ENGAGING WITH SPORTS, MUSIC, AND POLITICS:
POPULAR CULTURE AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE
IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Title of Study: ENGAGING WITH SPORTS, MUSIC, AND POLITICS: POPULAR CULTURE AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Abstract: This qualitative, multi-site case study examines two cases focusing on the dialogic relations of secondary English students and their teachers, as they interact with print and non-print pop culture texts related to sports and/or music as part of a curriculum unit on a politically sensitive topic. The purpose of this inquiry is to examine participants’ dialogic interactions as they engage with each other and the texts, observing what happens to the curriculum space and whether it influences the teacher's perspective. Data collection includes two interviews with each of the teacher and student participants, three observations of each case, artifacts, and researcher journal entries. Data collected from both cases is analyzed through the theoretical framework of polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). The analysis also interweaves autobiography as inquiry by including reflections on the researcher's own experiences using pop culture texts to introduce politically sensitive topics in the English classroom. Interpretations of the data provide insights into how students responded to the pop culture texts in writing, how they used the texts, and teacher participants’ reactions to incorporating them into their curriculum and pedagogy to discuss political topics with students. Findings suggest pop culture texts can enhance students’ creativity and critical thinking, act as participant in the emergence of multiple perspectives, and contribute to teachers’ ongoing becoming, when used to facilitate discussion of politically sensitive topics in the secondary ELA classroom. Dialogue often became polyphonic as participants were surprised by facts or ideas in the texts, leading to ongoing questioning or development of a new idea, and moments of polyphonic dialogue held space for dwelling in tensions.
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CHAPTER I

PRELUDE

As my teenage sister opens the large glass doors of Central Library and holds the door as I walk in, my senses tune into the familiar smell of books. I hear water dripping from the spray fountain into the giant pool where we always toss pennies for good luck. We walk down the long entrance leading to a giant staircase and slowly walk up the steps to the second floor. My sister holds my small, five-year-old hand in hers and gently guides me to the children's section where we walk up and down the aisles, stopping to choose books to open and leaf through. I pick a copy of Where the Wild Things Are, and we sit in the reading corner, where she turns the pages and slowly reads to me as I follow along with my finger, taking in the illustrations and connecting them to the words on the page, as she reads them softly. I love the peaceful feeling of the library; I feel safe there. I like the open spaces and the long walks from the entrance to the fountain, and the stairs, and the big windows that look out onto the city’s Art Deco downtown skyline. It's noon, and there's a story time in the auditorium. We sit and listen to a storybook version of The Little Prince. Everything in the library is so quiet, and I am so small; I feel engulped by the space yet enthralled by the expansiveness. I associate it with literacy. With knowledge of other places. With a sense of calmness and hope. It’s a space where I can breathe. My sister is my teacher and

1 Italicized passages come directly from my currere writing
guide. She stays with me the entire time, listening intently. When it’s over, we exit and walk back to
the fountain, tossing in the last of our pennies and making a wish before slowly beginning our trek
home, walking back down the long center aisle and out the tall glass doors to the empty fountain on
the promenade.

Cut to a large, white tile bathroom off the corner of a kindergarten classroom at
Phillips Elementary School, where the same child who was so content at the library is now sitting on
the floor with arms and legs crossed, elbows on knees. Although I have a mild stomachache, I really
pretend to feel sick so the principal will call someone to come pick me up from school. My red eyes
and tear-stained cheeks are both indications I have been crying. I hate kindergarten. I don’t want to
be here; I want to go home. Feeling no connection to this place or these people, the idea of staying at
school feels suffocating, like a weight on my chest. I want to run home, like I have several times, most
recently two days prior. I think of walking past the large glass pane that encloses the main office and
seeing secretaries and administrators busily talking to each other and greeting visitors, as I quickly
walk in step with the adult I am using as a cover so those in the office can’t see my small frame. I
make a beeline straight ahead and out the double doors of the school building, racing quickly over
the concrete drive to the path home. It doesn’t make any sense to just leave, but at that moment my
white-hot brain is thinking, I have to get away – there’s no reason to be here, I can’t learn here, and I
need to get back to a comfortable space. So, there will be no dwelling in the tension of remaining in
an uncomfortable space today, as. I head to my house two blocks away to put a record on the
turntable, curl up on my bed, and breathe deeply for the first time all day.

Music as a balm; pop culture as an escape – an exploration of possibility. Politics as
intellectual stimulation and the politics of everyday life. Sports as a connection to family and a chance
to be a part of something bigger. The literature speaks of popular culture as “an important site where
our understandings of the world, politics and identity are formed, contested and (re)formed”
(Grayson, 2015, p. 161). Remembering the “affective force” (Dolby, 2003) of sports in my life as a
child, a memory surfaces of sitting halfway up in the upper deck of the 15,000 seat Convention Center arena with my father and his friends, watching the Oilers play minor league ice hockey.

Their season ran from late October to early April, and from the time I was six until I was in high school, we were present for nearly all the home games. My dad owned the little motel across the street where all the players would stay when they were in town, and his friend Darryl and his wife LaVerne had season tickets. I would sit next to my dad and eat popcorn. Even though there was a concession stand at the arena, LaVerne would pop popcorn and put it in small paper grocery sacks that Darryl would sneak inside in a larger sack. Dad held onto one of the paper sacks and would hold it out for me to take some, and sometimes I would take a whole handful, as it was buttery and salty and delicious. When I would put several in my mouth at once, he would say “Slow down - one at a time”, followed by modeling what he saw as the proper way to savor popcorn. I would slow down and put one in my mouth and chew it up carefully, then another, thinking that it tasted drier and not nearly as good as chewing 4 or 5 at once. All the while, the sights and sounds of ice hockey continued below. The people around us shouted at the players and, predictably, a fight would break out on the ice. Players would throw their sticks down and push each other, shouting and sometimes pulling off their jerseys, until the refs broke it up - the theatre of hockey. Dad would narrate what was happening, explaining penalties like ‘high-sticking’ and ‘offsides’ to me as I looked around at the championship banners hanging around the walls at the top of the arena. Even as far up as we were sitting, I can still remember the swooshing sound the blades on the players skates made as they stopped on the ice and the call and response organ music punctuating the action, prompting the audience to shout “Charge!” when the Oilers had a power play due to a penalty on the opposing team.

At halftime, we wound carefully down three flights of steep arena stairs until reaching the bottom floor. We would walk over and lean up against the side of the ice rink, next to the penalty box, and wait for the giant Zamboni machine to roll onto the rink and smooth the ice during halftime, counting the number of times it went up and down the rink, until the ice glistened. I remember feeling
excited and content at the arena. I know a big reason for my attachment to this place is that it was a bonding place in my early relationship with my dad, and sparked an early interest in sports that continues to this day, even permeating my research interests. Even though his friends were there, it was something we did together – like watching other sports. It was something he taught me about early in my life– giving me little lessons during each game on everything from the rules of the game, to how the magic Zamboni machine worked to popcorn etiquette. The Convention Center has a new name, but the old entrance on the east side is unchanged. When I walk in the doors that open on the bottom floor, climb the black stairs in the middle of the long, narrow concourse and catch a glimpse of the ticket windows at the end, a wave of nostalgia hits me, thinking of those bonding days at the hockey games that ushered in a love of sports.

So much of the power of pop culture lies in sensory experience: As I climb to the top of the football stadium, the smell of the clean, crisp fall air following a recent rain surrounds me. I hold onto the cool, slick metal railing along the ramp, and feel the hard metal stai steps under my feet. As the sun is already setting, the pattern of 4 equidistant sets of 18 stadium LED lights illuminates the action and ensures the entire field is brightly, asymmetrically lit. The rectangular slices of turf bounded by thick white borders appear to be painted on, and the giant white numbers painted along the edges of the field within each rectangle mark the progression of the game – back and forth and up and down: 50, 40, 30, 20,10 on each side. The wavy vertical line of flags ripple on a metal pole in the distance, and the mossy green turf appears, cut in long rectangles, with a sea of black and gold uniforms and helmets bobbing up and down along the rectangles. It’s a visual cacophony of constant movement. There are more vertical stripes: three tows of cheerleaders in pink t-shirts and black mini-skirts - three vertical rows of pink and black and red and silver glitter pom poms – a sea of horizontal color moving in concert with the rhythm of their cheers.

The sense of sound, however, brings the experience together: flags rippling in the wind; cheerleaders clapping in patterns and engaging the fans in the stands in a call and response rhythm:
“Y-E-L-L, everybody yell ‘Go Cardinals!’ clap, clap, clap (Audience: ‘Go Cardinals’ clap, clap, clap)
‘Go Cardinals’ (‘Go Cardinals!’ clap, clap, clap), followed by the screams, cheers, and chants for
each team. The cacophony of horns and drums emanate from both marching bands in opposite stands
(rat-a-tat-tat), providing a pulsating rhythm, with chants accentuated by noisemakers, as the music
and the cheerleaders and the crowd work together to provide a soundtrack for the plays on the field.
The sound of traffic hums along behind the stadium, and cars honk as they drive by (‘beep, beep,
beep’). Drums and horns accentuate the action – getting louder as play intensifies, each side trying to
drown out the fans on the other side - feet stomping on the metal stadium stands, cow bells clanging
and cheerleaders dancing in sync to the beat. The sounds from the sidelines emanate to the field, and
the action on the field emanates to the sidelines, in a symbiotic relationship - one side energizing the
other, and both sides energizing the players moving back and forth on those green rectangles, until the
end of the game when one side prevails, and an eerie quiet extends over the stadium. Players and
coaches and fans alike make their way down the metal concourse on their respective sides, moving
out into the night.

Music brings such joy and relaxation: A list of walk on songs appears on Twitter – A flood of
memories emerge as I read through the playlists in the thread: Charli XCX “Claws”; Kool and the
Gang “Hollywood Swinging; Surfaces “Sunday Best: Chaka Khan (this takes me back to my brother
and sister and our old turntable); “Tell Me Something Good”; “Sweet Thing”: “Wake Up
Everybody”. And then my mind drifts to Natalie Cole’s “Unpredictable” (“This Heart; “Party
Lights”; “I’ve Got Love on My Mind”). The happy, joyful melodies lift my spirit reassuringly in the
midst of the loneliness of childhood with absent siblings.

Issues of social justice have been threaded through my life and work: It's 1986 and I’m in
college at TJC, preparing to give a speech I worked on it the night before with my brother and his
boyfriend. It is about the need for gay rights. The professor calls my name and I nervously walk up to
the podium with my cue cards. Everything goes blurry as I recited my speech. When I finish, I exhale
quietly and walk slowly back to my seat. I sit back down next to the girls who had been friendly to me before my speech, but now send hostile glances my way. It feels tense and awkward, as it’s the first time I’ve been brave enough to give my opinion out loud to an audience on a controversial topic that I get the feeling many of them don’t agree with. I feel proud because even though they wouldn’t talk to me after that, I presented my opinion clearly. After class, my teacher follows me out to the hall to tell me what a good job I had done. It occurs to me I was also standing up for my brother and his boyfriend. That makes me feel proud as well, and I realize for the first time that sometimes that also means other people will be unhappy with you. I dwell in the awkwardness of speaking without running away. The uncomfortable space. It’s the first time I have made a public political statement, though, and it feels right.

This has become a theme that has permeated my work in education: Thinking back, nearly twenty years later to the day I heard, “They think you’re gonna steal somethin’, just cause you’re Black”, I remember my students’ honest conveyance of their lived experiences and how, from that point on, whenever the subject of racial profiling comes up and I hear anyone say “well, I’m not sure that really happens to people” or “I don’t think that’s really a thing”, I can assure them it is, very much, a thing. The incident marks the first time I became more consciously aware of issues of race as something many people live with an ongoing, heightened awareness of - as something they can’t just ignore or step away from - and realize just because something isn’t part of my lived experience doesn’t mean it isn’t a very real part of someone else’s. As a White, middle-class, female career teacher of predominately Latinx, Black, Vietnamese and Hmong students, that experience is reflective of the ways many of my understandings have been informed by classroom experiences with students - dwelling in moments of tension - and what they’ve shared with me.

I have grown into my life as a high school English teacher little by little, through the synthesis of these seemingly disparate moments wherein the rhythms and intersections of popular culture, literacy, and tension that arise from moments of discomfort and encounters with (in)justice,
are omnipresent. I envision myself exploring a more expansive space where both students and teachers can experience possibilities for joy and playfulness in learning. At the same time, the educational climate surrounding curricular restrictions and other difficulties within public education can stifle breathing and hasten the impulse to run from tension and difficult emotions that emerge as we rise to meet (in)justice and facilitate a space that can build hope for the future. A space where we can lean into tensions and differences that emerge within and among our classroom experiences.

Connections between pop culture texts and literacy

At Central Library and elsewhere, my older sister and brother educate me about the work of writers, musicians, and other artists representing a variety of races and cultures. I lie on the scratchy baby blue quilt on my parents’ king size bed for hours listening to the records of Stevie Wonder, The Pointer Sisters, Leon Russell, Oscar Peterson, Alberta Hunter, Chick Corea, Tito Puente, and others on their old turntable. I jump up and down on the bed to the hypnotic drumbeat of “Yes We Can, Can” until I’m so dizzy I collapse onto the soft mattress. When I’m 16, I sit on my own bed and open a thin, square Christmas present from my cousins. A smile spreads across my face. It’s a vinyl record album with a note tucked inside: “Merry Xmas. Here’s some ethnic music to drive your mom and dad crazy with xoxo”. The playful, creative rhymes of the lyrics inspire joy (also due, no doubt, to the hint of rebelliousness, as my parents would never listen to rap or choose it for me) and bring a new way of thinking into my world – a more expansive idea of difference. As Lensmire (2017) observes, “Most white people live segregated lives, spend their time at home, at school, at work, at worship, with other white people. And yet people of color loom large in the creation of white selves” (p. 45). For example, athletes of color have “a huge impact on who you tried to be and what you tried to make of yourself” (p. 55), influencing attitudes and actions. For me, that looming large stems from the early influence of diversity in different forms popular culture, particularly music.
As I sit and write, even now, music accompanies me. The mode of transmission is iTunes, and not the needle gently placed on a turntable in a standing oak case, but the Pointer Sisters uplift and transport all the same, and in my mind I am once again jumping up and down on the bed to the steady, soulful backbeat of “Yes We Can, Can” until dizziness overcomes me and I collapse onto the soft mattress, as if I’m six again. I lie on my back and listen intently to the rest of the album, singing along and memorizing the lyrics as a kind of early educational exercise in remembering lines, motivated by the desire to hold them close for future use – for inspiration, for comfort, for instruction, for companionship, or for connection. An early exercise in combining the educational with the popular, with the popular not functioning as an enticement or a steppingstone but as a valid educational text in and of itself.

This awareness of the popular as educational text, fostering joy and playfulness as possibility, spans decades, bridging past and future. I am in a classroom with three other teachers. We sit in desks, arranged in a circle. Conversations drift back and forth between relating classroom anecdotes and personal stories. We are looking at student writing and I ask questions: Would you mind talking to me a little about the strengths and challenges you see in this writing? Is there anything you might want to adjust in response to what you see? We gather in grade level teams once a week to discuss student work as I help them talk through their plans, process where their students are and discuss their planning, making suggestions based on what they’re finding and where they want or need to be. I want to help them discover new entry points for relating to their students and experiencing more joy in and shared ownership of their classrooms. While engaging in this work, I feel calm and satisfied. I happily share resources for integrating pop culture texts related to sports and music into their existing lessons. Today we talk about strategies for incorporating music videos as texts for students to read. I want to be part of helping them find more joy in their classrooms and discover more ways to leverage texts that interest students to do that in ways that can’t be scripted,
from their own experiences observing students’ interactions with texts and work, allowing students
and the assignments drive the learning rather than the standard.

Even when teaching is difficult, there is the sound of laughter (with students, with colleagues)
that comes at the most unexpected and sorely needed times that gives such a feeling of contentment.
My husband, who is a high school football coach, walks into my office and tells me about watching a
student athlete give his all in his last race in a high school track meet. He says it was so intense it
moved him to tears and he was able to advise that student about giving that same intensity and
passion to whatever they pursue next. That’s one of the things about teaching that can’t really be
replicated in a business/support environment. These are tensions I dwell in with the absence of the
quirky, special moments of classroom life. Music floats in the background. A steady rhythm of beats
keeps me in the moment. Memories float back…the connotations that emerge with each song make me
smile, cringe, dance, sing, I feel melancholy as Elvis Costello’s “Monkey to Man” plays, filling me
with the pangs of estrangement. I resist the urge to forward to the next song, as that won’t make the
feeling go away. Instead, I listen and feel. I feel the estrangement but also the joy – the holding of
seemingly contradictory emotions that can eventually lead to acceptance and release.

I feel like I’ve come full circle in many ways - from being an early-career teacher who
thought more abstractly about issues of race, immigration, and socioeconomic status, to becoming
more aware of honoring the role of cultural identity in my students’ lives, to thinking about ways to
tap into students’ interests in and experiences with pop culture to help them learn about issues that
affect them. I’m still working out ways to give students’ more control over the process (thus my
interest in the writing of Bakhtin and issues of dialogic pedagogy), as well as wrestling with the
ongoing discomfort that can come from an increasing awareness of my own biases, but I’m learning
to exist in the tension more often, rather than run from it as I did so often in the past.
I can see clearly now how my interests from early childhood to early teaching experiences (music, pop culture, sports, literacy, and justice) are integrated into the fabric of my past, present and future and are integral to the work I am doing and want to continue to do. Much of education involves finding (or creating) spaces to breathe and connect to different parts of yourself and helping students (or other teachers) do the same. “Hope must replace despair as the central practice for students and teachers, regardless of race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, language, ability, ethnicity, or age” (Slattery, 2013. p. 233), and such hope can come from dwelling in tensioned spaces in the classroom. There’s something about top-down education that’s so suffocating, and this feels like an antidote to that. Akin to creating a more expansive space where we can all breathe.
On a fall day in an urban Oklahoma classroom, my students and I prepare to navigate the often-unpredictable terrain of combining textual analysis and political conversation. In this large English class, composed predominately of African American and Hispanic 11th graders from low-income households, students have been introduced to rhetorical analysis of nonfiction texts through examination of the interrelationship of speaker, audience, purpose, topic, and context, through studying a variety of letters, speeches, and short essays. On this day, we are watching pop singer Beyoncé’s controversial performance of “Formation” at the 2016 Super Bowl Halftime Show, before reading opinion pieces reflecting both sides of the debate around the controversial topic of police use of force. Students are drawn in by the sights and sounds of Beyoncé’s music, with one student lip synching and those who have seen the clip before telling others what’s coming up. Before the two-minute clip ends, one student excitedly asks, “Why can’t we analyze this?!?” When the song is over, we do just that, completing an objective rhetorical analysis of the clip, to establish the context and introduce the topic. This leads to a lively discussion of the dancers’ symbolic “X” formation, and the performance as the artist’s tribute to the Black Lives Matter movement, in the form of a personal statement on recent police killings of unarmed civilians. One student already understands the visual allusion to Malcolm X and energetically explains to others who the minister and civil rights activist was. This allows us to make a
connection between the non-print text of the video and song and the contemporary political issue it comments on, opening the door to an energetic discussion of students’ own feelings and opinions about the topic.

Increasingly, I have observed my 11th grade English students engaging in discussion of political topics such as racial profiling and immigration, voicing (through writing and/or discussion) their personal connections to those topics and examining how they shape their world views. I’ve seen and felt how passionate they (and I) become when given the opportunity to explore contemporary topics. Music and sports are two additional elements of daily life that are important to most of my students; I observe them listening to music through headphones and watching reruns of their favorite sports rivalries at every opportunity throughout the day. Whenever I use texts related to these two topics to introduce lessons, I have observed students are more interested and attentive. When I give them books to read independently on a sport or sports-figure they play or follow, they also become more engaged with the reading. This classroom experience has made me want to look more closely at how students engage with these pop culture texts and what other aspects of their thinking they may influence. Can they empower both teachers and students by allowing them to negotiate meaning in political constructs, topics and themes with texts that make them more than ethereal concepts? Do they promote tolerance of different viewpoints, as teachers and students navigate the challenging landscape of critical conversations? And can the emergence of polyphony open a constructive space for holding tensions that emerge for students and teachers as they negotiate public and personal dimensions of such dialogue?

Statement of the Problem

Classrooms are inherently political spaces, as students’ interpersonal relationships, and their future lives as citizens, have an essential political aspect. Whether they realize it or not,
students experience the effects of political decisions daily. Those from marginalized communities, especially, such as the students I work with, can be acutely affected by the outcomes of political debates (Morrell, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Dyke, Gordon & Job, 2017). As issues with political implications are not limited to the public sphere, politically sensitive topics can be defined not only as unsettled contemporary issues of public policy, such as gun control legislation, that involve “questions about how we should live together” (Hess & McAvoy, 2015, p. 161), but also personal political issues, such as engaging in military service. In both cases, the issues discussed should be open issues, or those on which there is disagreement, as politically sensitive topics are context-dependent, and a topic that might be contentious in one context may not be in another. For example, in a classroom where many students identify as African American or Latinx, topics around civil rights issues might be less contentious; whereas, in a classroom in a small, rural school where most students identify as white, they might be more so.

Opening classroom discussion to political topics is especially important in this time of political polarization, as students and even teachers may view difference as an enemy. There is a need to bridge divisions and hold tensions that emerge from encounters with difference, and it is critically important that students have an opportunity to talk about these current issues and be open to hearing all sides. However, teachers are often hesitant to introduce topics that could prove controversial due to fear of negative reactions from parents and administrators, or doubt in their own competence to handle issues that may arise when students engage with political texts (Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000; Hess, 2002; Dyke, Gordon & Job, 2017). I have also found myself at a loss at times knowing how to introduce these topics, or entertaining thoughts of what might happen if a parent or administrator had an issue with our discussion. Education is political, but it also extends beyond politics, and some teachers view their role as remaining more neutral.
While these perspectives and concerns are valid, the result is students and teachers both risk missing out on the experience of essential contact with texts that allow them to encounter multiple points of view on the political constructs that swirl around them. Although classroom discussion of sometimes controversial topics can create moments of discomfort, the vulnerability inherent in taking risks can also lead to increased engagement and investment in the classroom (Callahan & Low, 2004). Most teachers are focused on people, not agendas, but at the same time, schools are remiss when they allow limited opportunities for discussion of political topics that affect students’ lives (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Hess & Posselt, 2002). Failing to facilitate opportunities for discussion of political topics can impair young people by not preparing them to engage in society by facilitating a broader knowledge of what’s happening in the world and encouraging students to engage in critical thinking around contemporary issues (Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000; Hess, 2009; McEvoy & Hess, 2013). An opening is needed to a bigger space, beyond agendas, in which such conversation can happen.

Because examining popular culture is a social experience that relates to universal human values (Morrell, 2007), it can provide one entry point for such political discussion. Politics and popular culture are both relational and fluid - in a state of constant change. While they contain elements that may sometimes contribute to tension and division for some individuals and/or communities, sports, music, and politics also involve social experiences that have the potential to build community and inform students’ and teachers’ experiences. As cultural theorist John Weaver (2009) observes of sports, “it presents an opportunity to connect with something bigger” (p. 74). And music, “like everyday life and politics…operates as a global phenomenon” (Davies & Franklin, 2015, p. 122). Students often wear headphones and earbuds around their necks, so they can have access to their favorite artists, or watch reruns of their favorite sports rivalries on their smartphones, throughout the day. This illustrates how popular culture is “an important site
where our understandings of the world, politics and identity are formed, contested and (re)formed” (Grayson, 2015, p. 161). Certain songs can hold memories of specific people or places, and affiliation with certain sports, or teams, can be an important identity marker for students (and even the teacher). Dolby (2003) echoes this when she references Grossberg’s observation of the “major affective force” of popular culture in most people’s daily lives, such as the “emotional investment” fans make in sports (p. 263).

How, then, do these three cultural experiences (music, sports, and discussion of political topics) intersect in classrooms, which are already political by their very nature (Lynch 1995, p. 359; Dyke, Gordon, & Job, 2017)? Popular culture is a particularly appropriate component for this study as “the popular in classrooms and in the everyday lives of teachers and students is fundamentally political” (Marshall & Sensoy, 2016, p. 1). According to Morris (2016), for poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida, reading and writing are “inseparable and political” (p. 309). Since some of the primary things we do in English classrooms are reading, annotating, and responding to texts through writing, self-reflection, and discussion, combining that activity with popular culture texts related to sports and music (two cultural elements that play a role, in one way or another, in most students’ lives) can increase students’ engagement (Morrell, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Emdin, 2010).

More research is needed, however, to understand what happens when these texts are incorporated into the English classroom to engage students in discussion of politically sensitive topics. While there is existing research on both political discussion in the classroom and on using popular culture to engage students with literacy activities and enact social change, there have been fewer studies that combine the two by examining the intersection of popular culture texts and dialogue around politically sensitive topics in the secondary English classroom, and even fewer that address the teacher’s perspective on the experience. Studies in the field of critical media literacy have examined students’ interactions with pop culture texts in terms of how the
texts themselves are “up for critique and transformation to uncover power and commercialism” (Marshall & Sensoy, 2016, p. 6), often in terms of how they are being used to manipulate the viewer (often for political ends). Critical media literacy, however, is a different – albeit related - field, and this study focuses more broadly on what kind of space emerges when students use pop culture texts. There is a need to investigate what happens to the curriculum space as students enter into conversation around politically sensitive topics, and whether internal and external dialogue from contradictory perspectives can emerge and raise awareness of difference and multiple points of view.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the dialogic relations of secondary English students and their teachers, as they interacted with print and non-print pop culture texts related to sports and/or music, in an argumentative writing unit on a politically sensitive topic and observe whether using these texts influenced the teachers’ perceptions about presenting and discussing the topics. While popular culture has many definitions and components, it generally “designates a field of shared interests and pleasures among large numbers of people” (Richards, 2011, p. 18). Storey (2018) outlined six ways of understanding popular culture: high culture, mass culture, a culture from the people, a critical struggle between mass culture and a people’s culture, and a postmodern culture. Popular culture can also include films, songs, concerts, cultural events (Petrone, 2013) and lived experiences (Johnson, 2012). As they connect to students’ interests and their lives outside of school, pop culture texts can provide an avenue for introducing and discussing politically sensitive topics in a potentially engaging and accessible way.

**Research Question**
What happens to dialogic interactions - particularly during moments of polyphonic dialogue that may emerge - when the teacher integrates pop culture texts related to sports and/or music into an argumentative writing unit on a political topic in a secondary English classroom?

**Sub-questions**

How do students respond to different perspectives embedded in the pop culture texts related to sports and/or music, as revealed in their writing? How do students use pop culture texts related to sports and/or music as they relate to differing political perspectives, When in dialogue with themselves, the teacher, and other students? How does the teacher engage in discussions of political topics with students in their curriculum and pedagogy, using pop culture texts related to sports and/or music?

**Theoretical Perspective and Framework**

The theoretical perspective for this study is situated within a hybrid space where elements of interpretivism and critical theory overlap with polyphonic dialogue. Interpretivism holds there are multiple constructed realities, and the aim of inquiry is understanding. In an interpretivist perspective, reality is socially constructed, collectively and individually (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, there were elements of an interpretivist perspective in this research, as it examined both individual and group dialogue and ongoing construction of meaning. In interpretivism, knowledge emerges through such interaction, reflecting multiple realities (Zhao & Bailey, 2024). This study involved examining the emergence of multiple perspectives in dialogue, although in this study those perspectives emerged in a more open-ended way, particularly in polyphonic moments (Bakhtin, 1984).

Critical theory perspectives, which seek to empower humans to transcend domination and social struggle, are concerned with examining the role of power relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018) through exposing the ways power relationships impact marginalized members of society.
While acknowledging the existence of multiple truths and narratives, for critical theorists the ultimate truth is “the reality of political and economic power” (Sipe & Constable, 1996, p. 158). Giroux (1996), however, did advocate a “resistant or political postmodernism” (p. 61), in which power relations are understood more contextually. There were elements of critical theory perspectives in this research, as it investigated opening spaces for discussion of political topics in secondary English classrooms. Critical theory perspectives also support the idea that teachers and students should work together and learn from each other (Morrell, 2001), as they did in this study. In addition, several critical theorists have organized studies around popular culture texts, as they relate to many students’ experiences (Giroux, 2011; Morrell, 2002, 2004, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, & Morrell, 2005), and this study incorporated pop culture texts for the same reason. However, critical theory perspectives are more focused on changing institutional structures and society (Apple, 2013), whereas this study investigated individual perspectives and the teacher participants’ responses to using the texts and was not focused on institutional change.

While elements of both theoretical perspectives were applicable, I ultimately used polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) as the theoretical framework orienting this inquiry, as it exists in a space in-between critical theory and poststructuralism. The radical openness of polyphonic dialogue allows for holding the tensions and messiness of multiple perspectives, and bridging divisiveness, in a more open-ended, “pluralist” (Holquist, 1990, p. 34-35) space, and its essential characteristic of unfinalizability extends beyond the more focused aims and outcomes of critical theory.

Polyphonic dialogue emerged from the work of Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, based on his analysis of “Dostoyevsky’s double-voiced novels”, wherein the hero has an active rather than ‘othered’ consciousness. Bakhtin (1984) writes of dialogue, “living means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth” (p. 294), both internally and externally. It implies a diversity of discourse and thought engaging
different sides – not just one or the other. Such imaginative give and take - ongoing probing, and questioning – characterizes dialogic interaction. This mutual engagement is an essential component of dialogue, standing in contrast to monologue which, “manages without the other…Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Even two voices can be monologic, as their responses are “finalized and dead to the other’s” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293), cutting off difference without engaging another perspective.

When dialogue becomes polyphonic, it is full of “A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6) - all equally valid and often contradictory - that are ongoing and do not force each other into being the same. In the classroom, it “can be a creative process in which both teachers and students become engaged in their own becoming through dialogue with self, with others and with the world” (Wang, 1997, p. 21). This multi-voiced encounter with difference opens participants up to continual transformation, as contradictions are embraced and differences in perspective are supported and valued. Therefore, in terms of issues of power, authoring is viewed as a “form of governance” (i.e., power), but with its fostering of shared authorship, polyphonic dialogue does not demand consensus.

For Bakhtin, the “life” of a text… “develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects” that co-exist, without one having to dominate the other (Bakhtin, 1986, p.106). Each encounter with a text, or another consciousness, is a new event that cannot be repeated, in which there is a struggle for understanding, through inquiry and conversation, from which deeper meanings can emerge. This contrasts with a monologic response, which Bakhtin (1984) describes as “finalized and deaf to the other’s response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge it in any decisive force” (p. 392). Searching for only the familiar, or ideas with which one already agrees, does not allow new meanings to surface, as “even past meanings…can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the
process of future development of the dialogue…Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170). Dialogue is ongoing.

This openness to differing perspectives, and a sense of unfinalizability, allows participants to hold tensions in dialogue and be open to ongoing becoming and the creation of something new. For Bakhtin, an essential aspect of polyphony lies in the strength of individual voices that meet but do not merge; they retain their independence, resulting in a higher order unity (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 21). There is never a single, unified meaning; all meanings exist as links among others in a great chain that is eternally renewed (Bakhtin, 1986).

Similarly, in polyphonic authoring, the hero is always in a state of becoming, and the author allows situations and identities to develop, leading to surprising outcomes, transformations, and deeper understandings. This can be revealed through microdialogue, which represents the interior dialogue of a character (Bakhtin, 1984). This also comes in to play in Bakhtin’s (1992) discussion of the tensions and struggle between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own…we encounter it with its authority already fused to it” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342), whether institutional or individual. Internally persuasive discourse, in contrast, is open. It is “tightly interwoven with “one’s own word” and the thoughts of others (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). These discourses manifest in dialogic interactions, as participants encounter ideas which run counter to their own and test them against their own. Through such interaction, the hero (or character) is also able to speak back to the author, thus subverting their authoritative discourse.

The characteristics of the co-existence of differing perspectives, and the ongoing dialogical process of questioning and becoming through encounters with self, others and the world as text made polyphonic dialogue a fitting research framework to use for this inquiry, as
engagement with multiple and contradictory points of view and ‘otherness’ were studied, and a variety of traditional and non-traditional texts were used.

Methodology

For this investigation I used case study methodology, as it allowed me to conduct in-depth examination of interactions between participants in context, to illuminate understanding of their dialogical relations, using the cases as illustrations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several studies of political discussion in the classroom utilize case study methodology, but in this inquiry, the case was bounded by the dialogic interactions related to discussion of politically sensitive topics. Using case study methodology allowed me to gather ample information about the dialogic interactions between participants and to analyze emerging themes (Merriam, 1998). I planned a multisite study, utilizing within-case and cross-case analysis, allowing patterns and themes to emerge during various iterations of data analysis. Throughout the process, I needed to remain alert to possible limitations of case study research, including the possible emergence of confirmation bias (Merriam, 1998).

Sampling

I used purposeful maximal sampling to select two secondary English classrooms with varied characteristics that presented “information-rich cases for in-depth study” for the purpose of identifying themes that emerged in those different case settings (Patton, 2015, p. 264). I described both “the uniqueness of each site”, as well as “common themes across sites” (Patton, 2002, p. 235). The identified population was teachers and students in English classes in public secondary schools in a state in the Southwestern United States. I recruited participants from two different high school sites and observed one class period from each, as multiple cases can “show different perspectives” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 99). As I observed dialogic interactions in relation to multiple perspectives within this study, and “patterns that emerge from great variation are of
particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p.235), this was a fitting sampling strategy. In addition, during the process of data analysis, I juxtaposed my own autobiographical experiences related to engaging students in dialogue around politically sensitive issues using pop culture texts related to sports and music with participants’ experiences, thereby incorporating my own dialogic interactions and perspectives as a high school English teacher.

I recruited schools/teachers to participate through reaching out to secondary school administrators and/or approaching secondary English teachers, including members of professional organizations in the state (with the permission of the director and/or executive boards). I selected teacher participants who had at least two years’ experience conducting classroom discussion. The teachers designed and taught an argumentative writing unit lasting approximately two to three weeks, and I included an exemplar I designed in the initial recruitment materials, although the teacher participants had ultimate discretion over the texts and unit design. I surveyed potential teacher participants who were selected based on their responses to the initial recruitment email or recommended by an administrator or colleague regarding their views of and experience with facilitating classroom discussion and teaching argument writing, as observing classroom discussion was one aspect of the study. That process informed final selection of “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230), I recruited two teacher participants who were different from each other in gender and teaching experience, and there were 15 student participants, ages 13-18, in their classrooms, who were diverse in race, gender, and ethnicity.

