doing. However, in my fourth year there was a complete overhaul in administration at my school. While my principal ending a staff meeting with Bible quotes inspired a paper I wrote for my Master's degree in multicultural education, I had a fundamental issue working for people I did not respect. I was apprehensive about going to a new school, but my last year at the school found me with a new administrator, a demoted elementary school principal, and made my decision to leave a little easier.

The push for high standardized test scores was the driving force at the school. Technically, being the reading teacher, the responsibility of the test scores fell solely on me, but I could not in good conscious just teach to the test. As seen in the study, I began to question what the purpose of education was and that influenced what I chose to teach in my classroom. I felt it was my responsibility to prepare these 12-year-olds for the world. One afternoon, the administrator's secretary came to my classroom in the middle of class and informed me that my administrator wanted to see me. I was informed that we

were in the field of customer service and it was my job to make the parents happy. This was in reference to me confronting a student for copying another student's project from a different class period. I informed my administrator that I respectfully disagreed with him that education is a matter of customer service, to which he had no response. With the current power structure in place, it was not the norm for teachers, especially teachers with few years of teaching experience, to question or speak in opposition to administration.

Following this experience, I transitioned to teaching high school. Despite my trepidation, the transition was easy and I could not believe I had waited so long. I had a great principal who treated the faculty as professionals and fostered an environment of mutual respect. Coming from six years of creating my own curriculum, I was slightly concerned about how that would change once I was teaching a course required for graduation and not just enrichment. I found that the situation was not vastly different from my gifted research courses. There were the standard texts that were read in each grade level that I was expected to cover, but other than that, I was given autonomy over my classroom. Depending on a teacher's personal and professional experiences, this could prove an asset or a deficit to the students. Most of the texts I could recall from attending high school in the same school district in which I was teaching. Among other things, I thought back to how I had learned the texts as a student to inform my instructional practices. My graduate studies exploring issues of race, class, and gender in education also factored in to how I approached certain texts. My experience as an adjunct professor also influenced the choices I made in the classroom because I was able to see firsthand the skills that students in the final semesters of college degrees were lacking. Most importantly, I began to see how my students were starting to look at things from my

viewpoint, which I found both entertaining and interesting to observe. What I realized was my upbringing, beliefs, and experiences in and out the classroom that created my conception of myself were directly impacting my students' experiences in the classroom. Although all the students were reading the same texts, my students were having a very different experience with them than if they were in a different classroom because they were getting the texts from my perspective; my approach to instruction was a result of everything I have experienced in my life that has formed who I am up to this point. This led to the question of whether this is something positive or negative.

For this study, my focus was on the teaching of the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Lee (1960). Having taught this novel myself, I could not let my biases influence or interfere with the study. Much of my graduate work has been looking at issues dealing with race, social class, and gender in education, but my individual studies have focused heavily on gender. This becomes evident when I am teaching the novel in my classroom because although *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been taught as a novel addressing racial issues, in my classroom I include issues of social class and gender as well. Other factors that were taken into consideration were that my study was conducted at the school at which I am currently teaching with my colleagues as the participants. I was operating under the assumption that I teach the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* differently than my colleagues, so this research study provided insight to how others approached the novel based on their own intersectionalities.

### **Limitations**

Gender was a limitation of this study due to the demographics of the study's site: all of the participants were female. While this is representative of the demographics of

the teaching profession, there was a limited perspective within the role of gender by not having a male point of view. Another limitation is that one participant from the study changed schools partway through the study. This move prevented her from participating in the focus group and being available for further follow-up questioning.

### **Delimitations**

A delimitation imposed by the researcher was the scope of the study since it was conducted at only one site, which is where the researcher is currently employed. For the purposes of this study, the researcher only focused on one required text: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The last delimitation was that due to the site of the study being the researcher's current place of employment, the researcher had a working relationship with the participants of the study. While there are varying degrees of familiarity between the researcher and the participants, the researcher is on amiable terms with each teacher participating in the study.

### **Chapter Summary**

The goal of this research study was to look at how teachers' personal intersectionalities influenced their pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices, and what that looked like within their classrooms. The required text, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was used as a means of focus to provide continuity between the participants. This study used a phenomenological bounded case study research design, engaging in quantitative research methods through survey questionnaires, and qualitative research methods through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, a focus group, follow-up interviews, and document analysis of unit lesson plans.

This chapter provided background on the current state and climate of the education system in the United States. This chapter also provided the purpose for why this study was conducted, as well as a brief overview of the methodology that was used. Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth view of the conceptual framework for this study, as well a review of the literature related to this topic.

## CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature begins with an in-depth discussion of the conceptual framework being used for this study. This builds on the theoretical foundation provided in Chapter 1 with an exploration of the genesis of the poststructuralism movement through the works of Derrida and Foucault, then to the utilization by the third wave feminist movement to create the amalgamation of poststructural feminism from Butler's perspective and the role of intersectionality within third wave feminism under the guidance of Collins. Moving further, an explanation of the traditional Western canon of literature that currently dominates the English Language Arts curriculum in public schools is explored. Then, the literature review moves on to discuss the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Lee (1960). The literature review examines the use of the novel in the context of the classroom setting as well. From there the literature review explores the relationship between English Language Arts teachers' pedagogical beliefs and personal experiences and the choices they make regarding curriculum and their manners of instruction.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Poststructuralism**

Emerging from an opposition to structuralism's rigid use of universal truths and fixed binary oppositions, poststructuralism works to make visible the ways language operates to produce damaging structures in the world (St. Pierre, 2000). For Derrida (1968), a key figure of the origins of the poststructural movement, words do not have



intrinsic meaning; meaning is obtained through social context and is thus always changing. The goal is not to tear down current social structures, but to dismantle and rebuild the social structures in a way that is more inclusive of marginalized groups who have traditionally been oppressed or excluded.

**Jacques Derrida.** When Derrida presented his lecture “Signs, Structures, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” at John Hopkins University in 1966, the concept of deconstruction with which Derrida is most widely associated emerged. Considering himself a historian, Derrida looked at the nature of how knowledge was constructed throughout Western civilization. Derrida expressed that Western civilization was intrinsically oppressive; however, he did not think it possible or necessary to completely overthrow the current society. Poststructuralism is a tool that could be used for revolution, rather than for trying to achieve utopia. How this can be accomplished, according to Derrida (1968), is through the use of deconstruction, a literary and philosophical analysis of the underlying power structures which enable the perpetuation of the hegemonic hierarchies in place. By constant questioning and breaking down of the language that exists, Derrida felt that the system could be fought from within.

The idea of deconstruction was borrowed from Heidegger’s (2008) work, *Being and Time*. Heidegger developed a process of “exploring categories and concepts that tradition has imposed on a word, and the history behind them” (p. 21). Using this concept in application of textual reading, Zuckert (1996) explained that Derrida sought to address his concerns of the following issues:

- (a) A desire to contribute to the re-evaluation of all Western values, a re-evaluation built on the 18th-century Kantian critique of reason, and carried

forward to the 19th century, in its more radical implications, by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche; (b) An assertion that texts outlive their authors, and become part of a set of cultural habits equal to, if not surpassing, the importance of authorial intent; and (c) A re-valuation of certain classic western dialectics: poetry vs. philosophy, reason vs. revelation, structure vs. creativity, episteme vs. techne, etc. (p. 202)

Representing the language component of poststructuralism, Derrida (1968) asserted that “there is no outside-text” when observing where the meanings of words come from (p. 220). This has often been mistranslated as meaning that there is nothing outside of the text, but according to Derrida (1988), he was referring to the unavoidability of context. Lending itself to the non-essentialist facet of poststructuralism, Derrida asserted that all text is constructed around oppositions and the constructs only produce meaning through the interplay of differences within a system of distinct signs (Royle, 2004). During the analysis process of this study, Derrida was used to explore how meaning is obtained through social context and is thus always changing. Derrida was also used when looking at how knowledge is constructed and how deconstruction can be used to address underlying power structures that are perpetuating hegemonic hierarchies such as those seen in the school system.

**Michel Foucault.** St. Pierre (2000) stated that power is often thought to be inherently evil. Therefore, those concerned with social justice often try to give away some of their power to avoid domination by empowering those less fortunate than themselves. Resistance to domination is practiced by self-contained, autonomous individuals in response to an external oppressive force that challenges the liberty of the individual. However, Foucault interpreted power differently. In his work, *Discipline and*

*Punish*, Foucault (1984) theorized that power is no longer considered to belong to an individual or to be negative but, instead, power exists in relations. In human relationships, power is always present. In a relationship in which one person tries to reduce another to a position of subordination, power relations are not fixed once and for all—they are mobile, reversible, and unstable (Foucault, 1984).

According to Foucault (1984), power is not something that can be acquired, seized, or shared. For power relations, there must be a certain level of freedom on both sides. Foucault (1976) explained in *The History of Sexuality* that power is not an institution or a structure, but it is a dynamic situation—there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and the ruled. Foucault explains further that certain sociocultural practices can produce states of domination by blocking relations of power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1984) suggested that power is not inherently evil or negative, but is a means of production. For poststructuralists, what is important is to analyze relations of power in order to learn what exactly is being produced (St. Pierre, 2000). In this study, Foucault was used to look at the role power played in various relations: school districts and school administration, school administrators and classroom teachers, English Language Arts teachers and students, and English Language Arts teachers and their colleagues. Foucault's theory of power relations also influenced the interpretation the participants' responses gathered from the multiple forms of data.

### **Judith Butler's Poststructural Feminism**

Similar to the struggle Derrida and Foucault had with structuralism's universal truths, Butler became a significant figure in the ushering in of a third wave of feminism in the 1990s with her book, *Gender Trouble*, a critique of the idea the experiences of

women were universal (Butler, 1990). The first wave of feminism was associated with the suffragette movement and legally mandated inequalities between men and women. The second wave of feminism was associated with women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s of less official but more social practices of inequality between men and women. The aim of the third wave of feminism was to abolish gender role expectations and stereotypes (Snyder, 2008). This is why the poststructural feminist movement is synonymous with third wave feminism: "Poststructuralists insist that words and texts have no fixed or intrinsic meanings, that there is no transparent or self-evident relationship between them and either ideas or things, no basic or ultimate correspondence between language and the world" (Scott, 1988, p. 32). Inspired by this interrogation of fixed binary oppositions, in 1990, Butler released her seminal piece, *Gender Trouble*.

Pulling from the poststructuralists before her, Butler provided the feminist component by pulling from the argument against binary oppositions, as well as the idea that gender itself is a social construct perpetuated by discourse. St. Pierre (2000) explained that discourse organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world. Unfortunately, once discourse is seen as normal and natural, it is very difficult, but not impossible, to act outside of it. Poststructural feminist views of discourse allow for an understanding of how knowledge, truth, and subjects are produced in language and cultural practices (St. Pierre, 2000). For Butler (1990), gender is a social construction founded in discourse.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) borrowed from de Beauvoir's (1949) *The Second Sex* when explaining the concept of gender: Gender is the repeated stylization of the body; a set of repeated acts over time to produce the appearance of substance. This

means, as de Beauvoir expressed, that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman. Woman itself is a term in process—it is never possible to finally become a woman because of the discursive nature of the concept. Butler (1990) built on this by explaining that the gender binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine were developed through the performance of acts trying to assert common characteristics and interests of gender relations reinforced by a patriarchal culture. Gender is seen then as what you do, rather than a universal sense of who you are. Butler took issue with this internalized performance because it generates the idea that a gendered cultural experience is seen as an achievement. The idea of “feeling like a real woman,” or “not feeling like a real man,” should not be seen as acts of achievement or failure (Butler, 1990, pp. 171-90). Butler thought there was a real danger in trying to universally define women because much was cut out in the attempt. Akin to the poststructural sentiment of no universal truths, Butler argued that one must think more locally and specifically, not only regarding the society at large, but even within the feminist movement itself. In the current study, Butler’s assertions were used to look at issues that arose when certain discourse is accepted as the norm. Also, during the analysis process, Butler’s explanation of the *self* as a social construct helped to interpret the data provided by the teacher participants.

### **Intersectionality**

With intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw in 1989, there is not one aspect that defines a person. An individual does not choose to only be White, or only be poor, or only be a woman, or only be Jewish, or only be homosexual. It is the intersections of each of these facets that make up a whole person, and it is a disservice to all those involved to ignore, silence, or marginalize one piece over another. This is why the concept of self is a

fictional construct, not something that actually exists. For Butler (1990), instead of feeling the need to fit in a certain box, the use of constricting labels should be completely abolished.

Although the term was coined by Crenshaw, *intersectionality* in relation to third wave feminism is most closely associated with Collins. According to Collins (1990), intersectionality is a viewpoint on inequality that argues that oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but instead *intersect* and help mutually reinforce and shape one another. An additional layer to this concept is that for Butler (1990), with influence of poststructuralism, the concepts of *race, class, gender, and sexuality* are social constructions—concepts based on social practices and customs rather than biological or inherent things that exist independently in the world. In her work *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (1990) argued that the gender inequality that Black women have historically experienced is related to but conditionally different from the gender inequality experienced by White women. This is not because of essential differences between Black and White women, but because White women have historically been racially privileged while Black women have been dominated through race as well as gender.

Intersectionality played a role in the third wave feminist movement because, as hooks (2014) articulated, intersectionality challenges the notion that gender is the primary factor determining a woman's fate. Collins (2000) argued that cultural patterns of oppression were not only interrelated, but were bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society such as race, gender, and class. For Collins (1990), these systems form interlocking oppressions within the matrix of domination. The matrix of

domination works in four different domains: the structural domain, the disciplinary domain, the hegemonic domain, and the interpersonal domain. Collins (1990) explained the function of each domain as such: “The structural domain functions to organize power and oppression, the disciplinary manages oppression in attempts to sustain it, the hegemonic functions to legitimize oppression, and the interpersonal domain controls the interactions and consciousness of individuals” (p. 276). Feminists have argued that an understanding of intersectionality is a vital component to gaining political and social equality and improving our democratic system (D’Agostino & Levine, 2011).

In alignment with poststructuralism’s opposition towards fixed binaries, Collins (1986) pointed towards either/or thinking as an influence on the oppression of women in society, to which she referred as the construct of dichotomous oppositional difference. This construct is characterized by its focus on differences rather than similarities. While Derrida (1968) asserted that it is through differences that meaning is constructed, Collins’s (1986) emphasis on differences being the focal point carries a negative connotation. Collins’s explanations of intersectionality were used when developing an understanding of the participants and how their identities were constructed. While gender, social class, and sexual orientation were not very prevalent in the findings of the study, Collins’s discussion of the role of cultural pattern of oppression was employed when looking at issues of race.

### **Summary**

For this study, poststructuralism served as the foundation of the conceptual framework. Operating under the guise that there are no absolute truths and an aversion to fixed binary oppositions, this study drew from poststructuralism’s key figures in

examining the power of language within teachers' pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices. Derrida provided insight for how meaning is constructed while Foucault examined the relations of power. This study connected those concepts through Butler's amalgamation of poststructural feminism, emphasizing social constructs and the role of intersectionality through the lens of Collins.

## **The Traditional Canon of Western Literature**

### **Arguments For and Against the Traditional Canon of Western Literature**

According to Altieri (1981), canons are an institutional form of exposing people to a range of idealized attitudes. This would lend to the notion that the canon should shift and evolve along with the ideals of society to accurately reflect those ideals. The fixed Western canon has been revered as the body of books, music, and art that are seen as the most important and influential in shaping Western culture, generally perceived as representing the high culture of Europe and North America (Searle, 1990). H. Bloom (1994) asserted that the canon of books has been the most stable throughout history, but the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially since the 1960s, has seen much debate over the nature of the canon, with a push for more of a presence from women and racial minorities. Stevenson (2007), an American philosopher, framed the argument as such:

In the postmodern period, traditional literature has been found to have been written by 'dead white males' to serve the *ideological* aims of a conservative and repressive Anglo *hegemony*... In an array of reactions against the race, gender, and class biases found to be woven into the tradition of Anglo literature, multicultural writers and political literary theorists have sought to expose, resist, and redress injustices and prejudices. (pp. 9-10)



On the other hand, A. Bloom (1987) made the argument that moral degradation is the result of individuals being ignorant of the great classics that have shaped Western culture. Searle (1990) defended the canon further when he explained how he saw the canon with such items as the works of Socrates and the *Federalist Papers* to be liberation from traditional American politics and ideologies. Searle went on to explain further that if one asserts a critical attitude, the canon can serve to demythologize the conventional ideologies of the American bourgeoisie and provide a perspective from which to critically analyze American culture and institutions. Searle found it ironic that the same tradition was now regarded as oppressive—the texts that once served an unmasking function are now the texts thought to need the unmasking. For Foucault (1976), the relationship between power and knowledge is used as a form of social control through societal institutions such as schools and universities. Power and knowledge are not seen as independent entities but are inextricably related—knowledge is always an exercise of power and power is always a function of knowledge (Foucault, 1976). According to Foucault, power/knowledge can be seen as productive as well as constraining—power/knowledge not only limits what we can do, but also opens up new ways of acting and thinking about ourselves. This study aimed to explore how this power/knowledge relationship influenced the teacher participants' personal lives and experiences in a multitude of situations: teachers and administration and teachers and students, as well as teachers and parents.

### **The Canon in the Classroom**

Mackey, Vermeer, Storie, and DeBlois (2012) thought to explore the extent to which English teachers may feel a cultural or social duty to teach classics, which H.

Bloom (1994) defined as a book that has been accepted as exemplary or noteworthy.

Mackey et al. (2012) went further by stating that teaching the classics does not mean that the curriculum is stalled in the past, but rather as a sign of success:

If texts have not changed for many years it is because they continue to be successful texts in the classroom, if by successful we mean that they continue to be enjoyed by most students...they continue to be thought highly of and enjoyed by the teachers who teach them. (p. 50)

The Mackey et al. study showed that in a 20-year span, there was very little change in the most popular titles being taught in the high school English classroom. While the study showed the widespread establishment of the traditional Western canon, the researchers were still left questioning whether change is needed or desirable. What the researchers failed to delve further into was the role of the students in this decision. The success of the traditional texts is gauged on teachers' discussions without taking into account the lack of multiethnic staff who are represented in the multicultural dimensions of their classrooms.

Pike (2003) conducted a study on the relevance of the English literature canon to adolescent readers of diverse backgrounds and identities. The relevancy debate is one that arose from students and teachers alike. Pike acknowledged that the relevance of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century literature to the lives of young people growing up in a multicultural society seems limited, but he asserted that it is important to recognize that relevance is not dependent upon the writer and the reader residing within the same culture or having similar backgrounds. This was supported by literary theorist Iser's (1971) explanation of the nature of indeterminacy in literary texts:

Literary work does not reside entirely with the reader's own experiences; if it did, it would not be indeterminate, and indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation. One of the chief values of literature is that by its very indeterminacy it is able to transcend the restrictions of time and written word and to give to people of all ages and backgrounds the chance to enter other worlds. (p. 45)

Pike (2003) explained that it is not the texts themselves that are the issue, but how teachers are using them. When the literature is used to address the needs and realities of the world our students actually inhabit, Pike asserted that the teaching of literature from the past to schools with students from diverse social contexts is justified. By taking an active and exploratory approach to the readings, students are provided with opportunities to consider the human experience in other times and other places. Pike continued that with proper pedagogy, traditional texts can take on meaning in relation to very different ideological conditions of contemporary life.

In poststructuralism, the reader plays a role of fundamental importance in making meaning of texts in the classroom (Bush, 1995). The traditional pedagogy practiced in which a piece of literature has a singular objective, existence, and meaning has been rejected. Poststructuralist argue against structuralism's claims of culturally independent meaning, instead viewing culture as inseparable from meaning ("Post-structuralism," 2015). As previously mentioned, a poststructuralist approach must be able to utilize a variety of perspectives to create a multifaceted interpretation of a text, even if these interpretations conflict with one another. It is particularly important to analyze how the

meanings of a text shift in relation to certain variables, usually involving the identity of the reader (Mastin, 2008).

Bush (1995) suggested that reader response theory would build on poststructuralism's concept of deconstruction. Reader response theory is most interested in how individuals read the same text in vastly different ways, which would support Pike's (2003) assertion that literature of the past, such as the traditional Western canon, is still relevant. As Applebee (1994) pointed out, the primary objective of the English curriculum should be the enhancement and maintenance of the conversational feature of culture within the domain of the English classroom; content that does not invoke further conversation is of no interest—it is dead as well as deadly. For Pike (2003), past texts can still serve this function.

### **The Traditional Western Canon Versus the Common Core**

With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards, a shift in focus was made in hopes of equalizing the level of college and career readiness of students upon the completion of a K-12 education (Schieble, 2014). As explained in Chapter 1, the Common Core is defined as

a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy... created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. (CCSSI, n.d.)