Data Collection

I planned to collect data from a variety of sources from each of the cases, including data that came directly from student and teacher participants, in addition to keeping my own
observational research journal. Data was collected from individual interviews, documents, observations, and reflective researcher journal entries. Using a variety of sources allowed me to triangulate the data, gave me access to multiple perspectives from different sources, and allowed me to see the way those perspectives converged and/or diverged in the data (Fitchman and Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). Because I used case study methodology, it was especially important to incorporate “detailed, in-depth data collection”, in order to develop an “in-depth understanding of the case” (Creswell & Potts, 2018, p. 96-98) over the course of the two to three weeks of data collection.

I planned for initial, ongoing, and concluding data collection during the argumentative writing units. Ongoing data sources included documents, such as samples of student work, especially informal and formal writing, as one aspect of my research related to investigating participants responses to different perspectives in the texts, as revealed in their writing. This data assisted me in answering that sub-question, as it contained evidence of participants’ internal and external dialogue, as well as their perspectives on the topics and their reactions to the texts. Because I also wanted to analyze students’ thinking and responses as they were in conversation with the texts, the teacher and each other, documents also included brief analytical assignments used to capture their ongoing thought processes and responses, in addition to student writing on discussion boards, and formal essays. I focused predominately on analyzing student work produced by the two to three students I interviewed from each class.

My reflective researcher journal was another ongoing source of data. I wrote in it at least three times a week, recording field notes, pictures, and observations about individual students and the teachers during class observations and my own reflections on the research process. I visited each classroom three times throughout the unit, as Patton (2002) notes, “through direct observations the inquirer is better able to understand and capture the context within which people
interact” (p. 262). For example, I observed students as they engaged in discussion and recorded my observations in my reflective journal, looking for evidence in students’ responses and reactions that related to my second sub-question, “How do students use the texts to relate different perspectives in discussion? Additionally, I observed students as they interacted with the texts, rotating among them when possible, looking for evidence of the ways they used the texts to relate different perspectives through their responses and interactions with them, with each other, and the teacher. When permission was given, I audio or video taped these observations. As another aspect of my research related to investigating how the teacher engages in discussion of political topics with students using the texts, this data source also assisted me in answering that sub-question.

The other data source was two 15 to 45-minute semi-structured, face-to-face, individual interviews with two to three students from each class, conducted near the beginning and end of the unit. Where permission was given, interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and participants were given the transcripts to check for accuracy. The first interview focused on students’ perceptions of the topics and texts in the unit up to that point, as well as their thoughts regarding constructing and responding to arguments. The second interview focused on participants’ reflections on their work and the unit as a whole. Those students were chosen from ones who completed most of the work in the unit, and/or presented differing perspectives, then narrowed, using purposeful random sampling (Patton, 2002). I also conducted two individual interviews with each teacher participant, during the first week and the last week of their units. They were asked about the topics and texts, their feelings about teaching the units, and any changes in their thinking during the process.

The interviews were critical pieces of data, as they allowed entry into participants’ perspectives and allowed me to ask questions about things that cannot be observed, such as past
events and “how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world” (Patton, 2002, p. 341), all of which helped me understand how the teacher used the texts to engage in discussion of political topics with students, as well as how students used the texts to relate different perspectives in dialogue with the teacher and each other. In combination, these data sources helped me answer my main research question by providing insight into participants’ reactions to the texts, while providing evidence of any changes that occurred in their thinking.

**Data Analysis**

As I planned to approach case study analysis qualitatively, my methods were process-oriented, allowing for iterative readings of the data. I provided both within-case analysis and thematic cross-case analysis, describing “the uniqueness of each site”, as well as “common themes across sites” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). I analyzed the data using In-Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016), drawing connections between different sources, and looking for patterns in the data. I reflected on data at least twice a week. This ongoing pattern of analysis continued throughout the research process, as “research analysis and data collection are interrelated” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 7). The following interpretive questions provided a framework for my analysis (Buelow, 2017): (1) Is this significant (to the co-existence of contradictory perspectives, and the ongoing dialogical process of questioning and becoming through encounters with self, others, and the world as text)? (2) For which dialogical relationship is it significant (student-text, teacher-student, student-student and/or teacher-text), and (3) do these moments reveal polyphonic elements and interactions within those relationships? When those relationships reflected polyphonic moments, I looked at them through the lens of polyphonic dialogue and interpreted.

I reconstructed and juxtaposed dialogues that emerged from the interviews and other data, such as from the interactions between participants and/or the internal dialogue of one
participant, describing and analyzing them to better understand the dialogical relationships above and show contested or polyphonic moments. This juxtaposition served to illuminate connections between different voices in the data or different interpretations of the same experience; this is one place the juxtaposition could be used as a mode of polyphony. It also illuminated what the story revealed about the encounter with difference within a particular context in the exchange between self and other. This negotiation, and the potential emergence of polyphony, was central to the entire process of data analysis in this study, as it added layers to interpretation of the data. Polyphonic dialogue also provided a site to hold the tensions that could result from the emergence of multiple perspectives.

I also included reflections on my own experiences using pop culture texts to introduce politically sensitive topics in the English classroom. The autobiographical vignettes that make up the prelude contextualize my interest in the topics of sports and music in popular culture. They also relay significant encounters with political issues in my personal and professional life that have affected my development as a teacher incorporating discussion of politically sensitive topics in my curriculum. These vignettes added a historical perspective to the analysis, while also situating it in the current cultural and political context of recent legislation, such as Oklahoma House Bill 1775, which attempts to limit the teaching of politically sensitive topics. The autobiographical narratives, juxtaposed with teacher participants’ experiences, go beyond individual experience by also considering how the vignettes related to the discussion topics in teacher participants’ classrooms.

As my research questions related to dialogic interactions, triangulating the data sources helped me gain understanding of the different perspectives presented in the data (comparing and combining different viewpoints of participants and any changes in their responses over time). I also examined the consistency of different data sources at different points in time and in different
settings (personal interview vs. group discussion, for example). Examining multiple sources of data allowed contradictions between different sources to emerge, so I could address those and integrate them into my findings and implications.

**Rigor of the Study and Trustworthiness**

I took a number of steps to address process quality. In addition to giving the interview participants copies of the transcripts to check for accuracy, I also conducted member checks at the conclusion of the study to check and confirm the credibility of the report and findings. Triangulation holds “that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations” (Patton, 2015, p. 661). By incorporating triangulation of different qualitative data sources (interviews, observations, researcher observations/reflections and student documents), I strove to increase quality standards and support my claims with data from multiple sources, allowing for consideration of different perspectives, and attempting to address inconsistencies, as “understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative” (Patton, 2015, p. 661). Finally, I alternated data collection with ongoing data analysis, contributing to flexibility and methodological consistency, as well as providing a sense of ongoing research (e.g., this research study is not definitively concluded, but could lead into another cycle of inquiry and data collection).

In spending time with teacher and student participants in their classes and school environments, observing and talking with them as they worked and interviewing them about their experiences with the texts and capturing their views of their learning and the larger world, I sought to accurately portray their lived experiences and viewpoints. (Patton, 2015). Conducting member checks also bolstered credibility in this study.

To meet the criteria of transferability, I provided a clear description of my participants’ teaching situations and the contexts in which the inquiry was conducted. In combining this with
clearly outlining the initial wonderings that led to the inquiry, and their relationship to the existing research base, my hope is that another teacher will be able to see whether the findings would be useful for their own teaching situations. To meet the criteria of dependability I also documented the processes used in my researcher’s journal; this, combined with use of the Jamboards for collecting and sorting data bits, helped me keep logical, methodical records of the processes of data collection and analysis.

Keeping a researcher’s journal was crucial in adding to the trustworthiness of my research, because it addressed researcher positionality and reflection. In addition to using the journal to reflect on the research process, I used it to reflect on my own feelings and observations regarding the dynamics between the participants and myself (power and peer relationships, my views of the curriculum units and the data collection, etc.), and my positionality and changes in my perspectives over time, as I wanted to be aware of any ways my subjectivities could affect how I interacted with participants or portrayed them.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

As a middle-class, White female who has worked many years with a very diverse group of students in a high needs school, throughout this study I needed to be aware of my potential subjectivities, including my personal views on issues of race and class and my own identity. The majority of my students identify as African American, Hispanic and Asian American, and 99% of the students in the school where I work qualify for free or reduced lunch, based on their family income. Several are undocumented or first-generation immigrants. Over the twenty-two years I have been an English teacher, I have seen my students and their families affected by political issues, including immigration policy, racial profiling, police use of force, and access to health care. Part of my interest in this topic stems from the ways I have seen my students respond to discussing these and other topics that affect them as young people from predominately lower
income communities. I care about the issues that affect my students, even if they don’t necessarily affect my personal well-being.

Throughout the research process, I also wanted to be aware of how my own ideas about the topic might weigh into my interpretation of the data. I enjoy popular culture texts, and I have usually found them to be engaging for students I wanted to remain aware of that positioning and how that tendency to favor the texts could shape my data analysis. I also wanted to remain alert to issues of power that could emerge in my research, and how I could react to those. For example, as there was a strong element of student and teacher choice when it came to the individual texts used in the units, I wanted to make sure I did not impose my own will on those decisions, as the teacher and students, as “consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6), were joint participants and inquirers/learners in this study. My research question involved relating and responding to different perspectives, so, again, I needed to be aware of and reflect on my own reactions, being cognizant of my subjectivity when I encountered reactions that contradicted my personal views and experiences. Reflections and observations recorded in my research journal throughout the study helped me uncover my implicit biases and reflect on the role of power dynamics in the classroom. They also gave me a space to withhold judgment and reflect on my reactions to the inquiry process, giving me an opportunity to recognize them (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I planned a dedicated schedule and workspace, which helped me be thorough with data analysis, so I could adjust as necessary and have adequate time for reflection.

Having been a classroom English teacher for twenty-six years, I also needed to be aware of moments in which my implicit biases in favor of my own teaching style and my own students might surface. For example, I tend to avoid intervening in whole class student-led discussions, unless the conversation is veering considerably off-topic, or an incident happens that I need to address. If I observed the teacher intervening frequently, I needed to be aware of not judging...
them and simply noting the observation and being mindful of my personal views on race, class and my own identity. I needed to be aware that some of the students I observed might not react in the same ways my students do, or they might hold views on the political topics discussed that ran counter to my own. My research question involved relating and responding to different perspectives, so – again - I needed to be aware of my own reactions and be cognizant of my subjectivities when I encountered reactions that contradicted my personal views and experiences.
CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My research problem was related to the following issues: 1) the need for more investigation of what happens when the classroom teacher integrates pop culture texts related to sports and music into the English classroom to engage students in discussion of political topics, 2) the need to prepare students to engage in society by facilitating a broader knowledge of contemporary events and encouraging students to engage in critical thinking around contemporary issues, including potentially sensitive political issues, 3) teachers’ hesitance to introduce topics that could prove controversial, in spite of the critical importance of giving students the opportunity to talk about political topics and hear all sides, including teachers’, and 4) the need to examine dialogic interactions across difference. Therefore, I reviewed the existing literature related using popular culture texts in the secondary classroom, discussing politically sensitive topics in the secondary classroom, teachers’ perceptions of discussing politically sensitive topics in the classroom, and dialogue across difference, as they related to my research question and sub-questions.

Popular Culture Texts in the Secondary Classroom

As my research problem related to the need for more research into what happens when the classroom teacher integrates pop culture texts related to sports and music into the English
classroom to engage students in discussion of political topics, this section reviews existing literature related to using a variety of pop culture texts. It covers three major areas: a) research on understandings of popular culture, the alternative forms it can take and spaces it can open up b) pop culture texts utilized as a bridge to academic literacy development in different content areas and levels, and c) pop culture texts related to hip hop and rap music that function as a site of identity formation for high school youth, as well as a vehicle for engaging secondary students in social critique, political action and/or critique of hegemonic structures. This study extends the conversation around the use of popular culture texts in the secondary classroom by delving into the use of pop culture texts (specifically those related to sports, music, and politics) to introduce discussion of politically sensitive topics in the secondary English classroom, as there is a limited amount of existing research in this area.

**Popular Culture: Understandings and Alternative Spaces**

Understandings of popular culture are varied, context-bound, fluid, and often contested. Popular culture can be understood as being texts that people receive and act on, as well as lived experiences that people create (Dolby, 2003). Storey (2018) outlined six ways of understanding popular culture: 1) a culture that is popular with many people, 2) what is left over after high culture is determined, 3) popular culture as mass culture, 4) culture originating from the people (as opposed to being imposed), 5) a neo-Gramscian ideological struggle between mass culture and a people’s culture, and 6) a postmodern culture that does not distinguish between high and popular culture. Popular culture is conceptualized as part of the wider field of cultural studies, thus broadening it “to include the study of texts such as films, songs…*and* the study of lived cultures and communities, including…concerts and sporting events” (Petrone, 2013, p. 243).

In studying the use of popular culture texts, some researchers have further expanded the meaning of popular culture to include alternative forms that challenge teachers’ traditional
notions of what constitutes popular culture and how it can be used. In Johnson’s (2012) study she observed 23 students in a 10th grade English class performing and positioning one another’s identities while reading pop culture texts over the course of a year. She discovered “moments of performed identity” represent renderings of pop culture in the classroom that may reframe classroom events as “pedagogical acts with potential for change” (p. 169), such that identity performance constituted an alternative form of popular culture. These alternative forms of pop culture “provide educators new ways of understanding educational practice, both within and outside schools” (Sandlin & Milam, 2008, p. 347). They can also be empowering for teachers and students, as they both have the potential to become “cultural creators” (Chou, 2007, p. 61) in a way that forces them to reconsider their current subjectivities and understandings, question their own cultural assumptions, and even challenge hegemonic discourses (Sandlin & Milam, 2008; Chou, 2007). These broad understandings of popular culture allowed for incorporation of a wide range of texts for this study.

Intertwined with discussion of its varied understandings is the issue of the potential negative effects of interaction with popular culture. Storey (1998) argues it can lead to empowerment and function as a site of resistance but can also lead to passive consumerism and consumption of ideals that foster hegemony. While acknowledging mainstream pop culture could be characterized as “mindless entertainment”, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) contend that the same is true of traditional literature, as very few texts are included in the traditional literary canon. In answering those who question the value of incorporating pop culture texts in classrooms due to sometimes violent or misogynistic content, they point out instances of canonical literature, such as Shakespeare’s Macbeth, that also contain violent, problematic content for students and teachers to navigate. Dolby (2003) argues that regardless of how others may view it, from the student perspective, “it is unrealistic to expect that youth will reject popular culture because of its commercial nature, or its potentially racist, sexist, violent, or homophobic
content”, as it functions as a site for pleasure, and pleasure “will constantly draw us back to it, despite our intellectual critiques” (p. 264). For the purposes of this study, it will be up to the teacher and student participants to determine the specific content of the pop culture texts in their writing unit.

In the literature on popular culture, a main area of intersection is popular culture and the emergence of alternative spaces for learning. Many studies have examined the role of pop culture in facilitating a connection between learning inside and outside of schools, including connections between popular culture and alternative learning spaces (Faulkner, 2003; Callahan & Low, 2004). In a landmark ethnographic study examining how a group of African American children in first grade make use of popular culture, Dyson (2003) discovered the study participants recontextualized familiar influences from popular media as they organized their writing, reframing those pop culture resources in the context of an in-school setting. Findings such as these point to the interrelationship of in-school and out-of-school literacies and the ways both are relevant for entering into learning, particularly for students of color from lower income households (Dyson, 2003; Johnson, 2012; Martinez-Alvarez, 2017).

Several studies have also established students’ interaction with pop culture as opening a discursive third space for student learning, although some findings indicate pop culture can contribute to formation of "an unequally accessible third space" when students’ linguistic or cultural backgrounds prevent them from fully engaging with the texts (Duff, 2004, p. 231). This points to the need for teachers to fully unpack the references in pop culture texts to fully understand their complex nature when using them, lest they result in marginalization of students (Duff, 2004; Mangram, 2008; Lefstein & Snell, 2011). In some cases, however, students’ perspectives were mostly or wholly based on observations and teacher recollection to determine how students view and make meaning of pop culture, as opposed to direct interaction with them (Callahan & Low, 2004; Mangram, 2008). This may have led to missing insights that could be
gleaned from examining the whole context, instead of mostly or only collecting data from the teacher’s perspective.

Researchers have found popular culture can also contribute to the formation of third spaces where learning happens when teachers draw on students’ existing funds of knowledge (Moje, et.al, 2004; Buelow, 2017). Barton and Tan (2008) discovered “physical, political and pedagogical” hybrid spaces emerged wherein science knowledge coalesced with students' interests in pop culture in a sixth grade Science classroom to produce deeper learning. Studies such as these point to the need for teachers to engage students in reading texts drawn from “rapidly expanding and increasingly homogeneous funds of knowledge and discourse” (Moje, et.al, 2004, p. 39), including pop culture texts. Researchers also found these hybrid spaces can be places where teachers and students co-construct knowledge around discussion and creation of popular culture (Buelow, 2017; Callahan & Low, 2004). While there have traditionally been fewer outlets for publishing practitioner-based studies incorporating popular culture (Sourdot & Janak, 2017), there have recently been more practitioner pieces published illustrating how secondary teachers use popular culture, such as comics, to address issues of racial identity and cultural difference (Hughes, Hawkins, & Lopez, 2017), even ones incorporating dialogic pedagogy (Mielke & Brandon, 2017). Therefore, now that such outlets are becoming available, there is a need for additional research into practical teaching practices that incorporate pop culture to facilitate the creation of alternative curriculum spaces.

**Popular Culture Texts and Academic Literacy**

Numerous researchers have studied the effects of integrating popular culture texts in the curriculum on secondary students’ literacy skills. Pop culture texts have been promoted for their ability to engage students in the world around them by providing a connection to their background knowledge and experiences, while facilitating academic literacies and broadening the
possibilities for dialogic interaction, including those related to critical examination of texts (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Mahiri, 1998; Moje, Ciechanowski, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004; Buelow, 2017; Lefstein & Snell, 2014; Rodesiler, 2021). Researchers have found this to be particularly true for marginalized students, such as urban students of color, who often disengage when presented with more traditional English and Science curricula (Morrell, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Emdin, 2010). Researchers such as Morrell (2008) and Awad (2004) have studied how infusing popular culture in the curriculum positively affects marginalized students’ engagement with reading and writing tasks, while facilitating an awareness of social inequities that affect them; in essence, critiquing society and their own lives (cited in Petrone, 2013; Morrell, 2004). Instead of being dismissed for its commercial aspects, pop culture has been shown to provide “opportunities for critical analysis” that can be pleasurable for students by way of building on students’ prior knowledge, while allowing them to examine the construction of texts (Arthur, 2001, p. 295). Aronowitz & Grioux (1991) contend that “the curriculum can best inspire learning only when school knowledge builds upon the tacit knowledge derived from the cultural resources that students already possess” (cited in Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005, p. 289), such as references to popular culture, and even the youngest learners have been found to “articulate and develop key conceptual understandings” through their encounters with pop culture texts that connect to their prior cultural experiences (Parry, 2014, p. 14).

One major area of intersection in the literature on pop culture texts and pedagogy is using music to dialogue with students and provide a bridge to developing academic literacies and critical media literacy skills (Callahan & Low, 2004; Dyson, 2003). Many researchers have investigated the ways this has been done through analyzing song lyrics and incorporating the study of hip-hop music into the high school curriculum. Hip-hop has been shown to be an effective teaching tool when used to broach issues of race in social studies curriculum (Childs,
2014) and support students as they learn academic literary terms and apply them when analyzing works of literature (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Researchers have studied the impact of incorporating texts and dialogue around hip-hop culture in English and science curricula in urban secondary schools, finding it increased engagement and established hip hop texts as essential for developing content area literacy skills in both subjects, through drawing on students’ cultural experiences (Belle, 2016; Emdin, 2010). While some of these studies also focus on the ways students interact with pop culture texts for the purpose of developing “critical consciousness” (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 89), they all primarily investigate students’ interactions with the texts in terms of their relationship to traditional academic literacy, rather than in terms of dialogic interaction.

**Popular Culture Texts as Sites for Identity Formation and Political Critique**

In examining how popular culture texts function as a site for identity formation for high school youth, as well as a vehicle for engaging secondary students in social critique, political action and/or critique of hegemonic structures, much recent research again focuses specifically on the use of texts related to rap and hip-hop music. Several researchers have noted how adolescents construct identities through listening to and engaging with rap and hip-hop music texts. Ibrahim (2009) notes “identification is the initial stage of identity formation” and, by speaking to people’s issues, hip-hop “creates a space of identification” (p. 237) wherein “they may invest their identities and desires” (p. 238). Newman’s (2009) ethnographic study revealed how students constructed identities through their identification as members of an urban community, framed through “opaque” and “transparent” readings of rap music texts. Students constructed identities that, predominately, reflected opaque personas based on constructed rap identities and not their lived realities. Similarly, Dimitriadis (2001) notes the “gangsta” figure (p. 29) as a kind of outlaw archetype that is framed more as a “romantic figure” than a reality for adolescents to aspire to (p.
The MC’s in Newman’s (2009) study took on the outlaw or thug archetype as a kind of counter-identity to portray their thoughts about the world and their place in it.

Adolescents have also used rap music texts to construct "notions of place, self and history" (Petchauer, 2009, p. 956) in the process of creating fluid, complex and negotiated identities (Baszile, 2009). Dimitriadis’ (2009) ethnographic study of African American youth found participants at a community center used rap music to construct place-based identities in “unpredictable ways over complex life courses in particular social networks” (p. 94) focused on context-dependent geographic identification. In Ibrahim’s (1999, 2004) ethnographic study, hip-hop music and culture became a site for French-speaking African immigrants in a Canadian school to form Black American identities that informed their learning, both culturally and linguistically (Hill, 2009), and, therefore, should constitute an important site for ESL curricula (Petchauer, 2009). Based on his research, Ibrahim (2009) contends hip-hop should be a site for “Creative Margin Curriculum (CMC)”, as “students appropriate and develop aspects of CMC…as part of their identity formation” (p. 241), in effect becoming “curriculum sites where learning can and does take place”, that take the form of “a mattering map of investment, learning and desire” (Ibrahim, 2004, p. 116), as learning and identity intertwine.

Many researchers have also linked identify formation to the process of learning through a critical pedagogy lens, as “It is through the process of reading and identifying with particular texts that readers form identities” (Hagwood, 2008, p. 533). Hill’s (2009) ethnographic study of a high school course centered on hip hop pedagogy found students created identities within a counter-hegemonic community of storytelling that they could use to challenge their existing realities. Similarly, Mahiri (2009) studied how urban teenagers used rap and hip-hop music and culture to create texts outside of school that activated their agency through reflecting on their lives and surroundings and attempting to make sense of their “urban identities” (Hagood, 2008, p. 542). Mahiri (2009) observes, “their works demonstrate their lives differ greatly from how
they’ve been socially constructed” (p. 40), as they critique their world and counter the identities that have been prescribed for them.

The critical pedagogy framework, “addresses the potential for multiple readings of popular culture texts, the contradictory and shifting meanings of texts, and the shifting power struggles over control of texts” (Weaver & Daspit, 2000, p. xiv), thus facilitating students’ examination of “who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values and classroom practices” (Giroux, 2011, p. 5). Challenging hegemonic school cultures and working for social justice has been found to empower adolescents through development of their critical consciousnesses as they become “critical researchers and knowledge producers” (Morrell, 2007, p. 245; Morrell, 2008). Hip hop music has been studied as a vehicle used to challenge the school’s role in the reproduction of social inequality (Akom, 2009), by heightening students’ critical consciousness around social and political issues (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Gosine & Tabi, 2016; Morrell, 2001).

Baszile (2009) posits that hip hop culture functions as a kind of “counterstory that works to challenge the logic of the majoritarian story and its supposed commitment to a socially just democracy” (p. 11). As a counterstory, or “counter-curriculum”, students’ engagement with hip hop music and culture functions to “repair” and “act out…the oppression of marginalized identities” (p. 13), allowing them to challenge the hegemony of the official curriculum when incorporated within the school context. Kim and Pulido (2015) found, however, that when the hip hop curriculum in determined solely by the teacher, its relevance becomes diminished and its transformative potential hindered; therefore, they contend that to be effective as a vehicle for social change, hip hop must be incorporated within the framework and worldview of culturally relevant pedagogy. The majority of studies related to using popular culture texts as a site for identity formation and political critique, however, utilize ethnographic methodology and are focused on students’ interaction with rap and hip-hop texts in ways that reveal their developing
identities through examining context and their social interaction, rather than focusing on the dialogic interactions.

**Discussing Politically Sensitive Topics in the Secondary Classroom**

As my research problem related to the need to prepare students to engage in society by facilitating a broader knowledge of contemporary events and encouraging students to engage in critical thinking around contemporary issues, including potentially sensitive political issues, this section reviews literature examining students’ discussion of controversial political issues in middle and high school English and Social Studies classrooms. Some of these studies address the process of learning to discuss potentially divisive topics, and a more limited number incorporate pop culture texts. Numerous researchers have studied the implementation of both popular culture texts and discussion of political topics in the secondary classroom, drawing connections between students’ discussion and increased political awareness, improved collaboration skills, and understanding of content (Hess, 2002; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Hess & McEvoy, 2015).

Researchers have also drawn a connection between students’ discussion of political issues and increased tolerance for differences in political outlook, as a result of the cognitive dissonance that emerges from addressing opposing viewpoints (Fine, 1993; Hess, 2002; Hess and Gatti, 2010), as well as an increased awareness of political issues, particularly issues of power, through a critical pedagogy lens (Kim, 2011). Several of these studies came in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, which highlighted the necessity of teaching African American history in the secondary classroom and highlighting issues of social justice through use of graphic novels and other forms of pop culture media (Hughes et al., 2017). This study extends the conversation on political discussion in the secondary classroom by delving further into the use of popular culture texts related to sports, music, and politics to introduce such discussions. After reviewing
the literature related to discussing political topics in secondary classrooms and the incorporation of pop culture texts, I identified three main areas of intersection: the facilitation of critical thinking skills, democratic outcomes, and the role of power dynamics in the classroom.

**Political Discussion and Critical Thinking Skills**

The most common intersection between incorporating popular culture texts and political discussion in the classroom relates to developing students’ critical thinking skills. Researchers have integrated popular culture texts with traditional curriculum, analyzed through a critical pedagogy lens, to study how pop culture texts can be used to develop students’ critical thinking skills. In their teacher research study, Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2008) combined hip hop music and poetry texts from the traditional literary canon to strengthen students’ analytical and critical literacy skills and found students’ demonstrated the critical thinking ability to analyze the texts and “deconstruct or problematize” them, as well as “construct and support an argument and defend it against opposing arguments”, as they related the texts to contemporary issues and their own lives (p. 266). Buelow (2017) used a critical participatory action research (CPAR) framework to study how popular culture texts can be used to develop critical thinking skills, as she observed her 6th grade ELA students engaged in co-collaboration, utilizing their popular culture funds of knowledge to demonstrate how they “learned how to apply a critical eye to anything placed before them” (p. 15), including their self-created hybrid texts. In doing so, students used pop culture texts to draw on their funds of knowledge as a starting place for learning. Hall (2011) observed that students used pop culture texts critically, “as evidence to support their arguments” and “to shut down interpretations of social studies texts they did not agree with” (p. 300). She also observed, though, that students did not question the texts themselves critically and were still “dismissive” of more traditional academic texts (p. 302), pointing to the need to develop students’ critical media literacy skills when using pop culture texts in the curriculum.
Discussion of controversial public issues (CPI) in both social studies and English classrooms enhances students’ content understanding and critical thinking as “examining positions and supporting evidence, students can carefully analyze their reasoning as well as their classmates’, thus improving their abilities to think critically”, as their ideas are “challenged, broadened and refined by the dynamics of group discussion” (Hess, 2002, p. 13). Critical thinking has been observed in studies where students learn to discriminate between believing what people say and reasoning independently and engaging in critical examination of how perspectives are constructed (Fine, 1993; Welton, Harris, LaLonde & Moyer, 2015). In examining correlations among rubrics used in their mixed methods study of social studies classrooms in Chicago, Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede (2000) discovered a link between students’ opportunities to discuss contemporary social problems and opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, as they found a “the strongest relationship existed between opportunities to experience citizenship and opportunities for higher level thinking (r=.605)” (p. 330).

**Political Discussion and Democratic Outcomes**

Discussion of political topics and incorporation of popular culture texts can strengthen democratic outcomes in the classroom, as democratic education requires both students and teachers learn to deal with difference. However, students – particularly low SES and minority students - do not experience adequate substantive opportunities to discuss political topics in school (Hess & Posselt, 2002; Khane, Rodriguez, Smith & Thiede, 2000; Hess & McEvoy, 2015), despite findings that link such discussion to democratic outcomes (Hess, 2002; Hess & McEvoy, 2015; Avery, Levy & Simmons, 2013; Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017). Discussion of controversial topics has been connected to fostering “students’ awareness of the social conditions that can undermine democracy and promoting their sense of moral and political responsibility as future citizens”, as the dynamics at work in the classroom can mirror political differences in the larger world, allowing students the opportunity to manage conflict through talking about
contemporary issues (Fine, 1993, p. 414; Avery, Levy & Simmons, 2013). Hess (2002) found that for at least one of the three teachers who participated in her study of CPI classrooms, “democratic discourse is a critical outcome of their [CPI] curriculum” (p. 32), enhancing outcomes such as students’ understanding of their First Amendment rights. While the topics she engaged students in were not overtly political, Buelow (2017) reported the “democratizing” (p. 12) of her classroom was facilitated by her use of popular culture texts, as she learned from the funds of knowledge students brought into the classroom through discussion of those texts. Therefore, pop culture texts, a methodology focused on social justice outcomes and a third space theoretical framework together produced a “democratic, collaborative learning zone” (p. 10).

**Political Discussion and Classroom Power Dynamics**

Another topic that surfaces when engaging in discussion in the classroom, especially discussion of political topics, is the role of power dynamics. As noted earlier, using pop culture texts in a classroom framed by social justice issues can facilitate an environment focused on power sharing (Buelow, 2017; Pelo & Pelojoaquin, 2016), and teachers who focus on incorporating discussion of controversial public issues have been found to value student voice and power sharing when it comes to curricular decisions as they purposefully design student-led discussion to amplify students’ opinions and voices (Hess, 2002; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Mielke & Brandon, 2017). However, problematic power differentials can emerge between students and teachers, as well as between students and other students, in classrooms where political topics are being discussed. “Political” classroom events can occur when teachers exercise their power over students to either silence or empower students as they voice their opinions on political topics (Fine, 1993, p. 427; Welton, Harris, LaLonde, & Moyer, 2015).

While students are eager to discuss contemporary issues, there are mixed findings regarding the influence of teachers’ sharing their views with students, and there can be tension
between taking a firm position and being open to other points of view that can influence power
dynamics and put students at odds with each other and the teacher (Fine, 1993; Hess & McAvoy,
2015). Failure to examine how the sociocultural context and the design of discussions affects
classroom dynamics can simply reinforce existing power structures between students in the
classroom when political topics are discussed, regardless of the teacher’s desire to share power or
intentions to create an open environment for student’s to express their opinions (Hemmings,
2000; Welton, Harris, LaLonde, & Moyer, 2015); therefore, the existing sociocultural context of
the environment in which the discussion is happening, as well as the teacher’s responses, are
factors to consider when designing student discussion around political topics.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Discussing Politically Sensitive Topics in the Classroom**

As my research problem is related to teachers’ hesitance to introduce topics that could prove controversial, in spite of the critical importance of giving students the opportunity to talk about political topics and hear all sides, as well as the need to include the teachers’ perspective on political discussion, this section addresses the literature on teachers views towards discussion of politically sensitive topics in middle and high school English and Social Studies classrooms. This study examined the teacher’s reflections on their interactions with the texts, as well as their reactions to engaging students with political subject matter, so reviewing the existing research on teachers’ attitudes towards engaging in these discussions with students establishes context. This study contributes to the existing literature by extending the conversation on teachers views of political discussion through examining the teachers’ reactions to and reflections on incorporating pop culture texts to introduce political discussion.

In this time of political divisiveness and upheaval, it is understandable that many teachers are hesitant or unwilling to bring political topics into the classroom in any form (Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000; Hess, 2002; Dyke, Gordon & Job, 2017). There are many reasons for this
resistance. Diana Hess (2002), whose research has supported the teaching of controversial issues in the classroom, concedes, “CPI discussions, because of their potential to inflame emotional reactions, may be even more difficult than other types of discussion” (p. 14), and popular culture texts often contain references to “taboo subjects such as sex, drugs, violence and profanity”, although many often used traditional core texts often delve into controversial subjects as well (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005, p. 299). Because of the potential controversy, teachers fear push back from many stakeholders, including parents, community members, and administrators; they may also be apprehensive about students’ reactions, such as strong prejudices or unwillingness to participate, or their own ability to handle unpredictable outcomes (Dyke, Gordon & Job, 2017). Harmon Ziegler’s (1967) found that a “high degree of fear of sanctions” makes it less likely that a teacher will be willing to initiate discussion of political topics (cited in Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000, p. 297). In the literature on teachers’ views of political discussion in the classroom, two main areas of focus emerge: the impact of context on teachers’ curricular decision making regarding including political content and the link between equity-focused perspectives and teacher agency.

**The Impact of Context on Discussion of Political Topics**

Several contextual factors influence the way teachers’ view implementing discussion of politically sensitive topics in the classroom. One is the impact of political polarization in the surrounding school community, as “polarized beliefs often translate into opinions about how students should be educated” (Dunn, Sondel, & Baggett, 2019, p. 445). This causes some educators, including social studies teachers, to be apprehensive of including discussions of political issues in the classroom that may prove to be controversial, even when they see the value in having them (McEvoy & Hess, 2013; Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009). Byford, Lennon and Russell (2009) found that 72-73% of teachers who responded
to their survey agreed or strongly agreed that students should study controversial issues, but also found that “teaching controversial issues is important as long as it does not endanger their careers” (p. 168), due to parent or administrative disapproval. A survey conducted by the Education Week Research Center (Teachers not shying from political topics, 2017) found that in the current climate of political polarization, most teachers are not avoiding political topics, although 42 percent acknowledged the difficulty of doing so. Garrett (2020) found the ability to hold the tensions that emerge in the discussion of controversial topics, and an awareness of the political nature of emotions, as essential to helping students engage with controversial topics. Teachers that do avoid such discussion may prioritize discipline over content to avoid or minimize discussions that may prove to be uncomfortable (Rogers, 2017; Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009; Niemi & Niemi, 2007).

Another contextual factor influencing teachers’ pedagogical choices is the amount of support they feel from administrators and colleagues and how well prepared they feel to talk about potentially controversial topics with students. Some teachers’ curricular choices are influenced by whether or not their beliefs align with their school and district administration (Dunn, Sondel & Baggett, 2019; McEvoy & Hess, 2013). Dunn, Sondel & Baggett (2019) found that when teachers politics aligned with colleagues, administrators, and/or parents, they “expressed more confidence in their decisions” (p. 457), underscoring the importance of administrative and collegial support for teachers as they engage their students in the discussion of potentially sensitive topics. Researchers have also discovered that a lack of preparation contributes to teachers’ lack of willingness to discuss political topics with students, including a lack of guidance when it comes to curricular materials and support (Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004; Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009). An Education Week study found that of over 830 teacher participants, 44% felt adequately prepared them to handle discussion of controversial topics, 23% said they received no training that prepared them, and only 40% cited receiving
guidance from other teachers or administrators (“Teachers not shying from political topics”). Both a lack of support and a lack of preparation can lead teachers to feel less willing and able to handle “the unique classroom dynamics” that can emerge from discussion of politically sensitive topics (Rogers, 2017, p. 16), leading researchers to call for relevant curriculum development and teacher support systems (Oulton, Day, Dillon & Grace, 2004; Dunn, Sondel & Baggett, 2019).

The influence of curricular constraints, particularly standardized testing, is another factor in teachers’ attitudes toward broaching sensitive topics with students. Many researchers have noted how, in the current climate, “agency is challenged within the sociopolitical context that seeks to control curriculum and instruction” (Dunn, Sondel & Baggett, 2009, p. 448). Teachers have noted feeling limited in their ability to make time for discussion of political topics with students because of pressures to cover curriculum (Dunn, Sondel & Baggett, 2019; Journell, 2010; Oulton, Day, Dillon & Grace, 2004). In his qualitative study with six teachers in three high schools during the 2008 presidential election, Journell (2010) found that teachers fell into three categories: those who rarely deviated from the prescribed curriculum, those who integrated discussion of political topics with their planned curriculum when it is convenient, and those who intentionally make time for discussion of politics in their curriculum. Students’ potential performance on year end assessments was the most important factor those teachers considered when deciding how much time (if any) to spend discussing the 2008 presidential election with students, which the researcher noted speaks to the increased emphasis on standardized testing in that state, despite their belief that citizenship and politics are connected. This echoes the pressures teachers feel to cover math and literacy strategies at the expense of other topics, decisions based on curricular choices rather than experience. (Oulton, Day, Dillon & Grace, 2004).

The Link Between Equity-Focused Perspectives and Teacher Agency
When it comes to the link between equity-focused perspectives and teacher agency, some findings suggest prioritizing student needs can help teachers respond more effectively to the previously mentioned contextual pressures. Dunn, Sondel, and Baggett (2019) suggest, “only by anchoring pedagogy to a justice and equity framework can teachers determine how to best respond to contextual pressures and meet the needs of all students” (p. 446), finding while many teachers feel political topics are not appropriate for younger students, others use them to motivate students to question how they can affect change in their communities. When teachers bring political discourse into the classroom, regardless of the contextual situation, it often stems from a sense of obligation to meet students’ needs by ensuring they have an opportunity to voice their feelings and opinions about current issues that affect their lives, although sometimes in more covert than overt ways. At the same time, a sense of protecting students from discomfort can also lead teachers to avoid those same topics (“Teachers not shying away”, 2017; Dunn, Sondel, & Baggett, 2019). Many researchers, however, have argued against teachers taking a neutral stance, however, viewing deliberation of controversial topics in the secondary classroom as a way to address polarization and strengthen teachers’ agency (McEvoy & Hess, 2013), as “even within contexts that may be constraining, teachers have the capacity to resist and subvert” (Dunn, Sondel, & Baggett, 2019, p.466), empowering both themselves and their students. This study can add to literature in this area, as it examined pop culture texts as an entry point for discussion of politically sensitive topics and the teachers’ responses.

**Dialogic Pedagogy: Dialogue Across Difference**

As my research problem relates to the need to examine dialogic interactions, and this study examined dialogic interactions through the lens of polyphonic dialogue, this section examines the literature on dialogic pedagogy and the notion of dialogue across difference as it relates to dialogical practices for both teachers and students. The teacher’s sensitivity to students’ subjectivities, and an understanding that there is no endpoint for true dialogue, characterize
dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, 2009). Bakhtinian (1984) dialogic pedagogy can be viewed as instrumental, when “used to achieve preset curricular endpoints”, or ontological, when “based on the principal of consciousnesses with equal rights”, with their own interests and questions (Matusov et. al., 2019, pp. 120-121). In reviewing the literature related to dialogue across difference, four main themes emerge: the emphasis on the intersection between students’ lives inside the classroom and their lives and interests outside, the emergent and ultimately unfinalized nature of dialogic interactions, power dynamics and the role of the teacher in fostering dialogue across difference, and, finally, the importance of tensionality.

**The Intersection Between Students’ Lives Inside and Outside the Classroom**

Researchers have defined ontological engagement as being when students’ lives outside the classroom and their lives inside the classroom “become a crucial part of their education itself”, fostering dialogical participants’ true interest in each other and the topic being explored, as students begin asking questions and responding to the questions of others, in the spirit of Bakhtinian dialogical encounters (Matusov et. al., 2019, p. 143). There is a need for extended “dialogic space” that brings together life inside and outside the classroom (Fecho et. al., 2010; Matusov et. al., 2005, as cited in Elkader, 2015, A9). Such spaces allow students to address alternative viewpoints and develop their own perspectives, as they respond to their dialogic counterparts. Matusov et. al. (2005) found as students in a college course in elementary teacher education engaged in discussion of web postings, they integrated ideas from “outside references” with classroom topics. This integration enriched their responses and allowed them to address the contrasting viewpoints of their teacher and fellow students (p.16), facilitating dialogue across a variety of perspectives.

**The Emergent and Unfinalizable Nature of Dialogic Interactions**
Another characteristic of dialogue across difference noted in the literature is the emergent and, ultimately, unfinalizable nature of dialogic interactions. In their study of dialogic interactions across a variety of pedagogical settings, Matusov et. al. (2019) noted many teacher participants wrote about the unfinalizable nature of the dialogic interactions in their classrooms, as “Meaning was still emerging for all of us…it was not really closed”, in negotiating difference (p. 22). Part of this emergent nature of dialogic interaction stems from Bakhtin’s dialogical principle of “consciousnesses with equal rights – the equal rights to make judgments about what is relevant, what is important, and what is true” (Bakhtin, 1999 as cited in Matusov et, al., 2019). Engaging in dialogue as consciousnesses with equal rights is not about finding fault in the argument of the other, but creating something new, unique and unrepeatable in which meaning continues to emerge through interaction with oneself and others, and difference is understood as an opportunity, not an obstacle (DePalma, 2010; Morson, 2004). This can only happen, however, “if people are able to freely listen to each other without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other” (Matusov et. al., 2019, p.52; Eldaker, 2015). While the research of Fecho et. al. (2010) was limited to data from three participants in a dialogical classroom for teacher education candidates, they discovered “dialogue can challenge boundaries between self and other, as dialogues with others may shape voices within ourselves and vice versa”, (p. 444); therefore, the multiplicity of dialogues contributes to their unfinalizable nature.

**Power Dynamics and the Role of the Teacher in Fostering Dialogue Across Difference**

The issue of power dynamics, particularly the role of the teacher in fostering dialogue, also emerges as a prominent topic in the literature. There is a contradiction between the ethical principle of “consciousnesses with equal rights” and the idea of the teacher as an all-powerful authority figure in the classroom, as when fostering dialogue across difference the teacher should be part of the inquiry (Bakhtin, 1999, as cited in Matusov, et. al., 2019). The idea of the teacher maintaining a neutral stance also runs counter to this dialogical position of the teacher as a fellow
participant negotiating diverse perspectives, formulating their own views of the topics at hand, and helping students make connections between ideas (Dysthe, 1996; DePalma, 2010). While Bakhtin held there should not be any power in education (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019), Morson (2004) and Matusov (2007) contend, this is not desirable in classrooms. They argue the authority of the teacher is still needed, as “the teacher needs the power to kill his or her own power and the power of students’ ignorance” and start the students’ dialogical journey (Matusov et. al., 2019, p. 220). In Dysthe’s (2011) case study, for example, she documented how a teacher created “opportunity spaces” for dialogic encounters in high school classrooms that were mainly focused on student achievement on tests (p. 84); the teacher was not without authority, but her ability to build relationships and share power and control with students was the main factor in opening those dialogic spaces. Finding a balance between authoritarianism and “appropriate authority” when facilitating dialogue presents a challenge for many teachers, especially those with less experience (Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013, p. 10).

The Role of Tensionality in Dialogue Across Difference

Finally, the vital role of tensionality in dialogue across difference emerges as an important topic. Often, this tension occurs when, in the course of dialogic interactions, as described by Bakhtin (1999), participants test their ideas against the ideas of others in an internally persuasive discourse” (Matusov et. al., 2019, p. 170). It is at this point - when tension emerges as authoritative discourse encounters internally persuasive discourse - that learning can happen (Sidorkin, 1999, as cited in Eldaker, 2015), as findings show dialogical instruction can be more effective for promoting comprehension instruction and “literate thinking” (Skidmore, 2000, p. 292). These “generative”, tensioned spaces are not the result of dialogical teaching practices; they are already in existence but become “transactional” as dialogical participants allow them to become “generative” spaces of possibility for teachers and students, especially those whose
voices have been marginalized (Fecho et. al, 2016, p. 95-96). However, even as Fecho, et. al. (2016) studied teacher’s reflections on their dialogical interactions in the classroom, they did not venture specifically into their responses to dialogue around politically sensitive topics, focusing instead on teachers’ reflections on their “wobble” (p, 91) moments when balancing the often-competing demands of teaching standards and student needs.

Opening these tensioned spaces for dialogical discourse in the classroom is particularly important, as internally persuasive discourse is subject to constant change, and the “rich and complex “contact zone” inside the classroom yields plentiful opportunity for students to decide what will be internally persuasive for them, and consequently, for them to develop their ideologies”, as they interact with and learn from each other (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 8). Fecho et. al. (2010) discovered in their study that this finding extended to teacher educators as well, as their participants in a dialogical teacher education course, as their findings “suggest what can happen when educators choose to acknowledge and live within the…tensions of a dialogical classroom”, as teacher “participants embrace the dialogical possibilities of their focus of study, dynamism can increase, but so can tension, as unifying forces tug in opposition to those that individualize” (p. 432). While their study was limited to three teacher participants from the class who were willing to share their experiences with the researchers, it demonstrates what can be gathered from teachers, who are learning along with students and navigating the internal and external tensions inherent in engaging in uncomfortable conversations in a classroom setting.

This study contributes to this existing literature on dialogic pedagogy by examining students’ dialogic interactions in diverse settings, at the high school level. Many studies focus on dialogical encounters in higher education (Fecho et. al., 2010; DePalma, 2010; Matusov et. al., 2005), so this study contributes to the more limited research base on dialogical encounters in the high school English classroom (Dysthe, 1996; Dysthe, 2011), illustrating the curriculum spaces that result when students engage with the texts and how teachers can use that knowledge to
inform their practice. It also contributes to teachers’ understandings regarding classroom
teachers’ dialogical engagement around political discussion.

Specific Contributions

The majority of studies on popular culture and political discourse in the secondary
classroom have been qualitative, primarily utilizing classrooms observations, artifacts, and
personal interviews as data sources. Mixed methods studies also incorporated closed-ended
questionnaires, as the combination of qualitative and quantitative data helped the researchers
connect commonalities and themes from varied data sources (Hess & Posselt, 2002; Hess, 2009;
Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Several have been teacher research studies utilizing a critical pedagogy
lens (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Buelow, 2017). While there is much existing research on
both political discussion in the classroom, and on using popular culture to engage students with
literacy and enact social change, there are fewer studies that combine the two by examining the
intersection of popular culture texts and political dialogue, specifically in the English classroom,
that do not utilize a critical theory framework. Buelow (2017) points to the need for additional
studies examining what happens when students engage with pop culture texts, so this study
contributes to that research. These findings also contribute to research on pedagogy related to
introducing and discussing politically sensitive topics and current events in the English
classroom, potentially making those topics more accessible to teachers who might otherwise be
hesitant or uncomfortable with that process.

Two specific studies illustrate the contributions of this study to the existing literature in
curriculum studies. In previous research on students’ interaction with pop culture texts,
connections have been established between the use of pop culture texts and the development of
students’ academic and critical literacy skills (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Buelow, 2017).
While participants engaged in academic writing, this study extends the research on high school
students’ use of pop culture texts into the realm of discussion of politically sensitive topics. While Morrell and Duncan Andrade (2008) reflect on the classroom as a political space, and some of the texts used reflect various social and political issues, this study examined how students engaged with the texts as they entered political discussion. Bulow (2017) used a social justice lens and the theoretical perspective of a third space to analyze the data resulting from students’ interactions with pop culture texts, and Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2008) utilized a critical literacy framework. This study utilized polyphonic dialogue as the theoretical framework to examine multi-voiced dialogue in the English classroom, so it also extends into research on dialogic pedagogy by examining participants dialogic interactions with pop culture texts and reflecting on the role of curriculum in the emergence of such spaces in the English classroom. It also extends the research in dialogic pedagogy by examining the teacher’s reflections on their engagement both with the pop culture texts, as well as the student participants’. Finally, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2008) documented how pop culture music texts assist minority students as they access academic texts. This study extended that research by recruiting participants at two different locations, from a variety of cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic levels and examined overlapping themes across different contexts.
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Question and Purpose

In this chapter I chronicle how I used case study methodology, interwoven with autobiographical narrative, to document the dialogic interactions of teacher and student participants in two secondary English classrooms and addressed the following research question and sub-questions: What happens to dialogic interactions - particularly during moments of polyphonic dialogue that may emerge - when the teacher integrates pop culture texts related to sports and/or music into an argumentative writing unit on a political topic in a secondary English classroom? How do students respond to different perspectives embedded in the pop culture texts related to sports and/or music, as revealed in their writing? How do students use pop culture texts related to sports and/or music as they relate to differing political perspectives, when in dialogue with themselves, the teacher, and/or other students? How does the teacher engage in discussions of political topics with students in their curriculum and pedagogy, using pop culture texts related to sports and/or music?

The purpose of this study was to examine the dialogic relations of secondary English students and their teachers, as they interacted with print and non-print pop culture texts related to the topics of sports and/or music, when infused into the curriculum as part of an argumentative writing unit on a politically sensitive topic. A secondary purpose was to observe whether using
these texts influenced the teachers’ perceptions about presenting and discussing these potentially divisive and uncomfortable topics. In the context of this study, the popular culture texts used included print and non-print texts such as essays, songs and music videos, young adult novels with abundant pop culture references, photographs, and videos related to political topics that students used, examined, and responded to in forms that included oral discussions, short analytical assignments, discussion boards, interviews, projects, and essays. Dialogic interactions were defined as internal and external interactions in speech and writing between student and text, student and student, student and teacher and teacher and text. The units described in both cases were two to three weeks in duration, as in many secondary English classrooms.

**Theoretical Framework**

I chose polyphonic dialogue as the framework for this study because of its characteristics of the co-existence of differing perspectives, and the ongoing dialogical process of questioning and becoming through encounters with self, others, and the world as text. Searching for only the familiar does not allow these new meanings to surface, as “even past meanings…can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of future development of the dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170). I looked for the emergence of these characteristics when analyzing the data, such as when student participants Marisol and Thomas framed their research papers in terms of the ongoing questions it posed for them. Bakhtin’s (1984) concept of microdialogue: the “dialogized interior monologue” (p. 74) of a character taking in and recalling the voices of other characters, questioning himself and others, and coming into “dialogic contact” with the world (p. 74), is also an essential concept in this study, as much of the data was captured through such interior dialogue (through participants’ writings and/or their reflections in interviews). Older participants engaged in microdialogue as they tested their internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1984) against the discourse of voices in the text, such as
when Marisol engaged the claims of Raymond Moore about female athletes, then responded with her own ideas, creating a multivoiced dialogue.

Polyphony can also occur in the process of taking the words of others and repeating, interpreting, and evaluating them (internally and externally, sometimes even contradicting the original meaning), thus making them double-voiced (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 195). When looking for patterns and relationships in the data, I also looked for any instances where the data reflected this repetition, interpretation, incorporation or evaluation of the ideas of others, as well as any tensions between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1992), which manifested in dialogic interactions, as participants encountered ideas which ran counter to their own and tested them against their own ideologies. For instance, in the tension between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse in Dani’s classroom, moments of polyphony emerged between Dani and Marisol, as well as between Dani as the participant/character and me as the researcher/author (Bakhtin, 1984). This demonstrates how using this theoretical framework broadened the possibilities for the study of dialogical encounters by analyzing the data through the different perspectives of student-text, teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-text.

The Choice of Methodology

I chose multi-case study methodology for this research, as it allowed me to examine individual and social interactions between participants in their secondary classroom contexts to facilitate understanding of their dialogical relations, using the cases as illustrations of such (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study is an advantageous, inductive method for answering questions of how and why (Yin, 1994 as cited in Merriam, 1998), and all three of my sub-questions were how questions related to students’ responses to and use of pop culture texts, as well as their teacher’s engagement in discussion of politically sensitive topics using pop culture texts. Several studies in the literature on pop culture and/or discussion of political issues in the
secondary classroom utilize ethnographic methodologies (Ibrahim, 1999, 2004) or action research (Hill, 2009; Buelow, 2017; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). This study is unique from other case studies on the topic in that the case was bounded by the dialogic interactions related to discussion of politically sensitive topics, and using case study methodology allowed me to gather as much information about the dialogic interactions between participants as possible (through interviews, documents, and observations). I presented the case through thick description and analysis of emerging themes (Merriam, 1998). Using case study methodology allowed me to maximize the richness of data I was able to collect and interpret, due to variation across both cases.

This was a multi-site study, utilizing both within-case and cross-case analysis, which provided a window into the patterns and themes that emerged in multiple layers of data and allowed me to amplify voices that could otherwise be overlooked, as participants voiced tensions and observations that were not immediately evident and were often surprising, such as in the dialogue between myself and each of the teacher participants, or the dialogue between Sunny and the “Shots Fired” video. I also addressed my subjectivities through writing in my researcher’s journal, paying particular attention to those that emerged when analyzing and writing up the cases. This helped me guard against seeking out details that merely confirmed my existing biases, due to the amount of data I collected (Merriam, 1998) and even helped me identify the emergence of polyphonic moments.

**Sampling and Participant Selection:**

I utilized purposeful maximal sampling, which involves purposefully choosing a range of cases to “get variations on dimensions of interest”, to “document diversity” and identify common patterns across that diversity (Patton, 2015, p. 267), to select two secondary English classrooms as cases: an 11th grade classroom at Eastside High School and an 8th grade classroom at Westside
Charter School. These classrooms represented varied characteristics that presented “information-rich cases for in-depth study” for the purpose of identifying themes that emerged in different case settings (Patton, 2015, p. 264). I described both the different perspectives that made each individual site unique, as well as the themes that emerged across both sites (Patton, 2002, p. 235). I observed one class period from each site over the course of the unit, a 5th period English Language and Composition class at Eastside High and a 5th period English class at Westside Charter. I was able to observe both interactions in response to multiple perspectives within this study, as well as patterns that emerged within and across sites, which were “off particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions” of the settings (Patton, 2002, p.235), making this an appropriate sampling strategy.

As the identified population was teachers and students in secondary English classes in public secondary schools in a state in the Southwestern United States, I initially reached out to secondary school administrators and/or secondary English teachers from three different high school sites, including those I knew through professional organizations in the state. The two potential teacher participants from Eastside High and Westside Charter who responded to my initial recruitment email both had at least two years’ experience teaching 11th grade AP English Language and Composition, and thus had some experience facilitating classroom discussion and teaching argument writing. The teacher from Westside Charter, however, had to withdraw from participation before data collection could begin, due to going on leave for a family emergency that ultimately led her to resign from teaching. The fact that it was later in the school year by the time I learned she would not be returning, combined with the volatile political climate affecting teachers in the state, made for a challenging search for another teacher participant. I reached out to two other teachers at Westside Charter and five other secondary school teachers at additional school sites but received no response. In April, I was able to sit down with an 8th grade English teacher at Westside Charter who was recommended by both a colleague and an administrator. I
surveyed him regarding his views of and experience with facilitating classroom discussion and teaching argument writing, as observing classroom discussion was one potential aspect of the study. As he had three years’ experience teaching argumentative writing and conducting classroom discussion, I determined the interactions in his classroom could potentially provide an “information-rich” case (Patton, 2002, p. 230), and he agreed to be the second teacher participant.

The two teacher participants differed in gender and teaching experience.2 Dani, the AP English Language and Composition teacher at Eastside High School, identifies as a White female and has been teaching English for 21 years total, with the last six years being at Eastside. Paul, the 8th grade English teacher at Westside Charter School, identifies as a White male and has been teaching English for eight years total, with the last five of those being at Westside. There were 15 total student participants, ages 14-18, in the two classrooms, who were diverse in race, gender, and ethnicity. Teacher participants retained control of the distribution and collection of permission slips to consent to participation; there were twelve Eastside High and three Westside Charter students who returned slips. At Eastside, there were nine participants who identified as female and three who identified as male, ages 16-18. Of the three males, one identified as Black and two as Hispanic, and of the nine females, three identified as White, three as Black and three as Hispanic. At Westside, two student participants identified as Male, and one as nonbinary. All were 14 years of age. One identified as White, one as Hispanic and White and one as White and Indian.

The multiple case study sites were both located in a mid-size city in the Southwestern United States, but they differed in size, demographic makeup, and school design. I selected Eastside High School, in part, because is in an ethnically and culturally diverse urban area of the city. There are approximately 1100 students in grades 9-12, and demographically, the student

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2 All names of people and places referred to in this study are pseudonyms.
body is 56% Hispanic, 19% Black, 12% White, 5% Multiracial, 3% American Indian, 3% Asian and 2% Hawaiian. Another reason I selected this site is because it is one of the few remaining neighborhood high schools with open enrollment in a district that is increasingly adding charter and magnet schools. 100% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch based on their parents’ income, thus its designation as a Title I school that receives federal funding to support low-income students. The school has an open enrollment policy for AP classes, so there are students working at a range of levels, from struggling readers to students who have been identified as gifted. While teachers of on-level classers are expected to follow the district curriculum, teachers of Advanced Placement English classes, such as the class in case one, have leeway in designing their own curriculum. The teacher participant also had the support of the school administration in choosing texts and designing the curriculum unit.

Westside Charter School is an independent public charter school authorized by the same school district as Eastside. It serves approximately 523 students in grades 6-12. Currently, 50% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and students attend from every area within the city limits. The demographic makeup of Westside that follows is designed to closely mirror the demographic makeup of the surrounding city: 18.5% Hispanic, 12.4% Black, 45.8% White, 14.1% Multiracial, 6.1% American Indian. Students from across the city apply and are chosen to attend by a random lottery system. Thus, Westside contrasts with Eastside in terms of size, purpose, and demographic makeup of the school community. Teachers at Westside have a considerable amount of freedom in designing their own curriculum. They often plan in the English department through vertical teaming, in which teachers meet to decide which skills will be taught at each grade level, so they are aligned, and teachers know what has been taught the previous year, as well as what they need to teach to prepare them for the following year. While Westside offers Advanced Placement classes at the high school level, the class featured in case one was a general English class, with students working at a variety of levels.
Each of the teacher participants designed and taught an argumentative writing unit lasting two to three weeks, consulting an exemplar I designed that was included in the initial recruitment materials. Because the teacher retained ultimate control over the texts and unit design, there was great variation in the two units that were taught. At Eastside, Dani designed a unit that very loosely followed the sample unit design. The culminating assignment was to generate a research question and write a three-to-four-page researched argument around the students’ individual choice of either the gender pay gap in sports or income inequality in society at large. She incorporated several pop culture texts in the unit that students could reference in their writing, including an essay by professional basketball player Stephen Curry, a segment from the TV show *The Daily Show* and articles from ESPN.com. Students chose their own pop culture texts as well. Within the unit, students had discussion and revision sessions in small groups, created presentations of their thesis and sources in the multimedia program Padlet, completed peer reviews and a final multimedia reflection.

At Westside, Paul created a unit based around students’ reading of the young adult novel, *The Hate U Give*, and discussion of the issue of police brutality. Within the unit, students engaged in whole class discussions to share their perspectives. They also completed a small, written analytical assignment examining and reflecting on three different pop culture texts, chosen from a collection Dan curated. The assignment was modeled using the music video for the song “Trapped” by Tupac Shakur, analyzing it as a text commenting on police brutality. Students also had a choice of final assessment: they could write an argument essay over *The Hate U Give*, or they could complete a project about a global issue of importance to them. All three student participants chose to complete the project instead of the essay.

**Data Collection**
As a foundation for my data analysis, I collected data from a variety of sources, both directly from student and teacher participants, as well as from my own observational research journal. The types of data collected included individual interviews, documents, observations, and reflective researcher journal entries. Using a variety of sources allowed me to triangulate the data and capture multiple perspectives from different sources, so I could see the convergence and/or divergence of those perspectives (Fitchman and Yendol-Hoppey, 2019).

For each case, there was initial, ongoing, and concluding data collection during the argumentative units. Ongoing data sources included documents, such as informal and formal student writing produced by 9 of the 12 student participants at Eastside, which were collected by the teacher in print and/or digital formats. As one of my aims was to investigate participants’ responses to different perspectives in the texts as revealed in their writing, this data assisted me in answering that sub-question, as it captured participants’ internal dialogue, as well as their perspectives on the topics and reactions to the texts. Because I also wanted to analyze students’ thinking and responses as revealed in “conversation” with the texts and each other, documents also included some written peer reviews and brief analytical responses to the texts, collected from nine of the twelve student participants at Eastside and all three at Westside. Documents collected in the first case study also included student writing on discussion boards and formal essays from 9 of the 12 student participants at Eastside, which were collected by the teacher in print and/or digital formats. None of the student participants at Westside elected to complete the writing assignment in the unit, although two of the three completed a visual project on paper, which the teacher collected. I focused primarily on analyzing documents produced by two of the three students I interviewed at Eastside who elected to write about the gender pay gap in sports, rather than income inequality in society as a whole. I focused on analyzing documents produced by the two student participants I interviewed at Westside, as well as the two student participants at Eastside.
who chose to write about the gender pay gap in sports, thus creating equivalence in document analysis.

Another ongoing source of data collection was my reflective researcher journal, which included my observation notes. I wrote in my journal two to three times a week, recording field notes and observations about individual students and the teacher during class observations, as well as my own reflections on the research process and my subjectivities. I visited the classrooms of both cases on three different occasions each during the units. The exact dates for observation were determined in conversation with each teacher participant. In case study one, I observed students constructing their written responses and observed some interaction with the teacher. In the second case study, I observed whole class discussions on two occasions and students working independently on their pop culture analysis projects on another. This direct observation allowed me to get a sense of the context, classroom culture and teachers’ approaches to instruction, as well as observing students’ dialogues with each other and the teacher (Patton, 2002). These observations gave me insight into how students used the texts to relate to different perspectives in discussion, particularly in case study two, as the majority of observations were of whole class interactions. Additionally, I briefly observed student participants in both cases as they interacted with the texts, looking for evidence of the ways they used them to relate different perspectives through their responses and interactions with each other and the teacher. As permission was given to audiotape interactions, I audio taped the first whole class discussion I observed in case study two. In both cases, I focused my observations on the interactions of the two to three student participants I interviewed. Finally, another aspect of my research sub-questions related to how the teacher engaged in discussion of political topics with students using the texts, so this data source also assisted me as I observed both the ways the teachers interacted with their students and their decisions about incorporating pop culture texts into lessons.
The other data source was two semi-structured, face-to-face, individual interviews with three students from case one and two students from case two. The first interview was conducted within the first two weeks of the unit, and the second interview was conducted during the last week of the unit. Student interviews ranged in length from 13 minutes to 33 minutes and were recorded on my phone using the Voice Memo app and transcribed. All student participants who were interviewed were given links to the interview transcripts located within the transcription website Otter, to check for accuracy. The first interview focused on students’ perceptions of the topics and the texts, as well as their thinking processes regarding constructing and responding to arguments. The second interview focused on their reflections on their student work documents and the unit as a whole. Those students were chosen because they had completed most of the work in the unit and presented differing perspectives on the topics (the third student participant in case study two was not available to be interviewed and did not complete the project part of the unit). I also conducted two 30-45-minute semi-structured, individual interviews with each teacher participant, one during the first two weeks of the unit and one during the last week of the unit. Teachers were asked about their perceptions of the topics and texts, how they felt about teaching the units, and any changes in their thinking during the process.

The interviews turned out to be a central piece of data, as they allowed me to gain insight into participants’ thinking processes around the texts and ask questions about past events and how those events influenced their them, such as questions about the role of popular culture texts (songs, podcasts, sporting events, etc.) in their lives and their previous experiences teaching or learning about argument writing and discussing political topics (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Such interview questions helped me understand how or why the teacher used these texts to engage in discussion of political topics with students as they did, as well as how students used the texts to relate different perspectives when they were in dialogue with the teacher and each other. In combination, these data sources contributed to helping me answer my main research question, as
they provided specific insights into student and teacher perspectives on the topics and their reactions to the texts in oral and written modes and allowed for documentation of any changes that occurred.

**Data Analysis**

As the purpose of this study was to examine the dialogic relations of secondary English students and their teachers interacting with print and non-print pop culture texts and understand the teachers’ perceptions about presenting and discussing potentially divisive topics, I approached case study analysis qualitatively, so my methods were process-oriented and allowed for iterative readings of the data. I approached analysis of each case holistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018), providing within-case analysis followed by thematic cross-case analysis and describing the unique characteristics of each site, as well as categories and themes that emerged across sites (Patton, 2015). I analyzed the data using In-Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2016), grouping categories using Google Jamboard, describing the sources and my observations, drawing connections between different sources, and looking for patterns and relationships in the data.

Keeping a researcher’s journal was essential for addressing the criteria of trustworthiness and dependability in this study, because it allowed me, as a researcher, to reflect on my subjectivity and positionality in relationship to both the research question and the purpose of the study. In addition to using the journal to reflect on the research process, I used it to reflect on my own feelings and observations regarding the dynamics between the participants and myself and ways in which my subjectivities affected how I perceived participants. I also recorded my personal identification with the teaching style of teacher participant Paul in the second case, in addition to documenting my urges as a classroom teacher to critique the ways both teacher participants designed their units and structured their classrooms, relative to the third sub-question. My question involved relating and responding to different perspectives, so as a middle-class, White female who has worked many years with a very diverse group of students in a high-needs
school, I also needed to remain aware of my other subjectivities, including my personal views on race and gender and the ways I have found pop culture texts to be engaging for students. The latter often situated my positionality in favor of the texts when discussing them with teacher and student participants.

From the beginning of the data collection process, I reflected on data collected from the sources at least twice a week, making notations in my researcher’s journal. This cycle of ongoing data collection and analysis continued throughout the inquiry process, reflecting the interrelationship between research analysis and data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 7). I began by identifying codes that emerged from repeated readings of the data, in the form of short words or phrases identified in the interview transcripts, documents, and my teacher research journal, which I wrote on post-it notes created in Google Jamboard, as using participants exact words in coding, especially those of children and adolescents, can deepen “an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldviews” (Saldaña, 2016). Because most of my participants were young adolescents, and I wanted to better understand their perspectives, this was an appropriate approach to data analysis. Coding in this way also deepened my understanding of the teacher participants’ perspectives.

I sorted and resorted the coded data on the Jamboard according to similar words and ideas that emerged. In case one, there were 135 total data bits related to dialogic interactions (67=student-text, 35=teacher-student, 17=student-student and 16=teacher-text). In case two, there were 124 data bits total related to dialogic interactions (52=student-text, 34=teacher-student, 26=teacher-text, and 12=student-student). As part of these iterative readings of the data from each case, interpretive questions provided a framework for my analysis (Buelow, 2017), such as (1) Is this significant (to the co-existence of contradictory perspectives, and/or the ongoing dialogical process of questioning and becoming through encounters with self, others, and the world as text)? (2) For which dialogical relationship is it significant (student-text, teacher-student, student-
student and/or teacher-text), and (3) do these moments reveal polyphonic elements and interactions within those relationships? When those relationships appeared to reflect polyphony in curriculum, I interpreted the meaning of those relationships through the lens of polyphonic dialogue.

As I reread the coded data for each case, I sorted those that struck me as significant to the co-existence of contradictory perspectives, and/or the ongoing dialogical process of questioning and becoming through encounters with self, others, and the world as text (interpretive question #1), while also adding or adjusting codes that had emerged in subsequent review of the data. My next step was to color code those assembled data bits in Jamboard according to their corresponding dialogical relationships, for case one, then case two (interpretive question #2: student-text= green; teacher-student=pink; student-student=blue; teacher-text=orange). Finally, I created another page on the Jamboard with interpretive question #3 and sorted through the data again, looking for any moments that might reveal polyphonic elements and interactions within those relationships and sorted those according to the dialogic relationships above. Throughout the process I continued to revisit the initial Jamboard pages (with case study one and two on separate Jamboards), with the data sorted and resorted according to similar language and ideas that emerged, also adding the same color coding reflecting the dialogical relationship.