For English Language Arts teachers, this created two major instructional shifts: increasing the number of non-fiction texts being taught and engaging in a study of complex texts throughout the K-12 lifespan (Schieble, 2014). The issue arises as to *what*

qualifies as complex text and *who* is making that decision. The authors of the Common Core, in conjunction with reading research and the professional community, came up with tools to assist in this decision-making. The first area of consideration is quantitative features such as Lexile levels and readability formulas. The Lexile Framework for Reading (Lexile, n.d.) quantitatively measures the reading ability and text complexity of reading materials based on individual words and sentence length. This leads to the necessity of second area to consider, which is qualitative measures such as multiple levels of meaning and/or maturity of themes and content (Schieble, 2014). An appendix was offered with the CCSS of text exemplars that have been deemed sufficiently complex to be taught at each grade level. These texts are categorized by stories, drama, poetry, and informational texts. Table 1 is an excerpt from this appendix of the text exemplars for Grades 9-10.

Table 1

*Common Core 9-12 Text Exemplar List*

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**Grades 9-10 Text Exemplars**

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Stories:

Homer. *The Odyssey*

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*

Gogol, Nikolai. "The Nose".

De Voltaire, F. A. M. *Candide, Or The Optimist*

Turgenev, Ivan. *Fathers and Sons*

Henry, O. "The Gift of the Magi"

Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*

Olsen, Tillie. "I Stand Here Ironing"

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Shaara, Michael. *The Killer Angels*

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*

Álvarez, Julia. *In the Time of the Butterflies*

Zusak, Marcus. *The Book Thief*

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*Note.* Adapted from "Reframing equity under common core: A commentary on the text exemplar list for grades 9-12," by M. Schieble, 2014, *English Teaching*, 13, p. 166.

Schieble's (2014) critique of the text exemplar list for the Grades 9-12 argued the necessity of critical literacy as "a frame readers bring to a text to surface messages that normalize ideas about race, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation...in this situation where a teacher's professional judgement is a major factor in curricular choices" (p. 157). Schieble understood that the kinds of texts English Language Arts teachers select for their classrooms greatly influence the ways students understand and perform their

multiple and intersecting identities in the world. From Schieble’s analysis of the text exemplars list, it was noted that the list is heavily influenced by Harvard University’s English Department’s list of required reading and the College Board Advanced Placement Examination. Applebee (1994) explored the most frequently required titles in Grades 9-12 with findings from public schools, Catholic schools, and independent schools. While the order of the titles varies, each classification of schools have primarily the same top 10 required texts. It was noted that the most current title is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which was published in 1960. Table 2 displays the top 10 most frequently required titles and the percentage of schools within each classification that require them.

Table 2

*Most Frequently Required Titles, Grades 9-12 and Percent of Schools*

Public Schools		Catholic Schools		Independent Schools	
Romeo and Juliet	84%	Huckleberry Finn	76%	Macbeth	74%
Macbeth	81%	Scarlett Letter	70%	Romeo and Juliet	66%
Huckleberry Finn	70%	Macbeth	70%	Huckleberry Finn	56%
Julius Caesar	70%	To Kill a Mockingbird	67%	Scarlett Letter	52%
To Kill a Mockingbird	9%	Great Gatsby	64%	Hamlet	51%
Scarlet Letter	62%	Romeo and Juliet	63%	Great Gatsby	49%
Of Mice and Men	56%	Hamlet	60%	To Kill a Mockingbird	47%
Hamlet	55%	Of Mice and Men	56%	Julius Caesar	42%
Great Gatsby	54%	Julius Caesar	54%	Odyssey	39%
Lord of the Flies	54%	Lord of the Flies	34%	Lord of the Flies	34%

*Note.* Adapted from “Stability and change in the high-school canon,” by A. N. Applebee, 1994, *English Journal*, 81, p. 28.

In alignment with the argument against the continued use of the traditional canon, Schieble (2014) pointed out that for the 9-10 Grade band, 85% of the works were written by White authors and 80% were written by male authors. For the 11-12 Grade band, it is

a similar situation, with 78% White authors and 73% male authors. While this is an improvement from Applebee’s (1994) study of text lists where 98% of the authors were White and 81% of the authors were male, the focus is still Eurocentric, with the addition of diversity still treated as “other” (p. 158). Table 3 demonstrates the percentages of authors across categories.

Table 3

*Percent of Authors/Categories in Common Core Appendix B*

Grade Level	Type of Author	Percentage
Grades 9-10	Male Authors	37/46 = 80%
	Female Authors	9/46 = 19%
	Authors of Color	7/46 = 15%
	LGBT authors/themes	0/46 = 0%
	Contemporary (1990-)	3/46 = .06%
Grades 11-12	Male Authors	39/54 = 72%
	Female Authors	15/54 = 27%
	Authors of Color	12/54 = 22%
	LGBT authors/themes	0/54 = 0%
	Contemporary (1990-)	7/54 = 13%

*Note.* Adapted from “Reframing equity under common core: A commentary on the text exemplar list for grades 9-12,” by M. Schieble, 2014, *English Teaching*, 13, p. 159.

Within the third wave feminist movement, feminist literary criticism has followed in the tradition of the Frankfurt School’s approach to critical theory, which analyzes how dominant ideology of a subject influences societal understanding (Barry, 2002). However, as part of the deconstruction of existing relations of power aligned with poststructuralism, modern feminist criticism dealt with those issues related to the perceived intentional and unintentional patriarchal programming within key aspects of



society, including education (Barry, 2002). Third wave feminists and feminist literary critics are working to include more identities and aspects of intersectionality.

VanNewkirk (2006) stated that third wave feminism and feminist literary criticism is concerned more with the intersection of race and other feminist concerns. As a result, there is a push for the variety and nature of the curriculum to include more texts from transnational perspectives with their exploration of globalization, while still maintaining their roots in analyzing how male-dominated society affects the interpretation and creation of literature.

Schieble (2014) pointed out that an overarching goal for the CCSS was to address race and social class inequities in schools that has resulted in unequal access to college and career preparedness. For Schieble, the exemplar texts are not enough to alter the systemic inequality being faced. Her solution was to not disregard the text exemplars but pair the works with coordinating contemporary texts. This, Schieble asserted, will provide an opportunity for a more engaged, critical interaction with the texts in a classroom. Within the realm of deconstruction, Derrida (1968) placed emphasis on the theme of responsibility to the other, paying close attention to sameness and difference (Reynolds, 2017). As one of the key assumptions of poststructuralism, meaning is derived through the reader's interpretation, regardless of the author's intent.

Deconstruction supports that, in any text, there are inevitably points of equivocation that betray any stable meaning that an author might seek to impose on his or her text (Reynolds, 2017). This is why multiple perspectives must be applied to classroom texts and open a dialogue among teachers and students. Even if viewpoints conflict, that is the beginning of the process of deconstruction. As Reynolds (2017) explained, the

intervention of deconstructed readings of text reside in the neglected cornerstones of an already existing system. Most importantly, teachers need to be cognizant of the implied required use of professional judgement with the CCSS documents. Thompson (2014) suggested that to promote pedagogical and literary consciousness, it is crucial that English teachers with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and experience levels engage in professional development opportunities that go beyond reading strategies or text exemplars.

### **Summary**

The merit of teaching the traditional canon of Western literature is a topic often up for debate. Arguments can be made as to the social and cultural duty of teaching the classics, as well as the need for a more inclusive, diverse collection of texts in the classroom. Moving forward in the age of CCSS, the traditional canon of Western literature still holds a place in development of today's youth. The works of literature cannot be viewed in isolation—the instruction of the texts is a key factor as to the relevance of the texts. If used in conjunction with more contemporary pieces, the traditional canon of Western literature can still be used in the development and nurturing of students' identities and sense of selves.

This study is unique in that it brought into focus the tenets of poststructuralism, emphasizing the role of the reader as taking precedence over the author's intent with his/her work. It is the reader's construction of his/her *self* that serves as the basis for how the texts of the traditional Western canon are interpreted and understood. The push to examine texts from varying and sometimes conflicting perspectives allows for a deeper connection and relatable experience for all parties involved.

## ***To Kill a Mockingbird* in the Classroom**

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird*, the Novel**

In a 1991 survey by the Book of the Month Club and the Library of Congress Center for the Book found that *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Lee (1960) was rated behind only the Bible in books that are “most often cited as making a difference” (Johnson, 1994, p. 19). The novel has appeared on numerous other lists that describe its impact. In 1999, it was voted the “Best Novel of the 20th century” by readers of the *Library Journal*. It is listed as number five on the *Modern Library's Reader's List* of the 100 Best Novels in the English language since 1900 and number four on the rival *Radcliffe Publishing Course's* “100 Best Board Picks for Novels and Nonfiction.” *To Kill a Mockingbird* appeared first on a list developed by librarians in 2006 who answered the question, “Which book should every adult read before they die?” (Khan, 2008).

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was written during the impetus of the Civil Rights Movement, influenced by injustices seen in the Scottsboro Boys trials. The Scottsboro Boys were nine young Black men, falsely accused of raping two White women on board a train near Scottsboro, Alabama in 1931, during the same time period *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place. The nine young men were first removed from the train on the minor charge of riding the train illegally. When the Scottsboro deputies found the two young White women, they pressured the women into accusing the young men of raping them on the train. Within two weeks, the boys were convicted—eight were sentenced to death and the youngest, age 13, was sentenced to life imprisonment (Carter, 1979). The American Communist Party (CP) and the International Labor Defense (ILD) stepped in to represent the nine young men. After two trials with all-White juries convicted the boys,

the CP and ILD began national protests, drawing the attention of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Eventually one of the women came forward to renounce her testimony, acknowledging that she and the other young girl had been pressured into falsely accusing the boys (Foner & Shapiro, 1991). This led to the case going to the United States Supreme Court in 1937. All nine boys were saved from execution, but it took almost 20 years for the last boy to be freed from prison (Carter, 1979). The premise of this trial was echoed in the trial of Tom Robinson, who was accused of rape and convicted because he was Black and the accuser was White, despite his being innocent of the crime.

Lee's life also provided much of the inspiration for this novel. The main protagonist of Scout is modeled after Lee herself—born in 1926, Lee would have been the same age as Scout in the timeline of the novel. A self-described tomboy, Lee and Scout both grew up in a small town in Alabama. While both Lee and Scout's fathers were lawyers, Lee's mother suffered from mental illness and rarely left the house, with Scout's mother having died while she was young (Shields, 2006). Like Scout, Lee was more interested in reading and writing than fashion, makeup, or other traditionally feminine things.

One of Lee's closest childhood friends was the writer Truman Capote, who was depicted as the character of Dill. With Lee being tougher than many of the boys, she often acted as Capote's protector. Like Dill, Capote was often picked on for the fancy clothes he wore and for being sensitive (Shields, 2006). Despite their differences, Lee and Capote, as well as Scout and Dill, found a sense of solace in each other due to their

unorthodox and sometimes difficult home lives. This unorthodox upbringing can be seen reflected in Scout and Jem's nontraditional views of the social affairs of the town.

Lee's own father's failed attempts at defending a Black man and his son accused of murder can also be seen as an influence for Atticus's role in the trial of Tom Robinson, central to the plot of the story. Along with the influence of Lee's hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, the story has a parallel plot structure, told from the perspective of the young protagonist, Scout, speaking as an adult of events that happened in her childhood (National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], 2006). The first plot revolved around Arthur "Boo" Radley, a recluse who lived down the street from the Finches and was rumored to be some kind of monster. Scout, Jem, and their friend Dill engaged in pranks, trying to make Boo show himself. Unexpectedly, Boo reciprocated their interest with a series of small gifts, eventually showing himself to be an honorable and heroic character. The second plot line involved Scout and Jem's father, the attorney Atticus Finch. The local judge appointed him to defend a Black man, Tom Robinson, who was falsely accused of raping a White woman. Atticus suspected he would lose the case, but he faced the challenge just the same. This could be seen when, at one heroic point in the story, Atticus physically stepped between his client and a lynch mob (NEA, 2006).

In addition to the parallel plot lines, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has two broad themes: tolerance and justice. Lee addressed the first theme through a conversation towards the beginning of the novel that Atticus has with Scout after her first day of school. Scout expressed her frustration with her new teacher and how Miss Caroline did not know anything about how things worked in Maycomb. In perhaps one of the most famous quotes from the novel, Atticus explained to Scout that "You never really understand a

person until you consider things from his point of view.... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it” (Lee, p. 39). Lee illustrated the second theme of justice through instances of injustice. Tom Robinson’s trial revolved around the injustices he faced as a result of racism. Although all of the evidence during the trial proved Tom’s innocence, Atticus divulged a hard truth: “In our courts, when it’s a White man’s word against a Black man’s, the White man always wins” (Lee, p. 295). The wrongful conviction led to the death of Tom. For some, the ending of the book where Bob Ewell, the White man responsible for Tom’s conviction and therefore his death, is ostracized and then killed can be seen as justice for the injustices against Tom.

### ***To Kill a Mockingbird in the Classroom***

When Milburn (2001) asked his high school freshmen which book had survived the English class treatment of nightly assignments, class discussions, and tests while still sustaining their interest, the students unanimously endorsed *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, the novel has not reached the status of “The Great American Novel” (Khan, 2008) without a bit of controversy. Table 4 highlights numerous instances of controversy related to the teaching of the *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Table 4

*Instances of To Kill a Mockingbird Banned and/or Challenged*

Place/Date	Status	Issue
Eden Valley, MN (1977)	Challenged and temporarily banned	Use of the words “damn” and “whore lady” in the novel.
Vernon Verona Sherill, NY School District (1980)	Challenged	Was deemed as “filthy, trashy novel.”
Warren, IN Township schools (1981)	Challenged	Does “psychological damage to the positive integration process” and “represents institutionalized racism under the guise of good literature.”
Waukegan, IL School District (1984)	Challenged	Use of the word “nigger.”
Kansas City, MO, Casa Grande, AZ, and Park Hill, MO Junior High Schools (1985)	Challenged; retained on supplemental 8 <sup>th</sup> grade reading list	Contains “profanity and racial slurs.”
Santa Cruz, CA Schools (1995)	Challenged	Racial themes
Southwood High School Library in Caddo Parish, LA (1995)	Removed	Language and content were objectionable
Moss Point, MS School District (1996)	Challenged	Contains “a racial epithet.”
Lindale, TX (1996)	Banned from the advanced placement English reading list	“Conflicted with the values of the community.”
Normal, IL Community High School's sophomore literature class (2003)	Challenged	Book is “being degrading to African Americans.”
Stanford Middle School in Durham, NC (2004)	Challenged	Use of the word “nigger.”
Brentwood, TN Middle School (2006)	Challenged	Contains “profanity” and “contains adult themes such as sexual intercourse, rape, and incest.” Use of racial slurs promotes “racial hatred, racial division, racial separation, and promotes white supremacy.”

*Note.* Adapted from *Banned books: Challenging our freedom to read*, by R. P. Doyle, 2010.

While there are various themes and perspectives that can be addressed through the teaching of the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one topic that emerges often is that of race. In her 2015 study, Thomas reminded the reader that speaking about race in schools is fraught with difficulty, oftentimes leading to problematic conversations, disconnect, and lack of student engagement. This was not a reason to not engage in these conversations—it was more proof that these conversations about important and sometimes controversial topics need to take place until they are not as uncomfortable. Thomas noted that while the role of race in discourse has been explored through psychology, sociology, and linguistics, it has less often been looked at in regards to English education, especially research on the teaching of literature. When teaching novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, conversations regarding the history of race relations in the United States as well as contemporary race relations naturally occur. This relates back to Foucault's (1984) theory of power, which noted that the analysis of power relations is fundamental not only to our social relations, but to our knowledge of the world and ourselves (Sorensen, 2014). Two areas of focus within this analysis are subjectivity, which is the way we relate to ourselves, and the way we are with people and things around us. Modes of subjectivity are determined by this double relation: the subject's interaction with itself and with others (Sorensen, 2014). Foucault (1984) explored how social norms and constructs shape society and thus shapes individuals, allowing certain structures to exist. The power of the norm, Foucault (1976) explained, is the internalization of social dogmas such as racial prejudice.

Because conversations about race in literature mirror conversations about race in our society, they can often be met with great difficulty (Thomas, 2015). Maher (2013)



used *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a unit investigating the school-to-prison pipeline. In order to explore various factors affecting this dilemma, Maher divided the text into relevant cultural studies issues: single parent homes, lynching and racial discrimination, the criminal justice system, and poverty. The key was to help teachers navigate the reading, writing, and discussion throughout this process; but, as of yet, there has been limited research as to what is currently occurring in the classroom (Thomas, 2015). Again, the suggestion of professional development presents itself in terms of language and the role of race in English Language Arts classroom discourse (Thomas, 2015), but without specific suggestions of what that would entail.

As mentioned previously, Applebee (1994) proclaimed that the primary objective of the English Language Arts curriculum should be the enhancement and maintenance of the conversational feature of culture within the classroom. To create such a domain within the classroom requires content that invokes further conversation. For Tisdell (1998), the goal in the classroom of a poststructural feminist educator is to create opportunities that will help students explore the connection between who they are as individuals and the structural systems of privilege and oppression (e.g., race, social class, gender, sexual orientation) that partially inform how they think and construct knowledge on an individual and collective level. The positions of teachers and students within that structure, as well as the role of authority and shared power, are key to a classroom that reflects the poststructural feminist ideals (Tisdell, 1998). This study sought to examine the interplay between the varying power relations and the teacher participants' intersectionalities.

## Summary

It can be seen through its many accolades as well as decades of controversy that the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* has become a staple in the social and cultural climate of the United States. While the instruction of the novel is widespread among public and private schools, there are many areas that may be addressed beyond the novel itself. Story structure and language use are two academic areas that can easily be studied. More contemporary issues leading into discussions surrounding race, poverty, and similar issues are often cause for discomfort with teachers and students alike. While the teaching of this novel is still causing controversy, such as the recent challenge of teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* in Mississippi for the use of racial slurs, this study looked at how teachers' subjective identities informed the instruction of such a complex, divisive, popular novel.

### **The Relationship Between English Language Arts Teachers' Personal Lives and Classroom Practices**

There have been research studies conducted that focus on teachers as a general population, but studies focusing on English Language Arts teachers added an additional factor to the equation by not only looking at the role beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and knowledge play on decisions made in the classroom, but also uncovering the relationship between the role literacy plays in the teachers' lives outside of the classroom and the role teachers' lives outside of the classroom play on their classroom literacy experiences and instruction. Gomez (2009) sought to uncover how teachers make the connection between their personal literate selves and professional literate selves. Gomez defined teachers' literate selves as "their sense of self as literate people, their knowledge and beliefs about

literacy, and their values and dispositions toward literacy in and out of the classroom” (p. 21). Gomez explained that it is this literate self that determines how teachers create contexts for connecting literacy for students in the classroom. Gomez’s findings suggested that teachers value literacy, recognize the importance of literacy in their personal and professional lives, and believe that their personal literate selves are all connected to their professional literate selves. Teachers in the study who showed more enthusiasm for literacy also held strong beliefs about how a personal value of literacy directly impacts literacy pedagogy in the classroom (Gomez, 2009). Teachers from the study who were less enthusiastic about literacy felt it was central to the educational needs of students, but did not see a direct relationship between personal literacy and literacy pedagogy in the classroom.