As I sorted data bits, thinking about the emergence of possible categories, I noticed some overlap in terms of ideas: Both teacher participants discussed frustration with student limitations (Dani=lack of work ethic; Peter=lack of cognitive ability to grasp nuance), both teachers and students emphasized the importance of choice, and both teachers addressed HB 1775 and the idea of indoctrination/concern about pushback. From those initial ideas, I went back to case one, sorted and resorted the data bits and made a list of categories that were emerging (such as ‘How students experienced the texts’, related to data bits such as ‘excitement’ and ‘astonishment’), then
made note of possible initial themes (‘The potential for cultivating student engagement and elaboration through dialogic interactions’). In order to envision the possible relationships more clearly and get a better sense of emergent themes from the data as a whole, I printed out a PDF on of the data bits on each Jamboard, laid them out on a table and sorted them. I continued with this iterative process until I had identified three themes for case one, with two subthemes each. I then repeated the process with the data bits from case two. In the process of cross-case analysis, I identified where the themes intersected and diverged, returning to the data bits and categories to confirm my analysis, until three cross-case themes emerged, with two subthemes each.

Throughout the process, I triangulated the data, checking for consistency in my interpretation between different data sources, checking for any discrepancies or alternative explanations.

I reconstructed and juxtaposed the dialogues that emerged from the interviews and other data, such as from the interactions between participants and/or the internal dialogue of one participant, describing and analyzing them, to better understand the dialogical relationships and show contested or polyphonic moments. This juxtaposition allowed participants to surprise me as the researcher, while I spoke back to them, and illuminated connections between different voices in the data or different interpretations of the same experience; this is one place where juxtaposition was used as a mode of polyphony. It also illuminated what the story revealed about the encounter with difference within a particular context in the exchange between self and other. This negotiation, and the potential emergence of polyphony, were central to the process of data analysis in this study, as it added layers of interpretation of the data. Polyphonic dialogue also provided a site to hold the tensions that resulted from the emergence of multiple perspectives.

I also interposed autobiography as inquiry by including reflections on my own autobiographical experiences related to engaging students in dialogue around politically sensitive issues in the English classroom using pop culture texts related to sports and music. This added an embodied perspective to the analysis by incorporating my own dialogic interactions and
perspectives as a high school English teacher, while also situating it in the current cultural and political context of recent legislation, such as Oklahoma House Bill 1775, which attempts to limit the teaching of politically sensitive topics. I also went beyond individual experience by considering how these autobiographical vignettes related to the discussion topics in the teacher participants’ classrooms.

As my research questions related to dialogic interactions, I triangulated data sources to gain a more in-depth understanding of different perspectives presented in the data (by comparing and combining different viewpoints of participants and noting any changes in their responses over time), using evidence from multiple sources to support my findings/claims. For example, by having the data sorted and color coded, I was able to look at whether participants perspectives remained consistent or shifted from the first interview to the second. For example, I was able to identify points where the teacher participant’s perspective shifted over time, such as Dani’s. I also examined the consistency of different data sources at different points in time and in different settings (personal interview vs. student work, for example). This gave me deeper insight into how students came to their understandings, relative to the context and/or format they were related within. Examining multiple sources of data allowed any inconsistencies and contradictions between different sources to emerge, so I could address those and integrate them into my findings and implications. I also captured moments of polyphony through three different modes of analysis: traditional narratives, reconstruction of dialogue, and juxtaposition of found poems created from participant interviews and artifacts, enriching my understanding of the essence of participants’ interactions and experiences.

**Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the study, I abided by all guidelines of the Oklahoma State University IRB process, including obtaining formal informed consent from all teacher and student participants
and their guardians, as well as district/school administration at each site, and maintained strict standards of confidentiality. I followed the procedures outlined in the approved IRB to obtain consent and used the approved forms. Throughout the process, I assured teacher participants that their participation was voluntary, as well as their students’, and that their anonymity would be protected by using pseudonyms to refer to all participants and fictional place names. Students in each case study were informed their grades would not be negatively affected by their choice to participate or not participate in the study, and I maintained complete disclosure regarding the purpose of my research, with both teacher and student participants (Patton, 2015). Additionally, student consent forms were distributed and collected by the teacher participants, so I did not influence any students’ choice whether or not to participate.

Students who chose not to participate in any portion of the study still completed the same activities as participating students, but the assessment of their work was kept separate from the data analysis. Their work was excluded from the work samples collected and given to me by their teacher, their comments during discussions were not included in any transcripts, and their grades were not affected in any way. Additionally, students had the right to opt-out at any time, if they chose (including the right to opt out of specific parts of the study, such as an interview). All teacher and student participants who returned consent forms participated in all aspects of the study, except for one student participant in case study two who was not interviewed due to absences and did not complete the final project. I treated all students with dignity and respect as they expressed their viewpoints, as “Protection of human subjects’ procedures is…an affirmation of our commitment to treat all people with respect” (Patton, 2015, p. 341), while being mindful that they were discussing some sensitive topics, so productive tensions could arise. I also ensured that all participants felt comfortable during the interview process. For example, at Westside, when Lyn seemed uncomfortable because of the noise in the small space outside the classroom where the teacher had suggested we sit for the interview, we moved to another room where they were
comfortable, as it was quieter, and there was more privacy. I transcribed recorded materials, including interviews, and provided them to participants for member checking.

In addition, I addressed the issue of vulnerability, as research participants could respond or talk back to sources and the researcher, and student participants could disagree with the teacher participant, the researcher, or each other without fear of shame or reprisal. This was also a consideration when juxtaposing different positions, as polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) allows the participant to speak back to the researcher; teacher and student participants could be thought of as the character or hero, and the researcher as the author. This gave participants the freedom to hold different perspectives and/or surprise me as the researcher, without being forced into sameness or into agreement with either me or each other.
CHAPTER V

NAVIGATING TENSIONS AND ENGAGING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Case One

Students sit in an 11th grade AP English classroom with Chromebooks open, searching for a module on Canvas, the school district’s Learning Management System (LMS). A girl in a yellow hoodie leans her head down against her hand, which is propped over her folded arm. Stickers from regional colleges line the red bulletin board, with multicolored college flags neatly pinned to the cream-colored wall above. The neon ceiling lights are dimmed slightly, and the desks are arranged with five rows lined on each side of the room, facing each other, with a path through the middle. Student artwork and English Language Arts (ELA) posters are tacked to the walls. The old, wooden teacher’s desk sits left of center at the front, a Smartboard attached to the wall behind. “Alright, you guys ready?” The teacher, Dani, sits at her desk, and uses this as a signal to call the class to order, synonymously praising students who have been working on their assignments.

The teacher, Dani, plays a research source, a YouTube video titled, “Why the NBA perpetuates income equality”, introducing it by saying, “you should have chosen a question to research and entered it in the Google form. I want you to come up with one additional source from the side that you chose…then come up with your own thesis statement”. The video is an
example of a source they might choose. Some students turn and watch the screen, others look straight ahead and scroll through smartphones, while still others ask directions. When the video ends, all students except the girl in the yellow sweatshirt are looking through the materials on their Chromebooks. “I need you guys to be working”, Dani says, with a hint of strain in her voice. She continues to call individual students who have not submitted a thesis up to her desk to check on their progress. A girl wearing a blue hoodie and round glasses stares intently ahead, yping furiously, her fingertips dancing on the Chromebook keys. Another girl looks down, hand on her forehead while scrolling through her cell phone; she hands her Chromebook over to the girl beside her, indicating she has been working. “Are we just supposed to put the link?” the girl in a blue sweatshirt asks Dani. “Tell me what it is and put the link, yes”, she replies. “Ok”, the girl responds, her fingers methodically typing on the keyboard. Students are creating a crowdsourced research presentation in the online multimedia tool Padlet, to which they each add one additional research source related to the question they have developed, along with their tentative thesis. For example, Marisol adds her research question, “Is the income between genders fair?”, along with the source, “Male Tennis Star Thinks Equal Pay for Women is Dumb”.

Case one is a 5th period, 11th grade AP English Language and Composition class at Eastside High School, a large, traditional, 9-12 neighborhood high school in a mid-sized city in the Southwestern United States. The composition of this 25-student class mirrors the diverse ethnic and cultural demographic of the school. For this argumentative writing unit, students have the choice of researching income inequality in sports or another aspect of income inequality in daily life. Tom sits at a table at the back of the room reading two research articles about the NBA. When I assume he has chosen to answer a question related to income inequality in sports, he says, “I was just looking to see what sounded interesting, and this sounds interesting”. He scrolls down the page while scanning an article about the gender pay gap in sports. The girl next to him asks, “How do you get there?”, and Tom shows her how to get to the Padlet. Two student articles are
now popping up on the giant Padlet the teacher has projected on the Smartboard. Income inequality and daily life has three article submissions, and income inequality in sports has nearly twice as many, making it the popular choice (C1, OBS 1).

On another day, the staccato sound of the clicking of keyboard keys permeates the air as students write discussion board posts. They are all working online, with varying degrees of engagement. Since most students have chosen to write about the gender pay gap in sports, this is one of the few times students’ snippets of conversation can be overheard, as they discuss the topic. Dani’s classroom is often quiet. This is a recurring observation that emerges when talking to student participants, who all seem to agree that oral discussion is a mostly rare occurrence in the class. Tom observed, “My class is really quiet. They don’t say anything.” Marisol concurred, “We didn’t talk much...It’s more something you do on your own than discussions your teachers initiate, or your classmates” (C1, SI1- T, M), while Kelly said, “I find it hard to talk to my classmates. I don’t really know anybody” (C1, SI1, K). Dani, however, pays attention to the undercurrent of conversation happening, even when it isn’t formally structured. She recalls seeing students talk to each other informally about the texts, “I found as they were reading, or as they were researching, they would say, ‘Hey, did you know this?’ (C1, TI2). While both cases in this study were very much centered around constructing arguments on political topics, in this first case, the documents were more reflective of constructing written arguments and less about constructing oral argumentative responses. This is reflective of both the classroom environment and the nature of students’ dialogic interactions with the texts.

Themes

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1 C1=Case 1; TI1=Teacher Interview 1; TI2 =Teacher Interview 2; SI1(initial) = Student Interview 1; SI2 (initial) =Student Interview 2; MA 1,2,3, etc. (student initial) =Material Artifact; OBS 1, 2, etc. = Observation
Three themes emerged from repeated readings of the data from this case 1) The role of creative tensions in dialogic interactions with pop culture texts, 2) “Becoming” through the process of questioning pop culture texts, and 3) The potential for cultivating student engagement and elaboration through dialogic interactions. Each of the two subthemes reveal how the nature of each theme emerged across the case.

**Theme 1: The Role of Creative Tensions in Dialogic Interactions**

Throughout repeated readings of the data, various ongoing, creative tensions emerged as teacher and student participants interacted with pop culture texts, and with each other, to engage the political topics of gender pay discrimination in sports or income inequality daily life. Bakhtin (1981) writes of dialogic encounter as,

> The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group, and all this may crucially shape discourse (p. 276)

As they responded to previous utterances, different degrees of tension emerged that opened spaces for creativity and shaped student participants’ perspectives as they engaged with pop culture texts expressing opinions that differed from their own. The ways in which participants dealt with tensions was significant. Some disagreed with the texts and other students’ opinions unequivocally, while others bristled at the opinions expressed, but continued to engage them in dialogue, while still others appreciated the differences of opinion, such as Harmony, who reflected in her discussion board post at the end of the unit, “I got to read others’ opinions and got a different perspective about the way I think” (C1, MA2, H), although it was unclear whether she was open to engaging those perspectives. Others, such as Cassie, engaged with another perspective, while disagreeing with it. In a written response to an article arguing female athletes
shouldn’t be paid equally because they don’t generate the same revenue she said, “Women put in a lot of work and hours in something that they underfunded and underpaid, which isn’t right. It’s disrespectful towards us women” (C1, MA3, C). Cassie engages the perspective in a “tension-filled” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276) encounter and responds with her own opinion, opening a space for discourse.

Marisol found ideas in the texts that were difficult not to take issue with and answer, such as those voiced in professional basketball player Steph Curry’s article, “This is Personal” in The Players Tribune. As she wrote in her essay, “It is unbelievable that many men only seem to care about women’s problems when it impacts their mothers, daughters or granddaughters” (C1, MA 1, M). While she was open to Curry’s ideas, she was shocked it took so much to get some men to take a stand on the issue of the gender pay gap in sports. However, this tension with the text opened a creative dialogue in which she struggled with the text to create meaning (Bakhtin, 1990). The tension she encountered led to her response to his ideas, writing “Like Curry, many parents should care about women, not because it influences them emotionally, but because they are human and have dreams and hopes” (C1, MA1, M). While she did not agree with the emotional motivation for Curry’s position, Marisol was able to respond to his ideas without negating them and state her position.

Some of these tensions manifested while broaching the topic, while others emerged as students interacted with the texts, or in the course of interactions between teachers and students. Regardless of the mode of interaction, tensions were analyzed for evidence of narrowing the teacher’s choices of topic and approach, opening teacher and student perspectives as they interacted with pop culture texts, and facilitating the emergence of polyphony.

*Narrowing the Teacher’s Choices Around Topic and Approach*
In examining Dani’s interactions as a teacher with the pop culture texts she included in the unit, internal tensions emerged as she discussed the political context in her state, where legislation exists limiting the teaching of political topics in K-12 public schools. While Dani experienced the texts themselves as fun and interesting, her perspective regarding presenting them to students existed in tension with her fears surrounding her current teaching context. For example, during her first interview near the end of the first week of the unit, she commented on educational climate she was facing, saying,

I feel like, right now, people do not understand the term indoctrination. And I am so- I don't want to say scared, but paranoid of a parent going ‘well, she's teaching my kid to hate Republicans or… hate Democrats’, so I don't want that ever to come across as quote unquote ‘indoctrination’. So, if asked, I try to play good cop bad cop and give both sides... I try not to let people know where I stand - just on purpose (C1, TI1).

This shows the tension she felt discussing politically sensitive topics in her position as a classroom teacher, and the need she felt to obscure her opinion to address that tension. Her apprehension persisted despite the fact she sees value in discussing political issues with students (McEvoy & Hess, 2013; Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; Byford, Lennon & Russell, 2009). This was also revealed in choices she made about presenting the topic to the whole class, as well as in choosing texts. When asked in the first interview, “What did you think about or feel about asking students to write about their opinion on this topic [income inequality]?”, Dani answered,

I felt a little more comfortable giving them some autonomy to choose which subject [income inequality in sports or income inequality in society] they wanted to tackle, versus ‘everybody's gonna write about this’. I didn't feel real comfortable
doing that... So that made me feel a little bit more comfortable that we had a cushion, I guess, maybe, to reach a discussion and not boil over (C1, TI1)

She addressed this tension by giving students some topic choice, essentially inserting a “cushion” between herself and the topic. This also extended to her choice of pop culture texts for the unit, as she gave students some sources they could use, such as the video shown during the earlier observation, then let them choose additional sources. She chose “videos, photographs, journal articles, news articles”, so students had a “well-rounded sampling…to choose from” (C1, TI2)

So, again, choice acted as a “cushion” that could be used to obscure Dani’s perspective, as she used pop culture texts to broach a political topic with students. This tension also had a creative effect on students’ interactions with texts, as Tom noted, “she's making this become creative. Instead of her giving out the sources, she's making us find our own sources, giving us our own freedom to research” (C1, SI1, T). Dani’s decision to integrate more choice into the assignment, to give herself more space from the topic, meant students could use their own creativity in determining sources and the direction of their research.

Dani’s narration of her experience reminded me of an experience in my own classroom, when tensions emerged as a student engaged with a pop culture text during a writing unit on a politically sensitive topic,

While showing a video text from CNN and giving students a reading passage as part of an argumentative writing unit on police use of force, I feel the tension as they discuss common experiences and interactions with police. I notice tears slowly roll down the cheeks of a student. She hears the name of a relative who had been killed the year before by a local policeman. My stomach tightens and my shoulders clench as I realize what is happening. Uncertain of the best way to proceed, I sit down slowly in the empty desk next to her, lean in and tentatively
whisper, “What do you need? Do you want to step out for a few minutes or is there someone it would help to talk to?” She wipes away the tears slowly escaping from her eyes, says, “No, I’m alright”, then slowly composes herself and begins to write her thoughts down on paper. The tension that begins in my diaphragm and expands and rises to my shoulders begins to dissipate as I see that she is writing and processing her thoughts. It is a tension we must negotiate, as my heart tells me that ultimately, it’s part of moving forward. Some of her fellow students realize what she is experiencing, and the tension begins to dissolve as they join in conversation that makes it possible for us all to process. These are the moments I keep in my mind as I move forward, and back, and forward again.

This juxtaposition reveals the necessary creative tensions inherent in opening our classrooms to discussion of political topics. Dani struggled with opening her classroom to discussion but giving her students choices to alleviate her tension opened space for creativity in her classroom. My choice to open my classroom to discussion of a politically sensitive topic without a “cushion” and encountering an emotional situation, resulted in necessary tensions that opened a space for my students and I to dwell in to process that experience.

**Opening Teacher and Student Perspectives in Dialogic Interactions**

Dani’s hands-off approach contradicts comments she made in her second interview, near the end of the unit, revealing a possible shift to a more open perspective. When she was asked, “Have you had any changes in thinking around that [engaging in discussion of sensitive topics]?”, she replied,

I don't tend to shy away from controversial topics. Because I feel like the more you engage, the more you learn, and you're able to understand different people's points of view. One thing I noticed more than anything [in the unit texts], was, with sports,
a woman can be equally as talented as a man. But they don't get the endorsement
deals they don't get…the shoe deals, they don't get...sponsors. And that's an issue.
A lot of the male athletes, the older generation, feel like that's okay, because they
bring in the revenue. Whereas the newcomers…Steph Curry, having a daughter
has totally changed his perspective thinking, hey, this isn't right…those are the
kind of things that the kids noticed, that they had never thought of (C1, TI2).

Dani’s reflection on teaching politically sensitive topics, and the reference to her engagement
with the article “This is Personal” by Steph Curry, signals a possible shift to a more open
perspective, revealing her engagement with the texts and addressing some of the tension she felt
in broaching such topics in her classroom. It also reveals her awareness of opening a classroom
space in which students can experience multiple points of view and how the texts facilitate that
experience.

Creative tensions also emerged in dialogic interactions between Dani and Marisol. In her
first interview, when asked, “has there been a time in this so far in the unit you encountered an idea
in talking with students that was different from your own, or where they expressed something you
disagreed with?”, Dani spoke about Marisol, whom she “kept kind of going in a circle with” (C1, TI1)
about her opinion on the topic of the gender pay gap in sports, as there was tension between
Dani’s opinion and Marisol’s developing opinion. At first, Dani thought Marisol didn’t have an
opinion on the issue, saying, “What shocked me was it was a female, and so she did not have an
opinion on whether one gender was paid more than another?” (C1, TI1) But later in the day, during
class, Dani and Marisol had another conversation about the text Marisol had been reading,

Marisol: I read an article that explained the viewership doesn't really decide who
gets paid more because those sports, depending on the gender, will be paid like
around the same, and that it was, like, more….”
Dani: fan based, that there's more fans?

Marisol: I was gonna say it will be not really the fans who want to help people use sports…they see it as more male dominated and there's less resources for women sports, so there's, like, less education on them

Dani: Okay, so…I don't know how to even approach it…if you appeal to the emotions of females and female athletes and that pay gap, but then explain the logic of why… So…what I'm hearing is you're not on the fence. But you understand both sides. Okay (C1, OBS 1).

As Dani listened to Marisol explain her reasoning, it was a different opinion than she held (staunchly believing gender discrimination in sports is real and unfair), but she listened to her thinking process and later noted how Marisol, “thought about all the sides” (C1, TI2). The creative tensions that fueled their dialogue led Marisol to further refine her reasoning, while explaining it to Dani, and led Dani to understand and accept Marisol’s thinking without having to finalize it or reduce it to her own.

Marisol also brought in a point of view in a video text she disagreed with when forming her own argument. Responding in her essay to the video text, “Male Tennis Star Thinks Equal Pay for Women is Dumb” (Uygur & Kasparian, 2016), as she wrote, “Moore is one example of many people who have an institutional bias against women, yet still many people might agree with his claim. They might believe that men did pave the way for women…so therefore it’s only fair that they get paid more” (C1, MA1, M). While she disagreed with the source, she considered where the thinking originated, and incorporated it in a way that acknowledged the thinking behind it without acquiescing to it or trying to negate it, revealing a microdialogue (Bakhtin, 1992), or interior dialogue, between Marisol and the text. She engaged in interior and exterior
dialogue with the voices within the text, took in those ideas and combined them with her own, producing the multiplicity of voices that characterize microdialogue.

These interactions also reflected a creative tension between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1992) in Dani’s classroom. Tensions between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse can manifest in dialogic interactions, as participants encounter ideas which run counter to their own and test them against their own ideologies (Bakhtin, 1992). It is at this point that learning often happens (Sidorkin, 1999, as cited in Eldaker, 2015). In this case, there seemed to be tension emerging between what Dani believed, and wanted to insist students do, and what the students were believing or finding for themselves as they came to their own understandings. At the same time, in Dani’s dialogue with Marisol about her topic, she seemed to be more open to letting Marisol’s ideas develop, even though she expressed disbelief around what she perceived as Marisol’s lack of willingness to take a stand on something Dani felt so strongly about. This reflects the ways dialogic tensions in teacher-student interactions were resolved differently. In the classroom, Dani maintained that, personally, the unit and the texts were “very helpful” for teaching argument writing, and “I would definitely do it again”, but still expressed disappointment in the outcome for many students, as “the kids didn’t take it as seriously as I wish they would have” (C1, TI 2). Yet, in the tension between Dani and Marisol’s opinions, Dani was willing to let Marisol’s thinking develop without trying to change it, even when she didn’t agree, reflecting a more open perspective.

There were also instances when tensions emerged that led to a shift in student perspectives, based on information they read in the course of dialogic interaction with the text. For example, after examining an article comparing NBA and WNBA player salaries, considering the author’s evidence that there is greater internal income inequality in the NBA than the WNBA, Tom felt unsettled by the idea that several arguments he was reading were only framing the issue only in terms of “men vs. women”, so he investigated statistics related to advertising dollars spent
in both leagues. This led him back to an earlier source that claimed gender equality is not the only factor to consider when looking at player salaries and broadened the scope of his argument to reflect that rather than “just men vs. women, take into account players vs. sport” (C1, MA4, T). In this way, rather than arguing with or trying to change or reduce the sources he disagrees with, he considered the claims and then used them as a springboard for his own shift in reasoning.

In part because interactions between students in this case were more limited, due to the nature of the classroom structure, fewer instances of creative tensions emerged in those interactions, as there was less opportunity for surprise or emergence of opposing ideas. When they did occur, they were mostly expressed as students described encounters with students outside the class who disagreed with their opinions. When he mentioned broaching controversial topics with other students, Tom noted, “Whenever I say, ‘how is that true?’, their either say, ‘That’s how it should be’, or they try to insult you because you think a different opinion” (C1, I1, T). Marisol recounted of speaking to other students in the school cafeteria about her research on the gender pay gap, “I just tried giving them the evidence I researched, so I can change their mind, maybe; I mean, it’s their opinion, so…” (C1, I1, M). Both interactions reflected tensions in a more closed perspective when encountering an opposing opinion. Tom described a hostile response, and Marisol described trying to “change” peers, although her comment, “it’s their opinion, so…” indicating an understanding that even if they disagree and aren’t convinced by her evidence, her peers are entitled to their opinion on the topic.

Moments of Polyphony

Within some interactions that could be understood to be dialogic - reflecting an openness to other opinions and/or an element of surprise - moments of polyphony emerged. For instance, when asked her thoughts about using pop culture texts to teach this topic, Dani remarked on both her own interest and student apathy, saying,
The lack of response has been the most frustrating. Because generally, when it's a topic that I can kind of sink my teeth into, I get pretty excited about it. And with…the topic we're doing, we talked about the glass ceiling and how it's always raised. You think you've reached the top and then it's been raised for you. And they don't seem to grasp that concept. I don't know if it's the immaturity of a high school student not yet understanding that, you know, yeah, $75,000 sounds like a lot of money, but when your male counterpart is making twice that it's not. And maybe that will come later when they face real life. I don't know (C1, TI1).

Her perspective reflects a frustration with what she saw as a lack of engagement for several students in the class, and a tension between what she was getting out of the unit and what she perceived students were (or were not). She was engaged in the topic but felt many students were not. However, when observing the class, listening to students’ comments, and interviewing student participants, I noted in my researchers’ journal,

Dani is expressing the same disappointment around student apathy, absent students, and spotty work submission. However, when I observe the class, I notice students talking about the articles. Last time, I recorded a student getting excited about the text…seeming almost surprised that he was learning something new. I realize I had hoped Dani would see that, or appreciate that, or see some residual benefit to using the texts. Instead, she indicates she essentially sees no difference, “See, this is what I’m dealing with”, she says as she opens up her gradebook and points to the blank squares. But in conducting the first student interviews, and observing students working in class, I sense that at least those students are getting something more. So, I need to be aware not only of my subjective expectations, but also see how they influence my analysis of what I observe (C1, OBS 2).
During a later observation, I noted how Dani’s classroom is “almost always quiet”, and she “becomes irritated when students have off-topic conversations”. There seemed to be a disconnect between what Dani expected to happen and what students were experiencing. However, even though I clearly disagreed with Dani’s assessment of her students, based on my own observations, as reflected in my journal response, I allowed her to hold and voice her own perspective, without attempting to change it or subsume it within mine. Bakhtin (1984) writes,

> The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony. If one is to talk about individual will, then it is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded (p. 21).

Similarly, in the teacher-student interaction between Dani and Marisol, they each held their own perspective on the gender pay gap; however, neither tried to ultimately negate the other’s point of view, even in the midst of creative tensions. In both instances, within these moments of emergence of polyphonic dialogue, the participants were able to engage in dialogue, with an openness to the other opinion, without merging voices.

One of the most significant moments emerged at the conclusion of Tom’s first interview, during which he spoke about his initial reasoning about the gender pay gap in sports. Here I reconstruct the end of our interviews juxtaposed in dialogue format:

> JF: Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you’d like to add?

Tom: So far, what is your point of view on the gender pay gap in sports?

> JF: Empowerment in sports is also about having kind of a stake in the whole thing and not just money. So, considering the role of power is important as well.
Tom: So do you think that the reason why men get paid higher than women is because women have more lucrative deals [as far as benefits] than men? For example, women get maternity leave.

JF: No, I think men make more because, historically, that's the way it's been. I think it's also a viewership thing, right? Because women's viewership is lower, and that's a big argument against it - against equal play equal pay - that the women’s sports don't necessarily generate the same revenue.

Tom: How would you change the revenue that the woman can make? Do you think we could, like, do more promotions? We could do like a co-league of men and women.

JF: Well, I think more support from the men's league, in terms of maybe co-endorsements. I think that was something Sheryl Swopes was saying in this video we watched the other day more people would probably go to…WNBA games, if they knew more about them and knew more about the players. I think when the ad dollars and the ticket sales come, the money follows that.

My perspective clearly differed from Tom’s, but he didn’t try to negate what I was saying; we just continued to ask each other questions and engage in dialogue, even though we clearly had different views on the topic. Later, in looking at the interview data, I wrote the following entry in my researcher’s journal about that dialogic exchange,

As I went through the interviews again, line by line, it struck me that the last 12 minutes of my first interview with Tom, which I had initially barely selected data bits from, was actually a dialogue within itself about the topic and texts, in which forced agreement did not materialize, and no final resolution was reached (or necessary). A little moment of emergence of polyphony existing in tension with
our individual opinions. That epiphany unfolded in a moment of joy to me as a researcher; the moment had happened without me even realizing it, emerging out of a haze of uncertainty about the relevance or usefulness of the data.

In this moment of polyphony, the participant or “hero” spoke back to the researcher or “author”, as, “the planes of the characters’ speech and that of the authorial speech can intersect, that is, dialogic relations are possible between them” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 118). As a researcher, I was surprised by Tom’s perspective and he was surprised by mine, but we each allowed the other to have a different perspective without trying to resolve the question or find one answer, as we engaged in dialogue around this topic and the pop culture texts we each used to support our thinking.

**Theme 2: “Becoming” Through the Process of Questioning Pop Culture Texts**

Another theme that emerged from the data was the process of student and teacher participants’ “becoming” through questioning pop culture texts. As they engaged in dialogue around gender pay discrimination in sports, or income inequality, some students followed a very straightforward path in investigating their research questions – stating a perspective, finding evidence to support it and incorporating an opposing opinion as part of a concession; but, as the participant interviews and documents revealed, some students’ pop culture sources guided their thinking in a different direction, which led to further questioning. In Bakhtin’s (1990) thinking, there is a “well-known internal unconsummatedness of many of my thoughts, because my ideas have always been in a state of becoming” (p. xix). “Becoming” in this sense corresponds to Bakhtin’s sense of “individual becoming with the capacity to surprise”, an ongoing state of being in which past, present and future are connected as one “co-emerges...with the world...as the world changes as well” (Wang, 2009, p. 2). Popular culture itself is always in a state of becoming. A state of constant change over time, pop culture is constantly creating new spaces. What counts as popular and the meanings of popular culture both change and transform over time. This state of becoming
was reflected in teacher and student participants’ microdialogue (interior dialogue) (Bakhtin, 1986) with the texts, as the process of questioning led them to ongoing dialogic interaction. Such questioning emerged predominately in interactions between students, or as student participants engaged in dialogue with the texts, but also happened as the teacher interacted with the texts and with students. Regardless of the type of interaction, the process of questioning was examined for evidence of the ways it extended students’ thinking, and the insightful connections teacher participant made between the texts and her life as a teacher.

**Extending Students’ Thinking Through Questioning.**

Dani spoke of informal conversations with students, in which she asked them questions about ideas in the text that contributed to their own thinking, such as when she explained her reactions to ideas formed when reading the texts, such as “This is Personal” by Steph Curry, and the questioning that came out of it, such as, “Steph Curry, having a daughter has totally changed his perspective thinking, ‘hey, this isn't right’. It was cool to be able to have those conversations, you know, ‘Hey, you noticed this. What do you think about it?’ When they arrive at that on their own” (C1, TI2). This shows a connection between Dani’s questioning of student participants’, extending their thinking as she probed them to think more deeply in their discussions of the topic with her. Then, later, she was able to see them questioning themselves and each other in the same way, leading to ongoing dialogue.

In examining the essays and interviews of student participants who researched income inequality in sports, questioning also emerged as a path to insightful thinking about their topics. For example, in her essay, “Is the Income Between Genders Fair?”, Marisol asked, “People may claim, mainly male fans, that men in sports are just better in sports and are overall more entertaining at their job. Why is this mentality so common?” (C1, MA1, M) These questions followed her claim that readers’ comments on the video she mentioned in her interview
demonstrate how “people value men’s sports more and the work that women do is valued less” (C1, MA1). In these dialogic interactions with the texts, Marisol took in this claim and turned it into a question (“Why is this mentality so common?”). Without negating the claims, she simply used them to further drive her questioning. Rather than refuting them, the claims led to further investigation. In a similar way she asked, “Of course, sponsors are profit motivated in choosing athletes, but why is it that they just assume that men will be better?” (C1, MA1), Again, a claim in the texts led to another line of questioning, leading Marisol to read about statistics on women outperforming men in basketball in points yet receiving lower salaries.

Another example is when Tom explained how questioning led him to transition to a new perspective on his topic, based on his interaction with different statistics on player salaries in different sports in the texts, “I took it as more, how popular is one sport to another? And how does it change on the men's perspective and the females’ perspective?” (C1, I2, T) This led to the claim in his essay that the lack of attention brought to different sports and lack of viewers, promotions and benefits are the most critical factors (C1, MA4, T). In this way, he didn’t negate the claims in the sources; he engaged with them to shift his thinking. His thinking and argument developed as he was reading. Bakhtin (1984) writes,

> Without one’s own questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign (but, of course, the questions must be serious and sincere). Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched” (p. 7).

Through raising their own questions, Marisol and Tom both came to their own understandings their own ideas were in a state of becoming through an encounter with opposite meanings.

While there was more limited oral discussion between students, there were several instances Dani noted in her interviews when she observed student-student interactions, as when
Marisol and her partner were engaging in dialogue about the gender pay gap in sports to help Marisol develop a claim on the topic. In some cases, she observed, “I found as they were reading or as they were researching, they would say, ‘Hey, did you know this? Hey, did you know this?’” (C1,TI2), and how questioning around their discoveries about the topic deepened student interactions. For example, she noted of Marisol and her partner,

The more they talked, the more they interacted, the more I could see her decisions were developing the question [Marisol] was asking because [her partner], obviously took the stance that, you know, women were not paid equally. Marisol, it took her a minute to get there…those two were really good about bouncing ideas off of each other. And if Marisol would say something, [she] would go ‘okay, but did you think about this?’ and vice versa. So that was really cool to watch.” (C1, TI2).

Bakhtin (1986) writes, “If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue and enters systemic cognition, which is essentially impersonal” (p. 168). In these instances, such questioning led participants to clarify and extend their perspectives, creating an openness and becoming within dialogic interactions.

**Making Insightful Connections Between Life and Texts**

When I asked Dani questions about her interactions with the text, such as why she chose certain texts, or when she described her thinking around them, she often explained it in instrumental terms of wanting to have a variety of types of sources for students to incorporate into their arguments. However, at one point she discussed an ongoing line of questioning in response to a text, which revealed her perspective on the ideas and the connecting the text to her life,

So, the one that we went over in class as an example, talked specifically about, it was more in chronological order, like with Wilt Chamberlain, and how much he
made as a basketball player. And then we got to Steph Curry, and we got to Michael Jordan, and how much they were making. And then what pay was for middle class, and it was like, an astronomical amount of money. And the number that sticking out is like 80% higher than what the average person makes on a job, for them to play sports. And that does not include their lucrative deals outside, you know, with Nike or Adidas or whatever they're promoting. That goes back on top of their quote, unquote, salary. Yeah. And that really stood out as astonishing. That's the only word I can think of is, is...Yes, I know athletes get paid a lot to play. But without teachers, how did they get there? How did you become a doctor without a teacher? How did you become a lawyer without a teacher? How did you go to college without a teacher? And yet here you are making 80 times my (laughs)...

(C1, TI1).

Through the series of questions she asked, such as, “but without teacher, how did they get there?”, Dani is using ongoing questioning to make connections between the text and her own life as a teacher. In this way, engaging in dialogue with the text extended her perspective on, and her understanding of, gender and pay in professional sports.