Besides teachers’ view of their literate selves, both in their personal and professional lives, Golombek (1998) took it a step further by exploring language teachers’ personal practical knowledge. Golombek explained that personal practical knowledge is “personalized through the narrative reconstruction of experiences as learners and teachers” (p. 447). Golombek argued that the teachers’ personal practical knowledge informed their practice in two distinct ways: (a) by filtering experience so that the teachers reconstructed it and acted in response to the demands of a teaching situation and (b) by giving physical form to their practice—it is their knowledge in action. The teachers’ personal practical knowledge provided an interpretive framework through which the teachers made sense of their classrooms. Golombek found in her study that it was imperative to encourage teachers to become ethnographers of their teaching situations and/or engage in action research to directly examine their instructional

strategies. This process would allow teachers to “pursue self-exploration to discern how emotions and moral beliefs influence their sense-making process” (Golombek, 1998, p. 462). Typically, research studies conducted in the area of teacher beliefs use a relatively small sample size. For Muchmore (2001), his study used a life history ethnographic approach to explore the connection between literacy beliefs and teaching practices of a single high school English teacher. Muchmore acknowledged how there has been an increase in interest with educational researchers in understanding the lives of teachers. How Muchmore’s study differed from previous research studies was his use of life history and narrative approaches in studying teacher thinking and teacher socialization: “It is important in this work that there is an emphasis on understanding teachers’ thinking from *their* perspective—from the perspective of an *insider* looking around, and not that of an *outsider* looking in” (p. 89). Over the course of five years, Muchmore utilized personal observations and one-on-one conversations to learn about his participant’s beliefs and practices, rather than relying on surveys and questionnaires. As friends and colleagues, it was important for Muchmore to be explicit about his role as the researcher and any potential for bias. Muchmore acknowledged that an in-depth life history study of the beliefs and practices of a single teacher has little value for making generalizations about other teachers in quantitative sense, but it can be useful in understanding one’s own beliefs and practices:

Teaching is a solitary profession in which practitioners have limited opportunities to interact with their colleagues. Within an isolated existence, reading narrative accounts of other teachers’ experiences would have been at least one way that I could have overcome my feelings of isolation. (p. 105)

Research studies regarding the relationship between English Language Arts teachers' personal lives and classroom practices have thus far been from a practitioner's standpoint rather than an academic, empirical approach, without much emphasis placed on theory or theoretical frameworks. The role of theory in research is to act as the foundation from which all other pieces are derived. For any structure to be successful in its construction, a strong foundation is imperative. Theoretical choices frame how researchers develop their lens on how life is viewed and how that viewpoint will be expressed throughout their study. A lack of a clearly defined theoretical framework may lead to researchers suffering from a surface, non-critical exploration of their research. If researchers do not establish their framework for their approach to the research, it may lead the audience to question why the researchers are conducting the study to begin with. This research study looked to add to the current research by providing a clearly defined framework to ground the study and provide a lens based in poststructuralism and third wave feminism ideals. The purpose of establishing a concise framework for the study was to enhance the legitimacy of research regarding the relationship between teachers' personal lives, their experiences with intersectionality (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation), and professional lives (e.g., pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices).

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of conducting studies on how teachers' personal lives influence their professional lives was to provide insight to what can be considered by some to be a solitary profession. With the autonomy afforded to teachers within their individual classrooms, understanding the underlying factors that affect content and instructional choices is imperative. This study hoped to uncover the influence in which various aspects

of a teacher's intersectionality manifest in his or her teaching practices. The aim of the study was to find the link between how a teacher's identity, shaped by personal knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, enhances or inhibits the learning experience in the classroom.

## CHAPTER 3. METHOD

This chapter addresses the methodology and research design used for this study. Also included in this chapter is the sampling of participants for this study, the methods of data collection, and the procedures for data analysis. This study was designed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How does female English Language Arts teachers' intersectionality impact their pedagogical beliefs?

RQ2: How does female English Language Arts teachers' intersectionality impact their curriculum design choices with *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

RQ3: How do female English Language Arts teachers' pedagogical beliefs manifest themselves in the curriculum design for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

As defined in Chapter 1, intersectionality refers to a perspective on inequality that argues that oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but instead intersect and help mutually reinforce and shape one another (Collins, 1990). Pedagogical beliefs are defined as the attitudes and values held by teachers about teaching students, education, and the learning process (Khader, 2012). Curriculum design refers to a planned sequence of learning experiences, which includes the purpose of the curriculum, content, instructional methods, instructional resources, and evaluation approaches (Center for Learning and Teaching, n.d.). For the purposes of this study, the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was representative of the traditional Western canon, which is defined as the body of books, music, and art that are seen as the most

important and influential in shaping Western culture, generally perceived as representing the high culture of Europe and North America, which is comprised of mostly White males (Searle, 1990).

### **Research Design and Appropriateness of Design**

In order to explore how teachers' personal lives (e.g., background and life experiences), their experiences with intersectionality (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation), and their professional lives (e.g., pedagogical beliefs and content/instructional choices) influence one another, a phenomenological bounded case study was the most appropriate research design. A case study explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system or case over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013). As Yin (2003) explained, case studies should be employed when a *how* question is being posed. Yin further explained that the case study research design is preferred when the study's focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. This study was considered a bounded case study because it was done within a bounded system of time and place (Creswell, 2013)—one school site within one calendar school year. Creswell (2013) stated that the aim of a bounded case study is to develop an in-depth description and analysis of one case, or multiple cases, in which the unit of analysis can be an event, a program, an activity, or one or more individuals. This case study took a phenomenological approach because, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained, “researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular



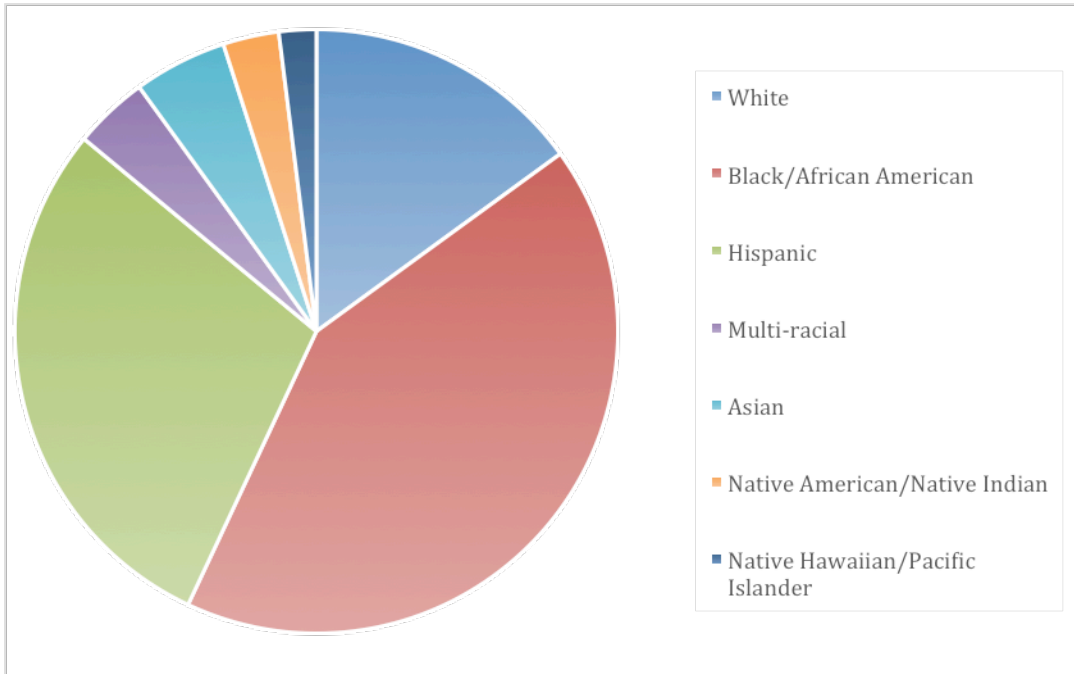
situations” (p. 25). The phenomenon explored in this study was the teacher participants’ perspectives of how they teach the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

To ensure validity in a case study, Yin (2003) encouraged multiple sources of data and the use of protocols during data collection. For this study, a survey questionnaire, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, a focus group, follow-up interviews, and unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird* were used as a means of collecting viable data. Due to the emergent nature of a case study design, Creswell explained that all phases of the process of data collection may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. According to Creswell, the best course of action if this occurs is to stay focused on the purpose of learning about the problem from the participants and adjust accordingly to engage in the best practices to obtain that information. While Yin (2003) echoed Creswell’s sentiment of necessity of the researcher to be adaptive and flexible, Yin also asserted that it is required for the researcher to have a firm grasp in the issues being studied. Following the process of data collection, a topic-bound unit of analysis was employed to explore the phenomenon of the teacher participants’ perspectives on the teaching of the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The participants were viewed holistically as one case, with each method of data collection analyzed by topic.

### **Population and Sampling**

Following approval by the university’s IRB (Appendix A), this study took place at a diverse suburban high school located within a large school district in South Florida. This school district is the second largest in the state of Florida and 17th largest in the United States, and permission was granted for the study (Appendix B). The school has a

current total enrollment of 2,532 students, and a letter of cooperation was secured (Appendix C). Figure 2 provides the ethnic breakdown of the student population.



*Figure 2.* Ethnic breakdown of student population at school site.

Due to 58% of the student population being designated as economically disadvantaged based on qualifications for the Federal free and reduced-price lunch program, the school has a Title I classification. Data were gathered at the site where the participants were employed. Survey questionnaires were completed independently via the website Survey Monkey. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews took place in the participants' classrooms during their planning period. The focus group session took place in one of the participant's classrooms that had the most centralized location for the teachers who participated. As an employee at the site, the researcher had access to the participants during this time due to the scheduling of a

common department planning period—the researcher and participants are members of the English Language Arts department.

For this study, there were seven participants. The goal of this phenomenological bounded case study was to obtain detailed, in-depth data (Creswell, 2013). Having at least five participants allowed for a variety of perspectives. The participants were classified as a convenience sample (Creswell, 2013) since they all taught at the same school with the researcher. The participants were approached in person to participate in the research based on the criterion of currently teaching, having previously taught, or planning to teach the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a high school English Language Arts teacher, and signed a consent form if they agreed to participate in the study (Appendix D).

### **Instrumentation**

For this phenomenological bounded case study, the process of data collection began with the distribution of a survey questionnaire via Survey Monkey to the teacher participants (Appendix E). The first part of the questionnaire addressed demographic information, education experience, and teaching experience. The second part of the questionnaire was Likert-type questions addressing the level of importance for three components of pedagogical beliefs: teaching, students, and content area (Khader, 2012). The participants were also asked to submit unit lesson plans via email for how they will teach or have taught the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The purpose of collecting the unit lesson plans was to examine how the participants' pedagogical beliefs manifested themselves through their curriculum design. Following the completion of the survey questionnaires and initial review of the submitted unit lesson plans, one-on-one semi-

structured interviews were conducted (see Appendix F for protocol). The interview protocol addressed the participants' curriculum design choices within the traditional Western canon of literature, specifically regarding the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The researcher allowed for the concluding portion of the interviews to be used for clarification, if necessary. The decision to follow a semi-structured interview modeled was based on the method of conversational interviews. This model is often used with feminist approaches to qualitative research because it works against the formal constraints of the researcher/participants relationship to instead mirror a conversation, allowing for more intimate, thorough responses (Roulston, 2008). Following the completion of each individual semi-structured interview, one focus group session was held with the researcher and six of the seven participants. The purpose of the focus group was to discuss the implications of teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* (see Appendix G for protocol). With the participants being viewed as one collective group, the focus group session provided an opportunity to observe the interaction between the participants. The concluding portion of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews that was included for clarification purposes if necessary was conducted separately as a follow-up interview after the single focus group session.

## **Data Collection**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

The purpose of the questionnaire for this study was to allow the participants time to examine their personal beliefs and attitudes about teaching, students, and content area. Philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, pedagogical beliefs, personal experiences, and/or professional experiences were all underlying factors for decisions teachers make

regarding curriculum or instructional practices. However, these concepts are not always in the forefront of everyone's minds. By distributing the survey questionnaire first in the process of data collection, the participants were allowed as much time as necessary to independently form more thoughtful and meaningful responses. The purpose of completing the survey questionnaires prior to the interviews was to allow the participants to begin the process of thinking about the *why* behind the *how* of their classroom practices, with the goal of achieving more in-depth responses in the interview portion of the study. The first section of the survey questionnaire included detailed demographic information to help create the portrait of each participant and inform their individual cases. The Likert-type questions were designed to solicit information from the participants regarding their pedagogical beliefs, revealing the level of importance they place on the attitudes and values about teaching, students, and content area. The Likert-type ratings ranged from *extremely important* to *not important at all*.

### **Interviews**

The purpose of using interviews was to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher could develop insights into how subjects interpret their personal environments (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) claimed the usage of semi-structured interviews asserts that the researcher is confident in getting comparable data across subjects. The interview protocol did not include demographic questions because that information was retrieved through the initial survey questionnaires. The interview questions began by examining the participants' thoughts about the purpose of education. Moving forward, questions addressed the participants' experiences as students and their thoughts about the current selection of texts in the

English Language Arts curriculum. The last portion of questions focused more specifically on curriculum design choices for teaching the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, since that was the text on which the study focused. After the set interview protocol questions, a section was included to provide an opportunity for the researcher to gain clarification for any other data collected from the teacher participants. This was done through a follow-up interview. The goal of the interviews was to produce rich data-filled words that revealed the respondents' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Unit Lesson Plans**

The purpose of the participants submitting unit lesson plans for the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was to uncover how the participants' pedagogical beliefs that were explored through the survey questionnaire manifested themselves in the curriculum design of the novel unit. Stemming from the original mandate of teachers being told to teach a novel and not receiving any further guidance beyond that, there was no template for the unit lesson plans the participants were asked to submit for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The researcher instructed the participants to provide the essentials for a unit lesson plan commonly expected at the site where the researcher and participants were employed; this included essential question(s), standards, and assignments and activities. The researcher requested that the participants provide as much detail and explanation as possible, with the unit lesson plans providing another reflection of the participants' classroom practices. The unit lesson plans also provided an additional measure of triangulation for the study, which required the researcher to make use of multiple and different sources to provide corroborating evidence to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2013). Table 5

shows the alignment between this study’s research questions and the various methods of data collection.

Table 5

*Research Question and Data Collection Alignment*

Research Question	Method of Data Collection
RQ1: How does female ELA teachers’ intersectionality impact their pedagogical beliefs?	Survey Questionnaire Semi-structured Interview Focus Group
RQ2: How does female ELA teachers’ intersectionality impact their curriculum design choices for <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> ?	Semi-structured Interview Focus Group
RQ3: How do female ELA teachers’ pedagogical beliefs manifest themselves in the curriculum design for <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> ?	Unit Lesson Plans Semi-structured Interview Focus Group Survey Questionnaire

**Focus Group**

The culminating piece of data collected during the study was one session of a focus group comprised of six of the seven teacher participants, with the researcher in the role of facilitator and not actively participating in the discussion. Merriam (2009) defined a focus group as “an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic” (p. 93). The purpose of the inclusion of a focus group was the fact that the case of this study was the teacher participants as a collective group. This was the single opportunity for the majority (six out of seven) of the participants to interact with each other. Patton (2002) also explained that focus groups were a valuable source of data collection because participants not only get to respond to a topic, they also get to hear

other responses, and then get to make additional comments beyond their original responses as they hear what others have to say on the topic.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), data analysis involves working with the collected data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns. The coding process that was used for the qualitative portion of the data came from the strategy Crabtree and Miller (1992) described as a continuum of coding that began from “prefigured” categories to “emergent” categories (p. 151). Prefigured codes come from a model or framework, but Crabtree and Miller’s strategy suggested still being open to emergent codes that may arise during analysis. This strategy was used in conjunction with a modified version of Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) process of a constant comparative method of data analysis. Borrowing from the foundational work for grounded theory, the researcher worked within and across the multiple forms of data collection to develop larger themes and categories within the data. While the multiple forms of data collection addressed the three research questions of the study, the prefigured codes employed to begin the process of constant comparison for data analysis were drawn from the conceptual framework’s areas addressing power relations, the fictional concept of self as it relates to established beliefs, and any emergent codes that became evident. Table 6 displays the coding scheme used during the analysis process.



Table 6

*Coding Scheme*

Prefigured Code	Key Terms/Ideas
Power Relations	Students, Colleagues, Administration, Parents, District, Policy
Beliefs Based on the “Self”	Students, Content Area, Instructional Methods
Emergent Codes	Facilitate, Purpose, Context

**Survey Questionnaire**

After acquiring the completed survey questionnaires, the researcher engaged in the analysis process by reading through the individual responses, creating a table to organize the demographic information provided. Descriptive statistics were employed to conduct a frequency analysis of the teacher participants’ responses to the Likert-type questions addressing the importance associated with the different areas of pedagogical beliefs. The individual items of the survey questionnaire were tested for symmetry with the use of Morris and Lieberman’s (2018) calculation of multinomial probabilities. This test was conducted to uncover whether the responses were significantly oriented toward *extremely important* or *not important at all*. For the purpose of this test, the Likert-type scale was given numerical values: *Extremely important* was 4, *very important* was 3, *slightly important* was 2, and *not important at all* was 1. While the questions were not presented in a preconceived pattern in the distribution of the survey questionnaire, the survey questionnaire was broken down into three sections, with subcategories distinguished within each section for the purposes of analysis. This organization of the survey questionnaire can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

*Survey Questionnaire Categories and Subcategories*

Teaching	Students	Content
<i>Technique/Delivery</i>	<i>Culture/Background</i>	<i>Knowledge/Expertise</i>
16	17	22
25	18	29
27	33	
28		
<i>Theory</i>	<i>Motivation/Engagement</i>	<i>Delivery</i>
19	23	21
20	31	30
26	32	
<i>Classroom Management</i>		
24		
34		
35		

The variable used when analyzing the survey questionnaire responses was the rate of extremely important. Responses were organized by subcategory, by overarching section, and by teacher participant. These results were used to inform the analysis of the qualitative data. For research question one, the results regarding the participants' pedagogical beliefs was the focus, with narrative support derived from the qualitative data findings. The data found in the survey questionnaires played a supplementary role in the reporting of research question three, which derived its information from a culmination of all the sources of data collected throughout the research study.

### **Document Analysis of Unit Lesson Plans**

The participants submitted unit lesson plans for the teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Due to the loosely prescribed formatting and requirements of the unit

lesson plans, the analysis process was less linear than with the interview transcripts. While employing the prescribed codes of power relations and beliefs based on the construction of the self from the conceptual framework, the purpose of conducting a document analysis of the participants' unit lesson plans was to address the third research question regarding the manifestation of the participants' pedagogical beliefs in their curriculum design for the novel unit for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) expressed that, in qualitative research, the researcher is considered a human instrument through which the collected data are mediated. It was the responsibility of the researcher to determine how the participants' pedagogical beliefs, established through the analysis of the survey questionnaire responses, were represented in their curriculum design for the unit to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The established prefigured codes were used to begin the process of constant comparison for data analysis to uncover unifying themes across the group of participants' submitted unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The findings were compared to the individual participant's survey questionnaire responses. This comparison examined the relationship between the individual participant's unit lesson plans and survey questionnaire responses, but also analyzed the holistic findings from what was seen in the unit lesson plans and their connection to the survey questionnaire responses.

### **Interviews**

In alignment with the qualitative data analysis procedures previously established, following the analysis of the questionnaires, the researcher moved on to the analysis of the transcripts derived from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each of the participants and the follow-up interview transcripts from six of the seven participants.

The protocol for the interviews addressed curriculum design, but the data were still analyzed for instances of power relations and beliefs based on the participants' construction of self, as was done with the content analysis of the submitted unit lesson plans for teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*. With the data organized by teacher participant, the researcher read through the transcripts from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews first and then the follow-up interviews to note instances related to the prescribed codes, but also making note of any words, phrases, patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, or events that stood out. continuing the process of constant comparison, the researcher went through these notes to uncover overarching themes and categories that were found across all of the participants' responses. Once the overarching themes and categories were established, it was decided with which research question each of the themes aligned.

### **Focus Group**

In a similar fashion to the analysis of the interview transcripts, the researcher ascribed to a topic-bound unit of analysis to analyze the transcript from the single focus group session. Using the established coding scheme, the researcher made notes to occurrences of information that contributed to the overarching themes established from the analysis on the unit lesson plans, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and follow-up interviews. Findings from the focus group were used to support the answering of all three research questions. The researcher as well as the participants found the focus group to be a useful experience, because as Macnaghten and Myers (2004) explained, focus groups provide an opportunity for people to talk about topics from their everyday lives

that they usually do not have an opportunity to discuss, such as the teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a detailed description of the design for this study and a rationale of each research method that was used. This chapter also provided a description of the population and sample of participants for the study. An overview of the process for data analysis of the various methods of data collection have been explained. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the study. Observations, implications, and recommendations based on the findings of the study are discussed in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers' personal lives (e.g., backgrounds and life experiences), their experiences with intersectionality (e.g., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation), and professional lives (e.g., pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices) influence one another. In particular, the study looked at how the relationship between these intersecting factors impacted the teachers' experiences teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Lee (1960). This chapter discusses the findings of this research study. These findings are presented in response to each research question posed by this study. There were three research questions that guided this study:

RQ1: How does female English Language Arts teachers' intersectionality impact their pedagogical beliefs?

RQ2: How does female English Language Arts teachers' intersectionality impact their curriculum design choices with *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

RQ3: How do female English Language Arts teachers' pedagogical beliefs manifest themselves in the curriculum design for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

A mixed-method phenomenological bounded case study was employed in order to explore how the teacher participants' personal identities impacted what they do in their classrooms. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, a bounded case study was found most appropriate—a sample of seven, female English Language Arts teachers who all taught at the same school and who were currently teaching or had previously

taught the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The site for this study was also the current place of employment for the researcher.

As part of the research study, the seven teacher participants provided their demographic information through responses in a survey questionnaire. The second portion of the survey questionnaire made use of Likert-type questions to gauge the level of importance associated with various aspects of pedagogical beliefs. The mixed-methods portion of the research design was employed in regards to the second phase of data collection by using the Likert-type responses to inform the interview and focus group protocols. The researcher met with each participant for a one-on-one semi-structured interview to gain insight into the participants' curriculum design choices with the support of the participant's unit lesson plan for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The interviews also provided an opportunity to clarify or gain more insight on the individual profiles of each participant based on their responses to the demographic portion of the survey questionnaire. The single session focus group was used to explore the relevancy of teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the current classroom and possible issues that may be faced.

### **Teacher Participants**

With the foundation of this research study based on the impact the participants' intersectionality had on various aspects of their classroom practices, it was imperative to have an expatiated profile of each individual teacher participant. As Muchmore (2001) discussed in his life history study of a high school English teacher, teaching can oftentimes be considered an isolated, solitary profession. A study such as this can provide a sense of community to teachers by providing in-depth insights and explorations of

experiences within the teaching profession. Table 8 presents the demographic information provided by each of the participants through the online survey questionnaire. Following the table are narratives for each teacher participant presented with the use of a pseudonym.

Table 8

*Participant Demographic Information*

Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	College Degrees	Years of Teaching Experience	Areas of Certification/ Endorsements	Grade Levels/ Subject Areas Taught
Anna	White	61	BS— Communications & Journalism	29	English, 6-12 Gifted NBCT	6-9 - Advanced English - Reading
Catherine	Caucasian	24	BA—English/ Creative Writing BS—Psychology	3	English, 6-12	9, 10, 12 - General English - Newspaper
Deborah	White/ Hispanic	54	BA—English M.Ed.— Curriculum & Instruction	30	English, 6-12 Reading Gifted ESOL	9-12 - Advanced English
Leslie	Black/ African- American	62	BS—Secondary English	35	English, 6-12 ESOL NBCT	6-12 - Advanced & General English
Michelle	African- American	41	BS—Elementary Education M.Ed.— Education Administration and Supervision	16	Elementary Education English, 5-9 ESOL	6, 8, 9 - General English - Advanced & General Language Arts

Table 8 (cont).



Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	College Degrees	Years of Teaching Experience	Areas of Certification/ Endorsements	Grade Levels/ Subject Areas Taught
Rebecca	African- American	49	BS—Legal Studies	12	English, 5-9 ESOL Gifted	8, 9 - Advanced English - Student Government
Samantha	Caucasian	66	BS—Applied Professional Studies (Psychology)	16	English, 6-12 ESOL	9-12 - General English - Peer Counseling - Critical Thinking

**Anna.** White, age 61, married, mother of one. Born in Chicago, Anna moved to South Florida during middle school with her mother and two sisters after her parents' divorce. As a first-generation college graduate, Anna obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in broadcast journalism from a Florida public university. After 10 years working in that industry, Anna accepted that she was not happy and returned to her original dream of being a teacher. Anna is certified to teach English, Grades 6-12, and did her gifted endorsement due to a need in the school district in which she was teaching. This led to the majority of her teaching experience being with the advanced-level students. Fifteen years into her teaching career, Anna lost her only child to cancer at the age of 15. Looking for some way to fill the void in her life, Anna dove into her work. During this time Anna reconnected with her former teacher who became a close friend during this difficult time in her life. Anna decided to join her former teacher who was going through the process to become a National Board-certified teacher, feeling that it would not only help her career, but would help her fill the void of her loss. A few years later, Anna survived breast cancer and adopted a daughter from Russia after accompanying her friend

and former teacher who adopted a child there. Now in her 29<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, Anna found her classroom her safe space where she can shut out the rest of the world and focus on her empathy for her students.

**Catherine.** White, age 24, single. Born and raised in the same city in which she currently resides and works, Catherine described her upbringing as privileged within a very Southern White family of government workers—her stepfather is a police officer and her mother is a prosecutor with the homicide division. Self-identifying as queer has led Catherine to, at times, feel ostracized from her family. Catherine attended a Florida public university, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in creative writing and a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. With aspirations of being a television writer, Catherine got the secondary degree in psychology to appease the worry of her mother about employment after college. Catherine felt that if she did not get a job as a television writer, then she would get a practical job teaching. When Catherine moved home after college, she got a job teaching at the high school she had attended, which is the site of this study. With certification to teach English, grades 6-12, Catherine is in her third year of teaching, predominantly teaching below-grade level students, but also the mixed-level newspaper course. Constantly making note of her privilege, Catherine hopes to provide her students with socio-emotional support in and outside of her classroom.

**Deborah.** White/Hispanic, age 54, married, mother of two. Raised in Connecticut, Deborah moved to South Florida in her early 20s. Born to Cuban parents, the move to Florida caused a shift in her cultural identity. Being bilingual in English and Spanish made it easier for Deborah to gain employment in a large South Florida school district comprised largely of Hispanic students. Deborah earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in

English, which prompted her to return to school to get a degree in the field of education, graduating with a Master of Education in curriculum and instruction. With certification in English, Grades 6-12, as well as being endorsed in reading, gifted, and ESOL, Deborah has taught all grades of high school English. In her 30<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, Deborah continues to teach predominantly Advanced Placement and Honors English courses. Throughout her career, Deborah's focus has been to create a literate populace who is aware of what is going on in the world and who communicate and express themselves effectively.

**Leslie.** Black, aged 62, divorced, mother of two. Growing up in an all-Black, Catholic community in Louisiana, Leslie described her upbringing in the American South to be one of oppression and racism—not only from the White community, but also from other members of the Black community. The youngest of nine children, Leslie expressed a lack of tolerance for students who play victim to their circumstances. Leslie's father had died when she was four, and when Leslie was 16, her mother died. This shaped her outlook of everyone being able to handle their own business regardless of their circumstances. Leslie got married when she was 26 and moved to Florida. Leslie has a Bachelor of Science in secondary English and is in her 35<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. Ten years ago, Leslie went through the process of becoming a National Board-certified teacher. When her principal approached a few teachers about completing the process, Leslie was taken aback that all of the teachers approached were White. Leslie felt this was racially motivated. While she did not have an interest at first, Leslie felt that she needed to complete the National Board certification to show everyone that she could. In addition, Leslie is certified in English, grades 6-12, and is ESOL-endorsed. Throughout her

expansive teaching career, Leslie has taught all levels of students from Grades 6 through 12.

**Michelle.** African-American, aged 41, married, mother of three. Born in New York to Jamaican parents, Michelle moved to South Florida at the age of three. Michelle lived in a mostly White neighborhood and attended a predominantly White school. It was not until middle school that Michelle noticed the disparities in treatment based on race. She was applying for an honors high school program that required teacher recommendations. One teacher would not sign the recommendation, stated that he did not think Michelle could handle the program. Michelle took this personally, obtained recommendations from her other teachers, and went on to be successful in that honors program. Michelle still thinks back to this experience now that she is a teacher. However, it is not a reversal of the situation she had faced growing up—her classes are comprised primarily of African-American students, with very few White students. Being conscious of this, Michelle does her best to make the minority of White students feel included. Although she has a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education, Michelle went back to school online eight years ago after the birth of her third child to pursue a Master of Education degree in education administration and supervision. Certified in elementary education, English, Grades 5-9, and ESOL-endorsed, Michelle taught middle school Language Arts for 12 years before transitioning to 9<sup>th</sup> grade English four years ago. Currently, Michelle aspires to transition into administration.

**Rebecca.** African-American, aged 49, married, mother of two. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Rebecca is first generation to Haitian parents. Growing up bilingual, speaking English and Haitian-Creole, Rebecca strongly identifies with her

Haitian culture. Fifteen years ago, Rebecca and her family vacationed in Florida. Her son was suffering from severe allergies that were onset by puberty, but within a week of being in Florida, the allergies had completely cleared, which led to her family relocating permanently. Used to the hustle and bustle mentality of New York, Rebecca now wanted to enjoy her children's upbringing at a more relaxed pace. Rebecca has a Bachelor of Science degree in legal studies and worked as a paralegal for most of her adult life. When she chose to relocate her family to Florida, she also made the decision to leave the corporate world. As a child, Rebecca always played school with her cousins and realized that she wanted to pursue the path of being an educator. After 11 years of teaching at the middle school level, Rebecca transitioned to high school one year ago. With English, Grades 5-9, certification, and gifted and ESOL endorsements, Rebecca teaches 9<sup>th</sup> grade English Honors and runs the Student Government Organization. A very active member in student activities, Rebecca finds it is important to teach students their history so that they know where they are headed with their futures.

**Samantha.** White, aged 66, single. Born in Detroit, Michigan, Samantha moved to South Florida when she was five. When asked about her upbringing, Samantha painted a portrait of small-town community with unlocked doors, children playing in the streets, and porch swings surrounded by cow pastures. Samantha attended a private university in South Florida, earning a Bachelor of Science in applied professional studies with a concentration in psychology. Samantha had worked a corporate retail job for 25 years before returning to school to finish her Bachelor of Science degree, then worked as a substitute teacher before becoming a full-time teacher. Samantha is certified in English, Grades 6-12, and is ESOL-endorsed. Over the past 15 years, Samantha has taught critical

thinking skills, peer counseling, and various levels of English from Grade 9 through 12. Based on her background, Samantha strives to prepare students for life in the real world after high school.

### Findings

As addressed by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative data analysis is defined as working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what the data will tell others. With this in mind, this section was organized by research question, with the use of Crabtree and Miller’s (1992) coding process of a continuum of prefigured codes grounded in the research study’s conceptual framework and emergent codes as seen in Table 6. The findings were drawn from four sources of data: survey questionnaires, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with follow-ups, one focus group session, and a unit lesson plan for the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Table 9 displays which data source was used for each research question.

Table 9

#### *Data Sources by Research Question*

Research Question	Method of Data Collection
RQ1: How does female ELA teachers’ intersectionality impact their pedagogical beliefs?	Survey Questionnaire Semi-structured Interview & Follow-up Focus Group
RQ2: How does female ELA teachers’ intersectionality impact their curriculum design choices for <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> ?	Semi-structured Interview & Follow-up Focus Group
RQ3: How do female ELA teachers’ pedagogical beliefs manifest themselves in the curriculum design for <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> ?	Unit Lesson Plans Semi-structured Interview & Follow-up Focus Group Survey Questionnaire

While the first research question utilized the mixed-methods portion of the research study by drawing from the survey questionnaires to inform the interviews and focus group, during data analysis significant results from the survey questionnaires were supported by findings in the interviews and focus group. For research questions two and three, primarily qualitative methods were used. Using the preconfigured codes established from the conceptual framework, two major themes emerged for each research question. With research questions one and two culminating in research question three, quantitative data from the survey questionnaires were used to support the qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews, focus group, and unit lesson plans.

**RQ1: How Does Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality Impact Their Pedagogical Beliefs?**

Research question one asked the English Language Arts teachers to examine their pedagogical beliefs. The areas addressed within the pedagogical beliefs were thoughts and feelings about teaching, students, and content area. The results for this research question are presented in frequencies. The participants were asked to rate various aspects of pedagogical beliefs, rating their level of importance with the use of a Likert-type of *extremely important, very important, slightly important, or not important at all*. The results from the test for symmetry with the use of Morris and Lieberman's (2018) calculation of multinomial probabilities showed that 16 out of 20 questions leaned significantly toward extremely important; thus 80% of the items demonstrated asymmetry. The results from the test for symmetry can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10

*Symmetry Test for Likert-type Items*

Item #	Description	<u>Scale Steps</u>				<u>Cooper</u>	
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
		Frequencies					
1	Q16	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
2	Q25	0	0	0	7	Multip=	<.001
3	Q27	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
4	Q28	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
5	Q19	0	0	5	2	Multip=	0.09
6	Q20	0	1	4	2	Multip=	0.179
7	Q21	0	1	5	1	Multip=	0.316
8	Q24	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
9	Q34	0	0	4	3	Multip=	0.039
10	Q35	0	0	2	5	Multip=	0.004
11	Q17	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
12	Q18	0	0	2	5	Multip=	0.004
13	Q33	0	1	2	4	Multip=	0.039
14	Q23	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
15	Q31	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
16	Q32	0	1	3	3	Multip=	0.09
17	Q22	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
18	Q29	0	0	2	5	Multip=	0.004
19	Q21	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
20	Q30	0	0	1	6	Multip=	<.001
	Sums	0	4	39	97	12.28	<.001

Note. Asymmetric conditions met: **asymmetric right** and **asymmetric left**.

The administration of the survey questionnaire was the first step of data collection to allow participants time to independently respond to questions regarding their pedagogical beliefs without outside interference. Also, this initial part of the research study allowed participants an opportunity for self-reflection, which would enhance the qualitative portions of the research study.



**Teaching.** One area of pedagogical beliefs addressed through the survey questionnaire was thoughts and feeling about teaching, which included three subcategories: technique and delivery, educational theory, and classroom management. This portion of the survey questionnaire consisted of one half of the total survey questions (10 out of 20). Table 11 provides the corresponding questions for each subcategory within the teaching section with the frequencies of extreme importance.

Table 11

*Teaching Subcategories*

Subcategory	Questions	Results
Technique/ Delivery	16. How important is it for teachers to know a variety of teaching techniques?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	25. How important is it for teachers to know how to deliver information so that students can understand it?	7 out of 7=extremely important
	27. How important is it for teachers to be able to adjust their teaching methods to reach a variety of learners?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	28. How important is it for teachers to know how to present information in multiple ways?	6 out of 7=extremely important
Educational Theory	19. How important is it for teachers to know the theoretical foundations and implications of their teaching practices?	2 out of 7=extremely important
	20. How important is it to know the <i>tricks of the trade</i> instead of educational theory?	2 out of 7=extremely important
	26. How important is it teachers to have a theoretical knowledge of educational practices?	1 out of 7=extremely important
Classroom Management	24. How important is it for teachers to know how to maintain order and control in a classroom?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	34. How important is it for teachers to be able to manage multiple needs and tasks at the same time?	3 out of 7=extremely important
	35. How important is it for teachers to establish and maintain a set classroom management system?	5 out of 7=extremely important

***Technique and delivery.*** The subcategory that had the most questions that were rated predominantly extremely important from the survey questionnaires was techniques and delivery methods associated with teaching. Question 25, which asked how important it was for teachers to know how to deliver information so that students can understand it, was the only question to be rated extremely important by all seven teacher participants. During the focus group, there was no explicit mention of teaching techniques or delivery, but the overall discussion heavily emphasized the need to teach the students context for the literature read in class, which aligned with the need to deliver information so that students can understand it being rated the highest level of importance. While most participants rated the majority of the questions within the teaching section as extremely important, Deborah and Leslie had the lowest number of questions rated as extremely important. With both participants only rating 4 out of 10 questions extremely important, two of the four questions were within the technique and delivery section. While none of the participants spoke about teaching techniques or delivery directly during the focus group, Deborah, the one participant who did not attend the focus group, was the only teacher to make mention of it in her one-on-one semi-structured interview. Deborah stated, “When you take a pre-packaged unit [purchased online] and do nothing to make it your own, it seems stilted, you know, not natural.” Within that same idea, Deborah expressed that, although teachers cannot limit what they teach in their classrooms to things they like, it does help with the delivery when you have a passion for what you are teaching.

***Theory.*** From all survey questionnaires, theory had the fewest extremely important ratings of any subcategory from all three sections of pedagogical beliefs. The

results from calculation of multinomial probabilities showed that all three items were symmetrical because the item responses leaned neither toward extremely important nor not important at all. Question 26, which looked at how important it was for teachers to have theoretical knowledge of educational practices, was the only question to have only one participant rate it as extremely important. Michelle, that one participant, was one of the two teacher participants to have a graduate degree. Although theory was not mentioned in conversation, she was also one of two teachers who rated Question 19 as extremely important, which addressed teachers knowing the theoretical foundations and implications of their teaching practices.

It stood out that Catherine and Rebecca, the two teachers with the least amount of teaching experience who also held non-education degrees, rated every question of the survey questionnaire as extremely important except the three questions within the theory section of the teaching subcategory. Rebecca rated Question 26 of this section as only slightly important, the lowest rating given to any question. She noted in her interview that she was not sure if it was perhaps coming from a business background that she thought about the client first, rather than in education where the learning process, pedagogy, and everything else is taken into account. Catherine, who has three years of teaching experience, expressed in her one-on-one semi-structured interview her trepidation regarding the professional certification test:

I have to take the professional test this year and I'm terrified... a lot of high theory I'm not super well-versed on. I just sort of try to get bits and pieces from what I heard other teachers say and like to do my own thing.

Catherine's concern regarding her lack of theoretical knowledge was reflected throughout the ratings of the theory subcategory of the teaching section. Six out of seven teacher participants hold non-education undergraduate degrees. The exceptions to this would be the two participants, Michelle and Deborah, who hold graduate degrees in education. It is important to note that although Michelle's undergraduate degree is in elementary education, all of her teaching experience is in secondary education.

Question 20 asked how important it was to know the tricks of the trade in education instead of educational theory. While this question would be the counterpoint to the questions addressing the importance of knowing educational theory, it still only had two participants rate it as extremely important. Catherine mentioned that "I know if I had honors kids, I could like go into higher theory stuff." Deborah, who already expressed the importance of technique and delivery, was the other teacher to rate the question as extremely important. Catherine mentioned in the focus group that Deborah had been her teacher in high school and was acting as her mentor. This aligned with her comment earlier about gaining knowledge about teaching from what other teachers had said. Although Leslie made no mention of theory in any other area of data, she rated this question as only slightly important, the lowest rating given to any question. Questions 20 and 26 were the only questions within the teaching section to receive the rating of slightly important.

***Classroom management.*** Classroom management was not an area explicitly mentioned in the focus group or in the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Only three of the participants found it extremely important to be able to manage multiple needs and tasks at the same time (Question 34). These three teachers—Catherine, Rebecca, and

Samantha—are the three participants with the least amount of teaching experience. Leslie, who had rated the least number of questions in the teaching section as extremely important, rated Questions 34 and 35 as extremely important. Leslie discussed in the focus group that her reservations about teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, were not due to the subject matter of the novel, but rather its length and the time needed: “My experience with kids and absences, you miss a day, you miss half a week [block scheduling], and then the conversation has moved on....” However, she expressed in the survey questionnaire that it was extremely important to establish and maintain a set classroom management system (Question 35) in which student absences would be figured.

**Students.** Another area of pedagogical beliefs addressed through the survey questionnaire was thoughts and feelings about students. The two subcategories addressed in this area were the students’ culture and background and student motivation and engagement. This portion of the survey questionnaire consisted of six questions. In Table 12, the questions corresponding with each subcategory are presented with frequencies of responses that rated the questions as extremely important.

Table 12

*Student Subcategories*

Subcategory	Questions	Results
Culture/ Background	17. How important is it for teachers to have knowledge of child/adolescent development?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	18. How important is it for teachers to understand the cultural background of the students they teach?	5 out of 7=extremely important
	33. How important is it for teachers to know their students' personal backgrounds and experiences?	4 out of 7=extremely important
Motivation/ Engagement	23. How important is it for teachers to know how to motivate and engage students?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	31. How important is it for teachers to know how to match teaching approaches to student needs?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	32. How important is it for teachers to have knowledge of motivational practices?	3 out of 7=extremely important

Although the section regarding the student component of pedagogical beliefs was comprised of less than half the questions in the survey questionnaire, the teacher participants spoke largely to their beliefs concerning students in both the semi-structured interviews, follow-ups, and focus group. While the current mantra in education is teaching with the students in mind, that looked very different for each of the participants. Catherine noted that she did not relate to her students right away due to their vastly differing lives, interests, and upbringings:

It sort of ended up surprising me and I feel like I ended up knowing them as people first and students second. I like, cared about them, and was like, I don't

know, I feel like I'd want to hear about their day before we launched into school stuff.

While Catherine is a new teacher gaining her bearings, Leslie, who is a 35-year veteran teacher, had some very strong opinions regarding students. She rated four of the six questions as extremely important, but was at the other end of the spectrum for the other two questions, rating them as only slightly important (the lowest rating). One issue Leslie discussed at length that she brings into her classroom is that students are capable of greatness no matter where they are coming from:

Don't come in and use excuses to be mediocre, just don't. I was the youngest of nine, my mother died when I was sixteen, my father had already died when I was four. So, don't come in with hardships, I don't get them, I don't understand. I know everybody is capable of processing things in their own way, but I had no one telling me I had to go to school past sixteen, I could have decided to just stay home. They come in crying about things that seem so small—someone didn't get something they needed, they can't do it, it's too hard...