**Moments of Polyphony**

Polyphonic elements emerged during several of these modes of interaction related to the theme of “becoming” through the process of questioning pop culture texts. While not polyphonic, in the teacher-text interactions, Dani questioned the text to deepen her thinking. However, in teacher-student interactions, Dani probed students to think about the topic more deeply, without insisting that they agree with her and without directing their thinking. This element of allowing students to voice their opinions, spurring their ongoing thinking without reducing them to
sameness with hers, gave them an element of polyphony. Dani described priming students to develop their own questions, such that they are each “mutually enriched” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 7).

Both Marisol and Tom used questioning of an opinion they disagreed with to develop their perspectives. Their responses to a different opinion led to questioning that spurred their ongoing becoming through the dialogic process. For example, in Marisol’s video source, Raymond Moore said in an interview,

> In the WTA, because they ride on the coattails of men, they don’t make any decisions and they are lucky. They are very lucky. If I was a lady player, I would go down on my knees and thank God that Roger Federer and Rafael were born. The WTA has a handful of very attractive prospects that can assume the mantle. They have a lot of very attractive players (Uygur & Kasparian, 2016).

Marisol responded in her essay,

> Moore is one example of many people who have an institutional bias against women, yet still, many people might agree with his claim. They might believe that men did pave the way for women and overall are better at tennis, so, therefore, it’s only fair that they get paid more…In sports, viewships, sponsors, advertising, and overall skill play a part in how famous a sport or a particular player is. The more viewers that love a player, the more likely they’ll be sponsored and therefore earn more revenue. What if the sponsors themselves were biased and prefer sponsoring men over women?…Of course sponsors are profit motivated in choosing athletes, but why is it that they. Just assume that men will be better? (C1, MA1, M)

As the questioning moved her thinking forward, Marisol went on to quote statistics that supported her position without necessitating merging the positions of Moore and others she disagreed with.
into her own perspective. In this way, she disagreed and used the ideas in the source to prompt ongoing questioning that spurred her thinking forward. The issue was not finally resolved, but led to further thinking, reflecting, “The peculiarities of polyphony. The lack of finalization of the polyphonic dialogue (dialogue about ultimate questions).” Bakhtin also notes how great writers participate, “with his creativity as one of the sides in this dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 151). Marisol’s questions exhibited an element of creativity that led to further thinking and dialogue as she interacted with the texts.

Similarly, Marisol deepened her thinking as she and her partner engaged in a process like Bakhtin (1987) describes,

Active agreement/disagreement (if it is not dogmatically predetermined) stimulates and deepens understanding, makes the other’s word more resilient, and true to itself, and precludes mutual dissolution and confusion. The clear demarcation of two consciousnesses, their counterposition and their interrelations...Recognizing and encountering the new and unfamiliar. Both of these aspects (recognition of the repeated and discovery of the new) should merge inseparably in the living act of understanding...The exclusive orientation toward recognizing, searching only for the familiar (that which has already been) does not allow the new to reveal itself (p. 142).

As her partner probed Marisol to consider other possibilities, and vice versa (‘okay, but did you think about this?’), they engaged in dialogic interactions that allowed both of them to develop their thinking and understanding without having to always be the same.

**Theme 3: The Potential for Engaging with Political Topics Through Interacting with Texts**
A final theme that emerged from this case was the ways the potential for engagement, insight and elaboration emerged through participants’ interactions with pop culture texts related to issues of gender pay discrimination in sports or income inequality. This theme mainly surfaced as students interacted with pop culture texts, but it was also present as the teacher participant engaged with the texts, and in a few instances when students interacted with the teacher, and/or each other. Participant interactions were analyzed for evidence of the potential for cultivating engagement, insight into, and/or elaboration on the topic, as well as for the emergence of polyphonic elements.

**Cultivating Interest in Discussion and Writing on Political Topics**

Students’ interactions related to this theme often centered around their interest in the topic of the texts and other forms of pop culture. When asked about her topic, Kelly said, “Is it interesting? I think it is” (C1, SI1, K). Tom also said, “that’s really interesting” to express how he found the ideas in the article he was reading (C1, OBS 1). Marisol also said, “But I enjoyed researching about it. The topic interested me so... “ (C1, SI1, M). This interest mirrors their reflection on other forms of pop culture, as Kelly said, “I find a lot of joy in it... it takes me away from the real world...it’s just comforting” (C1, I1m K). Marisol said of music, “it makes me sad, but it's like a comfort” (CS1,I1, M). And Tom also reflected on music, “it is some kind of sensory thing, because I think of it as music in terms of art…if it gets me, I'm gonna listen to it for a couple of days” (C1, I1, T). These comments show how engaging pop culture is for student participants, particularly music, an interest that extended to their interest in the pop culture texts in the unit.

Near the end of the unit, Dani commented on the need to “engage” controversial topics to learn from other points of view, indicating a shift from earlier, when she spoke more often of putting a “cushion” between herself, the topic and texts, any potential criticism. When asked
about what she learned, if anything, about using print and non-print pop culture texts to engage students in argument writing, she also noted of the class, and particularly students who took the work “seriously”,

for this group, the fact that they were allowed to research on their own and find what they wanted to read, seemed to make a big difference. A topic that they were semi-interested in at first, the majority of them became more interested, the more material they found. So that has created a thought process in me, how can I adapt that into my lessons? If we need to cover a certain genre or a certain topic? How can I get them to arrive at that research on their own? (C1, TI2)

She described how, through having some choice over which pop culture texts they read, students became more engaged, leading her to question how she could incorporate elements of the unit in future lessons. This question, which was left without a final answer, came from thinking spurred by the tensions she encountered in her classroom with students who were not completing the work. Her experience using the texts, and giving students more choice, had generated questions related to her ongoing becoming as a teacher and questioning how she could adapt her instruction.

This interest and engagement were mirrored in students’ interactions with pop culture texts, such as when I observed Tom, “getting excited about the text…seeming almost surprised that he was learning something new” (C1, OBS1). These were interactions Dani described as “eye opening” for students (C1, TI1), giving them ideas to write about. As Kelly reflected, “I've got my claims like this so far.... I read through them. And it's like, they've kind of inspired what I'm going to write about” (C1, I1, K). This inspiration mirrored insights that emerged from students’ encounters with the texts, such as when Tom recounted the insight gleaned from reading a text that led to a shift in his thinking, “And I realized that the viewership accounts for how much money that each player made. And it goes for the same as promotions” (C1, I2, T).
Similarly, in her essay, Marisol’s writing reflected insight gained from reading Steph Curry’s article about the gender pay gap in sports in the Players Tribune, “Like Curry, many parents should care about women, not because it influences them emotionally, but because they are human and have dreams and hopes” (C1, MA1). She also noted how the texts encouraged elaboration on her ideas, as “the sources, like, they gave me a lot of opinions that I wanted to elaborate into my essay” (C1, I2, M). Matusov, et. al. (2019), argue that ongoing dialogue begins with the participants’ and teacher’s true interest in each other and the topic. This genuine engagement with the texts, insights gained in the course of interaction with them and each other, and the role of the texts in the elaboration of ideas in writing, illuminate the potential for cultivating engagement, insight, and elaboration on a political topic through dialogic interactions with pop culture texts.

**Gaining Insights from Texts on Politically Sensitive Topics**

Dani’s encounters with the texts revealed an engagement with and insight into the topic that extended to potential curricular choices. Her engagement with the pop culture texts perhaps stemmed from her engagement with pop culture overall. In speaking of her personal interests in pop culture she said, “True crime is what I'm interested in, really. I can't get enough of Dateline, and podcasts, and interviews, and Netflix series…that's my thing” (C1, TI1). When asked about her feelings about using pop culture texts to teach argument writing early in the unit, she expressed her initial frustration, citing students’ ‘lack of response’ in turning in work. She alluded to the fact that she found the topic engaging, noting, “when it's a topic that I can kind of sink my teeth into, I get pretty excited about it” (C1, TI1), and saying of Pritchett and Tiryakian’s (2020) article, “Income Inequality Explained: A Sports Tutorial from the NBA” (Pritchett & Tiryakian, 2020) from Forbes, “the number that sticking out is like 80% higher than what the average person makes on a job for them to play sports. And that really stood out as astonishing” (C1, TI1). Her
use of “astonishing” indicates a surprising new insight she gained related to information in the reading she took issue with.

There were also instances when students gained similar insights as they interacted with the pop culture texts. As Dani and student participants discussed that same article about professional players’ salaries, for example, students learned new information about the topic. Dani observed, “a few students that were...not involved in sports were kind of shocked, I think, because they had never thought about it in that in that way” (C1, TI1). This indicates a surprising new insight about the large salaries of professional sports figures they gained from interacting with the article. While still acknowledging she was disappointed in the lack of engagement for some students, she also spoke of seeing the “light bulb go on” for others when reading, saying, “That was pretty cool” (C1, TI1). This indicates they came to new understandings as a result of interaction with the texts.

Students also acknowledged Dani’s decision to give them choices in the texts they read. Tom said, “she's making this...creative. Instead of her giving out the sources, she's making us find our own sources, giving us our own freedom” (C1, I1, T). In using the words “creative” and “freedom”, he conveys how Dani’s choices gave the class the opportunity to interact with at least some pop culture texts of their choice. This informed her observation, “A topic that they were semi-interested in at first, the majority of them became more interested, the more material they found” (C1, TI2). This decision to incorporate choice contributed to students’ engagement with the topic and texts.

Student-student interactions around this theme were limited, as with the previous themes, mostly involving students’ insights into getting, as Harmony noted, “a different perspective about the way I think” (C1, MA2, H) from listening to and reading other students’ ideas. Students exchanged ideas through discussion and peer reviews of their essays. In the course of researching
and questioning each other about their topics, students would ask, “Hey, did you know this? Hey, did you know this?” (C1, TI2). This student-student questioning led students, such as Marisol, to new insights, as when she engaged in dialogue with her partner to develop her claim around the gender pay gap in sports.

**Moments of Polyphony**

Distinct polyphonic moments did not emerge as often around this theme, as many of the interactions did not involve a sense of questioning or ongoing dialogue, but, rather, insights revealed in the moment. As the researcher/author, I continued to allow the participants (character/hero) to hold their individual perspectives throughout this process, without trying to reduce them to sameness. There were moments from which elements of polyphony did emerge, such as when Dani was astonished by the facts presented to support claims in the article “Income Inequality Explained: A Sports Tutorial from the NBA”, which presented the following claim,

Fast forward to 2020, and the highest paid player in the NBA is Steph Curry, making $40 million. The game has changed; 3-point shooting is now perhaps the most valued competency. In 2020, the average player in the NBA makes $7.7 million, roughly the same multiple of income inequality at 5x. Stated another way, both NBA figures, the top, and average contracts, represent a 10.5 percent CAGR (Compounded Annual Growth Rate), demonstrating how much American and global consumers value the NBA. In 2020, the US median household income is $63,688 and the average pay of the NBA security guard is $13.91 per hour, $32,429 per year. While the income inequality measure between the guard and the family remained constant at 2x over 45 years, as did the inequality between the top salary and the average salary in the NBA, the income inequality between Curry
and the average family increased to 628x.

What these salaries reveal is the liberating nature of free enterprise. Free enterprise gives opportunity to the creative and encourages productive actions. There is no other way to explain the substantial decline in extreme poverty in the world over the past 40 years…Instead of focusing on the income gap, we should keep raising the floor….Rather than focusing on attempting to narrow the gap between rich and poor, we should focus on expanding economic growth. That’s what the professional sports leagues have done over the past four decades, and there are many more millionaires as a result (Pritchett & Tiryakian, 2020).

In her interview, Dani’s response to the article revealed her astonishment at salaries professional athletes are paid compared to those of the “average person”,

And then we got to Steph Curry, and we got to Michael Jordan, and how much they were making. And then what pay was for middle class, and it was like, an astronomical amount of money. And the number that sticking out is like 80% higher than what the average person makes on a job for them to play sports. And that does not include their lucrative deals outside, you know, with Nike or Adidas or whatever. They're promoting it. That goes back on top of their quote, unquote, salary…And that really stood out as astonishing. That's the only word I can think of…Yes, I know athletes get paid a lot to play. But without teachers, how did they get there? How did how did you become a doctor without a teacher? How did you become a lawyer without a teacher? How did you go to college without a teacher? And yet here you are making 80 times my (laughs)...? (C1, TI1)
The juxtaposition of these two passages illuminates how Dani added her voice to this conversation on income inequality in sports while allowing the voices of the author to co-exist independently, thus embodying the independent, multi-voiced quality of polyphony (Matusov, et al., 2019). In acknowledging, “Yes, I know athletes get paid a lot to play. But without teachers, how did they get there? How did how did you become a doctor without a teacher? How did you become a lawyer without a teacher? How did you go to college without a teacher? And yet here you are making 80 times my (laughs)...?”, she questions the source’s position through illuminating the relationship to her own profession, the connection between players and teachers, and the implications for the value placed on her own career. The authors answer likely lies in their claim that NBA salaries are “expanding economic growth” and promoting free enterprise, leading to a decline in world poverty, but Dani’s questioning added an ongoing dimension in which more questions enter into and extend the conversation without closing it at one perspective or the other.

**Case Two**

Twinkling white mini-Christmas lights draped along the walls welcome students as they enter the room. Blue, green, and pink paper letters posted on another wall spell out READ THINK WRITE, reminding students what they are expected to do in an English classroom, accentuated by the chatter that fills the room. The teacher participant, Paul, never sits down. He is constantly pacing and checking bell work as students get settled in their desks, which have been arranged side by side in the shape of a square, so all students can see each other. They are discussing the current class text, the young adult novel *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. This is one of several discussions about the novel and other incorporated pop culture texts that students will engage in, with each having a slightly different, flexible structure.
On this day, there is initial discussion of a concern that has arisen around participation, as Paul says, “I’ve noticed that in our speaking in our conversations, sometimes these conversations have become a little bit stale or circular, right?”...People say ‘I think it's bad too’ And then we don't really get much deeper than that.”. He proposes a participation grade vs. five points per response and asks the students to raise their hands to indicate which option they would like. The majority vote for a participation grade, and the discussion begins. This vote is representative of the classroom culture, where students and teacher work together to decide what is best for the whole class. They openly discuss issues of police brutality and race that permeate the novel, and initially, Paul appears comfortable posing the questions, often framing them by saying “I’d like to hear what you think”. Holding a green stuffed cat in his hand, which he tosses to students as they raise their hands to answer a question, he seems tuned into how his students are responding. When they talk over each other, he softly reminds them to “respect the cat”. Lyn is always making notes. They bow their head, face covered in a mask, bent over their notebook, quiet and intense, pencil moving quickly across the page. Their hand goes up for every question, even as other students are talking and answering. At one point the energy in the room reaches a manic level. The constant buzz in the background grows louder. Sensing the frantic level of distraction, Paul pauses and asks, “We’re at the part of the class where we try to have one speaker, one voice. Can we take a collective pause and take a deep breath in for a second and exhale for a second?” The chatter slowly quiets, and some students take exaggerated breaths, while others bow their heads, as the strands of tiny lights float around the room in the silence.

The last week of the unit, students work on their pop culture projects. Paul uses a Tupac Shakur song to introduce and model the assignment. Sunny chews snacks out of a plastic bag, as other students studiously write to answer the question, “What do you think a theme of The Hate U Give is”? Dan introduces the idea of “Art as Activism”, comparing The Hate U Give and another novel he teaches, The Outsiders, as works where teenagers see a problem and use their voices and
art to fix it, saying, “Using art to try to combat problems in our world is a common thing”. He introduces and plays the video to the song “Trapped “by 2PAC” (1991), setting it up by telling 2PAC’s history with police brutality and the story of the 1991 beating of Rodney King, then asks, “See if you can notice this history in the lyrics”. Sunny combs through his hair with his fingers, head cocked to listen, while Lyn’s head stays down as they write. Dan draws a connection that the character of Khaled was listening to 2PAC when he was pulled over and shot by police in the book, and the title *The Hate U Give* comes from a 2PAC lyric. “What is a line from the song or image that conveys the message”? Paul asks, adding, “It’s setting up the normal world 2PAC lives in”. The project directions are projected on a PowerPoint slide at the front of the room: “Create a piece of art that talks about a problem you see in your world, bringing in songs, poems, visual art, etc. Check the links in the Google Doc and listen to, watch, etc. the art, and answer the questions in the doc for three pieces of art of your choice”. Paul moves around the room, kneeling to be on the same level as his students — arms folded, listening intently while answering questions. Lyn kneads a large, purple ball of Model Magic as they work - part nerf ball, part playdoh, part silly putty - pushing it down between typing, flattening it out like a pancake. Sunny plays air guitar in between typing, and Darius sits upright at his desk, wearing his omnipresent grey knit cap, searching sites linked in the Google Doc.

Case two investigated Paul, Lyn, Sunny, and Darius’s interactions with pop culture texts in this 8th grade English Language Arts class at Westside Charter School, an independent public charter school located in the same city as Eastside. Students apply to Westside and are chosen through a random lottery. The demographic composition of this class mirrors the composition of school and surrounding city, which is approximately 46.7% White, 12.3 % Hispanic/Latino, 12.3% Multiracial, 11.9% Black and 5.3% American Indian or Alaska Native. For this curriculum unit, students read the young adult novel, *The Hate U Give*, and discussed issues related to police brutality. Within the unit, students engaged in whole class discussions to share their perspectives.
They also completed a written assignment in which they examine and reflect on three different pop culture texts, introduced using the music video for “Trapped” by Tupac Shakur. For a final assessment, students could choose to write an argument essay over *The Hate U Give* or complete a project about a global issue of importance to them. All three student participants, Lyn, Sunny, and Darius completed the project instead of the essay.

**Themes**

Through repeated readings of the data from this case, three themes emerged: 1) The Role of Productive Tensions in Participant Interactions with Pop Culture Texts, 2) Moments of Connection that Promote Dialogue and Raise Awareness of Political Issues, and 3) Moments that Reveal the Necessity of Moving Students Beyond Binary Thinking. Each of the two subthemes reveal how the nature of each theme emerged across the case.

**Theme 1: The Role of Productive Tensions in Participants’ Interactions with Pop Culture Texts**

Productive tensions emerged as both teacher and student participants interacted with pop culture texts, and with each other, to engage both the politically sensitive topic of police brutality, as well as the topics students chose for their individual projects. Some of these tensions, which opened a space for productive interactions and outcomes, manifested when the teacher and students engaged in dialogue with each other, as well as when the teacher interacted with the topic and texts. Regardless of the mode of interaction, the resulting tensions were analyzed for evidence of how they shaped the teacher’s choice of topic and approach, and how they raised an

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2 C2=Case 2; TI1=Teacher Interview 1; TI2 = Teacher Interview 2; SI1(initial) = Student Interview 1; SI2 (initial) = Student Interview 2; MA 1,2,3, etc. (student initial) =Material Artifact; OBS 1, 2, etc. = Observation
awareness of diverse perspectives for both teacher and student participants, as well as for any polyphonic elements that emerged.

**Productive Tensions Shape the Teacher’s Choices Around Topic and Approach**

In investigating Paul’s interactions with his students and the pop culture texts he included in the unit, what emerged were productive tensions that shaped his choices when broaching the topic with students, as well as the ways he approached discussions. These emanated from his feelings around the political context in his state due to recent legislation enacted to limit the teaching of political topics in K-12 public schools, as he finds, “there's like, a little bit of tension in that as a public-school teacher” (C2, TI1). For example, he encountered tension around choosing the unit text, the young adult novel *The Hate U Give*, which addresses the issue of police brutality. The main character Starr and her friend Khalil, both of whom identify as Black, are pulled over while Khalil is driving, and he is shot and killed by the police officer. Starr is left to navigate the aftermath between the two worlds of home and school. The novel has a plethora of references to popular culture, and the title comes from a song by rap artist Tupac Shakur. Paul had taught *The Hate U Give* twice before, but questioned teaching it again, as “I've been thinking a lot about [pause] with our current political environment... is *The Hate U Give* the best text for this? Because it is an oft banned text” (C2, TI1). He continued,

Starr Carter is the main character, and her uncle is a police officer, and he's a Black cop. And he brings a whole other perspective from the cop side of things, and his answer isn't, ‘oh, my colleagues are all terrible people’. His answer is they're good people. They're good people doing hard work. And ‘I'm a good person, and I'm trying to do hard work. It's just hard’. And I really liked that because I think a lot of kids who've heard about *The Hate U Give*, or who know that this is a Tupac quote…they expect it to be all…fuck the police and all this kind of stuff. And I
really want to draw out the more nuanced version of this conversation...And I think that's what Thomas does really, really, well in the book. So that's why I want to keep reading it...I want to look at maybe some more or some less balanced texts in combination with this. Oh, let's look at this song by this artist who is really thin blue line. And how does that match up with Uncle Carlito’s statements...Which one has a better approach to this conversation?...I'm wrestling a little bit with how much of that I can really do… How much of it can I really bring…and not be seen as supporting either of those ideas? Honestly, I'm pretty moderate myself…I want to view The Hate U Give as a text that holds those things in tension with one another really, really well (C1, TI1).

In explaining them, he contemplated the tensions he felt within the content, the possibility of incorporating other pop culture texts with politically sensitive content and trying to present texts with politically sensitive content without coming across as pro or anti-police, maintaining either a nuanced or neutral stance. These were not damaging tensions but, rather, productive tensions that opened a space for Paul to process both the possibilities and his reasoning for continuing to teach the novel and incorporate new pop culture texts that relate to the themes.

He later reflected how these tensions were ongoing within teacher-student interactions and decisions about his approach as, “I was nervous about opening the door to, like, class discussion and just kind of like ask your own questions” (C2, TI2). While they had discussed current issues informally in the classroom, “this is probably the moment when we really spend class time, intentionally and academically looking at a political topic” (C2, TI1). One student, Lyn, noted of class discussions on a current events topic, “This is, like, the first time I've been doing it out loud the way I am doing it” (C2, I1, L). Paul was able to dwell in the tensions that emerged in this foray into this new territory, as he allowed students to have shared authority in the classroom (Matusov, et. al., 2019), as they helped create the questions that drove class
discussion. He spoke of encountering students with strong political opinions and how, “navigating that as a teacher is interesting…especially when I'm really trying to teach you about nuance” (C2, TI1). This resolve to dwell in productive tensions reflected Paul’s own becoming as an educator, as he opened himself to ongoing dialogue with the text, students, and himself, allowing students to voice their independent ideas without having to come to one conclusion (Bakhtin, 1984). This was reflective of how it was not the tensions themselves that were significant, as much as how participants chose to deal with them.

On a day when students from each of Paul’s classes created the discussion questions for class, one question referred to a part of the book where Starr, who is navigating two cultural worlds between home and school, has a falling out with a good friend because she is offended by a comment the friend makes. Paul asked one student’s questions to begin the discussion, “How do you think Hailey’s racist comments could have affected Starr in the long term? What consequences will Hailey face as a result of her comments?” Lyn answered, “She will hopefully stop being friends with her, because it [the comment] causes psychological harm”. Paul played off their comment by asking, “Should you have to apologize if someone is offended by a comment you made?” Sunny said, “If you don’t know them then you should”, before beginning a tiny air drumming concert, tapping his pencils (one in each hand) in rhythm to the beat in his head, his hair bouncing in rhythm with his hands. Wearing a blue face mask and a grey knit cap, even in the warmer weather, long blonde/brown hair underneath hanging over their shoulders, Lyn raised their hand for the cat, then accepted it and offered, “Yes, you should apologize”, clarifying, “If someone overhears- just because they heard it – then you shouldn’t apologize”. This was a very popular question, as hands shot up in hopes of being tossed the cat. A palpable hum hung in the air – accented by the tiny white bulbs, as students took in each other’s perspectives, without one voice trying to change another (C2, OBS 1). These interactions reflect how argument was envisioned from a differently in this case: centered around constructing oral
argumentative responses, rather than constructing written arguments, as it was built around what Paul already had planned, with the addition of the pop culture texts.

**Raising Awareness of Diverse Perspectives**

When productive tensions arose between students, or between teacher and students, students and the text, and/or teachers and the text, there was often an awareness of perspectives from varied points of view, depending on the mode of interaction. I asked Paul, “How do you respond as a teacher to students encountering a text or an idea that presents a different perspective than yours?” I observed that he seemed very confident about addressing differences of option, both with students and between students, and I commented that, “personally, I'm probably less so”. (C2, TI2). Paul remarked,

As far as like disagreeing with me, like if a kid was in here, they're like, ‘no really blue lives matter. We need to support the police. We really need to like pour money into this’. I think I'm okay with them arguing that if they're bringing rational and reasonable arguments…if they're saying that in the name of small government, I'm going to point out the flaw in that argument, right? Because…I'm okay with somebody supporting the police and…when someone's supporting like… 'racism is over' kind of arguments…if they're doing it a logical…way. But these arguments that don't make any sense, when we're saying ‘no, we want small government, and we want a giant police department’. Sorry, what? And I wanted to get to a place where we make good arguments, because I think that that's where…while we're making good arguments, we're having a solid debate, and able to rationally think through things and we’ll get to a better solution…so, I think that's kind of, like, what I'm pushing (C2, TI2)
Paul’s reaction shows how he allowed students to hold their own opinions, even when he felt a tension in disagreeing with them, so long as he felt they were well-reasoned arguments. He was able to listen without having to change the student’s mind or force a position, or sometimes he asked a question to get to the heart of the issue. For example, he explained, “Sometimes I'm hearing hypocrisy, or they're arguing for something that I'm like, ‘you don't realize the implications of this’. So, let's like really process the details given”. For example, when one student voiced an opinion about riots following protests of incidents of police brutality, as it did in the climax of the novel, Paul addressed the issue by asking, “Do you think riots are ever necessary?” Lyn answers, “Most of the time riots aren’t necessary, but don’t bring a whole city into it and don’t bring small businesses into it.” (C2, OBS 1). So, even when he didn’t agree with students’ opinions, Dan promoted ongoing conversation to “process the details” of the argument (C2, TI1).

Sometimes, however, students encountered ideas they disagreed with and had difficulty opening themselves to them. For example, Paul observed, “Kids will say things that are not particularly socially conscious. And their peers recognize that and kind of jump all over them for it. Usually, the thing that I've noticed is that it has to be a pretty, like, direct statement. Because they aren't super great at evaluating nuance”, and “they're also like, hormonal, and just really wanting to be at odds with everybody else and wanting to kind of prove themselves to their peers” (C2, TI1). He observed that students “actually disagreed with their other classmates about a lot of the questions I asked. That was really interesting” (C2, TI1). For example, Lyn responded to the opinion of a student in another class by saying,

“Someone from a different class…I heard was trying to justify in the book why the officer shot Coolio, and I was, like, ‘Oh, well, that's not a good thing to do’. Because…I don't think he had a reason to shoot him, like, a real reason. He could
use his flashlight to look at the hairbrush angle and see that it wasn't a gun, you know? So, officers are just like that” (C2, I1)

Lyn took issue with the other student’s defense of the character of the police officer and didn’t appear to be open to further conversation on another perspective. Other times, though, they were possibly open to different perspectives, as when choosing pop culture texts for the analysis assignment, when “I wanted to do a song I've never listened to” (C2, I1, N). However, the text they chose they were unfamiliar with, the song “I Can’t Breathe” by H.E.R., presented a message they identified as “More white people should be fighting for this equality that we want” (MA1, L). Like the messages in the other two pop culture texts they chose, this perspective was one they already agreed with. Sunny also observed of class discussions, there were “not too much differences, but they're mostly all the same kind of line towards the question” (C2, I2, S). He didn’t see very many varied perspectives represented. Paul said he wants to “play the devil's advocate a little bit more” in future discussions, to push students to think more about different perspectives (C2, TI2).

**Moments of Polyphony**

Even though there were times students did not encounter productive tensions that raised awareness of diverse perspectives, whether in the course of oral class discussion, or as a result of choice of texts, like Lyn, there were polyphonic moments that emerged out of productive tensions. This happened during teacher-student interactions, when Paul encountered student perspectives he disagreed with, opening himself to ongoing dialogue with the text, students, and himself by allowing students to voice their independent ideas without having to come to one conclusion (Bakhtin, 1984). A moment of polyphony also emerged in student-student interactions when Paul asked,
Paul: Should you have to apologize if someone is offended by a comment you made?

Sunny: If you don’t know them then you should

Lyn: Yes, you should apologize…If someone overhears- just because they heard it – then you shouldn’t apologize (C2, OBS 1)

Students took in each other’s perspectives, without one voice trying to stifle or change another, even when the ideas were in tension.

At the end of the first interview, I asked Paul, “Is there anything I haven't asked about that you want to add?” He responded by discussing the tensions public school teachers face in addressing topics like police brutality with students,

It's weird. Like, during this conversation, I don't really…I mean, we don't know each other very well. And I don't really know, like, I'm just finding it's so interesting right now. I feel like I'm really careful with students about presenting my views about stuff, like, I don't want to [pause] We were talking in PD this morning and…our principal said that we unintentionally, or intentionally, have the power in the classroom to massage kids views on stuff, just kind of by a really sudden, unspoken curriculum or hidden curriculum kind of way, like, because of my stance, and I try pretty hard to be conscious of that. And I’m really aware of the person that I was in eighth grade and how I would have felt if my, if my teacher said, things that I didn't agree with what my parents might have said about that and, like, try to be pretty aware of that. But I don't know. It's interesting, just, like, I'm noticing myself in this moment, because I'm talking to you, and I'm being recorded. And this is ostensibly going to be written up in some form or fashion. Like, I don't know, how careful do I need to be, like, I'm still talking to like an
adult who can understand that I'm not I'm not saying all these things to kids, and I'm not… Like, there's, like, a little bit of tension in that as a public teacher (C2, TI1).

Paul’s experiences reminded me of my own experiences dwelling in the tensions inherent in the current political climate and navigating politically sensitive topics in the ELA classroom:

As I prepare to talk to the ACLU lawyer about HB 1775, my stomach tenses. This is such a critical time and an important issue - how do I do it justice? The lawyer wants feedback about how the law has impacted the way teachers think about curriculum and planning for instruction. My mind races as I scribble down ways the bill is impacting the rhythms of classroom life. I think of standing outside my classroom door as a first-year teacher asks about a book with themes of gender identity that has recently been pulled from the shelves of the district’s school libraries. She wants to place her own copy in her classroom library. “Do you think I can bring it to my library? Should I?” She asks tentatively. My shoulders tense, and my breathing quickens, as my heart and gut reactions clash. It feels surreal that we are even having this conversation – as our professional judgment is under attack. “How do see HB 1775 has impacted daily for teachers?” “What problems, personally, do you have with the law; what problems do you see with it?” These are the tensions – the moments of daily experience that fill the conversation. My issues with 1775 are multiple: the vague nature of the wording – the fact that it feels like it’s being used as a “catch all” to entrap teachers. And the essential question, “where does it stop?”, or “what’s left to teach if you completely avoid topics of race and gender?”. The essential way in which issues intersect leads me to believe it would be next to nothing. You can’t discuss capital punishment
without talking about race, for example (not without it being biased and misleading). I must ensure I have my rationales and research base together before teaching a work or topic that might be seen as problematic, as I must continue because teaching political topics is essential to promoting critical thinking. Creating a space for teachers’ voices in this conversation gives me hope, though. I also think about the centrality of safety and interconnection and helping teachers create spaces for using pop culture texts to spark discussion of critical issues where students can research and discuss these issues that affect their lives - spaces for dwelling in both tension and hope. Helping teachers find that place in their own classrooms and students find their voices permeates my thinking.

This juxtaposition of my experience with Paul’s reveals differences in my experience and reasoning, as when my “my heart and my gut reactions” clash, I do not always know what to say or do. However, dwelling in the productive tensions allows me to move forward with hope. As the interviewer/ “author” (Bakhtin, 1984), I allowed Paul to talk about his struggle with the effects of the legislation, and - even though I reassured him he could ask me to take out any parts of the interview he wasn’t comfortable with - his own conflicting feelings about talking to me surfaced. I listened without trying to impose my own ideas or tell him he shouldn’t feel that way. In this way he could, as a “character” (Bakhtin, 1984)/participant in the study speak back to me as the researcher. His perspective was a surprise to me, as my observation of his demeanor in his classroom and his interactions with students belied his own questioning of using the text and opening the classroom to discussion of politically sensitive topics. This juxtaposition also shows a struggle with “internally persuasive discourse” Bakhtin (1984) says, “When someone else’s ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up…More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other
internally persuasive discourses...this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean” (pp. 345-346).

These dialogic interactions reveal Paul’s ongoing “becoming” as a teacher through his struggle with internally persuasive discourse as well as my own “becoming” as a teacher and researcher working among the sensitivities of the current heightened political climate in education. As a result, polyphonic moments emerged in the author/character interaction between the researcher and teacher participant, as I allowed Paul to speak back to me as the researcher about working within the tensions of the current heightened political climate in education, as “the planes of the characters’ speech and that of the authorial speech can intersect, that is, dialogic relations are possible between them” (Bakhtin, 1984, p.116).

Theme 2: Moments of Connection that Promote Dialogue and Raise Awareness of Political Issues

Moments of connection emerged for student participants as they interacted with pop culture texts, and with each other, to discuss the topic of police brutality. Participants also made connections as they interacted with pop culture texts related to their chosen topics. Some of these moments emerged as students made positive connections between pop culture texts and political issues, while others emerged as students connected to various interests and sources of inspiration as they interacted with the texts. Regardless of the mode of interaction, these connections were analyzed for evidence of how they promoted dialogue between participants and raised student participants’ awareness of political issues, as well as for any polyphonic elements that emerged.

4 CS2=Case Study 2; TI1=First Teacher Interview; TI2 = Second Teacher Interview; SI1 = First Student Interview; SI2 = Second Student Interview; MA 1,2,3, etc. (student initial) =Material Artifact; OBS 1, 2, etc. = Observation
Making Meaningful Connections Between Pop Culture Texts and Political Issues

As students engaged with pop culture texts on the topic of police brutality, as well as their chosen topics, they experienced interactions with those texts that connected them to political issues, as revealed in the views embedded within their responses. For example, for the assignment where students chose three pop culture texts from a list Dan provided and responded to a series of analytical questions about them, Sunny chose the short film, *Shots Fired* (Sondler, 2019), written by Adrian Gaeta, Marios Gavarilis and Sascha Kuznia. This short film is about the issue of police use of force, as a police officer shoots an unarmed Black youth in the course of duty. From a transcript of the video,

Rookie, arresting his partner: Sir, stand up and show me your hands. Show me your hands!