This sentiment would align with her survey responses of teachers knowing their students' personal backgrounds and experiences (Question 18) being rated as having only slight importance. Keeping this in mind, Leslie has a very frank rapport with the students with statements such as "I tell them a lot of the times, you are brilliant bright kids, but you're so lazy and stuck in the mindset of getting by, doing just enough...I just hate ignorance." This was supported by her response to Question 32 that having knowledge of motivational practices is just slightly important. Question 32 was also symmetrical based

on the results of the calculation of multinomial probabilities because the item responses did not lean toward extremely important nor toward not important at all.

***Culture and background.*** While three of the teacher participants—all self-identified as White—found every aspect of the student section of pedagogical beliefs extremely important, two teachers—Anna and Deborah—only rated two of the six questions as extremely important. With 29 and 30 years of teaching experience, respectively, the one question that both of them rated as extremely important was having knowledge of child and adolescent development. Samantha, one of the three participants to rate all six questions in this section as extremely important, made a statement in her interview that stood out when thinking about students’ cultures and backgrounds:

I don’t see color. I was raised not to see color. I had a student one time say to me, ‘Do you realize you’re the only White person in the room?’ And I said, ‘I am?’ It had never even crossed my mind.

Anna, who is of a similar age and cultural background as Samantha, expressed her surprise during the focus group that there are still workshops being given about equity, commenting “Here we go again...I mean it’s just unbelievable how, you know, we’re still talking about this....” Leslie, who again did not rate knowing the students’ backgrounds as being important, had a very nuanced argument regarding cultural differences within a race when discussing Caribbean Black students versus African-American Black students:

They [the Caribbean Black students] don’t know anything. What they know is very degrading too because they don’t understand how Black [African-American] people don’t take advantage of everything. Like, they [Caribbean Blacks] come



over to America hungry. They don't come with the same set of obstacles or guidelines that American Blacks have. So, they don't get any of this [slavery and segregation].

While equity trainings and the idea of teaching with the students in mind is prevalent throughout the current schooling environment, knowing the students' personal backgrounds and experiences (Question 33) had the least number of ratings of extreme importance out of the entire subcategory (four out of seven).

***Motivation and engagement.*** Six of the seven teacher participants rated two-thirds of this subcategory as extremely important—knowing how to engage and motivate students (Question 23) and matching teaching approaches to student needs (Question 31). A disconnect can be seen between the responses for Question 23 and Question 32, which addressed the importance of having knowledge of motivational practices. While six out of seven participants rated Question 23 as extremely important, only the three teachers—Catherine, Samantha, and Rebecca—who rated the entire student section as extremely important—rated knowing motivational practices as extremely important. While Deborah and Rebecca had the widest discrepancy regarding their responses in this section, they both expressed similar sentiments in their interviews when discussing how they choose the texts for their classrooms. Rebecca voiced:

I try to choose what I think students are going to relate to. Even if it's not relatable to their lives, but an emotion, a feeling...whatever it is to get them interested because at the end of the day, if they're not interested, they're not going to do well.

Similarly, Deborah articulated that the main thing she thinks about when choosing a text is whether or not it is something to which she somehow makes connections, such as present-day things that are happening in the students' lives, to keep them engaged.

Leslie and Samantha had the same discrepancy in their survey questionnaire responses, but both expressed in the focus group that with their students, motivation and engagement was an issue: "Our students [lower academic performance level] can't finish anything in five weeks, it's next to impossible. We can't and shouldn't devote more time than that to teaching a novel anyway." While Samantha did not speak more to this concern, Leslie made mention of the issue in her one-on-one semi-structured interview that she wished to figure out some sort of reward to get her students to be more engaged and motivated, because she found simply attaching a grade to something did not work because her students did not care.

**Content area.** This area of pedagogical beliefs addressed through the survey questionnaire looked at the thoughts and feelings about teachers' content area. The two subcategories within this area were knowledge and expertise of subject matter and delivery. This portion of the survey questionnaire consisted of four questions. In Table 13, the frequencies of extreme importance are presented with the corresponding questions for the two subcategories of the section.

Table 13

*Content Area Subcategories*

Subcategory	Questions	Results
Knowledge/ Expertise	22. How important is it for teachers to have extensive knowledge of the subject matter they teach?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	29. How important is expert subject matter knowledge for teaching?	5 out of 7=extremely important
Delivery	21. How important is it for teachers to know how to use different teaching techniques depending on the content they teach?	6 out of 7=extremely important
	30. How important is it for teachers to know instructional methods for the specific content area(s) they teach?	6 out of 7=extremely important

***Knowledge and expertise.*** Although the majority of the teacher participants do not hold degrees in education, only four of the seven have English Language Arts-related degrees. One of those four is Leslie, who has a Bachelor of Science in secondary English. However, she only rated one question in the section of content area as extremely important: the need for teachers to have extensive knowledge of the subject matter they teach (Question 22). Deborah, who holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Education in curriculum and instruction, was the only teacher to not rate Question 22 as extremely important. However, when discussing her approach to choosing activities and materials for a unit teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Deborah explained the importance of having this extensive knowledge: “I mean, obviously standards come in because I have to be looking and making sure that I’m following what the standards are.” Michelle rated all four questions in this section about content area as extremely

important, but felt similarly to Deborah regarding the importance of the curriculum standards when designing her unit:

First, obviously, I looked at the standards and identified the areas I wanted to focus on, and when coming up with the [*To Kill a Mockingbird*] unit, I then created objectives that would address those standards. For example, I know characterization was something I wanted to address, so, I would, you know, read a little ahead of the students. Obviously, I read like the first few chapters before, like, we read it in class just so I could plan out and I would find activities.

During the focus group, all of the teachers who participated repeatedly stressed the importance of providing background and historical context for the literature, which would require a certain extent of knowledge on their part.

Question 29 had the least number of ratings of extremely important, with Leslie and Samantha rating expert subject matter knowledge for teaching as only very important. Catherine was the only other teacher to rate all four questions of this section as extremely important. She stated several times throughout her one-on-one semi-structured interview and follow-up how much she loved English literature and considered herself a “Shakespeare girl.” Without a degree in education, Catherine felt that she would excel at reaching her students through content:

In my first year I could not relate to my kids at all so I thought my in with them would be with content. Even if I’m not helping them to pass the test...I’m never going to say that I’m the best FSA, or standards teacher, because I don’t think that’s my strength as a teacher....

As seen with her statement, Catherine's interests did not translate into expertise of the subject matter regarding the curriculum standards when she reflected on her own teaching practices.

***Delivery.*** Technique and delivery in regards to teaching practices was the most highly regarded subcategory in the teaching section. This trend can be seen when looking at the delivery subcategory of content area. Every participant, aside from Leslie, rated both questions in this subcategory as extremely important. As noted with Deborah in the teaching section, having a passion for what one is teaching helps in the delivery of the content. Deborah attributed the passion to teachers' personal preferences, but did not delve any further into how the actual delivery of the content may vary based on a teacher's likes and dislikes of a text. Questions 21 and 30 looked at the importance of knowing (Question 30) and using (Question 21) instructional techniques specific to the content area a teacher teaches. Leslie was the only teacher to not rate both of these concepts as extremely important. In her follow-up interview, Catherine expanded on her point regarding her love of English literature: "I totally geek out when I'm up there hoping that the kids see it's ok to like what we're reading and like their English class. Even if I get overly dramatic with Romeo and Juliet...they think I'm crazy...." However, as seen with the technique and delivery subcategory of the teaching section of the survey questionnaire, there was overall very little mention of instructional methods—having knowledge of and/or using ones specific to the content area being taught.

## **RQ2: How Does Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality Impact Their Curriculum Design Choices with the Novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*?**

For research question two, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each of the seven teacher participants to go through the process of how they made their choices regarding the curriculum for teaching the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This research was supported by a focus group consisting of six of the seven teacher participants of the study discussing the relevancy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as well as their approaches to teaching the novel in their classrooms. When presented with questions about the participants' thoughts on the purpose of education, the current state of the English Language Arts high school curriculum, and the process of finding and choosing instructional materials, participants varied in their level of comfort at reflecting on and discussing these topics. Within the setting of the focus group, the teacher participants were better able to articulate their thoughts about teaching the novel as well as general aspects of what they encounter in their classrooms. Follow-up interviews were conducted with six of the seven participants to expand on the dimensions of their intersectionality. The two main themes to emerge from this portion of the research were the idea of teaching with the students in mind and the power structure of teaching experience.

**Teaching with the students in mind.** Research question two looked at the teacher participants' decision-making process when designing their unit for teaching the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As seen in the survey questionnaire responses, students were a large focal point for the decisions teachers made when selecting materials and instructional methods for the unit. Derrida (1968) asserted that meaning is obtained

through context and is thus always changing. In conjunction, Butler's (1990) view on discourse being difficult to act outside of once it has become the norm led to an emergence of findings regarding the students' role in the teachers' decision-making process. For some teachers, student deficits showed a prominent influence on curriculum design choices, but with others, student needs did not explicitly impact the choices they made regarding materials or activities.

During the focus group, many of the teacher participants placed their focus on what the students were doing, were not doing, and should be doing. Despite the research study exploring the teachers' impact on their own practices, mention of their teaching practices was not often present in the conversation. Reservations regarding the teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird* were discussed. Many teachers showed some reservations, but all agreed that it was their responsibility to teach students about the past in context of the literature. Most of the required historical background the teachers discussed for this novel was race-related. Leslie voiced concerns that race conversations will cause issues among students as race is not something in the forefront of students' minds at this point in time. Rebecca countered:

It is important now more than ever to have possibly uncomfortable conversations in a safe space with an educated adult facilitating. The conflicts being faced in *To Kill a Mockingbird* like race and prejudices are unbelievably timely and relevant in this day and age.

Michelle echoed this sentiment by explaining that although some of the subject matter in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is looked at as controversial, she still felt the students needed to be exposed to it:

We need to have those conversations with kids so they can, depending on their experience, some of them may be able to relate to the characters, some of them won't be able to relate, but that's why we read—so that we can still expose them and point out different issues that some people experience and become more aware of what's going on socially.

Leslie responded thoughtfully to this point: “We must involve the parents in the teaching of the novel. Racism is not innate; it's a learned behavior.” Leslie further explained that it is imperative to teach kids to think about and question from where their ideas, thoughts, and feelings come.

During the one-on-one semi-structured interviews and subsequent follow-up interviews, teachers spoke to their thoughts on the purpose of education, the role their own experiences as students had on their teaching practices, and how they decide what to do when teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When discussing what the purpose of education was, Anna, Leslie, and Rebecca's insight was reminiscent of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s previously mentioned feelings about the purpose of education being about more than just what is learned in the classroom, but preparing students to think critically about the world. Anna felt that it is important to teach kids how to think, how to process, and how to interpret, so that they can become independent, lifelong learners. Leslie emphasized the individualistic nature of this process:

The purpose of education is to guide kids in evaluating what they think is important for their lives. They need to read so that they can start looking at what other people have done in history, and what people are doing now, and to determine—really, evaluate—what they want to believe without forcing them.



Rebecca simply tied these together by explaining that the purpose of education is to prepare students not only for their educational experiences, but their life experiences as well; it is important to have a balance of both.

Another point to which the teacher participants responded was the role their experiences as a student had on their teaching practices. What stood out with Catherine, Leslie, and Michelle was how their experiences as students motivated them to conduct their classrooms differently from the way they had learned during school. Catherine, who graduated from high school seven years ago, remembered novel study as an independent, at-home process: “My students wouldn’t have done very well in a solitary experience. They need to hear the opinions of what their neighbors or friends felt to help figure things out. I say people think best out loud.” Michelle had a similar experience to Catherine when it came to novel study. She expressed that when she was in high school, most of the reading was done at home:

To be honest, sometimes I did it and sometimes I didn’t. That’s why I had the students read the whole book in class; I wanted to make sure they were actually doing the reading. Then if there was a question, I would be right there to address it or have the students discuss it so that we could figure out what was going on.

Michelle also explained that from her experiences as a student, she knows that she does not like to just sit and listen to lectures, so she takes that into consideration by purposefully infusing activities that promote active involvement because for her, she knows that she tends to remember more if she is actively writing or doing something.

Another point Michelle brought up when talking about the influence of her experiences as a student was the role of race:

As one of the few Black students in a predominantly White school, I can always remember feeling uncomfortable whenever we learned about slavery in class, and I definitely take that into consideration in my classroom. However, it's the opposite—the majority of my students are African-American, and I might have a few White or Caucasian students. So, I don't want them to feel the way I felt, I want them to be a part of the conversation and feel welcome. Obviously, they're going to be uncomfortable at certain times, but that's life.

Rebecca had a similar experience as a student at a predominantly White school. Being of a similar age to Michelle, what stood out most to Rebecca was the lack of connection she felt to the literature she read in school. That feeling and awareness of a lack of representation led to Rebecca's heavy focus on ensuring the students can relate to the texts in some manner. Leslie, as an African-American woman, although of an older generation, felt repressed as well by her experiences as a student at an all-Black parochial school in Louisiana. It was important for Leslie to teach kids to see how the literature relates to their lives, rather than, "Here's a book you need to read to take these tests." It was more important for Leslie to make the kids see that they can find some way to relate to what is being read, especially since that was not how she was taught.

Another influence on the role students played in their teaching practices was simply the experience of being in the classroom. As part of the National Board certification process, Anna and Leslie spent time reflecting on and understanding their teaching practices. Both of comparable age and years spent teaching, Anna and Leslie spoke of the change in their teaching over time. Leslie reflected:

Over anything I've learned through so many years is to be more of a facilitator; to try and get the kids to be accountable and responsible for what they learn. We've got to make it interesting enough for them to want to do that, but to make them more accountable.

Likewise, Anna explained that essentially the process was looking at how to make teaching relevant and how to engage students. Although not a National Board-certified teacher, Deborah, who has been teaching for approximately the same amount of years as Anna and Leslie, noted a change in her approach to teaching, focusing on getting students to be able to verbalize their knowledge.

Samantha, Rebecca, and Catherine, while not having as many years of teaching experience as Leslie, Deborah, and Anna, were influenced by the teaching experience they do have in regards to the students when they are teaching. Samantha referred to herself as a control freak in her interview, but, being aware of this, felt she was getting better at letting the students take on more responsibility for themselves. As seen in Catherine's survey questionnaire responses from research question one, when referring to pedagogical beliefs regarding content area, Catherine acknowledged her lack of knowledge regarding the English Language Arts curriculum standards:

I think because I'm young, it helps because I want so badly to just understand their experiences, that I like let them talk a lot more than their used to. I guess that's my philosophy as a teacher; it's not gonna get them to pass the FSA [state standardized assessment], but...if it's gonna help them in life it's okay.

While Catherine has the least amount of teaching experience, it has still impacted the role the students have in her curriculum design choices. More than any of the other teacher participants, Rebecca actively involves her students in the curriculum design process:

I poll the students at the end of the year: What did you like? What didn't you like? Which novel did you like and why? Which novel didn't you like and why? Anything else you want to tell me...you know. So, I kind of use that to gauge what I'm going to do for the next year. People ask why the students are so eager to come to my class and I think it has a lot to do with the fact that I cater to them and they know that from the beginning.

Rebecca followed that up with a comment regarding education as a whole. She felt that teachers needed to move away from being stuck on teaching the stories they like and instead teach stories that are relatable to their students, a sentiment slightly echoed by Deborah in research question one regarding teachers not just teaching the texts they like. Rebecca continued that when you have teachers who have been teaching for 20 or 30 years and are still teaching the same materials, it is not going to work.

The last trend discovered from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews that dealt with teaching with the students in mind while making curriculum design choices was the actual process of deciding what materials and activities to include. All of the participants had varying degrees of depth when discussing this process. Some teachers, as mentioned, approached the decision-making process by first looking at the students in their classrooms before making decisions. Others had a general idea of what information they wanted to cover and planned accordingly.

Academic performance levels based on state standardized test scores was also a factor for

some teachers. For Samantha and Rebecca, most of the decisions made regarding the materials they would use and the activities they would do were not decided until they saw the group of students they had in their classes. Rebecca, coming from a business background, has stated that she thinks of the clients' needs, who in this case would be the students:

I always think of the audience first. I do have to take a look at the demographics. There's also always a concern, being an African-American teacher, but I don't want to be the Black teacher teaching a Black book. There are certain things that I'm going to talk about [when teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*]. It's hard because you don't want to ruffle any feathers.

Rebecca mentioned her own role in the student interaction, but Samantha focused solely on the students. For Samantha, she was the only teacher participant to mention knowing what the students' different learning styles are. She said she used that information to incorporate a wider variety of activities to reach all the students and encourage dialogue in her classroom.

Deborah and Anna both had a general idea of what they would like to cover in their units while teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both teacher participants taught the advanced level students, but they made no mention of that in the one-on-one semi-structured interviews when discussing their decision-making process. Both teachers discussed the desire to choose activities that will interest the students. For Deborah, it is a very thoughtful process:

When choosing activities and materials, I make sure I'm following what the standards are, but I try not to overwhelm the students...I try to have options but

also try not to have *too* much. So, I want things that are group work, which are speech like they're talking to someone. Some kind of discussion always has to be in there, Socratic seminar. Some kind of project is important. Some writing assignment. I don't usually use a lot of multiple-choice tests, but writing assignments are important.

For Anna, her design is much more simply stated: "I try to find activities that get the students to think in higher order thinking levels, writing about what they read, interpreting what they read...." But for both Deborah and Anna, it is important to make connections to contemporary things in order for the students to connect the literature to their own lives.

The academic performance level of the students was very much in the forefront for Catherine and Michelle when choosing materials and activities for the *To Kill a Mockingbird* units. Both teacher participants teach students who are performing below grade level academically. This more or less dictates what Catherine does in her classroom:

I had study guides for every chapter. I had quizzes for every five chapters because if I don't, then those precipice kids, you know, they'll just not do it. These kids usually have never read a book before they came to me. It's about accountability—these aren't honors kids who will do the reading because it's assigned.

With similar sentiments Michelle read the entirety of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in class with her students, fearing that they would not doing the reading otherwise. Both women spoke

to the students' deficits being a limitation on what they could do in their classrooms.

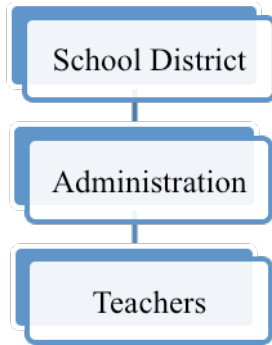
When deciding what to do in the *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit, Catherine explained:

I know if I had honors kids that I could go a lot more into like higher theory stuff, but I know the big thing with level ones, twos, and threes is like meet them where they're at. So, if like the simplest conversation they understand and can participate in is just like very blanket about like race and race relations and nothing higher level than that, it's still a useful conversation to have.

Michelle had a comparable opinion about having to reach the students at their level: "I know it's important to teach the classics, but the students I work with get a little turned off by the classics. If we introduce some newer material, maybe they'll get on board."

Deborah, Anna, Catherine, and Michelle all thought about the students when designing their curriculum. The difference is that Catherine and Michelle were simply trying to get the students to get the work done while Deborah and Anna were trying to get the students to interact with the text at a deeper level.

**The power structure of teaching experience.** The idea of power is often seen as a force asserting its domination over another. But for Foucault (1984), power does not belong to an individual force nor does it hold the traditional negative connotation—power exists in relations. Foucault explained how power relations are not fixed but are mobile, reversible, and unstable. This concept is what led to the second theme of research question two—the power structure of teaching experience. Schools currently employ a hierarchical top-down model as seen in Figure 3.



*Figure 3.* School hierarchy of power.

This has led to an internalization of a power structure where teachers place themselves in a position of submission to school administrators, who are essentially dominated by the school district. But for Derrida (1968), the role of poststructuralism is to deconstruct underlying power structures that are perpetuating such hegemonic hierarchies, through constant questioning and breaking down the language that exists, to fight the system from within. For the participants in the research study, the role of their teaching experience factored into the decisions they made in their classrooms, functioning within the current power dynamics.

Teaching experience impacted the participants at various levels when it came to their decision-making process regarding curriculum. The years of teaching experience among the participants ranged from 3 years to 35 years. However, the years spent teaching did not show the expected disparities in how the teacher participants found materials to use in their classrooms. When asked how she finds materials and activities to use, Catherine, a third-year teacher, responded:

I'm a big fan of Teachers Pay Teachers [website to purchase pre-packaged lessons] and not reinventing the wheel. I think there's not a lot of other jobs where you go in and for your first few years, they're telling you create new content.



Like, I think that I should be relying upon teachers that have done this for many decades successfully. So that's my argument for why I like Teachers Pay Teachers.