0:22

Show me your goddamn hands right now [shouting].

0:27

Sir, you're under arrest.

0:30

You have the right to remain silent.

0:32

Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have a lawyer present during any questioning. If you cannot afford a lawyer, one will be appointed for you.


0:58

Rookie: I’m not (Sonder, n.d.).
Sunny wrote the following answers on his assignment sheet:

4) Why did you choose to talk about this piece?

To be honest, my family is from Mexico, and they still don’t have documents of registration and it’s scary to know if they get caught, I won’t be able to see them again. So this explains how something so stupid can destroy a family.

5) What do you think this piece is trying to say?

Speak the truth, or you may never find your way!

6. What details (lines, images, etc,) from the piece show the message?

The scene where the rookie has his phone out with his gun

7) Do you agree with this message?

Yes

9) Why do you think that the artist chose the details you mentioned in the question above?

To show what police do to get out of trouble (C2, MA2).

In this response, Sunny makes connections to the political issue of police brutality through dialogue with the text, citing the scene above where the rookie officer pulls a gun to arrest his partner, who shot an unarmed teenager. He also makes a connection to the issue of deportation of illegal immigrants, citing his family as an example of the reason he chose the piece. He is connecting the actions of police in the situation in the film and actions of police as they relate to his life. This shows he made a meaningful connection to political issues, as he was thinking about implications related to both issues, and was able to connect those issues to his own experience,
something he also referred to in our second interview, when he clarified, “I’ve never been involved with the police, but like, if my family origins ...are notified by the police....What's the word? Oh, I can't remember the word...Detained or...” (C2, SI1).

There were other instances of students connecting to political issues through pop culture texts, as when Darius chose the music video of the song “Precious Cargo” by Hurray for the Riff Raff (Segarra, n.d.).

Darius wrote the following answers on his assignment sheet,

5) What do you think the piece is trying to say?

I think it is talking about how I.C.E. treats people, and that they separate families and how it should be brought down

6) What details (lines, images, etc,) from the piece show the message?

They split me from my family/Now the light begins to fade/They took me to the cold room/Where I slept down on the floor/Just a foil for a blanket/For 17 days or more” (MA3, D).

7) Do you agree with this message?

Yes

Paul recalled how, initially, two students, including Darius, misinterpreted the lyrics, and thought they were referring to the political issue of homelessness. Through Paul working one-on-one with him, looking more closely at the pop culture text and the ideas represented, Darius was able to make a more meaningful connection to the issue of I.C.E., and immigrant detention centers, so he could begin to develop his understanding of the artist’s message in the song. In this way, the text
also promoted student-teacher dialogue around the issue, as Dan and Darius interacted to construct meaning from the lyrics. Later, Paul commented, “So yeah, maybe we should do that more with the kid who said “Easy on the Thieves” is about shoplifting (C2, TI2). The outcome of the dialogic interaction with Darius, in which they both continued to question the song and wrestle with the meaning, made Paul think this could be a good approach to use with other students.

Students also made meaningful connections to political issues in creating their own pop culture texts, as part of the assignment to “Create a piece of art that talks about a problem that you see in the world around you” (C2, TI2). Paul spoke of how Sunny was creating a drawing using characters from the show Sonic the Hedgehog, saying,

“He's drawing Sonic characters, which is a big thing for him, Sonic, and trying to connect that to police brutality, which is a lot of what he…feels like the message of the Sonic show that he's watching in the world is. “Hazel” is a piece of art that's talking about the problem of over policing in our world. So, I've been trying to encourage him to make that connection from not just using the very thing but bringing it back to us. And it was hard to do that (C2, TI2).

In speaking about his project, Sunny said, “t's sort of how the government, like, has, control over it and everything needs to be a little more considerate”, but then said he didn’t have anything else to say about it (C2, SI2). His cartoon drawing was of a large Sonic character holding a gun rising over three smaller Sonic characters who were running, with “Stop Police Brutality!” written underneath. Sunny did make connections to the issue of police brutality, which he was able to express, but had difficulty making and explaining connections to the issue in the present, as reflected in Paul’s recollection of their dialogue.
While they had a difficult time connecting it back to the earlier pop culture texts in the unit, Lyn made connections to the issue of how animal habitats are affected by global warming, saying,

Polar bear habitats are shrinking, and I don't really want them to go extinct, so more akin to news estimated polar bear habitats…will not be there; they'll go extinct. They're already vulnerable, so they might get endangered. If you look at the scale of how endangered they are, it says ‘vulnerable’” (C2, I2, N).

To represent this idea, they drew a ‘Bear Reserve’, with a picture of a lone, caged polar bear in a bleak environment, reflecting a meaningful connection to the issue of global warming.

Students’ Connections to Interest and Inspiration Through Interaction with Pop Culture Texts

As they engaged with pop culture texts on the topic of police brutality, as well as their chosen topics, student interactions reflected connections to their interests and fostered inspiration, as revealed in their engagement with the texts and the dialogue it promoted around political issues. Near the beginning of the unit, Paul observed, “one of the cool things about our kind of current age is that they have so much access, that everyone can really dial in to what is interesting to them” (C2, TI1), and when reflecting on the three pop culture texts they chose to examine and reflect on, using Dan’s guiding questions, participants often cited ‘interest’ as a reason for the choices they made from his list. For example, Lyn wrote of the song, “Another Brick in the Wall” by Pink Floyd, “I chose this because I like this song” (C2, MA1, N), further explaining in our second interview, “I chose a Pink Floyd song because I like Pink Floyd metal, and I wanted to kind of write about how I think about it” (C2, I1, L). They identified the message of the song as, “Don’t be the same as everyone else” (C2, MA1, N); however, they did not identify any details
relevant to this message and didn’t answer whether they agreed with it. In explaining their choice of “I Can’t Breathe” by H.E.R., Lyn reflected, “I wanted to do a song I've never listened to...it'd be interesting to me” (C2, I1, N). In this case, they were able to identify quotes like “Will anyone fight for me?” that related the message, “more white people should also be fighting for this equality we want” (C2, MA1, N). This shows their interest in pop culture texts was also sparked by novelty, in addition to existing preferences. While saying, “I liked it; I liked the assignment” (C2, N, I1), in reflecting on using pop culture texts to teach about political topics, they also said, “It's a good idea but probably not do it a lot. Because it's English Language Arts. I don't know if we should be focusing on that” (C2, I1, L). They seemed to view the exercise as one that was pleasant because they could connect to pop culture texts they loved, but seemed to not feel that these texts were appropriate for regular use in a school setting.

At the same time, Sunny expressed interest in the “real-life” connections to the topic of police brutality, saying, “I would say is it was interesting how Mr. Dan has thought of these new things. I genuinely wasn't expecting... we're gonna do, like, how other real-life people are experiencing police brutality. It's been really interesting” (C2, I1, S). He found the topics themselves interesting, and the music inspirational, rather than simply liking the artists. He described his choice of the song “Live & Learn” by Crush 40 by saying, “It really has been reaching out towards me and it really says that some people can’t figure out how to make a good future” (C2, MA2, S). In his first interview, after hearing him talk about his interest in playing the drums (the question was sparked by observation of his air drumming) and drawing, I remarked to him, “you do a lot of creating your own pop culture things” (C2, I1, S). Perhaps this is why he found the song so inspirational, writing of the artists purpose as “to inspire, to encourage, and to rock out!” (C2, MA2).
Darius’s motivations for choosing pieces were less inspired and more functional, such as “It’s the only video” and “Because the message is pretty clear” (C2, MA3), and he didn’t choose a third piece. However, Dan observed that while student responses were limited in some cases, “I think it's cool to see how they've engaged with some of those pieces” (C2, TI2). After this assignment, he remarked, “Only one student said, ‘we have to do three?’ It went much better than I expected” (C2, OBS 3). Students were working at their individual desks with Chromebooks, intently consulting the resource list and searching the internet for sources. Starry played air guitar in between keyboard strokes. Paul later remarked, “I had intended for it to be a loud and boisterous activity where they were all moving around, but they were very siloed and focused, which was weird to me” (C2, TI2). This shows students were, for the most part, interested in and engaged with the activity; working in a focused way and having more to say and write.

**Moments of Polyphony**

Polyphonic moments were more limited in relationship to this theme. Polyphony emerged again during student-teacher interactions, as Paul and Darius engaged in dialogue to construct meaning from the lyrics to the song “Precious Cargo”,

We made it to the border/I jumped and I was detained/They split me from my family/Now the light begins to fade/They took me to the cold room/Where I slept down on the floor/Just a foil for a blanket/For 17 days or more/Me sleep on the floor for 17 days/Me sleep on the floor like a dog

Me sleep on the floor for 17 days/Foil blanket shivering hard (Segarra, n.d.)

Paul recalled how Darius initially interpreted the lyrics, thinking they were referring to the political issue of homelessness,
There's another kid, though, there's a song called “Precious Cargo” by Hurray for the Riffraff. It's very much about, like, in the bridge, or whatever, it says ‘ICE oh ICE. I hate you oh ICE’, and…it's about crossing the border and, like, the precious cargo, and crossing the border, and taking care of the people who are moving in…and things like that. I caught on the line, like, 'you made me sleep on the floor for 17 days/on the floor like a dog'. And he was like…” sleep on the floor. He's arguing against homelessness”. I was like, “No”. It was like, ‘dig in and look at the text a little bit more’, because he presented that homelessness argument to me. Because like, in person, like, while he was working through the assignment, we have a conversation, I was like, “let's look at other lines, things that support that idea. Let's look at the whole text” (C2, TI2)

Paul did not force his ideas on Darius, or insist that they come to consensus, but helped him think through the words and ideas in the text to re-form his interpretations based on dialogic interaction upon re-reading the lyrics. This juxtaposition shows how even though they disagreed on the interpretation of the lyrics, Paul did not insist Darius hold exactly the same understanding but led him to think through it himself - to let his ideas develop. as ““the author…leaves that dialogue open and puts no finalizing period at the end…all endings are merely new beginnings” (Bakhtin, 165). While Darius ultimately formed a position about the issue through dialogic interaction with the lyrics, polyphony emerged in the form of a developing understanding as he and Paul engaged with the text.

While there were dialogic encounters as student participants engaged the texts, such as Sunny’s interaction with the song “Live and Learn”, polyphonic moments did not appear to emerge in student-text interactions, perhaps because participants only chose pop culture texts they liked, or whose messages they already agreed with, and polyphony is dependent on ongoing meaning making and contrast, as “The exclusive orientation toward recognizing, searching only
for the familiar (that which has already been) does not allow the new to reveal itself”
(Bakhtin, 1984, 142). Students’ interactions with each other around this theme were limited as well, as participants did not share many pop culture texts and interpretations with each other. At the end of the unit Paul remarked that when he taught this unit again, he would like to incorporate more discussion of the pop culture texts up front, so students would have the opportunity to discuss them with each other, rather than having it be an exercise centered mostly on internal dialogue.

**Theme 3: Moments that Reveal the Need to Move Students Beyond Shallow, Binary Thinking**

Moments that revealed the necessity of moving student participants beyond shallow, binary thinking emerged as Paul engaged in dialogue with his students to analyze both pop culture texts related to police brutality, as well as texts related to their chosen topics. Some of these moments emerged as interactions revealed limitations around surface-level and/or either/or thinking, while others emerged as the interactions revealed a need to encourage students to dig deeper into the meaning of the texts and/or incorporate strategies designed to take students to a deeper level of interaction. Regardless of the mode of interaction, these moments were analyzed for evidence of the ways they revealed the limitations of binary thinking within different modes of interaction, as well as for any polyphonic elements that emerged.

**Limitations of Surface-Level and Either/Or Thinking**

As Paul and his students engaged with pop culture texts, participants’ interactions often revealed limitations in their thinking, in that they were unable to think beyond limited abstractions, or could only envision two possibilities, as revealed when interacting with their

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5 CS2 = Case Study 2; TI1 = First Teacher Interview; TI2 = Second Teacher Interview; SI1 = First Student Interview; SI2 = Second Student Interview; MA 1,2,3, etc. (student initial) = Material Artifact; OBS 1, 2, etc. = Observation
teacher and the texts. These limitations sometimes hindered their ability to develop or
demonstrate nuanced thinking, in which the complexities of different points of view are
acknowledged. In some cases, students were able to demonstrate nuanced thinking, in dialogue
with the teacher and each other, as they voiced different opinions about political topics. For
example, in thinking about Paul’s question, “‘Do you agree with the statement “snitches get
stitches”? Lyn responded, “I think it depends on what context…if it’s something small, it doesn’t
matter, but Mr. Lewis ended up getting beaten up because he told what happened next to his
store’” (C2, OBS 3). Lyn was able to see the question from different angles and understood how
the answer could be relative, depending upon context. Paul’s decision to continue teaching The
Hate U Give rested on his assessment of the author, Angie Thomas, and her ability to relate a
“really, really nuanced conversation... I really want to draw out the more nuanced version of this
conversation, which is something that I think eighth graders really need to do, as they're entering
into a more adult world, is learn how to look at the nuance of things and how to be like, ‘oh,
there's a lot of sides to this” (C2, TI1).

At the end of the unit, he struggled somewhat with the outcome of the pop culture
assignment, as he observed students often demonstrated limited thinking in their responses to the
pop culture texts, saying,

A lot of them were pretty surface-level,’ This is great', and I'm wondering if that
was how quickly we did the assignment, because it was basically just that one
day...because I asked them for three reflections over three different pieces; that
felt like a lot to do...Some really got in there and were using, like, textual analysis.
Some of them made points about pieces that I was like, ‘Oh, that's really like
insightful, and I've never considered that before. It's great’...we didn't do, like, the
class discussion, which is maybe something that I would like to do...like, we
watched Tupac, and then we talked about it for a second, and then we moved on to their own exploration (C2, TI2)

One example of this was when he saw surface-level thinking in students’ misinterpretation of the theme of “Easy on the Thieves”, as they took meaning from the surface of the song,

We've been going easy on the thieves/Stolen goods will get traced back to thee/What a proper pair of charlies/Ducks behind a tree, and hope that no one sees/Holding their breath, chose not to see/Not listening, forgot to breathe/Guessing their gaps, getting it wrong/You don't know me, or what I've done/People want blood, and blood is what/Is what they've got; is what they've got/Suckers feeding, you could feel them wheedling/Once you had some space, now you've got panicking/That's just how they work, exactly how they win/First they dope you up, and then they dope you in (Stables, n.d.)

In reflecting on students’ misinterpretation of the song, based on a very literal reading, Paul said,

The Tupac video had a very, very clear theme…And there wasn't a lot of debate about that. But then, like, one of the ones that comes to mind is a song called “Easy on the Thieves” by one of my favorite bands…And I think of it as a song about, like, the health care system. And it's about, like, they are the thieves and we've been going easy on them and the ways that they like, take advantage of and treat their patients…And then I had a couple kids who are like, ‘oh, yeah, this is about shoplifting’. No, no, no, no (laughs). So, they, like, disagree with each other in what they wrote, but not directly (C2, TI2).

This also surfaced in Lyn’s explanation of their choices of songs to respond to, saying, “the other two, I just wanted to pick something I was familiar with. I don't really know what to say about
them” (C2, I1, N). Even though they had been able to express a nuanced view in response to Dan’s earlier question about *The Hate U Give*, their thinking was more limited regarding the pop culture texts they had chosen. While they were able to articulate the message in the song, their interaction with it was limited, beyond indicating they agreed with the message (C2, MA1). Dan pondered incorporating more class discussion of those pop culture texts as a way to help students process the texts more as a group before interacting with them individually, reflecting, “I think that it would be better to do, like, class discussions, so we get some more of that interaction beforehand. And maybe limit the choices a little bit more” (C2, TI2). So, spending more time discussing the texts and allowing more time to work on the actual assignment were solutions Dan considered when thinking about the next time he would use the assignment.

Paul explained his choice of texts by saying,

I've got kind of a range of difficulty levels in there. Some of them were very, like, it's like, you know, like NWA's *Fuck the Police*. And like something like, oh, yeah, I get this...this is clear. And then I put it in a couple of things, like I put in *Carmel Police* by Radiohead, and the responses about that were, like, all over the map, like, ‘What are we…what are they talking about? What is this? Where are we?’ Even things that they’re like, you know, between those two kinds of ends of the spectrum. I will be doing that textual analysis and really thinking critically about some students who are just kind of naturally good at it, or have already experienced and been taught that, or been paying better attention to what I’m saying…So, I want to practice those things more (C2, TI2)

Paul is expressing his desire to help his students interact with the texts in a deeper way that will move them beyond surface-level, either/or thinking, as he is aware his students are operating at a
wide range of levels and feels practice will be critical to engage in a more nuanced way with the wide range of texts he has chosen.

In reflecting on *The Hate U Give* early in the unit, from engaging in microdialogue (Bakhtin, 1990) with the text, Paul was able to engage the “nuanced conversation” in the book in the way Thomas characterizes Starr’s Uncle Carlos, as

He brings a whole other perspective from the, from the cop side of things, and his answer isn't…’my colleagues are all terrible people’. His answer is they're good people. They're good people doing hard work. And I'm a good person, and I'm trying to do hard work. It's just hard (C2, TI1)

Paul’s dialogic interactions with the text opened up possibilities beyond black and white thinking, in which he may not agree with all the statements and decisions, but he is able to see different sides of the arguments in ways he doesn’t always see his students doing, as he thinks,

A lot of kids who've heard about *The Hate You Give*, or who know that they this is a Tupac quote…they expect it to be all ACAB, you know, they expect it to be all fuck the police and all this kind of stuff…it’s sometimes really hard…for the eighth graders in particular, to understand with their kind of undeveloped brains that those are the only two options that they see(CS1, TI1)

In choosing a variety of texts, incorporating more class discussion, and spending more time with the texts, Paul hoped to guide his students to a more nuanced understanding of the texts in the pop culture assignment.

*A Need to Dig Deeper*

Knowing he wants to incorporate more of the pop culture text projects in the future (C2, TI2), Paul expressed a realization that he would need to find ways to help students dig deeper into
the texts to transcend the surface level and/or binary thinking some were experiencing, such as Darius’s literal (mis)interpretation of Precious Cargo, of which Paul remarked, “he was like, [inaudible] sleep on the floor. He's arguing against homelessness…I was like…dig in and look at the text a little bit more (C2, TI2). Digging emerged as a metaphor for Paul’s dialogic interactions with students as he delved into the text with them to create meaning. As with the literal interpretation of Easy on the Thieves, Paul and the student did not agree on the interpretation of the text, but rather than try to impose his interpretation, Paul said, the kid who was like, ‘Going Easy on the Thieves is about shoplifting’. I didn't really argue with that... cause I'm gonna not do that. I'm like, ‘Hey, let's talk about this’ (C2, TI2). At that point, Paul and the student were interacting as “consciousnesses with equal rights - the equal rights to make judgments about what is relevant, what is important, and what is true” (Bakhtin 1999). Their individual opinions did not merge, but they tested their ideas against each other, constructing meaning from the text. This happened when Paul was able to engage the student in dialogue about their interpretation. His guidance in the process made it possible for the student to test their ideas against his. Matusov (2007) argues that the teacher’s epistemological authority is needed for starting up internally persuasive discourse among students…*Paradoxically, the teacher needs the power to kill his or her own power and the power of students’ ignorance” (220). This is similar to what Paul said about how he approached Darius to address his misconceptions about the text, “while he was working through the assignment, I was like, let's look at other lines, things that support that idea. Let's look at the whole text” (C2, TI2).

Moments of Polyphony

Paul’s approach again allowed a moment of polyphony to emerge, as his approach of saying, “Hey, let’s talk about this”, rather than imposing his interpretation on the student, allowed them to enter into a shared exchange from which each drew their own conclusions, in essence becoming “double voiced” (Bakhtin, 1984), as “someone else’s words introduced into our own
speech inevitably assume our own interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them that is, they become double-voiced…our practical speech is full of other people’s words” (p. 195). In the exchange of ideas, each took away ideas from the lyrics, as from each other. As Paul said, “Let’s look at other lines…Let’s look at the whole text”, he was also interacting with and creating meaning from ideas in the text, as well as interacting with Darius’s interpretation, with which he disagreed but didn’t attempt to change.

Paul used figurative language related to the idea of striving for depth when he described his concerns about the unit, as well as his desire to continue incorporating pop culture texts in the future, as he reflected on his mixed feelings about the lack of depth in some students’ responses, “I feel like if I had started with our first thing, like incorporating other stuff, and blending things that they could -we could - be at a deeper level at this point.” (C2, TI2). He seemed to be hoping to live out this metaphor of striving for greater depth through his ideas for selectively choosing texts, frontloading more class discussion about those texts, and spending more time delving into them, as well as focusing on pushing students’ thinking through playing devil’s advocate,

This is a really heavy, big topic. I oftentimes don't give them enough credit, that they can do more and be more serious and really recognize what I allow them to do that makes sense. So, I feel like it's been good to see their responses and they're picking huge heavy hard things to talk about, and to work on, and to really think carefully and critically about. So that's been cool. And I think it's made me want to lean a little bit more into one of the reasons that I liked it is because of the nuanced conversation that I think it has. Like, I want to try to hit that a little bit harder in the future, like really play the devil's advocate a little bit more. Do some of that. A little bit more conversations around it, which I did a little bit this year (C2, TI2)
Paul’s perspective reminded me of teaching an argumentative writing unit on the gender pay gap in sports, using pop culture texts, noticing how students interacted with the texts and ideas. For example,

In one lesson, students spent 15 minutes organizing four “talking points” on chart paper that they wrote down on post it notes (they had a “discussion talk” sentence frames and terms for agreement and disagreement, to support collaboration). These “talking points” could be questions about or quotes from the text, text connections or other observations about the text. Students then worked in the same groups to fill out the final column of a “Claims and Evidence” chart they worked on during to indicate evidence they might use from that source to support their opinion on the prompt, based on reading and discussion in their small groups. Students then repeated this process with at least two other texts. For example, three students discussed a cartoon from the Arkansas Gazette claiming that female soccer players on the USWNT earn a greater percentage of the overall proceeds than male players on the US Men’s Team, even though the proceeds for the women are much lower, so the male players still earn more. One student reads another’s post-it, “Women are not being discriminated against because they get more revenue” then says, “I disagree with it because it’s wrong; they get less revenue”. The student responds, “Well, what I meant was the men have more revenue, right, …they make more money overall and the women get...more of that”. The other student retorts, “but it’s not the same pool of money”. The first student responds while looking at the source for clarification, “I know, because the men have, what, a billion? And the women have millions? They get more of a portion of…14%”. The student used textual evidence from the source to support an opinion that female players are not
discriminated against, even while acknowledging the male players make more money overall.

This give and take about texts seems to mirror the deeper level of interpretation Paul is trying to help his students achieve. Playing devil’s advocate more would further allow Dan to set up an environment in which “alternative ideas are examined and tested by the participants” (Bakhtin, 1999), allowing moments of polyphony to emerge, much as they did in his dialogic interactions with Darius. This juxtaposition shows how while I as the author/researcher (Bakhtin, 1984) allowed Paul to voice his ideas and feelings about his class, it also reminded me of my own ideas about how to engage students in discussion of political topics - ideas Dan is still developing. Rather than jump in and tell Paul, “Hey, you should do this…”, I let him work through his thinking about the problem and voice his opinions in this moment of polyphony, ultimately taking in his words and connecting them to my own experience with student interaction. Paul says he wants students to think about the fact that, “you have a voice, and you have tools as you do things. So, use them” (C2, T12), and he sees giving students opportunities to test their ideas against those of the pop culture texts and each other, and engaging in dialogue with their classmates as one possible path to doing just that, but he is still struggling with how to facilitate that depth of interaction, so the process is ongoing.
CHAPTER VI

THE CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS - TENSIONS, BECOMING AND POTENTIAL IN DIALOGIC RELATIONS: POP CULTURE TEXTS AND POLYPHONY

Using the following three interpretive questions as a framework for my analysis assisted me in keeping my focus on examining the collective data through the lens of polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984): (1) Is this significant (to the co-existence of contradictory perspectives, and the ongoing dialogical process of questioning and becoming through encounters with self, others, and the world as text)? (2) For which dialogical relationship is it significant (student-text, teacher-student, student-student and/or teacher-text), and (3) do these moments reveal polyphonic elements and interactions within those relationships?) (Buelow, 2017). As I conducted cross-case analysis to synthesize the data and identify points of convergence and divergence within the two cases (Merriman, 1998), I began to see how participants’ experiences were framed in relationship to overarching elements related to the emergence of moments of polyphony across cases. For example, I began to see how participants’ expressed tensions in their dialogic interactions that led to the emergence of multiple perspectives and conditions under which dialogue could become polyphonic. I could also see how their engagement with political topics could lead to participants’ ongoing becoming, within which dialogue could become polyphonic. I also began to see how the potential for emergence of polyphonic moments related to an understanding of depth in participant interactions. As a result, I created major themes out of a construct of the following
three elements of polyphonic dialogue: Tensions, Becoming and Potential, to illustrate common threads woven through participants’ relationship to moments of polyphony.

Each section begins with a theme title, followed by presentation of the analysis, with juxtaposed excerpts from participants' dialogues woven throughout. In some cases, these dialogues are represented in the form of found data poems. Drawing on an arts-based method of presenting data, these are poems constructed from the participants own words, taken from interview transcripts (Cooper, Chatfield, Holden & Macias, 2015). These juxtapositions are intended to highlight an understanding of participants’ perspectives that relate to a common theme and illustrate how dialogue becomes polyphonic. Subthemes illustrate specific aspects of the nature of each theme and analyze how dialogic interactions can lead to polyphony.

**Theme 1 - The Unfinalizable Push and Pull of Tensions in Dialogic Interactions**

To understand how participants expressed tensions in their dialogic interactions with pop culture texts and each other that led to the emergence of multiple perspectives and conditions under which dialogue could become polyphonic, I began with interpretation of how situatedness and unfinalizability often characterized the ways participants’ experienced tensions that led to the emergence of multiple perspectives in their dialogic interactions, followed by analysis of how polyphony emerged from those tensions.

*Situatedness, Unfinalizability, and Multiple Perspectives*

The nature of how participants experienced tensions with the pop culture texts and with each other emerged as a significant theme across cases. Often this tension was framed as situatedness, wherein “whatever is perceived can be perceived only from a uniquely situated place in the overall structure of possible points of view”. Bakhtin referred to this point of view as an “excess of seeing” (Bakhtin, 1990, xxiv), in which each person always sees and knows something from their perspective that the other cannot see. Several participants experienced this
as they interacted with each other, such as when the generative tensions that fostered Dani and Marisol’s dialogic interactions helped Marisol refine her thinking through explaining it to Dani, saying, “I was gonna say it will be more not really the fans…they see it as more male dominated and there’s less resources for women’s sports, so there’s, like, less education on them” (C1, I1, M), and listening to her perspective led Dani to be more open to Marisol’s ideas, even when they conflicted with her own, as Dani countered, “what I'm hearing is you're not on the fence. But you understand both sides. Okay” (CS1, TI1). From their individual points of view (“excess of seeing”), they were each able to push the other’s thinking. Thus, their dialogue was not finalized – they did not agree but were each processing a different perspective that was still developing.

Another example is when Paul and his students experienced productive tensions that led to ongoing oral dialogue to “process the details” of their varying points of view on police brutality and other issues of race. Each saw the issue and the other’s perspective from a vantage point that pushed the other’s thinking.

These emerging, ongoing tensions, however, often appeared to be the result of Paul pushing students thinking with his questioning, rather than how students’ also experienced tensions within themselves, as they did in Dani’s classroom. For example, when Paul’s students were able to choose three pop culture texts for the “Art and Activism” assignment, they almost always chose texts they already liked or agreed with, whereas when they engaged in discussion, they were more likely to engage with a different perspective, see nuances and contribute to ongoing conversation. For example,

Paul: The officer who shot Khalil…As you are pretty upset about this, my question to you is…Is there a situation where we shouldn't arrest a police officer for killing someone? Like do police officers ever have the right to kill the citizens of our country?
Darius: If they’re, like, blatantly targeted…like, shooting at the police officer”

Paul: Okay, so kind of like a self-defense thing…I think there are many cases where it does happen [police officers shooting civilians]. Do you think it can be justified for children?

Lyn: If it’s in self-defense, in some situations, it’s probably okay

Paul: So the question I have is, do you think riots are necessary? I get looting, probably not, is kind of what I'm hearing…but do we think rioting, when we're not being heard, is it a necessary progression in this conversation?

Lyn: Most of the time riots aren't necessary, but if they are necessary, don't make it to where the whole city's involved” (C2, OBS 1)

So, participants experienced the tensions in different points of view that opened up ongoing dialogue, but it occurred mostly as a result of the teacher’s questioning, as opposed to students’ direct interactions with the texts. In the first case, students experienced tensions characterized by unfinalizability that emerged between themselves and the texts as a result of their direct interactions with them, as when Marisol’s dialogic interactions with the Curry and Moore texts, and Tom’s interaction with the text comparing NBA and WNBA salaries, led to ongoing dialogue around the issues.

In both cases, the teacher participants also experienced and expressed tensions related to their concerns about teaching politically sensitive topics and texts in the current political climate. For example, Paul said, “Like, I don’t know, how careful do I need to be…there’s like, a little bit of tension in that as a public school teacher”. He, however, continued to dwell in the tensions, even though he was “really careful with students about presenting my views about stuff”. This idea of the teacher maintaining a neutral stance contrasts with the dialogical position of the
teacher as a fellow participant negotiating diverse perspectives, formulating their own views of the topics, and helping students make connections between ideas (Dysthe, 1996; DePalma, 2010). However, even though he was cautious about inserting his opinion into the conversation, Paul continued to teach politically sensitive texts like *The Hate U Give*, and the Tupac Shakur song “Trapped”, even when nervous about giving students more control over the course of the discussion. On the other hand, while she opened up more towards the end of the unit, Dani still used student choice and obscuring her position as cushions that put distance between herself and students, albeit ones that ended up being generative in the sense of fostering students’ creative, ongoing interactions with the texts, and being a participant in moments of polyphony herself.

As a researcher, I also experienced productive tensions as I interviewed and observed both teacher participants engaging with students and pop culture texts in their classrooms while teaching the units. Observing the tension between Dani’s authoritative discourse, related to the classroom atmosphere she fostered, and my own perspective regarding what I perceived as the internally persuasive discourse motivating students like Marisol and Tom, as well as experiencing the productive tensions that emerged when Paul spoke about his experiences teaching politically sensitive texts, which triggered my own memories of dwelling in tension with students, I began to see and understand the ways in which a sense of unfinalizability characterized how participants experienced tensions as an ongoing struggle of ideas connected to emergence of multiple perspectives. I began to see that these tensions did not have a final ending, as both teacher participants acknowledged how navigating topic and text choice is an ongoing issue. As I related through my vignettes in both cases, the tensions around discussing political topics in the classroom are still emerging, and the conversation is still developing.

*Tensions and Polyphony.*
Understanding how moments of polyphony emerged from the ways participants experienced tensions in their dialogic interactions involved looking at how individual voices met but did not merge (Bakhtin, 1984) across cases and provided a space for holding tensions. Through examining excerpts from participants dialogues, and reflecting on them, it became clear how a sense of choosing to dwell in a space of unfinalizable tension characterized polyphonic interactions. For example, when Paul said,

I feel like I'm really careful with students about presenting my views about stuff, like, I don't want to [pause] We were talking in PD this morning and…our principal said that we unintentionally, or intentionally, have the power in the classroom to massage kids views on stuff, just kind of by a really sudden, unspoken curriculum or hidden curriculum kind of way, like, because of my stance, and I try pretty hard to be conscious of that. And I'm really aware of the person that I was in eighth grade and how I would have felt if my, if my teacher said, things that I didn't agree with what my parents might have said about that and, like, try to be pretty aware of that. But I don't know. It's interesting, just, like, I'm noticing myself in this moment, because I'm talking to you, and I'm being recorded. And this is ostensibly going to be written up in some form or fashion. Like, I don't know, how careful do I need to be, like, I'm still talking to like an adult who can understand that I'm not I'm not saying all these things to kids, and I'm not… Like, there's, like, a little bit of tension in that as a public teacher (TI1).

There is tension between us as I respond,

JF: Yeah, this is interesting…just…because we've had these conversations…all the time, and even with classroom libraries right now..I mean, that's kind of a different thing than what you're talking about, but still the umbrella issue is [pause]
yeah…and then there's also, like, kind of like what you were talking about…I mean, your own feelings about issues play into it, but how do you keep that line.

Paul: Right, but I’m probably going to spend a lot of the rest of the day like, thinking about, ‘and I said…’

JF: Oh, no, no, no…

Paul: You're fine…I don't…My gosh, did I… anyway, because it's just…I think that's where we are. I don't know. You got it, like, this is where we are.

Paul surprised me with his candidness in discussing his self-reflection and inner dialogue, during which he expresses questioning, “how careful do I need to be?”, but I allowed him to talk, even while my own self-reflection and inner dialogue was leading me back to my own experiences dealing with the tensions in navigating teaching politically sensitive topics in the ELA classroom.

My reasoning is different, and my experience is different, as I am thinking about creating a space for other teachers’ voices, recognizing that these spaces involve “dwelling in both tension and hope”. Paul, on the other hand, is thinking about the texts he is introducing and how they promote nuance, so he has decided to continue teaching them. Our ideas met around a common theme, but did not merge (Bakhtin, 1984), opening a space for holding the tensions inherent in dialogue around discussing political topics in the current environment in education. The radical openness of polyphonic dialogue allows for holding the tensions and messiness of multiple perspectives…in a more open-ended, “intransigently pluralist” (Holquist, 1990, p. 34-35) space. As we each reflect and talk, our dialogic interactions about texts are dwelling in that tensioned space in a moment of polyphony, without either of us pushing it away or running from it. There is also an acknowledgment that this dialogic encounter is unfinalized, as Paul says, “You got it, like, this is where we are”. This discussion is not concluded, and there is no final word. The issue is
ongoing, and while we approach it from different perspectives, our thoughts are still developing, characterized by “an open dialogic attitude toward oneself and toward the other” (Bakhtin, 1984, 251), leading to new insights and understandings. This also addresses Bakhtin’s idea of power as relationship (Matusov, et al, 2019), demonstrating how hierarchical relationships can be disrupted by moments of polyphony such as this, when Tom and I engaged in an unfinalized conversation between character and author (Bakhtin, 1984) that opened a space for ongoing exploration of the topic.