However, when Anna, who is a National Board-certified teacher with 29 years of experience, was asked the same question, she responded that she, too, goes on Teachers Pay Teachers often. She further explained how much easier it is now for new teachers to find curriculum guides and supplemental materials on the Internet, where websites like Teachers Pay Teachers sell pre-packaged units, lessons, and activities. Deborah, who similar to Anna has been teaching for 30 years, acknowledged the role the Internet plays in curriculum design, but had a differing viewpoint than Catherine and Anna:

In the old days, we used to get together a lot and come up with our own things. The Internet has a lot of great stuff and I do go on and see what's out there, but I think when you create things on your own it's better because you really make it your own. You understand it because you understand how you created it and why you created it.

As mentioned earlier, Rebecca felt that it was problematic if teachers taught the same curriculum for 20 or 30 years. This opinion contradicted Catherine's feeling that she should rely on materials created by teachers who had been teaching the curriculum for decades.

As the newest teacher in the research study, Catherine's statements regarding her performance as a teacher came predominantly from a place of uncertainty and submission. A comment she repeated often throughout the one-on-one semi-structured interviews and follow-up interview was that her struggles in the classroom were due to

her not having a degree in education. As previously mentioned, six of the seven participants have non-education undergraduate degrees, the exception being Michelle, who has a degree in elementary education but has only taught at the secondary level. Not one of the other participants alluded to this being detrimental to their teaching practices in any way. Also, being the youngest participant, with the next closest in age being 17 years older, Catherine was very forthcoming with her insecurities about being in the classroom:

The first bell rings and the kids come in and I'm like why have people let me be in charge of them? So, like, when I started teaching, I was like, I don't even know what a successful lesson looks like. I just sort of try to get bits and pieces from what I heard other teachers say and like do my own thing. It's like, teaching is very much a sink or swim profession. You just find out if you have it in that like first year to five years maybe.

The idea of just doing her own thing was echoed by Anna when she explained that she listens to all of the mandates and directives, but once she gets into her classroom, she just closes the door and shuts out the rest of the world.

The amount of leeway a teacher has with the curriculum was also a point that came up. Anna felt that classic texts were classic for a reason—they're universal and timeless and those texts should be the standard when designing curriculum. Rebecca, who came to teaching as a second career 12 years ago, showed a sense of confidence in her decisions regarding curriculum design:

There's certain classics you have to teach that are important, but I love finding a way to modernize them, like looking at the story in reverse. They may not remember the characters' names, but "Isn't that the one about this, this, and this?"

and then I feel like my job as an English teacher is done because they clearly get it. That's more important sometimes than the actual standards everybody's so focused on.

While Rebecca was comfortable making the curriculum her own and, like Deborah, felt that there was an express need to do so, this idea posed problematic for Catherine: "A big problem I had this year, from my very limited perspective, too much emphasis was placed on the standards and test prep...but there are people above my pay grade making decisions for reasons that I don't know." This opinion was aligned with her earlier comments about valuing veteran teachers' curriculum rather than her own insights when choosing what materials and activities to use for teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

How the teacher participants viewed their role in their classrooms was also something influenced by their teaching experience. For Michelle, who has taught for 16 years, how she viewed her role as a teacher has changed over time:

In the first couple of years of my career, when it was summer, I was just done and didn't do anything work-related. As I've grown as an educator, I've realized the importance of professional development. Now I go in the summers [to professional development] because I feel like it's helping me and I always have at least one take-away. That's what I want to do for my students, or at least I try to.

Rebecca as well makes a point to continue to grow and learn as a teacher: "I keep a notebook so at the end of whatever unit I'm working on, I reflect—did it work? What would I do differently? I make a note of questions I might want to pose...." Samantha, who also came to teaching as a second career, agreed that to be a good teacher, every

year should be a learning experience: “I don’t know if I consider myself a great teacher, but I think I’m a learning teacher and I’m constantly learning.” This idea is something that arose during the focus group as well as Samantha’s follow-up interview.

During the focus group, Catherine shared her experience with discussions she had in her classroom while teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*: “The kids on their own were making connections...on their own telling me like, what they thought...I ended up learning a lot from them, which I know isn’t ethical....” Samantha immediately responded that it should be a teacher’s goal to learn from their students because it means you are making them think.

### **RQ3: How Do Female English Language Arts Teachers’ Pedagogical Beliefs Manifest Themselves in the Curriculum Design for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?**

For the third research question, the researcher reviewed the teacher participants’ unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird* in conjunction with interview and survey questionnaire responses to find a connection between their pedagogical beliefs and what they reported they were doing in their classrooms. This was augmented by the single focus group session with six of the seven participants. Through this process, the two main themes to emerge were the concepts of teaching versus facilitating and process of teaching versus the desired product.

**Teaching versus facilitating.** The idea of power was an undercurrent throughout the research study, including the analysis process. For Derrida (1966), Western civilization is intrinsically oppressive. This idea can be seen in the current school setting where the atmosphere is one of empowering the students. St. Pierre (2000) echoed Foucault’s (1984) assertion that power is often seen as inherently evil, which leads to an

overcompensation of individuals attempting to give away some of their power to avoid domination by empowering those viewed as being in a position of oppression. This was seen during the analysis of research question three with the emphasis being placed on teachers' desire to facilitate learning rather than provide direct instruction.

For the survey questionnaires exploring pedagogical beliefs, the subcategories of technique and delivery were rated of the highest importance for the teacher participants in the teaching section and the content area section. As mentioned in research question one, the survey questionnaire item that looked at how important it was to deliver information so that students understand it was the only question (Question 25) that all seven participants rated as extremely important. Deborah, however, was the only teacher to mention the instruction component when discussing her curriculum design:

The more I go through resources to pull materials together, the better my instruction is because I've made it more my own instead of just buying a pre-packaged unit. When you do that [use a pre-packaged unit], it seems stilted, you know, not natural.

The focus on instruction was also seen in Deborah's *To Kill a Mockingbird* lesson plan unit where she included guided close readings of sections of the novel with varying literary focuses. It is important to note that in the survey questionnaire, six of the seven teacher participants said it was extremely important for teachers to have extensive knowledge of the subject matter they teach, although most of the participants pull their lessons strictly from online sources. Deborah, again, was the only teacher to speak to the need to not rely entirely on the Internet for curriculum units. The only other mention of direct instruction in the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews,

focus group, or unit lesson plans was during the focus group. Anna expressed the importance of pre-teaching the historical context and author's biographical information before reading the novel. Catherine also mentioned the need to teach the students about privilege and race-related activism.

During the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, Anna and Leslie spoke about their experience of going through the National Board certification process. Anna explained how after going through the process, she learned that she should not be doing all of the talking in her classroom: "You really should be a facilitator—let your students do the work and learn through sharing and exploring...things like that." This mirrored Leslie's experience almost exactly:

Over anything I've learned through so many years is to be more of a facilitator; to try and get the kids to be accountable and responsible for what they learn. We've got to make it interesting enough for them to want to do that, but to make them more accountable.

Keeping the students in mind, the majority of the participants were in agreement that their role as the teacher was to be more of a facilitator rather than directly instruct students.

While the thought process behind the desire to promote active learning over passive learning was present, there was a disconnect between responses within the survey questionnaire where the teachers examined their pedagogical beliefs. When looking at the responses in the section regarding students, six of the seven participants felt that it was extremely important for teachers to know how to motivate and engage students (Question 23). This would support the desire for active learning, but with Question 32, which asked

how important it was for teachers to have knowledge of motivational practices, only three of the seven participants rated that question as extremely important, the lowest rated question of the entire section regarding their beliefs about students. During her one-on-one semi-structured interview, Michelle offered great insight into the thought process behind her decisions when teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

This year I decided to incorporate more opportunities for students to either work in pairs or small groups, and I try to play more the role of facilitator, because I really wanted the kids to dig deeper into the text and find meaning on their own instead of me just reading and explaining my thoughts. I wanted them to own their learning, so that was something I consciously made an effort to do this year that, you know, I didn't do in the past.

While Michelle previously expressed a desire for more active learning, in her unit lesson plan Michelle assigned chapter questions to be completed after the students have listened to the audio of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in its entirety during class. This is the same process reflected in Catherine's unit lesson plans—study guide questions while listening to the audio of the novel. However, Michelle introduced the concept of chat stations during her interview, which she found from a pedagogy podcast series:

I do chat stations with review questions. Instead of giving them questions every night, I break it up and write questions on chart paper around the room and they work in groups to answer the questions. I walk around to make sure they're actually talking about the questions and everyone is participating.

This description did not align with her unit lesson plan exactly, but she did include one cycle of chat stations during the second week of her unit. Anna shared a similar sentiment

to Michelle's original statement when she explained how she decided what to do in her *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit: "I didn't want to give the students chapters to read and questions to answer then a multiple-choice test. I wanted more hands-on, student-led discussions, less memorization of the plot." This was reflected in Anna's unit lesson plan where she had small group discussions based on character studies and literary elements that the students initially explore independently.

In Rebecca, Samantha, and Leslie's unit lesson plans, they had the students read *To Kill a Mockingbird* independently, but with varying accompanying activities. Rebecca provided her students with guiding questions that were completed while the students read at home. Samantha had her students read at home, but then would have them answer questions in pairs or groups of three in class. Leslie also had her students read at home, but instead of providing questions for her students, she required them to complete Cornell notes while reading.

All of the teacher participants have noted the need for discussion in class. Rebecca brought up in the focus group how important it was to have possibly uncomfortable conversations in a safe space with an educated adult facilitating. These classroom conversations showed how timely and relevant the issues in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are. Leslie spoke similarly in her one-on-one semi-structured interview when explaining her view of the fundamental purpose of education:

The purpose of education is to guide kids in evaluating what they think is important for their lives. They need to read so that they can start looking at what other people have done in history, and what people are doing now, and to determine and evaluate what they want to believe without forcing them.



This viewpoint is carried through in Leslie's unit lesson plan where she does a pre-reading activity with students working in small groups to create collages based on various points of the background and historical context for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The need for this context has been mentioned by the teachers at various points, and Rebecca includes it in her unit lesson plan as well as she has her students work in small groups to research background information about the Great Depression prior to reading the novel. The idea of the students completing independent research was supported by Leslie and Anna as well. Anna, speaking in more general terms, explained: "With vocabulary, don't just give them the meaning. Have them see how the word is being used in context. Don't let them look it up in a dictionary—try to figure out what the word means using context clues." Leslie, following that student-driven approach, expressed her pleasure at the school site's promotion of students bringing their own electronic devices because instead of her standing in front of the room with a PowerPoint presentation, she can simply tell the students to take out their electronic devices and look something up.

**Process versus product.** Poststructuralists insist that words and texts have no fixed or intrinsic meanings. Butler (1990) expanded on this by asserting that the concept of one's self is a social construct in which meaning is derived by context rather than meaning being something that inherently exists. For poststructuralists such as Baudrillard (1968), an object, such as the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, only has meaning based on its relations to others—there is not just one way to interpret the novel. Through a student's construction of his/her self, there are a variety of ways to understand and interpret the novel. This poststructuralist approach would be possible if emphasis was placed on the process in which the students interacted with the text. However, the

counter-position uncovered in the findings for this theme was that the teacher participants placed more focus on the end product they wished for the students to produce based on the teachers' interpretation of the novel.

As seen in the previous theme for research question three, technique and delivery had the highest rating of importance for both teaching and content area, but it is not something mentioned in the teacher participants' unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. During the focus group, most of the teachers were more focused on what the students were doing or not doing—completing homework and/or assigned reading—rather than their own teaching practices. In the survey questionnaire, six of the seven participants felt it was extremely important to know instructional methods for the specific content area they teach (Question 30) and how to use different teaching techniques depending on the content they teach (Question 21). This belief was not reflected elsewhere in the data collected because in the unit lesson plans, the focus group, and the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, five of the seven participants prioritized what the students are producing, not the process of learning the information.

In the unit lesson plans submitted by the teacher participants for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, five of the seven participants were product-focused, having the students complete guiding questions by chapter. As Catherine explained about finding materials to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*: “I didn't follow a set calendar, I just pulled out things I wanted to do like an anticipation guide or study questions or an activity I thought would be fun.” As explained in an earlier section, Catherine had her students complete study guides for every chapter and administered a quiz every five chapters, operating on the assumption that the students would otherwise not read the book. Anna and Deborah

approached the novel in sections, having students analyze the section thematically or by literary element, allowing for a deeper interaction with the text. Anna and Deborah were also the only two teachers out of the seven participants to include a unit summary in their lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Deborah had a very thorough plan in mind and was intentional in her planning of the unit to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

I always have more than I need, but I think about what I'm going to do to introduce the lesson, what are going to be my middle kind of activities, and then what's going to be formative stuff, and then what's going to be at some point summative, trying to have options but trying not to have too much. So, I want things that are group work which are speech-like—they're talking to someone. Some kind of discussion always has to be in there; Socratic seminar. Some kind of project is important. Some writing assignment. I don't usually use a lot of multiple-choice tests but writing assignments are important. So ultimately, it's hard because I do tend to have more than I should and then at some point I have to take stuff out.

Samantha did have her students complete chapter questions to accompany their reading, but she was the only other teacher besides Deborah to have in her unit lesson plan that the students would participate in a Socratic seminar after the completion of the novel.

Deborah asserted the importance of having students connect the literature read in class to their own lives. For Samantha, as mentioned earlier, she thought it should be a goal for a teacher to learn things from their students, as seen through student-directed Socratic seminars, because it means that the students are thinking and processing what they have learned. Leslie mentioned something similar in the focus group:

We need to let them [students] decide what to think, not tell them what to think. That's why frontloading about why this is happening and why it does happen takes up most of the time, otherwise you'll just be reading another story.

To build on this, Rebecca mentioned the importance of paired texts when reading classic literature like *To Kill a Mockingbird*: "I'm big on paired texts showing a different side or perspective because every time we do that, the outcomes and discussions from the kids come out so differently." Unfortunately, this was not reflected in Leslie or Rebecca's unit lesson plan for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as they and three of the other participants ended their novel unit with a standard exam. It was discussed earlier Michelle's reason for completing the reading of the novel in class accompanied by the audio versus the students reading on their own. She argued that aside from ensuring the reading is being done, it would promote the learning process: "If there was a question, I would be right there to address it or have the students discuss it so that we could, you know, figure out what was go on... you know, the process." However, Michelle was in the portion of teacher participants who were product-focused—her unit lesson plans showed that her students answered chapter questions as they read and then ended the unit with a standard exam covering the novel.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings from this mixed-methods phenomenological bounded case study that was conducted. This chapter discussed the findings for RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. RQ1 presented the quantitative data from the survey questionnaire, which was then supported by qualitative data from the focus group, one-on-one interviews, and follow-up interviews. RQ2 presented two themes that were supported by strictly

qualitative data from the focus group, one-on-one interviews, and follow-up interviews. RQ3 showed the connection between RQ1 and RQ2 presented through qualitative data from unit lesson plans, the focus group, one-on-one interviews, and follow-up interviews. This information was supported by quantitative data from the survey questionnaire.

Frequencies found in the survey questionnaire were presented in addition to four key themes. Each section of pedagogical beliefs and the subsequent subcategories within each section was displayed, along with the frequency in which each question was rated extremely important (RQ1). The first key theme (RQ2) was the role the students played when the teacher participants designed their units for teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The second key theme (RQ2) was the revelation of the power structure associated with the years of teaching experience. The third key theme (RQ3) was the disconnect between the concepts of teaching and facilitating. The fourth key theme (RQ3) was the emphasis being placed on what the students produced over the process of learning information.

Chapter 5 discusses implications from the findings of the research study. The chapter also includes the observations made during the analysis process, which informed the implications and recommendations that can be made as a result.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Discussion**

This study examined how intersectionality impacted female English Language Arts teachers' pedagogical beliefs and the decision-making process for curriculum design. This study also explored the relationship between the participants' pedagogical beliefs and their curriculum design choice for teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The study was a mixed-methods phenomenological bounded case study that drew from a conceptual framework influenced by poststructural feminism to develop, conduct, and analyze the study. Drawing from the works of Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault, Butler, and Collins, four themes emerged from the data collected through the study: (a) making curriculum design choices with the students in mind, (b) the power structure associated with teaching experience, (c) the concepts of teaching versus facilitating, and (d) emphasis placed on the process versus the product of teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Table 14 explores how the key themes that emerged from this study connected to the conceptual framework.

Table 14

*Connection of Key Themes to Conceptual Framework*

Theme	Connection to Conceptual Framework
Teaching with the students in mind	Meaning is obtained through context and is thus always changing (Derrida, 1968) Discourse is difficult to act outside of once it has become the norm (Butler, 1990)
The power structure of teaching experience	Power exists in relations—mobile, reversible, unstable (Foucault, 1984) Deconstruct underlying power structures; fight the system from within (Derrida, 1968)
Teaching versus facilitation	Western civilization is intrinsically oppressive (Derrida, 1966) Overcompensation by individuals attempting to give away some of their power to avoid domination (Foucault, 1984)
Process versus product	One’s self is a social construct; meaning is derived through context rather than inherently existing (Butler, 1990) An object only has meaning based on its relation to others (Baudrillard, 1968) Poststructuralism—students’ construction of “self” lends to various interpretations

**Intersectionality and the Self**

The idea for this research study originated under the speculation that teachers’ life experiences, both personal and professional, impacted their beliefs about pedagogy and therefore the choices they made in their classrooms regarding curriculum design. The goal was to explore the various facets of the teacher participants through a case study to see if this was in fact a phenomenon taking place or if a teacher’s intersectionality did not have an influence over what they did in their classrooms. Historically, gender has been

the primary determining factor in a woman's fate (hooks, 2014). But in this study, with seven female participants, gender was not addressed. Third wave feminism brought about the distinction that not all women are facing the same forces of oppression. Collins (1986) expressed that emphasizing our differences holds a negative connotation, but, as seen in this study, race was in the forefront for the three Black teacher participants. The idea of being the "Black teacher," whether they were teaching predominantly White students or predominantly Black students, was something Leslie, Michelle, and Rebecca mentioned throughout their interviews and follow-up interviews. Why this stood out was that race was not mentioned as something that impacted the decision-making process regarding curriculum design choices for the remaining participants, who all self-identified as White. Catherine did mention in her interview and the focus group the idea of privilege, but this was in reference to her social class, not her identity as a White woman. This was also the only reference to social class from any of the participants. It became evident that while the participants of the research study were being viewed as one case—the group of teachers teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*—Collins's (1990) matrix of domination is applicable. Although all seven participants had the same classification—female English Language Arts teachers—the distinction of race provided an opportunity for some and not others. For Anna, Deborah, Catherine, and Samantha, race was not something that they had to take into consideration at any point in their personal or professional lives. Collins explained this as one of the main aspects of the matrix of domination: an individual may be privileged in one area, but they can be oppressed in a different aspect of their identity. Keeping in line with Butler's (1990) poststructural feminist assertion that the self is a social construct and not something that



inherently exists, the oppressive state of Black women addressed by Collins (1990) has apparently been a prevalent force in Leslie, Michelle, and Rebecca's conception of their identity, where for Anna, Deborah, Catherine, and Samantha, it did not have to be based on their social interactions. What Collins brings to the conversation with how the self is constructed is through the introduction of the role of power—intersectionality is no longer limited to the gender, race, social class, or sexuality of an individual, but must include the role of society in the construction of what each of those concepts means and how that individual can be oppressed by any or all of those constructs.

### **Teaching with the Students in Mind**

St. Pierre (2000) explained that discourse systematizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world. The problem with this, as Butler (1990) pointed out, is that once discourse is accepted as the norm, it becomes difficult to act outside of it. The current discourse in education is student-driven. The participants of the research study generally affirmed that their goal when designing their curriculum units for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was to create a positive learning environment for their students, but this became a more complex issue. Leslie, who has been teaching for 35 years, came across as having a very negative view of students as a whole. Throughout her one-on-one semi-structured interview, the focus group, and her follow-up interview, she complained that the students made excuses for their behavior and performance and that she told them that they were lazy; but she repeatedly mentioned the need for students to be accountable. Interestingly, though, in the student section of survey questionnaire, Leslie rated the questions that addressed knowing motivational practices or knowing the students' personal backgrounds as not being important. If she placed more importance on

motivating her students and learning about them as individuals, she may rethink her view of her students as lazy and full of excuses.

It became evident in the findings that the teachers were operating under many assumptions about students. For Catherine, Samantha, Leslie, and Michelle, gross generalizations were made based on students' academic achievement levels, leading to preconceived ideas about their students' deficits, academically and socially speaking. One of the key tenets of poststructuralism is that there are no universal truths. Derrida (1968) explained that meaning is obtained through social context and thus is always changing. This would lend itself to the idea that students should be factored into choices teachers make when designing their curriculum. Rebecca expressed the necessity of reflecting on what did work and what did not work when she was teaching, and she also went so far as to ask the students directly in order to fit the needs of her students. However, participants would make statements about teaching without any sort of theory to support their statements. This was a surprising observation due to survey questionnaire responses for the educational theory subcategory of the teaching section of pedagogical beliefs. Rated of the lowest importance of the entire survey questionnaire, only two teachers, Samantha and Michelle, found it important to know the theoretical foundations and implications of their teaching practices. But when asked in the immediately subsequent question if it was important to know the tricks of the trade instead of educational theory, it would serve to think that the remaining teachers would find that more important since they did not rate knowing the educational theory as important; only two teachers, Deborah and Catherine, rated this question as important. Catherine disclosed during the focus group session that Deborah had been her former high school

English teacher and was serving as her mentor. This connection could have possibly influenced Catherine's rating of this question.

### **The Power Structure of Teaching Experience**

When he discussed the concept of power, Foucault (1984) posited that power does not belong to an individual force, but it exists in relations. He acknowledged that power is often looked at as something negative, but that should not be the case—it is mobile, reversible, unstable, and something that is always present in human relationships. It was discussed in the previous chapter how the current school model follows a top-down approach where the school districts dominate the individual school administrators, who in turn dominate the teachers. Resistance to this domination, according to Foucault (1976), is practiced by self-contained, autonomous individuals in response to an external oppressive force that challenges the liberty of the individual. The teacher participants of this study practiced resisting in various degrees. It was seen, though, that it was not the number of years of teaching experience that led to a sense of expertise. Catherine, the teacher with the least amount teaching experience, repeatedly referred to her age and lack of experience as an excuse for anything she viewed as a deficiency in her teaching practices: student performance, theoretical knowledge, development of curriculum. It was surprising as well as slightly alarming when Catherine said during her interview that people above her pay grade were making decisions about what she has to do as a teacher for reasons she did not know, and it never occurred to her to simply ask. This is where Derrida (1968) explained how deconstruction could be a tool for revolution. The desire is not to completely overthrow current society, but to deconstruct underlying power structures that are perpetuating hegemonic hierarchies, like those seen in public school

systems, through constant questioning and breaking down the language that exists to fight the system from within.

Rebecca, who has only been teaching for 12 years, was comfortable making decisions she thought were in the best interest of her students and the needs of her classroom, even if they did not completely align with school expectations. Similarly, Anna, who has been teaching for 29 years, expressed that while she listened as necessary, when she shut the door of her classroom, she acted as she pleased without outside interference. Something else that stood out with Anna though was that Catherine, who has 26 years less teaching experience, and Anna had very similar views on curriculum design, relying on purchasing pre-packaged materials. While Catherine expressed her reliance on trusting teachers who were more knowledgeable based on their years of experience, Anna, with no commentary, was using the same resource.

### **Teaching Versus Facilitating**

Derrida (1966) considered himself a historian. From studying the nature of how knowledge was constructed throughout history, Derrida concluded that Western civilization was intrinsically oppressive. As seen in earlier themes, the oppressive nature of Western culture has been explored, at least on the surface, with the notion of empowering students. This is where the shift from being a teacher has turned to being a facilitator. The idea of teaching has taken on a negative association, that teaching equates to passive learning for students. St. Pierre (2000) built on Foucault's (1984) assertion that power is seen as inherently evil by explaining how this can often lead to an overcompensation of individuals who feel they are in a position of authority, such as teachers. By attempting to give away some of their power to avoid domination, teachers

try to empower those viewed as being in a position of oppression, in this hierarchy, students.

The fear of not empowering students has led to direct instruction being seen as that inherently negative position of authority. Leslie and Anna prided themselves on having the students do all the work when it came to building background knowledge for a novel or acquiring new vocabulary. While the 90-minute block of time that the teacher participants have with their students every other day should not be solely comprised of the teacher lecture, Leslie and Anna's approach to attaining new knowledge can be problematic. It is an unfair assumption on the part of the teachers that their students are all equally equipped with the knowledge to obtain this information on their own. If the teachers want the students to go through the process of discovering meaning independently, there still needs to be some initial guidance to give the students the tools to do so. The use of scaffolding (Bruner, 1978) would allow for a helpful, structured interaction between the students and their teachers to help them achieve a specific goal together.

Leslie and Anna mentioned the shift from teaching to facilitating being a big portion of their National Board certification process. While Michelle has not gone through that process, she did complete an online graduate program in school leadership with aspirations to become an administrator. While Michelle spoke frequently of her intent of making her lessons hands-on and student-driven, this was not reflected in her unit lesson plan for *To Kill a Mockingbird* where she had her students just listen to the audio of the novel and answer questions. This disconnect with self-perception is addressed further in this chapter.

## Process Versus Product

Building on Butler's (1990) poststructural feminist viewpoint, the self does not exist but is constructed through an individual's views of themselves based on their cultural and social interactions. With poststructuralists asserting that there are no universal truths, this conception of the self is how an individual interprets the world around them. In a classroom setting, the students' construction of themselves is how they will interact with texts. With poststructuralism, the intent of the author is secondary to the reader's interpretation. Disapproving binary oppositions, there are no right or wrong interpretations. This would mean that the process of gaining knowledge should take precedence over producing a preconceived right answer or interpretation. This does not mean that teachers should not provide insights or guidance for the students during the unit for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Teachers need to make the effort to be open to more than one interpretation, allowing for various perspectives and viewpoints being just as valid as their own or what the answer key says is correct.

Baudrillard (1968) explained that objects, such as a text, have varying types of value. In alignment with poststructuralism, that value is based on the meaning construed from the object's relations to others. *To Kill a Mockingbird* holds symbolic value as a text that students experience their freshmen year of high school. The value of the novel is diminished by the emphasis being placed on answering questions and taking a test instead of the students making connections to and constructing meaning of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for themselves. Deborah stood out for really moving away from the standard product-driven curriculum units where students completed uniform tasks that left no room for interpretation or deviation from the right answers. Her unit lesson plan

and discussion during her one-on-one semi-structured interview showed how she truly wanted to provide opportunities for her students to interact with the text on various levels in order to make connections to their own lives and the world around them. It was important for Deborah that her students could communicate their understanding in their own words rather than a one-size-fits-all performance task. While some of the other teachers had one or two activities that allowed for students' personalized interpretations of the text, the overall group presented a fairly standard approach of reading and answering questions.

### **Researcher Observations**

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, noteworthy observations were made based on the teacher participants' responses to the survey questionnaire, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, focus group, and follow-up interviews. While the research study's findings informed these observations, the observations in turn informed the implications and recommendations of the research study.

### **Self-reporting**

When conducting a study that explores individuals' beliefs and thought processes, self-reports through surveys or interviews are useful because valuable information is provided by the participants themselves. In a practical sense, this type of information can be obtained quickly and easily as well. However, as Jupp (2006) explained, a disadvantage of self-report studies is respondent bias. Whether it is done consciously or unconsciously, many individuals are influenced by social desirability bias, in which they either want to please the researcher by providing responses they deem more socially acceptable or preferred, or try to put themselves in a more positive light (Jupp, 2006).

Garcia and Gustavson (1997) suggested that the inherent bias in self-reporting was influenced by the participants' feelings at the time they filled out the survey questionnaire, participated in the interview, or partook in the focus group.

The initial inkling that suggested there may be an issue with self-reported information came during the focus group session. During the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, each participant was asked whether or not they had read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in high school. Anna answered that she had not, which seemed appropriate because she was born one year before the book had been published. It seemed odd though when Samantha, who is five years older than Anna, expressed the enormous impact reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* in eighth grade had on her life. The opening question for the focus group session asked what each teacher participants' favorite book was that they had read in high school. Both Anna and Samantha answered "without a doubt, *To Kill a Mockingbird*." While the timeline was slightly off for Samantha, it stood out more that Anna had said one-on-one that she had not read the novel as a student. It should not be immediately assumed that Anna's intent was deceit, but as shown in Table 15, with Jupp's (2006) explanation of the disadvantages of self-reporting, it provides some insight to what may have happened to cause this disconnect.



Table 15

*Disadvantages of Self-reported Data*

Biases/Limitations	Disadvantage
Honesty	Participants may make the more socially acceptable answer rather than being truthful
Introspective ability	The participants may not be able to assess themselves accurately
Interpretation of the questions	The wording of the questions may be confusing or have different meanings to different participants
Rating scales	Numerical scales can be inexact and subject to individual inclination to give an extreme or middle response to all questions
Response bias	Questions are subject to all of the biases of what the previous responses were, whether they relate to a recent or significant experience and other factors

Response bias was something that stood out considering there were four phases of data collection. The survey questionnaire responses about how important the individual teacher participants found the different areas of pedagogical beliefs informed the follow-up portion of the interview process. When looking at that data in conjunction to the information gathered from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews and the unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a disconnect was evident for many of the participants' responses. For example, Catherine said in her interview that with the level of students she taught, she could not get into anything more challenging than race and race relations; gender and such would be too "high theory" for them. Dismissing the fact that race and gender are both complex topics regardless of a student's academic achievement level, Catherine stated in her follow-up interview that she discusses gender performance with her students based on the character of Scout.

**Disconnect with self-perceptions.** Besides a disconnect between data sources, there were disparities between what the teacher participants thought they were doing or

expressed they wanted to do and what they were actually doing. As seen with Jupp (2006), it may have been an issue of introspective ability—the participants may not have been able to assess themselves accurately. A by-product of education graduate programs is learning to think about the why behind the what. As seen with the survey questionnaire, five of the seven teacher participants thought it was unimportant to know the theoretical foundations and implications of their teaching practices. The two participants who found educational theory important were Michelle, who has a graduate degree, and Samantha, who said that 17 of the 20 questions were extremely important.

Samantha rated six out of the six questions in the student section of the survey questionnaire as extremely important. A subcategory of the student section addressed the importance of students' culture and background. It was mentioned earlier that the three Black participants had race in the forefront of their thoughts when making decisions for their classrooms. What stood out with Samantha though was her repeated mentioning of how race was *not* a factor for her. In a boastful manner, Samantha expressed that she was “colorblind”—she did not see color and when students pointed out to her that she was the only White person in the classroom, she responded that she honestly had not noticed. This comment raised a flag because it contradicts her responses about it being extremely important to know and understand their students' personal and cultural backgrounds and experiences. It may be due to Samantha being from an older generation, but it seems problematic to say how important it is to understand a student's culture, but in the same breath not see that culture, of which race is a part. Self-identifying as White, Samantha does not seem cognizant of her own privilege that has afforded her to take the stance of not seeing color.

Anna, one of the veteran teachers of the study with 29 years of teaching experience, mentioned that when she is in her classroom, she shuts out the world and focuses on her empathy for her students. In her follow-up interview, Anna discussed how she purchased a unit on empathy to be used in the teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and, based on her life experiences, how important it is for her to teach her students about empathy. This is definitely a positive and admirable position to take, but there was nothing in her submitted unit lesson plan to reflect this. Based on her survey questionnaire responses, Anna only found two of the six questions in the student section important—knowing about child/adolescent behavior and how to motivate and engage students. She did not rate the questions regarding personal or cultural background as important, which goes against the desire to instill the importance of empathy in her classroom.

Catherine was the youngest participant in the study and the novice teacher. While all of the participants had college degrees in something other than what they were doing, this was most evident with Catherine. Referring to herself as the liberal black sheep of her family, Catherine referenced her “privilege” at multiple points throughout the interviews and focus group. Something she prided herself on was her strong content background with English and that she taught her students that words have power. She did not expand on what that exactly meant, but it became noteworthy when Catherine’s choice of words in certain situations became questionable. During her one-on-one semi-structured interview, Catherine referred to her students as “precipice kids.” Although she does teach the students who performed below grade level on the state standardized test, the word precipice means “a headlong fall or descent; chiefly figurative: a fall into a

disastrous situation or condition” (“Precipice,” n.d.). While this may not have been her intent, it is questionable to equate her students to an abyss. Another questionable choice of words occurred during the focus group when the teacher participants were discussing the experiences they have had while teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* in their classrooms. Catherine shared her surprise at actually learning things from her students, not only the students learning from her, but then continued that she knew it was not “ethical” to learn from the students. This caused some alarm—how is it morally wrong, dishonorable, indecent, and lacking virtue (“Ethical,” n.d.) to learn from students?

### **The Concept of Facilitating**

As seen with research question three, the idea of being facilitators rather than teachers has been the current trend in education. It has been explained at various points that poststructuralists believe that meaning is derived from context. The current interpretation of facilitation is an issue because the teachers view it as being completely hands off—there is no context provided for the students in order for them to obtain meaning. The Oxford English Dictionary defined facilitating as “the action or process of making something easy or easier, or of assisting to bring about a particular end or result” (“Facilitating,” n.d.). When looking at facilitating in a classroom setting, Brown (n.d.) explained that facilitators build on the knowledge base of the group of students to find the answers to questions. Leslie and Anna were mentioned because of their emphasis on facilitating after going through the National Board certification process. Unfortunately, their perception of facilitating has equated to an absence of instruction, as it has for many of the teacher participants in the study. Having students look things up on their own without guidance not only leads to problems with the validity and reliability of the

sources in which students are finding their information, but the idea of context comes to mind. Leslie used the example of having students look up segregation before reading the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Without further guidance, the students have no context of segregation as it relevant to the understanding of the novel due to the broad topic with which they are dealing.

Facilitation can be used when looking at it from a position of constructivism. With constructivism, the teacher's main role is as a facilitator—there to offer support and advice when needed, but also to provide the necessary scaffolding and teaching of skills when necessary (Grennon Brooks, n.d.). Teaching is not then the lecture-based passive learning the teacher participants of this study have expressed, but it is providing that knowledge and expertise that the teacher possesses, where in turn they can provide opportunity for the students to interact with their new knowledge with the teacher facilitating, or making it easier as the definition of the term suggests. Although it was evident from the findings that the teacher participants were not familiar with educational theory, nor did they place a high level of importance on theoretical knowledge, having a better understanding of constructivist learning theory would allow the teachers to facilitate more effectively.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

### **Consistency and Accountability**

Implications of this study were derived from the findings and observations made during the analysis process. From these implications, recommendations arose to address perceived needs that emerged. The first implication addressed consistency with lesson planning. As part of the research study, the seven teacher participants were required to

submit a unit lesson plan for the teaching of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Other than the topic the unit was covering, there was not much consistency with what the teachers included in their lesson plans. The level of detail provided, the organization of the unit, the content of what was included in the unit—all seven units varied greatly. During the interview process, many of the teacher participants mentioned the state standards, which are meant to be the foundation of a lesson. However, only four of the seven teachers included standards in their lesson plan. Some teachers organized their unit by weeks, with an overview of what they planned to cover during that week. For the teachers who did use that organizational pattern, the number of weeks still differed. Some teachers designed their unit by pre-reading, during reading, and after reading. When speaking about the current secondary English Language Arts curriculum during her one-on-one semi-structured interview, Leslie referred to the curriculum as standard and prescribed. The findings of this study are not consistent with that perception. Not only was there a lack of consistency with the information presented by the teacher participants in their unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there was a lack of consistency with what the teachers said they were doing to teach the novel and what they actually put in their unit lesson plans.

As seen when discussing issues with self-reported data, inconsistencies existed between the various sources of data collected for this study. Teachers are not asked to discuss their decision-making processes when designing curriculum during their typical day-to-day in teaching. This study required teachers to examine their beliefs about pedagogy and to talk through what factors contributed to the choices they made for curriculum design, and then that information was looked at to see what, if any, the

connection was between the two. Having multiple methods of data made the discrepancies from what the teacher participants said they believed about teaching, students, and content area, and what they said they were doing in regards to curriculum design did not make the connection in the unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This led to a question of accountability. Many of the teacher participants mentioned the desire to encourage accountability with their students, often complaining of students' lack of work ethic and the teachers' assumptions that students generally do not want to and will not complete their assignments. If in the current hierarchy of the school system students submit to teachers, then the next step would be teachers submitting to administration. However, there does not seem to be that same level of accountability being called into question when it comes to what the teachers say they are doing and actually are doing in their classrooms. Lesson plans should be representative of what is happening in a teachers' classroom, but as seen in this study, what a teacher said they are doing in their classroom was not always reflected in their lesson plans. The reason for this is not known, and the assumption cannot be made that the teacher participants deceit was intentional. For example, during the focus group, Michelle spoke at length about using the computer application Flipgrid during *To Kill a Mockingbird* to create video projects about social justice that included student-generated poems, songs, and visual artwork. While the other teacher participants were very impressed, Michelle made no mention of Flipgrid or this project in her interviews or unit lesson plans.

At the school site where the study was conducted, the teachers are required to submit their lesson plans at the end of each quarter. The issue of consistency still exists because as seen with this study, a template does not exist to outline what should be

included in a teacher's lesson plans. Also, lesson plans for an individual unit are typically thought to be more in-depth than general lesson plans, but it was seen from the unit lesson plans submitted for this study, depth and detail lacked uniformity as well. The only way to make teachers accountable for what they are teaching is for administration to be in the classrooms observing what is actually taking place. There is no way to assure that administration would substantiate the observations against what the teachers turned in for lesson plans, so the teachers' accountability is still questionable.

### **The Use of Buzzwords**

Jupp (2006) pointed out that with self-reporting, whether it is consciously or unconsciously, participants may be trying to impress the researcher or put themselves in a more positive light by providing answers they *think* the researcher wants to hear, rather than answering honestly. This was seen with the heavy use of education buzz words throughout the study. Buzzwords are defined as terms used more to impress than to inform, especially a technical or jargon term ("Buzzword," n.d.). This seemed to have taken place frequently while collecting the data from the teacher participants. Facilitation, which has been mentioned often throughout this chapter, was used at least once by each of the seven teacher participants at some point in the study. As discussed, understanding what it truly means to be a facilitator did not seem clear to the participants, but they are aware that that is currently the direction education is promoting. In relation to facilitating, the use of higher levels of thinking; critical thinking skills; analyzing, evaluating, synthesizing; and other variations of such terms were used throughout when the participants discussed their goals for teaching and curriculum design. While these terms



are often thrown around in school, academically, there was no support that such skills were being employed in the participants' classrooms.

During at least one part of the study, most of the teacher participants mentioned the use of state standards. However, evidence of "planning with the standards in mind" was not clear in the submitted unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with again only four of the seven teachers even including state standards in their unit lesson plans. Michelle, who disclosed during her follow-up interview that she was on a standards taskforce for her school district, was one of the three participants who did not include standards in her unit lesson plan. Having students be "hands on" in their learning and the activities that took place was also mentioned as an aim for curriculum design, but was also not evident in most unit lesson plans. Samantha's use of buzzwords stood out from the rest of the group during her one-on-one semi-structured interview, but even more so in her unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The use of the term "colorblind" is not in vogue as much as it once was with the push for equitable treatment expressing the need to acknowledge, understand, and respect everyone's "color." While Samantha referring to herself as colorblind may at one point have been the "correct" thing to do, that is no longer the case. Coming across as trying to provide the most socially acceptable answers rather than honest ones, Samantha's unit lesson plans seemed to include every traditional and contemporary model of instruction or activity that could be found in education. In at least one point while teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Samantha had her students do the following: work in pairs and groups of threes, participate in literature circles, complete a reflective essay at the end of the novel, complete peer reviews during the essay writing

process, and participate in a Socratic seminar. Samantha was also the only teacher participant to include a rubric with her unit lesson plan.

### **Recommendations for Professional Development**

It was concluded that based on the implications of the study, professional development would be the most accessible and successful means of addressing needs uncovered in the findings and observations. In addition to professional development, providing opportunities for the mentoring and modeling of the concepts addressed through the professional development sessions would be helpful. For the school site where the research study was conducted, the English Language Arts teachers have a common department planning period. This can be helpful because it provides a time when all of the teachers would be able to attend professional development. A drawback of all the teachers having the same planning period is that organizing opportunities for teachers to go into other teachers' classrooms for modeling lessons or activities does not logistically work out because there is not a time where one teacher will have students while another does not. Logistics aside, there are still plenty of opportunities to promote and support teacher growth.

One topic of professional development that would benefit not only the teachers from this study, but classroom teachers in general, is making educational theory seem more accessible. Key schools of thought that should be included could be critical theory, constructivism, and culturally responsive teaching. If Catherine was familiar with Freire's (1972) dialogic learning, she would see that learning takes place through dialogue where different people, teacher and students, provide arguments based on the validity of what is being said and not the perceived position of power in which the speaker is. Tying back to

the poststructuralism's assumption that meaning is obtained through context, Freire promoted dialogic learning as a way to provide validation for multiple viewpoints and perspectives. When discussing facilitating, constructivism was introduced to explain an appropriate way of incorporating it into the classroom setting. Grennon Brooks (n.d.) provided a chart to show the connection between what is seen as a traditional classroom and what that would look like in a constructivist classroom, shown in Table 16.