Furthermore, as Dani discussed her classroom and students, leaning into the ongoing tensions between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1984) that emerged out of my perceived disconnect between Dani’s reflections about her class and what I was observing, led to a moment of polyphony. I, as the author, chose to dwell in tension while listening to Dani’s tensioned perspective regarding her classroom, without trying to change it, as we acted as “consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1984). This conversation was left unresolved, as Dani still struggled with student apathy in her second interview, and processed how to approach it, while I opened a space for listening. Balancing authoritarianism and permissiveness when facilitating dialogue presents a challenge for many teachers, especially those with less experience (Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013). Dani still did not dwell in the ongoing tensions around teaching a political topic the same way Paul did, continuing to put space between herself and the topic and texts, and she expressed the same disappointment in student apathy. However, she did not push the topic and texts completely away and still said she would “definitely” teach the unit again, as it was “helpful” for teaching argument writing (CS1, TI2).

Fecho, Falter and Hong (2016) reported observing “generative” tensioned spaces that were not the result of dialogical teaching practices; they were already in existence but became “transactional” as dialogical participants allow them to become “generative” spaces of possibility
for teachers and students (p. 95-96). Such tensioned spaces occurred in both cases, for example, when Dani and Marisol engaged in dialogue around the gender pay gap, each with an openness to the others’ opinion, without merging voices, as learning can happen when tension emerges as authoritative discourse encounters internally persuasive discourse (Sidorkin, 1999, as cited in Eldaker, 2015). Similarly, Paul opened himself and his classroom space to ongoing dialogue as he asked during a class discussion, “Should you have to apologize if someone is offended by a comment you made?”, and students took in each other’s perspectives without one voice having to agree with another, even when their ideas emerged from different perspectives.

This theme aspired to describe how participants in both cases experienced tensions in their dialogic interactions with pop culture texts and each other. Through examining these tensions across cases, I determined they were characterized by unfinalizability and the emergence of multiple perspectives. My interpretation of participants’ experiences attempted to show how dwelling in those tensions opened a space for polyphonic dialogue to emerge. I realized the ways individual voices met but did not merge (Bakhtin, 1984) was a useful indicator of the existence of a space for holding tensions. Teacher participants’ collective experiences included a mix of both positive and negative experiences with tension that stemmed from their varied levels of resistance to teaching political texts and topics. Through examining participants’ interviews, observations, and artifacts within the context of dwelling in tensions, polyphonic moments were revealed.

**Theme 2 - Understanding Ongoing Dialogue as “Becoming”**

In line with the related nature of my themes, which were each framed in terms of overarching elements related to the emergence of moments of polyphony across cases, next I present my understanding of how the ways participants’ expressed engagement with pop culture texts through their dialogic interactions on political topics led to a sense of dialogic “becoming” (Bakhtin, 1984). I begin with interpretation of the ways in which participants’ questioning the
texts, connecting to their interests, and expressing insights characterized their engagement with political topics, as revealed in their dialogic interactions, followed by analysis of the conditions under which polyphonic dialogue emerged.

**Interests, Insights, Questioning, and Connection: Engaging Political Topics**

The different ways many participants’ expressed engagement with pop culture texts through their dialogic interactions on political topics led to “becoming” through a sense of ongoing dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) emerged as another significant theme across cases. For example, Marisol and Tom expressed engagement with and insights into pop culture texts through questioning that led to their own ongoing state of becoming. That multi-voiced encounter with difference opened them up to transformation, an “unconsummatedness” (Bakhtinm 1990, xix) leading to more questions and new ideas.

Bakhtin said of dialogic interaction and questioning,

> The transmission of someone else’s statement in the form of a question already leads to a clash of two intentions within a single discourse, for in so doing, we not only ask a question, but make someone else’s statement problematical. Our practical, everyday speech is full of other people’s words: with some of them we completely merge our own voice, forgetting whose they are; others, which we take as authoritative, we use to reinforce our own words; still others, finally we populate with our own aspirations, alien or hostile to them” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 195).

This process of questioning, taking statements from the texts and problematizing them, rather than demanding consensus, and using them as springboards for their continued thinking, opened a space for participants/authors to construct meaning from the texts. This extended to classroom discussions of *The Hate U Give*, where Paul used questioning to probe students’ thinking to think critically and “get to a better solution” (C2, TI1). It was also present in student-student
interactions in Dani’s classroom, as she reported students questioning each other around their discoveries, “Hey, did you know this?” and “Ok, but did you think about this?” (C2, TI2). Dan encouraged students to create the questions for class discussions, reminding me of Matusov, et. al.’s (2019) definition of ontological Bakhtinian pedagogies as “ones with emergent curriculum…guided by and addressed to students’ personal interests, questions and needs” (p.124). Difference seemed to be key in this process of questioning and becoming and shared authorship (Bakhtin, 1984), as when students were engaging with texts they already agreed with, such as some of the songs and videos Sunny, Lyn and Darius chose to analyze, questioning of texts did not happen, just consensus. An exception would be when Darius chose the music video to the song “Precious Cargo” and Paul engaged with him in a dialogue to construct meaning from the lyrics. In that case, the teacher-student interaction was key to the construction of deeper meaning.

All my participants expressed interest in and engaged with the pop culture texts in a way that connected them to the political topics. For example, Sunny made a connection between his family and issues with police. Teacher participants also made connections between their lives and opinions and the texts in ways that reflected their interest in them. For example, when I asked, “would you mind telling me a little bit about one of the texts that you've incorporated that stands out on your mind?” Dani connected a text about the “astonishing” salaries of professional basketball players to her own salary as a teacher (C1, TI1). Interest is key to dialogicity (Matusov, et. al., 2019), and the interest participants expressed led them to increased engagement with the topic, particularly in writing. For example, Marisol said, “The sources…gave me a lot of opinions that I wanted to elaborate into my essay” (C1, I2, M). While interest in the texts and topics did not always translate into his students’ making connections to the present, Paul described how his students surprised him when “only one student said, ‘We have to do three?’ It went much better than I expected”. As infusing popular culture in the curriculum can positively
affect students’ engagement with reading and writing tasks and facilitate an awareness of social
inequities (Morrell, 2008; Awad, 2004), participants’ interest in the texts increased their
engagement and connected them to political topics.

“Becoming” and Moments of Polyphony.

Understanding how moments of polyphony emerged from participants’ expressions of
genagement with pop culture texts through their dialogic interactions on political topics involved
looking at how individual voices met but did not merge across cases, and how that provided a
space for “becoming” through fostering ongoing dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). In polyphonic
authoring, the hero is always in a state of becoming, and the author allows situations and
identities to develop, rather than insisting they conform to a predetermined expectation, leading to
surprising outcomes, transformations, and deeper understandings. Through excerpts from
participant interviews, observations, and my reflections on both, it became clear how participants’
openness to an element of surprise, and a sense of creative, multi voiced inquisitiveness
characterized polyphonic interactions. Marisol and Tom, for example, both approached
questioning in a way that opened up moments of polyphony through multi-voiced inquisitiveness.
The juxtaposed found poems below represent the essence of the voice and claims of Raymond
Moore that Marisol took in and reveal the way she responded to his voice with her own questions,

Lucky, lucky WTA lady player

A handful of prospects

attractive players

Down on your knees

Thank Federer
Thank Rafael

Don’t make decisions,

just ride their coattails

And Marisol’s response,

Many might agree men are better players,

and they paved the way for women,

so more profit for them is fair

But what if biased, profit motivated sponsors prefer men?

Why assume men are better athletes?

This juxtaposition shows how Marisol took in Moore’s words and ideas from the original text (“In the WTA, because they ride on the coattails of men…they are lucky. If I was a lady player, I would go down on my knees and thank God that Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were born” (Yugur & Kasparian, 2016)) and weaved them into her own words and thinking (“Many people might agree with his claim. They might believe that men did pave the way for women and overall are better at tennis, so, therefore, it’s only fair that they get paid more”), such that her “voice is full of other people’s words” (Bakhtin, 1984). She then responded with two of her own questions that her dialogic interaction with the text had led her to formulate. She used Moore’s view, which she didn’t agree with, as a springboard for her own questioning, thereby creating something new. This is what Bakhtin (1986) refers to as “The peculiarities of polyphony. The lack of finalization of the polyphonic dialogue” (151).

This multi-voiced questioning of pop culture texts characterized other participants’ dialogic interactions, such as when Tom questioned statistics on player salaries in different sports,
asking, “I took it as more, how popular is one sport to another? And how does it change the men’s perspective and the female’s perspective?” (C1, I2). For participants, these questions, formed from dialogic interaction with the texts, lead some participants to their own claims about their topics. It also revealed students using creative, critical thinking when problematizing pop culture texts in dialogic interaction (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Buelow, 2017; Welton, Harris, LaLonde & Moyer, 2015). And Darius and Paul’s teacher-student interaction when working together to (re)construct meaning from lyrics to the song “Precious Cargo” revealed a creative, multi-voiced encounter with that pop culture texts from which a moment of polyphony emerged when Paul said,

I caught on the line, like, ‘You made me sleep on the floor for 17 days/on the floor like a dog’, and he was like…”sleep on the floor. He’s arguing against homelessness”. I was, like, ‘No’…Because, like, in person, like, while he was working though the assignment, we have a conversation. I was like, ‘let’s look at other lines, things that support that idea. Let’s look at the whole text (C2, T12)

Researchers have studied the use of music to dialogue with students and provide a bridge to developing academic literacies and critical media literacy skills (Callahan & Low, 2004; Dyson, 2003). Some researchers have investigated the ways this has been done through analyzing song lyrics. In Darius and Paul’s dialogic encounter, one did not insist the other construct the same understanding but let ongoing ideas and becoming develop creatively between the voices of Paul, Darius, and the lyrics.

In some cases, participants’ openness to an element of surprise characterized their inquisitiveness, such as when Tom surprised me by asking, “What is your point of view on the gender pay gap in sports?” (C1, I1, T). Tom and I engaged in creative, inquisitive, ongoing
development of our ideas that revealed a state of becoming in dialogic interactions between hero and author, based on the hero’s creative questioning.

This theme sought to describe how participants in both cases expressed engagement with pop culture texts through their dialogic interactions on political topics, leading to “becoming” through ongoing dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). Through examining these instances of engagement across cases, I determined they were characterized by questioning the texts, connecting to interests, and expressing insights, as revealed in dialogic interactions. My interpretation of participants’ experiences attempted to show how their openness to an element of surprise, and a sense of creative, multi voiced inquisitiveness allowed moments of polyphony to emerge. I realized the ways individual voices met but did not merge (Bakhtin, 1984) was a useful indicator of the existence of a space for “becoming”. Teacher participants’ collective experiences included a variety of ways of engaging with texts that led to ongoing dialogue. Through examining participants’ interviews, observations, and artifacts within the context of becoming, polyphonic moments were also revealed.

**Theme 3: Shallow and Deep: Understanding Dialogue as Potential**

Once again, I framed this theme in terms of overarching elements related the emergence of polyphonic moments across cases. In this case, presenting my understanding of potential, as revealed in participants’ dialogic interactions, and the ways in which those interactions moved into ongoing, multivoiced dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). I begin with interpretation of the ways participants’ voices in oral dialogue and microdialogue contrasted across cases, as revealed in their specific dialogic interactions, followed by analysis of the conditions under which polyphonic dialogue emerged.

*Contrasting Voices: Oral Dialogue and Microdialogue*
The nature of how and to what extent participants’ interactions with and about pop culture texts expressed potential through a sense of ongoing, multivoiced dialogue emerged as another significant theme across cases. Rooted in Bakhtin’s belief that meaning and understanding “grow…over time”, potential reflects a work’s “capacity to grow in unforeseeable circumstances”, in relationship to the concept of unfinalizability (Moreson & Emerson, 1990). In other words, “The text contains the potential for new meanings, but the specific meanings revealed also require the special contribution of the interpreter and his or her unrepeatable experience” (Moreson, 1990, 289); therefore, moving beyond potential involves engaging in active dialogue. This happened, for example, when Marisol engaged Raymond Moore’s position in microdialogue, wherein multiple voices met but did not come to agreement in an ongoing, internal conversation (Bakhtin, 1984).

Some participants engaged in oral dialogue about texts and topics that held potential for new meanings which was not realized, such as when Paul and Sunny engaged in dialogue about Sonic the Hedgehog and Sunny’s project, tying it to the issue of police brutality. Dan recalled, “I've been trying to encourage him to make that connection from not just using the very thing but bringing it back to us. And it was hard to do that” (C2, TI2). Sunny’s work, and his thinking, contained potentials that could develop into further dialogue in the future. Some participants engaged orally with texts in ways that also kept them at a surface level and did not progress, but held potential, as In Dani’s classroom where there were more limited opportunities for discussion because of the quiet atmosphere. Still others engaged with the texts in ways that did not allow their thinking to develop, as when Lyn chose songs to analyze whose messages they already agreed with, saying, “I just wanted to pick something I was familiar with. I don't really know what to say about them”. Thus, this encounter with a text did not result in active dialogue.

Making Meaning: Polyphonic Voices in Conversations
Once again, understanding how polyphony emerged from participants’ engagement with pop culture texts involved looking at how individual voices met but did not merge across cases, and how that provided a space for moving beyond potential into active dialogue through embracing the element of surprise and engaging in ongoing, multivoiced, dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984). The essential element contributing to the emergence of polyphonic moments in this case was moving beyond potential into active dialogue. Participants engaged in oral dialogue from which polyphonic moments emerged as Paul and his students discussed the issues of police use of force, after the character Khalil was shot by a police officer in *The Hate U Give*.

Paul: The officer who shot Khalil…As you are pretty upset about this, my question to you is…Is there a situation where we shouldn't arrest a police officer for killing someone? Like do police officers ever have the right to kill the citizens of our country?

Darius: If they’re, like, blatantly targeted…like, shooting at the police officer

Paul: Okay, so kind of like a self-defense thing…I think there are many cases where it does happen [police officers shooting civilians]. Do you think it can be justified for children?

Lyn: If it’s in self-defense, in some situations, it’s probably okay

Paul: So the question I have is, do you think riots are necessary? I get looting, probably not, is kind of what I'm hearing…but do we think rioting, when we're not being heard, is it a necessary progression in this conversation?

Lyn: Most of the time riots aren't necessary, but if they are necessary, don't make it to where the whole city's involved” (C2, OBS 1).
In this way, Paul and his students are engaging in dialogue with events from the text, as the author’s perspective, as articulated by Paul, is that what has happened in the book after Kahlil is shot and killed is a complex situation “with lots of sides” (C2, T11).

Teachers who focus on incorporating discussion of controversial public issues have been found to value student voice and power sharing when it comes to curricular decisions (Hess, 2002; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). This is reflected in student discussions such as these, as Paul begins to let students create the initial questions and allows himself to incorporate their ideas as cues for ongoing conversation, such as when a moment of polyphony emerged as Paul was open to taking Darius’s ideas into his own, “Okay, so kind of like a self-defense thing…I think there are many cases where it does happen. Do you think it can be justified for children?”, leading to further developing ideas and moving beyond potentials into active, ongoing dialogue. Paul and Darius’ voices meet, without one subsuming the other, in shared authorship (Bakhtin, 1984). Dysthe (2011) documented how a teacher created “opportunity spaces” for dialogic encounters in high school classrooms that were mainly, otherwise, focused on student achievement on tests (84). The teacher was not without authority, but her ability to build relationships and share power and control with students was the main factor in opening up those dialogic spaces, much like Paul was able to open spaces for conversation in which he shared power with students and pushed their thinking beyond potential into active dialogue, whereas when students engaged individually with the texts, the exchange rarely developed into microdialogue, as students chose pieces they already liked or agreed with, and their thinking remained at a surface level, lacking nuance. However, in most cases, the interaction still raised their awareness of political topics.

Some participants expressed active dialogue as they interacted with texts in microdialogue, or interior dialogue, in which “Dialogue has penetrated inside every word, provoking in it a battle and the interruption of one word by another” (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, when Marisol engaged the essay “This is Personal” by Steph Curry (2018) in
microdialogue, She read and responded to his ideas about how his attitude about the gender pay gap in sports had been affected by being the father of girls. The juxtaposition of these found poems shows the interaction of their ideas,

Every day

Working, working, working

Fathers, daughters, hopes, dreams

(Women’s) basketball

No, wrong message

Just basketball

Work together

Close the gap

Every day

And Marisol’s ideas in response,

Unbelievable

(Women’s) basketball

No, just basketball

Emotional influence

for

Fathers of daughters

150
Who should care about hopes & dreams

They both agree that women’s basketball should be “just basketball”, as Marisol makes the conversation multivoiced through engaging Curry’s language, However she is surprised by his idea, “Not just as ‘fathers of daughters’ or for those sorts of reasons” and responds, “It is unbelievable that many men only seem to care about women’s problems when it impacts their mothers, daughters or grandmothers” In this way, a moment of polyphony emerges from Marisol’s surprise, leading to her insight, “Like Curry, many parents should care about women, not because it influences them emotionally, but because they are human and have dreams and hopes”. The conversation is not closed, but, rather, allowing herself to be surprised by the text engages Marisol with it in an “unrepeatable experience” that is part of an ongoing dialogue with “potentials for the future” (Morson & Emerson, 1990). She did not merge her ideas with Curry’s, but incorporated them into her own developing perspective.

This theme sought to describe how participants in both cases constructed meanings, as revealed in their dialogic interactions, and the ways and the extent to which those interactions with and about pop culture texts expressed potential through ongoing, multivoiced dialogue. Through examining these potentials, I determined they were characterized by moving beyond potential to engage in active dialogue. My interpretation of participants’ experiences attempted to show how being open to an element of surprise and moving beyond potential into active dialogue contributed to opening a space for polyphonic dialogue to emerge.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the dialogic relations of secondary English students and their teachers at two school sites in a Southwestern city, as they interacted with print and non-print pop culture texts related to the topics of sports and/or music, when infused into the curriculum as part of an argumentative writing units on politically sensitive topics. The experiences of teacher and student participants offered insights into the ways they used and responded to the texts, as well as the ways teachers engaged in discussion of political topics with students. Researchers have found teachers are often hesitant to introduce topics that could prove controversial (Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000; Hess, 2002; Dyke, Gordon & Job, 2017), but pop culture texts have been promoted for their ability to engage students in the world around them by providing a connection to their background knowledge and experiences (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Mahiri, 1998; Moje, Ciechanowski, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004; Buelow, 2017; Lefstein & Snell, 2014; Rodesiler, 2021). My hope was to share and interpret both teacher and student voices and illuminate the ways they engaged both popular culture texts and discussion of political topics in their classrooms. Their experiences give us a look at the hopes and challenges of teaching in the political climate surrounding education today, as well as the spaces that emerge when teachers and students engage with pop culture texts on political topics.
In this last chapter, I begin with discussion of the research questions that guided this inquiry and provide a short review of how my data is presented. This was a qualitative case study utilizing polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986, 1992) as my theoretical framework. As such, in presenting data I reconstructed and juxtaposed excerpts of dialogues that emerged from the interviews and other data and described and analyzed them to better understand the dialogical relationships and illustrate the emergence of moments containing polyphonic elements. This juxtaposition allowed for illumination of connections between different voices in the data and allowed me to use juxtaposition as a mode of polyphony. It also illuminated what the story revealed about the encounter with difference in the exchange between self and other, adding layers of interpretation of the data. I also interposed autobiography as inquiry by including reflections on my own autobiographical experiences related to engaging students in dialogue around politically sensitive issues in the English classroom using pop culture texts related to sports and music, incorporating my own dialogic interactions and perspectives related to the discussion in the teacher participants’ classrooms. In some cases, during cross-case analysis, participant dialogues were represented in the form of found data poems (Cooper, Chatfield, Holden & Macias, 2015), constructed from interview transcripts. These juxtapositions highlighted an understanding of participants’ perspectives that related to a common theme and illustrated how dialogue becomes polyphonic. The interpretation below synthesizes my findings and explains how they contribute to the existing literature. Next, I include a researcher reflection, as well as implications for practice and limitations of the study, then end with recommendations for future research.

**Interpretation of Findings**

In chapters four and five, data was organized and presented primarily as a readable thematic analysis. Three themes, with three sub-themes each, were presented for each case. Following each theme, I explicated and contextualized the emergence of polyphonic moments in
the data. This was followed by presentation of cross-case analysis in the form of organized themes. Below, I briefly reflect on participants’ experiences and synthesize general answers to each research question. I will begin with findings as they relate to my three sub questions, followed by findings related to my main research question. The first sub-question follows:

How do students respond to different perspectives embedded in the pop culture texts related to sports and/or music, as revealed in their writing?

Students’ responses to the pop culture texts in their writing revealed the texts were interesting and engaging for all participants. Students repeatedly included words in their writing like “interesting”, “I like this song”, “I love this song” and [it’s] “reaching out towards me” to describe their responses to the texts. That interest led to both engagement with ideas related to political topics and insights and elaboration in their writing. However, interest did not always lead to tolerance of different perspectives. As mentioned previously, Sunny and Lyn often chose to engage with pop culture texts they already liked, or the perspective in the text was one with which they already agreed. While older participants were more likely to engage with texts relating a different perspective, in some cases their writing revealed monologic responses that cut off difference. Participants such as Marisol and Tom, however, were open to different viewpoints in the texts, and responded by engaging in productive struggle with those ideas, leading to insights. Others, like Darius, were able to take in a different perspective and create ongoing understanding by engaging with the text and the teacher participant. Another factor related to this question was that the three student participants in the second case chose to complete the project rather than write an essay, so their written responses were more limited.

Some students, like Tom, came to different understandings as they struggled with the texts, and incorporated those into their writing. Some older students used the texts as support for their own opinions or pulled out facts and statistics to use as evidence, rather than responding to a
different opinion. Others used the sources as part of a concession, including a quote from a source relating a different perspective, then answering with their own evidence. Still others, like Marisol, responded to different perspectives in the texts with inquisitiveness, leading to polyphonic moments.

These examples show the varied ways students responded in their writing to different perspectives in the texts, either choosing those they agreed with, rejecting a different opinion outright, creating meaning with the help of a teacher, using the texts as evidence to support or reinforce their own opinions, or struggling with and questioning different opinions in writing as a springboard to a new understanding. I argue that students’ responses reveal various level of openness to different perspectives. When they were open to different perspectives, the texts acted as a participant, opening a space where they could struggle with and create meaning from pop culture texts on political topics in ways that enriched their own perspectives. I also argue that when the texts were high interest for students, they were more likely to engage with them and elaborate more in their writing. These findings add to literature establishing connections between the use of pop culture texts and the development of students’ academic and critical literacy skills (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Buelow, 2017), by extending it into the realm of discussing politically sensitive topics and showing ways the texts pop culture texts can engage students in writing that can enrich their understanding of other perspectives.

Another sub question relates to students’ use of the texts themselves:

How do students use pop culture texts related to sports and/or music as they relate to differing political perspectives, When in dialogue with themselves, the teacher, and other students?

Most student participants made connections to the texts that increased the potential for raising political awareness and engaging differing perspectives through dialogic interaction with
themselves, their teachers, and other students. Creative and productive tensions emerged as students and teachers engaged in dialogue on political topics. Those tensions affected students’ classroom environments in ways that influenced how they used the texts to make connections with political topics, as well as how they chose texts that presented a different political perspective. Even in a quiet environment there was some discussion, and students could engage with the texts dialogically and experience moments of polyphony. Some students’ dialogic interactions helped them develop their own internally persuasive discourse, as they used the texts to construct their perspectives on political topics through questioning them, as well as using them to support their own opinions. When that took the form of Bakhtinian microdialogue, students took in the political perspectives in the texts and tested those voices against their own, then used them to develop a new perspective, while still remaining in an unfinalized dialogue with the texts. In oral discussion, students used examples from the pop culture texts to support a variety of developing political perspectives.

Several students used those texts to make connections to political issues such as immigration and police brutality when in dialogue with themselves. These were often issues that had either affected their lives or that they already held strong opinions about, although sometimes these were issues that were new to them. When students engaged with their teachers on political topics, they often used the texts to process their thinking and test their internally persuasive discourse against that of the teacher. As participants’ interest in the texts was so high, and polyphonic moments emerged in different environments, I argue that engaging with pop culture texts opened a space to raise students’ political awareness of issues in ways that allowed a multiplicity of voices to emerge. These findings contribute to the existing literature on discussing political topics in secondary classrooms (Hess, 2002; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Hess and Gatti, 2010) by providing additional findings specific to English classrooms and
demonstrating popular culture texts related to sports, music and politics can be used to introduce and facilitate those discussions.

A final sub question relates to the teacher participants’ experiences: How does the teacher engage in discussions of political topics with students in their curriculum and pedagogy, using pop culture texts related to sports and/or music?

Teacher participants expressed feeling creative and productive tensions around incorporating discussion of political topics and texts into their curriculum, given the current political climate surrounding education in their state. This was the first time either of these teachers had discussed a political topic in this way with these students. While they both expressed them, Paul seemed more willing to accept the tensions and dwell in them, forging ahead despite apprehension, whereas Dani continued to distance herself from it until later in the unit, when she began to ascribe more value to opening her classroom to the topic and texts. Accepting tension seemed to be a key element in creating an environment where students could experience multiple perspectives in oral discussion. Teacher participants made choice a part of text selection and discussion topics (a key element of Bakhtinian pedagogy), opening a creative space for several students, even when used as a way to give the teacher some space from the texts and topic. Both teachers kept their personal opinions on the topics private, for the most part, as the tensions surrounding the current political environment are ongoing and unfinalized. This is also true for me as the researcher/author, as I teach within the same context.

Incorporating pop culture texts into their curriculum and pedagogy led to moments of “becoming” for teachers, as they struggled with balancing internally persuasive discourse and authoritative discourse in their classrooms. As I entered into polyphonic moments with teacher participants, I realized getting that balance right is an ongoing tension for all three of us.
The texts afforded a way for teachers to make personal connections with the texts and with students, through oral discussion and microdialogue related to various modes of interaction. Both teacher participants said they would use the texts and units again, as they were useful for teaching argument writing, although the ‘how’ remains unresolved. These findings contribute to research on pedagogy related to introducing and discussing current events in the secondary classroom (Bulow, 2017; Garrett, 2020; Hess & McAvoy, 2015) by finding pop culture texts can facilitate dialogue in different contexts, making them more accessible to English teachers who might otherwise be hesitant or uncomfortable with that process. These findings contribute to the existing literature by adding to the conversation around teachers’ views of political discussion (Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000; Hess, 2002; Dyke, Gordon & Job, 2017), as findings relate teacher participants’ evolving reactions to and reflections on incorporating pop culture texts to introduce political discussion. They also add to the existing literature on dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019; Fecho, Collier, Friese, & Wilson, 2010; Dysthe, 1996), through providing findings related to classroom teachers’ dialogic engagement in political discussion and providing a new framework for presenting moments of polyphony.

Finally, the interpretations above contributed to answering the following primary research question:

What happens to dialogic interactions - particularly during moments of polyphonic dialogue that may emerge - when the teacher integrates pop culture texts related to sports and/or music into an argumentative writing unit on a political topic in a secondary English classroom?

When the teacher participants integrated pop culture texts related to sports and/or music into an argumentative unit on a political topic in each of the secondary classrooms, the dialogic interactions of the fifteen student participants and two teacher participants revealed different degrees of engagement with the perspectives embedded in those texts. When interactions were
monologic, it was revealed more often in participants’ written responses. Sunny and Lyn often chose to engage with pop culture texts they already liked, for example, or the perspective related in the text was one with which participants already agreed. This happened most often among younger participants. Older participants were more likely to engage with texts relating a different perspective than their own; however, even then, monologic interactions resulted when participants merely cut the differing opinion off with written responses, or merely repeated the claim made in the text then repeated their own position rather than engaging the other voice in dialogue. Younger participants were often hindered by a lack of depth in their thinking, such as when Sunny had difficulty connecting Sonic characters to present issues of police brutality. Paul reflected that when incorporating pop culture texts in the future, he would probably introduce them differently, so there would be more oral discussion of the texts beforehand. So, it may have been that without previous discussion to introduce the written assignment, students were only thinking about what they liked or agreed with in the texts. In Dani’s classrooms, students discussed the ideas in their chosen texts with partners, but they were not required to specifically discuss other perspectives, and the oral discussion was limited to a degree by the authoritative discourse of the teacher.

When dialogic interactions reflected an engagement with multiple perspectives, this was often facilitated by participants’ curiosity about or questioning of the texts, opening a space for engaging in unfinalized dialogue that raised awareness of difference and multiple points of view. Sometimes this occurred during oral dialogic encounters after students had read the text, such as when Paul opened their thinking through questioning during classroom discussion of The Hate U Give. Sometimes it happened during participants’ Bakhtinian microdialogue with pop culture texts, such as in Dani’s classroom, reflecting the ways classroom structure affected dialogic interactions. Student-student dialogic interactions were the least frequent mode, and student-text the most frequent. When student-student dialogic interactions did result in engagement with a
different perspective, they were most often facilitated by the teacher, or they happened during peer feedback.

Some polyphonic moments emerged from dialogic interactions when the teacher integrated pop culture texts into their units. These moments opened a constructive space for holding unfinalizable tensions that emerged for participants as they negotiated public and personal dimensions of dialogue. Dialogue most often became polyphonic as participants were surprised by a fact or idea presented in the text, leading them to ongoing questioning or development of a different idea. In tensioned encounters, a choice to dwell in tensions – to stay in place and not push against it - and an openness to others’ perspectives characterized polyphonic interactions. Sometimes these moments developed when I, as the researcher, was surprised during creative dialogic interactions with Tom, or during interactions with teacher participants Dani and Paul, as they were engaged in working through tensions of “becoming” as teachers, or as Paul and Darius engaged in dialogue to create new understandings.

Sometimes these moments emerged as participants like Marisol and Tom developed their own internally persuasive discourse through engaging creativity and inquisitiveness. Other times they emerged during unfinalized questioning, as Paul facilitated class discussion, or as participants moved beyond potential into active, multi-voiced dialogue. All cases of the emergence of polyphony were characterized by engagement of individual voices that intersected but did not merge, such as Marisol taking in Raymond Moore’s words, then using them to develop her own perspective. The texts and questioning also stimulated critical thinking, resulting in students’ development of their own ideas as they negotiated meaning in political topics with texts that made them less abstract. Pop culture, politics and becoming all connected in time and space, in a state of constant change. I argue that in all cases, the texts functioned as a participant in opening spaces for the emergence of polyphony, in conjunction with the above elements. Therefore, I argue high interest pop culture texts that relate to students’ interests, such as song
lyrics and opinion articles by sports figures, should be used to facilitate discussion of politically sensitive topics in the secondary ELA classroom, as they can enhance students’ creativity, act as a participant in the emergence of multiple perspectives, contribute to teachers’ ongoing becoming, and increase students’ awareness of political issues.

These findings extend the current research on dialogic pedagogy at the secondary English level (Matusov, et. al, 2019; Dysthe, 1998, 2011) by revealing the conditions under which dialogic interactions can lead to the emergence of polyphony when secondary students engage with pop culture texts related to sports and/or music. It also adds to literature establishing the link between discussion of political topics in secondary classrooms and the development of critical thinking skills (Hess, 2002; Chicago, Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000; Hall, 2011), particularly studies in secondary English classrooms (Buelow, 2017; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008) through illustrating that link in a different context.

**Researcher Reflection**

As my study of the dialogic interactions of my student and teacher participants at two secondary school sites comes to a close, I will now reflect on the research process and my subjectivities. While I kept a research journal throughout the process of data collection and data analysis, there were still many surprises and insights that came together for me as I reflected on the process as a whole. For one thing, I knew from reflecting on and writing about my researcher subjectivities earlier, that my experiences could be intertwined with data analysis; that was part of the point, after all. What surprised me was the extent to which I became part of the research process, in a way, as I interviewed teachers about their experiences and my own subjectivities interacted with theirs. This is something I wasn’t quite as aware of as it was happening, but through the process of data analysis, and in writing up my findings, I realize how personal this study has been for me. For example, I knew I would need to be aware of my own lens as a
classroom teacher, as I would be observing other classroom teachers, but I didn’t realize that my own lens would become part of the data, such as when I interviewed Dani, and my voice became part of a moment of polyphony. That dialogue emerged out of my lenses about how classrooms should feel and sound– my own ethos as an educator.

Likewise, I had another insight when I realized mine was one of the voices in Marisol’s dialogue with the Curry text and the text containing the Raymond Moore interview. In reviewing the interview transcripts, I realized in engaging in dialogue with me about the texts and bringing in Moore’s words and her responses to them, Marisol was bringing me into her multi voiced dialogue. This also happened when Tom and I had the polyphonic exchange at the end of his interview, when we engaged in an unfinalized dialogue around the topic and texts.

I wrote in chapter 1, “I want to make sure I do not impose my own will on those decisions, as the teacher and students, as “consciousnesses with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6), are joint participants and inquirers/learners in this study. While I did not impose my will on teacher participants, or try to change anything they planned, once again my subjectivities came into play as I listened to Dan reflect on the process of teaching the unit in his classroom. As I mentioned previously, I had difficulty recruiting a second teacher participant, and when Paul agreed to be in the study, since he was already preparing to teach The Hate U Give, we decided he would work the other pop culture texts into his existing argumentative unit. In his second interview, he reflected on what he would like to do differently next time he teaches the unit. This brought up a memory for me of when my students engaged in a collaborative discussion. I hadn’t thought about it too much at the time, but in reflecting I realized this was an instance where including my voice as a teacher allowed me to let the teacher participant work through his thinking without imposing my will or suggesting what direction he should take.

Limitations of the Study
This study is a “rich and holistic account of a phenomenon”, which “offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers experiences” (Merriam, 1988, p. 32), in line with the aims of case study research. One of the limitations of this study is that it utilizes a small sample size and a limited age range of students, limiting generalizability to other ages or other groups of students. However, by providing thick description of the participants and setting, transferability (Patton, 2015) provides the basis in qualitative research. This study could benefit from a third case, or from additional participants, to add another layer to the data. However, the findings provide a snapshot of the participants and their classroom settings, so these limitations do not negate the benefits of this case study.