Table 16

*Traditional Classroom Versus Constructivist Classroom*

Traditional Classroom	Constructivist Classroom
Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.	Curriculum emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.
Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.	Pursuit of student questions and interests is valued.
Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.	Materials include primary sources of material and manipulative materials.
Learning is based on repetition.	Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows.
Teachers disseminate information to students; students are recipients of knowledge.	Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.
Teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority.	Teacher's role is interactive, rooted in negotiation.
Assessment is through testing, correct answers.	Assessment includes student works, observations, and points of view, as well as tests. Process is as important as product.
Knowledge is seen as inert.	Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.
Students work primarily alone.	Students work primarily in groups.

Most of the teacher participants expressed in the survey questionnaires their belief that knowing their students was extremely important. To take that one step further, an understanding of culturally responsive teaching would strengthen teachers' desire to teach with their students in mind in a way that is effective for everyone involved. Ladson-Billings (2009) essentially tied Freire's (1972) critical push of dialogic learning together with a constructivist approach, but culture is the focal point for learning. Culture is a piece of the poststructural socially constructed concept of self, which informs how students receive information and communicate information. By providing teachers with this background, it will help solidify their teaching practices by grounding their pedagogy in theory that will help them better understand the why behind the what of what they do.

Another area of professional development that would prove helpful for teachers is novel study. Leslie and Samantha alluded to the fact that they did not wish to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* because of the time a novel of that size would take out of instructional time. That mindset is problematic because novel study does not just mean the students read a book and answer questions. Leslie specifically expressed that reading a novel of this size (approximately 360 pages) takes away from grammar, vocabulary, and writing instruction. If professional development for novel study was offered, teachers would learn that all the necessary skills that need to be covered in an English Language Arts classroom can be covered through the use of the novel. Somersett (2016) explained that novel study covers an array of skills. Aside from reading, students learn to conduct research to learn about the background and context of the novel and they learn how to annotate their reading to make sense of their learning—plot, characterization, theme, new vocabulary. True novel study also provides opportunities for evaluation; whether through

writing or discussion, both are skills covered by the state standards that are measured on the standardized state assessment.

Another recommendation is meaningful professional learning communities (PLCs). The school district where the research study was conducted requires all classroom teachers to participate in a PLC. The school site where the research study took place organizes PLCs by content area and grade level. Five of the seven teacher participants from this study participate in a data-driven PLC because their students take the standardized state test. Another reflection of the power structure currently present in the schools is the push from the district for data from the schools. This leads to administration requiring teachers to provide data, but without much more direction than that. As with educational theory, teachers have shown varying levels of comfort regarding the accumulation and use of data in their classrooms. Currently, a common formative assessment is administered to students that focuses on one English Language Arts skill at a time. The proficiency levels for the pre-tests and post-tests are submitted to the teacher leader of the PLC to be compiled and submitted to administration, but that is the extent of what is done with the PLC. A useful addition to the mandated PLC participation would be for teachers to share their best practices with their colleagues. For example, since all of the teachers are required to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*, bringing an activity or lesson used in their own classrooms to the PLC would enhance the experience by adding a practical component. New ideas are presented and teachers can share what has worked and what has not, the struggles they have faced, and celebrate successes. After the focus group session for this research study where six of the seven participants essentially sat as a group and discussed teaching, students, literature, and

everything that goes into being an English Language Arts teacher, many of the participants shared how much they enjoyed the focus group and they wished there were more opportunities for similar sessions. The PLCs would be the perfect opportunity to make that happen.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study provided insight into the impact teachers' personal and professional experiences had on their pedagogical beliefs and curricular choices, there are aspects of the study that could be improved in the future that would enhance the study. Classroom observation was not included in study due to the timeframe assigned to the study—one school year. Catherine and Michelle taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* during the first quarter of the school year while Anna and Rebecca taught the novel during the second quarter. While Leslie and Samantha had taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* in previous years, which met the criteria to be a participant in the study, they were not teaching the novel during the year the research study was conducted. Deborah unexpectedly transferred to a new school during the data collection process—she submitted her unit lesson for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, completed the online survey questionnaire, and participated in the one-on-one semi-structured interview. Unfortunately, Deborah was not available to participate in the focus group, did not respond to the request for a follow-up interview, nor would she have been available for the classroom observation had that been included since she was at a different school site. By adding the observation component, there would be an additional source for the triangulation of data that would support the connection between what the teacher participants self-reported in their survey

questionnaires, their interviews, and the focus groups, and what was included in their unit lesson plans for *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

There are many areas of interest that would benefit for future research being conducted. This study originated under the assumption that although students have certain required texts they are supposed to read, their experiences would differ depending on which teacher they had. While this study looked at the role the teacher played to see if there were differences in what they were teaching, a study with student participants would add the other side of the original assumption. A sampling of students from this study's teacher participants' classes could explore the teachers' intentions with the students' reception. It would be interesting to uncover how the teachers' perceptions differed from the students' perceptions; if what the teachers thought they were doing or trying to do actually translated to the students' experience with *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Another recommendation for future studies would be to look at other required texts from the secondary English Language Arts curriculum. *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* is required reading during the same grade as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It would be interesting to see if the findings from this study were text-specific, or if the teacher participants' curriculum design choices would change based on the text they were teaching. This leads to the question of whether this phenomenon of the teachers' perceptions of their teaching of the novel is confined to English Language Arts, or if it is a problem in other content areas. Social studies, science, and mathematics teachers generally have a scope and sequence based on a textbook for their course in which there are certain key concepts that need to be covered during the course. It would be interesting to see how the teachers make choices about what to include in varying curriculum units

and if those choices are made individually or in conjunction with other teachers, and the same issue of whether the topic affects the curricular design choices.

There are plenty of opportunities for future studies just within the one school site where this research study was conducted. However, in the future, many of the options mentioned as possible research studies could be employed at different schools, different districts, even different states. The possibilities are endless and provide inspiration for insightful research that would add to the field of education studies.

### **Conclusion**

This research study demonstrated that there is a disconnect between teachers' perceptions and teachers' practices. The findings, observations, implications, and recommendations from this study suggest that exploring the why behind what teachers do is not only insightful for the teachers who participated in this study, but also for teachers as a whole. There are many facets to a teacher—a complex construction that encapsulates a person's experiences, personal and professional; beliefs; and understanding of their self to impact their pedagogy. The hope is bringing awareness of the interaction between who a teacher is as a person and what they do in their classroom will benefit all parties involved in the education process.



## APPENDICES

## Appendix A. University IRB Approval Letter



**Institutional Review Board**  
Division of Research  
777 Glades Rd.  
Boca Raton, FL 33431  
Tel: 561.297.1383  
[fau.edu/research/researchint](http://fau.edu/research/researchint)

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Chair

DATE: June 19, 2018

TO: Traci Baxley, Ed.D.  
FROM: Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB

IRBNET ID #: 1179060-1  
PROTOCOL TITLE: [1179060-1] The Impact of Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality on Classroom Practices

PROJECT TYPE: *New Project*  
ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: June 19, 2018  
EXPIRATION DATE: June 19, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review  
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # B7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The Florida Atlantic University Social, Behavioral and Educational Research IRB has APPROVED your *[enter project type]*. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

- This study is approved for a maximum of **10** participants.
- *Please remember to submit the permission from the school district once you have obtained it through the IRBNet system*
- It is important that you use the approved, stamped consent documents or procedures included with this letter.
  - Adult Consent Form (stamped)
  - Study Plan (stamped)
- **\*\*Please note that any revision to previously approved materials or procedures, including modifications to numbers of subjects, must be approved by the IRB before it is initiated.** Please use the amendment form to request IRB approval of a proposed revision.
- All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All regulatory and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed, if applicable.
- Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.
- Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

- **This approval is valid for one year.** A Continuing Review form will be required prior to the expiration date if this project will continue beyond one year.

If you have any questions or comments about this correspondence, please contact Donna Simonovitch at:

Institutional Review Board  
Research Integrity/Division of Research  
Florida Atlantic University  
Boca Raton, FL 33431  
Phone: 561.297.1383  
[researchintegrity@fau.edu](mailto:researchintegrity@fau.edu)

\* Please include your protocol number and title in all correspondence with this office.

**This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations,  
and a copy is retained within our records.**

## Appendix B. School District IRB Approval Letter

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### IRB Approval

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**Approval Date:** 6/19/18  
**Protocol ID#:** RR1012  
**Type of Submission:** IRB Approval  
**Status:** Approved

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**Principal Investigator:** Ms. Jillian Berson, Doctoral Student, FAU  
**Protocol Title:** *The Impact of Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality on Classroom Practices*

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**Current Approval Dates<sup>1</sup>:** 6/19/18 – 6/18/19  
**Original Approval Dates:** 6/19/18 – 6/18/19  
**Approved Change Requests:**  
**Approved Renewals:**

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**Approval is granted to contact the principal at:**

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**Approval Notes:** Per the Common Rule, requests to change any aspect of the research process or informed consent procedure must be submitted to this IRB for approval before the change is implemented. A *Change Request* must also be completed for instruments or protocols not developed at the time of review.

**PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY:** Participation in this research is **strictly voluntary**. To assist school-based staff in their decision to participate, present this Certificate to the principal and outline the research activities to be conducted at their school. Based on this information, each principal would then make a decision to participate or not.

**DATA REQUESTS:** Applicants are responsible for costs incurred for data requested from the District's Data Warehouse. Fees (\$100/hr.) are based on the time required by staff to build data files. Data requests for approved projects should be directed to

**SECURITY PROTOCOL:** All researchers must complete security protocol to receive a **Security ID Badge** before entering a school or sponsored school event, or having contact with staff, students, or parents under any circumstances. *Researchers not completing these procedures before visiting a school site will have their IRB approval suspended.*

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** School-based or District staff with questions about this Certificate may contact IRB staff at

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Signature of IRB Chair

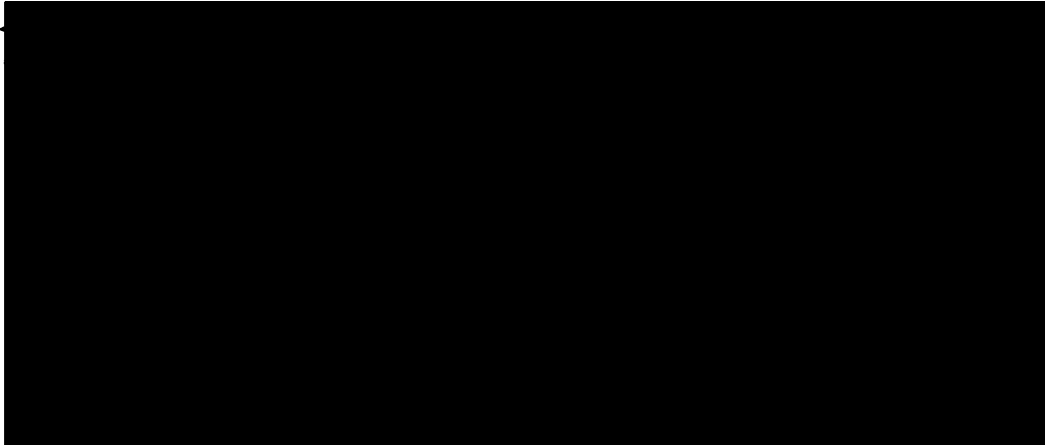
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6/19/18  
Date

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<sup>1</sup>If researchers are unable to complete the approved research by the annual expiration date, a *Renewal Request* must be submitted one month prior to the expiration date. Research not completed within the timeframe specified in the protocol approved on the original Research Request will require re-approval by participating schools and staff.

## Appendix C. Letter of Cooperation



### Letter of Cooperation

February 22, 2018

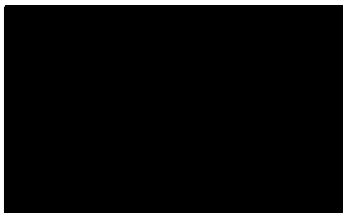
To the Florida Atlantic University IRB:

I am familiar with Jillian Berson's research project entitled *The Impact of Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality on Classroom Practices*. I understand [REDACTED] involvement to be allowing employees to be interviewed, participate in a focus group, complete an online survey, and submit a unit lesson plan.

I understand that this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that participant involvement in this research study is strictly voluntary and provides confidentiality of research data, as described in the protocol.

Therefore, as the institutional authority of [REDACTED] I agree that Jillian Berson's research project may be conducted at our institution.

Sincerely,



## Appendix D. Informed Consent

### Adult Consent Form

**1) Title of Research Study:** The Impact of Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality on Classroom Practices

**2) Investigator(s):** Faculty Advisor/Principal Investigator: Dr. Traci Baxley  
Study Personnel/Doctoral Candidate: Jillian Berson

**3) Purpose:** The purpose of this study will be to explore the link between how a teacher's identity, shaped by personal knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, enhances or inhibits the learning experience in the classroom.

**4) Procedures:** Participation is voluntary. If you choose to be a part of this research study, you will be asked to:

- complete an online questionnaire regarding demographic information and educational background a survey consisting of twenty questions.
  - This should take approximately 30 minutes.
- submit a detailed unit lesson plan for the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.
  - This will be submitted electronically via email.
- participate in one face-to-face interview.
  - This will take place during your planning period and will take approximately 30 minutes.
  - The interview will be audio-recorded and will take place in the interviewer's classroom.
- participate in a focus group with the other participants of the research study.
  - This will take place during your planning period and will take approximately 30 minutes.
  - The focus group will be audio-recorded and will be held in the moderator's classroom.

**5) Risks:** There are no physical, psychological, social, legal, or other risks to you in the procedures and administration of this study. Data collected through this study will not be shared with anyone other than the individuals working with this study. You will have a pseudonym attached to your information, as well as the school site and county, to ensure that you cannot be implicated through information associated with this research study.

**6) Benefits:** Participation in this study will provide an awareness and cognizance of your beliefs and practices, allowing for self-reflection. This opportunity for self-reflection will provide insight allowing for personal and professional growth regarding instructional practices and curricular choices.

**7) Data Collection & Storage:** Any information collected about you will be kept confidential and secure and only the people working with the study will see your data, unless required by law. The data will be kept for three years in a folder on a password-protected computer. After three years, paper copies will be destroyed by shredding and electronic data will be deleted. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name/identity unless you give us permission.

### **8) Contact Information:**

- If you have questions about the study, you should call or email the investigator(s) Dr. Traci Baxley at (561) 297-3506 or [baxley@fau.edu](mailto:baxley@fau.edu) or Jillian Berson at \_\_\_\_\_ or [jberson1@fau.edu](mailto:jberson1@fau.edu).
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Florida Atlantic University Division of Research, Research Integrity Office at (561) 297-1383 or send an email to [researchintegrity@fau.edu](mailto:researchintegrity@fau.edu).

### **9) Consent Statement:**

\*I have read or had read to me the information describing this study. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and freely consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I agree \_\_\_\_ I do not agree \_\_\_\_ to be audiotaped.

Printed Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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Approved On:	June 19, 2018
Expires On:	June 19, 2019

## Appendix E. Survey Questionnaire<sup>1</sup>

- Full Name:
- Race/ethnicity/cultural identity:
- Place of Birth:
  - If outside of the U.S., how many years have you been in the U.S.:
- Native English Speaker: YES or NO
- Language(s) Spoken (other than English):
- Age:
- Marital Status:
- College Degrees held (level and content area):
- Areas of certification (including endorsements):
- Years of teaching experience (total):
- Years at current school site:
- Grade level(s) taught:
- Subject Area(s) taught:

Questions Regarding Teacher Knowledge	1=Not at all important 2=Slightly Important 3=Very Important 4=Extremely Important			
1. How important is it for teachers to know a variety of teaching techniques?	1	2	3	4
2. How important is it for teachers to have knowledge of child/adolescent development?	1	2	3	4
3. How important is it for teachers to understand the cultural background of the students they teach?	1	2	3	4
4. How important is it for teachers to know the theoretical foundations and implications of their teaching practices?	1	2	3	4
5. How important is it to know the “tricks of the trade” instead of educational theory?	1	2	3	4
6. How important is it for teachers to know how to use different teaching techniques depending on the content they are teaching?	1	2	3	4

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<sup>1</sup> Survey questionnaire adapted from Fives, H., & Buehl, M. M. (2008). What do teachers believe? Developing a framework for examining beliefs about teachers’ knowledge and ability. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 33, 134-176.

7. How important is it for teachers to have extensive knowledge of the subject matter they teach?	1	2	3	4
8. How important is it for teachers to know how to motivate and engage students?	1	2	3	4
9. How important is it for teachers to know how to maintain order and control in the classroom?	1	2	3	4
10. How important is it for teachers to know how to deliver information so that students can understand it?	1	2	3	4
11. How important is it for teachers to have theoretical knowledge of educational practices?	1	2	3	4
12. How important is it for teachers to be able to adjust their teaching methods to reach a variety of learners?	1	2	3	4
13. How important is it for teachers to know how to present information in multiple ways?	1	2	3	4
14. How important is expert subject matter knowledge for teaching?	1	2	3	4
15. How important is it for teachers to know instructional methods for the specific content area(s) they teach?	1	2	3	4
16. How important is it for teachers to know how to match teaching approaches to student needs?	1	2	3	4
17. How important is it for teachers to have knowledge of motivational practices?	1	2	3	4
18. How important is it for teachers to know their students' personal backgrounds and experiences?	1	2	3	4
19. How important is it for teachers to be able to manage multiple needs and tasks at the same time?	1	2	3	4
20. How important is it for teachers to establish and maintain a set classroom management system?	1	2	3	4



## Appendix F. Interview Protocol

### Introduction:

Hello. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and allowing me to interview you. I am currently a doctoral candidate at Florida Atlantic University. For my dissertation study, I am conducting a phenomenological bounded case study to explore how teachers' personal experiences impact their professional decision-making. Everything you share with me in this interview will be kept confidential. Do you mind if I record the interview?

Title of Study: The Impact of Female English Language Arts Teachers' Intersectionality on Classroom Practices

Name of Interviewer: Jillian Berson

Name of Interviewee:

Place: Date:

Starting Time: Ending Time:

### Interview Questions:

1. How would you explain the purpose of education?
2. How would you describe your approach to teaching?
3. How would you describe the selection of literature in the high school English Language Arts curriculum?
4. A 1991 survey by the Book of the Month Club and the Library of Congress Center for the Book found that *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee was rated behind only the Bible in books that are "most often cited as making a difference." What are your thoughts or feelings about this?
5. Did you personally read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in high school?
  - a. How have your experiences as a student with *To Kill a Mockingbird* influenced the decisions you make in your classroom?
6. What is your decision-making process when designing the curriculum unit for *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
  - a. How do you find materials?
  - b. How do you decide what activities/ supplemental resources will be used?

\*Follow-up questions and further clarification from questionnaire responses and/or unit lesson plans would be addressed at this point in the interview.

### Closing:

Thank you for participating in this project. Your time and contribution are greatly appreciated. Remember this is a confidential interview and I will use a pseudonym to represent your interview. Would you like to choose your pseudonym? I will be sending a copy of the transcript to confirm the accuracy of the responses. In addition, are you available for follow-up questions, if needed?

## Appendix G. Focus Group Protocol

Name of Moderator: Jillian Berson

Date:

Start Time:    End Time:

Introduction: Good morning and thank you for being a part of the focus group for my research study. *Modern Library's Reader's* "List of the 100 Best Novels in the English Language since 1900" listed *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee as number five. On a list developed by librarians in 2006 who were asked which book every adult should read before they die, the novel appeared as the first title on the list. This focus group is intended to uncover the relevance of teaching this novel in the high school English Language Arts classroom. I would like your permission to record the focus group. I also ask that you keep whatever discussions arise in the group confidential.

Opening Question:

1. Tell us your first name, what you currently teach, and your favorite piece of literature you read as a high school student and please explain what made it your favorite.

Key Questions:

1. Having previously taught or currently teaching the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, do you feel that novel is still relevant and should continue to be taught as a required text?
  - a. If you do not find the novel still relevant, what do you feel makes it irrelevant?
  - b. If you find that the novel is still relevant, what key components do you think make the novel relevant to the times and our students in our classrooms?
2. What, if any, reservations do you have about teaching the novel?
  - a. What themes or motifs do you feel are important to emphasize while teaching this novel?
    - i. How did you come to this conclusion?
  - b. What challenges, if any, do you face when teaching this novel?
  - c. What benefits, if any, have you seen from teaching this novel?

Ending Question:

1. Would you like to share any personal anecdotes of your experience with the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*? This could be from your experience as a student, teacher, or otherwise.
2. Is there anything that we missed throughout the focus group that you would like to discuss that we have not?

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