**Implications for Practice**

One very interesting part of this process was listening to Paul and Dani talk about their individual practice, such as their thought processes in choosing texts and designing projects. I kept thinking of ideas I could share, or thinking about what texts I might choose, or how I could adapt pieces of what they had done in my own classroom. Seeing the high interest level when participants engaged with pop culture texts, and the ensuing dialogues, made me consider the value in disseminating these strategies to other teachers in professional development. Now more than ever, teachers need professional development in which they have opportunities to engage with pop culture texts themselves. This study shows teachers can still incorporate discussion of sensitive political issues in their classrooms, in different contexts. Therefore, I contend that now, more than ever, teachers need professional development in which they have opportunities to engage with pop culture texts themselves and learn and practice new strategies for using them to facilitate discussion of current issues in ways that can engage student interest and open spaces for unfinalized dialogue. Administrators can also support teachers by providing resource guides and professional development on responding to issues that could potentially arise when teaching controversial issues in the secondary classrooms.
Dani and Paul both had administrative support for the content they were teaching and had at least some flexibility in choosing texts and designing lessons. Of course, realistically, many school districts in the current climate have mandated curriculum teachers are expected to adhere to; however, those materials often contain texts that engage political topics. As this study supports previous literature establishing that such texts are high-interest for students (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Buelow, 2017), and it also shows engagement stemming from that interest could lead to elaboration in writing, I would suggest district-level curriculum designers could benefit from designing ways for teachers to incorporate pop culture texts into their existing curriculum, such as curating pop culture text sets that could be used as companion pieces with mandated texts, to facilitate and enrich discussion of the political topics in curriculum teachers currently use.

Finally, incorporating choice and student voice are essential components of dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, et. al., 2019), and in this case study, choice was clearly an important component of each unit that had an impact on students’ creativity and engagement. It is important for school administrators to support teachers in taking risks in their classrooms and trying new things. Paul, for example, expressed some trepidation when it came to letting students create group discussion questions, and even though Dani used choice as a way to put some distance between herself and their topic choices, she was taking a risk in opening her classroom to student engagement with a political topic. Those risks turned out to be essential elements that contributed to the emergence of polyphonic moments in their classrooms. Therefore, this study shows teachers judgment should be trusted, and they should be supported in trusting their instincts and taking risks, as they can lead to moments of “becoming” for themselves and their students.

**Future Research**
Given the findings of this study, there are a few possible directions to consider for future research. First, in this inquiry I have provided a new framework for presenting data capturing moments of polyphony through three different modes of analysis: traditional narratives, reconstruction of dialogue, and juxtaposition of found poems created from participant interviews and artifacts, capturing the essence of their dialogic interactions. Future research could focus on a study of the framework itself, as a possible contribution to qualitative research methodology, using a post-structural research lens. It could also be utilized as part of a similarly designed study carried out in a different context, such as a rural school setting, enriching understanding of the essence of participants’ interactions and experiences.

Because each of the participants at Westside Charter elected to complete the project instead of the argument essay at the end of the unit, data in that case was primary collected from oral interactions, with more limited written responses, while much of the data in the first case came from written responses, with less from oral interactions. I found myself wondering what this study would look like if the focus was intentionally on writing and if participants in both cases were at the same grade level. While this study yielded rich data, examining dialogic interactions in argument writing through the lens of polyphonic dialogue could inform curriculum design for writing instruction by offering additional insights into the ways students use and talk about pop culture texts in developing a piece of writing responding to a contemporary topic and considering multiple points of view.

Finally, another area for future inquiry could be researching school administrators’ perspectives regarding creating spaces for this kind of dialogue in public schools. Since school administrators are often the school personnel tasked with carrying out policies, this kind of study could inform our understanding of the restrictions and possibilities of public schools when it comes to creating space for political discussion.
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*Equity and Excellence in Education*, 48(4), 549-570.


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: First Teacher Participant Interview

1. Would you mind talking to me a little about a teacher or classroom experience that’s left an impression on you this school year? (warm-up/rapport question)

2. I’m interested in hearing about pop culture that you’re interested in. (warm up question)
   a. Could you tell me the names of some of the music artists you like and their most popular songs?
   b. What are some of the aspects of their songs/lyrics or the artists themselves that you find really cool?
   c. Are there sports figures you really like? If so, tell me about a couple of them
   d. Do you have any favorite podcasts? If so, tell me about one of them.
   e. Do you have a Netflix watch list? If so, do you mind telling me what’s on it?

      Tell me what you experience (see, feel, hear, taste, etc.) when you watch or listen to them

3. Have you had previous experiences teaching argument writing? If so, would you mind telling me about what those experiences were like?
4. Could you talk to me a little about your feelings about using pop culture texts to teach argument writing?

5. Would you mind telling me about one of the pop culture texts you’ve incorporated into writing or discussion so far in this unit in that stands out in your mind, or you had a particularly strong reaction to? How did you use it?

6. Do you often discuss politically sensitive topics with your students? If so, can you tell me a little about that? If you don’t, would you mind telling me a little bit about why not?

7. What did you think about asking students to write about their opinion on a political issue in class this week?

8. Was there a time you encountered an idea or opinion in one of the texts that differed from your own? If so, would you mind telling me what that experience was like?

9. How did you respond in teaching pop culture texts that related differing perspectives?

10. Has there been a time in the unit you encountered an idea in dialogue with students that was different than your own? If so, would you mind telling me what that experience was like?

11. What did you notice so far, if anything, about using pop culture to engage students in discussion of politically sensitive topics?

12. Is there anything else you’d like to share that I haven’t asked about?
APPENDIX B: Second Teacher Participant Interview

1. Would you mind talking to me about something that’s stood out for you in school this week? (rapport question)

2. What are your thoughts about some of the ways people are currently dealing with difference when it comes to discussing politically sensitive topics? What have you noticed, if anything?

3. Can you walk me through a couple of the pop culture texts you used and talk about why you chose them?

4. How did you put these texts together in the unit (i.e., in arranging curriculum and pedagogy)?

5. Have there been any changes in your thinking about engaging in discussion of politically sensitive topics with students over the course of the unit? If so, could you talk to me a little bit about those?

6. What did you learn, if anything, about using non-print pop culture texts to engage students in argument writing?

7. Would you mind talking to me a little bit about how the students responded to the pop culture texts or how they used them?

8. How do you respond as a teacher to students’ encountering a text that presents a different perspective than theirs on the topic?

9. Did the text itself play into how you thought about approaching discussion of a politically sensitive issue? If so, would you mind telling me a little bit about that?

10. Looking at these samples of students’ writing from the unit, what do you notice?
11. Have there been any moments when you noticed students were discussing ideas on which they had differing perspectives? Could you describe what happened?

12. Would you mind talking to me about any additional things you learned, or insights have you had, if any, about using these pop culture texts to discuss politically sensitive topics with students?

13. If you were to teach this unit again, do you think you would make any adjustments or change anything? If so, what would you do differently?

14. Is there anything else you’d like to share that I haven’t asked about?
APPENDIX C: First Student Participant Interview

1. I’m interested in what’s popular with teenagers. (warm-up question)
   a. Could you tell me the names of some of the music artists that you and your peers talk
      about and the names of their most popular songs?
   b. What are some of the aspects of their songs/lyrics or the artists themselves that you find
      really cool?
   c. Are there music artists you really like? If so, tell me about a couple of them.
   d. Are there sports figures you really like? If so, tell me about a couple of them
   e. Do you have any favorite podcasts? If so, tell me about one of them.
   f. Do you have a Netflix watch list? If so, can you tell me about it?
      Tell me what you experience (see, feel, hear, taste, etc.) when you watch or listen to them

2. Have you had previous experiences writing about your opinion? If so, would you mind
   telling me about what those experiences were like?

3. What do you think about using pop culture in the classroom?

4. Would you mind telling me about one way you’ve used pop culture so far in this unit, in
   writing or discussion, that stands out in your mind?

5. Do you talk about current events with your classmates at all? If so, would you mind
   telling me a little about that?

6. What is a political event that you have written on recently in class? How did you feel
   about this exercise? What are some things you liked/disliked?

7. Was there an idea or opinion in one of the pieces you’ve encountered during these first
   few days of the unit that was different from your own? If so, how did you respond?
8. Has there been a time during the first three days of the unit, when you were talking with your teacher or classmates, that you encountered an idea that was different from your own? If so, would you mind telling me what that experience was like?

9. What did you notice, if anything, about the way your teacher has worked in pop culture during the first three days of this unit?

10. What, if anything, have you learned these first few days of the unit from discussing pop culture with your teacher and/or classmates?

11. Is there anything else you’d like to share that I haven’t asked about?
APPENDIX D: Second Student Participant Interview

1. Can you talk to me about something in school that’s stood out for you this week? (rapport question)

2. Would you mind telling me about anything you’ve learned about coming in contact with ideas on a topic that differ from your own over the last couple of weeks?

3. Can you talk to me about what you were thinking about when you used one of these texts that contained a perspective that was different from yours?

4. Looking at your writing (hand to interviewee), can you describe for me how you incorporated the pop culture texts? What were you looking at, thinking about, or remembering about it? Take me through that process.

5. Did the text itself play into how you thought about the issue, or a perspective that differed from yours? If so, would you mind telling me a little bit about that?

6. What differences, if any, do you notice about your writings from the beginning of the unit until now?

7. What do you think may account for any change in your writings? How, if at all, are the pop culture texts related to that?

8. Would you mind telling me about any additional things you’ve learned, or insights you’ve had in discussion with your classmates, about using pop culture as part of making an argument?

9. If you were to participate in this unit again, is there anything you think might be done differently? If so, what would you adjust or change?

10. Is there anything else you’d like to share that I haven’t asked about?
ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING UNIT: TRUE CRIME: THE DEATH PENALTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Activities/Materials/Strategies/Assessments</th>
<th>Skill</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1-2</td>
<td>Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson? Introducing the topic of capital punishment by examining/discussing the primary source “1911 Wyoming State Prison Baseball Team”</td>
<td>ELA objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guide students in filling out the LOC Primary Source Analysis Tool (whole class discussion or in pairs)</td>
<td>R1.11-12: Cite strong textual evidence to support analysis of the text, including where the text leaves matters uncertain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students share and discuss one or two questions they have about the source with a partner and write at least one on a sticky note</td>
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<td>• Read the article “The Death Row Inmates Forced to Play Baseball for Their Lives” that tells the story of the team in the photograph (individually or as a group). Guide students in connecting the photograph and the article and discuss the main rhetorical elements, given the information in the article (speaker, audience, purpose, context). Focus on the claim the speaker is making, given the relationship between the speaker (M.F. Juke/the prison) and the audience (both the people of Rawlins, WY in 1911 and possibly a wider audience). Ask students to support their idea about the claim with at least two pieces of evidence from the photograph (students draw rhetorical triangle and write claim and evidence at the bottom of their LOC primary source tool).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students add another question to their post it about the death penalty and stick the post its together on a piece of chart paper (teacher models questioning and adds a post it)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students write in a Canvas discussion board or in journals, in response to the question, “What are your initial thoughts about capital punishment? What are you wondering about it? What might be some similarities and differences between the practice in 1911 and today, from what you read in the article? What claim do you think the photograph is making about the death penalty and the lives of the men in the picture?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Students respond to a classmate (on the discussion board or in pairs)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Photograph of “1911 Wyoming State Prison Baseball Team” (also in the article below):</td>
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- Primary Source Analysis Tool: https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/documents/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool_LOC.pdf
- LOC digital collections: https://www.loc.gov/photos/?q=capital+punishment
- Chromebooks and/or journals and handouts
- Post it notes and chart paper

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
The photograph of the “1911 Wyoming State Prison Baseball Team” (analyze the main rhetorical elements and identify a claim) and the New York Post article (summarizing background information and connecting to the photograph)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Pair/group work with the Primary Source Tool
- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the analysis tool for students
- Go to LOC.gov and search the digital collections to find another image related to the issue of capital punishment that they find compelling, post the image in Canvas on the discussion board thread (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
- Complete LOC Primary Source Analysis Tool with rhetorical triangle, claim and evidence
- Discussion board or journal entry
- Questions on post its/chart paper

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2.1-2</th>
<th>Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?</th>
<th>ELA learning objectives</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choose a few student questions on the chart from day one and</td>
<td>RI1.11-12: Cite</td>
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</table>
- Students fill in the first line of the “It Says/I Say” chart to review the source, “1911 Wyoming State Prison Baseball Team” (as a group, on handouts or computer, with teacher modeling)
- Students read, annotate, and discuss the opinion piece, “Kareem Abdul Jabbar: Abolish the Death Penalty” (including the embedded surveys and other evidence) identifying claims and evidence and clarifying concepts and vocabulary as needed (whole group, teacher led)
- Fill in second line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group)
- Students share and discuss one or two questions they have about the essay with a partner and write at least one on a sticky note
- Watch the video “Parkland Parent Wants Daughter's Killer to Pay ‘Ultimate Price,’ Pushes for Death Penalty”, identifying claims and evidence. Fill in the third line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group), guiding students in identifying the claims being made within the video, so they understand there can be multiple sources/positions conveyed within a source.
- Students add another question to their post it about what they are wondering about the tensions between the two sources (teacher models questioning and adds a post it – add post its to chart paper)
- Students write in a Canvas discussion board or in journals, in response to the questions, “What are your feelings about capital punishment after analyzing the last two sources? How do you feel about the tension between the positions they hold? Does either text influence you? Why or why not? Students respond to a different classmate (on the discussion board or with written feedback in journals)

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
- “1911 Wyoming State Prison Baseball Team”
- “Kareem Abdul Jabbar: Abolish the Death Penalty”:
- Post it with questions on chart paper
- “Parkland Parent Wants Daughter's Killer to Pay ‘Ultimate Price,’ Pushes for Death Penalty”:
- They Say/I Say chart:
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vTVnA0hekXOWwMXkH47NvHBV-dT2f60eGtAX67H-CV0/edit?usp=sharing

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
“1911 Wyoming State Prison Baseball Team” (They Say/I Say chart)
Kareem Abdul Jabbar opinion piece (They Say/I Say chart) and news story video about Parkland trial (They Say/I Say chart)

| SL1.11-12: | Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues |
| W.8.11-12: | Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess the strengths and limitations of each. |
| Which skills will students be practicing during this lesson? | Comprehension Analysis Reflective writing Developing an argument |

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<table>
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<th>3. 1-2</th>
<th>Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?</th>
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<td>Choose a few student questions on the chart from day two and project them for the class to discuss (anonymously - 5 min)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students read Russell Westbrook’s letter for Julius Jones in pairs, aloud, then write in their journals or Canvas about their reactions to and questions about the source.</td>
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<td>Annotate the letter (as a group, teacher led) identifying claims and evidence and clarifying concepts and vocabulary as needed.</td>
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<td>Fill in fourth line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Read and annotate the opinion piece, “Everyone on death row gets a lawyer. Not everyone gets a Kim Kardashian” identifying claims and evidence and noting/discussing connections to the Julius Jones case and the Parkland case (in terms of admission of guilt and issue of remorse and implications for the death penalty). Fill in the fifth line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students write in a Canvas discussion board or in journals, in response to the questions, “Which of the sources resonate with you so far? Which ones do you want to push back against? Which ones have given you something new to think about? What are your feelings about capital punishment after analyzing the last two sources?” Students respond to a classmate (on the discussion board or with written feedback in journals)</td>
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What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Pair/group work with the “It Says/I Say” chart
- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the chart for students/translation available
- Locate another digital source related to the issue of capital punishment that the student finds compelling, add it to the chart and post the source in Canvas on the discussion board thread (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
- Complete first three lines of “It Says/I Say” chart
- Complete discussion board or journal entry
- Post it notes on chart paper

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<tr>
<th>193</th>
<th>ELA learning objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RI1.11-12: Cite strong textual evidence to support analysis of the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain</td>
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<tr>
<td>SL1.11-12: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>W.8.11-12: Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess the strengths and limitations of each</td>
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</table>

Which skills
Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
Russell Westbrook letter for Julius Jones (“It Says/I Say” chart)
“Everyone on Death Row Gets a Lawyer. Not everyone gets a Kim Kardashian” (“It Says/I Say” chart)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Pair/group work with the “It Says/I Say” chart
- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the chart for students/translation available
- Locate another letter related to the issue of capital punishment that the student finds compelling, add it to their chart and post the source in Canvas on the discussion board thread (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
- Complete fourth and fifth lines of “It Says/I Say” chart
- Complete discussion board or journal entry

4.1-2 Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?
- Choose a few student questions on the chart from day two and project them for the class to discuss (anonymously - 5 min)
- Students read Russell Westbrook’s letter for Julius Jones in pairs, aloud, then write in their journals or Canvas about their reactions to and questions about the source.
- Annotate the letter (as a group, teacher led) identifying claims and evidence and clarifying concepts and vocabulary as needed.
- Fill in fourth line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group)
- Read and annotate the opinion piece, “Everyone on death row gets a lawyer. Not everyone gets a Kim Kardashian” identifying claims and evidence and noting/discussing connections to the Julius Jones case and the Parkland case (in terms of admission of guilt and issue of remorse and implications for the death penalty). Fill in the fifth line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group).
- Students write in a Canvas discussion board or in journals, in response to the questions, “Which of the sources resonate with you so far? Which ones do you want to push back against? Which ones have given you something new to think about? What are your feelings about capital punishment after analyzing the last two sources?” Students respond to a classmate (on the discussion board or with written feedback in journals)

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Choose a few student reflections from day three journaling and project them for the class to discuss to stimulate thinking and synthesis of ideas/texts (anonymously - 5 min)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students read, annotate, and discuss the news article, “NBA’s Stephen Jackson says Minneapolis policeman who killed George Floyd deserves death penalty”, identifying claims and evidence and clarifying concepts and vocabulary as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fill in sixth line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Play the song “Ellis, Unit One” for the class, as they read the lyric sheet. Students then read and annotate the song lyrics, identifying claims and evidence. Fill in the seventh line of “It Says/I Say” chart and discuss (as a group).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students write on a Canvas discussion board or in journals, in response to the questions, “How do the last two sources contrast in terms of their perspectives on the death penalty? These texts are both full of emotion – did either one move you? Did either affect your opinion on the topic? Students respond to a classmate who</td>
</tr>
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</table>
relates a perspective different from their own (on the discussion board or with written feedback in journals)

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
- “NBA’s Stephen Jackson says Minneapolis policeman who killed George Floyd deserves death penalty”:
- Song – “Ellis Unit One” by Steve Earle:
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Tc700Yi8KQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Tc700Yi8KQ)
- “It Says/I Say” chart:
  [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vTVnA0hekXOWMXkH47NvHBV-dfTfl60eGtAX67H-CV0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vTVnA0hekXOWMXkH47NvHBV-dfTfl60eGtAX67H-CV0/edit?usp=sharing)
- Chromebook and/or journal

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
- “NBA’s Stephen Jackson says Minneapolis policeman who killed George Floyd deserves death penalty” (“It Says/I Say” chart)
- Song – “Ellis Unit One” by Steve Earle (“It Says/I Say” chart)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Pair/group work with the “It Says/I Say” chart
- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the chart for students/translation available
- Locate another song related to the issue of capital punishment that the student finds compelling, add it to their chart and post the source in Canvas on the discussion board thread (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
- Complete sixth and seventh lines of “It Says/I Say” chart
- Complete discussion board or journal entry

5.1-2 Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?
- Students summarize on post-its some of the different perspectives on the death penalty from the sources. Next, they write their own “I Say” perspectives. Students post the sources perspectives on a continuum on the wall and then place their perspectives where they fall within the sources. Discuss (5 min).
- Play the Jason Flom interview for students
- Go to the podcast website and demonstrate how to access individual episodes
- Students choose a podcast to listen to (individually or in pairs), from the capital murder cases (episodes #234, #238 (Jones), #210 (Glossip), #257, #268, #246) then add the source to the eighth line of their charts

ELA learning objectives
- RI1.11-12: Cite strong textual evidence to support analysis of the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain
- SL1.11-12:
• Students write in a Canvas discussion board or in journals, in response to the questions, “Write about the podcast you listened to. What was the case? Why did you choose it? What are two things that were compelling about the evidence you chose? What did you hear that was different from your own opinion? Students respond to a classmate (on the discussion board or with written feedback in journals)

• In their journals or Canvas, students respond to the question, “How has your perspective come in contact with different ideas in the sources? Have any challenged your own thinking and given you something different to think about?

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
• Wrongful Conviction Podcast:
• “It Says/I Say” chart:
  https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vTVnA0hekXOWwMXkH47NyHBV-dT2l60eGtAX67H-CV0/edit?usp=sharing
• Chromebooks and/or journals
• Post its

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
“Wrongful Conviction” podcast (selecting evidence)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
• Pair/group work with the “It Says/I Say” chart
• Teacher modeling of the process
• Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the chart for students/translation available
• Locate another podcast related to the issue of capital punishment that the student finds compelling, add it to their chart and post the source in Canvas on the discussion board thread (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
• Complete eighth line of “It Says/I Say” chart
• Complete discussion board or journal entry

6.1 Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?
• Brainstorm all the areas of the issue of capital punishment that the sources address (on chart paper), i.e., celebrity influence on the outcomes of death penalty cases, whether remorse should be a factor, etc.
• Model writing a claim about the topic for students
• Students write their own claims at the top of the “Planning a line of reasoning” chart and read aloud to a partner
• Review final column of “It Says/I Say” chart with students

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues

W.8.11-12: Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess the strengths and limitations of each.

Which skills will students be practicing during this lesson?

Comprehension
Analysis
Reflective writing
Developing an argument

ELA learning objectives

W.8.11-12: Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess the strengths and limitations of each.
- Model how to select and highlight 5-6 pieces of strong evidence and at least one piece of evidence to counter
- Students work individually to choose evidence and fill out the left side of their chart.

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
- Planning a line of reasoning chart: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hPYgYK810w4ttrxuN1ujuNERQZEHP4Z1HM6nMOVIP4/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hPYgYK810w4ttrxuN1ujuNERQZEHP4Z1HM6nMOVIP4/edit?usp=sharing)
- “It Says/I Say” chart: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vTVnA0hekXOwMXkH47NvHBV-6T2f60eGtAX67H-CV0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vTVnA0hekXOwMXkH47NvHBV-6T2f60eGtAX67H-CV0/edit?usp=sharing)
- Chromebooks and/or journals

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
All 8 sources (selecting evidence for argument)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Pair/group work with the “Planning a line of reasoning” chart
- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the chart for students to write claims/translation available
- Plan an outline of argument (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
Completed “Planning a line of reasoning” chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.1</th>
<th>Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write a 200-300 word discussion board or journal response to the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reread two of the print sources (“NBA’s Stephen Jackson…”; “Kareem Abdul Jabbar…”; Westbrook letter for Jones; “Everyone on Death Row Gets a Lawyer…”), and then put them into conversation with each other, with you, and with one of the non-print sources (“1911 Wyoming State Baseball Team” – photo; “Ellis, Unit One” – song; “Parkland Parent…” - video)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the following questions to guide your thinking:

What are the different claims made and opinions being expressed? What do they have to say to each other? Where do they agree and disagree with each other and with you (bring your own voice into the conversation)? You can use the sentence stems below):

Sentence Stems for Talking to Sources:
- Yes, and ...
- Yes, but ...
- No, because ...

ELA learning objectives
W.8.11-12: Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess the strengths and limitations of each. Integrate information into the text selectively to avoid plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and follow a standard format for citation
Respectful Agreement

- “I agree with _____ because _____. To build on that, I would add ______.”
- “I agree with _____; and on the other hand, ______.”

Respectful Disagreement

- “I disagree with _____ because _____.

“I can see that _____ says ________; however, I disagree with _____ because

- Respond to at least one classmate who has expressed an opinion that contrasts with yours and answer them (you don't have to have a completely different opinion; you can just find a piece that's slightly different from your own or gives a different take on something you basically agree with). Address what they are saying. Are there parts of what they are saying that you differ in opinion on? What reasons can you give why your opinion is more valid? What can you give them to think about or add to what they have to say? (100-150 words).

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?

- The eight sources students have been working with
- Chromebooks and/or journals

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
The three sources they are choosing to write about (putting into conversation in discussion board response)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?

- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the chart for students to complete chart/translation available
- Plan an outline of argument (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?

Complete discussion board or journal entry demonstrating students putting the sources in conversation with each other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?</th>
<th>ELA learning objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce the sample argumentative essay outline and demonstrate how to make connections to their chart (using a student example)</td>
<td>W.8.11-12: Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
- Sample argumentative essay outline (PDF)
- Chromebooks and/or journals
- Planning a line of reasoning chart: [link to Google Doc]

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
The three or four texts that contain their selected evidence

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Extended time for writing/resource room
- Graphic/visual outline tools (Sutori)
- Teacher modeling of the process
- Sentence stems on the board or added to hardcopies of the argumentative essay outline for students to write draft/translation available
- Create a visual model of argument in Sutori (accelerated).

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?
First draft of argument essay

### 10.1 Task/Activities: What will the teacher and students be doing during the lesson?
- Guided circle discussion using the sources students put in conversation in their drafts
- Students bring their sources and drafts to the discussion
- One student is a moderator and initiates discussion, and the other students find entry points using four compelling quotes they’ve chosen from their sources and three questions they have related to the topic/sources (following the guidelines for guided discussion)

What materials are needed (handouts, technology, websites, etc.)?
- Guidelines for guided discussion (PDF)
- Students’ chosen texts

Which pop culture texts will students be interacting with in this lesson and how?
The texts students bring (for discussion)

Which strategies are used to address differentiation for ELD, SPED and accelerated students?
- Sentence stems for entering the conversation and writing questions
- Written response to one of the opinions expressed in the discussion (accelerated)

Which formative or summative assessment(s) or work products are used to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and skills students learn during the lesson?

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Strengths and limitations of each. Integrate information into the text selectively to avoid plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and follow a standard format for citation.

Which skills will students be practicing during this lesson?
Develop an argument citing sources

RI1.11-12: Cite strong textual evidence to support analysis of the text, including where the text leaves matters uncertain.

SL1.11-12: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues.

Which skills will students be practicing during this lesson?
| At least two contributions to the discussion that reflect a position supported with evidence and at least one question put forth for discussion | Developing an argument  
Comprehension  
Analysis  
Participating in respectful discussion  
Citing sources |
APPENDIX F: IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 06/06/2022
Application Number: IRB-22-177
Proposal Title: Engaging with Sports, Music and Politics: Popular Culture and Political Dialogue in the Secondary English Classroom

Principal Investigator: Jo Flory
Co-Investigator(s): Hongyu Wang
Faculty Adviser: Hongyu Wang
Project Coordinator: Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Expedited
Expedited Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved
Approval Date: 06/04/2022

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent, and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a status report to the IRB when requested
3. Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
4. Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the OSU IRB and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
5. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB
APPENDIX G: Parent/Guardian Permission Form

CONSENT/PERMISSION FORM
Engaging with Sports, Music, and Politics: Popular Culture and Political Dialogue in the Secondary English Classroom

Background Information
Your child is invited to participate in a research study of the dialogic relations of high school English students and their teachers, as they interact with print and non-print pop culture texts related to the topics of sports and music when infused into the curriculum as part of an argumentative writing unit on a politically sensitive topic. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to participate in the study. Your child’s participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and your child is free to withdraw their consent to participate at any time. If your student is being interviewed as part of the study, they can skip any questions that make them uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. If a class discussion is being videotaped, they may ask for the recording to be stopped at any time. Your decision whether or not to consent for your child to participate in this study will not affect their grades or educational experience in any way.

This study is being conducted by: Jo Flory, Doctoral Candidate - Curriculum Studies, Oklahoma State University under the direction of Dr. Hongyu Wang, Oklahoma State University.

Procedures
If you give your consent for your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to do the following things: Participate in their English teacher’s argumentative writing unit and agree to the usage and/or publishing of any student work, photographs, and video or audiotaped materials collected during the unit, and read, write about, and discuss print and non-print pop culture texts related to sports and music on a political topic in the unit. Student work produced during the unit may include pre-writing graphic organizers, used to capture those ongoing thought processes and responses, as well as student writing on discussion boards, in journals and in formal essays. Students will also participate in small group and whole class discussions of the texts. Two or three students will also be invited to participate in two interviews lasting about 45-55 minutes each, to find out about their experiences during the unit and their reactions to the pop culture materials their teacher uses. The first interview will be conducted during the end of the first week of the unit, and the students will answer questions about their perceptions of the topics and the texts, as well as their thinking processes regarding constructing and responding to arguments. The second interview will be conducted near the end of the final week of the unit and will focus on their reflections on their student work documents and the unit as a whole.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: Participation does not involve any time commitment beyond the regular school day. If your child is one of the two or three students invited to participate in two 45-55 minute interviews, the primary investigator will conduct each of those individual interviews during the school day, in a quiet location, at a time that is convenient for the student (e.g., in a private space in the library during the students' study period or the teacher's classroom during their planning period).

Compensation
Your child will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Risks
There is a potential risk in the discussion of topics which some participants may consider sensitive, which is minimized, as the teacher will retain full control over the topics and texts discussed over the course of the unit. Regarding any audio or video taping of class discussions or interviews that may be conducted, both student and teacher participants will have the right to withdraw at any time (including the right to withdraw from specific parts of the study, such as an interview or recorded discussion). Participants will still complete the same graded activities.
APPENDIX H: Student Participant Assent Form

School of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies
Curriculum Studies

ASSENT FORM

Engaging with Sports, Music, and Politics:
Popular Culture and Political Dialogue in the Secondary English Classroom

I am doing a research study because I am trying to find out more about what happens when high school English students and teachers use pop culture texts related to sports and music as they write an argument on a political topic. I would like to ask you to be in this research study, as your teacher is a participant, and we want to know more about your responses to the topic and the pop culture texts being used.

What will happen during this research study?
I want to tell you about some things that might happen if you are in the study. It will take place in your English teacher’s classroom at __________ High School and will last for 2-3 weeks. If you want to be in this study, here are the things you will be asked to do: Participate in your teacher’s argumentative writing unit and agree to the use and/or publishing of any student work, photographs, and video or audiotaped materials collected during the course of the unit. You may also be asked to participate in an interview that will last about 45 minutes to find out about your experiences during the unit and your reactions to the pop culture materials your teacher uses.

Are there any bad things that might happen during the research study?
There are minimal risks involved with participating in this study. You may be asked to read, write and/or talk about a political topic you, or the people around you, have strong feelings about, and things may happen during the unit that the researcher doesn’t know about yet. If they do, we will make sure that you get help to deal with them. As a participant, you will have the right to stop participating at any time (including withdrawing from specific parts of the study, such as an interview). If you choose not to participate, you will still complete the same activities, but your work will not be included in the work samples collected for the study, and your comments will not be included in any transcripts.

Can I catch COVID-19 if I participate in this study? We will do everything we can to keep from spreading the virus and are following local, state, and federal guidelines. You don’t have to wear a mask if you don’t want to.

Are there any good things that might happen during the research study?
We hope to learn something that will help other English teachers and students when designing lessons in the future.

Will I get money or payment for being in this research study?
You will not get any payment for being in this research study.

Who can I ask if I have any questions?
If you have any questions about this study, you can ask your parents/guardians, teacher, or the researcher.

What if I don’t want to be in the study?
If you don’t want to be in this study, you don’t have to. It’s up to you. If you say you want to be in it and then change your mind, that’s OK. All you have to do is tell us. You will still complete the same graded activities (including any opportunities your teacher includes for extra credit), and your grade will not be penalized in any way.

My choice:
If I write my name on the line below, it means that I agree to be in this research study.

Indicate Yes or No:
I agree to be audiotaped during this study.
___ Yes ___ No

I agree to be videotaped during this study:
APPENDIX I: Adult Participant Consent Form

School of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies
Curriculum Studies

Adult Consent Form

Engaging with Sports, Music, and Politics:
Popular Culture and Political Dialogue in the Secondary English Classroom

Background Information
You are invited to participate in a research study of the dialogic relations of high school English students and their
teachers, as they interact with print and non-print pop culture texts related to the topics of sports and music when
infused into the curriculum as part of an argumentative writing unit on a politically sensitive topic. I ask that you
read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation in this
research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and
participation in this project at any time. When being interviewed, you can skip any questions that make you
uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. If a class discussion is being videotaped, you may ask for the
recording to be stopped at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect any
aspect of your employment.

This study is being conducted by: Jo Flory, Doctoral Candidate - Curriculum Studies, Oklahoma State University
under the direction of Dr. Hongyu Wang, Oklahoma State University.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Teach a 2-3 week argumentative
writing unit on a political topic based around pop culture texts related to sports and music (I will provide you with a
unit template you may use as-is or adapt), collect documents (samples of student work) over the course of the unit,
allow me to observe and take field notes in at least one class 3-4 days a week over the course of the unit, agree to the
usage and/or publishing of any student work, photographs, and video or audiotaped materials collected throughout
the unit, and participate in two 45-55 minute interviews to find out about your experiences during the unit and your
reactions to the pop culture materials you use.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: 2 hours for interviews, 2 hours for
collecting/providing documents over the course of the unit, 8 hours unit planning time over the course of the unit or
12 hours total.

Compensation
You will receive a Visa gift card for $300 as compensation for your participation. You will receive payment after
the last observation at the conclusion of the unit. As compensation is over $100, you may need to provide your
social security number to receive payment. In the event you withdraw from the study, payment will be prorated at
$100 for each week of the unit in which you participated. Partial weeks will be prorated at $20/day.

Risks
There is a potential risk in the possible discussion of topics which some participants may consider sensitive, which is
minimized, as the teacher will retain full control over the topics and texts discussed during the course of the unit.
Regarding any audio or video taping of class discussions or interviews that may be conducted, both student and
teacher participants will have the right to opt-out at any time (including the right to opt out of specific parts of the
study, such as an interview or recorded discussion). I will transcribe any recorded materials, including interviews
and provide them to applicable participants for member checking.

Confidentiality
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code
number and will be referred to by a pseudonym in any written analysis. The list connecting your name to this code

Approved: 06/04/2022
Protocol #: IRB-22-177

205
VITA

Jo Flory

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: ENGAGING WITH SPORTS, MUSIC, AND POLITICS: POPULAR CULTURE AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Major Field: Curriculum Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2024.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2002.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 1992.

Experience:

East Central High School – Tulsa, Oklahoma May 1998-Present
English Teacher and English Department Chair

Oklahoma State University – Stillwater, Oklahoma. Spring 2021-2024
Graduate Research Assistant, Curriculum Studies

Professional Memberships:

National Council of Teachers of English
International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies