MYSPEDAGOGY: APPLICATIONS OF MYSTHEORY
IN SECONDARY ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION
AND TEACHER EDUCATION

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by
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ABSTRACT

Within the past two decades, federal and state governments have increased the frequency, number, and importance of standardized tests in elementary and secondary American schools. These tests are characterized by recognition-based frameworks that privilege “best” or “correct” answers, processes, and understandings which remain beyond questioning and challenge to the exclusion of all others. The Common Core standards, such as those which value a single, specific narrative writing structure, or an analysis that exclusively values and privileges authorial intent (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014, CC.1.4.11-12.P, CC.1.3.11-12.D) also appear to endorse these frameworks. The same may be said for pedagogical approaches that value only a single writing process, analysis or interpretation of a text, or one standard form of grammar and composition, as well as schools that force their teachers to teach in a single “best” way, with inflexible mandates on which concepts are to be covered and when.

Given the apparent dominance of recognition-based frameworks throughout our schools, I offer mypedagogy as an alternative approach to teaching, learning, and thinking in our classrooms. Mypedagogy is the application of an original theoretical framework I call “mystheory” to educational and pedagogical practices and contexts. Inspired and informed by scholarly perspectives and work from post-identity theories, poststructuralism, posthumanism, quantum mechanics, chaos theory, performance theory, among others, mystheory infuses our recognitions and beings with mys-, an onto-epistemological concept that embodies mystery and uncertainty. By informing and infusing our pedagogy with mys- and three other mystheoretical concepts—semi-actuality, coherence, and inversion—we may promote questioning, vulnerability, conversation, consideration, and freedom in our classrooms.
This dissertation explores these mystheoretical concepts and their myspedagogical applications in their classroom through a postmodern, ethnographically-informed, qualitative inquiry across three sites: a secondary English classroom, a professional development schools program, and an undergraduate classroom. Chapter 1 introduces mystheory and its concepts. Chapter 2 focuses on my research methodology, sites, data, and participants. Chapters 3 and 4 explore myspedagogical approaches in the classroom. Chapter 5 critically addresses standardized testing from a mystheoretical perspective. Chapter 6 offers further possibilities for mystheoretically-informed approaches and research in education.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

A Moment in the Classroom

“It is known.” ~Dothraki saying (Martin, 1996)

This classroom is like many others at first glance: there is a row of windows along one of the walls. These horizontal rectangles of glass open into a small courtyard beyond. Above them blinds cover the rest; it’s as much visibility to the outside as most public school classrooms get. A few plants make their home in this place, stretching their leaves up to the ceiling in corners, while others sit upon bookshelves and window sills that extend out several inches. Several posters of various inspirational figures and quotes adorn the walls in the front, opposite the windows, and in the rear of the classroom. Black chalkboards are found along the front and side walls. Tackboards on which various items are attached, are up on the side and rear walls, including 8 ½ x 11 inch typical paper sized colored and laminated pages with advice, suggestions, and common guidelines to follow. A projector screen can be unfurled at the front of the classroom, and is often down. Two small rectangular desks, one larger than the other—not student desks, but about as long as two side-by-side—are placed directly in line with the doorway. A large teacher’s desk with drawers sits in the back, diagonally situated in the rear right corner of the classroom from the door. A machine to make hot water, and beside it a basket of snacks and tea, sit along the center of the rear wall. The center space of the classroom is dominated by student desks of a standard variety. Each desk is beige in color with metal legs. The chairs that go with them are also beige, with metal legs, and are unattached. They are arranged in clusters, but their arrangement can and will change throughout the weeks to come. This is a shared classroom between teachers, who move in and out of it as the school day goes along. A round clock hangs above the door.
More than twenty students are seated at their desks, and for the moment their attention is, more or less, upon the two teachers who usually take their places around the two desks situated in front of the room, though they do and will move about the classroom at times. The central class topic (HSE, 10/18/2016) is American transcendentalism, a movement typically represented by writers such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville. Rachael Sawyer, the English teacher for this high school class along with Greg Weathers, her student-teacher, passed around an excerpt of the first chapter of Emerson’s *Nature* (1836), for a “glossing” exercise, which she explained to the students:

> What I mean when I say ‘glossing’ is when you read it, in the margins, write what you think each paragraph is saying. When you’re done reading, talk to each member in your group and see if you can figure what he’s arguing in each paragraph.

Afterwards, the students share out what they think various paragraphs mean and why for about fifteen minutes. Concepts like the “transparent eyeball” and “pathetic fallacy” are introduced, then Rachael explains that one of the reasons she had students gloss over the paragraphs in Emerson’s *Nature* was to “think of nature, reverence for nature, as one of the major tenets of transcendentalism.” She follows this statement immediately with these questions: “Does anyone know what the other major tenets of transcendentalism are? What are the big ideas of transcendentalism? Does anyone remember from last year?” One student offers, “Wasn’t there a universal spirit?” which Rachael and Greg confirm and rename the “oversoul.” Rachael asks for others and admits that she had to look them up prior to class because she couldn’t quite remember them herself. Another student answered, “Self-reliance.” Rachael repeats this in affirmation of its correctness and then proceeds to cover the remaining tenets in rapid succession: “individualism, nonconformity, and simplicity.” This sets students up for the
next activity, which asks them to brainstorm, reflect, and review where in Melville’s *Moby Dick* (particularly in the first fourteen through twenty chapters) these concepts appear.

**An Initiation into Mystheory**

“*The truth is rarely pure and never simple*” (*Wilde*, 2006).

In the rest of this introduction, I will provide a brief exploration of an original theoretical framework I call “mystheory,” the concepts of which, when applied to education, I call “myspedagogy.” This section may feel like a detour away from the focus on pedagogy, the classroom, teaching, and learning that comprises the body of this work beyond this opening chapter. I ask you to humor me while I take you through the abstract concepts of mystheory in an effort to familiarize you with them, so that you may better understand these concepts when I reference them in my analysis of various educational settings following this chapter. Since mystheory and its concepts resist a total, authoritative clarity of understanding by anyone, including myself, a fuzzy, imprecise understanding is truer to them than an exact one. There is an intrinsic concealing that is part of their revealing that is no more intentional or malicious than our shadow on the sidewalk, going along with us as we journey through these concepts (*Heidegger*, 2008, p. 130).

**Mys-: being/becoming and recognition.** According to some philosophical models, we experience reality in two ways: ontological (*Scotland, 2012, p. 9; "ontology, n.," 2017), pertaining to our existence and being, and epistemological (*Scotland, 2012, p. 9; "epistemology, n.," 2017), pertaining to our methods of knowing and understanding. We may articulate mystheory into these forms accordingly: mysbeing and mysbecoming may represent the ontological aspect, mysrecognition the epistemological. In mystheory, recognition represents
perception, knowledge, and understanding; it is what we are able to apprehend and find to be intelligible (Butler, 2009, pp. 6-7).

Mys- embodies the defining characteristics of mystery, “a hidden or secret thing; something inexplicable or beyond human comprehension” (“Mystery, n. 1,” 2015), and reintroduces mystery in all that we may recognize or claim to know. In our classroom narrative scene above, we may question what each paragraph means in Emerson’s *Nature*, in a way that does not conclude with a definitive answer. Even if we were able to ask Emerson himself what he meant, there are other potential meanings a paragraph within his work might have, with justification and support, not only from the text itself, but from different critical perspectives applied to the text.

Mys- appears structurally as a prefix, and thus incomplete, but it is *also complete* in its hyphenated form; it is a partial *and* whole linguistic term and concept. Emerson’s text may function in the same way: we can recognize it as a text, complete and taking up a certain number of words and pages. Those words are written in a recognizable language, with words that have meanings we may find in a dictionary. Yet, as mentioned above, we may also acknowledge the potential meanings and critical ways in which we might reconsider Emerson’s text. These depend on countless factors, such as our own sociocultural beliefs, personal understandings about the world we live in, and critical lenses we may apply such as New American criticism, feminism and poststructuralism. The sliding puzzle is an apt metaphor for this mys-ness in our recognition of Emerson’s text; the puzzle is incomplete because there is always a tile missing; it is complete because the tiles would not be able to move if all of all spaces were filled in (Figure 1).
We may consider the ontological and epistemological aspects of mys- separately, but if our ontology is not entirely separate from our epistemology, and our existence is performative and we cannot be without doing (Butler, 2004, p. 3), then we may also consider them together. Depending on who you are, where you’re from, the kinds of social values and education you bring to Emerson’s text, it may be something very different to you than someone else. One person may see Emerson’s “transparent eyeball” as putting forth the colonizing mandate that Emerson’s particular, sociocultural, embodied view is one that may speak for everyone. Another reader may appreciate Emerson’s representation of a divine presence in nature, but rather than being positioned as a perspective over and beyond it, they may understand divinity in nature as manifesting pantheistically within and through it. Still another person, coming from a particular part of the United States where coal plants or lumber mills have been shut down because of environmental regulation, may see Emerson’s text as politically oppositional.

Mys- goes further than offering an appreciation for these different interpretations and perspectives of a text. It subjects each of them to questioning and challenge, even after they are defined and explained, just as it subjects a text to this questioning and challenge. Why not use the prefix “mis-” instead? “Mis-,” implicitly characterizes our understandings with an element
of error as “‘badly,’ ‘wrongly,’ ‘perversely,’ ‘mistakenly,’” ("Mis-, prefix 1," 2015), situated within a binary framework of “right” and “wrong.” Mys-, by contrast, asks us to consider each recognition, understanding, each way of being, and becoming, as an unsolved mystery even if it appears otherwise. If we allow for uncertainty, the rightness or wrongness of our understandings and recognitions gives way to possibilities that beckon for exploration and inquiry. By sustaining the mystery in our beings and becomings, our recognitions and understandings, mysputs forth an indefinite onto-epistemological justification for curiosity, discussion, and wonderings, in and out of the classroom.

The framework of mystheory includes three other concepts beyond mys-: coherence, semi-actuality, and inversion. Each is distinguished by certain characteristics while sharing others. There is no authoritative arrangement of these concepts (Figure 2). Figure 2 is not meant to be a complete or all-inclusive representation of these concepts or their respective characteristics; it is meant instead to provide an abbreviated, visual representation of two main characteristics of each concept.
In their mysbeing-and-becoming, these concepts resist explicit recognition, precise
definition, and certain knowing. True to mysthory, they trouble attempts to clearly separate or
define these concepts apart from each other, which is why Figure 2 is depicted with blurry,
unclear lines that cross into each other. Depicting these concepts clearly and separately would
distort and misrepresent their intra-interactive relationship with each other; a relationship that
affectively contributes to the being and becoming of each concept. In this respect, mysthory
and its concepts align with a thesis of poststructuralism, “that the defining dichotomies on which
structuralist systems are based express distinctions that do not hold up under careful scrutiny”
(Gutting, 1998, p. 597).
Why allow this ambiguity and uncertainty to perpetually go unresolved? Let us return to Emerson’s *Nature*. Suppose we could say once and for all what Emerson’s text means, exclusively. Case closed, the text means this, and only this, forever after. All discussion ceases. All exploration ceases. All other possible interpretations and meanings are wrong. All other ways we might look at the text are without legitimacy or value. We have our answers and the mystery has been solved. Our only task is to acquire and understand that meaning and move on.

The ambiguity at the core of mys- and other mystheoretical concepts preserves and sustains their uncertainty, mystery, and capability of being understood in two or more ways (“Ambiguity, n.,” 2015), leaving them “fuzzy” ("Fuzzy Logic," 2010) and facilitating “slippage” (Butler, 2011, p. 82) in their being and recognition. It precludes untroubled, definitive being and becoming, expression and recognition by preventing closure (Derrida, 1978b, p. 295) even if closure seems to have occurred, treating such apparent closures as conjectural (Phillips & Burbules, 2000, pp. 26-30). It thereby maintains a degree of perpetual onto-epistemological vulnerability to challenge and questioning, regardless of authority or expertise. Conceptually, mys- is more closely aligned with “unfinalizability” (Bakhtin, 2013, p. 61); as unfinalizability precedes “polyphony,” (Bakhtin, 2013, pp. 176, 284-285), mys- provides for multiplicity. While limiting the resolution and precision of recognition, mys- provides for one or more pathways to liberation and agency under circumstances of imposed or apparent resolution.

How does it do this in our classroom example? One way is that it facilitates the possibility for interpreting the text in different ways. It legitimizes asking what the text may mean, even when we already have recognized meanings before us. It sets up a space and possibility, for dialogue and discussion, that brings these different interpretations into conversation in ways that may cause each of us to question, and reconsider them, as well. We
may ask questions that go beyond the answers we have. Then we may question those answers anew, without being confined, defined, or remaining within our pre-existing recognitions of ourselves, others, the text, or countless other aspects of our realities.

Across academic disciplines, we may find other examples that align with mys-, conceptually. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (1927) asserts that there is an inescapable degree of uncertainty when measuring the momentum and position of a particle simultaneously (Heisenberg, 1927; “The uncertainty,” 2016), and that beyond being a limitation of measurement, may be “inherent in the nature of things” (Landau & Lifshitz, 1977, Kindle Locations 333-342). This onto-epistemological uncertainty may conceal differences hiding within our recognitions that erupt from them as they did in Edward Lorenz’s weather program, producing what he called the “Butterfly Effect” (Gleick, 2011, pp. 8-17). These possibilities lurking within our recognitions give us reason to pause and consider that each recognition, each set of data, may contain multiplicities we do not recognize as such, just as, according to string theory, each dimension within space-time may contain multiple dimensions (“Compactification (physics),” 2017).

Mys-, and the uncertainty it embodies, does not need to paralyze us with skepticism. In addition to promoting inquiry, discussion, and exploration, it may be used to advance social justice initiatives that push back against systems of profiling, surveillance, and prejudice. As teachers, we may resist matching our expectations to the tracked level of our students, their grade level, their race, ethnicity, or gender. We may question what their capabilities are, what their interests are, how they might learn, and what material and concepts might be most appropriate for them. We may even challenge them with material, tasks, and understandings unsuited to
their recognized capabilities, put faith in their potential to grapple with such material, and offer the possibility of rewarding them for struggling with it.

**Semi-actuality.** During the moment of totality in a full solar eclipse, it is possible to see the sun’s corona extend beyond the perimeter of the moon (Figure 3). On any given day here on the Earth’s surface, one may observe various effects of the sun’s presence, including illumination, heat, photosynthesis, magnetic fields, and sunburns. These effects intra-interact with various others within the scope and reach of the sun’s presence, producing further effects. Where, then, does the sun’s presence truly begin and end?

![Figure 3: Sun's solar prominences (in red) and coronal filaments seen extending beyond the disk during a solar eclipse. Source: Viator, 1999](image)

This question challenges our defined recognitions of being and identity. Consistent with mys-, it blurs hard lines and boundaries of recognition like an impressionistic painting. Semi-actuality of being is like composite imaging ("Compositing," 2017) with multiple overlapping images intra-interacting within, beyond, through, and with each other. In mystheory, “actuality” represents the extent to which these images attain recognizability, affectivity, and agential being upon each other and within themselves ("Actual, Adj.," 2017). The prefix “semi-” represents the
inability to fully distinguish, recognize, and separate these images from each other in their being and becoming, or to claim with certainty where their actuality begins and ends.

Being a multiplicity of semi-actual elements may sound like something out of science fiction, but let us use our clothes as an example. When you go into a store to look for a shirt, you may find several on the racks. Picking up a few, you may then go to the dressing room to try them on. Why? Because how they look or fit on a manikin or the rack may not match how they look or fit on you when you put them on. But why is this? It’s the same shirt, whether it’s on the rack, or on your body, after all. Yet, it fits you differently; the shirt looks different on you, and you look different with it on. Both the shirt and you have affected each other, and become something other than you were before or after you the put the shirt on. You and the shirt mysbecome together.

We may begin to consider the way semi-actuality might work in the classroom, by considering the way a student might bring their experiences from outside the classroom into it. How they were taught by other teachers, how their parents feel about the subject, what grades they received, and what they were told about certain concepts or practices, such as writing, grammar, or narratives, may all extend their semi-actual affective influence in a classroom that is removed by both time and distance from those occurrences.

If we take the position that “all matter... manifests wave behavior under the right experimental circumstances” (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 1752-1753), the question “Where does one begin and end?” becomes, to a degree, unanswerable. It’s like asking the precise, single location of a wave or ripple in space; there is a valid argument that one wave exists in more than one place simultaneously, and when we cannot perceive how these two places are entangled in a singular being, we might be inclined to call such seemingly separate, distant, and
unrelated phenomenon, “spooky action at a distance” ("Einstein's 'spooky," 2012). Yet, in this moment, there is probably someone or something thinking about you, whose life is being affected and shaped by you. Likewise there is someone, or something, you are thinking about and shaping your life around, without sharing the same space.

A semi-actual element or force not only extends over space like a wave, but through time as well, through traditions, histories, memories, plans, predictions, and intentions. A wine glass given to us by a beloved, departed relative keeps the past with us as we drink from it, and semi-actually infuses that moment when it shatters upon the floor with meaning and emotional resonance that extends back years into the past—a past that is actually in that present moment. The absence of that glass upon our shelf is also a manifestation of what used to be there, and the meaning it had for us. Just because its physical materiality is no longer present, does not mean its actuality goes with it.

Coherence. The mystheoretical concept of coherence deals with the composition of semi-actual mysbecomings-in-being within, between, through, and beyond assemblages, and their dynamic, affective, intra-interactive composite agency in various mysbeings-and-becomings. If I describe a scene by the ocean, including such semi-actual elements as: the power and solidarity of the breakers crashing upon the shore, the booming sounds they produce, the sprays of the mist, the scents arising from the ocean, the contents of salt, seaweed, shells, and fish, and the feelings and thoughts inspired by these things in those upon the beach; coherence is these elements mysbecoming together in a wave that smashes upon the sand and scoops it out to sea.

We all mysembody coherence. Our bodies represent a coherence of physiological processes, flows, and organisms intra-interacting within our being-in-becoming. Our minds are
home to various conscious and unconscious streams of thought, memories, and desires that share identities and become composite beings. A writer composing productively could be performing this way because of a coherence of bodily processes, time of day, location of writing, scents, sounds, company, topic, motivation, incentivization through rewards, peer-pressure, looming deadlines, caffeine intake, etc. When these factors, even those in seeming opposition—such as an adversary doubting the writer's capability to accomplish this task, thereby motivating the writer to accomplish it in spite of that adversary—contribute to the becoming-in-being of writing as performance and object, that is a manifestation of coherence.

The terms mysembodiment and mysmanifestation recall the performative blurring of distinctions within the togetherness of coherence, whether across time, space, identity, recognitions, boundaries, or divisions. We may lose sight of coherence by exclusively treating elements as distinct components, if we are not considering the ways they mysbecome each other intra-interactively. For example, taking all of the parts off of a car and examining them each in isolation denies us the experience of seeing how they perform together. The same is true for students. A student may behave very differently working alone as opposed to working with one group of students, or another group.

We may also lose sight of coherence if we merge all semi-actual aspects, selves, or beings together into a union that annihilates any degree of contrast, distinction, and form. Such a flattening (Sousanis, 2015, pp. 6-7) may conceal a multitude of elements and differences within. These differences might erupt as in Lorenz’s weather data, or Hawking & Mlodinow’s (2010) proposal of spontaneous creation in the existence and making of universes (Kindle Locations, 1743-1745). Where something may appear to come from nothing, boundaries and distinctions between the two begin to blur as well, troubling attempts to frame and separate what is within
from what is without. A literary parallel to this im/possible framing may be found in Poe’s *Masque of the Red Death* (2012). Prince Prospero shepherds the favored members of his populace into a castellated abbey, designed to keep them in and the Red Death out (p. 106). Yet, by the end of the story, the Red Death appears among them, as if out of nowhere (p. 109).

Composition in coherence is performative; the ways in which various elements come to be coherent matters as much as the way they semi-actually affect and mysbecome each other in coherence. Paine’s (1994) description of his experience in a Saami village near the northernmost tip of Norway, details the semi-actual existence of the supernatural “Little People” in the village: “The Little People are inside the village, as well as outside it. Inside the village, they bring disorder, but it is a tidy and patterned disorder, indeed, one that offers a mirror image of the customary order” (p. 346). He also mentions the “raw'ga” who exist on the periphery, where the boundaries are trespassed and blurred:

Along the shore, on the other perimeter of the village the raw'ga may be encountered—a humanlike apparition dressed in oilskins, seaboots, and sou'wester, perhaps with a garland of seaweed in its hair. Having been of the land but now belonging to the sea (where it died), the raw'ga leads villagers, I suggest, to thoughts about mortality and about the village as an island of life onto whose shores are washed up this unwholesome, threatening, intrusive figure. Both spatially and temporally, however, the raw'ga is held to the edge of the village: It comes out of the sea and only at night; it has to be back in the sea before dawn. (p. 348)

The intra-interactive composition of the village transgresses and extends in both directions over its boundaries, so that both what is in the frame of the village as well as what is outside of it are part of the coherence of the village. In coherence, we find ourselves in a
borderlands existence that blurs interaction with intra-action into intra-interaction, representing betweenness and withinness. Within the coherence of our classroom, students of different backgrounds, perspectives, races, ethnicities, gender, interests, and capabilities come together with ourselves and the other elements of the room, such as desks, plants, chairs, and bookshelves. Beyond, other students, teachers, school administrators, families, businesses, politicians, and events influence and shape our classroom in their coherence, just as our classroom impacts them.

**Inversion.** The capability to cohere opposites, to exist between and beyond, within and without simultaneously, are characteristics of inversion. Examples that align with inversion include Newton’s third law of motion, which asserts that for every action, there is a reaction, and Foucault’s (2012a) claim that discipline “must neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance” (p. 219). Inversion speaks to the fighter who steps back to throw a punch, the Jedi master who only becomes more powerful when struck down, the slingshot that propels an object forward by pulling back, and the breaker that rolls forward into a pipeline as the undertow drags sand and shells back underneath it. It may be found in a society “which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function” (Foucault, 2012b, Kindle Locations 123-125).

Everything is “dangerous” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014) because of inversion. Foucault (2012b) provides an example of how condemned forces may be produced and acquire agency as a result of, and in opposition to, measures that attempt to prohibit, expunge, and repress them in his analysis of the censorship of sexual discourses during the 17th century:
As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. And even these prohibitions, it seems, were afraid to name it. Without even having to pronounce the word, modern prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence. Censorship.

Yet when one looks back over these last three centuries with their continual transformations, things appear in a very different light: around and apropos of sex, one sees a veritable discursive explosion. (Kindle Locations 195-202)

Inversion is aligned with Butler’s (2004) conceptualization of identity and agency as “riven with paradox” (p. 3). It is simultaneously local and not, like leaders in a lightning strike coming together from the ground and sky to form the bolt ("Leader Lightning," 2009). It incorporates and embodies conflicting opposites and differences in agential action and coherent being, just as the “deep play” of a Mardi Gras game incorporates chaos and crisis to maintain and reaffirm it (Ancelet, 2007, pp. 172-173).

The economic law of diminishing returns also aligns with the concept of inversion, in the relationship between returns and the costs of production ("Diminishing Returns," 2017). We may find a complementary law in physics: “This increase in relativistic mass makes every extra unit of energy you put into speeding up the object less effective at making it actually move faster” (Jha, 2014). Yet, many initiatives in education pay no heed to inversion, operating instead on linear intuition that more equals more: more oversight, accountability, and testing will produce more progress, success, and children who succeed, with the goal of getting everyone to
succeed. Inversion resists efforts at achieving either all or nothing, just as the other mystheoretical concepts do, and more significantly, we find an ethical responsibility in acknowledging that our solutions also create problems.

Let us consider two different educational approaches. A colleague who teaches theater told me of a student who had suffered from anxiety and depression. She had seen counselors before, and her parents were well-aware of her conditions. Schools she attended had protocol and systematic measures in place for preventing and addressing her anxiety and depression, but the result of these interventions only exacerbated her condition; her own anxiety would become heightened by the concerns and worries of her parents and sessions with her counselors. She would withdraw into a tight blanket of silence, unable to speak for fear that speaking would betray the need for further intervention. Of course, recognition-based intervention was precisely the recommended path: see something, say something, address problems, intervene, and administer treatment as often as necessary to treat the condition. More surveillance and monitoring equals better results and less risk, the logic went.

My colleague opted for an alternative approach. He decided not to contact the young girl’s parents and alert the counselor, but instead allowed her to perform and act through her difficulties with anxiety and depression. He acknowledged the risk he was taking on, that she could suffer the effects of her anxiety and depression without monitoring and counseling, but instead of succumbing to her condition, she was able to trust him. She opened up, communicated with him, and worked through her anxiety in a way she had not been allowed to do before. By taking a path inclusive of risk, my colleague had actually caused less harm to the student than the approach put into place by the school and her parents in the name of avoiding risk and harm. His approach serves as an example of responsibility aligned with inversion,
because, rather than attempting to recognize and eliminate the potential risks and oppositional consequences in his approach, as the school protocols did, he embraced them.

A responsibility of inversion is a responsibility of tolerance and coping, not of prevention, exclusion, and elimination. In this kind of responsibility, mistakes may be treated as valuable and effective to learning. A pedagogical approach that permits them opens up opportunities to learn from them, to risk making them, that an approach which penalizes each mistake does not (Klemp et al., 2008, p. 4; Floden & Clark, 1988, p. 509; Floden & Buchmann, 1993, p. 374; Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013, p. 191). Through inversion, a teacher may see a discussion centered on an emotionally and psychologically difficult topic as a meaningful learning experience worth having both for the topic and the distress it may cause (Garoian, 1999, p. 116). Being able to help students manage their distress while effectively and sensitively participating in such a discussion is empowering and may better enable them to have such discussions in the future with others.
Chapter 2: Context and Methods of Inquiry

A few more words about Mystheory and this dissertation

The coming pages are an exploration in the ways that we might conceptualize, recognize, and apply mystheoretical concepts within the discourse, experiences, settings, and practices of education. They may also serve as a guide to how, through a myspedagogical perspective, a teacher might reimagine and reshape their classroom and pedagogy in alignment with these concepts.

There are a number of practices and goals that are not aligned with mystheory and its concepts. Mystheory is ill-suited to defining anything with complete certainty or accuracy. It does not endorse exact replication. It resists communicating concepts precisely. It opposes autocratic, authoritative, disciplinary micromanagement. It challenges the goal of a single “best” method or understanding to the exclusion of all others. It problematizes unmitigated data gathering. It turns from any approach that has perfect security, preservation, or invulnerability as its goal—such methods too often resemble imprisonment and entombment (Heil, 2012).

A wide variety of approaches and examples are represented herein across individuals and contexts. I am not here to answer the question of which pedagogy is most effective, or to propose that certain pedagogies and methodologies are insufficiently effective by comparison in all ways. I instead ask the following questions, “How might mystheory present effective and viable options and approaches to teaching? What values, ethics, and practices might we uphold and endorse with a myspedagogical approach? In what ways might we mysrecognize and mysbecome our classrooms, pedagogy, and ourselves?”

Mystheory does not support consistency or replication in the application of its concepts, nor the mechanization of life or education (Innis, 2008, pp. 209-210). Practitioners of
mystheory, holding the mystery of its concepts sacred, display humility and faith in their understandings and applications, rather than mimic a precise, procedural set of steps or recite explicit definitions. The concepts of mystheory, true to its postmodern, poststructural influences, do not advocate for a particular side or cause fully; it is a trickster (Hyde, 2010) framework, capable of playing with you, for you, and against you.

Therein lies its troublesome freedom: it does not unquestioningly identify with, or stand completely against, a particular paradigm. It is capable of operating within a supportive or antagonistic environment and cannot be completely banished or supported by recognition-based practices. A national regime aligned with mystheory might be called a “performative interregnum;” a vulnerable borderlands where no central authority could dominate or persevere unchallenged; a true non-empire (Stamps, 1995, p. 72) precariously balanced upon a population of mysbeings mysbecoming intra-interactively, semi-actually, coherently, and inversely with agential myscentric responsibility and freedom.

You may have noticed that I sometimes shift back and forth between singular and plural pronouns, even though we inhabit the body of a recognizable individual. This is partly due to the binary structure of pronouns in the English language. Because mystheory troubles identification of oneself and others exclusively and purely as a singularity or multiplicity, we/I find ourselves without a more suitable set of pronouns to mysrepresent the mysbeing-in-becoming through, within, beyond and between the binary poles of singular and plural, the one and the all. Yet, we/I also acknowledge that many readers at the time of this dissertation’s composition come from sociolinguistic, cultural, and historical contexts that have utilized these binary pronouns exclusively. The most direct solution may be to create pronouns in English and other languages to aptly mysrepresent ourselves and others—this is a task we accept and invite others to take on
as well. However, until such time as these mysrepresentative pronouns manifest in the languages of our readers, I/we will adopt a more conventional usage of the existing binary pronouns of the English language, asking only that our readers offer leniency and tolerance for our switching back and forth between singular and plural forms. Truth be told, we have a colony of hamsters living, playing, and working inside our head demanding some form of representation.

I admit to shaping my concepts at times into familiar structural forms, such as binaries, to facilitate understanding. There are also methodologies and practices with which I admit “alignment,” by which I mean that certain aspects are compatible with those of mystheory without embracing or reflecting their frameworks entirely or exactly.

Being an original theoretical framework, mystheory and its concepts should not be associated or confused with any other usage of the terms by which I refer to them, such as the prefix “mys-” and its composite terms like “mysrecognition,” or other terms like “inversion,” “coherence,” and “semi-actuality.” It would be misleading to assume that these terms and concepts are borrowed directly and unchanged from another scholar, work, or discipline that employs them. While they may be used elsewhere, these terms, such as they are used to represent the concepts of the framework myscontained in this work, are unique in their usage and meaning to this particular work.

However, this is not to say that the concepts and practices that are offered up in the following pages have never been endorsed, defined, and practiced before under other names; quite obviously I draw on and cite a number of works and concepts that have provided inspiration and examples of elements and features of those concepts I am naming under mystheory and mysпедагогия. Wherever such concepts and practices have been used or defined before, I have striven to give credit where it is due to the best of my knowledge and awareness.
Much of the originality of this theoretical framework should be understood in this context as part of the refrain of these concepts, carried on in my own concepts and practices with a difference (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 325; Deleuze, 1994, p. 299).

Finally, any examples herein that may not be in alignment with a mystheoretical approach to education are featured to provide a practical point of contrast and comparison, not to bring any negative, critical judgment to bear against any individuals involved. I am grateful for their participation and appreciative of their efforts and work in the classroom as learners and teachers.

**Methodology**

It may be said that this study was conducted in the spirit of postmodern, ethnographically-informed, qualitative inquiry. However, while there are alignments with the frameworks of postmodernism, ethnography, qualitative research and inquiry, as well as post-identity theories, poststructuralism, posthumanism, quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and new materialism, mystheory informed this research most directly. A trickster (Hyde, 2010) framework that wanders into and out of these other theoretical domains, mysbecoming itself with, through, and beyond them, mystheory differs from these established frameworks enough to never quite fit into them comfortably, completely, or permanently. It finds itself among them by getting lost, slipping through their tenets and past their gatekeepers while whistling a seemingly familiar refrain (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 311) of myscreation.

In the spirit of covering notes that researchers may recognize, this section will detail our research methods and methodologies, sites and participants, data collection and analysis. Together with these research procedures and theoretical frameworks, I have drawn upon a wide range of academic and popular literature, pop cultural media and references, and various other
sundry sources that lend their voices to my motley chorus in moments of resonance. Some readers may find their contributions and presence to be inappropriate, but I ask that they temper their condemnation with tolerance and consideration.

**Research Sites**

There were three primary sites in which I conducted ethnographically inspired research (Glesne, 2011, pp. 17-19; Kawulich, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 1-5). The first was a classroom and participants of a single class in a suburban high school in the northeast United States during the 2016-2017 academic year in which I took on an observer-as-participant stance (Kawulich, 2005). The second was an undergraduate methods course at a large public university in the northeast United States that I taught in which I took on a participant-as-observer stance (Kawulich, 2005). The third site was a professional development school (PDS) partnership program affiliated and run by faculty from a large public university in the northeast United States that works with a local suburban high school in the area in which I took a participant-as-observer stance as a consultant supervisor for student-teachers working through the program and practicing in the high school. The research conducted in these sites took place from September through December, 2016. For the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, I have removed markers of identification from my context documents and artefacts, and utilize pseudonyms for all participants.

The breakdown of data for the participants and their respective pseudonyms is as follows. Data regarding racial or ethnic, and gender identification was taken from information voluntarily reported to the institutions. These categories are thus exclusive and broad, but intended to give non-identifying background for the subjects of study:
Primary Site #1: High School classroom cited in text as “(HSE, Date of Observation)”

Teachers:
Rachael Sawyer: Female, Caucasian/White, Mentor teacher
Greg Weathers: Male, Caucasian/White, Student-teacher

Students:
Gender breakdown: Males: 5, Females: 17

Role and participation: I observed and participated twice per week in Rachael’s classroom for the full ninety minute class period from 09/12/2016 to 12/14/2016, for a total of twenty observations.

Primary Site #2: Professional Development School Partnership Program meetings cited in text as “(PDS, Date of Observation)”

Meetings were conducted in available rooms in the high school wherein student-teacher members worked with their mentors.

PDS Group #1: All participants were student-teachers who met on the same day in the same room simultaneously for ninety minutes, the equivalent of a full class period. I met with this group once per week for six weeks, for a total of six meetings from 09/13/2016 through 10/17/2016.

Gender breakdown: Females: 4, Males: 1
Racial/Ethnic breakdown: Caucasian/White: 5

Pseudonyms: Sharon, Tracy, Melanie, Max, Sara
PDS Group #2: All participants were student-teachers who met on the same day in the same room simultaneously for ninety minutes, the equivalent of a full class period with the exception of one “make-up” meeting with one of the participants. I met with this group once per week for six weeks, for a total of six meetings from 10/25/2016 through 11/29/2016.

3 total participants

Gender breakdown: Females: 2, Males: 1

Racial/Ethnic breakdown: White: 3

Pseudonyms: Robin, Greg Weathers, Leia

Role and participation: I observed and participated in my role as consultant supervisor to both groups of student-teachers. Meetings consisted of conversation and questions between participants and the researcher as a group; questions and conversation were raised and addressed by both participants and the researcher.

Primary Site #3: Undergraduate methods course cited in text as “(SEED, Date of Observation)”

Meetings were conducted in the classroom within a building on the campus of the public university that the participants were enrolled at as undergraduate students. I met with these students for three hours once per week from 09/02/2016 to 12/09/2016 for a total of eleven meetings.

Gender breakdown: Females: 4, Males: 1

Racial/Ethnic breakdown: Caucasian/White: 5

Pseudonyms: Laura, Hillary, Kayla, Tina, Brad
Role and participation: I observed and participated in my role as instructor to these undergraduate students. Meetings consisted of the normal activities of the class in which they were enrolled. All discussions, questions, and activities were part of the course practices. Questions and conversation were raised and addressed by both participants and the researcher.

Beyond these three primary sites, I drew upon other classroom experiences from the undergraduate courses that I taught before and after the dates listed above, as well as my experiences as a teacher at high schools in which I taught from 2003-2010. Other participants who were not regular members of these primary site groups were observed and studied with consent.

**Research Participants**

While I have provided statistical data about my research sites, some readers may desire or require a more personal understanding of the human beings, myself included, who participated in each of these sites. Because an extensive and exhaustive profiling of these participants may compromise their privacy, I have kept their descriptions brief while endeavoring to represent them in a respectful, detailed way in each of their particular sections below.

**Rachael Sawyer.** In terms of conventional identity categories, Rachael would be recognized as a white/Caucasian, middle class, female teacher who has spent much of her life in the northeast US. She is highly skilled, passionate, intelligent, and effective educator, who cares deeply and selflessly for her students and works tirelessly on their behalf. She has been teaching for two decades, at the college level, at private and public schools, and currently teaches juniors and seniors at a suburban high school in the northeast US. She has two master’s degrees——
Curriculum and Instruction, and English Literature—and National Board certification in English Language Arts: Adolescence and Young Adulthood. Rachael values professional development and collaboration with colleagues, attending and presenting several times at the National Council of Teachers of English conference and others, but above all, she values what her students teach her every day. She also reads voraciously and sometimes writes about it on the blog of a local organization of English teachers that she edits in her free time. She also has published work in journals, newspapers, and books for teachers.

When I observed and worked with Rachael, I witnessed a teacher who responded to emails the same day and had each assignment organized and in front of them in a custom binder at the beginning of the year. Here was a teacher who considered her students and their learning in the texts she chose for them to read, who positioned herself as just one more participant in a student-led discussion, who empowered her students to do research on relevant topics like the Harlem Renaissance and present it to the class in Google slides. Rachael would be ready at a moment’s notice to lead the class, as well as step outside with a student in tears; she would bring in sheets of ships and whales to have students doodle and color in, have tea and snacks at the ready, and open up new possibilities for creative exploration in her assignments.

She was always considerate and open-minded, offering students the opportunity to formulate and work through their own understandings. Even if Rachael was very well-read on the authoritative interpretations of a work (as she often is), she wouldn’t wield that knowledge like a hammer; rather, she was ready to offer it in assistance, whether it was a new book she had found, or a new way of working with students that she had learned about at a conference. Hers was a classroom where student-made origami flowed over the walls, and where the desks
changed their positioning daily. Her students have often expressed their trust and confidence in her teaching and practices.

In between classes and after them, Rachael often needed to get away, to take a break; she was human, after all. She questioned her practices and lessons daily, and expressed anxiety born of this uncertainty and her concern for her students’ learning and wellbeing. She wrestled with letting go of her control and presence in the classroom to her student-teacher, Greg, and debated with herself about when and how to intervene and push, and when to step back and let him learn and practice on his own.

Yet, while her schedule is invariably hectic, and time is ever against her, she often made time to have conversations with me about specific occurrences in her class, or to explain certain elements and practices to me, or to consider different ways it could have been done. Rachael welcomed my presence in her classroom and allowed me to participate with her students, as well as carry out my own activity with them during her class time. She has my enduring appreciation for her work, time, effort, consideration, thoughtfulness and dedication to her teaching, her students, and to me for allowing me to work and conduct research in her classroom.

**Student-teachers, PDS and undergraduate methods class.** The majority of student-teachers in the PDS program and those undergraduate students I taught in the classroom once a week in the morning for three hours would be recognized in terms of conventional identity categories as white/Caucasian females between the ages of 17-23 from a middle class background. They are on their way to becoming effective and capable teachers in their own right, and each are caring, dedicated, intelligent, and passionate individuals devoted to the goals of their educational careers and future students. While their paths differed, and their challenges and questions were shaped by their particular programs and personalities, in many ways, they
shared a common feeling of anxiety and stress about whether they would become the teachers aspired to be. Both the undergraduate students and PDS student-teachers grasped for answers, methods that would ensure learning and effective teaching practices.

The PDS student-teachers expressed concerns and tensions related to their mentor’s practices, student responsiveness, effective teaching methods, and classroom discipline. The undergraduate students agonized over the student who wouldn’t write at all, or how friendly they should be with their students, whether they should reveal their lack of understanding or not, and whether their height (this was particular to the female students) or closeness of age to the students they would be teaching would present problems with discipline and respect. Both groups expressed frustration with the myriad challenges they faced in designing and implementing lesson plans.

The undergraduate students often adopted a mindset and approach that favored an authoritative recognition-based framework. Inside such a framework, a student typically waits to be assigned tasks, and focuses on how to complete them according to predefined specifications set forth by an authority figure—usually the teacher. If the student has questions, the instructor answers them by providing the answer(s), or the “correct” way to proceed with a task; these answers are authoritative recognitions in this framework.

By contrast, in a myspedagogical framework, students and teachers may question and discuss tasks and concepts, (re)define them together, and support their particular approaches to these tasks and their understandings of concepts. Even after doing so, they remain open to reconsidering their definitions, processes and understandings, and exploring alternatives offered by other participants. Even if there are required texts, standards, concepts and processes to be covered, these teachers and students may explore ways to flexibly interpret, apply, work with,
and understand them differently. For many of the undergraduate students in my methods course, opening up their minds to reimagine and explore alternative pedagogical approaches, such as a mysopedagogical one, beyond those aligned with recognition-based frameworks, is one of the most significant challenges they face. One primary reason for this is that so many of their own educational experiences as students were framed almost exclusively within recognition-based frameworks and approaches.

The PDS student-teachers wrestled more with authority and managing the countless responsibilities that many teachers must juggle and balance to perform effectively. Many of them assumed a teacher-centered mindset that placed the majority (or sometimes all) of the responsibility for student success upon their own shoulders. They struggled with empowering their students with responsibility without losing their authority, seeing the value and drawbacks of different approaches in a way that didn’t lead them to embrace one particular method as more effective than the others in all situations, and not being so hard on themselves and their students when things didn’t work like they hoped they would.

Many of these student-teachers were excellent learners, however, adapting to challenges and learning to appreciate different approaches for their own merits, and seeing that each approach, each lesson, no matter how successful, could always be done another way, each offering challenges, benefits, and aspects to consider and question. While they all desired more time to train and learn, many became comfortable with not having a sense of complete mastery or perfect knowledge of how their lessons would go—both critical aspects of mysopedagogical approaches and mindsets. They became more familiar, more aware, and more comfortable with themselves as teachers without letting go of themselves as learners—a difficult challenge for
anyone, but one that I believe will remain important throughout their careers. I look forward to seeing them at conferences and hearing of their successes and struggles in their own classrooms.

Myself, the teacher-researcher. In terms of conventional identity categories, I would be recognized as an American, cisgender, heterosexual, white/Caucasian male who came from a middle class suburban background in central Pennsylvania. I am the only member in my immediate family with a bachelor’s or graduate degree.

In terms of my teaching experience, I taught as a high school English teacher for over five years to all levels of students in two schools with tracking systems from grades 9 through 12. These schools had diverse student populations from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and both schools were labeled as “in need of improvement” under NCLB from 2004-2010 while I taught. I also taught evening classes where I worked with adults who were coming back to school after dropping out to get their diplomas. Finally, I participated in constructing a 12th grade curriculum course that aligned our school with state standards, which, in addition to teaching, involved selecting textbooks and materials as well as putting together assessments for students and designing units and lessons around significant concepts.

I have also served as a graduate assistant for a total of nearly seven years between two universities at the graduate level. During my time as a graduate assistant, I have taught methods courses in English secondary education pedagogy, supervised and taught in a professional development school partnership program, and performed research including observations, interviews, notetaking and analysis in qualitative, ethnographic, and case study frameworks.

I have been a part of a faculty reading group since 2013, and a participating member of a local teacher-writer group that counts among its members teachers from all grade levels (including university) from the local schools. I am a founding member of a graduate student
group that has been central to assisting graduate students coming into the department at all levels of their careers, as well as hosting and facilitating events such as local conferences and social justice initiatives. In addition, I have been a continuously participating member in local and national teacher conferences, and serve as a campus representative for the Conference on English Education.

I usually prefer not to disclose details about myself, however, as I tend to be a fairly private person who will happily write some other name on a name tag when they are passed out in icebreaker activities. The scraping of information above does not really reveal much about who I am as a person, and while I do offer up glimpses of my personal teaching experience and past relevant to the contexts in which they appear throughout this work, I am aware that some readers may wish to know a little bit more about myself as a teacher-learner-researcher-person in this section. I make no promises that what you are about to read will actually help you to know me better in a recognition-based way.

I grew up playing with Legos. Initially, when I got a new Lego set, I would follow the instructions and build the thing that was pictured on the box the pieces came in. I soon became disenchanted with this, however, to the point that I would build the thing on the box only to immediately reduce it again to pieces. Those pieces would summarily join others in a giant bin where other Legos were kept. Sometime later, I would embark on grand projects that began with dumping all of those pieces onto the basement floor where I would spend the next several days, hours at a time, piecing them together in whatever ways I wanted. Gradually, a pattern emerged that trended towards gigantic ships (flying and otherwise) that would be veritable communities, fortresses, and battle stations all at once; I was the child who would build something like the Death Star.
Then, after spending two weeks working on and finally completing it, I would reduce it to pieces in some grandly destructive fashion a day later. For those readers who are fans of lifetime teleologies that portend and explain future becomings like a neat origin story, I suppose that little account could contribute to a believable narrative about my theoretical and practical work today. I confess, however, that when a professor asked, “So what are you planning on doing for a career?” a week before my undergraduate graduation, I responded sincerely, “I have no idea.” I didn’t consider becoming a teacher for the first time until nearly two years later, so I sympathize when students confess that they’re not completely sure they want to become teachers, that they’re considering other career paths, or perhaps they’re not sure about anything, even late in their college careers. The whole destiny narrative leaves a lot to be desired.

I have approached each class I have taught like I approach my writing, my thinking, and my research: wandering in and finding myself in medias res. To be sure, I have goals and intentions, but like the Lego ships of my childhood, those are subject to destruction at a moment’s notice, and while instruction manuals and prescribed methods abound, I’m just not a huge fan of following them unquestioningly. I don’t often know what I’ll be teaching, what we’ll cover, what I’m looking for, or what the result will be, even if the syllabus, materials, concepts and focus for a course are already decided (Fallon, 2016c, pp. 37-38). Mine is an approach that embraces unexpected results, recreating, altering, and transforming potentially every aspect of the lesson, even if those changes introduce their own surprises and differences to my recognitions and intentions. When my advisor told me that “almost nobody goes away and writes a whole draft of a dissertation,” that what generally happens is that “people get stuck, they weird out… they get so confused in the middle of the weeds that they can’t write at all,” I assured her that getting lost was and remains part of the process for me, whether in research,
writing, thinking, or teaching. My syllabus has always featured a quote from Barbossa in the film, *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End*, “For sure, you have to be lost to find a place what can't be found, elseways everyone would know where it was!” (Verbinski, 2007); I suppose it’s fair to say I embrace uncertainty not only as a teacher, but as a researcher.

Uncertainty lives and breathes in my theoretical framework, mystheory, which has guided, informed, and shaped my research approach, analysis, understanding, and work, as well as my philosophical perspective. It has been—and continues to be—informe, challenged, revised, and transformed in dialogue with other theoretical perspectives and frameworks as well as practices, methods, methodologies in an ongoing dialogue with students, student-teachers, teachers, professors, the general public, scholarship from across a variety of disciplines, news, media, and all manner of worldly events and phenomena. It is not confined to the discipline of education in its concepts or possible applications, but one of its applications was always intended for educational purposes in secondary and college classrooms, particularly with a focus in English education. It is fair to say that theory and practice have, and continue, to my become each other throughout my academic and educational experience, as teacher-learner-researcher-person.

**Data Collection**

My personal tablet and keyboard were used to compose notes and my smartphone (with an audio recording app) was used to record the conversations and events that took place during my observations. I made the decision to not use any video recording equipment, except for the smartphone to take pictures of artefacts. Audio-recording possesses two qualities of video-recording: reproducibility and a limited window of data collection (Haidet, Tate, Divirgilio-Thomas, Kolanowski, & Happ, 2009, p. 466). However, unlike a camera’s presence,
positioning, and recording, (Gross, 1991, pp. 658-659), a smartphone recording audio could blend in almost seamlessly in a class where smartphones were used by the participants and out on the desks, minimizing reactivity (Haidet, Tate, Divirgilio-Thomas, Kolanowski, & Happ, 2009, p. 466). In addition, audio recording could be done for entire sessions without the need to move or touch the recording device in any way that could draw attention back to it. While I acknowledge that video recorded data is denser, I found little enough correlation between quantity and clarity to justify the camera’s gaze (Phelan, 2003, Kindle Locations 250-256).

An ethnographic approach fit the kind of intra-interactions I would have with participants during the course of my research: “People’s actions and account are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher—such as in experimental setups or in highly structured interview situations. In other words, research takes place ‘in the field’” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). I took a naturalistic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 7-9), allowing the activities, participants, and settings of my sites to happen as they would have under normal circumstances, and my own presence was part of the predetermined composition of these sites where I took a participant-as-observer stance. Only in the high school classroom did my presence change the site’s natural composition.

The second and third features of ethnographic research according to Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) are:

2. Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

3. Data collection is, for the most part, relatively ‘unstructured’, in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified
at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection process through use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead, they are generated out of the process of data analysis. (p. 3)

I chose not to employ a formal interview approach in any of my conversations and other interactions with research participants, except in the directed exam activity (Appendix) I conducted with students in the high school classroom site, wherein I asked students a few directed questions and recorded their responses:

Next, I have two questions for each of you: 1) How many of you chose a different answer than (or in addition to) the “best” answer (according to the testmakers)? 2) How many of you could support your choice with literary critical theory, textual evidence, or other resources at your disposal?

My reasoning was that a formal interview approach with pre-selected questions appears to be based in will-to-know (Conquergood, 2007, pp. 374-375) recognition: a researcher predetermines questions to retrieve specific information from participants. Even when interviewees provide responses that confound the researcher’s expectations, specifically desired responses are often sought after by the researcher in follow-up questions.

Instead, I adopted a conversational approach that followed topics of discussion raised by the participants and questions that they posed to each other and to me, resembling “unsolicited oral accounts:”

Not all oral accounts are produced by informants responding to an ethnographer’s questions: they may be unsolicited. [...] Ethnographers may find these ‘naturally occurring’ oral accounts a useful source both of direct information about the setting and of evidence about perspectives, concerns, and discursive practices of the people who
produce them. Furthermore, there are some sites where the exchange of accounts among participants is particularly likely to take place; and these are often rewarding locations for the ethnographer to visit. [...] Of course, oral accounts not only are provided by participants to one another, but also are sometimes given in an unsolicited way to ethnographers. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 99)

My role in the activity of the sites where I adopted a participant-as-observer stance was predetermined, but regardless of my level of participation, I refrained from shifting directly into a complete-participant stance because I announced my research intentions to the participants at these sites at the outset (Kawulich, 2005). Participants were made aware that their consent and participation in my research would in no way affect their academic performance or standing in their respective communities, and written consent for their participation was provided. I am aware of the authority I possessed in the roles that I inhabited at these sites and acknowledge here the ways in which it may have allowed me to shape and influence the discourse and events.

My collected data, beyond the exam activity, included documents in context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 128-133) such as classroom materials, assessments, audio recordings, and artefacts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 133-137). I did not utilize categories for interpreting what people said or did in order to construct observation schedules or questionnaires; my data analysis and coding occurred after data collection.

The final two features of ethnographic research as detailed by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) are as follows:

4. The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.
5. The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role at most. (p. 3)

As mentioned, I drew upon experiences and research beyond my three primary sites, blurring and transgressing the boundaries of my research frame. According to mystheory, composite intra-interactive multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.29) of mysbeing are diffractive (Davies, 2014, Kindle Locations 326-353; Barad, 2007, p.30) in their ont-epistemological excess (Butler, 2011, p. 82), agentially transgressing the borders of recognizable subject or site, entangling them in coherent mysbecomings that straddle the divisions between lives precariously balanced upon the enduring possibility of coming apart (Ancelet, 2007, pp. 170-171). The prospect of keeping my focus exclusively on particular subjects and sites was problematic at best.

The way the mystheoretical concepts above came directly into play with my ethnographic approach aligned with Marcus’ (1995) description of multi-sited ethnography:

The other, much less common mode of ethnographic research [...] now often associated with the wave of intellectual capital labeled postmodern, moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation. [...] This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and
within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction, for example, between lifeworld and system, by which much ethnography has been conceived. Just as this mode investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also ethnographically constructs aspects of the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among sites. (p. 96)

With less emphasis on the concept of “worlds,” my mystheoretically-guided postmodern (Glesne, 2011, pp. 12-13) ethnographic approach compelled me to travel between sites, to mysrecognize these sites and their subjects, and to trouble their boundaries of identity, being, and becoming with greater degrees of mys-. The onto-epistemological existence of mystheoretical concepts could not “be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation,” even if I was forced to confine myself to what might be recognized as a single site. The mysbeing(s) of that site would be cut off from those parts of their selves existing beyond the borders of that site, their comings and goings hidden behind an arbitrary research frame barrier. While I could have mysrecognized a single site into a multiplicity of sites and subjects existing without and within, being able to entangle and traverse between these sites facilitated a representation of their intra-interactive, semi-actual, diffractive mysbecoming into each other. In addition, this multi-sited approach lent itself better to data triangulation (Denzin, 2007):

*Data triangulation* attempts to gather observations with multiple sampling strategies. Observations on time, social situations, and persons in various forms of interaction can all be gathered. The use of data triangulation insures that a theory is tested in more than one way, increasing the likelihood that negative cases will be uncovered. (p. 472)
Data Analysis

These concepts, such as they are, problematized efforts to observe and analyze potential mystheoretical elements at play between and within sites, subjects, and myself. This complicated my application of Hammersley & Atkinson’s (2007) primary directive regarding analysis: “Underpinning the process of analysis is the necessity to know one’s data. Detailed and repeated readings are necessary” (p. 162). The implication that coding and indexing “entirely dependent on close reading” (p. 162) would produce this “knowing” of data was called into question by mystheoretical concepts that resisted an agential cut (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 2799-2806) around a set of data that would sever its coherence and semi-actuality.

However, other characteristics of the analysis process defined by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) were compatible with a mystheoretical approach:

The initial task in analyzing qualitative data is to find some concepts that helps us to make sense of what is going on in the case or cases documented by the data. Often we will not be sure why what is happening is happening, and sometimes we may not even understand what is going on. The aim, though, is not just to make the data intelligible but to do so in an analytical way that provides a novel perspective on the phenomena we are concerned with, builds on previous work, and/or promises to tell us much about the phenomena of similar types. (p. 162)

This initial task fit my own analytic process of data well, beginning with my research questions: What may be some of the ways that mystheoretical elements and concepts appear and act within pedagogical practice and a classroom context (without explicit awareness or acknowledgment of these concepts)? How might I account for these concepts that resist recognition in my analysis and design my pedagogical practice and classroom in alignment with
them? What may be some distinguishing differences in implementation, interactions and outcomes between pedagogical approaches and classrooms that account for and implement mystheoretical elements and concepts into their design explicitly or implicitly and those that do not?

Prior to my research, I had constructed a preliminary framework for mystheory and its concepts through analogy and metaphorical examples that drew from a variety of disciplines and the work of various scholars in order to explain and develop it. I then explored those concepts as they might manifest in three contexts: a philosophical context, a pedagogical one, and a context situated in identity. Those explorations provided a developmental understanding of the concepts within these particular contexts, allowing me to support them with the ideas, frameworks, and examples drawn from the literature I had gathered, just as Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) suggest:

While it is rare for ethnographic analysis to begin from a well-defined theory, and indeed there are dangers associated with such a starting point, the process of analysis cannot but rely on the existing ideas of the ethnographer and those that he or she can get access to in the literature. What is important is that these do not take the form of prejudgments, forcing interpretation of the data into their mould, but are instead used as resources to make sense of the data. This requires the exercise of some analytic nerve, tolerating uncertainty and ambiguity in one’s interpretations, and resisting the temptation to rush to determinate conclusions. (p. 163)

Where mystheory provides a challenge to analysis with its resistance to recognition and deterministic conclusions, here it provides a built-in safeguard. Even if the researcher makes a claim of perceiving an element of mystheory in their observations, this recognition is subject to
an analysis guided by mysrecognition, sustaining the opportunity and invitation to mysrecognize the data in a distinctly different way. My process of data analysis followed the steps that Hammersley & Atkinson (2007, pp. 163-166) outlined after the audio recordings were completed and transcriptions were composed from them and combined with notes taken during my observations.

The transcripts were, therefore, combinations of notes written during the experiences of my research sessions and audio recordings, as well as pictures taken of particular material artefacts. Bringing together these different forms of collected data satisfied the requirement for methodological triangulation set forth in Denzin (2007), “When properly conceived, the method should include observations on the part of the investigator, informant interviewing, and sampling techniques. He thus broadens the conventional view of the method and indicates how triangulation may be implemented with the field technique” (p. 472). In the sessions where I adopted the participant-as-observer stance, the audio recordings served as a way to account for and preserve details of these sessions for analysis later when more detailed notetaking could not occur due to my participation in these sessions. For those sessions where I adopted an observer-as-participant stance, I was able to supplement and inform the notes that I composed during the session with the content of the audio recordings. After each session, I analyzed and transcribed portions of the audio recordings, marking the audio tracks in a software program called Mixcraft. This allowed me to import my files and flag timestamps with descriptions of the activities occurring during that moment in the recording that produced an outline of the recording with timestamps upon completion. Each file was labeled for the kind of session it was and the date. These audio files were saved with the notes, pictures, context documents (such as worksheets) and transcript analysis in a dated subfolder within a larger folder for each of my primary site
groups. Furthermore, the timestamps, transcript details, various documents and artefacts, as well as my shifting participation role within each context across the temporal range of observations helped my research to fit Hammersley & Atkinson’s (2007) definition of data-source triangulation:

More specifically, data-source triangulation involves the comparison of data relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases of the field work, different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting, or the account of different participants (including the ethnographer) differentially located in the setting. (p. 183)

It may be worth clarifying that I did not employ triangulation here to narrow and crystallize my understanding of events, but rather to expand and reveal different possible ways they could be interpreted. In this way, my application of triangulation helped me to recognize the data, and for the data to become in relationship to different pieces from different contexts. This approach to triangulation revealed multiplicities of interpretation, rather than supporting one interpretation over, or to the exclusion of, others.

My next step was to take the analysis of each transcript and print them out, after which I cut them up and stapled them to pages with pieces of other observations that they resembled, ending up with over twenty different threads of stapled excerpts that were labeled with concepts, topics, and foci around which those observation pieces could be categorized based on their content. I made multiple copies of transcripts because I discovered that individual sections and pieces of these transcripts of observation data could be categorized and grouped under various headings. By doing this, I could defer the process of finally deciding how these transcript segments would be categorized and coded, allowing them to maintain their recognition across categories and threads. In order to prevent confusion, each transcript piece was dated to
match with its parent transcript, so that I could trace it back to its source in order to contextualize and situate it within the audio recording data. This resembled the process described by Hammersley & Atkinson (2007):

More usually, though, ethnographers collect quite large amounts of data of various kinds from different sources (observational fieldnotes and/or transcripts from various sites; interview notes and/or transcripts from various people; published and unpublished, official and personal documents; material objects; etc); and they seek relationships across the whole corpus. Here the aim is to compare and relate what happens at various places and times in order to identify stable features (of people, groups, organizations, etc) that transcend immediate contexts. (p. 163)

In order to arrange and make sense of such “stable features” across these threads of observation, I created a digital Google Doc outline from the dozen consolidated threads I had left after accounting for duplicates, getting rid of some shorter threads that were quantitatively less represented by the data, and combining others together that addressed similar or compatible topics. This initial outline helped to give me an overall view of my data after it was organized in this way.

At this stage I had a few different types of categorizing concepts: those that were part of my theoretical framework, those that were formed from assembling my data into categorical threads, and those that arose “‘spontaneously,’ being used by participants themselves” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.163), such as Rachael’s “purposeful ambiguity” (HSE, 09/20/2016). When I initially sought to group these concepts and observations together into chapters focused on these aligned elements, I was confronted with the obstacle of removing these elements from their respective situational and conversational contexts, especially in the case of
more complex, multi-layered observations that represented several sets of concepts at play simultaneously. I was torn between keeping these with their respective contexts, or chopping them up and designating the pieces to their respective thematic and conceptual groupings. I settled on a hybrid solution of keeping multi-layered accounts together, while distributing smaller pieces that maintained their meaning better outside of their respective event/conversation contexts.

Revisiting the thematic outline, I started reorganizing the excerpts and topics in an attempt to assemble them into a narrative flow that would develop and illuminate the various interpretations of the data across contexts. The data, however, did not lend itself to a linear trajectory, appearing more as an intra-interactive assemblage that could potentially be arranged any number of ways. Here I compromised in order to format the data into a more traditional narrative structure, putting the data into sections and arranging those sections into a linear order. Expanding the outline out into the fully detailed excerpts in their respective places, I began revising and supplementing them with relevant supporting citations and references from literature, media, and culture. When I did this I discovered that the linear structure and excerpts, despite the removal of duplicates, still revealed a kind of looping design that reintroduced concepts and ideas from earlier into later sections with a difference, connecting different sections together in nonlinear ways within the linear narrative structure (Deleuze, 1994, p. 56). The writing of the initial full draft of this work could then begin alongside the outline and excerpt chapters.
Chapter 3: Myspedagogy

A Pedagogy of Mysrecognition

“We live in a world of mysteries, my friend!” ~Mike Krahulik as Jim Darkmagic

(pennyarcadeTV, 2017)

One of the most common questions I have been asked about myspedagogy is how do we begin? How do we suddenly turn our backs on all that we recognize, including our understandings, our knowledge of others and the world around us, and our knowing of ourselves and our identities as recognized by others? A mystheoretical approach to pedagogy does not require that I abandon recognition and recognizing as a practice. On the contrary, myspedagogical practices allow for and work upon recognition, being aligned with poststructuralists, queer theorists, critical theorists (Derrida, 1997, p. 24, 1978b, p. 279; Butler, 2004c, p. 3, 2005, pp. 7-8; Althusser, 2001, pp. 118-119), and other perspectives and frameworks (Anastasion, 2016; Kruglanski, 1990, pp. 182-183) that support a personal need for recognition in the form of identity, definition, or cognitive closure, and acknowledge a world of recognitions that precedes, surrounds, and contributes to our own. Mystheory is not an onto-epistemological framework of unrecognition; it is one of mysrecognition. Let us begin, then, with what we already know; what we already recognize.

Pedagogies of recognition. Recall the opening scene at the beginning of this work where students were being asked to find recognized transcendental concepts in an excerpt of Emerson’s Nature. Recognition-based activities that ask students to determine what the author is saying or find explicit concepts in a text are fairly common in American school classrooms. They are effective for reviewing and teaching known “scientific concepts” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 148 as cited in Karpov, 2003, p. 66) quickly and efficiently, and for making certain that students
recognize these concepts in the same way through standard definitions and examples. They also align with the requirements of content knowledge transmission outlined in the Common Core state standards (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014).

The students in my undergraduate class (SEED, 10/28/2016) and the student-teachers I worked with (PDS, 11/15/2016) also followed the recognition-based pedagogical approach of these activities in their own lesson plans: Acting as teachers, they would ask their students about a concept, what they thought of it and recognized about it, and then provided their students an authoritative definition and other associated concepts. There’s a cognitive movement here on the part of the students from misunderstanding, partial understanding, and personal understanding to a single authoritative understanding, or recognition, presented and offered to learners by a figure recognized as a keeper of such knowledge, such as a teacher. Micheletti (2010) calls this movement a “pseudo-dialectic,” which is the “illusion of students and teachers actually ‘discovering’ knowledge with and from each other, because the teacher poses a question but already has the solution in mind. In this way, the students are directed towards a particular outcome.” This is the recognition-based approach that a learner takes when they search for information about a topic without questioning what they find; they are seeking to acquire authoritative recognitions from a deficit position that lacks them. Even when Greg tried to have his students construct their understandings differently, they reverted to this approach:

They were constructing their own definition very well. At the same time, a couple of them really wanted just for me to tell them the right answer so much that they were looking it up on their phone, like, “OK, what’s the definition.” (PDS, 11/29/2017)

I found evidence of this in all three primary sites, lending support to the argument that students in almost any context will encounter and emulate this path to authoritative recognitions.
This learning trajectory positions learners in a deficit stance, submitting themselves to the process of acquiring exclusively valued authoritative recognitions. This positioning mirrors Freire’s (2014) “banking concept of education” (Kindle Locations 993-998). These authoritative recognitions are considered final: the answer is positioned as definitive and beyond questioning or challenge when the teacher or other authority provides it to the students, who are there to passively receive it. Students positioned this way are ill-equipped to critically question and challenge recognitions they encounter outside of school. In an era where news stories proliferate through a variety of media channels that may be completely fabricated, the need for a citizenry capable of and experienced in skillfully questioning and challenging these authoritative recognitions is greater than ever.

Let us examine this model of pedagogy that is dependent upon recognition. First, the teacher is positioned as a figure of authority (Micheletti, 2010) in possession of authoritative recognitions (Fenimore-Smith, 2004, p. 228). The teacher transmits these recognitions to students who receive and accept them; they may be assessed on their ability to recall and recognize them (Freire, 2014, Kindle Locations 993-998; Ranciere, 1991, p. 3). Assessments that align with this recognition-based pedagogy include fill-in-the-blank, matching, short answer, and multiple choice forms (Figure 4); they all test based on authoritative recognitions, whether specific answers, specific forms, such as the five paragraph essay, or specific processes that must be followed, to name a few. Regardless, the answers and outcomes are recognized and predetermined at the outset.
Loosening the knot of recognition. Heidegger (2008) begins his essay *On the Question of Technology* with the statement, “Questioning builds a way” (p. 311). Questioning opens up space, enables resistance, and invites reason; yet, a question still operates within the structure and limits of recognition; a question is framed in recognized terms, and the question mark stands as a recognized symbol that invites inquiry, uncertainty, and dialogue, except in the case of predetermined recognitions masquerading as inquiries.

But what if no invitation or permission is offered? What if there is an element of mystery to all things, regardless of their declared certainty? Death is certain—for now—but Derrida (2008, pp. 54-55), Puar (2005, p. 129), Mbembe (2003, pp. 37-39), and Shakespeare (Shakespeare, Gilbert, & Abel, 1979, pp. 1884-1886) among countless other writers, philosophers, and scholars have all questioned its agency, meaning, and actuality. If even those aspects of our existence that seem certain are anything but, then what is truly beyond questioning?

In fact, I can turn to an exercise supported by state standards to find a method that makes questioning essential: the claim-data-warrant activity. On another day in September, Rachael

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Please write the character's name in front of the quotation describing them. (3 points)

_________ “whom Starbuck, the chief mate, had selected for his squire.”

_________ “Khan of the plank, a king of the sea, and a great lord of Leviathans.”

_________ “Instead of first putting his legs in his trousers, he put his pipe into his mouth.”

_________ “Indian from Gay Head...Martha’s Vineyard.”

_________ “King-Post.”

_________ “I will have no man in my boat who is not afraid of a whale.”

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Figure 4: Excerpt from a quiz asking recognition-based questions with one specific, correct answer.
uses black and white photographs from an all black community near Eatonville, Florida, a place that might resemble “the muck” in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, to lead students through this activity. Displaying a picture of a field with wires, she asks students what they see:

Rachael: What do you notice about this photograph?

Student #1: There’s telephone wires.

Rachael: Ah! That’s a claim. There are wires. There are wires.

Student #1: There are wires.

Rachael: See, it’s hard! That’s the first thing I did! The data is, there are wires. You could make a claim that it might be a telephone wire. What else could it be?

Student #2: Telegraph?

Rachael: Telegraph wires, what else could it be?

Student #3: Electric?

Rachael: Electric. Right. So we have to be careful with conflating what we think we know with what’s happening. (HSE, 09/28/2016)

The discussion turned to other aspects of the picture as students learned to reel in their claims and begin looking at the photograph with less certainty. Claims are a kind of recognition, and Rachael was showing students the ambiguity of their recognitions by questioning what they thought they saw without the promise of definitive recognition. The my- in data allows the possibility for different claims to be made from the same data, and no claim to be completely beyond questioning. This is representative of the ontological ambiguity of data and epistemological vulnerability of claims to questioning and challenge, regardless of their foundations of authority or expertise.
Conceptually and performatively, this ontological mys- in the data and epistemological mysrecognition in the claims works against closure (Derrida, 1978b, p. 295) even if it has already occurred in the form of recognition, allowing us to justifiably treat every closure as conjectural (Phillips & Burbules, 2000, pp. 26-30). Some might consider this to be a form of skepticism, but mystheory creates a space for possibilities within closure, opening up pathways to liberation and agency through questioning. It is not limited to resistance and doubt, but encourages creativity and freedom, aligning with Adorno’s (1981, pp. 13-15) negative dialectics, Keats’ (1817) and Butler’s (2004a, Kindle Locations 219-223) negative capability, Derrida’s (Coward & Foshay, 1992, pp. 66-67) negative theology, and Benjamin’s (2007) photographic negative, “From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense” (p. 224). Mystheory does not require an absence or removal of authoritative recognition in order for these possibilities to be realized; it needs only the subversive, potentially productive, onto-epistemological uncertainty in mys-.


Mys- compels us to question, not only as a willful act born of curiosity, but as an acknowledgment and affirmation of the onto-epistemological uncertainty lurking within the foundations of our reality and existence. Rather than being a source of weakness, this
uncertainty imbues us with justification to call our understandings into question and explore possibilities heretofore unconsidered, as “threshold people:”

In comparison, Turner (1996) characterizes persons, like my students, who are engaged in playful exploration, experimentation, and improvisation as irreducible “threshold people… liminal entities [who] are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (p. 95).

The students’ gaining awareness of and confidence with the indeterminate, elusive forces of chaos as a resource for creative agency constituted intra-assemblage inasmuch as it emerged from what they extracted from and attempted making sense of their experiments. (Garoian, 2015, p. 490)

We may call all of our lesson plans, regardless of results or effectiveness, into question and challenge all of our recognitions of grammar, poetry, literature, organization, ideas, conventions, no matter their source of authority. Even if we choose not to acknowledge or address it, we cannot banish the uncertainty and capability for challenge and questioning that mys- invites with the declaration, “This is the (only) correct meaning, this is the proper structure, this is the best practice, according to one authority or another.” Every recognition about ourselves, our reality, and our pedagogy is subject to this questioning: This is who I am(?) This is what and how I must teach(?) This is who my students are(?) This is what they are capable of(?) This is what and how they must learn(?) I will cover this material today(?) These authors, scholars, poets belong to this perspective(?) This is my history(?) This is what it means(?) In the implicit questioning of each of these declarative statements, born in the fertile soil of mysontoepistemological uncertainty and ambiguity, we may find room to mysinterpret,
mysunderstand, and myseducate; we may find a path to resist and challenge; and, we may find permission and opportunity to myscreate. Let us question, then.

**Who are we (as teachers)?** Who am I? This is a fractal question; one that is simple enough to say and comprehend, yet daunting in the potentially infinite depths one can go to in search of an answer. From the moment of our birth, we are hailed into the world (Althusser, 2001, pp. 117-118), called into being, and given a name, just as Adam named all things in Eden (Gen. 2:20, English Standard Version). It seems synonymous with existence that something be given a name, and it is a general assumption that a name may serve as an apt, linguistic recognition of ourselves (Wollan, 2016). Nearly every form of official identification we have bears our name. When we walk into a classroom, we introduce ourselves with our names.

Increasingly, along with our names, we tend to have an image of ourselves, whether it be on a profile page (like on Facebook or a faculty directory), in a yearbook or class roster, or on our driver’s license or student ID card. Perhaps just the name isn’t enough. Lacan (2006) marks the passage from the Real to the Imaginary and Symbolic through the Mirror Stage, and signifies the moment that the child recognizes itself in the image in the mirror for the first time with identification (p. 76). A person’s name and appearance are only the first scraps in an ever growing hoard of information harvested by our federal, state, and educational agencies and institutions in the United States.

In order to acquire their certification, teachers are required to submit themselves to and pass more background checks than ever before in the history of education ("Necessary Clearances"). In addition to these clearances, they are required to provide transcripts, recommendations from references, and submit to a standard job interview. Nearly every teacher in America today will be given a list of materials, concepts, and understandings that they will be
required to teach, and informed of the standards and assessment goals they must meet in order to satisfy the district and state mandates necessary to remain employed and in good standing before they even enter the classroom. They will be observed regularly and undergo an annual review of their performance based on student achievement and these observations, among other factors.

All of these measures serve to further the public and district’s recognition of and increase their control over a teacher’s identity and responsibilities within the school and community. A growing number of schools go even further, defining to the page number what their teachers will cover on a daily basis in scripted lessons that are part of reform programs such as Slavin’s “Success for All” ("Success for All Foundation,” 2015; Colt, 2005).

I argue that an exacting recognition of our identities and roles (personal, professional, gendered, or otherwise) is a prison (Foucault, 2012a, p. 197; Phelan, 2003, Kindle Locations 249-250), characterized by oppression and mechanization (Innis, 2008, pp. 209-210) delivered through recognition-based discipline and surveillance (Kupchik, 2010, pp 6-7; Bracy, 2011, pp. 382-384; Butchart, 1997, pp. 7-9; Skiba & Peterson, 1999, p. 376; Way, 2001, pp. 365-366) that turns us and our students into automations directed and programmed to follow prescribed methods and pass on specific definitions and understandings without the opportunity to question, challenge, discuss, or otherwise deviate from these authoritative recognitions and ways of being (McMahon & Rice, 2014; Colt, 2005; Carey & Markoff, 2010). Recognition-driven measures in education include neoliberal accountability metrics, like value-added models (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014a, 2014b; Collins & Amrein-Beardsley, 2014; Pivovarova, Amrein-Beardsley, & Broatch, 2016), journal impact factors, research funding scores, standardized testing and other forms of success measurable by quantifiable data. They also include methods and practices driven by authoritative recognition like scripted lesson plans. Recognition in these various forms
is a pharmakon (Derrida, 1981, pp. 97-98) that may lead to death, imprisonment, disempowerment, and shame (Gen. 3:6-7; Hyde, 2010, p. 166; Foucault, 2012a; Way, 2001, pp. 365-366). Butler (2009) positions recognizability, driven by norms, directly in opposition to survivability in these cases:

There are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. It may well be that my sense of social belonging is impaired by the distance I take, but surely that estrangement is preferable to gaining a sense of intelligibility by virtue of norms that will only do me in from another direction. (p. 3)

Practices that increase visibility and other forms of recognizability are continuously expanding with means and justification to match; for the sake of business goals, security, publication quotas, accountability, and success according to quantifiable metrics, the visibility project shows no signs of abating. I am not arguing that these reasons and results are unsupported or without merit; instead, I am bringing into focus the cost and consequences of adopting these measures in ever increasing degrees in our personal and professional lives. That may be acceptable to those who would have security and transparency at all costs, but regardless of the support this goal may have, the resulting imprisonment and consequences for students as well as teachers within this system of recognition are directly proportional to the application of these measures.
Teachers, in their professional roles, are often saddled with three cultural myths in education about who they are, who they should be, and how they should act: everything depends upon the teacher; the teacher is an expert, and teachers are self-made (Fenimore Smith, 2004, pp. 227-228; Britzman, 1991/2003, p. 223). These recognitions that position teachers as authoritative figures upon which everything depends (Obama, 2008) can be supported by research that indicates the significance of highly effective teachers to student performance and success (Tucker & Stronge, 2005; “Teacher Quality,” 2005). This significance can be used as justification to impose as many interventions and evaluations as are needed to make sure that teachers are of the “highest quality” and “highest effectiveness,” regardless of the paucity of research that demonstrates conclusively how to actually do that (Hanushek, 2010, p. 84; Rockoff, 2004, pp. 247-248). Of course, this is a recognition-based, state-imposed double-bind (Garrison, 2003, p. 355; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 40), because if teachers have relatively little significance (Berliner, 2009, p. 1; Williams, 2015), then teachers potentially become replaceable and disposable. Teachers are thus offered two options in this trap of recognition: be recognized as significant and submit to federal, state, and private oversight, or be recognized as insignificant and become disposable and replaceable.

**Questioning ourselves.** Five weeks into the academic year, my undergraduate students confronted me with a question, posed by Tina: “Should I admit that I don’t know about something, or that I’m bad at teaching? Should I always be honest? Is that professional?” (SEED, 09/30/2016). Her peers related their experiences with two other instructors of classes they were taking this semester. As Laura put it, “I feel like I’ve gotten contradictory answers from Rob and Tasha.” They related that Rob was more honest and laidback when he couldn’t remember a character’s name, asking his students, “What’s the main character’s name in this
book again?” giving them the impression that it’s “O.K. when you don’t know everything, or that you’ve forgotten the main character’s name. He’s presented this perspective that it’s better to be open and honest.” Laura admitted that she agreed with this perspective, that she would be fine with saying to students, “You help me out; you know this just as well as I do.” By contrast, Laura stated that Tasha kept saying, “Oh no, don’t admit weakness, [your students] will tear you apart.” Laura was skeptical, “I don’t know if that’s necessarily true, but I don’t have much classroom experience to say that for sure.” They then related that they watched a video two weeks prior of a teacher whose lesson plan wasn’t working for her, and Laura asked, “Why wouldn’t you just admit, ‘guys, this lesson plan isn’t working for you so we’re going to regroup and do this.’” Tasha had responded, “No, you can never do that!” Laura confessed, “We’ve gotten some really conflicting perspectives from professors we’ve had” (SEED, 09/30/2016).

At the heart of this discussion was the question: Who should we be? Should we maintain the cultural myth of teacher as expert upon which everything depends? Or, honestly expose our lack of understanding and knowledge and leave ourselves vulnerable to being “torn apart” by our students? I responded to Laura, Tina, and the others that these contradictory perspectives represent a diversity inherent in the mystheoretical concept called coherence, which embraces the potential and possibilities that may arise from different combinations of elements—in this case, perspectives—regardless of contradiction.

A mystheoretical approach permits, invites, and embraces the opportunity to question ourselves, to welcome other possibilities for being beyond the limits of, and in opposition to, our recognition of ourselves, and to mysbecome in ways that do not depend upon the preservation of an unchallengeable recognition of who we are, who we could be, or who we should be. We have
permission within this framework to be honest and admit when we don’t know something without vacating our authority and responsibilities, as Sharon did in our PDS program:

I hate poetry so much. We were doing annotating, and I worked through part of it with them and then let them do the rest on their own. Then we came back together and I said, “Something I just noticed and realized was, Lucy was here,” and I didn’t know what that meant [in the context of the poem]. And five students raised their hands, and said, “maybe it means…” and I liked giving them that time to do that, because you guys said about calling on people. They have something written down, there’s no issue with formulating an answer there [on the page]; they just don’t want to say it out loud. But there was a comfort with discussing with them, like in a small group, and they felt their answers were validated. (PDS, 10/03/2016)

Sharon discovered that in admitting she didn’t know, students suddenly felt empowered to contribute and participate. There was a sudden vacuum of authoritative recognition, created by her willingness, as a student-teacher, to admit that she didn’t know the answer. This same absence of authoritative recognition is present in the case of unsolved problems, which have the inverse energizing effect of removing the possibility of failure and shame; if nobody has solved the problem, nobody has to worry about being wrong, because nobody is right. Without that authoritative recognition, everyone can investigate the mystery (Gleick, 2011, p. 37). I see this phenomenon in the common experience of a presenter struggling to get a projector, computer, or other piece of technology working. After a brief period of time, audience members will often offer to assist and help the presenter to get the technology working properly.

There’s not only a sense of authenticity in teaching this way, but an element of humility as well; of being able to question ourselves—not to induce a torpor of doubt, but rather as a way
to constructively, collaboratively, and conversationally move forward without the fear and shame
of failing to preserve oneself against all challenges and questioning, or defend a practice from
such. Rachael described the way a critical reflection and questioning of her texts led her to
transform her course curriculum this year:

    Rachael: I used to teach *Light in August*, but never had discussions like this. I
don’t know why.

    Me: So when you changed it, was there a reason?

    Rachael: When I looked back over my books, I realized I whitewashed the
curriculum! I thought, ‘Oh my god, what have I done?’ Last year, I really thought about
diversity and block scheduling. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was a shorter book,
whereas *Light in August* was really long and difficult, so I was considering both
accessibility and diversity. With *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I’m much more open
to discussion. (HSE, 09/12/2016)

    Rachael’s openness to questioning her course materials, for several reasons, including
diversity, accessibility, and discussion, allowed her to address each of these concerns by
changing her texts from *Light in August* to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which in turn
allowed her to also address topics and themes she wasn’t able to with *Light in August*, and put
into practice an engaging student-centered discussion element in her pedagogy. Central to this
change was the professional freedom and invested responsibility she had to choose the texts for
the course—freedom and responsibility that is not granted to teachers in schools where such
choices are made for them.

    Allowing myself to possess this kind of agential vulnerability to questioning enables me,
as a teacher, to become a learner, again. Much like the unsolved/unsolvable mystery, this
willingness to expose myself to questioning reveals that I am, in fact, human, in a way that my students don’t always recognize. By allowing myself to be open and receptive to criticism and insights from my students, there is an opportunity to rebalance the inequality of authority and agency in my classroom, thereby decolonizing it by positioning them in roles of authority and responsibility within the classroom ecology. One activity that can represent this pedagogy of shared authority and vulnerability is allowing students to see me struggle through the writing process, through drafts and revisions that are not “Grecian Urns” of expertise and perfection (Gallagher, 2006, Kindle Locations 564-566), and allowing them to get some “skin in the game” (Gee, 2014) by revising and editing my writing. Research has shown that there is an impact on the writing of those who revise the writing of others, and in the case of my students, allowing them the opportunity to participate in such revision of my own writing will also mean that they are working on skills applicable to their own compositions (Fallon & Whitney, 2016). I personally engaged in such an activity when I showed my undergraduate students drafts and revisions of my cover letters, research agendas, curriculum vitae, and comprehensive examination papers (SEED, 09/16/2016) and have participated alongside my students in revision activities that they have run in which we shared, commented on, and revised each other’s writings (SEED, 09/30/2016, 10/21/2016).

**Inverting limitation into agency and possibility.** One of my PDS student-teachers from the 2015-2016 academic year came to me, anxiety and concern saturating his face. He explained that he had been up all night the previous evening, agonizing over preparing for the lessons he was going to teach the coming week pertaining to the text, *Speak* (Anderson, 2011). Within *Speak*, the chapters and narrative of Anderson’s school-aged female narrator are shaped and contextualized by a traumatic rape experience that she endured and is trying to come to
terms with throughout her school year. This student-teacher admitted he could not speak to this experience in the same way from a gendered, experience-based, or situational context, but he also was aware of how sensitive and important this central crisis was, not only to the story, but to the lives of his students. He wanted to plan for all outcomes, to address all concerns, to give every facet of that experience described in the book the respect it deserved, but was anxious about not giving it the justice and kind of treatment that the subject of adolescent rape from a female gendered perspective deserved.

He was well-intentioned, and was one of the stronger candidates in our program, but I saw the scope of his concern becoming his undoing. He was trying to plan for every eventuality, understand every interpretation, honor every aspect of the experience for his students, and he was realizing his own limitations in trying to accomplish those goals. Finally, crestfallen, he looked at me and asked, “Can you think of how I can manage this?” I sat back and suggested:

Perhaps you’re trying to do too much? You’re trying to anticipate every single possible outcome and every aspect of the young female narrator’s traumatic rape experience at the center of this text when you discuss and address it in the classroom, when your own positionality makes that difficult, if not impossible to do. Instead of attempting to take a position of omniscient understanding and control, why not become vulnerable in front of your students, and admit the truth: you only have one life’s worth of lived experiences to draw from; your perspective is limited, gendered, and human. Let us invert the task and allow our students to contribute their experiences and thoughts to our own, to compliment, challenge, and supplement our own in the handling of this sensitive subject. Let us facilitate that conversation, instead of trying to control and know it ahead of time on our own.
I am not attempting to trivialize the potential ways that such a conversation could be very difficult emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually for participants; being able to work through and facilitate such genuine, challenging conversations is critical to a myspedagogical and mystheoretical approach. Reasons include the sharing of responsibility and authority between participants who have different experiences and perspectives to offer; promoting an environment where such experiences and perspectives may be addressed and heard respectfully; and, acknowledging our personal limits as participants to address sensitive, meaningful topics exclusively from a single perspective or set of experiences. It is because sensitive subjects such as rape are as challenging to talk about and discuss, while being so significant and real to our lives, that we may advocate for a mystheoretical approach that values an acknowledgment of our inability to cover such a subject neatly, cleanly, and without acknowledging the experiences and perspectives that other participants may have and bring to the conversation. My student-teacher smiled, the fear and worry about the extent of his preparations having faded, and thanked me, stating, “I feel so revitalized; so relieved” (PDS, 01/25/2016).

Our limitations do not end there. They apply to the breadth and depth of our knowledge and understanding as well as our personal capabilities in a discipline or field not only in areas outside of and even adjacent to one’s area of specialization, but also within a discipline or area of study as well. Even if we accept a teacher’s expertise in a chosen field, such as English literature, we are soon confronted with the reality that each field has numerous experts practicing, researching, teaching, and learning about a limitless range of topics in that field—some that have yet to be identified or recognized as such. Our students, too, may be experts in particular areas of knowledge that we are and are not familiar with.
Rather than try to anticipate and cover all such material as they may have expertise in, or their experiences and reactions to material we will cover in class, let us, as teachers, admit our limitations and open the door for students to contribute their knowledge, skills, and expertise to our classrooms (Beach & Myers, 2001, pp. 22-23). Let us design assignments and activities to allow students to participate in ways we cannot entirely predict or know about with certainty. One example of this type of assignment that I encountered in my observations was the “creative exploration” that Rachael and Greg allowed students to do this year for the first time (HSE, 10/10/2016). When they both announced this creative exploration assignment as an option to the class, the atmosphere was immediately charged with enthusiasm and energy from the students and Rachael confirmed this after class:

They are so locked down with traditional assignments and their thinking is tied down to the requirements of those assignments, whereas the creative explorations allow them the freedom they crave, and this is in part because of their high powered intellects, and they struggle to contain those within the assignments. These creative explorations motivate and excite their thinking. (HSE, 10/12/2016)

The difference between a “normal” exploration and a “creative” exploration was that the latter offered students the option of doing something other than a written analysis of a theme, topic, or element in the chapter(s) that were assigned for reading. Greg informed me that he and Rachael had come up with the idea prior to the beginning of the school year, in order to “address different ways the kids want to think about and explore the text.” He mentioned that Rachael had done alternative assignments before like interpretive dance for a class in which she taught *Frankenstein*, but she had never done this particular assignment before.
These weren’t throwaway assignments given in isolation that had little relevance to the overall course; they were significant building blocks to other assignments and activities that all contributed meaningfully to each student’s learning and comprehension. Normal explorations required the student to come up with ideas and analyze and develop them in depth in at least five-hundred words on the current assigned readings. The grading was based on “if you used quotes effectively, and if you made an argument.” Creative explorations were critically different and similar: on the one hand, they still required students to come up with ideas and develop them with evidence of analysis of the readings, but on the other, they opened up a wide range of unpredictable products and approaches that would also require different forms of evaluation than the normal explorations.

Formally, the rationale was to get students “to develop ideas for essays, for future homework and engage with the book actively,” but it also helped them “to develop ideas for in-class discussions” (HSE, 10/10/2016). Discussions in class were student-led by small groups who came up with questions to ask their peers and teachers in class about certain themes and topics that they recognized in their readings. The explorations and student-led discussions contributed to final multi-page written essays, projects, and portfolios on topics that the students chose for themselves; topics that they had been developing and exploring through these other activities throughout the year (HSE, 11/30/2016).

A Pedagogy of Inversion

“Up is down. That’s just maddeningly unhelpful.” (Verbinski, 2007)

Too often, we think in terms of an Aristotelian logic that follows a law of noncontradiction:
It is, that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect; we must presuppose, in face of dialectical objections, any further qualifications which might be added. This, then, is the most certain of all principles, since it answers to the definition given above. For it is impossible for anyone to believe the same thing to be and not be, as some think Heraclitus says. (Aristotle, 1984, p. 1588)

Using Aristotle’s logic, we might suppose that what gives us more information, more visibility, more safety, only gives us these things; what is harmful is only harmful, and could not possibly have beneficial effects. So once we prove these things to be true, they’re easy to endorse. After all, who doesn’t want more ways to gather information or be safer? Let us indulge in a seemingly benign example of using brighter lights by which to see.

**Inversion in our concepts and practices.** American automobile headlights have become increasingly bright and intense over the years, culminating in the latest version of headlights called “high intensity discharge,” or “HID.” These headlights project light farther, presumably improving their owner’s driving safety by increasing the time available for reaction to potential problems in darkness. Glare is proportional to brightness, however, so increasing this brightness also increases glare for oncoming drivers, making the driver less safe from other drivers than they would be with less intense headlights (Mainster & Timberlake, 2003). The fact is that increased visibility for one person, in this case, leads directly to increased blindness for others, and an increased potential for harm *together with* an increased potential for safety to all participants. In short, visibility, like technology, is a pharmakon (Derrida, 1981, pp. 97-98).

The constant push to gather ever increasing amounts of data is implicitly linked with seeing more, not just in space, but time—predicting more. Yet, like the headlights, gathering
more data does not actually lead to a clearer or more accurate understanding in many cases, such as in the 2016 American election (Lohr & Singer, 2016; Metz, 2016). The consequences of this increased visibility and gathering of data may include compulsive behavior (Peysakhovich & Stephens-Davidowitz, 2015), harassment (Lohr & Singer, 2016), and the delegitimization of that which is not tracked and recorded by data and visibility (Whitehead, 2015). In fact, when confronted with large amounts of data to consider, such as student-teachers experience when going into the classroom for the first time, it can be “overwhelming” (PDS, 09/13/2016). In one of his freewrites, Brad wrote in his first week: “I feel ashamed to say this, but certain things I have learned so far this semester have actually kind of scared me. I am still 100% sure that teaching is what I was made to do, but my number of concerns have definitely increased” (SEED, 09/09/2016).

Anxiety and shame correlate with increased visibility and recognition. Literature and myth are replete with examples of the dangers of visibility. Diana had Actaeon fed to his own dogs for his voyeurism (Ovid, 1986, p. 55). Adam and Eve lost their paradise because of their drive to know and see everything (Gen. 3:1-7). Psyche lost Cupid because she had to see him (Apuleius, 2011, pp. 106-108), Zeus is paralyzed with shame by Argus’s one-hundred eyes (Hyde, 2010, p. 166), and Orpheus loses Eurydice forever to the gloom of the underworld because he cannot help but look back at her before she completes her journey (Ovid, 1986, p. 226).

Rachael’s discomfort with voyeuristic activities emerged when she had her students perform an alternative version of a Socratic circle that positioned a group of students in the center of the room to have a brief discussion on the reading while other students sat on the perimeter. She went around to the students, anxiously asking, “It wasn’t terrible when you were
in there, was it?” When I discussed this activity with her after class and brought up the similar fishbowl activity, in which students could voluntarily go in and out of the center, she admitted, “The fishbowl is the same concept, everybody is watching you in the center, but I cringe at calling it that too, because fishbowl has this weird voyeuristic element to it” (HSE, 09/26/2016).

I acknowledge that some students thrive at the center of attention, and some appear to love being in the center, alive with conversation and engagement. Rachel’s apparent anxiety for them, it could be argued, might reflect her own discomfort with being in the center of the classroom. Her concerns and questions may have been an appeal to them to rescue her and reassure her, inverting the conventional representation of a teacher in control and rescuing her students into one of the students instead reassuring and rescuing their teacher. If this was the case, it might have been a representation of a kind of critical self-visibility and awareness that she may possess, projected through her questions and concern in a way to assuage her own worries and doubts.

I also admit that this visibility could (and did) function as a disciplinary measure on student performance for those in the center. They were in the spotlight, being watched, in the same way that student-teachers Max (PDS, 09/19/2016) and Sara (PDS, 09/27/2016) watched over their students to keep them on task. Tracy pointed out other ways visibility can affect participants when she talked about the impact of desk placement in her classroom:

I personally don’t like the horseshoe formation because I think that it intimidates students for discussion. I think it’s helpful only in classes where the students are already comfortable voicing their opinions. I think that in evaluating students who aren’t comfortable voicing their opinions, it puts too much pressure on them; it seems like the spotlight’s on them, because everyone is able to look at you when you’re speaking [...]
whereas the desks [in other arrangements, like rows] there’s some comfort in having something to hide behind. (PDS, 09/19/2016)

These effects, and others, contribute to my position that visibility can and often does have an actual impact on these events on multiple levels, in multiple ways, just like in the example of the high intensity headlights. Too often, I find, the ways in which these effects are playing out beyond our control or recognition, or their capability for doing so, goes unacknowledged. Furthermore, it may be the difficulty or impossibility of recognizing or controlling these effects that contributes to this lack of acknowledgment on the part of many people, as some theories, such as Uexküll’s theory of Umwelt, indicate: “For von Uexküll, to perceive is to bestow meaning. Only what is perceived and is important to an organism has meaning, in the same way that something doesn’t have meaning if it can’t be perceived” (Despret, 2016, pp. 161-162).

Given this possibility, we are faced with the question of how to adjust and account for that which may elude our perceptions in our pedagogy, as well as how to grapple with the unintended, mysrecognized effects of our efforts to try to perceive these effects, even through methods that may seem directly purposed for seeing.

A complicated responsibility. Teaching is riddled with decisions that are rife with unintended and unavoidable paradox. This lends our responsibility a messiness that challenges any concept of practice that is purportedly free of these consequences. Our brief exploration of approaches above, utilizing means of visibility, whether for discipline, security, information, or accountability and participation may serve as one way of highlighting the mys-ness of what we do, whatever our intentions or methods. The mystheoretical concept of inversion, aligned more with Heraclitus than Aristotle, calls on us to reexamine and reconsider our pedagogy and practices in an effort to explore the potential contradictory and multiplicity of effects within our
practice. This allows an acknowledgement of the multidimensional complexity and depth of onto-epistemological possibility of being and doing that goes against Aristotle’s logic of non-contradiction; our practices can be and not be what we intend, simultaneously, producing consequences that meet and defy our expectations from student to student.

An appreciation for inversion entails realizing that no practice is free of mysbecoming in ways that defy our recognitions. This compels us to not only acknowledge and accept the richness of consequences within and beyond our intentions, but to make our pedagogical decisions accordingly. Teaching is difficult; myspedagogy embraces this. It reveals how, and why, it is unfair and even reprehensible to hold teachers accountable by an exacting standard of culpability and expectations that do not leave any room for the mysbecomings-in-doings of their practices, especially when practices and approaches are considered along one-dimensional lines that categorize them as purely and exclusively “best” and “most effective” in their implementation. Nearly all practices hold within them potential for mysbecoming, and possibilities beyond their original intention or purpose, whether or not this is acknowledged. Teachers who realize this about their practices must accept one set of possible consequences, in order to achieve others, without having an easy alternative that allows them to escape the questioning and discomfort that comes with this realization.

For example, we turn to the question of participation, and specifically, how much we should expect or require from our students. Some schools evaluate their teachers based on how many students participate and how often, with better marks being assigned for more, as mine did when I taught. I noticed during student-led discussions about Moby Dick that Rachael was keeping a checklist of those students who participated. Greg pointed out (PDS, 11/15/2016), however, that she doesn’t grade them, explaining further that Rachael wanted the students to
volunteer. To require them to do it through assessment and evaluation, would make their contributions potentially arbitrary, in service to that requirement. I have known other teachers and professors, myself included, who have wrestled with this dilemma in the context of participation on forums for their classes. Davies (2014) writes against participation when it is used as a form accountability (Kindle Locations 445-447), valuing instead the importance of voluntarily speaking and emergent listening that may not be measurable, and Goodwin & Goodwin (2004, p. 238) reveal the marginalization that students of minority ethnic and racial backgrounds and those who are considered disabled, such as deaf students, may experience in classrooms where their participation is required in specific ways. No matter which approach we take towards participation, according to inversion, we will be facing the consequences as well as the possibilities that lurk within and go beyond our recognitions, intentions, and performance.

**Sharing agency and responsibility through inversion.** We do not have to bear the burden of responsibility for our pedagogical decisions and agency alone. Inversion provides for distributed and shared agency among the participants in any intra-interactive engagement within and beyond our assigned roles and defined responsibilities. Of the experiences of my life preceding my personal teaching experience before I decided to pursue certification and step into a classroom, one stands out to demonstrate this potential for shared authority and responsibility for a pedagogy-in-myabecoming. I used to design and run *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures with a few friends of mine when I was a high school student. In many ways, being a “dungeon master” (hereafter, “DM”) for a story-based adventure roleplaying game aligns with inversion and mypedagogy. Recently, another DM, Chris Perkins, a former teacher himself, gave a talk about the experience of being a DM:
But, books aside, games aside, I’m probably best known for my work as a
dungeon master: the kind who crafts stories, puts it in front of a group of players, watches
them poke holes in it, tear it to pieces, go off in strange directions they’re not supposed
to, and make it their own. So, the DM is part writer, part director, part editor, part cat
wrangler, but the movie, the novel, the story that you’re telling, the story that’s being
written, is happening while we play. And how it ends can depend on the roll of a die, or
some crazy decision that one of the players makes in a peak fit of madness. It’s like if
Lord of the Rings was happening in real time, and the actors knew their characters so
well, we’re just making things up on the fly, and things were happening as a consequence
of their decisions. The power of D&D and the power of games like D&D is the
unscripted shared storytelling that it provides. (PAX South, 2017)

It is stunning how easily this translates into a teaching approach that facilitates and offers
students a measure of freedom and control over the content and direction of the lesson. A
teacher utilizing this approach is engaged in a doing (Kaprow, 2007, pp. 160-161) and playing
with her students (Sutton-Smith, 2007, p. 157), even at the risk of lesson plan falling apart
classroom:

To illustrate the concept of transaction, one can consider any card game, but for
this example I will use pinochle. [...] In the game, four players laying down one card each
during the playing of a trick might be considered an interaction. However, seen as a
transaction, something much more complex occurs. The first card determines the next
card played and the juxtaposition of the first two cards determine the next choice. [...]
By thinking of my classroom as a place where multiple transactions with multiple texts were occurring, I began to imagine a place where learning was always under construction and was based on our individual and collective experiences. (pp. 45-46)

In order to successfully practice myspedagogy, I allow my students to take a hand in the telling and writing of a classroom narrative that is shared in its composition by all of us. I may begin by questioning my assignments, assessments, and activities, and thinking about ways that I might distribute my control and position of expertise to my students, inverting a more traditional power dynamic where the teacher retains and exercises control and authority almost exclusively. Instead of exclusively coming up with themes and questions myself, I might distribute this responsibility to my students as Greg did when he had his students come up with questions for each other’s mysnarrative about the text (Figure 5):

Your group will create five quiz questions covering the most important points of chapters 84-100. These should be fact-based questions with a specific answer in mind, and should be fair to answer for someone who read and took notes.

Part 1: Each member of the group will be responsible for writing one question. Put a star next to the question you contributed. No two questions should cover the same chapter. (4 points)

Part 2: Write the rest of your group’s questions on your sheet. They should be in the same order on each member’s paper. Indicate the chapter each question comes from.

Part 3: Individually answer at least three of the questions made by your group members. (6 points)

Figure 5: Excerpt of Greg’s quiz with his questions

Paradoxically, forming these questions in a meaningful way may be just as, or even more, effective at demonstrating that students read the material as having them answer questions that a teacher might put to them. It also provides an opportunity for their mysnarratives to be shared, mysbecoming together in a discussion of possible interpretations that may cause each of us to
reconsider our own understandings, and transform them in dialogue with these other interpretations, these other mysnarratives, to mysbecome with them (PDS, 11/15/2016).

Co-constructed Google Slides presentations were another activity I observed Rachael and Greg perform that ceded control over content and distributed responsibility for expertise to their students. Traditionally, PowerPoint or Google Slides presentations are worked up by a teacher and presented to students, as Greg intended to do for one of the lessons he was teaching by himself (PDS, 10/25/2016). I reminded him of the co-constructed, student-centered Google Slides presentation that he and Rachael guided the class through (HSE, 09/20/2016):

Rachael: This is typical [example] of what our class generally looks like, because we’re very student oriented. So, we could have lectures, but...

Me: It gets them involved to some degree.

Rachael: Yeah.

Me: Lecture, it’s mostly teacher; they bring the materials, they read the materials, the students take the notes, maybe…

Rachael: You deliver and bring the content.

Me: Yeah, you deliver and bring the content, and assemble the content. Whereas here, all of that is inverted on the students. This is the second co-constructed PowerPoint I’ve seen you do; the other was on Zora Neale Hurston. In both, you were getting the students to each do something: talk, research, and work in groups.

For this Harlem Renaissance co-constructed presentation activity, Greg and Rachael came up with a list of historical figures that their students would research and construct slides for in small groups. Each student was given a “mystery card” with the name of historical figure on it and tasked with finding information about him or her. For the co-constructed presentation
about Zora Neale Hurston, the students were assigned one of five parts of Hurston’s life:
biographical information; publications; quotes; recordings; and awards, influence, images, etc.

This activity maintained a recognition-based, teacher-centered framework in its delivery.
Unlike a presentation designed and delivered exclusively by a teacher, however, these co-constructed presentations used teacher-selected historical figures and parts of an author’s life as placeholders for students to territorialize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 9-10) with their own findings. In this way, Rachael and Greg constructed a kind of frame around the potential and limitless freedom and agency students could have, without robbing them of either; the students constructed every slide of these presentations, including their aesthetics, images, and content. In our post-class discussion, Rachael described the risk, surprise, and learning that she experienced in doing this activity with her students:

Rachael: We didn’t really know, I didn’t really know who these people were this morning, but now I feel like an expert because I’ve seen them twice now. Some students come up with some really interesting things that we had no idea about, like talking about Louis Armstrong’s work in Congo. I mean, wow, that’s fascinating! So, yeah, we don’t know what they’re going to come up with; it’s a risk.

Me: And it’s also a space for opportunity!

Rachael: Well, it’s like anything; there are affordances with limitations. So it affords us the opportunity. (HSE, 09/20/2016)

Recalling my own high school teaching experience, these presentations mirrored a historical figure activity I would run with my own students. For various texts and time periods that allowed them to select an individual from a list I prepared, or choose a figure not on the list. If a student wanted to research a person from that time period or social context that wasn’t on the
list, then they could talk about that individual and explain who he or she was, allowing me a way to vet them beforehand to make sure they were appropriate for this activity. These activities demonstrate my pedagogical inversion in the way that they distribute and share the responsibility and work of constructing these slides to and among the students. They demonstrate my pedagogical recognition by allowing the students to construct and present their recognitions of these people in ways that may differ from other recognitions presented either by other students, or other sources, such as a textbook or encyclopedia entry. These are but a few ways a pedagogical activity or approach might incorporate elements of inversion and recognition, or other theoretical concepts.

**A different kind of work.** Some might see my application of inversion in pedagogical practice as simply shifting the workload of the classroom from the teacher to the students, but the workload isn’t being shifted, it’s becoming different. Upon advising my PDS students one day about this kind of decentered pedagogy where the teacher takes on a role akin to a facilitator, rather than transmitter of recognitions, one of them responded:

In a way that seems like *more* work to me. I’m teaching World History, which I haven’t taken in a while, since ninth grade. So, I’m learning everything again, and having to teach it, and I feel like I wouldn’t know enough to facilitate their learning. At the same time I feel like I have to read their minds, like I have to know what they’re thinking and really engage with them to figure out where they should go next with what they have, and that feels like *more* work. (PDS, 10/17/2016)

I responded to Melanie that in a banking model, where the teacher is the expert communicating authorized recognitions to the students, the work for the lesson falls to the teacher in the preparation stage, where she will craft a lesson and put together materials, and then
deliver them in class. Because this model allows students very little authorized freedom in practice (taking notes, answering questions on a quiz, filling in worksheets) the majority of the work is completed by the teacher prior to the lesson. In activities like the co-constructed presentations described above, much of the teacher’s work is in the moment of the lesson. By allowing students more freedom and control over the direction of the work in the classroom, the teacher is adapting to the mys-scripted pedagogy as it unfolds. Much like Perkins’ DM, the teacher must still know her material and be able to address spontaneous student-generated happenings and challenges for which there may be no planning or preparation. For example, a student may ask if there is any other way a sonnet could be written besides the Shakespearean form. A teacher with a knowledge of sonnets could provide the student with examples of sonnets in the Italian tradition, which may have inspired Shakespeare, as historical alternatives. Presenting these forms, the teacher may then encourage students to come up with their own forms, named after themselves, that remain true to certain elements of these different forms, while breaking from them in other ways. If a teacher has no knowledge of these other sonnet forms, she has less material at her disposal to help address either her students’ questions or support their potential myscreations of the sonnet and other forms of poetry and writing.

This may add to the challenge of the earliest years of teaching a subject, because teachers may not have as much familiarity with or a more expansive knowledge of material and practices with which to address such questions and support these alternative ventures. After the teacher has taught the same material for a year or two, that preparation and background knowledge deficit decreases, allowing her to focus more of her energy on facilitating this in-the-moment classroom performance (Grossman et al., 2000, pp. 632, 656). The workload, authority, and
responsibility for the performance of the class hasn’t actually lessened (Fecho, 2004, pp. 13-14); it has just become different.

Imagine a train. With a typical train, the locomotive, in front or behind, pulls or pushes all of the other cars; it bears the entire burden and is consequently, the only car able to actually push or pull at all. In a classroom following the banking model of education (Freire, 2014, Kindle Locations 993-998; Ranciere, 1991, p. 3), the teacher is positioned and expected to be the locomotive, while the students are the unpowered, passive cars. If we made each car capable of pushing and pulling the train, however, even without any one car possessing the capability to do all of the work, the train would still be able to move. The same work is being done, but in an entirely different manner; investing each car with part of the responsibility, and capability, to push and pull the train.

By inverting a teacher’s role and positioning them as a learner, as well as a teacher, one possessing as many questions as answers, allowing for knowledge and participation in her students that goes beyond her own, an opportunity is created for students to take a more agential role in the responsibility of their learning. I hesitate to call this “student-centered” pedagogy, even though it shares characteristics with that approach. I prefer the term “myscentered” to represent a classroom where the roles and capabilities of each participating factor—human or otherwise—are capable of mysbecoming in different ways, on different days, in different kinds of classroom intra-interactions and coherent assemblages.

I acknowledge that a teacher is still invested with a mantle of institutional and professional authority and responsibility, regardless of how much she distributes to her students. There are many ways to share authority and responsibility without surrendering it, in the same
way that a DM is still in charge of a storytelling adventure without having complete scripted control over the story itself.

**A Pedagogy of Coherence**

“Franny is listening to a program on wolves. I say to her, Would you like to be a wolf? She answers haughtily, How stupid, you can’t be one wolf, you’re always eight or nine, six or seven.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 29)

A myscentered classroom is a place where coherence thrives. Represented by an onto-epistemological assemblage of flowing semi-actual elements impacting and mysbecoming each other in the classroom, coherence embodies the vitality of these intra-interactions that slip agentially and diffractively beyond and through the boundaries of recognition-based frameworks.

Myspedagogical practice therefore welcomes diversity, difference, approaches that increase and promote discussion, a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, and revelatory intra-interactions within and beyond the frame of the classroom that inspire transformative mysrecognition of already-existing recognitions. A classroom that values coherence may see questions like, “Who’s right? What is the best approach?” (SEED, 09/30/2016) as limiting and exclusive in their ideology, encouraging a war for supremacy. Activities like a debate wherein only one side can “win” by maintaining, defending, and advancing their respective position against another are oppositional to a myspedagogical approach that endorses coherence. Schools that separate their students by perceived ability, as tracking does, discourage the potential for coherence among students and faculty and disregard the effects of homogenized classrooms on their potential capabilities and understandings. The environment of these classrooms becomes one of reinforcement and amplification of challenges, whether psychological or sociocultural, found in similar groups of learners. Both students and teachers are impacted by this system of
recognition-based tracking, altering their activities and expectations according to these groupings in often detrimental ways that fail to engage or challenge students or themselves differently (PDS, 11/15/2016, 11/17/2016).

Through available technology at a school, such as Google Docs, Wikis, and other collaborative media and programs, it would be possible to go beyond classroom walls and have a discussion, conversation, interaction between classes of students. They wouldn’t have to be the same grade, building, level, or even looking at the same material, but there could be a few common themes or subjects around which the dialogue could happen. Leia, a student-teacher inquiring into ways to foster dialogue and collaboration between students from different levels, put this idea into practice with her mentor teacher in a limited way. Each student was assigned with one or two other students. They all read the same article, and then in their groups, they composed their individual responses to the article. The other students in the group then wrote responses to the written responses of the other students. This activity was similar to the way students might post responses to an original poster in a discussion forum, and then post responses to each other in response to their different responses. Leia’s activity applied that across classes at different tracking levels.

The value of coherence may reveal itself in conversations across generations as well, problematizing the way our schools segregate students by age—another form of tracking (The RSA, 2010). Robin, another student-teacher, told me of a meeting between herself, her mentor, a supervisor, and the parent of a student who was failing (PDS, 10/31/2016). He was a student who was always on his laptop, and often pretended to be working by flipping his screens, but she had caught him doing this and called him out on it. He would actually be accessing a roleplaying forum where people collaboratively wrote various kinds of fiction. One story was about a girl
who was repeatedly raped in various situations and his character was attempting to help her. The parent and mentor were of the mind that the student should be taken off the computer, go out and make friends in person, and complete his assignments on paper. Robin contested this, saying, “If we take this away from him, he might not have anyone. He might need this, since he hasn’t made personal emotional connections in school. If he’s making them online, then it’s better than nothing.” Robin argued that, as adults, they were generationally removed from the ways students and younger generations were “always connected” to technology in cultural, personal, and social ways. She also observed that during group work he was often unfocused, even when he was not on the computer, leading her to believe that the source(s) of his problem(s) may lay elsewhere.

The supervisor, mentor, and parent, upon hearing her perspective, acknowledged her points and reconsidered their approach. Without Robin voicing her perspective as someone familiar and close enough to the student’s social norms and culture, but also as a member of the adult circle of the mentor, supervisor, and parent, it is likely that the measures the three had come up with would have been implemented. Instead, the group agreed to continue working on alternative solutions to address the situation with this student.

In a PDS meeting, Robin and the other student-teachers came up with alternative approaches to help the student to manage his time and priorities. One of these was a hybrid approach that would allow him to use the computer but only once his work was done. Another involved apps like Self Control (Stigler & Lambert, 2016) and Stay Focusd (Transfusion Media, 2016) that could limit the amount of time he spent online, or on a particular site. Both of these approaches may not have been available to the student or adults had Robin not been part of this coherent dialogue.
Coherence offers opportunities for mysrecognition and mysbecoming by bringing together diverse participants in different ways. I have worked with student-teachers in one-on-one and group meetings, and have found that the latter, like a roundtable, tend to offer an increased capability for suggestions, revelations, and transformations in thinking that is not as likely in the former. In a similar fashion, I have noticed that the intra-interactions among and between students in undergraduate and graduate courses have been markedly different depending on class size and participants.

The relationship between a mentor teacher and student-teacher is another that can be enriched with a coherence of insights and revelations that challenge the assumptions and recognitions of both. Tracy’s mentor teacher spoke to her of the value having other examples and models to follow, because he had only one to learn from in his own student-teaching experience, and it took him several years to figure out other methods and approaches (PDS, 09/19/2016). This collaboration pushed Tracy to appreciate different perspectives, engage in more questioning, and become more comfortable with not knowing everything for certain—a significant change from her initial perspective in our first meetings together (PDS, 10/11/2016).

Encouraging coherence means constructing a pedagogical environment that welcomes challenge and vulnerability between different perspectives within a hybrid third-space (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990, pp. 212-213) that does not keep them separate and safely undisturbed. One of the ways to methodologically facilitate the acceptance of these sometimes confrontational views is to teach students practices, such as playing Elbow’s (2008) “Believing Game,” that assist them in their efforts to hold and honor two opposed ideas in their minds at the same time and still function (Fitzgerald, 1936):
In contrast [to the doubting game], the believing game is the disciplined practice of trying to be as welcoming or accepting as possible to every idea we encounter: not just listening to views different from our own and holding back from arguing with them; not just trying to restate them without bias; but actually trying to believe them. We are using believing as a tool to scrutinize and test. But instead of scrutinizing fashionable or widely accepted ideas for hidden flaws, the believing game asks us to scrutinize unfashionable or even repellent ideas for hidden virtues. Often we cannot see what's good in someone else's idea (or in our own!) till we work at believing it. When an idea goes against current assumptions and beliefs--or if it seems alien, dangerous, or poorly formulated---we often cannot see any merit in it.

Elbow's (2008) believing game methodology complements a mystheoretical approach that asks the listener to question and resist their initial recognitions in favor of looking for more positive aspects in a perspective or concept that we perceive as “alien, dangerous, or poorly formulated.” It is a practice that sustains and encourages dialogue and meaningful conversations about topics that are as difficult to talk about as they are meaningful and authentic (McCann, Whitney, & Olcese, 2013). Having such conversations, whether in the classroom between teachers and students, mentors and mentees, or between supervisors, parents, teachers, and student-teachers is essential to opening up pathways of semi-actuality between participants within a framework that fosters coherence. Without this, suspicion, distrust, and misunderstanding can limit future dialogues by providing an isolated, closed-loop for reinforcing misrecognitions. Both Greg (HSE, 11/10/2016) and Robin (PDS, 11/29/2016) were hesitant to share their respective ideas with their mentors out of fear that they would not accept them. I assisted Greg with his conversation with Rachael, who, after a few minutes of explanation,
accepted it after she realized that she had misunderstood his initial idea for an alternative quiz format. I encouraged Robin to speak to her mentor about her social media activity, even knowing that her mentor was against using social media applications in her classroom. By having a conversation and bringing the other person in, even if they don’t approve of the idea, they can provide reasons why it might not work, whereupon it may be possible to assure them that those reasons have been or would be considered; if they hadn’t been, there is an opportunity to incorporate those concerns into the design of the activity before moving forward. This mindset is not a defensive one, but rather one that accepts and embraces different opinions; one that is open and vulnerable to revolution through dialogue (Flusser, 2013, p. 54; Ulmer, 1985, p. 174).

It is tempting to apply a judgment of reductivist relativity to the whole matter; that everyone is equivalent in their bias, opinion, and perspective. I cannot endorse this recognition of equivalence because it too easily flattens (Sousanis, 2015, pp. 6-7) the depth and multiplicity of mysrecognized differences intra-acting within a conversation into one-dimensional sameness that harbors exclusive, complete authority among the participants: My view is as good as your view and you’re welcome to yours, just as I’ll keep mine, because we’re all equivalent. A mystheoretical/myspedagogical approach that endorses coherence recognizes bias in each perspective in order to acknowledge the vulnerability and capability for questioning, challenge, and difference in each perspective as a source of participatory agential intra-interaction, not as knee-jerk justification to refrain from discourse and maintain one’s position under the auspices that no perspective is flawless and “correct.” The latter reasoning implicitly brings to bear a framework of judgment that is evaluative and comparative in a way that facilitates a process of elimination towards one best recognition by refusing to acknowledge any other arrangement or
Coherence in argument. I am back in Rachael’s classroom (HSE, 10/06/2016) and the students are working on their essays and papers that will soon be due. Rachael and Greg demonstrate to the whole class how to use quotes. They model, they give examples, and they explain what not to do. Then they give the whole class a single quote to use as a walkthrough example of how to contextualize and work with a quote to provide a good framing for why they are using it. The implicit assumption was that the whole class could agree on how to contextualize and frame the quote effectively and purposefully. However, as Greg acknowledged, the quote was isolated from its context.

I believe that having students offer up examples of quotes that they are using from their own paper drafts with their respective context, purpose, and framing, that would then be looked at as a class, may have accomplished the original goal of deepening student understanding about quoting, while also demonstrating by a wide variety of examples the different ways a quote could be put to use for the purposes of argument. In an effort to avoid offering up unreviewed quotes that might leave them personally open to shame-inducing criticism by peers and teachers, we could have students initially work with their respective quotes in small groups. That way, there’s an opportunity for students to confer with peers to assist them in framing and contextualizing their own quotes. If they are unable to do this, the responsibility could be shared among the group as a whole, instead of held by a single member, and then the quote could be reworked by the whole class.

Having the same quote framed in different ways would also present an opportunity to
demonstrate how a quote can be purposed and repurposed to serve different claims and warrants, and how, as a piece of data, it may be characterized by a recognizable degree of ambiguity and semi-actuality. This activity could allow students, by their own examples, to appreciate how their quotes may be used in a variety of diverse contexts and arguments effectively, and further develop their appreciation for diversity when quotes from different context are put into coherent proximity with each other.

This quote activity is relevant to the claim, data, and warrant activity (HSE, 09/28/2016). Rachael had the class break up into small groups for analysis of the pictures she and Greg had distributed to them. Then, they brought the class back together, and as a whole class, questioned and pointed out data and made co-constructed claims together about the pictures. After class, I had a conversation with Rachael, in which I suggested an alternative version of the activity where the students could—once they knew how to make claims, support them and develop a warrant—develop their claims, decide what was going on and then, when they reconvened as a class, claims about the same picture could be revealed, side-by-side, exposing their differences in reasoning and deductions. Rachael appreciated this suggestion:

Oh yeah! I really like that, because then you can see how the same data can contribute to different claims! It’s like the defense and the prosecution in a criminal court case; same piece of evidence, but their arguments are different. I like that. That’s a really good addition to this.

Bringing in multiple perspectives, participants, and elements through decentered discussion has been demonstrated to generate student ideas and responses in all of the sites that I observed, including my own experiences (HSE 11/03/2017; PDS 11/15/2017; SEED, 2016-2017). Discussions have been described as more “freewheeling,” eliciting and provoking
tangential responses that riff off what has been said. The dialogic intra-interaction of multiplicities resembles Deleuze’s learning by swimming:

     [...]learning occurs through a multiplicity of unanticipated ideational movements that disrupt and disarticulate sedentary representations thus casting socially and historically constructed knowledge and intelligence into a predicament, an anomalous sea of complex and contradictory signs. (Garoian, 2017, Kindle Locations 1621-1623)

Like moments of spontaneous memory and inspiration, connections are made, realizations emerge, and we are enabled, through the dynamics of discussion and coherence to reference related material that we can bring to the conversation from beyond the work itself. In one class discussion that I participated in, Rachael’s class was covering a few chapters in *Moby Dick* that I had not read; yet I found myself able to participate and add to the discussion meaningfully, due to the connections to works and concepts beyond the text to those that were raised and focused on in the discussion (HSE, 11/03/2016). Robin pointed out that she noticed that this was something her students who had not read were able to as well: they were not typically the first to speak, but rather, they riffed off what other students had to say, allowing them to participate meaningfully in an activity that came back to the text through their connection and relevance to the reading (PDS, 11/15/2016).

A professor teaching a graduate course in which I was enrolled approached me after class one day and put before me the problem of how to handle students who had not read prior to class. If they had not read, there was less motivation for them to participate in the discussion in class on the reading material, and since they were already late with their written responses on the reading, there was less motivation to contribute their thoughts on the forum as well. I suggested allowing them to draw on ideas sparked by the in-class discussion to connect back meaningfully
to specific parts of the text raised in a written post for the forum after class had concluded that day. This would accomplish the task of encouraging students to think about the reading material discussed in class and offer them a meaningful way to still participate in the forum discussion after the fact. By rearranging the standardized path involving an isolated process of reading, comprehension, and composition before class, a pre/during/post class cycle could be created with a great potential for coherence in class and on the forum, along with several different paths to meaning-making for students. An argument could be made that no one might do the readings beforehand under these circumstances, but in my experience, there has always been a small percentage of students who prefer to do things on their own or accomplish tasks earlier than the rest. Alternatively, a teacher could always assign a small percentage of students to do the reading and composition before class on a rotating basis.

It’s not surprising that people may have trouble coming up with ideas and understandings on their own, that dialogue/conversation sometimes sparks ideas based on something someone else said, or even that talking to someone helps to work through ideas—all three of these phenomena may be explained through coherence and semi-actuality. There is a connection here to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (1980, Kindle Locations 1653-1656), and the advantages, cognitively and performatively, of collaboration versus isolation, and the question of a person’s true capability: Is it what can be accomplished in isolation, or what they can accomplish with others?

We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his
environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement.

I have embraced opportunities to audit courses, because I acknowledge the mysrecognition in my understandings of texts and honor the probability that other participants will focus on different areas of the text, or contribute ideas and understandings that I either missed, forgot about, or understood differently. I appreciate the semi-actual shocks (Massumi, 2002, p. xxxi) to my recognitions that these participants from different generations, experiences, sociocultural backgrounds and circumstances, locations, and academic degrees can provide in coherent intra-interaction with each other.

If a discussion turns into an argument wherein perspectives are defended and attacked with a goal of preservation or conquest, like a military operation, then several mystical elements change immediately: mysrecognitions become recognitions to be advanced and defended, coherence is reduced to uniformity, silence, and dualism, semi-actual impacts are minimized from without, semi-actuality within is masked with completeness, and inversion may be perceived from defined, inflexible positions as an act of betrayal. In this scenario, negotiation is replaced with war—but wars are not predestined to endure endlessly, and there are opportunities to resume negotiation from a war scenario.

Just such a moment arises in Gaiman and Pratchett’s (2011) novel Good Omens, when eleven year old Adam, the predestined anti-christ figure of the story, actually halts the Apocalypse based on reasoning that evolves from an earlier conversation he has with his gang of misfits, known as “the Them,” about eliminating a rival gang, known as “the Johnsonites:
“I dunno,” said Pepper. “I mean, it wouldn’t be so interesting without ole Greasy Johnson and his gang. When you think about it. We’ve had a lot of fun with ole Greasy Johnson and the Johnsonites. We’d probably have to find some other gang or something.”

“Seems to me,” said Wensleydale, “that if you asked people in Lower Tadfield, they’d say they’d be better off without the Johnsonites or the Them.”

Even Adam looked shocked at this. Wensleydale went on stoically: “The old folks’ club would. An’ Picky. An’—”

“But we’re the good ones…” Brian began. He hesitated. “Well, all right,” he said, “but I bet they’d think it’d be a jolly sight less interestin’ if we all weren’t here.”

“Yes,” said Wensleydale. “That’s what I mean.” (pp. 325-326)

Adam recalls this conversation when he stands before the Metatron and Beelzebub and questions the seemingly inevitable clash that was foretold to occur between Heaven and Hell, but he adds another aspect of coherence that sustains it even through the war’s enactment and conclusion: “It’s like us an’ the Johnsonites. But even if you win, you can’t really beat the other side, because you don’t really want to. I mean, not for good. You’ll just start all over again” (p. 373). Adam’s position is not one that advocates for a way forward that sustains a vital coherence among the coexisting beings of the world indefinitely for its own sake, but rather undermines the binary, exclusionary war that ends in one best “gang” or “side” by pointing out that “you'll just start all over again.” This is one way coherence can persist even through and beyond war; not as the same coherence between the same beings, but as a different kind of coherence within, among, and beyond the mysbeings-in-becoming in the aftermath.

This war framework, driven by conflict between binary, recognition-based factions destined to end in one “best” side, is found not just in Gaiman and Pratchett’s entertaining story;
it exists in our classrooms, politics, and sociocultural fabric. It is found in the Common Core standards, such as CC.1.4.11-12.G, and was present in my undergraduate class. Tina was running a lesson based on the Toulmin Model (Wright, 2016) that breaks rhetorical analysis and argumentation into six parts:

Claim: assertion one wishes to prove.

Evidence: support or rationale for the claim.

Warrant: the underlying connection between the claim and evidence, or why the evidence supports the claim.

Back: tells audience why the warrant is a rational one. In scholarly essays, the warrant and backing would be the areas most supported by factual evidence to support the legitimacy of their assertion. In causal arguments, the warrant and backing are often taken for granted.

Counterargument/Rebuttal: addresses potential objections to the claim.

Qualifier: additions to the claim that add nuance and specificity to its assumption, helping to counter rebuttals.

The characteristics of a war framework are all present in the Toulmin model: binary factions, defined by specific recognitions, set against each other in a conflict, wherein they are tasked with defending and preserving themselves as they are from all challenges and criticism, and wherein only one faction can be best, or survive beyond the conflict, to the exclusion or demise of the other. When she put this method into action in her lesson, our class was divided into those who would support one side of an issue against those who would support an opposing side. Tina had provided a choice of topics for us to debate, but when we got to debating our individual sides, Brad remarked of the other side, “I kind of agree with you guys” (SEED,
There’s no mention in the Toulmin method about how to handle a student that respects and agrees with certain parts of what the opposition says—a critical aspect of Elbow’s (2008) believing game strategy. That’s because, in a war framework, there’s virtually no consideration for other perspectives and ideas, except to recognize them as an opposition to be rebuffed or overcome, as the method instructs. A war framework finds its strength in certainty and recognition; even if there is mysrecognition or uncertainty in it, these aspects will be either ignored or denied in favor of securing one’s position for the fight (Szymborska, 2007, p. 147; Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“War” framework</th>
<th>“Coherence” framework</th>
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<tr>
<td>Focuses exclusively on defining, supporting, and defending one perspective, recognition, or understanding in order to preserve and sustain it in argument, except where it considers other perspectives for the purposes of addressing potential objections, counter rebuttals, and strengthen one’s own position in opposition to others.</td>
<td>One’s own position is vulnerable and open to questioning and reconsideration, even if it is known, defined, or recognized. It de-prioritizes solidifying one’s convictions and sustaining a recognition or understanding in favor of listening and considering other perspectives in order to invite and facilitate questioning, reconsideration, and transformation of one’s own position.</td>
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<td>Presents discussion in an “either/or” binary framework; one side must win, one choice must be selected, while the other will be excluded or eliminated, based on the “merit” of the argument, and factors of consideration deemed more valuable.</td>
<td>These perspectives are not framed in terms of oppositional binaries in an “either/or” framework, nor is the adoption or choosing of one side wholly over another endorsed. Instead, elements and aspects of different perspectives may be aligned with and incorporated in ways that may differ from their form, meaning, or usage in their original contexts.</td>
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<td>If one adopts aspects and elements of the other side, it is seen as conceding to that side, and converting to and adopting their elements in place of one’s own. Thus, transformation is exclusively one-way; it facilitates conversion and colonization, because the aspects of the other perspectives are replaced by one’s own.</td>
<td>This facilitates a conversational and discussion-based collaboration because all sides question, acknowledge, consider, and value aspects and elements of other positions in addition to their own.</td>
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<td>Drives towards a single dominant perspective, to the exclusion, elimination, assimilation, and/or colonization of all others.</td>
<td>However, this does not function to reduce or eliminate perspectives. Multiple perspectives may remain, transformed, at the end of the discussion, valued for what these changed perspectives can bring to themselves, as well as other perspectives in future conversations.</td>
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Table 1: A brief comparison of a War framework with a Coherence framework
When Tina suggested that she was going to allow the students to agree afterwards, I raised the question of the affective impact of the arrangement and order of activities in her lesson. If we pursue a course of battle in which sides must be taken, fought for, and defended against by other sides, there’s a potential to create feelings of hostility and antipathy for those points raised by the opposition, regardless of their merit. So should we have battle then peace? Or peace then battle? Does the linear trajectory of these concepts even make sense to maintain at this point?

There is an opportunity to invert the debate by rewarding students for adding to, enhancing, or buying into each side’s points as though they were their own. This alternative activity offers a way to discover possibilities that emerge when someone recognizes their positioning to support ideas other than or oppositional to their own. It can also help students develop an empathetic appreciation for the ways different perspectives can coherently compose their own understandings into new composite forms.

**Coherence, semi-actuality, and unruly classrooms.** Of course, empowering different perspectives with democratic, participatory agency can present challenges for administrators and teachers who want to maintain control and micromanage the conversations and topics in their classrooms. Hillary provided an example from her experience as a high school student when the Sandusky scandal occurred. She said that administrators had decided not to discuss this issue to “protect the students,” but that this only bred “mistrust and resentment” instead (SEED, 11/11/2016). I also observed that discussions were not being had at my high school site regarding the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. The feelings of mistrust and resentment seem to arise because of a lack of willingness to be vulnerable, to be open to the impact of events
and happenings beyond one’s own choosing, and to allow others a measure of responsibility and freedom to handle those events in their own way.

If all perspectives are vulnerable to questioning and mysbecoming, including our own, we facilitate a way for our students to authentically discuss topics in a deeply challenging, honest manner. The semi-actual impact of others upon myself, and myself upon others makes our coherence affective, effective, and vital; without it, we are back to cells within walls where we may keep our static perspectives and others may keep theirs inside a safe liberal matrix.

A mystheoretical conceptualization of diversity is alive with this messy potential for transformative intra-interaction that troubles recognitions and viewpoints, like a national park wherein the animals may engage with each other. This stands in contrast to a more traditional, liberal concept of diversity that is like a zoo, valuable for the vastness of its preserved collection of separate differences, in the same way that a museum or boutique shop might curate a variety of artifacts or products (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990, pp. 212-213). Kanu (2005) expresses the difference in pedagogical approach in terms of classroom management between cultures of teachers and students:

More often than not, our job as teachers is framed as one neutralizing or eliminating the contradictions, differences, or gaps between the curriculum’s address and the student’s response. In reality, however, teachers cannot ever eliminate the volatile happenings in the space between address and response, between curriculum and student. As Donald, an educator in Britain’s Society for Education in Film and Television, explains, this space “is characterized by oscillation, slippage, unpredictable transformations, even resistance” (cited in Ellsworth, 1998, p. 42). (p. 511)
Semi-actual agency and coherence in the classroom may perform “oscillation, slippage, unpredictable transformations, even resistance” between curriculums, students, teachers, or any other participant, human or otherwise, including environmental and material objects. This is valuable to the educational process because it creates “power and possibility… by inviting important questions such as: What gets hidden/erased/ignored when we seek perfect fits between curriculum and student response/understanding?” (Kanu, 2005, p. 511) Kanu and Ellsworth (1998, p. 43), tie agency to resistance and the capability for intentional refusal that gives rise to these messy classroom dynamics between participants. If this is truly allowed, then holding teachers or students to exacting and precisely formed expectations is a cause I happily surrender in favor of developing a myspedagogy that “sees our failure to produce intended social outcomes not as a malfunction but as something necessary if agency, creativity and passion of learning are to be possible” (Kanu, 2005, p. 512).

Max, a student-teacher, recalled a recent classroom experience where the class went in a direction he and his mentor did not anticipate (PDS, 09/19/2016):

We did a four corners thing: if you strongly agree, go to this corner; sort of agree, this corner. That worked out very well in fifth block. But in my sixth block class, one of the [topics for discussion] was, “teens everywhere face the same problems.” And it got heated! Rose (his mentor) and I had to step in. One girl was on the debate team, questioning our questions about how vague they were. The other student, they’re both friends, but he just wanted to shut her down. Somebody brought up that kids were starving in Africa. He said, “You don’t really see that problem here. Let me ask you, are you starving?” And she reveals she’s been starving herself for two summers. The whole
class went dead silent and it’s like let’s just go to the next question. [...] That surprised me, when that came up. That question, more than any other.

A mysapedagogical approach embraces these surprises that erupt when students have the agency and responsibility to ask and respond to questions beyond those the teacher(s) have chosen, even when the discussion gets “heated.” These tense situations have critical potential to be “teachable moments:”

“Teachable moments” occur, according to McCauley, when discussions about “charged issues” are contentious, when dialogue is polarized, and when there is a breakdown in communication. Felman (1992) refers to such moments in teaching as “crises” that are necessary for true learning to take place. Drawing a parallel between the testimonial process of crisis pedagogy and psychoanalysis, she argues that both “live through crises. Both are called upon to be performative, and not just cognitive, insofar as they both strive to produce, and to enable, change. Both this kind of teaching and psychoanalysis are interested not merely in new information, but primarily, in the capacity of their recipients to transform themselves in function of the newness of that information” (p. 53). (Garoian, 1999, p. 116)

Surprises and “teachable moments” like these, born of distributed, decolonized, myscentered agency, also frustrate approaches that prioritize a predictable, carefully planned classroom where nothing is unanticipated—a classroom that operates fully and exclusively within the bounds of precise recognition. These unpredictable turns call upon the class participants to adapt, tolerate, and cope, rather than predict and prevent. I asked Max, “Knowing what happened now, would you have done the exercise again?” His response led to the following conversation:
Max: Yes, because it got them talking about things they need to talk about to understand the book and learn others’ opinions. I would’ve moderated it differently.

Me: How?

Max: I would’ve stepped in sooner, because that was the only question where the discussion got heated. They don’t talk about kids in Africa in the book. [...] I would’ve made sure they focused on teenagers in the US. [...] I think I would’ve asked more pointed questions, such as, “Do you think you face the same problems as teens in 1965? This text is set in Oklahoma. Do you think you have the same problems?” I would’ve had them focus on the setting of *The Outsiders* instead of taking it where they wanted to. But I still would’ve let them go…

Me: Do you think that discussion would’ve happened had you done that?

Max: We wouldn’t have found out she was starving herself, that part of the discussion wouldn’t have happened. But I also don’t know if that part of the discussion added anything to what we were talking about, because once that came up, we couldn’t talk about that topic anymore. We had to move on.

Me: Why?

Max: Rose and I didn’t want it to go any further than that because we didn’t want any other things to come out like that! You could tell that she (the student) was getting uncomfortable. Her face was getting red, she was getting defensive. She was really the only one advocating for her side, there were people standing with her but she was the only one talking. And she’s an extremely competitive person. So she was not going to lose.

Me: She was very emotionally invested?
Max: Yes, so we had to either let it continue, where I think it would’ve really gotten out of hand, or just shut it down and move on. Because they still got the points out of it that they needed to, we could still see where other people stood, and everybody still said their opinions based on where, well, everybody in the group did. They were talking about it for five-ten minutes, so they got, they pretty much exhausted the point.

Even when a teacher chooses material she may recognize as safely uncontroversial, these situations can arise, as Fecho’s (2004) account of his class on Nikki Giovanni’s poem demonstrates (pp. 12-13). When I talked about this incident that happened in Max’s classroom in my undergraduate class with another professor, Dana, in attendance (SEED, 09/23/2016), she responded with empathy to the situation that the teachers and their students found themselves in:

Dana: That story makes my heart pound. Maybe she (the student) wasn’t signing up for a full-class discussion of her personal eating disorder. [...] But I was also in a class one time where something very similar happened. [We were doing] a kind of a storytelling exercise with a writing activity attached, and someone told a serious, sad one about their dad and a bad thing that had happened and... it just seemed weird to do the exercise on that story.

People would tell a story and you were supposed to say “So what?” and they would talk more and you would say, “So what?” The idea was to develop the theme and develop ideas in the story, but this girl was like, “My dad did this and that bad thing” and you were supposed to say, “So what?” How could you even be a human being and do that?

This [teacher] was my advisor, and he said, “OK, we’re going to pause. Forget about the activity for a moment and let’s just be human beings.” And he just modeled; he
said “I’m so sorry that happened to you, and thank you for telling that story,” and then there was silence and a couple people said warm things to the woman who had shared, and she said a little bit more about it, and then she gave permission and said, “And the so-what is…” and she just kind of did the activity on herself and let it be OK. [...] It was a nice moment because he didn’t force us to take that up as a class, but he didn’t let it go unremarked upon. It was “OK, pause, human moment.”

There was another class [I was in] in college, masters, where [the focus was on] the contemporary novel of the 80’s to present, and we read American Psycho. Brutally gory, scary book about a serial murderer and rapist, just a nightmare book that I had the worst bad dreams about. So, we read it and then we came to class that night, and the class is half women, half men, and the professor really didn’t talk about the scariness at all; gender was not addressed at all; that it might have been hard to read, especially if you were a woman or just a human—none of that! It was just like, “OK, let’s talk about the themes!” as though it was like the other books we had read. And I don’t think anyone in the class needed it to be a discussion on rape, but you kind of have to acknowledge it! It was not even commented upon.

Me: Ignored completely.

Dana: Yeah! And I thought about that as a teacher, and what I thought was, “What a wimp.” That was what I thought. He didn’t want the class to be therapy or something and I get that; nobody in the class wanted it to be therapy, but you kind of have to remark that, “Boy, these are bad things that are happening in this book” or, “Boy, it was a little scary to read this book;” just to even name it!
Vulnerability, responsibility, and authenticity all go hand-in-hand when materials, texts, students, teachers, and their connected experiences, understandings, and questions come into play in a genuine discussion that can be as surprising as it is difficult for all involved on multiple levels—emotionally, professionally, psychologically, socially, culturally, and personally. These moments can occur whether we invite them to or not. Dana’s account presented two different ways to approach and handle these situations: the first example demonstrated a teacher’s willingness to honor the misdirection that the activity had taken by carefully facilitating it to its conclusion, while the second example demonstrated a complete lack of acknowledgment for any experience, topic, or emotional discourse beyond the predetermined themes. One educator modeled his responsibility in a way that his students could handle their own towards each other with sensitivity and consideration for the vulnerability they shared; the other kept to a predetermined course, abdicating his own responsibility to it; though, Dana made it clear that in that moment, her perspective of the professor and his course had changed.

**Critical lenses in coherence.** The focus of today’s class (HSE, 11/01/2016) is on literary critical analysis utilizing the different frameworks and perspectives, such as New Criticism, Postcolonialism, New Historicism, Feminism, Archetypal theory, Psychoanalysis, and Marxism. A discussion leading to an analogy to the different varieties of literary theory and what the characteristics are for each one is initiated by Greg with a question: “Do you think you act differently at different points in your life?” A student requested clarification, asking: “Do you mean the people we’re around with, or the age of our life, or stage of our existence?” This question represents a critical awareness of the impact that others may have on one’s lived experience and perspective, a coherent understanding. Perhaps without realizing it, the student asking this question gave voice to a key difference between theories that divide human growth
and experience into stages, like Piaget’s (1963, p. 4), and those that account for the semi-actual influence and impact of others on oneself, like Vygotsky’s (1986, pp. 31-32; Lightbown & Spada, 2006, pp. 20-23). The discussion continued:

Greg: It could be the people you were with, but it could be anything; friends you were with, sports team versus when you’re with the debate team, or with your parents. Why do you think you act differently in different situations?

Student #1: Depending on your mood, or the environment you’re in and how they influence you.

Student #2: Depending on comfort level… some places, like this classroom, I feel more comfortable around, other classes I don’t… I still talk, but not as much.

Student #3: When you feel like you perceive a different type of expected behavior, and the values of the people in those situations.

Student #4: I agree about the expected behavior, about what is expected. There’s the relationship between yourself [and them] that changes things.

Student #5: For me it’s how other people perceive me.

Greg: Yes, because there’s different expectations, and different goals that we have to meet with those expectations. And I just wanted to relate that to these literary theories and that you want to look at things in a certain way depending on what goals you have.

Rachael: If you have different goals, you act differently, or you apply different information.

I found this to be an interesting approach to understanding literary theories, since I was used to thinking of these theoretical frameworks as lenses, akin to spectrometers that read various bands of the light/sound/wave spectrum. However, new possibilities emerge if we
consider how these interpretive frameworks might be woven together to mysbecome new frameworks that are not exactly like any of the original frameworks which may have contributed to them. Such mysframeworks could allow us to explore what kind of interpretations may be possible through a framework that incorporates particular elements of queer theory, postcolonialism, and new historicism, for example.

*Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015) was used as a common text for a class-wide Feminist reading. Rachael likes this movie and was inspired to do *Moby Dick* as a class text after having seen *Fury Road*. The class watched a clip featuring a scene awash in blue tint, with a young former member of Immortan Joe’s harem in the desert with other older women, one of them leaning against a motorcycle. The class then went to small groups and discussed for several minutes the gender types and feminist elements of the scene. Then, they came back together and shared out their claims with the class. This was a walkthrough activity for the next two exercises, which involved small group discussions of two more scenes of the movie, a chase scene and an ambush scene in a canyon. Each group looked at these and analyzed them with a specific theoretical lens. Afterwards, they shared their findings out to the class.

The coherence of this activity may be enhanced by bringing multiple theoretical perspectives together to see how they align, inform, and work against each other. For example, when the class explored a feminist interpretation of the scene with the older women and motorcycle and I explained what I recognized as feminist elements in that scene, Greg acknowledged that my analysis had also applied a new critical approach by exclusively limiting itself to that particular scene. I confirmed that my analysis blended these perspectives.

Later on, Rachael and Greg transitioned into one of several exam prep activities they do throughout the academic year, this one utilizing an exam administered in 2004. The section
featured a reading passage followed by fifteen multiple choice questions about it. One of the students had a very conscientious question that considered this exam activity in context with the theoretical perspectives activity the class had participated in earlier: “If we’re taught to apply these lenses, and draw on other texts for references, why then do we have to read in a vacuum for the exam?” (HSE, 11/01/2016) She had observed that the exam specifically prohibited the utilization or referencing of any outside material in order to answer the questions about the passage—an exclusively New Criticism approach to the reading that restricts its potential coherence. Rachael explained that she was having the class practice with the format of the exam in order to prepare them and make sure they had a clear understanding of the kind of rules and restrictions they would be working under while taking the exam.

In the next class (HSE, 11/03/2016), two students in particular had begun to go back and forth in a debate about how Melville could have had meaningful “downtime” between parts with more action in his novel. Because this disagreement explored the meaning of these different terms and the ways the novel could have been written differently, Rachael allowed it. When the two boys started entrenching themselves in their positions and recognitions in preparation for an extended argument, she cleverly defused the situation by suggesting they collaborate together to coherently develop and represent their perspectives in a co-authored essay; if their two perspectives were written in isolation and merely put beside each other, the affective impact of their coherence would exist primarily in the reader’s intra-interaction with these two perspectives, rather than the writers themselves.

Similarly, an activity featuring separate stations representing different ways to approach materials, concepts and themes (PDS, 10/25/2016) would open up pathways of coherence if these stations were somehow able to semi-actually intra-interact with each other, mysbecoming
together. This is not to say that there isn’t a level of coherence present within these individual stations, and in intra-interactive dialogue with students working at those stations, only that there are other levels and kinds of coherence depending on their materialistic intra-interactions and performative arrangements with each other.

Another activity I participated in with a colleague of ours in a graduate class was a multi-genre, multi-author collaborative novel (Fallon & Beam, 2012). Weaving together hypermedia, writing, literary figures, and settings, we myscreated a coherent composition that pushed the boundaries of the terministic screen (Burke, 1968, pp. 45-46; Brooke, 2009, pp. 38-39) with a heteroglossic, polyphonic chorus of voices (Bakhtin, 2008, Kindle Locations 5521-5526).

**Internal coherence, irresolvability, and dissonance.** Coherence does not just exist between beings, but within them as well. It may represent being-in-becoming through entangled intra-interactions of multiplicities within what might be recognized as a “self.” Akkerman & Meijer (2011) make note of depicted characteristics in scholarship on teacher identity that align with a coherent representation, “involving ‘sub-identities’ (referring to multiplicity), as being ‘an ongoing process of construction’ (referring to discontinuity) and as ‘relating to various social contexts and relationships’ (referring to the social nature of identity)” (p. 310). The diffractive performance of these semi-actual teacher identities upon each other and within themselves keeps the dynamic assemblage(s) of our being(s) and becoming(s) in perpetual flux (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 33; Puar, 2005, p. 128). Composed of transgressive elements that come and go over recognized boundaries of identity and existence, these “selves” blur the separations between one “self” and another, troubling the concept of a clear and distinctly separate “self”. Like watercolors, we bleed into each other. For most people, the cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962, p. 93; Wong, 2017) created by irresolvable uncertainty of coherent being-in-becoming can
be discomforting; we tend to like having answers, being able to say who we are, what we believe, and where we stand on an issue. We also tend to want those answers to be consistent, rather than oppositional or contradictory. Instead, we are confronted with onto-epistemological challenges that frustrate our efforts to achieve those resolutions and recognitions.

The students of Rachael’s class (HSE, 09/12/2016) wrestled with one such challenge put forth in Ta-Nehisi Coates’ essay, “In Defense of a Loaded Word” (2013). The focus is on who has permission to say the n-word, and how conditions and context affect this. Coates explores the way the same word can be appropriate for certain people to say but not others, such as calling your spouse, “Baby,” could be considered appropriate, but calling someone else’s spouse, “Baby,” would likely not be. The desire to resolve who can say the n-word and who cannot is what Coates attempts to confound in his article, however; his message is that you cannot separate the attachment of the word to “one of the most vibrant cultures in the Western world,” from the “violence that birthed us.” The n-word is both celebratory and harmful. To attempt to ban the word or decide once and for all what it means and when and by whom it can be used is “finishing school,” according to Coates. I like that phrasing, since school has the capacity to be a place where inquiry, discussion, and learning, rather than finalized, certain knowing, might meaningfully happen. Rachael and Greg took on the task of facilitating a discussion about the n-word after students read and discussed Coates’ essay in small groups:

Student #1: We all agreed that it was just depending on the context and what your intent is when you say it and how you say it.

Rachael: Two different arguments there, context and intent. Which is more important? [...] It’s really very complex.
Student #2: The third paragraph on the back page clarifies how groups use these words, if a group just censors themselves, they don’t know the vocabulary. I think intent could be more important, because if a group already used these words but then used them in a mean-spirited way, first it would just not make sense, also it would still be offensive, but that’s not how they used these words. But it’s how other groups use them, so that’s where context comes in.

Student #3: I think Coates would say context is more important because he keeps bringing that up as a point. On the first page, he says, “I understand that words take on a meaning in context,” and on the second page, he says, “Words in context take on a meaning in relationship…” So since it’s stated more often, I think his argument would be that context [is more important]; it’s not whether you intend to use the word in a positive way, it’s whether you’re part of the group that matters.

A little later on, another student responded: “I think that people should be responsible about context, I mean intention matters, but you are still responsible for how you say things around others.”

The discussion continued, diving into examples of self-deprecation, the public and society subjecting certain words and acts to judgment, the politics and tensions surrounding the Confederate flag, and rappers’ usage of the n-word. Rachael repeated the acknowledgment that this was a complex issue, and one student offered that it was “nuanced.” Afterwards, students offered a few more examples where certain words were used among certain groups without arriving at a clear reasoning about which words were appropriate where, and on what basis.

It was tempting for the teachers and students to frame this discussion in binary terms, such as which was more important, context or intent, but I also perceived binary thinking in
another student’s comment: “A lot of people shouldn’t have to justify themselves to other people.” This is demonstrative of an implicit all-or-nothing framing. Another student turned this hands-off declaration into a question about responsibility and celebrity:

I think that also ties back to public figures, and how essentially they have this sort of responsibility, [...] they have to ask, “Do I owe it these people to be [good] and present this goodness? Or can I just be queen and say whatever I want and let them assume whatever they want because I don’t have that responsibility?”

Rachael eventually brought the discussion to a close with a transition to an introduction of Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, leaving it without a clear resolution. Considering the different points of view and examples that were offered up, it would be possible to have a lively conversation representing these different perspectives in one’s head; this would be an example of internal coherence. I found another example in Rachael’s introduction of Hurston’s text:

Now we’re reading a book that was written in the 1930’s by a black woman and she’s going to use this word. Now that’s a little different than a book I used to teach, *Light in August*, and that was in the 1930’s and so Faulkner’s use of the n-word is a little different than Hurston’s use of the n-word, and I was never quite sure: is he being oppressive here? Or is he just using it? I never quite felt comfortable. Now because we are reading a book written by a black woman, I feel more comfortable that she’s using the word, because she’s of the community. All the books that have this word in them have been banned at one time or another. You’ve all heard that Huck Finn has been banned, but if you look at the portrayal of the characters it was not a negative portrayal per se; it was of the time. The other thing to bring up is this whole idea of white washing. Should
we never read anything that uses the language that is derogatory or offensive? Or should we read it and be offended? [some more discussion among the students occurs] So, we’re going to read this! We’re going to read this book and the n-word is going to come up, and I feel like every time you read it, you’re probably going to cringe. That’s good. I don’t want you to become desensitized to it. That’s not what I hope. I hope you won’t be desensitized to it. (HSE, 09/12/2016)

Rachael expresses her perpetual discomfort in various ways here, as well as her hope that her students will feel a similar discomfort when they encounter the n-word as a result of being sensitive to the history and violence associated with the word. She hopes that her students maintain that discomfort as they read, as she does, and that they do not find a way to resolve it. Sustaining this perpetual discomfort with unresolved—perhaps, irresolvable—concepts, texts, thoughts, feelings, and experiences is a form of internal coherence that allows these ideas to remain in play and vital, despite the tension they create within us.

This internal coherence allows us to contain and manage contradictions without adhering to a foolish consistency (Emerson, 1841/1847), because it is valuable that we change with our experiences, age, and responsibilities (SEED, 09/30/2016, 10/21/2016). It allows us to have a measure of empathy and understanding for others who differ from us by considering multiple, oppositional perspectives. This capacity for internal coherence allows us to carry on more complex relationships with others whom we might still appreciate and be friendly with, even if we may disagree with their ideas (PDS, 10/25/2016). This capacity to walk in someone else’s shoes (Lee, 1960, p. 30) enables us, as writers, to imagine and see things from a variety of different perspectives for our characters (PDS, 09/27/2016); it allows performers, actors, musicians, and artists to become a multiplicity in their doing, to become selves within their being
that they may not identify with, just as most of us inhabit a variety of roles and become “different people” in the presence of certain groups, relationships, and environments, as the students in Rachael’s class pointed out (HSE, 11/01/2016). Critical internal coherence allows us to differ in our opinions, beliefs, and practices as student-teachers or colleagues from our associates or mentors while going along, comparing our thoughts, understandings, and approach to different ones being enacted before us (PDS, 11/15/2016). It can shock us as well when someone we thought we knew is jarringly different around other people and in different situations.

A Pedagogy of Semi-actuality

 Finch: Who was he?

 Evey Hammond: He was Edmond Dantés... and he was my father. And my mother... my brother... my friend. He was you... and me. He was all of us. (McTeigue, 2005)

 Semi-actuality troubles our pedagogy, our identity, our expectations and our understandings in countless ways. It is a concept that compels us to face the probability that we do not and cannot have as much control in the classroom as we might like. We both are and aren’t in place and time; our intra-interactions with and effects on others both are and aren’t what we think they might be; our influence is likely different than we might recognize; our words are understood in ways that we can never truly be certain about, even when our students nod their heads in apparent alignment with our own understanding. Even our own performative selves mysbecome with others, presenting us with a mysidentity that offers us a self that is always transformed in mysbecoming with others. In this way, our mysbeings-in-becomings are like the concept of mys-; they are both recognizable as entities unto themselves, and yet incomplete in the sense that the actuality of our mysbeings is ever in intra-interactuality with our onto-
epistemological existence with the reality we inhabit. Our semi-actuality gives us cause to question what our students really learn from us, who they are in other classes and outside of school, how they understand our concepts and lessons as we present them, and how the same lessons we ran last class, last year will turn out in today’s classes, this year. The mysbecoming-with others, our past selves and lessons, our selves beyond school, our selves with students, our selves with the world and events that impact us, indirectly and directly, entangles our selves onto-epistemologically with all of these phenomena of our reality as they manifest, intra-interacting within and beyond ourselves, our students, our classroom.

**Semi-actuality in the classroom.** With our mysbeings-in-mysbecomings coherently entangled, partitioning responsibility cleanly into separate, individual roles is problematized. The concept of the autonomous teacher or student is troubled by a reality that neither teacher nor student is who they are completely unto themselves; they mysbecome each other in their intra-interactive engagement. Similar attempts to separate the environment, community and the world beyond from our classrooms are likewise problematized. Using a visual metaphor, our classrooms might look like a cat’s cradle, a web of strings, pulled upon and tangled up with others in the classroom, representing people, objects, time, space, and sociocultural happenings and issues from within and beyond the school. This semi-actual entanglement of being and becoming challenges the myth that the teacher is, or could be, in complete and total control (Fenimore Smith, 2004, pp. 227-228; Britzman, 1991/2003, p. 224).

In particular, every single experience I have had with new student-teachers has been marked by frustration as they acclimate themselves to a new kind of internal coherence between their desire to control and plan things out, and the actuality of what happens in the classroom when events do not go as expected, such as Greg described with one of his experiences:
I was considering what you said about how much time you put into lesson plan, and I’m still thinking about how I’m in the habit of planning out every little thing, or trying to. Doing a lot of research, making a PowerPoint that’s longer than it needs to be. But, as the day went on I was skipping over stuff I had planned out because I think they got it. I had a lot of explanation and a lot of examples of stuff, but during the parts where I would be getting input from them, it was such good input that it would derail where I was taking it. So that’s kind of where I’m thinking next time that I won’t plan it out as meticulously. But on the other hand, it’s hard for me to do that because I feel like I’m so inexperienced, that I need to have that extra control because of something unexpected that may happen that I’m not going to know what to do. So it’s sort of a tough give and take, because there were certain points where they would ask a question and I’m like “I didn’t prepare for this, I’m not exactly sure how to answer this question, I should have prepared more.” But on the other hand, there were points where, they brought so much to the table here, I didn’t need to draw all this out. It was a good learning experience for sure. (PDS, 11/29/2016)

When Greg calls this learning experience one of “give and take,” I see at least two phenomena from my framework in play: internal coherence with the differences that manifest between what he plans to do and actually does; and the intra-interactive semi-actual agency his students exert to alter events in contrast to his mysexpectations. Teachers who assume all of the blame for the way things go implicitly deny the responsibility and agency these semi-actual, agential participants have in their classrooms. When their students fail, the teachers may feel like they, themselves, are the ones who have failed, as Sharon did (PDS, 10/11/2016). The
relationship between responsibility and control can lead teachers and student-teachers to try
to control as much of the classroom as possible, as Greg admitted:

Sometimes when I fail to get them to open up I think it had a lot to do with being
too vague. So then I fall back on having something to fall back to, to be more specific.
So it’s a tough line to walk between giving them enough to think, and not leading them to
something specific. (PDS, 11/29/2016)

Student-teachers often believe that a teacher can have the kind of control over students
that would be necessary to get them to perform in specific ways according to their
expectations—I saw this belief in Tracy’s desire to know how to get students to get engage in
discussion (PDS, 09/13/2016), and in Hillary’s question, “How do you motivate students, get
them to have ‘flashes of brilliance’?” (SEED, 09/23/2016) This belief arises from a recognition-
based paradigm that proposes that certain practices will have predictable, replicable results. It
does not acknowledge the agential semi-actuality of the classroom and the shared responsibility
that arises from it; it cannot become-other (Garoian, 2017, Kindle Locations 1603-1611), it
cannot swim with the winds as a bird does (White, 1958, p. 43), it cannot understand sense of
balance that a skater has with a skateboard. In all of these examples, the participants—human
and non-human—are in semi-actual mysbecoming with each other, as a rider with a horse. A
paradigm that enslaves my agency and responsibility to a mechanical formula makes little room
for trust or respect. Even in a paradigm that makes masters and slaves of its participants,
however, they can still mysbecome together (Hegel, 1977, pp. 111-119).

Other factors exert their influence on learning and the dynamic intra-interplay between
these factors adds to the lack of control that a teacher may sense in their classroom. Factors such
as the time of day the class takes place, the kind of building it is in, the school and classroom
policies in place, and the intra-interactions the students and the teacher have prior to and after the class. The lighting, temperature, each student and teacher’s personal preferences of educational approach, the materials at their disposal, the relationships and happenings between them that exist and transform in relation to the makeup of the classroom, and the amount comfort they feel with the classroom dynamics can all play their part on the behavior and happenings that occur between and among the teachers and students in the classroom and beyond it.

Acknowledging the agency of these factors on learning and teaching is to admit that performing pedagogy is dependent on a great deal beyond an individual teacher’s control. I have not been a part of the fifteen to eighteen years my students spent growing up in a household, the experiences they have had, the kind of family events, expectations, rules, and behavior they’ve known. I am often not a member of the community or neighborhood that they come from, go back to; I do not often share their circle of friends or day-to-day conversations.

Teenagers and college students are often positioned with more in-betweenness than at other points in their lives, even if they may claim identities already recognizable to them. They arrive in the classroom with a number of pedagogical experiences, including testing, other teachers’ frameworks, approaches, and value systems, and their own recognitions that they bring with them before we, as teachers, meaningfully enter their lives in many cases. All of these factors exert, to some degree, their semi-actuality on my classrooms and pedagogy.

Within the classroom space even more elements take on a role, such as the positioning of desks and spacing between them, and the performativity enabled by the composition of the students and teachers gathered together in a class. Rachael often wondered how desk positioning affected conversations and discussions (HSE, 09/26/2016). When Sara was describing the challenges of her lower level classes and comparing them to her advanced classes, she indicated
that they could be “very disruptive, off task, and won’t do the work” (PDS, 09/27/2016). I asked her to describe the classes and their performance in more detail:

Sara: [Lower level classes] are a bit of a challenge. They’re nice kids but they can be very disruptive, off task, and won’t always do the work. Only five kids yesterday only did their work, the rest were blank. [...] [The lower level students] will call out to each other; there’s one group of boys who are constantly talking. I have to stand next to the one boy for the entire class, otherwise he distracts the other one, takes his water bottle or flicks his pencil at his head. The other kid doesn’t get mad, he thinks it’s funny, so he keeps doing it. So unless I stand next to him, he doesn’t get any work done. I feel like I have to babysit him.

Me: What is the gender makeup in [the lower level] classes?

Sara: Very boy heavy. One has 3 girls, rest are boys, out of 18 total. The other has 5 girls, about the same size. A lot more boys in both. [...] 

Me: What is the arrangement of desks?

Sara: One is in pods. The other has long tables, facing each other, not the front.

Me: Can they be rearranged?

Sara: We can’t. It’s not our room.

Sara mentioned an additional constraint that teachers face when they’re assigned to classes in a room that is “not theirs:” some teachers are O.K. with their desks being rearranged, but others are not. This is not something that a visiting teacher often has much say over without causing conflict.

In my own experience in Rachael’s classroom, I noted that even “advanced” kids will talk when desks are arranged in pods. We both supposed that because they were in small groups
facing each other in each group, rather than at some central point in the classroom, their attentions were diverted and decentered accordingly. These examples demonstrate how something as simple as desk arrangement can have a significant impact on class performance, and how teachers who cannot change the arrangement are forced to cope with this factor beyond their control.

Additionally, Sara’s experiences also indicated other factors beyond our control like gender dynamics that may also play their semi-actual role on classroom intra-interactivity. I call these factors semi-actual for the impacts they can have, but also because they do not contribute to student and teacher performance in a standard, predictable way. For example, Sara noted there were an equal number of boys and girls in two of her advanced classes, while the third had a greater proportion of girls, yet she noted no difference in performance between them. Assuming gender plays a semi-actual role in classroom dynamics, we cannot be certain that it would be the same in each situation.

**Semi-actuality and shared authority/responsibility.** Student-teachers, like Greg, often find themselves in an ongoing struggle for authority in their relationships with mentors and students. In one particular class, when he admitted that, “I don’t like calling on people who don’t have their hands raised,” one of the female students immediately responded, “That’s good! That’s good. That’s a good way for a new teacher to be” (HSE, 10/10/2016). The student’s tone was authoritative and instructional, and in that moment, she mysbecame the teacher, coaching Greg on how he should be conducting himself.

Later in that same class, however, a student started crying, and Rachael took her out of the classroom to work with her, leaving Greg alone to manage the class. While Rachael was absent, Greg seemed to assume more authority as the sole teacher in the classroom in his body
posture and voice, as well as in his management of the class. Greg’s semi-actuality of being-teacher appeared to be affected by Rachael’s presence and absence in the room with him, and I noticed a similar difference in Rachael’s teaching performance when Greg was absent in class (HSE, 10/12/2016).

This handling of authority is not something that can be learned simply through instruction. Rachael consistently encouraged and coached Greg in ways to assume more authority as “even contributor with authority beside her,” rather than “backing her up” (PDS, 10/25/2016). Greg also told of times when he felt Rachael would seize control of a lesson away from him. Other student-teachers reported experiencing a similar struggle for responsibility and authority with their mentors. Leia explained that Beth, her mentor, would plan things out with her, but criticize Leia’s plans and activities based on her own experience. Robin indicated that she often felt tension and disagreement with her mentor about how much time she was supposed to be devoting to teaching (PDS, 11/29/2016).

From a mentor’s perspective, Rachael admitted that “it’s hard to give space. I have to try hard to give him space. He’s not as confident” (HSE, 10/12/2016). She confessed that it threw off “her rhythm and normal teaching style” to work with a student-teacher in her class. When Greg was absent, differences in her performance emerged like the way she raced through her words and included a surprising amount of amusing commentary.

Part of providing a space for the sharing of authority and responsibility is offering trust and faith. This means being willing to open ourselves up to and be supportive of different values, beliefs, approaches, and potential failure, particularly where someone is positioned as less capable, experienced, or knowledgeable about their practice, such as students and student-teachers. Education scholars like Dewey and Nolan (1982, p. 49) have emphasized that there is a
risk in placing student-teachers into “real world experiences before a spirit of reflective inquiry and experimentation was developed.” Dewey (1974), in particular, asks whether the expectation of immediate capability might be the reason for a lack of growth soon after teachers get into a classroom, “Is this in some part due to the undue premature stress laid in early practice work upon securing immediate capability in teaching?” (p. 321) In a more declarative statement later on, Dewey insists the environment of the student-teacher should be one that is initially, and for a time, free of critical judgment and correction: “They should not be too closely supervised, nor too minutely and immediately criticized upon either the matter or the method of their teaching” (p. 334). He immediately connects this recommendation to student-teachers finding and assuming their own share of authority:

Students should be given to understand that they not only are permitted to act upon their own intellectual initiative, but that they are expected to do so, and that their ability to take hold of situations for themselves would be a more important factor in judging them than their following any particular method or scheme. (p. 334)

In my opinion, this is a critical insight into sharing authority and responsibility that may be applied to a wide number of settings and groups, including teachers and the students in their classroom. Trust means having faith in an individual, a group, or ourselves in spite of past performance or failures. This can be facilitated by acknowledging my recognitions as my recognitions of capability in order to see results and remain uncertain as to their meaning or portents; to give a student/teacher who does not seem to be competent a chance to experiment, try things, and fail. Students and teachers alike need to be allowed to be terrible with their technique, group work, questions, and approaches, because without being given an opportunity to fail, they may not be able to appreciate the liberation of knowing that sometimes things may
not work out, but that’s no reason not to try. Being allowed to do this, against the recognitions of
experience, theory, and personal values and belief systems that a mentor, supervisor, or teacher
may have can be critical for a student’s and teacher’s willingness to take risks and participate in
ways that are loaded with uncertainty (PDS, 10/17/2016). Through mysrecognition, we may
endorse initiatives and approaches that operate by mysidentification—allowing us to escape the
confines of an identity that has been chosen and imposed on us by systems of recognition, as
well as reclaiming those identities in forms that differ significantly and meaningfully from their
already-recognized characteristics.

Dewey (1974) acknowledges that students and student-teachers come to the classroom
with a “very large capital of an exceedingly practical sort in their own experience” (p. 322), and
that there is “every presumption… that [they have] been learning all the days of [their lives], and
that [they are] still learning from day to day” (p. 323). He’s quick to note, however, that “the
material at hand is pathological as well as healthy. It serves to embody and illustrate both
achievement and failure, in the problem of learning” (p. 323). Students and student-teachers
arrive in the classroom with several years, perhaps even decades of experience of supervisors,
teachers, and others critically analyzing their methods, telling them what the “right” and “wrong”
answers are, and assessing them according to these recognitions. The semi-actual weight and
influence of the accumulation of these experiences cannot be ignored without consequences. It
may be one primary reason that teachers so often revert back to the methods and practices they

Accounting for the impact of these past experiences, the differences between students and
teacher recognitions, and the uncertainty characterizing their recognitions means allowing time
and space for participants—whether students, student-teachers, or teachers—to build trust and
faith in others enough to openly share their ideas and themselves. I recall the first several weeks of silence in my high school freshmen classes during September and October as an example of this period of trust-building. Rachael noted that she could run student-led discussions with her other classes, but that “it takes a certain level of preparation, a certain level of trust that they’ll have things to say. It also takes community, that they’re willing to talk in front of each other” (HSE, 09/26/2016).

Why does this establishment of trust and faith take time? I believe at least two related factors are at play: visibility and vulnerability. In many cases these factors seem to be related; when one increases, the other tends to as well. Both of these factors play critical roles in many forms of sharing, such as communication, responsibility, intimacy, honesty, confession, and storytelling.

All four primary mystheoretical concepts require and embrace vulnerability. Myst-imbues recognitions and being with vulnerability to questioning and challenge by investing them with uncertainty. Semi-actuality incorporates vulnerability into our recognitions and being by asking us to question the extent and influence of other recognitions and being upon our own. Coherence welcomes it by embodying the affective multiplicity of various recognitions and beings in composition within us. Inversion reminds us that our actions will produce oppositional forces and effects through their agency, and compels us to responsibly consider the consequences and outcomes we risk in all of our intentions.

Allowing for this vulnerability, as well as the criticism which may follow, is also part of being able and willing to share ideas, responsibility, and oneself with others. This is dialogic and semi-actual: accepting and respecting one’s vulnerability is as much the speaker’s responsibility as the listener’s—one cannot reasonably ask that their ideas not be critically responded to if one
is unwilling to accept their vulnerability in sharing them, but, in critically responding, the vulnerability of the one sharing those ideas should not go unacknowledged (Flusser, 2013, p. 51; PDS, 11/29/2016). It is precisely because of this vulnerability that trust and faith are valuable and often necessary.

This is where we need to be careful not to make the mistake of assuming that visibility is necessary for trust and faith; in many cases, it inversely threatens them. I am reminded of a scene in the film *Constantine* (Lawrence, 2005), where Gabriel chastises John and tells him the difference between faith and explicit knowing:

John: Haven’t I served Him enough? What does He want from me?

Gabriel: Only the usual: self-sacrifice, belief…

John: Oh I believe, for Christ’s sake!

Gabriel: No! No! You know. There’s a difference! You’ve seen!

Gabriel clarifies the way in which the need and value of belief, faith, and trust evaporate under the harsh light of visibility, just as Psyche’s relationship with Cupid disintegrates when she illuminates his face under her lamp (Apuleius, 2011, pp. 106-108). Visibility seduces us into a recognition-based knowing as a means for trust, faith, and belief, but these virtues can only truly exist without this explicit, certain knowing.

Trust and vulnerability come together when we allow ourselves, our ideas and words, to be affected by others; when we permit and invite the semi-actuality of others into ourselves, to offer to them a measure of responsibility to agentially affect and recompose these extensions of ourselves in the same way that a writer might trust themselves and their words to an editor. In the case of the student-teacher sharing potentially problematic ideas and plans with a mentor, it brings the mentor into the process, instead of ambushing them with an activity they were never
informed about, out of fear of what they might have to say about it (PDS, 11/29/2016). This is part of a mystheoretical ethics of responsibility.

Of course, semi-actuality, like other mystheoretical concepts, can take forms that may be considered “negative,” such as peer pressure that promotes destructive behavior or practices like hazing. I remind my readers that my goal is not to advance a flawless method without consequences or the potential to be used in harmful ways; I believe everything is as potentially dangerous as it is affective and effective. This dangerousness is also part of a mystheoretical ethics of responsibility, that even if I intend no harm or consequences I might deem negative, my performativity is subject to mysbecoming, resisting my recognitions and troubling my efforts based on them. I honor my mysrecognition of my doings and beings, just as I acknowledge that not every individual or group will likely respond to the same semi-actual influences and practices in the same way.

**Materialistic semi-actuality and coherence.** It’s 8 o’clock in the morning on a Friday (SEED, 2016-2017). This class meets once a week for three hours. Even though there are signs informing those who use this classroom that no food or drink are permitted, I allow my students to either bring drink and snacks with them, or go get them at some point in the middle of the class. Particularly, many of my students are big fans of coffee. When they come back to class ten or fifteen minutes later, they are noticeably more awake, talkative, and in better spirits than before.

A few of my students are “morning people,” but the majority cannot cognitively perform at their best during this time slot without some form of dietary boost. So, I challenge the rules in order to enable them to perform and engage in our class activities and discussions more fully and effectively. While many school and university administrators seem to be in favor of redesigning
classrooms to facilitate technology, they’ve also seem to have forgotten that we’re teaching human beings. Just as technology needs ready access to power sources, so do most students and instructors need to be allowed nourishment in the form of drink and food in order to optimally perform their tasks. I realize that may cause problems, particularly in the form of vermin, cleanliness, and malfunctioning technology exposed to liquids and food, but I take the position that there are consequences regardless. If I maintained a technology-friendly, sterile environment devoid of food and drink, my students’ and my own performance would noticeably suffer. An argument could be made that students should partake of such nourishment prior to class or afterwards—probably by someone who is in denial about the lifestyles of most teenagers and college students.

The semi-actual influence of food and drink in the classroom is nearly impossible to ignore. When I allowed my high school students to bring in snacks and drinks in the classroom, or when I passed out candy to my students, I became instantly more popular and well-liked. Snacks and tea were always present in Rachael’s classroom (HSE, 09/26/2016), as well. The positive behavioral effects of these edibles were consistent: students were more alert, responsive, talkative, and engaged.

Food and drink can often add a coherent dimension to a text or activity just as music (HSE, 09/20/2016), drawing (HSE 10/12/2016), origami (HSE 09/12/2016, 10/24/2016, 11/03/2016, 11/16/2016), and other elements can. A cake from each of the three classes covering Moby Dick represented a different element of the novel: the Pequod, the white whale, and, perhaps the most surprising, Queequeg’s coffin (HSE 11/10/2016, 11/16/2016). On that same day, cheddar cheese crackers in the shape of little whales were passed around (Figure 6).
These snacks all brought an additional, coherent way to experience the novel on a multi-sensory level.

Another form of coherent activity that Rachael’s students intra-interactively made a part of their learning experience was the folding and creating of origami swans (HSE 0912/2016, 10/24/2016, 11/03/2016, 11/16/2016; Figure 7). Unlike other forms of coherence, the swans were a part of every single class for at least one group of students. When I asked Rachael if she thought this was a positive thing, she countered that it was “not negative!” (HSE, 09/12/2016). Rather than being a distraction for these students, Rachael explained that these coherent activities helped students relax and de-stress, because many of them were under an incredible amount of
stress in class and in their lives. A reduction in their stress could have also increased their mental focus and serenity.

Other students who came into Rachael’s classroom and noticed the ships that they could illustrate and color in were also noticeably uplifted, with one immediately piping up, “I know what I’m doing today! Drawing!” (HSE, 10/12/2016). In my personal experiences, I’ve often noticed colleagues or students doodling or drawing during a meeting or lesson as a way to help them pay attention, such as the dinosaurs Laura drew during one of my undergraduate classes (SEED 10/28/2016), or the remarkably detailed illustration of Gandhi that one of my seniors drew on his desk in pencil during one class that was focused on Indian texts. One of the teachers who was always doodling during faculty meetings explained that it helped her to focus, that she was able to pay better attention to what was being discussed if she could doodle while she was
Working with the swans over the course of the academic year, the students moved progressively from one stage of this activity to another, filling up smaller (HSE, 09/12/2016) and then bigger (HSE, 09/20/2016, 09/22/2016, 10/24/2016) boxes with origami swans. Then, they set to work stringing the swans together (HSE, 10/24/2016) and reterritorializing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10) Rachael’s classroom with strings of swans hanging from the walls (HSE, 11/03/2016). Later on, when the class was covering *Moby Dick*, they started folding origami whales (HSE, 10/18/2016, 11/16/2016; Figure 8). I had not returned to Rachael’s classroom to see how their origami project evolved and developed, but I am almost certain it continued to the end of the school year.

![Figure 8: While reading *Moby Dick*, some of the students were inspired to fold origami ships and whales](image)

Technology can also play its part as a coherent element that can help students to focus. Some students wore headphones or earbuds in while they worked; they were not off-task or
distracted, but rather had a kind of singular focus and concentration on their task (HSE, 10/04/2016, 11/03/2016). Smart phones shared space with laptops on students’ desks but students were given the responsibility to use them responsibly and for the completion of school work.

One key element that I noticed in the coherence of music, technology, and swan-making is that they were less likely to be a distraction if they were chosen. In most of the cases, the participants, whether colleagues or students, chose to make these coherent elements part of their performative assemblage of being. This may indicate the importance of acceptance of these elements and their coherent, semi-actual effects-in-mysbecoming with the individual.

I also do not propose that coherence is absent when a student or colleague works in relative quiet without music; the absence of music or company just performs a different kind of coherence. I compare this to an analogy I use about a blank piece of paper: someone looking at the piece of paper might be inclined to say that the paper is “blank.” On the other hand, I could say that the paper is filled up with white. The paper is always “full,” it’s just a matter of what it seems to be full of that embodies the coherence at play. This is a critical understanding that recalls the survivability of coherence and semi-actuality in the face of extinction or exclusion; coherence and semi-actuality are still possible in the absence of things; it’s just not the same kind of coherence and semi-actuality as when those things are present. Their presence and absence can also be agentially affective in different ways that can be critically significant in their intra-interactive mysbecoming in absence as well as presence. This mysbecoming of absence and presence thus blurs the lines between the two, making it possible to feel the presence of an absence, and the absence of a presence in the semi-actual coherence of the classroom.
Transversal semi-actuality. I can make an agential cut (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 2799-2806) to frame the classroom and my time with my students as a focus for my pedagogy, but by defining these parameters, I inevitably draw a line between what is inside the classroom in that space and time, what is beyond it (Butler, 2011, p. 82) and what nomadically comes into and goes from it (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, xii). I am inevitably situated within a greater symbolic order (Lacan, 2006, pp. 459-460), an eco-sociocultural assemblage of policies, lives, and events that engage with the texts, framework, and intra-interactivity of my classroom. My students and myself, each moment of each day, affect and are affected by people and events in their lives and ours, whether in our relationships with friends, peers (Juvonen, Espinoza, & Knifsend, 2012, pp. 387-388), and family, our politics, community, jobs, obligations, or various other elements and aspects of our mysbecomings. Whether I acknowledge these factors or not, they play their part in my classrooms. I cannot personally exert a significant amount of control upon the community, parents, income inequality, accidents, upheavals, clashes, triumphs, celebrations, or numerous other occurrences that populate the lives of my students or myself. Even technology plays its cyborgian role in our beings-in-becomings, affecting my students in how they see themselves and present themselves, vulnerable to entirely different vectors of approval, rejection, validation and affirmation from others based on their being on the internet and through social media (Haraway, 1991, Kindle Locations 3118-3128; Hayles, 1993, p. 174; SEED, 09/16/2016). I cannot determine whether parents are home or working, whether there is a home environment that supports or hinders schoolwork, whether the community is safe, whether, or how many times, a student has moved between homes (Wood, Halfon, Scarlata, Newacheck, & Nessim, 1993, pp. 1337-1338), or countless other circumstances beyond my recognition (Jeynes, 2003, p. 202; Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012, pp. 315-317). However, I may rest assured that in most
cases, these elements will exert their influence in some form upon my students, myself, my classroom and pedagogy, and student-teachers began to realize this as they worked with students in classrooms (PDS, 10/17/2016).

How might I work with these factors that are, by and large, beyond my control and explicit recognition? Recalling the analogy of the surfer and ocean, if I am unable to control the way the breaker forms or when it arrives, in what ways might I misform my pedagogy in discourse with the semi-actual influences of these countless uncontrollable factors upon myself and my students?

When I was working as student-teacher at an inner city high school in Indiana, I noted that my mentor teacher had a very predictable, unwavering routine for each of his classes. At first, this routine seemed to me to be rather monotonous and stifling. No matter what had occurred, every Monday, new vocabulary was introduced, every Thursday it would be reviewed, and every Friday there would be a quiz. The first ten minutes of each class period was devoted to sustained silent reading of a book of the students’ choosing. These were a few of the daily activities that followed this consistent pattern of his weekly lesson structure.

After a couple weeks of observing this, I asked him about it. His response was that in their personal lives, many of these students had very little structure or organization. Their families, jobs, peer relationships, and a variety of other factors contributed an excessive amount of chaos to their lives. There was very little they could consistently rely on, as so many aspects of their lives regularly changed in unpredictable and often stressful ways. He had discovered that by restructuring his classroom into a place with a high degree of routine and order, the behavior of the students in his classes became calmer, more focused, and capable of completing assignments in his classroom. The students knew that no matter what else was going on in their
lives, new vocabulary would always be introduced on Mondays, and a quiz for that vocabulary would always happen on Fridays. In effect, this teacher had shaped his classroom pedagogy into a kind of refrain that his students could whistle in the unpredictable chaos of their lives (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 311).

If Rachael instituted that kind of order on her classroom, she might have experienced a very different result, since her students’ lives, by her own account and my observations, were very structured at home, with parents calling in to make sure their students were in class and completing assignments, and expectations for student performance ran high. Instead, Rachael allowed her students ways to escape that stress and structure by offering them alternative assignments like creative explorations, origami paper for making swans and whales, and a more relaxed classroom atmosphere where the progression of activities was often determined and carried out by the students.

This is not to say that we cannot encourage and facilitate such freedom within a school community where students’ lives are subject to a higher degree of unpredictability and chaos. For my part, as a student-teacher, I did allow the inner city students a significant amount of creative freedom for a theatric activity, and I admit that their behavior did test and sometimes break the structure of the class that had been put into place by my mentor. This introduces an element of transversality into my mypedagogical framework; a concept that Guattari (2015) represents utilizing Schopenhauer’s parable about porcupines:

One freezing winter day, a herd of porcupines huddled together to protect themselves against the cold by their combined warmth. But their spines pricked each other so painfully that they soon drew apart again. Since the cold continued, however, they had to draw together again once more, and once more they found the pricking
painful. This alternate moving together and apart went on until they discovered just the right distance to preserve them from both evils. (p. 112)

In a similar way to how I may achieve and push the boundaries of balance upon ice skates or a bicycle, I am tasked with finding and pushing the limits of transversality with the forces from beyond my classroom, the lives that traverse the boundaries between these worlds, and the goals and structure of my pedagogical approach.

**Transgressing the boundaries of today’s classroom and lesson**

These semi-actual, transversal elements may arrive in my classroom in the form of concepts and materials from my personal life or those of my students that bear some perceived relevance to the subject matter (SEED, 09/16/2016). When my students contribute connections and references of their own, they are accepting a measure of responsibility for their learning and contributing to the coherence of our classroom. By permitting this, I let them have some skin in the game instead of “handing them instruction manuals for games they’ll never get to play” (Gee, 2014). Just as Robin Williams’ John Keating (Weir, 1989) has the black and white pictures of past students speak the words “Carpe diem!” to his current students, I ask, what might today’s students write between the lines and along the margins of their texts to the students of tomorrow? Even with e-book formats such as Amazon’s Kindle, there is the capability to share underlined passages with an indication of how many other readers underlined those same words.

In my own high school classes, I awarded points to those students who provided information that I did not have, or that challenged information I did have, on a concept or topic. In my undergraduate education classes, I have provided opportunities for students to bring in works that they found personally inspiring (SEED, 09/09/2016, 09/16/2016, 2017), in part to
emphasize that texts and works of importance do not just come from a common core curriculum, anthology, or canon.

Rachael has welcomed and utilized student contributions to her lessons on a number of occasions. In one class (HSE, 10/18/2016), she demonstrated good titles, introductions, and conclusions by using student examples from previous classes that she had categorized into four main types. Advice from previous students was offered on college essays. She introduced *Moby Dick* with a “concise biography” video short on Herman Melville that a former student had found. For a lesson in existentialism, Rachael and Greg showed a trailer of *Wreck-it-Ralph* (Moore, 2012) for students to analyze. This was followed by students breaking up into small groups to find clips or trailers of their own that represented existentialist characteristics (HSE, 11/14/2016). Among these was a clip from *Ghost in the Shell* (Oshii, 1995), *The Office* “Stress Relief” episode (Daniels & Blitz, 2009), *Toy Story*, the part where Buzz Lightyear sees his own commercial (Lasseter, 1995), *Steven Universe* (Sugar, 2013-2017), featuring a scene with Pearl and a hologram, a *Doctor Strange* (Derrickson, 2016) trailer and a *Saturday Night Live* (Kelly, Schneider, King, & Briganti, 2016) cold open with Kate McKinnon’s Hillary Clinton character playing on the piano and singing Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” in post-election defeat.

A lesson about gender and human sexuality (HSE, 11/08/2016) began with a short letter from the 1920’s that questioned the gender of the moon followed by a video of Hank Green discussing the complexities of human sexuality (vlogbrothers, 2012). After responding to the way Hank broke down different aspects of sexuality and gender in an individual, students were invited to provide examples of gender dynamics and stereotyping in their own lives. At least a few students openly identify themselves along the LGBTQIA spectrum. Many of the experiences raised touch on how gender norms are imposed upon us by others in various settings.
and ways, and how we perform these norms ourselves, or take issue with them. Rachael wrote these experiences on the board (Figure 9) including makeup, occupations and jobs (sheetrock), sports and weight-training, who gets to use the equipment, multitasking (women are expected to), the roles of women and men in situations, do you have a ___? (boyfriend, husband, etc), kids, accessories, emotions (underlined twice), household chores, music, and colors (pink pens, for example). Rachael was forced to cut this discussion short with five hands still up and more coming because of time constraints.

During a lesson on existentialism, following a video titled, "What is an Existential Crisis?" (The School of Life, 2016), students were again invited to share and discuss various experiences from their personal lives they felt represented concepts and characteristics of an existential crisis (HSE, 11/14/2016; Figure 10). In the discussions of both classes, students
contributed personal experiences to the discussion and exploration of concepts and subject matter that were not present in the texts or the personal lives of their teachers. In both cases, teachers and students constructively deepened and broadened the scope of the discussion by acknowledging and inviting the semi-actual coherence of their lives into the classroom.

Permitting discussions to go “off topic” can allow tangential lines of flight to enter and exit the discourse, providing the opportunity for new and different understandings and connections to emerge. Given these possibilities, keeping a discussion “on topic” within the boundaries of a dominating center may not actually be preferable. For example, after one of our freewrite sessions, Brad asked a question that he pointed out was not addressed in our readings so far:
Everything we’ve read so far… kind of seems aimed to the students who are going to write no matter what you tell them; if you tell them to write, they’re probably going to write. Are there strategies that we’re going to get into or that you know for students that refuse to write? How do we get them to write, rather than the ones who are compliant? (SEED, 09/23/2016)

While safely within the scope of the focus of our course—teaching students how to write—Brad may not have been as likely to ask this question if the scope of questions was limited to just what was addressed in the assigned readings.

When Rachael walked students through a New Criticism reading of a passage that featured an argument between Ahab and Starbuck about pursuing Moby Dick, with Ahab attempting to win the crew to his side (Melville, 2011, pp. 150-151), semi-actual and coherent elements emerged in resistance through the students (HSE, 10/26/2016). Some had read outside the text in other sources such as the Bible, searching for additional connections to the characters of Ahab and Ishmael. Other students brought up similar events they had seen in Spongebob and Tom and Jerry cartoons. One mentioned connections between The Picture of Dorian Gray and Their Eyes Were Watching God.

I found my own connection in John Milton’s Paradise Lost by comparing Ahab’s dialogue with Satan’s and finding similarities, from striking at the sun, to proposing rebellion, and questioning the divine power behind the white whale—possibly “nothing” according to Ahab. The other students in my group lit up with understanding as I pointed out how specific words matched the rhetorical arguments made by Satan in Paradise Lost. The same student who made references to Dorian Gray and Their Eyes Were Watching God picked up on the act of striking the sun as representative of Ahab’s malice towards the divine, being a celestial body.
Even Rachael joined in, pointing out strong parallels to *Hamlet* Act 1, Scene 5, with Ahab’s demand to swear upon his sword and similarities between Ahab’s speech and *Henry V*’s “On St. Crispin’s Day” speech in Act 4, Scene 3. These students may have been able to theorize and construct rich and diverse meanings exclusively from this passage—though, in an allegorical work, for example, it would certainly be challenging—but, the coherence of their interpretations would likely be significantly different in the absence of these semi-actual outside texts to complement and enrich their understandings.

Students have expressed to me—and I have experienced this as well—that, at times, organic and creative inspiration seems to erupt from various cross-disciplinary activities and sources, such as the integration of dance, music, art, recess, sports, academic subjects, and other aspects of one’s existence and learning (SEED, 10/28/2016). This aligns with conceptualizing our beings-in-becomings as intra-interacting biological, cognitive, and sociocultural multiplicities. Max (PDS, 09/13/2016), for example, described learning as a process that involved an active cognitive making of connections that can become doings:

> I would say the same thing, the little points are connecting. We were doing *The Outsiders* yesterday, and I did a “welcome to the sixties” kind of thing, and it took me until the third class to be able to relate some of the concepts back to the book, and Rose [his mentor] jumped in a couple of times to make sure it was relating back to the book. So it’s just figuring out how everything works together and just making it so students understand why we’re doing these things, instead of just here’s information, but this is actually what you’re going to do with this information. It matters.

Bringing concepts and texts together from beyond the classroom is only one particular form of semi-actual coherence. With our world becoming increasingly networked in new and
different ways through the internet, social media, and other technology, we are better able to explore potential connections and dialogue across classrooms, grade levels, disciplines, geographical locations than perhaps at any point in history. Leia’s activity that had students from various tracking levels dialogue and collaborate on reading passages and analysis (PDS, 11/17/2016) inspired her peers to put this kind of activity into use challenging and bridging divisions they encountered, changing the semi-actual coherence of an educational environment where these students are traditionally isolated from each other.

Just as discussions where mycentered authority can go beyond the boundaries of topics in surprising directions, so too can the semi-actual affective forces of our lives impact our pedagogy and classroom in ways we cannot predict or control, such as when Rachael had to take care of a student who had broken down into tears suddenly (HSE, 10/12/2016), not because of anything that she, Greg, or the students did, but because of happenings that had been occurring at home over the past few years. Rachael acknowledges the presence of these semi-actual forces in the lives of her students and her classroom, affording spaces and opportunities for them to emerge, such as on one of the quizzes she administered to her students (HSE, 11/16/2016). One question asked students how they were doing with the stress of their daily lives, “How are you doing right now? Many stresses probably exist for you including college application and the current national situation. Are you OK? What has been helping your stress or causing your stress?” After the quizzes were collected, Rachael thanked the students and reaffirmed that she believed in writing as a healing process, telling her students that even though “many of you, for many reasons” were potentially stressed out, “if you just write [about it], you might feel a little better.” It was her way of acknowledging and inviting that which she could not explicitly recognize, in the same way that she acknowledged in another question the possibility of
recurring topics in her students’ reading without having direct or accurate knowledge of these topics. Both questions acknowledge a presence that may remain hidden or misrecognized through open-ended inquiry that creates a space for these presences to emerge in whatever form they may.

The cultures, societies, communities, and upbringings from which my students arrive in my classroom have their own constructed frameworks of recognition that are part of my students’ composite beings-in-becoming (Beach & Myers, 2001, pp. 5-6). They bring these recognitions into the semi-actual, coherent assemblage of my classroom in their intra-interactions with me, their peers, the texts, concepts, and understandings. I cannot reasonably be expected to know every single recognition borne into my classroom from these frameworks, nor anticipate how these will affect a student’s engagement and participation in daily activities. This is part of what gives rise to our mysbecomings and mysrecognizings.

One example of this is how students may recognize linguistic terms, metaphors, figures of speech, phrases, idioms, and sarcasm. For a teacher who expects students to be able to answer the questions that she puts to them in specific ways, this can be a daunting obstacle, as Sharon (PDS, 09/19/2016) described:

When coming up with questions, I’ve found things to be careful of, and in some ways, I’m too afraid to give them questions they can’t answer. Like when I asked them, what realization did one of the characters stumble upon [in Speak] when they were running away, and one of the students said “I don’t remember anyone falling,” and I thought, oh no, I didn’t mean… They were taking the phrase “stumble upon” as literal. And it’s so funny to me because that’s such a common phrase. So that made me question the way I phrased questions and what I call them, etc.
Phrases go in and out, and there’s a fair chance that students may understand them differently, or may never have heard them before. While Sharon’s reaction is to try to monitor her phrasing more in an attempt to cut down on potential miscommunication, her proposal is one that pursues the goal of accurate recognition. By contrast, I see an opportunity to explore this miscommunication as myscommunication.

It seems certain phrases are always in use that obscure their intended meaning—a meaning that is only recognizable if one is within a sociocultural circle that recognizes and adheres to an authoritative meaning for phrases like “Turn down for what?” or “This is lit!” The opportunity to teach the way these phrases act beyond any capability to determine their meaning from the words alone is valuable, both for how to read text and how to participate as a member of human society. I am reminded of the character Drax from the film, Guardians of the Galaxy (Gunn, 2014), who is from a race of people who, according to Rocket, “are completely literal. Metaphors go over his head.” Drax responds by saying, “Nothing goes over my head! My reflexes are too fast, I would catch it.” Some students may realize, for perhaps the first time, that language operates on multiple levels, not only because people communicate in different ways, but because this is how dialogue and language operates in text, as Sharon pointed out:

She’s really sarcastic and funny in Speak, and I feel like a lot of them might miss that. So it probably would be a good idea to go through a lesson like that. I mean, the book would be pretty boring if you didn’t get that. (PDS, 09/19/2016)

Sharon’s remark about how interesting Speak might be, or not, unlocks another possibility about why students may not be as engaged in a text that we teachers may find interesting; we’re recognizing the text in a different way than our students, and the capability for the text to be read in these different ways represents its poststructural potential for onto-
epistemological mysrecognition. The text’s mysbeing contributes to its potential for what Derrida would call “differance” (Spivak, 1997, p. xliii, lxxvii; Derrida, 1982, pp. 24-26).

Whether in the form of books, songs, films, television shows, or video games, texts possesses the capability to bridge personal lives and sociocultural communities, bringing them together in a coherent multiplicity of recognitions. One such exchange about a television show, *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, Kirkman, & Nicotero, 2016) brought teacher and student together before class (HSE, 10/24/2016) in a vigorous dialogue:

Rachael: “I’m done with that show!”

Marissa: “At first, I’m like, OK, I can deal with this. After that, I was like, why are they doing that? They’re making [character] do things that…”

Marissa went on to criticize the writing of this character by explaining how he do certain things in earlier seasons that now he does “big time.” Over the next several minutes, she and Rachael discussed the characters and described what was ruining the show for them.

Rachael: “I watched the whole thing and I was like, no, I’m done.” She then called the class to order and explained that after “last night, I’m done with [the Walking Dead]!”

Brian: “Hey, no spoilers!”

Rachael: “I’m not! I’m just saying, I’m irritated. Any show that does that [kind of thing] after six seasons, you’re done.”

The amount of criticism, review, and detail in this two minute conversation—a fraction of which I’ve transcribed here for the reader—could easily have filled at least a few pages of written analysis. I wonder what kind of potential exists if we leveraged shared texts across
sociocultural lives like *The Walking Dead* or *Game of Thrones*. As much as any canonized text we may normally find in a school classroom, these texts provide opportunities for critical analysis of elements of writing, like characters, dialogue, and plot events. Additionally, because these texts are shared and recognized across a wide range of lives, the potential for dialogue across groups and classes, regardless of level or location likewise exists, as Rachael remarked about *Harry Potter*, calling it a “trans-class piece of cultural capital” (HSE, 10/24/2016). The opportunity to deepen and enrich understandings of such texts with a coherent, trans-class discussion could bring these respective recognitions into affective play with each other, facilitating their becoming.

Of course, these trans-class semi-actual influences exist whether or not I recognize, acknowledge, or invite them; they can still surprise me, manifesting in unpredictable ways. Throughout several discussions about *Moby Dick* across multiple classes, for example, Rachael noted that one block of students seemed to have an obsessive focus on the trustworthiness of the narrator. So, she asked them (HSE, 11/16/2016), “Why are you so focused on this?” The students explained that last year, that had been a focus of their class. I thought this was a heartening thing to observe, as a teacher, because these students actually carried their teachings forward, in contrast to the many times that I have heard teachers complain about students forgetting things over the summers from year to year (Boser, 2017). Given the semi-actual infiltration of these carried over learnings into their classrooms, I imagine that some teachers might retract their complaints and wish students had forgotten after all.

“Worst week ever,” one of my students wrote in a freewriting exercise. She was referring to a particular week in November, towards the end of the Fall semester, when every single one of her professors had some significant amount of assigned work due (SEED,
11/11/2016). This is a fairly common phenomenon, since most professors tend to assign larger projects and longer papers to come due at the end of the term. If one employs the logic that a cumulative amount of knowledge acquired over the semester would be at a student’s disposal for use on such papers at such times, then making these assignments due earlier does not seem appropriate. Yet, we face the problem of such assignments coming due at the same time across courses, inevitably adding to students’ stress levels and affecting their performance on these assignments and in our classes accordingly. In recent years, I have made efforts toward breaking up longer assignments into smaller chunks that could be completed throughout the semester, treating the traditional rough-and-final draft paper product as an ongoing process that takes place with revision and various additions during the duration of the semester. My students have expressed their appreciation and gratitude for having even one less class’ worth of work on their piles in the middle and end of the semester.

I used to believe that if a teacher had done their job, they would make themselves obsolete; students would have learned everything and could go on to put these teachings into practice without their teacher. I no longer subscribe to this belief. Because our flows of being cross over boundaries, I feel confident that my pedagogy will reach beyond our classroom through the diffractive mysbecomings of my students, similar to the way Rachael experienced the pedagogies of prior teachers through her students, and how our readings and teachings in class reached Hillary’s mother, who was also a teacher (SEED, 10/28/2016). Fascinated by a suggestion we had read about in Gallagher (2006) for individualized rubrics, she is now implementing them in her own classroom. The ways in which our teachings and learnings reach beyond the scope of our classroom could be called a teacher’s “legacy,” in the words of one student who wrote to me:
When I am a teacher one day, I will tell them about you and all that you did for me. Why? Because your teaching legacy is more than in the classroom; it is what you believe in and what you pass on to future teachers, like myself. I'm proud and honored to have had you cross my teaching path and life. Your words in class, teaching methods and emails will forever be carried along with me as I journey through my path to the unknown.

Being teacher is more than a profession; it’s a way of being and becoming that transforms us, challenges us, and asks us to question ourselves, just as we summon those same challenges, transformations, and questions in those we teach and they may in turn summon them in others. Our journeys, impacts, and memories can remain entangled in ways that refuse to be partitioned off into compartmentalized experiences, semi-actually, coherently mysbecoming in our lives in ways we may never completely or accurately recognize.
Chapter 4: Students

Who are our Students?

“Me? I can change during the course of a day. I wake and I'm one person, when I go to sleep I know for certain I'm somebody else. I don't know who I am most of the time.” (Haynes, 2007)

Our PDS students embark on an inquiry project during their time as a student-teacher working with mentors in our schools. One student-teacher, Leia, was investigating a possible connection between labeling and tracking and the student achievement gap: “Are teachers creating the achievement gap with expectations versus reality, advanced versus [other levels], and differentiation?” (PDS, 11/17/2016) Addressing this potential issue in another PDS meeting, Robin went into detail about her experience of the assumptions teachers make based on tracking:

We always go into these things assuming that the advanced [tenth grade] kids can do this, and regular [tenth grade] can’t, and this is what the regular [tenth grade] can handle and it’s too easy for the advanced. But, we shouldn’t have those assumptions. Just because these kids are tracked that way doesn’t mean that that’s their level of… that that’s what they can accomplish. And so it sparked this debate. [One teacher in a department meeting] said, “Well, I would never try to teach Tale of Two Cities to regular [tenth grade students],” and I’m like, “Well, why not? Why couldn’t you just try? I know there’s a different way to teach these things, why not give it a try?” “No, no, I could never do that. Just going to waste my time and nobody’s going to get it.”

When I went into ninth grade, I didn’t get put into honors English in ninth grade, and I was so mad; why couldn’t I be in honors English? I’m really good at English, why wouldn’t they put me there? And for the summer everybody had to read Grapes of Wrath.
and I was like, “Fine, if they’re going to read *Grapes of Wrath*, I’m going to read *Huckleberry Finn* and I’m going to figure it out and I’m going to love it!” And I could not read that book for the life of me. It was rough; I just wasn’t used to the language. But I had this mentality that if they don’t think I can do it, I just want to try, and so who’s to say that there aren’t other kids like that who aren’t in an advanced class but they feel like they can handle it? Why shouldn’t we let them try? (PDS, 11/15/2016)

Robin’s perspective was directly influenced by her own experience with tracking as a student, causing her to question the accuracy and wisdom of recognizing our students in this way. One could point to her trouble with *Huckleberry Finn* as support for tracking and its accuracy, but that argument potentially disregards the fact that Robin was working on understanding this book on her own without assistance, and assigns very little, if any, value to her motivation and desire to challenge herself by reading it.

Leia also recalled having a discussion about labeling and recognizing a student and the effects this could have on the student’s perception of themselves as well as other teachers’ perceptions of their capabilities: “If you limit a student based on what you think or perceive that they’re able to do, then they’re not going to reach their full potential” (PDS, 11/17/2016). When tasked with teaching her own unit based on *A Monster Calls* (Ness & Kay, 2013), Leia set out to teach both her advanced and lower level classes with the same material and lessons:

I am teaching advanced first, and then the [lower levels]; the same exact unit, same outcome, same end project, but depending on how I can perceive their ability or not, changing things as need be with differentiation. I want to see if they’re pushed and expected to get the same end-result, same goal as my advanced kids, to see if they’re coming out around the same level. It just gets annoying with this whole labeling, saying
they’re not able to handle certain things, dumbing them down, I don’t think it’s
necessarily fair or accurate. (PDS, 11/17/2016)

Both of these cases highlight just a few of the problems that can arise if we fail to
consider our recognitions without acknowledging their mys-ness. There are more than a few
examples in educational scholarship that question our recognitions of others and ourselves. One
is Vygotsky’s (1980, Kindle Locations 1653-1656) “Zone of Proximal Development” concept to
highlight the inaccuracies and contingencies of assessment conditions and the way a student’s
performance changes depending on whether the student can work with others or not. Boldt and
Leander (2012) also openly acknowledge their inability to recognize “Lee” and “Hunter,” two
boys they observed at play:

And yet still, in naming the assemblage, we are capturing only what we can see or
what Lee and Hunter can articulate, which is not the same as what they are doing or as
the conscious and unconscious affected experienced in the body. What difference is
produced toward what end if we take the stance that at least some of the time the boys are
not sure of what is happening or of what [is] going to emerge, are not designing toward
anything but are simply becoming, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would say, responding
to the energy of the moment, or perhaps, just trying to see what happens? (p. 36)

Furthermore, Fecho (2004) describes what can happen when we select our texts based on
our recognitions of our students, quite certain that they are precisely the texts our students need
and want: “This poem, [Nikki Giovanni’s “Beautiful Black Men”] which I thought would set
them talking about life “back in the day” and the positive African American images inherent in
the verse, instead had made them tight-lipped and seemingly disgruntled” (p. 13). This
challenges the myth of total recognition or control by the teacher, compelling us to consider
alternative approaches, such as those that honor the ways that our students can bring their own mysrecognitions to the text, and make mysnarratives from it.

It is important to note here that accessibility, ease, and cultural fitting of texts and materials to our students *can* work and generate discussion and activity, but I am highlighting the ways these texts, selected through recognition, may backfire with inverse complications and consequences we are “absolutely prepared for and totally unsuspecting of” (Fecho, 2004, p. 12). In trying to line up curriculum, texts, and materials with our recognitions of students’ culture, capabilities, and interests, we also run the risk of keeping them in comfort zones of the familiar, forsaking challenge and wildness for domestication of language and concepts (AbdelRahim, 2015).

**The Mystery of our Students**

“*Let us risk a little more light.*” (Jackson, 2001)

This is not to say that *some* visibility and information about my students cannot be useful to me, but I treat that information as a pharmakon (Derrida, 1981, pp. 95-99); something with benefits and consequences that may be considered a type of mysrecognition. My students come to me with their own problematic recognitions—about themselves, myself, and my course and subject of study, to name a few. It’s tempting to wish for an academic portfolio of work and performance that follows the student through their years in school, like a detailed transcript (SEED, 09/23/2016; PDS, 10/17/2016), but this desire comes from a preconception that more information will help to clear up my mysrecognition. I approach such measures with caution, for the entirety of their contents is subject to mysrecognitions of various sorts from a variety of perspectives and contexts. Attempting to circumvent this by asking students to reveal themselves by telling me of their interests and experiences or showing me their best work,
likewise depends upon recognitions—theirs—about their own capabilities and identity—
recognitions that are anything but hard and fast (Dewey, 2011, Kindle Locations 94-98) or autonomous in the making. A teacher may help to reveal recognitions as mysrecognitions by pushing students out of the familiar, out of their comfort zones, out of their recognitions of who they are and what they can and cannot do. One student in Rachael’s class asked her, after class, “Do we search for ourselves in literature or in life?” (HSE, 09/22/2016) It was a question that struck me as an honest admission of curiosity and inquiry, possibly driven by her own acknowledgment of mysrecognition and mysidentity about herself and her efforts to resolve this through literature and experience.

We’ve barely broached the mystery that confronts even experienced teachers who may come to a realization when activities and lesson plans they have taught numerous times before do not proceed in the way they have in the past: these students are different and their teaching experience is as much a hindrance as a boon of recognitions. The frustration that tends to erupt when grappling with the mystery of teaching came out in my initial meetings with PDS student-teachers:

Tracy: Undergrad education didn’t prepare me for the things that I would’ve liked to be prepared for. The ideas we’ve been taught for the last three years have been kind of lofty, and they have good intentions, but they aren’t practical. So, I guess, in my observations, and the few times I’ve gotten up I feel like there are so many subtle intricacies that are culturally important that I had no idea I’d encounter.

Me: So when you say “lofty notions,” what were those things?

Tracy: Like, what is the difference between discussion and lecture, and if one is better than the other. And I think those are the kinds of things most people, and
especially those at the college level have thought about if you’re going into education, so while it’s a good notion to touch on, I don’t think the entire class needed to be focused on that. Instead, when I tried to have a discussion, I quickly realized that the subtle ways you form sentences or form your questions after a student has raised their hand can either shut them down or facilitate more people into raising their hands, so things like that. Like, if we had a class on how to productively engage with students in discussion, that would be way more helpful, than just talking about what discussion is. (PDS, 09/13/2016)

Tracy’s complaint began from her belief that teachers just need to learn how to work students, and that this information should be taught to student-teachers. She was approaching education with a recognition-based transmission mentality, where recognitions are collected and passed on as knowledge for practical application by those in the field. But this model carries with it the assumption that students are all basically the same, that they respond to particular approaches in predictable ways, and that these approaches, once discovered, will yield results if applied correctly. This trivializes not just the difficulty and mystery of teaching, but the diversity of differences in our students and their intra-interactions, even if they share an ethnic, racial, sociocultural, and historical background.

I pointed out that the difference between lecture and discussion depends on the setting, what you’re teaching, who you’re teaching, and who you are, among numerous other factors. This is complicated by the semi-actuality of one’s mysidentity, an affected composite of coherent intra-interactivity with other elements, including other individuals, objects, sociocultural norms, context, place, time, etc. This semi-actuality problematizes any onto-epistemological recognition of teachers or students independent of these composite elements; such a recognition is possible, but like the prefix, mys-, its completeness is troubled and transforms when brought together with
other elements, mysbecoming what it was. One of the teachers in the school who observed multiple classrooms for the PDS program remarked, “These students are night and day different when talking about fiction versus nonfiction. Brenda [one of the more talkative students] wouldn’t say three words in the other class” (HSE, 09/22/2016). That’s just describing one relational impact of a particular type of material and concepts being covered for one student.

In prior observations I conducted in another school in 2015, following certain students from class to class, it became quickly apparent how different these students performed and engaged, and not just because of any particular recognizable reason. In addition, I further explained to Tracy that I could tell someone how I teach but that if she was to perform the same method of teaching, it would almost certainly be different, depending on any number of factors in semi-actuality, including gender, classroom demographics, school and community culture, time of day, etc. On a personal level, I remarked that some of my former and current colleagues would be infuriated by the way I teach, and if I was forced to teach the way they did, I’d be uncomfortable as well.

This is part of the beauty and challenge of teaching; that it is a genuine mystery, impervious to approaches that seek to break it down into a predictable, replicable, exact process. I’m not just teaching, I’m learning; I’m learning how to teach as I teach. A mystheoretical mastery of this pedagogical approach comes not in the form of precision, recognition, and predictability; it comes as it does for a surfer. It’s not about saying I know where the wave’s going to be, how it’s going to happen, and when it’s going to crash. No, I look for the wave and try to ride it as well as I can, but each wave is different, and how good I am is not based on how precise my calculations are; it’s about how well I can balance, sense the flow of the wave, and adapt to the ever changing surface of water beneath and around me.
Our students may surprise us (PDS 11/15/2016, 11/17/2016) with knowledge and skills that could never have anticipated or discovered from their records, as Rachael indicated about her students’ capabilities with literary analysis:

I was surprised because I had never seen this before, where they were already applying literary theoretical analysis to the text before I had a chance to teach it to them. And they weren’t being taught this in the grades before, so it’s coming from somewhere else. (HSE, 11/01/2016)

They may complain initially, and then actually appreciate an assignment later (PDS 11/15/2016; HSE 11/16/2016), or they may appear to be doing well, achieving top marks, only to come home and confess that they are utterly disengaged and not learning anything new or different, as one student-teacher told me about her daughter. We may discover that some of the best participants in class discussion are actually some of the worst quiz takers (PDS, 10/11/2016, 11/15/2016). They may complete a five minute activity in one (PDS, 09/19/2016), or they may refuse to participate or cooperate in the way we had planned and hoped:

Tracy: When I tried to lead the discussion, I have these ideas of what works for me, but when I went into that I felt totally lost. I’ll learn something from this since I feel lost, but I feel like there could’ve been discussions prior to this that could’ve helped me. If you go up there and try to ask a question and for ten seconds nobody raises their hand, or you’re trying to talk, you’re trying to lecture, and kids are not paying attention and talking... so I’m not up there going, “Shit, what do I do?” (PDS, 09/13/2016)

The feeling of being “lost” is one we may struggle to acclimate ourselves to in a profession that all too often positions the teacher as someone who must be an expert with a complete recognition of the students with whom she is working. Combine this with institutional
requirements for students to perform at a certain level on assessments based in the acquisition of specific recognitions, and you have the teacher and her students caught in a vice of expectations that has little to no regard for the mysteries and difficulties she faces on a daily basis. “I feel like a failure,” (PDS, 10/11/2016) Sharon told me. Students in the last block of the day had gotten failing grades on their exams:

Their grades were like 50%. We gave them a word and they had to write a sentence to use the word correctly. Some used it incorrectly and I gave them some credit for trying, but some just left the page blank. And they might have done well on character matching and multiple choice, like “Great!” and then flip the page and it’s blank. I don’t want to change the grade, but these are words they should know!

Compounding her dismay was the fact that she said that the other two classes she had given the same exams to that day did significantly better, passing the exam with a “C average.” These were the same tracked level of students, in the same grade, and Sharon was at a loss to explain the results.

**Distributing Authority and Freedom; Student-on-Student Interaction**

One activity that depends on semi-actuality is called “pass it along.” It is a class activity that requires students to write about something for a brief period of time and then pass this piece of writing along to the next student, who continues the exercise by adding to the writing in some way. If a student refuses to write, the activity is ruined for the entire class or group, so it exerts a certain amount of pressure on that individual from the group to at least participate to some degree in the assignment (SEED, 09/23/2016).

Since semi-actuality represents the dynamic and diffractive mysbecoming of someone or something as it is extends into and within others, as well as being composed of others extensions
and flows into and within (Davies, 2014, Kindle Locations 307-315), the roles of creator, whether in the form of author, artist, or developer, and audience, which could be an editor, fanbase, or readers/viewers/listeners, are blurred and entangled, each affecting and mysbecoming with the other. As Dana put it:

You’re changing up the audience any time you have a piece of writing that’s going somewhere, a brochure to somewhere, a letter to someone. We can say, yeah, school’s important, but when you’re writing for another person, someone other than yourself, it changes things. (SEED, 09/23/2016)

We take this further by utilizing a concept of the self as selves, as a multiplicity, within and across space, time, social relationships and positioning, cultural and personal context, to say that writing to your selves changes things as well. When I offered my students the chance to participate in an unsent letter freewrite activity, one of the students surprised me by writing to a younger version of herself (SEED, 2017). This still fit the parameters of the unsent letter exercise, since she couldn’t actually send the letter to herself, but it was a powerful reflective exercise for her, and generated a significant amount of discussion around the table as other students thought about their past selves in relation to who they recognized as themselves in the present.

In Rachael’s classroom (HSE, 09/22/2016), students participated and interacted with each other in different ways during student-led class discussions focused on assigned chapters in *Moby Dick*. Students led these seminars by forming and presenting questions, facilitating discussion, and inviting peer responses that could wander from topic to topic. The class recognized and responded to their peers differently, with seemingly more authority for their own positions, than they did when responding to either Rachael or Greg. In this assemblage, students
treated each other’s responses less like authoritative answers and more like conjectural statements.

I also observed an example of creator/audience semi-actuality at play during a study I conducted on a teacher-writer writing group, discovering a rarely discussed phenomenon that seems to occur when people read over the work of their peers, similar to that described in Aitchison (2009), “When you’re reading somebody else’s [writing] and saying ‘this doesn’t make sense,’ or ‘this would make more sense up there,’ then you think back to your own work and think ‘that’s what I need to do’” (p. 913). In my study, the teacher-writers who peer-reviewed the work of other group members expressed that they had experienced this effect on themselves as well in a variety of ways, such as inspiration:

Sharon [...] characterized feedback as “cross-pollination” of ideas, inspired by sharing ideas and writing with other in the group, noting that “Feedback also includes exchanging each other’s writing so that we could read each other’s writing and that helps give us some ideas too.” (Fallon & Whitney, 2016, p. 66)

Another member of the writing group admitted that the writing he read or peer-reviewed affected his own in stylistic, grammatical, and tonal ways as well:

I must say that good writing—in journal manuscripts or from students—can influence my tone and style and voice. Reading good writing helps me write better—at least, temporarily. I’m sorry to say that bad writing may have the same effect, and I read a lot of bad writing. As a result, my sentences might get shorter. Or longer. Thoughts become fragmented. Or, and this happens with non-English speakers, the writing goes on and on with little punctuation or attention to usage and grammar conventions and is typically full of conjunctions and marks of punctuation for no apparent reason and then
ends up being very confusing not just for me but for anyone who might choose to read it whether they have to or not. See what I did there? (Fallon & Whitney, 2016, p. 68)

Another activity invites this influence openly, engaging in a permissive vulnerability in order to facilitate the revision process. In this activity, the writer takes responsibility for what they want the reviewer to focus on, by asking them questions and pointing out specific areas and aspects that they would like their reviewer to focus their criticism, thoughts, and suggestions on. For example, a writer may be struggling with an element like organization in a particular section of their composition, and ask the reader to look at the way they have arranged their discussion and exploration of topics, inviting suggestions about how the might go together differently, as well as criticism about problematic aspects with this arrangement. Given this particular focus, framed and offered by the author, the reviewer is directed to and given “permission,” according to one of my students, to provide their own perspective and analysis of this particular section (SEED, 2016-2017). Contrast this with the lack of responsibility a writer assumes when they turn over a draft for revision without any acknowledged vulnerability or direction for the reviewer. In this scenario, the reviewer is left with nearly the entire burden of responsibility about how to approach the composition.

In the same way, the responsibility for assessment and evaluation can be distributed and mycentered by sharing it beyond the teacher to the students through practices such as peer review or self-reflective evaluation. Because I am not framing this as an either/or binary, the teacher would not cede all authority or responsibility—they would share it in a dialogic intra-interaction with the student, both of whom would communicate their recognitions of performance in terms of assessment. The advantage of this shared responsibility is that it treats the teacher’s and the student’s assessments as mysrecognitions; each may discover recognitions
they did not have, different recognitions that challenge those that they did have, as well as ways their recognitions align with each other. There is always the possibility that students or teachers will utilize this mystheoretical practice to advance a deliberately skewed, misleading recognition of their work, but this manner of deception is no less possible in a recognition-based practice that positions a single, centered authority as unquestionably accurate in its judgment.

**Classroom Management**

There are several ways that classroom management practices may facilitate the sharing of authority and responsibility that encourages semi-actual, coherent mysbecoming among participants. One could begin by taking a little extra time at the beginning of the school year to negotiate and collaborate on a class contract or constitution, wherein certain key concepts, values, principles, or behaviors are agreed upon. However, this is not necessary to facilitate a myspedagogical classroom environment.

When I taught in high school, co-authoring such a contract had not occurred to me. Instead, I framed class conduct around three basic principles: respect, responsibility, and effort. I did not include “excellence,” “best practices,” or any explicit form these three principles should take. Effort allowed for and permitted a variety of levels of performance and results, because I knew that not every student could or would excel in the same way. Effort, however, was something that everyone could potentially give to the classroom. Respect honored the sharing and consideration of perspectives, even if they differed from my own. This applied to assignments and lessons when a student did not understand or see the importance in the material. Finally, responsibility represented an acknowledgment and acceptance of each participant’s accountability and agency in their efforts and outcomes, facilitating a myscentered classroom
environment. In this way, my classroom principles aligned with a myspedagogical approach, even if we did not come up with them together as a class.

A myspedagogical approach to classroom management can feel like a balancing act. For example, if I use a myscentered approach to discussion that can tangentially develop from different lines of flight initiated by respondents into unanticipated directions, there is always the possibility that events proceed so far down a particular path that they begin excluding a critical number of other opportunities and directions from emerging (PDS, 09/19/2016). Rachael and Greg encountered one such case where students were wrestling with the question of why Ishmael, or anyone really, would want to pursue an activity as dangerous and life-threatening as whale hunting; what was the enjoyment in that? As students explored the possibilities, such as the adrenaline rush one experiences on a rollercoaster, the discussion progressed for much longer than they had anticipated, so it was necessary to initiate a transition so that other topics and questions could be taken up. Greg accomplished this by saying, “Well, wherever the adrenaline rush comes from, that’s possibly part of the appeal for them.” After the class ended, Rachael said to him:

I really liked how you did that. Sometimes they pick up something and they just keep arguing… and I think you solved that elegantly. It wasn’t like… there was one time when we were doing Their Eyes Were Watching God in one class, and we got so off, we were only talking about one thing for half an hour, and I felt like we didn’t get through everything. I didn’t feel like that with this. (HSE, 10/24/2016)

It’s a balancing act that teachers who assume the responsibility of their positions are obligated to engage in, such as deciding when to step in; do so too early, and the students feel like they cannot explore the topics they bring up meaningfully, but wait too long, and the
discussion could just as easily monopolize the remaining potential for other possibilities and directions.

This is just one example that demonstrates how a teacher can maintain a measure of control without dominating the discourse or activities in a classroom—a balance that is difficult to achieve because organic discussions that spontaneously emerge and take on different directions challenge a teacher to decide when they’ve had enough time to develop without oppressing student initiative, exploration, and voice. There is often no clear or certain way to know when the “right” time to move on is, or how the classroom dynamics may change or progress by doing so.

**Safety, Discomfort, and Responsibility**

“One day, however, Baldr begins to be troubled by nightmares indicating some harm will come to him. His mother Frigg therefore sets about exacting an oath from everything in heaven and earth [...] not to harm Baldr.” (Hyde, 2010, p. 101)

In a graduate class focused on the writings of Foucault, a discussion arose about gender and fighting, particularly, the phenomenon that sometimes boys will physically fight, but remain on neutral or pleasant terms after. My professor could not understand how this worked; she explained that in her experience, girls would not generally react to a physical fight with anything other than negative feelings towards the other combatant. In this gender binary frame, boys perceived fighting as an aspect of a healthy relationship, while girls saw it exclusively as a means to do damage, emotionally and physically. I am not suggesting that all boys and girls fall neatly across this binary, or that either gender is bound to consider fighting in one particular way.

My interest is in what fascinated my professor: a concept of fighting that was considered acceptable and sustainable in a relationship of mutual understanding, despite the almost
unavoidable injury inherent in such an act. This acceptance of injury or discomfort runs contrary to the logic that these elements are exclusively destructive and should be prevented at any cost; a logic that leads schools and universities to operate more like Bentham’s Panopticon (Foucault, 2012a), with hallways and classrooms designed and built to be as visible and transparent as possible, students and staff being tracked and observed at every turn by parents and administrators (HSE, 09/28/2016; PDS 10/03/2016; Wingfield, 2016), security checkpoints at every door, cameras in every hall, zero tolerance policies, and more.

While there is little evidence that these measures prevent school violence or protect students, there are indications that they may contribute to higher levels of disruption and disorder. Increased security measures have also been shown to effectively spread fear and mistrust in a school environment (Research on School, 2013; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Tollefson, 2008, Kindle Locations 3124-3135; Cline, 2004). These measures, designed to prevent disorder and harm, have demonstrated an inverse capacity to cause both.

I have experienced and observed all of these measures in schools in which I have taught and conducted research. Teaching in a room which is entirely visible from the hallway through a glass wall, many of my undergraduate students displayed and expressed feelings of discomfort every time a group of people would walk by (SEED, 2016-2017. The effect of their visibility and the transparency of the classroom was not one of security, but oppression, just as Foucault (2012) theorized it would be.

The human immune system might work as a functional analogy here. An immune response to something that should be considered harmless is a key characteristic of immunological disorders, such as asthma. Research has revealed a causal relationship in animal
test subjects between an increase in immunological disorders and the sterility of their environments that is called the “hygiene hypothesis” (Okada, Kuhn, Feillet, & Bach, 2010). This hypothesis posits that “some infectious agents—notably those that co-evolved with us—are able to protect against a large spectrum of immune-related disorders” (pp. 1-2). By ridding ourselves of an increasing number of these infectious agents, we cause our immune system to become hypersensitive, bringing on allergic reactions to environmental factors that would not normally trigger them.

There is a parallel here to the increasing efforts to root out any potential disorder, misbehavior, or possibility of harm and violence in our schools. This drive towards maximum security has seemingly ignored the harmful effects that have manifested in its wake. The implication behind this movement of security and safety at any cost is that any pain or discomfort is exclusively recognized as negative, that visibility and security are exclusively recognized as positive, or at the very least, the consequences of this hypersensitive immunological system are entirely justified.

There are many cases, however, where discomfort, stress, and pain actually promote health, freedom, and agency. Neurologists, for example, have discovered that older people who maintain higher mental performance may actually be able to do so because of increased activity in critical brain regions—the cause of which is linked to stress and discomfort:

The road to superaging is difficult, though, because these brain regions have another intriguing property: When they increase in activity, you tend to feel pretty bad—tired, stymied, frustrated. Think about the last time you grappled with a math problem or pushed yourself to your physical limits. Hard work makes you feel bad in the moment. The Marine Corps has a motto that embodies this principle: “Pain is weakness leaving the
body.” That is, the discomfort of exertion means you’re building muscle and discipline. Superagers are like Marines: They excel at pushing past the temporary unpleasantness of intense effort. Studies suggest that the result is a more youthful brain that helps maintain a sharper memory and a greater ability to pay attention. (Barrett, 2016)

An argument could be made that heightened security and surveillance measures that may cause stress and fear could result in breaking boundaries for students and teachers—and this is true, but we may want to ask how and why. In an environment of fear and stress created by increasingly intrusive security measures, mysbeing-and-becoming and mysrecognition happen in resistance to the intended goal of preservation and centralized control by restricting the agency of those within the system through recognition-based enforcement. By contrast, a myspedagogical approach facilitates mysbeing-and-becoming through myscentered responsibility that simultaneously and inversely empowers and makes vulnerable through the composite, coherent semi-actuality its participants. Is this a potentially dangerous environment? Yes, but it is a hospitable, nurturing environment as well, as many environments are, in different ways.

Let us look a different kind of “safe space,” a classroom that endorses and promotes freedom of speech (Gup, 2016):

“This is a sanctuary for free speech,” I will tell my students next week at their first class in nonfiction writing. With this manifesto I begin each semester and have for 30-plus years. What does it mean? It means that in here, you can say anything.

[...] Now I have their attention. I may or may not be in violation of a college rule, but I am clearly outside the “safe zone.” And that’s fine, because outside of it is where I want to be, and where I want them to be.
This is, after all, a class in writing, and words are not to be trifled with. They have consequences. You want to use a word—any word—fine by me, but be prepared to accept what happens next. [...] It is a lesson not only in the power of words, but in democracy, free speech, and responsibility.

Mr. Gup’s concept of a “safe space” is made so through the inverse linking of freedom with consequences and the responsibility that emerges because of them. Conversely, when free speech is made invulnerable to consequences, it becomes free of this kind of responsibility. The vulnerability and risk associated with these consequences is critical; if it is absent for any reason—whether through money, political power, mob rule, means of force, or total anonymity, among other reasons (Krahulik & Holkins, 2004)—responsibility, and the freedom it facilitates, tends to go with it.

By acknowledging, accepting, and drawing upon our vulnerability to these consequences we may pursue a different approach toward raising and educating children that myscensers and distributes responsibility among them:

Mike is a deep believer in the idea that “kids have to find their own balance of power.” He wants his boys to create their own society governed by its own rules. [...] “Think about your own 10 best memories of childhood, and chances are most of them involve free play outdoors,” Mike is fond of saying. “How many of them took place with a grown-up around? I remember that when grown-ups came over, we stopped playing and waited for them to go away. But [grown-ups] nowadays never go away.” (Thernstrom, 2016)

Lanza, drawing upon research, connects micro-management supervision of children and students with anxiety, behavioral disorders such as depression, and a reduced capability to think
for themselves in the first pages of his book (2016, Kindle Locations 159-170). He also links hyper-visibility forms of parenting to an achievement-based culture that prides itself on ticking as many boxes as possible (Thernstrom, 2016). There is a striking parallel here to the ever-increasing demand for longer lists of activities and accomplishments in order to remain competitive in today’s neoliberal schools and workforce without much consideration for the consequences of this demand.

I watched Rachael apologize multiple times in the span of a few minutes for anything perceived as a trigger event on the screen during the showing of a few clips of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (HSE, 11/11/2016). Professors have apologized dozens of times in class for saying things that someone might regard as offensive. I imagine that as possibilities for harm are increasingly recognized, we might all eventually find ourselves apologizing continuously, every minute of every day, as a way of life. In an effort to do no harm, we may incarcerate ourselves in a prison under constant threat of punishment and anxious repentance.

What about forgiveness and tolerance? Jesus is perhaps most noteworthy for bringing forgiveness into a world that lived by intolerant law by reminding us that no one is righteously free of sin (John 8:1-11). Forgiveness and tolerance require an inverse capability to sustain offense without giving it in recompense, but in a world where there is zero tolerance for such offense, where it is censored at every possible opportunity, so goes our need and value for tolerance and forgiveness.

Let us accept that we will do and sustain harm, then, in spite of our best intentions. Let us further accept that this capability for discomfort and pain can be inversely empowering and healthy, both in the sustaining and doing of it. My mystheoretical ethical responsibility is sustained through inverse agency and vulnerability to the semi-actual coherence of my composite
beings-as-doings with others. My actions have inverse consequences that exist in coherence simultaneously as doings-and-beings; effects and manifestations beyond what I may recognize or intend, that semi-actually affect others as well ourselves in their mysbecoming. My doings-as-beings are dangerous.

Therefore, when teenagers complain of assignments, I accept and recognize that this is not exclusively a negative thing, but may represent of a number of positive aspects in its mysbeing-as-doing, such as the difficulty and challenge of the work being assigned. Just as coaches may expect their athletes to be sore after a hard practice that has also strengthened their physical capabilities, I might reasonably expect my students to be mentally fatigued, confused, and unsettled after a difficult lesson that has challenged and deepened their understandings. I may also accept their complaints as an indication of the occurrence of these effects, whereas the absence of such might give me pause.

My undergraduate students preferred seats that rocked and required balance to sit upon (SEED, 09/09/2016) to more stable, secure chairs. Every day I taught in high school, I was greeted with the common sight of at least one or two students precariously balancing themselves on one or two legs of a chair they perpetually leaned back on. I know these students accepted the possibility for falling because they expressed and confirmed this with me.

Sociocultural perceptions of risk-taking behavior by teenagers tend to present them as incapable of being able to fully appreciate the consequences of their actions, driving legislation and judicial decisions to remove their culpability and responsibility for such behavior either in large part or entirely. Yet, recent neurological research has concluded that teenagers are just as capable as adults of understanding the risks of behaviors in which they engage and do not consider themselves to be invincible; in fact, they may even consider themselves to be more
vulnerable than adults (Casey, Getz, & Galvan, 2008, pp. 71-73; Millstein & Halpern-Felsher, 2001, pp. 38-43), despite how illogical or irrational this might seem when taken together with their increased likelihood for risk-taking behavior. The importance of these findings to my position is the acknowledgement of the possibility that teens may accept, and perhaps even prefer, a more risky approach with potentially painful consequences by which to learn.

I acknowledge that there are a variety of other factors that can determine risk-taking behavior in children, adolescents, and adults, however, I believe that the studies cited herein are enough to question and reconsider an approach to educating adolescents based on maximum security and safety, in favor of others that may be considered less safe. If true, even in some cases, this lends further support to a myspedagogical approach that addresses uncomfortable subjects, allows conversations to develop on troubling topics, welcomes issues and events into the classroom that may lead to heated discussion and debate, and permits engagements and actions that may carry some risk of potential harm. If we step beyond the classroom into the realm of sports and recreational activities like cycling, ice skating, or playing football—activities enjoyed by people of all ages—the probability of suffering harm or injury is accepted as a necessary and even healthy part of the learning process. Still, among those who have zero tolerance for harm and see nothing of value in its possibility, efforts are underway to keep children from engaging in these recreational activities (An Act to Amend, 2017).

Along the same lines, if we truly held physicians to an absolute and inflexible understanding of the Hippocratic oath’s (2017) requirement to “do no harm,” then no surgery, no shots, no blood tests, indeed, no act of any kind that actually causes harm as part of a healing process could be ethically justifiable. Many of us understand, however, that whatever injury and pain may result from these measures, they are part of a procedure that considered to be beneficial
to the patient’s overall well-being. Again, my ethical responsibility does not adhere to cleanly recognized binary lines of good or bad, perpetrator or victim, benefit or harm. My mysbeings-as-doings embody different, potentially oppositional characteristics simultaneously in their agential coherent becoming.

With these allowances in mind, we may advocate for an approach that brings the n-word and other potentially offensive elements into the classroom (HSE, 09/12/2016); that emotionally charged events like that 2016 election and its outcome could reasonably become topics of discussion with educational value for working through them (HSE, 11/10/2016; SEED, 11/11/2016); that certain textual questions and discussions touching upon and exploring sensitive and personally disturbing experiences such as rape, drug abuse, and other forms of violence can be had that may result in appreciation for and a development in understanding not just in how those experiences may impact others, but also about how to have such discussions that help facilitate an empathetic understanding across a variety of perspectives and lives (PDS, 09/19/2016; SEED, 09/23/2016). As Dewey (1974) succinctly states: “As a matter of fact, the ‘best interests of children’ are so safe-guarded and supervised that the situation approaches learning to swim without going too near the water” (p, 317).

Beyond these activities, we might promote acts which make students and ourselves less comfortable as a means to enhance educational performance. Rachael changed seating arrangements and desk positioning on several occasions (HSE, 09/19/2016; HSE, 10/10/2016), and I asked her about it (HSE, 09/28/2016):

Rachael: We’re starting to think about choosing new groups at this point.

Me: Why is that?

Rachael: Because they are now really comfortable in the groups they are with and
I want to shake it up a little bit. I’m also wondering with that activity (seminar on Moby Dick) if it is better or worse to allow them to select their own groups. Comfort-wise for some of them, they’re already friends, so it would be easy to get together, but I want to challenge them to work with people they’re not familiar with and not comfortable with. They’re starting to get a little off-task when they’re in these groups.

Me: It’s an inversion idea in my concepts; you are deliberately doing something that causes discomfort in order to renew focus.

Rachael: Yes.

Me: Normally people don’t put those two concepts together as something that cohesively produces the effect that you want. Within the context of this exercise, it’s the comfort that allows for the talking, which allows for the focus to drift away from those topics.

Rachael: Well, in the long term, I want them to be comfortable with everyone in the class. They don’t even know everybody’s names. I don’t know if you noticed that in the conversation on Monday (9/26). They didn’t all know each other’s names. So the initial discomfort is part of the long term goal of greater comfort and safe space, because these [small groups] are all great safe spaces, and I want the whole room to feel like a safe space.

Me: So the process to getting to the overall comfort involves the discomfort as necessary to it. That’s counterintuitive to most people; why would you take a step back, to take a step forward...

Rachael: But sometimes you have to.
Rachael deftly alternates back and forth between comfort and discomfort, joining the two together in an inverse progression that contributes to a hybrid form of comfort that shares traits of both. She acknowledges that discomfort plays an inverse role in the development of comfort without being troubled by the seeming contradiction in this statement.

The correlation between familiarity and comfort sustains this hybridity through norms. I associate familiarity with norms ("Norm, n. 1," 2017), through a recognition of how things usually are much of the time. Even measures that cause discomfort may come to be familiar if encountered on a normalizing basis:

We created certain norms for this unit. Every unit has norms, so when we change the norms, there’s a crisis of “What are we doing? This is different!” What’s interesting is we’ve gotten them so used to the change in the desks every day, when they come in, they don’t freak out whereas in other classes where we don’t change the desks around so much, they have that crisis. (HSE, 11/14/2016)

This account builds on Rachael’s understanding of attaining comfort through a series of steps that are deliberately discomforting. It may also explain a social acceptance for conditions encountered on a daily basis that once may have been a source of discomfort: what may be called “the new normal.” The importance of inserting discomfort in the form of something not as easily recognized or familiar emerges from recent research that shows that what we are familiar with, what is “normal” to us, has a tendency to reinforce itself as what should be in our minds (Bear & Knobe, 2016):

People might sometimes be able to separate out the average from the ideal, but they more often make use of a kind of reasoning that blends the two together into a single undifferentiated judgment of normality. This apparently instinctive judgment appears to
play an important role in people’s ordinary way of making sense of their lives and the world around them. [...] Combating this tendency in ourselves and others is—perhaps now more than ever—something to be vigilant about. (Bear & Knobe, 2017)

This research may provide insight into the semi-actual impact of our recognitions of what is and isn’t “normal,” and how those familiar interactions and experiences not only become routine and comfortable, but also prescriptive—how our teaching and learning should be, how it should appear, and what results it should be producing and the forms it should be producing them in. Greg confessed how easy it is sometimes, “without thinking about it, to just fall back on what I find familiar, and what I’ve experienced, such as lectures” (PDS, 10/25/2016). Mystheory cautions us to be wary of enforcing these conventions and norms in an unquestionably prescriptive manner by perpetually leaving them vulnerable to ethical inquiry, discussion, and challenge, no matter our supporting evidence, disciplinary authority, experience, traditions, conventions, or convictions.

My responsibility sometimes compels me to push students to do something they may not want to do initially, but come to appreciate afterwards, as happened when Rachael invited students to write about sources of stress in their lives (HSE, 11/16/2016). This applies to student-teachers as well, as Rachael described a few occasions throughout the academic year that she had to push Greg to perform in ways he was more reluctant to do:

Sometimes it’s our job to push them, which is so interesting with Greg. When he was creating his lesson plan, I said, “You need to write a narrative introduction; you can’t just have a list of things. I’m not going to be here, you have to introduce it, like three-hundred word narrative introductions. [...] Like the other day I gave an Ahab-like speech to fifth block because they were slacking with their explorations, and when he did it for
sixth block, he said three lines. He’s doing a lot better, but his insecurity, I think, makes it hard for him because he’s not a naturally confident person. He’s smart in so many ways, like archetypes and pop culture, he’s so good at that, but he needs to get to the point where he’s confident about it and can speak to it. Sometimes I just need to push him to do the things that he knows that he should do, but doesn’t. (HSE, 11/16/2016)

During a conference presentation activity that I conducted (Fallon, 2014), I had asked participants to think back to a few memorable experiences and describe them in writing, and then exchange those written pieces with someone else in the group who would then see what they could recognize as the most significant and meaningful elements of that written memory. When I asked participants to exchange writings, I was told that I had not specifically mentioned that these writings would be shared, and that some participants had written about personal memories that they did not initially intend to share. Yet, afterwards, these same participants remarked that they were, in a way, grateful that they had written those experiences after all, since it provided a way to look at them differently through the eyes of another that they may not have permitted otherwise.

We are faced with the responsibility to either push our students through such an experience, risking exposure that may induce shame and discomfort, or allow them to maintain their silence and risk missing the opportunity for an understanding and experience they may not have allowed themselves to have. If we continue to look at measures and approaches through a classical logic of harm=harm only, safe=safe only, then we miss out on the complexity of true responsibility and decision-making that incorporates rather than excludes oppositional and unanticipated effects. As long as we continue to equate responsibility exclusively and punitively
with blame, we will continue to suffer the limitations and damaging consequences of this one-dimensional, binary logic.
Chapter 5: Testing, Policy, and Recognitions of Success

One particular concept that may be effectively, responsibly, and inversely misunderstood beyond a one-dimensional, noncontradictory representation is that of failure. The experience of failure has been shared by students, teachers, and schools throughout the scope and history of our education system. However, I believe failure is valuable. Let us consider how failure already is, has been, and might be recognized and handled within our education system.

Initially, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 under Lyndon Johnson’s administration was legislated to target the “achievement gap” and institute “high standards and accountability” in primary and secondary schools. Mainly, it directed and distributed funding through its Title I provision to schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families to address the effects of poverty on student achievement ("Elementary and Secondary," 2017). However, with the reauthorization under George W. Bush’s administration, called No Child Left Behind, the primary focus shifted from funding to accountability, and standardized testing became the primary measuring stick of that accountability that brought with it consequences for schools that failed to measure up:

When it comes to our schools, dollars alone do not always make the difference. Funding is important, and so is reform. So we must tie funding to higher standards and accountability for results. [...] Children should be tested on basic reading and math skills every year, between grades three and eight. Measuring is the only way to know whether all our children are learning -- and I want to know, because I refuse to leave any child behind.

Critics of testing contend it distracts from learning. They talk about "teaching to the test." But let us put that logic to the test. If you test children on basic math and
reading skills, and you are "teaching to the test," you are teaching ... math and reading.

And that is the whole idea. [...] 

Schools will be given a reasonable chance to improve, and the support to do so. Yet if they do not, if they continue to fail, we must give parents and students different options -- a better public school, a private school, tutoring, or a charter school. In the end, every child in a bad situation must be given a better choice, because when it comes to our children, failure is not an option. (Bush, 2001)

In clear language, Bush outlined a new transformation in the ESEA that would tie failure directly to funding, as measured by standardized testing. In 2015, under the Obama administration, the ESEA was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act. While it granted “flexibility to states regarding specific requirements of NCLB,” the name itself wrote off failure as an option, and maintained the annual standardized testing requirement of its NCLB predecessor ("Every Student,” 2017). Both NCLB and ESSA received bipartisan support in Congress.

There has been compelling research that has argued that not only do these laws “force school failure by design” (Shannon, 2007, p. 200), but that they do so specifically by targeting individual groups with disaggregated scoring, and requiring the exact same performance on the exact same test from each of these groups in scoring, in order to produce a deeper, more pervasive level of surveillance and visibility upon the achievement, or lack thereof, of these individual groups of students, “Federal officials state that separation of scores by race, class, ability, and English proficiency is necessary to monitor schools’ treatment of these underserved groups in order to improve their service” (Shannon, 2007, p. 201).
These tests are exclusively formed in a traditional recognition-based format that requires students to select “the best” answer to questions about reading passages, utilize one particular method to solve math problems, and compose their written responses in a strict writing format, usually a standard five-paragraph essay. These activities vary and include others, but all of them are formed around a specifically recognized “best” response and method, and every student is measured and judged according to how closely they match these. Each question is counted as right or wrong, and every single question counts towards a student’s overall score. No answer is to be disputed, multiple answers, responses, and pathways of thinking are excluded, and it is assumed that every student’s success can be accurately measured in this single, standardized way.

What has been the result of these mandated standardized tests? As Shannon (2007) and others predicted, the number of students fleeing the public school system has steadily increased. Enrollment at secondary schools is at its lowest point since 2003-2004, and has dropped by 3.5% since its peak in 2007-2008. Taking this decline against the overall increase in numbers means that nearly 9% of the school age population has abandoned public schools by the time they reach the secondary level. Where are they going? To charter and magnet schools, which have experienced an increase in their enrollment numbers by 461% and 110% respectively ("Number and Enrollment," 2016).

These changes in enrollment correlated with the growing number of schools labeled as “failing” under NCLB right up to 2011 when then Secretary of Education Arne Duncan predicted in 2011, “82 percent of America's schools could be labeled ‘failing’ and, over time, the required remedies for all of them are the same—which means we will really fail to serve the students in greatest need” ("Duncan Says," 2011). Under NCLB, any participating school that did not make
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two years was required to offer parents the choice to send their child to a non-failing school in the district, and after three years, provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance. After five years of not meeting AYP, the school was required to make dramatic changes to how the school is run, which basically entailed state takeover of its operations ("The Condition of Education," 2006). The goal of a 100% success as measured by these tests was never consistently attainable through any means that didn’t involve cheating, gamesmanship, or redefining “proficiency” (Kamenetz, 2014). However, since these unattainable proficiency goals have been reworked to focus more on growth and other factors under ESSA, there are some, like Sandy Kress (one of the chief architects of No Child Left Behind) who feel that “rather than fixing and advancing accountability, we seem to be weakening and abandoning it” (Kamenetz, 2014). In other words, “accountability,” according to people like Kress, is achieved through a clear binary division of failure and success in a model that requires failure to be recognized and rooted out as an exclusively negative outcome (Shannon, 2007, pp. 102, 154).

No conclusive evidence exists that test scores correlate directly or significantly with indicators of national success, economic prosperity, individual happiness, democracy, or social equality in nations that rank highly in these sociocultural metrics (Baker, 2007, pp. 103-104; Tienken, 2008, p. 10; Ravitch, 2013b). In terms of individual success, the tests fail to correlate either for adult maturity, competence, or success later in life for much beyond taking standardized tests (Heath, 1977, p. 613; Weldon, 2012; Zuger, 2014). Even in regard to future success in a strictly academic environment such as college and university, research has demonstrated that high test scores (Rooney & Schaeffer, 1998) correlate far less significantly than high school GPA scores or other measures in predicting college success. In fact, new
research reveals that the tests may not be a reliable indicator of academic achievement, effective teaching, or future college success at all. Instead, by just taking into consideration three factors: percentage of families in the community with income over $200K, percentage of people in the community in poverty, and percentage of people in community with bachelor’s degrees, a significant majority of the test scores can be more accurately predicted than on any other basis (Tienken et al., 2017, pp. 1-2), leading me to believe that these may be the only factors that the tests are capable of accurately measuring.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that a government policy based exclusively on these tests as accountability measures may not just be unsupported, but actually damaging to its national population (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013, p. 84). Not only are the tests are so limited in the ways that they measure and in what they measure, but given that they are mandated on an unprecedented scale and tied now to school funding and teacher effectiveness (Ravitch, 2013a, Kindle Locations 2058-2063), they have the capability to damage and demolish any growth, comprehension, capability, and thinking beyond what they can recognize and assess (Baker, 2007, pp. 103-104; Ravitch, 2013b). The arts are one area of education not recognized or measured by the tests, and as a result these programs have been defunded and cut throughout the country (Hambrek, 2016; Parsad, Spiegelman, & Coopersmith, 2012; Chira, 1993), along with the countless benefits that these programs have been demonstrated to provide to society and individuals at all levels. So much for standardized tests designed with single, best, recognition-based responses that designate any thinking and performance outside correct responses exclusively as failure.
Putting the Test to the Test

On December 14, 2016, I led a standardized exam preparation lesson with an excerpt of a previously used standardized exam. The section that Rachael supplied featured a reading passage followed by multiple choice questions about that passage, like those found on many standardized tests. I received approval from Rachael in a meeting two weeks prior to running this activity in her class.

I began by recalling the experiences students already had with analyzing texts through literary theoretical frameworks and critical perspectives, such as feminism, archetypal theory, queer theory, and psychoanalysis, as well as through class discussions and assigned explorations. These methods and approaches revealed that many perspectives and understandings are possible for each text, encouraging an appreciation for a diversity of viewpoints and interpretations.

I contrasted these experiences and approaches with the rules, format, and requirements of the standardized test reading comprehension section that directed students to select the “best” answer from the selection of choices provided for each question. In its multiple-choice format, all answers were predetermined and only one was correct.

Next, I had the students select all of the answers to each question that appeared to be correct to them, deviating from the test rules that directed students to select only one answer. Afterwards, I provided the “correct” answers to each of the questions and directed the students to write in detail why the answer to one of these questions was “correct,” thereby supporting the test makers’ selected answer.

I then asked the students two questions: 1) How many of you chose a different answer than, or in addition to, the one designated as “correct” by the test makers? 2) How many of you could support your choice with literary critical theory, textual evidence, or other means? I asked
these two questions to reveal the mysrecognition within a test like this one, designed with a recognition-based framework. By allowing students to select multiple answers, I could see which answers had credibility in their eyes. It is easy enough to say that some answers will always appear to be correct—this is part of what makes a test like this challenging to students—but that undermines the validity and reasons for choosing those “incorrect” answers. In an effort to restore that validity and honor those reasons for choosing the other, “incorrect” answers, I had students explain why they chose those other answers. Their responses were enlightening, interesting, and thought-provoking.

The answers to the first question I put to the students brought a powerful piece of data to the forefront: No student in the classroom managed to get all of the answers correct, nor did any student in the classroom believe that only the answers chosen by the test makers were the only “correct” ones, nor did any of them agree that all of the “correct” answers were truly “correct.” This indicates a one-hundred percent occurrence of mysrecognition in the taking of this test across this class of students.

Recall that mysrecognition differs from misrecognition, because misrecognition implies error and wrongness; if you misrecognize something, you’re mistaking what it is for what it is not. Misrecognition aligns with the dualism inherent in questions, perspectives, and approaches that frame understanding inside parameters of “right” and “wrong,” “correct” and “incorrect,” as standardized tests do. Misrecognition supports a process of elimination, a process a few students openly acknowledged and utilized to support their responses to the test questions (“Student #1” below is not the same as “Student #1” in other examples):

Student #1: Using a process of elimination, we know that this sentence talks about repetition, which covers B&C.
Student #2: Answer E is correct because all of the other answers are incorrect.

[The student lists off the reasons the other answers are incorrect.] Therefore, Answer E is correct by means of process of elimination. (Appendix)

The process of elimination works in this case because one answer is authoritatively recognized as the “best” or “correct,” facilitating the process of discrediting any others. Understandably, the process of elimination has been encouraged repeatedly as an excellent strategy for performing successfully on standardized tests such as the SAT (McCammen, 2016; PrincetonReviewBook, 2012), since these tests are designed with a recognition-based framework that sets up these conditions.

Mysrecognition, by contrast, problematizes framing any recognition or answer as “right” or “wrong” by framing every recognition as a mysrecognition, subject to challenge and questioning, and imbued with potential and validity. This approach is validated by the unfinalizability (Bakhtin, 2013, pp. 61, 176, 284-285) in each recognition’s onto-epistemological mys-ness, revealing a multiplicity of ways to misunderstand them, sustaining them in relation to each other through uncertainty and forestalling the process of elimination through irresolvability. Raising these mysrecognitions from the problem or question into a discussion (Flusser, 2013, pp. 51-58) provides further possibilities for transformation of these mysrecognitions as they intra-interact (Barad, 2007) with each other, potentially drawing on sources beyond the frame of recognition as well as new mysbecomings within.

While students may have found more than one answer to be valid, I had only asked them to explain one of those answers in detail. Each of their responses demonstrated thoughtful critical analysis that challenged the “wrongness” of their chosen answer:

Student: [Question] #35 E (why it’s not wrong) (correct = D)
The incident with the ugly red sweater (while it may symbolize ironic cruelty) could symbolize adult justice. In the passage, Rachel refers to the adult status of Mrs. Price: “Because she’s older and the teacher, she’s right and I’m not” (line 46). Mrs. Price refuses to listen to Rachel because she believes herself to be correct. By forcing Rachel to wear the sweater despite her denial, Mrs. Price is enforcing her sense of “adult justice” over Rachel. (Appendix)

This student recognizes justice as a complicated concept, and deepens it to account for different perspectives where an act that is recognized as “just” from one perspective could be recognized as “unjust” from another. This is not an understanding that the test makers acknowledge, nor is complicating any concept, such as justice, an approach they endorse in their single, one-dimensional, authoritative recognition-based answer framework.

For question #39, which asks, “How could Rachel be characterized?” one student chose C instead D, pointing out that, “Juvenile [is] a negative, cynical choice. Youthful has a happier tone. The author [Rachel] is very negative through the piece” (Appendix). While the test makers imply that no other choices could characterize Rachel, this student provided textually supported evidence drawing on a critical analysis of the tone and style of the text to select a different answer. Here, again, a student’s critical capability and valid analysis of textual elements is not just ignored, but effectively punished with a deduction of points.

Another student challenged question #40’s “correct” response of D by illuminating the way Rachel could be understanding inanimate and animate objects:

I chose answer E because her making the comparison between inanimate objects and humans on a deeper level shows her complex and refined ability to understand
things. She can make the connection between things that seem to be completely unrelated, which is complex & refined. (Appendix)

This type of analysis is aligned with a new materialism perspective, a more recent theoretical framework being endorsed by a number of well-respected scholars in the humanities such as Brian Massumi, Rosi Braidotti, and Karen Barad that decenters and deprioritizes the human in relation to inanimate objects and environmental matter. This student sees a potentially deeper apprehension and understanding of the relationship between objects and people being explored here by the character, yet, this insight goes unheard and unseen in the singular recognition machinery of the exam.

Question #41 is a classic question found in many reading passage sections on standardized tests asking the student to explain or identify the author’s intent in a passage. Not only is authorial intent also a focus in Common Core standards, but it reflects an understanding of language, literature, and writing that opposes (or, at least, ignores) the work and scholarship of Barthes (1968/2010, pp. 1322-1326), Foucault (1966/2010, pp. 1475-1490), and Fish (1980/2010, pp. 1974-1992) as well as many other scholars from a variety of prominent and established theoretical perspectives and schools of thought going back over fifty years. One of the students demonstrated with contextual details precisely why authorial intent has been challenged by noteworthy scholars throughout the latter half of the twentieth century by showing how answer C, instead of E, meaningfully represents the author’s intent:

Question 41’s answer should be C. Many of her metaphors suggest this. Trees and onions grow in rings where each new ring grows off of old rings. She also acknowledges that as an adult you can lean on the experiences and emotions of your
young years but as 11 you can’t be 102 or an adult and lean on experiences or emotions you haven’t felt yet. (Appendix)

The entirety of this student’s response supports answer C with specific details drawn from the text and calls on as much of the passage for its evidence as the “correct” answer E. In fact, the evidence for answer E calls for a strikingly shallow reading of the numbers and their personal and emotional value as so much existential rambling on the supposed grounds that the author desires to escape from her situation, instead of accounting for the value of her experiences. Furthermore, where the test makers limit the scope of the question and answer around the assumption that the author is the character Rachel, the student’s response allows for a reading of the passage that may indicate a perspective of the author of the piece that differs from and can appreciate a broader scope of meaning than the character can.

In all of these examples and others that I collected at the end of the activity, students challenged and put forth interpretations supported by textual analyses that were at least comparable, if not deeper, more complex, and more emotionally intelligent than the apparent scope of literary interpretation and understanding that the test makers demonstrate in their questions and chosen answers. In fact, the test makers may be well aware of the work and scholarship that opposes authorial intent and single, best interpretations of writing, but the design of their exams bar these possibilities from ever being acknowledged.

Furthermore, I find a secret, vindicating power in the truth that these tests, designed firmly within a recognition-based paradigm, not only fail to recognize the rich and diverse insights of the students taking them, but they cannot even present the literature without misrecognizing it in their own way, through alteration and sanitizing of famous works they excerpt from such as those of Kafka and Huxley (Winerip, 2003). Even the authors of texts
featured on the exam have proven incapable of choosing the “correct” answers to questions about their own work (Holbrook, 2017). So much for recognizing authorial intent.

To those who wish to give the test makers the benefit of the doubt, I ask: If they acknowledge the research and scholarship that has criticized the principles of design for these tests as a means to evaluate deeper comprehension and understanding, why do they continue to design these tests this way? Why do state and federal authorities continue to rely on, exclusively in an increasing number of cases, these exams when there has been so much criticism and scholarship decrying their effectiveness at measuring student capability? Why are school systems, state governments, and the federal government continually funding and endorsing a tool that only recognizes the narrowest of understandings at the expense of all others? The answers to these questions are urgent and our sense of ethical responsibility and social justice compels us to consider alternative approaches to assessment, such as one informed and guided by mypedagogical principles that could offer us different ways to address concerns of accountability, equity, and fairness effectively.

Mysrecognizing Failure

"The best way to get the right answer on the Internet is not to ask a question, it's to post the wrong answer." ("Cunningham's Law," 2016)

We find ourselves, inevitably, at the limits of recognition; of failure, our students, our teachers, and our educational system. Let us seek out other ways of being that are not bound to our recognitions. Let us mysrecognize the paths before us to slip through our prison bars and go beyond the dead end of recognition. Let us mysrecognize failure.

Since the education system mandated under NCLB and ESSA defines failure in opposition to success in an exclusive binary relationship where both are recognized as distinctly and
autonomously separate from each other, let us blur (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 97; Kaprow, 2006, p. 48) the lines of recognition between them, around them, and through them, as we have already begun to do with teachers and students. By blurring these recognitions, we may see success and failure as not entirely distinguishable, nor separate, and find this particular mysrecognition of these concepts in educational programs that advocate for failure as part of success through the arts, sciences, mathematics, technology, business, and entrepreneurship, among others (Richman, 2015; Foumberg, 2016; Ombelets, 2014; Madda, 2015; Ramirez, 2013; Bennett, 2017).

These ways of mysrecognizing failure include learning by doing with a dismissal of fear based on outcome and results by accepting failure as a healthy and necessary part of education and learning (Madda, 2015; Dewey, 2012, pp. 136-137; Gee, 2014; Kaprow, 2006, p. 49). There is an acceptance of unpredictable open-endedness that defies preexisting, binding, specific recognition (Kaprow, 2006, p. 47). In the case of advanced, honors, or gifted students competing to get accepted into top universities and colleges with the highest test scores and GPAs attainable, the penalty is maximized for any kind of mistake, error, or deviance from recognition-based responses.

Schools and programs that mysrecognize failure value questions and mistakes as well as recognitions and answers (Ramirez, 2013). They enable risk and ventures that are well outside the comfort zone of what is recognized, familiar, or sensible, because the inevitable failure encountered in embarking on such pursuits is more than worth the gains, discoveries, knowledge, and understanding acquired by these new ways of thinking and doing (Ombelets, 2014). Institutions and programs that mysrecognize failure blend and blur the lines between school and the workplace into a meaningful third-space (Rutherford & Bhabha, 1990, pp. 210-212;
Zeichner, 2010, p. 92) where the problems faced in the “real-world” are engaged for what they are: messy, complicated, paradoxical, and contradictory (Richman, 2015; Firestein, 2015, p. 12). Rather than serving as a warning, a restrictive and punitive force, failure is inverted in these places as a reason and ends in order to fuel and encourage innovation, resourcefulness, flexibility, creativity, diversity, meaning, and fearlessness in approaches (Foumberg, 2016; Gleick, 2011, pp. 181-182). Pathways are opened, motivation is unlocked, and outcomes previously forbidden are sought after and begin to emerge.

A myspedagogical approach to failure has applications at every level of education, from the mission and design of the school, to teacher preparation programs, to student-teaching and teachers in the profession in practical and theoretical pedagogy and practice. I have personally begun every undergraduate course in teaching methods with an agreement from the outset that we will design lesson plans that fail (SEED, 09/02/2016, 01/13/2017). This is an acknowledgment of the inevitability of failure in learning and teaching, regardless of planning, effort, and understanding (PDS, 10/11/2016, 10/25/2016). By enabling failure within lesson planning, the anxiety generated by trying to predict and recognize as much as possible to minimize or prevent failure is mitigated by an acceptance of this outcome and a realization that a completely successful lesson plan is only temporary, potentially illusory, and recognized as such within narrowly defined parameters, such as perfect scores, that may fail to reveal that a student is not actually learning anything (PDS, 11/15/2016). These parameters, no matter how clearly defined and distinguishable from each other, cannot entirely prevent or account for mys- in my lessons. Regardless of the measures of surveillance, visibility, and reflection I might employ, a myspedagogical approach admits and sustains the mystery in my recognition of a lesson’s

By adopting a myspedagogical approach that embraces failure, I am compelled to realign my recognition-based assessment, outcomes, expectations of all my students, from a class labeled as illiterate (Kaprow, 2006) to doctoral students (Ombelets, 2014). There is a historic relationship of critical success and failure in the lives and works of authors in our curriculums: James Joyce did not sell a successful number of copies of *Dubliners*; F. Scott Fitzgerald was not heaped with unconditional praise for *The Great Gatsby*; Shakespeare was criticized, Dante was exiled, and Chaucer didn’t finish *Canterbury Tales* (SEED, 09/09/2016). We accept that failure and success do not oppose each other, but are part of each other, enabling each other. If these authors were worried about these consequences enough to avoid them, their works might never have been written. If we judged them on their failures, we might have no single author or work left to praise. Truly the process of elimination would cull the works that give us breath and life from our libraries and leave us with bare shelves, devoid of risk, venture, and failure in a pristine, perfect vacuum where no fault can be found—nor anything else.

By incorporating failure into my pedagogy, approaches and pathways open up that we may not have considered otherwise (Rinaldi, 2017). I may see mistakes as a viable and valuable part of our work, expanding what it can be and do, as in the case of Jerome Robbins’ *Concerto* (Leitner, 2013). One of the young women arrived late to rehearsal; instead of exorcising her performance from his work, Robbins incorporated it, creating an enjoyable masterpiece of humor and humanity that one of my undergraduate students, Laura, found to be inspiring (SEED, 09/16/2016). There isn’t actually one writing process, and that the act of revision does not need
to be one that gets my writing or that of my students to its so-called “best” form (HSE, 11/30/2016).

Instead of beginning as well as we can, we may begin badly on purpose (PDS, 10/31/2016); we may write towards failure and free ourselves of the stifling, restrictive inner editor that accepts only the very best sentences and structure from the start (Goldberg, 2010, p. 33). Revision, bereft of meaning and function when we write perfectly from the start, becomes a valuable engagement in deliberately bad writing, offering not one path forward, but many. Unleashed from shame (Hyde, 2010, p. 172), we may write in a Bacchanalian ecstasy, so that others may take our far flung words and find a way to write with us, back to us, each one presenting us with a different assemblage for our words. Instead of one potential piece, we may write many; this is a schizophrenic, rhizomatic, nonlinear process that revels in possibility, rather than finality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 29).

We may embrace failure in our lessons, in ourselves, and our students in order to share the responsibility for our struggle and the appreciation for the effort, time, and commitment required to work through material and experiences that challenge us. There is an internal fulfillment that can only be achieved as one strives and weathers adversity; one that contributes to pride and inculcates experience and capability for dealing with risk. Take failure away and the risk and responsibility, the lessons for enduring and thriving in that failure are lost as well.

We may reclaim failure as a way to question, reflect, and propose additional paths forward that may also fail. This is an experimental mindset where failure affords us the opportunity to question our recognitions, to consider new and different ways to understand our work (Overbye, 2017), and to try our approach again to see if the results change or remain as they are. Such a mindset encourages us to run a lesson plan that did not appear to work before to
find the mys- at play within it (SEED, 10/28/2016). Having the faith and courage to do so is only meaningful when the capability for failure is present (PDS, 11/17/2016). Having the humility to acknowledge that a seemingly well-planned, well-intentioned lesson may fail in ways we cannot anticipate is only valuable if we are willing to consider failure as an outcome we’re willing to work towards and accept (PDS, 11/29/2016). If we ask, “What if this doesn’t work? What are the ways it could work other than we intend?” rather than view these possibilities as something to be avoided, we may welcome them as opportunity to mysrecognize our plans.

When I taught in high school, my supervisors required a detailed description in a structured format of the week’s lesson plans by Monday morning. It was accepted practice that by Friday, that plan would no longer be accurate. The changes made between Monday and Friday, the accounting for circumstances that could not be anticipated or predicted accurately, the alterations of time spent on detailed concepts, as well as on concepts not listed. I didn’t consider this failure to align with the scripted plan and goals as evidence of incompetence, but rather as evidence of flexibility, sensitivity, and adaptation—all qualities that can be counted as indicative of effective pedagogy. I also didn’t try to plan for everything, to account for all possibilities, or to ensure that events would proceed as I had envisioned—not because I am lazy, but because I have an appreciation for surprise, mystery, and the chaos that comes with truly allowing freedom and liberation to exist within my curriculum and practice. My acknowledgment of my inevitable failure to plan and to meet that plan from the beginning of the week to the week’s end was an essential and necessary part of a pedagogy that valued all of those organic interactions and emergent happenings I welcomed in my classroom. Instead of predictable homogeneity across a particular lesson or unit with a particular grade level of students, I embraced the differences they would bring to each lesson, each class (Fecho, 2004, p.
6), and the ways our recognition and performance of these lessons would mysbecome through our democratic co-constructed engagements. By validating and accepting failure (SEED, 02/17/2017) as a worthwhile occurrence, my student-teachers may have the courage to take risks with creative approaches that may not work, as Sharon gratefully admits:

I’m always impressed with how much control she’s able to give over. I think it’s really important to fail sometimes. She told me on Day 1, ‘You’re going to screw up sometimes, and I’m just going to let you go. You’re not going to destroy these kids at this age.’ But it doesn’t make it any more comfortable. (PDS, 09/13/2016)

No lesson’s outcome is entirely up to us; our students’ capability to transform and co-construct my lessons is real and valuable; and, binding their performance and products, as well as ours, to strict recognitions of success and failure is closer to slavery than freedom.

**Mysrecognizing Assessment and Outcomes**

“Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look like” (Arendt, 1958).

If we adopt a stance that connects assessment directly to pedagogical design (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005, pp. 18-20), then a mystheoretical approach to the former is critical to a myspedagogical practice of the latter. This means that instead of utilizing recognition-based assessments with one or more predetermined “best” or “correct” answers, such as in multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and matching assessments, we consider, permit, and value mysrecognition in the design of these assessments (PDS, 11/17/2016).

One way to do this is to allow for and genuinely acknowledge the potential validity of answers and approaches to problems that may have been excluded otherwise. Students will often
hesitate to offer a response to a question if they feel that a particular answer is being sought after and they doubt their own answer being the correct one. This is the paralyzing effect of shame in the face of punitive recognition-based practice and assessment (Hyde, 2010, p. 166). It is far easier to maintain one’s pride and dignity by waiting on the instructor to either provide the answer being sought after, or wait for someone else to risk giving a wrong answer (PDS, 10/03/2016). If the answers we already have are open to challenge and reconsideration, or we admit that there are answers we have not considered or do not recognize, then invite a host of responses, each vying for potential validity. Gleick (2011) describes a situation like this in his account of the academic origins of chaos theory:

“The same thing really drew all of us: the notion that you could have determinism but not really,” Farmer said. “We were driven to understand what made that tick.

“You can’t appreciate the kind of revelation that is unless you’ve been brainwashed by six or seven years of a typical physics curriculum. You’re taught that there are classical models where everything is determined by initial conditions, and then there are quantum mechanical models where things are determined but you have to contend with a limit on how much initial information you can gather. [...] It was just an exercise in frustration.”

[...] Crutchfield said, “It was a realization that here is a whole realm of physical experience that just doesn’t fit in the current framework.” [...] They enchanted themselves and dismayed their professors with leaps to questions of determinism, the nature of intelligence, the direction of biological evolution. (p. 250-251)

It was with the discovery that the authoritative recognized knowledge presented in textbooks was questionable, incomplete, and unfit for the experiences and problems they...
confronted that energized the first students in chaos theory. Gleick (2011) draws on Stoppard’s *Arcadia* (1993) to capture the revitalizing feeling of possibility that these students may have felt:

The ordinary-sized stuff which is our lives, the things people write poetry about—clouds—daffodils—waterfalls—and what happens in a cup of coffee when the cream goes in—these things are full of mystery, as mysterious to us as the heavens were to the Greeks. The future is disorder. A door like this has cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It’s the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew was wrong. (p. 320)

This is an example of what happens when we break open the cognitive closure that happens inside a field of recognitions and invert failure into possibility. It is because the authoritative models and recognized knowledge are allowed to fail in some regard—they’re too limited, they don’t match the data, or they simply don’t address the discrepancies and problems at all—that the opportunity to explore other possibilities arises (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007, p. 587; Overbye, 2017). Along with this fallibility of recognition, the baseline for success and validity is transformed as well: because all recognitions are contested and vulnerable to challenge, exploring possibilities without the expectation of arriving at definitive answers becomes acceptable practice.

This has enormous potential for mystheoretical pedagogy. When we are willing to mysrecognize endpoints, the focus shifts from getting students to these specific endpoints in recognized ways to thinking, work, and activity that potentially arrives at and produces a multiplicity of mys-endpoints. The product and process, the lesson and assessment, have become entangled (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 81-86); not the same, but inseparable and affective of each other.
How might this look in practice within the classroom? Rachael offered one possibility through a conceptual practice she called “purposeful ambiguity:”

Rachael: Usually our directions are vague purposefully, because they’re not going to get a ton of direction next year. They’re going to say, “Do something.”

Me: Why is that?

Rachael: Because I don’t think life is full of really detailed directions. So I like to be purposefully ambiguous. Call it “purposeful ambiguity.”

Me: Purposeful ambiguity. What is that?

Rachael: Embracing inquiry, embracing chaos; there’s no one right way to do things. So they all did whatever their interpretation of it was and it was fine. What was it we did, with *Dorian Gray*?

Greg: Yeah, the first class had plot points; this happened, this happened, and then this came next, and the second class, sixth period, all had themes.

Rachael: Yes! That was so interesting!

Greg: They approached it more like symbols and on a much deeper level of thinking.

Rachael: But I wouldn’t have thought of the second one [the themes and symbols] and I thought it was just as valuable if not more valuable. So I try to do ambiguous stuff so that they will go beyond expectations, because I have no idea of what is out there and there are so many possibilities! (HSE, 09/20/2016)

A mysпедagogical approach incorporates “purposeful ambiguity,” in order to allow for enlightening and revitalizing surprises and outcomes that go beyond the limits of a teacher’s scope of recognition and expectations. By opening up a legitimized realm of student interactions
beyond what a teacher can think of or imagine, the boundaries of student performance no longer need to fit inside what the teacher might be able to recognize or expect.

We may now ask the question, “How might we enable a pedagogy for issues, identities, and challenges that we do not know of, or have no experience with?” and consider possibilities free from the tyranny of exclusively experienced-based practice (Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013, p. 192). The burden of knowing all possibilities is lifted from the teacher’s shoulders, and the opportunity to allow students to explore topics and questions beyond our own experiences and knowledge beckons as the distinction between those who teach and those who learn is blurred. A myscentered participatory classroom becomes possible when divisions between teacher and students are no longer impervious to crossing, and the roles of teacher and student can be inhabited simultaneously by any member of this assemblage.

When we remove the shackles of recognition, we also disarm potential snares of failure hinged upon specific expectations, such as those that held back a struggling student in a ninth grade classroom that Sharon was student-teaching in:

Sharon: He was a student who had failed ninth grade last year. He had the sweetest teacher; if he didn’t pass ninth grade English, he tried not to. He’s very vocal about not doing the work you give him. If he doesn’t do the assignments, how can I help him?

Me: Have you asked him to write about last year?

Sharon: Part way through the year, his father died, his grandmother passed away, and his mother can’t take care of him. They had a memoir unit, they had to write one, and the teacher shared that with us. It was good. He’s a good writer, has style, everything. There are stupid little things he doesn’t care about: he won’t capitalize i’s,
won’t put a space between sentences, spelling, etc; he doesn’t care about that. If he would’ve put any effort into it, it would’ve been a great essay. (PDS, 09/19/2016)

Because of “stupid little things” like capitalizing “i’s” and putting spaces between sentences, this student failed a memoir essay in which he had written about a year of his life that was full of life-altering, traumatic experiences. Yet, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and countless other critically acclaimed authors have all broken these conventions of grammar in their great works. Instead of allowing a student to take responsibility for and define their own style, a classroom where a particular form of essay with specific grammatical conventions is exclusively valued punishes deviation from that form; it demands conformity at the cost of responsibility and possibility.

I contrast this specific form-based approach with Rachael’s reasoning for incorporating creative explorations into her assignments:

Some of it is to facilitate student potential, some of it is to facilitate creativity, and some of it is to make it more interesting and to give them a break, because there’s a huge amount of work and it’s a big assessment, and NCTE has put out a position paper about multimodal learning. Some of it is for creativity and some of it is to generate connections and interest. It’s also part of our [Greg and herself] personal teaching philosophy. (HSE, 10/12/2016)

Creativity has its place as a valued part of Rachael’s pedagogy as well, entangling assessment with practice: “I never do the same things twice. I’m always changing things, adding things, trying new things; nothing is ever the same” (HSE, 10/12/2016) By allowing student contributions and work that don’t quite fit into her current assignments to shape and influence future assignments, her pedagogy welcomes new possibilities, instead of precluding them.
Rachael mentioned an epic rap battle from last year that inspired her to create an assignment where the students could have the freedom to engage in that kind of activity and still be credited for it; this became the template for her creative explorations.

While the creative explorations present a virtual blank slate alternative to the more structured and traditional explorations, it is not necessary to abandon form and structure to offer students a significant measure of revitalizing freedom. Rachael’s co-constructed Google slide presentations on the Harlem Renaissance and Zora Neale Hurston or my own Historical Figures & Epic Events research and presentation assignment represent two examples of structured assignments that allow considerable freedom to students. Additionally, a myspedagogical approach to these assignments could mean pushing students to mysrecognize these events and people in very different way that could yield surprising insights, as Foucault does in his history of the present (Garland, 2014).

Assessing Mysrecognition

If our goal is no longer to have students recognize an individual or event in a specifically authorized way, we might ask, how do we assess a form we cannot recognize ahead of time? This question comes from a preconceived notion that to assess something means definitively being able to recognize it in specific form and terms, as though we’re dealing with a computer program. But human beings are not computers; they’re very capable of apprehending (Butler, 2009, pp. 6-7) and appreciating something they do not entirely recognize with certainty. There is a certain degree of ethical responsibility (Butler, 2004b, pp. 42-46; 2012, p. 142) that goes along with making an intelligible judgment under these circumstances.

Forms of assessment that clearly define specific products and endpoints take this responsibility from the teacher, relegating them to the simple binary task of confirming whether
or not the outcome before them matches the predetermined outcome they are assessing it against.

It is no coincidence that such assessments, like those that employ scantron bubble sheets are entirely mechanized in their scoring, removing the judgment, responsibility, and importance of a teacher or any human evaluator from the process altogether.

Mysrecognition can be incorporated into effective assessment. I may still use rubrics, such as Education Northwest’s 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment rubrics (2014) and I can still fulfill and align with some, if not all, of the Common Core standards—particularly those that are not based in certain, exact recognition, such as CC.1.4.11-12.D, CC.1.4.11-12.G, CC.1.4.11-12.M, CC.1.4.11-12.N, CC.1.4.11-12.X, CC.1.5.9-10.A (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014). All 6 + 1 traits identified by Education Northwest for writing assessment may be mysrecognized and assessed: ideas, organization, voice, presentation, word choice, sentence fluency, and even conventions. Myspedagogical assessment departs from the more precise, specific forms detailed in some Common Core standards, or the singular scale of evaluation utilized in Education Northwest’s rubrics. For example, we might look at a section in Education Northwest’s rubric that focuses on the concept of organization in writing (Figure 12). It is apparent that Education Northwest privileges the reader over the writer in their scale of evaluation, rewarding less challenging organization that “flows so smoothly [that the] reader hardly notices” with the highest marks. However, some of the most rewarding texts that I have read have been wild and complex in their organization and structure, and some poetry artistically and intentionally rattles and wakes up the reader by breaking the flow in specific places in order to get the reader to take notice. Yet, according to this scale, such authorial and artistic moves that may present difficulties for the reader are punished with lower scores.
Education Northwest aligns their rubrics to the Common Core standards, and this is apparent when we look at the section in the Common Core standards for narrative organization (Figure 13). From grades 6-12, the standards value exclusively a “smooth progression of experiences and events” complete with a “conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences and events.” Yet, how many works of literature are written without such a conclusion? There seems to be no value placed in open-ended narratives, nor the type of disjointed series of perspectives and events that characterize the events of numerous noteworthy texts.
Unlike the recommendations in Education Northwest’s rubrics or the Common Core standards that insist upon “smooth progression” of the narrative that is barely noticeable to the reader, or clarity and clear communication of authorial intent (CC.1.3.11-12.D, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014), for example, I see a multiplicity of emergent opportunities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 249) in these categories. I do not need to explicitly recognize the ideas presented before me, in order to see that they are well-supported and developed beyond my expectations, or taken in directions I would not have anticipated. I do not need to limit conventions to proper formal or standard usage to perceive or understand that they are being employed purposefully, artistically, and intentionally with function and design. I do not need the organization to fit into an introduction, main points, conclusion format that goes in a single, linear direction in order to recognize that there is an organization present, that it may deviate from a standard form, but may do so in a creative and effective manner. I certainly do not need to be familiar with a presentation format to appreciate the way it may surprisingly convey ideas,
perspective, and provoke a different understanding of the material when I view, listen, and even participate in it.

I advocate for open-ended assessments that evaluate based on aspects that honor multiple approaches, products, and understandings. Therefore, I oppose multiple-choice exams that recognize only predetermined answers, only one of which—usually—is correct. I oppose fill-in-the-blank assessments that present a pseudo-dialectic facade of openness for many possible answers that veils one correct answer for each question. I oppose matching assessments that connect a preconceived definition, statement, or question with a term or concept in a single authoritatively recognized relationship. I oppose requirements for a mathematical problem to be solved in one particular way, for a science experiment to require one particular approach, and for a history exam to assess based on facts found in a textbook that remain unquestioned and unchallenged.

I endorse assessments that leave every authoritatively recognized fact, piece of data, and understanding vulnerable to challenge and open to discussion, as Derrida proposed: “A center, a body at the center of a space exposes itself on all sides, uncovers its back, lets itself be seen by what it does not see” (p. 99, as cited in Ulmer, 1985, p. 174). Because I do not require a specific, recognized answer to assess my students, I can present them with problems no one has figured out and invite them to solve problems in different ways with different solutions than those I already know about. This kind of problem-resolving that can occur by my recognizing existing problems and solutions to create others is one of the purposes of research and development departments in government and business. After all, if we stopped working on ways to write poetry, design and build buildings, play games, make cars, and identify ourselves upon
discovering one way, much of the vitality (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 3559-3562) of our world would vanish.

Mystheory does not, however, endorse the premise that all recognitions or beings should be treated as equivalent, nor does it advance this as a goal. Equivalence across all beings and recognitions flattens the landscape of our understandings and becomings into homogeneity with a veneer of difference. Calling each recognition equally valid with all others allows us to be content with whatever we know, recognize, or are, and opens the door for us to walk away from any and all other viewpoints, because ours is equivalent to theirs in validity. Reducing everyone’s recognition to just another, equally valid opinion makes each of those opinions more easily, and justifiably dismissed and ignored.

As mystheorists, we are compelled by its concepts to do more. We are called upon to question our own recognitions and beings because of the inherent mys-ness in both. We question others as well as ourselves, without a definitive way to know for certain where our being may begin and end, how we may impact and affect each other coherently and semi-actually, and what consequences and effects may be produced by our beings-and-becomings with and upon each other. Our recognitions and beings remain infused with a core of mys-, removing our onto-epistemological grounds for knowing ourselves or others, or any phenomena in our reality with enough certainty to apply an unchallengeable judgment or recognition upon anyone or anything.

In these respects, mystheory may be aligned with some of the goals and principles of relativistic theories and frameworks. As mystheorists, we find common cause in the pursuit of understanding each other, even if that understanding of others and ourselves may change in intra-interactions with other phenomena and individuals of the world, or be perpetually beyond certain knowing through its ontological mys-ness.
Certain frameworks of relativism endorse a humanist perspective, infusing each human being with a basic value, by which they compel us to honor and respect each other for the reflective possibility of understanding each other and ourselves better. Mystheory likewise favors approaching others with curiosity. By sustaining the mys- in our recognitions in order to honor the onto-epistemological possibilities in other beings and phenomena, we remain open to considering and intra-interacting with them in a way that honors those possibilities. In alignment with theories that decenter the human experience, such as post-humanist frameworks, mystheory puts such prioritizing and centralizing of the human experience, or any experience, in question and proceeds from there.

While a goal of some relativistic frameworks may be to understand each other and ourselves better, mystheory parts ways from this goal by exploring the possibilities of understanding ourselves and each other differently, even in the same recognition of ourselves and others. This difference is not the goal, but more a likely consequence of misunderstanding each other and ourselves. As mystheorists, our misunderstandings and mysbecomings are how we do, as a way of being.

A mystheorist proceeds with their work without certain recognitions of where the lines between oneself and another begin and end, or even who they may be completely or certainly in any given moment. They may have recognitions of themselves and others, of their reality, but those recognitions remain subject to mystheory and its concepts, leaving them vulnerable and open to questioning, challenging, and reconsideration of their recognitions. In this way, a mystheoretical perspective differs significantly from a perspective that claims a certain recognition of itself and others, and by that recognition judges and frames unquestionably the relationship of oneself to others—even if it is to consider everyone as equals.
By holding on to the vulnerability of those recognitions to questioning, by maintaining the onto-epistemological mys-ness in those recognitions, mystheory embraces the opportunity to reconsider such recognitions, and to explore them as mysrecognitions. If we are not recognizable in relation to each other as equals or otherwise, if we are intra-interactively, agentially affective and affected by others in ways we may not be able to recognize accurately or with certainty, we are compelled to question and explore our intra-intersubjectivity, our mysdoings and mysbecomings upon and with each other.

Mystheorists may justifiably question and explore the hierarchies and structures of recognition and value in our relationship not just for their mys-ness, but for the way that we mys-shape and mys-form each other. We honor each other, because we question what our capabilities may be in our intra-intersubjectivity. Deep down, we may know that we cannot be or do in the same way by ourselves as we can with others. We may know that what is possible with those in our lives may not be possible for us without them. We may acknowledge that our friends may not always be our friends, our enemies may become allies. We may come to love a book that we originally disliked in its opening pages. We may acknowledge that our mysbeings and mysrecognitions may be composed in uncertain ways by the world and its inhabitants around us. We may acknowledge that yes, our sociocultural, environmental, physical realities shape us, constrain us, empower us, without being certain of the true extent or impacts of those effects. And in that uncertainty, we may find reason to hope, reason to believe, reason to question.

As mystheorists, in our inability to determine the extent and capabilities of our being and knowing, or that of others, we may find justification to find out what they—or we—may be able to do that remains hidden within our recognitions of them and ourselves. Even in our limitations, we may question what is possible with others. We may wonder what they may be able to
provide that we cannot, and what we may be capable of with them. We may find reasons to listen to the perspectives and experiences of others, not just to fill in shortcomings and gaps in our own, but to offer ourselves the possibility to mysbecome with those perspectives and understandings, just as they may mysbecome with us. We may question our recognitions of them, empowering them with authority and placing our trust and faith in them out of sheer curiosity; not just for what they may be able to do, but also for how that may empower or transform ourselves and our own capabilities. Without certain knowing, we find justification and reason to inversely believe as well as doubt. Without recognized, consistent performative capabilities and beings, we may wonder what is possible if we defy our recognitions and ways of being to explore and empower possibilities that we might otherwise not consider.

Instead of just posing questions with predetermined answers to my students to test their understanding and knowledge, I may invert the quiz, as Greg did with his quiz, asking the students to come up with the questions, empowering them with the authority and responsibility to ask those questions: “Your group will come up with five quiz questions covering the most important points of chapters 84-100” (HSE, 11/10/2016, 11/14/2016). While Greg did require the students to design the questions with a “specific answer in mind,” as long as that answer was not the only acceptable one, they would still be engaged in designing a mystheoretical evaluation. The reason for this is the same for challenging recognized answers: Mysrecognition is not about doing away with answers; it’s about questioning the answers we have and leaving our solutions and our understandings vulnerable and open to new ways of conceiving the world, each other, and ourselves. We may all form and rely on recognitions, just as we’re all given names, but we can resist being imprisoned by them, just as we can resist viewing a film again the same way or getting the same understandings from a text that we developed during a prior
reading. Our interpretations, understandings, and perspectives allow for transformation and difference because they are always already my recognitions when we originally form them.

Another aspect of my assessment is the formation of evaluation criteria. There are scholars (Gallagher, 2006, Kindle Locations 1739-1801; Newkirk & Kent, 2007, pp. 67-68) who advocate for students co-constructing rubrics and selecting products for evaluation with the teacher—an activity that incorporates inversion by distributing the authority that is usually wholly kept by teachers or test makers to students, and coherence by allowing students to participate in the creation and revision of assessment. My PDS student-teachers noticed that when they designed a quiz with questions they selected about specific topics with specific answers, the students did worse than with a tool of assessment that allowed them to choose what they would draw on to demonstrate their knowledge, “I could ask them on the quiz, ‘What happened in the shack while they were training in Chapter 1,’ and then they’re like ‘I… let’s talk about human nature! Because I figured out how to respond to that!’” (PDS, 11/15/2016).

The student-teachers expressed a healthy skepticism towards allowing students choice in the topics they could explore because they felt this could conceal gaps in reading and learning, and the possibility existed that students could draw on their answers and preferred topics from SparkNotes or another available resource. This is a legitimate concern, but there are ways to counter it with a my theoretical approach. One of the student-teachers came up with one such solution: “What if you took an excerpt from SparkNotes and had them add to what wasn’t mentioned in the SparkNotes?” (PDS, 10/31/2016) Leia’s suggestion brilliantly incorporated SparkNotes into the activity, instead of trying to banish it. Greg acknowledged that was an interesting idea, and admitted that he looked at SparkNotes to figure out what they said and then designed the quizzes to go around that.
Both of these approaches align with mystheory by exploring the understandings lurking beyond the edges of recognition found in SparkNotes and other resources. Another approach would be to challenge the recognitions found in SparkNotes and other resources directly—an act that empowers the student to deauthorize these texts in order to raise a different interpretation or understanding. Maintaining a mys-ness in their recognitions is critical to a mystheoretical approach; student recognitions must likewise be vulnerable to challenge and open to a diversity of interpretations.

If the criteria and responses for evaluation are not bounded by specific forms, correct answers, and are not exclusively decided by any single participant—teacher, text, or student—these criteria and responses become meeting points for negotiation between participants whose form cannot be predicted ahead of time (Canagarajah, 2013, pp. 43-44). By coming together, a shared, negotiated set of understandings about these points of evaluation can achieve recognition that may differ significantly from what each of the participants had previously envisioned. This can potentially turn each syllabus, rubric, and assignment into a living document that perpetually mysbecomes in intra-interactive negotiation between and among participants of each class that defies definitive recognition (SEED, 10/21/2016).

Sometimes I am faced with a realization when I am scoring by my rubric, adding up my points, and I realize: the score does not truly tell the story. What then? Do I stand by my numbers in their predefined recognitions? If I treat them as mysrecognitions, I may adapt them to better represent a student’s performance; they become provisional instead of unquestionable (Newkirk & Kent, 2007, pp. 68), subject to my responsibility to assess fairly. The grades may not always count until they do, and even then, I can change them (PDS 10/11/2016). I don’t narrow possibilities, I don’t paint myself into a corner; I slip my chains to go beyond the limits
of my predefined systems (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 1914-1944). I’m not moving the goalposts; I’m simply acknowledging that I don’t recognize where they were to begin with, or where they could be in the end. It’s a negotiation (Canagarajah, 2013, pp. 48-49) with myself, with my differences, my students, my past, present, and future; it’s an acknowledgment that these recognitions slip their original interpolations (Butler, 2011, p. 82).

I may also mysrecognize the point system we traditionally assign grades by, where 100 is “perfect” and 0 is an absolute bottom. For example, Robin told me that for her advanced classes she and her mentor gave their students a “must do” and a “can do” activity: “Here’s what you must get done, but here are some options if you want to challenge yourself.” In her conferences with these students, some complained, “This doesn’t feel advanced.” So, she decided to give them some options for advancement beyond the ceiling of required work. She would give them prompts for which they could write as much as they wanted, and some would come in with huge stories. These students told her, “This is really awesome, it’s great, I love it, there’s so much work to do!” Robin felt it helped because these kids who previously didn’t have the option to do anything could now do as much as they wanted. The students that didn’t want to do the extra work could still do what was required and get the grades they desired. According to her observations, this worked “really well” (PDS, 11/15/2016).

This is one way differentiated and inclusive classrooms can challenge advanced students by giving them a way beyond the ceiling of a set amount of work and assessment. If the endpoint isn’t explicitly defined, you can have students think beyond the scope of your recognition and pre-set boundaries, facilitating an opportunity to learn that exceeds your planned goals and limits. As a result, these students are afforded opportunities to excel in ways I cannot either match or predict, and it’s humbling and wonderful.
For classroom management, during my time as a high school teacher, I utilized a “character point” system. Each day, students were given a set amount of points for good behavior and conduct. If a student was disruptive or not participating, then some or all of those points were deducted. My department supervisor pointed out that this approach only served to penalize the students without the possibility for reward. Following his suggestion, I added the possibility for getting extra points and going above the maximum amount allowed for the day. These extra points never exceeded the 2-3% limits set by my district, but they motivated the vast majority of my students to try to get them whenever possible—and offered a pathway of rewards particularly to those kids who struggled on other assignments, but could see their studious efforts and participation rewarded with a higher character point grade. In both cases, the limits of grading and assessment were recognized for the students’ benefit, getting better performance and more effort out of them while rewarding them in ways that a flat, hard-bounded system of evaluation never could.

Are there instances where a teacher’s bias may result in an unfair assessment? Yes, but that happens anyway, regardless of how standardized or mechanized we make our assessments—one need only look at standardized testing to see that these tests repeatedly and systematically exclude and penalize students from different ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Jencks & Phillips, 1998, pp. 1-6; Au, 2008, pp. 3-5; Boaler, 2003, p. 504). We trust our doctors to make their diagnoses and our judges to interpret law; might we not also trust our teachers to evaluate our students’ capabilities? Unlike standardized testing evaluations, the pathways to challenging a teacher’s assessment are readily available and accessible to students and parents in many cases, but if a teacher is co-constructing and negotiating these assessments with students in a genuine participatory dialogue, these measures are much less likely to be needed. If the
teacher, student, and community embrace the misrecognition of grades as an onto-
epistemological inevitability, then it stands to follow that there are grounds for challenging the
recognition and perspectives of everyone involved, thereby supporting the need for dialogue
and cooperation—something that a mechanized exam delivered by a faceless bureaucratic entity
doesn’t offer.
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

What this means for Teachers

“*They can tell me what to teach, but they can’t tell me how to teach it.*” (Kayla, SEED, 2016)

Some practical questions may be asked at this point: How do I teach if everything I recognize may be my recognition? How do I teach if I, my students, my materials and concepts are all my becoming-in-mysbecoming? How do I assess and evaluate what I may not recognize or know already? These questions come from a perspective that still depends upon recognition for answers beyond questions. As such, it forces us into a corner, upon an island of seemingly solid ground that is battered by the waves of change, discovery, contradiction, and questioning. Slowly but surely, everything we have taken for granted, that we have stood upon for authority, washes out to sea. Let us take to the water, then.

**Leaving explicit recognition behind.** Some might be tempted to label mypedagogy as a “process over product” approach to education, but this is a misleading binary. In truth, process becomes product and vice versa, so I oppose both processes and products that affirm and uphold a recognition-based paradigm. By challenging, questioning, and myapplying applications of recognition and discipline imposed through standardized testing, district policy, and traditional teaching practices, we may find effective ways to help a students who are held back under these practices, assessments, and systems.

Josh was one of these students. He had built up defiance to a system that refused to adapt to the tragedies of his personal life; a system that had responded to a traumatic year with a verdict of failure. It forced him to not only repeat 9th grade, but to also take 10th grade English *simultaneously*, presumably so that he could keep pace with his peers and graduate with them? I
am not certain. On top of this, Josh had mandatory 90 minute tutorial periods assigned to him every week (PDS, 10/03/2016). For a student who had failed to account for “stupid little things” like spacing and capitalization, the district’s approach was to triple his workload (with two classes and a mandatory tutorial period) in order to generate improvement. It’s a classical, Aristotelian logic that *more equals more*, aligned with the maxim that *practices makes perfect*. Unfortunately, this approach did not motivate Josh to work harder or better; it only reinforced his stubbornness and resistance (PDS, 10/03/2016).

On the matter of practicing increasingly and endlessly, the poet, Sarah Kay, writes:

> Practice does not make perfect, practice makes permanent. Repeat the same mistakes, over and over, and you don’t get any closer to Carnegie Hall; even I know that. Repeat the same mistakes, over and over, and you don’t get any closer. You never get any closer. *(speakeasynyc, 2011)*

Sarah’s point is well taken when the solution applied to a failing student is more of the same. When we favor a standardized, repetitive approach, whether in the name of fairness, tradition, or mandates, without questioning or considering other possibilities, we’re simply going through the motions. The results will often reflect that.

Teaching can be thought of as a three-legged sack race, where two partners put one leg in a sack and try to run together. With one partner’s right leg, and the other partner’s left leg, in the sack between them, doing this successfully requires coordination between the two. Similarly, we may try to coordinate with our students to forge a successful partnership of dynamic needs and approaches that goes both ways. Classes later in the day sometimes go more smoothly than similar classes that occurred earlier, because the teacher reflects and changes their approach and lesson plans, as Sara did:
My mentor, every time I do something, she has me reflect on it; she has me think about what went wrong, what could be done better: “Summarize things they say to you to the whole class, ask more questions, move around more.” (PDS, 10/11/2016)

We should be careful not to reconstruct our classrooms and lessons towards a “best” form. Instead, we may tweak and experiment; trying new and different things each time we run a lesson, modifying it so that even if it is a lesson covering the same material and concepts, we acknowledge that there are countless ways to teach it:

Over 8 years, I inquired into the Harlem Renaissance three times; each time the inquiry had different goals, different purposes, different students, and thus different directions to explore. The end products were different, and both teacher and student ways of working changed. Furthermore, each subsequent inquiry into the Harlem Renaissance was in some way a response to that which had come before. (Fecho, 2004, p. 6)

A myspedagogical approach to teaching is aligned with a mindset inspired by Britzman (2003, pp. 26-27) that follows the modified maxim, “practice makes practice.” The same lessons are not the same for a variety reasons. This perspective works against the rule of experience as the ultimate authority in the field of teaching, and effectively makes student-teachers of all who adopt a myspedagogical framework in their approach. At some point, a class is going to come along and challenge a lesson that seemed to work for everyone else, because those kids are different. With a mystheoretical approach, reflections, perceptions, and recognitions are all subject to questioning and mys-re-cognizing. This calls on us to reconsider what we think we know from months or years of teaching, and what others may know from their own experiences. This is a critical understanding that many student-teachers miss in their effort to catalogue any
practices that work from mentor teachers who have been in the field (Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013, p. 185). Behind a mindset prizing experience-based perspectives above others is the implicit assumption that based on their experience, veteran teachers recognize methods that work, they recognize their students for who they are, and they recognize the concepts and materials that they teach. Thus, from a position of knowledge and understanding based on recognition, they may speak authoritatively from experience.

This presents a number of pedagogical problems. With the assumption that theory and learning leads to the recognitions above in a linear progression, one can hardly blame a student/teacher for thinking that once these concepts and understandings are acquired, there is no further need for theory and learning. Many student-teachers, prizing expedience and efficiency, rush towards the acquisition of those skills and understandings, bypassing seemingly needless questioning in order to reach the answers—a mindset that mirrors student thinking in recognition-based frameworks: “Can’t you just tell us the answers?” (PDS, 11/29/2017; Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013, p. 193). Embodying this approach in their pedagogy, these student-teachers go into the classroom with the goal of passing on another set of skills and understandings to their students as efficiently as possible. This perpetuates a cycle of knowledge transmission and acquisition, from teacher to student to teacher, that dismisses inquiry and questioning (Grossman et al., 2000, p. 637):

There’s a level of inquiry that needs to be established and challenged and praised and rewarded in elementary school, or else by the time we [secondary teachers] see them, it’s just… “What am I supposed to write? Yeah, you want three paragraphs. Here they come. I’m going to give you three paragraphs.” And so if you only want to build skills, you are damaging the students.
In addition, this recognition-based perspective also lends itself to either/or thinking that leads to questions like, “Which is the right/best way?” (SEED, 09/30/2016). A student-teacher with this perspective will be looking for the most effective, best practices to incorporate into her classroom to the exclusion of all others (Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013, pp. 192-193), as though it was all just another process of elimination to find the single best method.

This perspective also ignores the fact that any given teacher can only give you a limited set of practices they’ve tried from experience, in addition to those they may have encountered through reading, conferences, and their colleagues and workplaces. Even if a teacher was to somehow amass every single practice, method, and approach under the sun, all of these practices could not be enacted simultaneously. Likewise, each approach will not be implemented the same way by each teacher, nor receive the same response from each student. Each teacher will have a preference and capability to teach certain methods over others, in addition to reshaping these preferences to accommodate and work with students.

Furthermore, once a teacher finds a method that “works,” a recognition-based perspective rewards the assumption that they have acquired a static, universal truth in teaching. This compels them to simply repeat the application of that method with presumed results. If replication occurs, the practice is considered known, and the teacher ceases to think any more about it; the tyranny of replication has claimed another classroom. Needless to say, this replication, born of recognition-based, process-of-elimination thinking leads to a narrow, standardized pedagogy that is applied by governments to schools, schools to teachers, teachers to students, and students upon themselves. Any deviation from this hierarchy of recognition is labeled as failure. Those who refuse to conform, adopt, or adapt to this standardized, “best” approach are slowly but surely excised from the system like victims on Procrustes’ bed.
Let us return to Josh and Sharon. Sharon described a group activity that she and her mentor were running in class. Josh decided to work by himself, being a tenth grader among ninth graders and unwilling to work with them in this activity. Sharon commented that she saw this as unacceptable: “That’s not fair to others if they see him [choosing not to work] but they can’t.” (PDS, 09/27/2016) Despite her efforts to get him to join with the other students, he stood his ground, unwilling to participate in activity with peers who were a year behind him. When I suggested an approach of inversion that positioned Josh in an empowered role instead of one that fought against the authority figures of the classroom, Sara, another student-teacher who had Josh in her class remarked that her mentor actually did just that:

That’s exactly how Susan went with it. She approached him and said, “I need you to act as a mentor to this other kid named William who struggles. He has a hard time making friends, and people pick on him, and Josh said, “I don’t like that, I don’t like that at all.” He pretty much agreed he didn’t want William to be picked on, and that can be his thing now, to work with William, and the two people we were afraid would be alone, aren’t. (PDS, 09/27/2016)

This is a kind of differentiated approach (Tomlinson, 2013, pp. 287-300) that treats a student differently in order to accomplish the same goal: having students work together on a class project.

Robin had also been struggling with a student named Paul who refused to do any work. I suggested that she collaborate with him on a different writing assignment than the other students were doing. This assignment allowed Paul to freely write about any topic that he chose, and Robin would write with him, on the condition that he wrote as well (PDS, 09/27/2016). With this approach, the more conventional hierarchical relationship between teacher and student that
positions the teacher in a role of assignment-giver to a student who has little choice about the design or content of the assignment was transformed. By contrast, this assignment set the student and teacher side-by-side in a cooperative, collaborative relationship, where the student has a degree of freedom and responsibility. This inversion of authority provided Robin with an alternative way to work with Paul, similar to the way that Arthur kneeled to Ureynes in the film *Excalibur* (1981), upending their roles and gaining Ureynes’ allegiance by this act of humility:

Arthur: Swear faith to me, and you shall have mercy! I need battle lords such as you!

Uryenes: [scornfully] A noble knight swear faith to a squire?

Mador: NEVER... NEVER!

Arthur: You are right. You're right... I'm not yet a knight.

[Hands Excalibur to Uryenes and kneels]

Arthur: You, Uryenes, will make me a knight. Then as knight to knight... I can offer you mercy.

Merlin: [Alarmed] What's this? What's this?

Mador: Keep it, Uryenes!

Uryenes: [hesitates and then touches Excalibur to Arthur's shoulder] In the name of God, St. Michael and St. George, I give you the right to bear arms and the power to mete justice!

Arthur: That duty I will solemnly obey, as knight and king.

Merlin: I never saw this.

Uryenes: Rise... King Arthur.

[Uryenes kneels before Arthur]

Uryenes: I am your humble knight, and I swear allegiance to the courage in your veins.
So strong it is, its source must be Uther Pendragon’s. I doubt you no more!

[kisses Arthur's hand - other knights also kneel] (Boorman, 1981)

Arthur’s willingness to misrecognize his identity in relation to Ureynes opened up another kind of intra-interaction between them, with Arthur kneeling to a knight who was not his equal, and asking to be knighted by this adversary. By allowing his adversary to take a position of authority, they misbecame equals, assuaging Ureynes’ sense of pride and recognition of himself as knight who would never kneel to anyone less than himself. I see this same humility in the behavior of Jesus, as he washes his disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17, English Standard Version). Both acts powerfully misrecognize the roles of these participants, developing their relationship in ways that would be difficult to accomplish by maintaining their preexisting recognitions. In the case of Robin and Paul, I learned later that the boy who refused to do any work since the beginning of the entire academic year started writing for the first time when Robin sat down to write beside him (PDS, 10/31/2016).

Examples of teachers devoting extra time to students, and working with them to forge a path forward together, are found in all manner of classrooms. For example, Rachael was working with one of her students, Bailey, after class, to help her with an exploration essay assignments (HSE, 10/04/2016). Bailey was unable to maintain an interest in writing according to the assignment guidelines, which directed students to draw conclusions and support them. Rather, her interest was piqued by those parts of Their Eyes Were Watching God that left her with questions about topics like the significance and meaning of the symbolism of the ships in the book. I wondered aloud if Bailey might instead write a paper about the mysteries she uncovered, and the questions that emerged from them. Rachael facilitated this option by altering
the exploration guidelines from providing supported answers, to asking, pursuing, and framing questions with details from the text.

For Rachael, writing was the most important goal of the assignment, and she knew that Bailey could write. Bailey had shown her that she had the required materials, notes, and reflections to do the assignment; it was the requirement of reaching cognitive closure by providing a definitive answer to a question that stopped her. Addressing this obstacle, Rachael proposed a reflective journey framework called an “I search” that would allow Bailey to assemble those mysteries in the text that she had an inner dialogue about. This collaborative flexibility allowed Bailey an alternative path that didn’t end in recognition. It was Rachael’s willingness to recognize the assignment requirements, in light of Bailey’s potential contributions, that enabled her to offer this path to her struggling student.

As a teacher, Rachael was assuming a pedagogical responsibility to Bailey’s development and learning. That compelled her to alter rules that, in this case, stood in the way of that development; even if that was neither the intention behind them, nor their effect on other students. Actions born of recognition can still occur in instances where rules are strictly enforced and maintained. But they often materialize as willful defiance and resistance, rather than as a collaboration.

Some assignments are more open by design, like creative explorations and freewriting—these assignments impose fewer structural requirements. They provide space for students to approach, and work on them, in a different mindset from more traditionally structured assignments:

Freewrites/Journals are a really good way to express themselves, because in school we get caught up in writing analysis and they don’t enjoy that all the time. Letting
them write to enjoy themselves would be a good way to get them motivated. (SEED, 09/23/2016)

Hillary, a student in the undergraduate class site, pointed out that these assignments enable a teacher to better motivate and reach students that might be reluctant or resistant to more structured assignments: “They challenge a teacher to be creative, to keep things new and fresh. There’s something that’s going to inspire students and it’s just a matter of finding that” (SEED, 09/23/2016). These assignments may be able to tap into a student’s reservoir of personal experiences or interests, due to the freedom they offer for students to make of them what they will: “It’s a personal response, so it’s different than always writing academically” (Kayla, SEED, 09/23/2016).

Mysrecognition is one reason that although I may run with the same materials, syllabus, and concepts, they may be repeated with a difference (Deleuze, 1994, p. 21), like the performance of a Shakespearian play. Attempts to halt this mysrecognition are stymied when students fail to recognize the syllabus, for example, in precisely the way that the instructor intended. At a conference presentation, one teacher confessed that her syllabus had reached a length of twenty pages, because, “every time I try to add in things to make it clearer, but they still misunderstand” (Fallon, 2016a).

Rather than perceiving this as a fault, I see this consistent mysrecognition creating opportunity and freedom in the same material, even if it is not always permitted. Instead of pursuing a seemingly futile course of explicit recognition, by tirelessly adding to a syllabus in the name of clarity, a teacher may incorporate student mysrecognitions to collaboratively and coherently mutate it (Zingsheim, 2011, p. 26). It may be the syllabus for the class that she taught before, or the class she is teaching currently, but it is alive with a mys-ness. Every semester that
I’ve taught my courses I’ve changed deadlines, altered assignments, dropped and added new materials, and incorporated student suggestions and commentary into the design (Fallon, 2016c, p.38). I may lay out the calendar and dates, but I know that by the end of the semester, things will not be the same. This is a living pedagogy that accommodates, responds, changes, and adapts through mysbecoming.

Rachael’s syllabus was put into a Google Doc that perpetually mysbecame with weekly adjustments, contributions, and reflections. On one particular occasion she modified her Claims+Data+Warrant page to include the following under the Warrant section:

— Using literary terms to unpack literary language.
— Adding literary theory to the list of things you can warrant (HSE, 10/04/2016).

She also changed her calendar to spend more time on papers with students, pushing back the beginning of her Moby Dick unit to the following week. Her calendar was always shifting, and her lesson sheets and materials were always being modified. This teaching isn’t afraid to acknowledge the plan is a mysrecognition; that the current goals, understandings, and timetable are only one version of the way things could turn out. This is also the kind of teaching that is marginalized, and oppressed, in districts that micromanage the activities of each teacher in each classroom of the school.

A teacher possessing the capability to reorganize and reconsider her assignments is invested with an investigative freedom: to explore and experiment with how assignments may be functioning together with other assignments. For example, Greg noted that exploration topics were more repetitive, whereas classroom discussions exposed a greater variety of topics for that discussion. Considering this, Greg supposed there may have been less risk to toss out an idea for the discussion, but in formal explorations, the students might not have been aware of the topics
other students were doing, and chose to stick with more conservative ideas. One suggestion I considered was making students create a list of topics to write about to reduce repetition in the formal explorations. Then I had to also consider this might cut down on class discussion, since a greater breadth of topics would be more fully considered in explorations (HSE, 10/10/2016).

Rather than treating these lessons as autonomous units to be taught in a specific, static order, a mystheoretical approach questions not only what these assignments could be doing, but how they might be performing in relation to other assignments. Their onto-epistemological mysbeing is not limited to the boundaries of each individual lesson, but rather exists in semi-actual, intra-interactive entanglement with other lessons.

Through this kind of inquiry mindset, fueled by leaving nothing resolved for certain, teachers remain learners. They continue questioning what they see, and trying things again, even when they don’t appear to work at the outset. When I try a lesson again, another class may come back with different answers, as different levels of classes did when presented with the question “Would you take a selfie in Auschwitz?” (PDS, 11/15/2016). When I adopt a position of certainty about what my lessons do, about what and how I teach, about what my students learn, I experience cognitive closure (Anastasion, 2016), just as Paul Rezendes remarks about tracking animals: “Once people label something, they think they know it. They stop looking and they stop learning. You have to keep looking” (Wollan, 2016). This is a trap (Foucault, 2012a, p. 200; Phelan, 2003, Kindle Locations 250-251) that recognition and experience lay for us.

When attending conferences, I always look for opportunities to discuss or try new approaches, and consider different practices for my concepts. But I am not looking for certainty about how these forays into the unknown will turn out. When I commented that one of my recent presentations turned out surprisingly well, Rachael remarked with surprise, “What you
didn’t think it was going to work?” I replied in the affirmative; I was experimenting, after all.

Uncertainty suffuses our day-to-day teaching:

Teaching is evidently and inevitably uncertain. No teacher can be sure how a lesson will go or exactly what a student will learn. No one can know which teaching approach will guarantee access for particular groups of students. While casual observation and systematic research indicate the importance of multiform uncertainties to the ways teachers think and feel about their work, little has been published about the stance teacher educators should take towards uncertainty. (Floden and Buchmann 1993, p. 373; Floden & Clark, 1988, p. 505)

This doesn’t necessitate brand new or different concepts, materials or skills, as I have said before. One of the most valuable aspects of a mypedagogical approach is finding difference in the same. Instead of having students read Shakespeare, have them perform it. Instead of having them perform it to be accurate in form, have them perform it to be accurate in spirit. Each refraction opens different possibilities and outcomes, to both students and teachers, from the same material.

I see mechanical, technical repetition every semester, all around me, whether in the high school or the university classrooms. On the walls of both of the classrooms in which I have taught at the university were student-created posters depicting the steps of the writing process. Every single one of these posters depicted it as a linear process beginning with “pre-write” and then proceeding to “write,” “edit,” “revise,” and “publish” (Figure 11). Around them were various shapes, such as islands or s’mores—and for that I smile, finding at least a bit of aesthetic difference in the same—but all of them depicted these steps in this precise order. I pointed them out to my students and asked them, “What do you notice about these posters?” “They’re all the
same,” was the first response. Others followed, “They all depict the process as a straight line;” “They all have these same five steps;” “They all go in order.” (SEED, 2016-2017).

I asked them, “Do you follow this process when you write? Do you always proceed in this order?” They began to disagree in various ways. “It’s not always helpful to write to publish,” said one, “Not all writing is meant to be published.” “I just write everything in one draft,” said another, “That way I don’t have to edit and revise, and I just do it the night before.” “I sometimes edit and revise, but only if it’s for a school paper,” a third chimed in. Others responded that they do the steps in different orders or repeat certain steps in different ways.
“Do you think, then, that this is the only writing process we should, or could, teach?” I asked. They began to think. “Suppose I tell you that I don’t write everything to publish either. A diary or a journal, such as I have my students freewrite in, or write for their private purposes, isn’t intended for publishing.” They nodded in agreement. “And what about ideas that form ideas for other papers? How would that look on the writing process up there?” “It would branch off,” one student-teacher replied. “Why not have more than one writing process?” I asked, providing another example.

I heard Ken Robinson speak at Millersville University in 2012. Robinson described an experience he had when his publisher came to him ten years after publishing the first edition of one of his books, and asked him if he had wanted to make any corrections. Robinson figured that sure, he would make some minor corrections, and that would be the end of it. What actually happened was that he ended up rewriting a majority of the book for its second edition. I offered this as an example of how publishing, the “last step” in the depicted standardized writing process, actually had editing, revising and writing steps after it for this respected author. In the end, these student-teachers had incentive and reason to recognize the writing process. Reasons exist to challenge it, and realize for themselves, and their future students, that the standardized model depicted on the walls was ill-suited to meeting the needs of a variety of writers, writing forms, and purposes.

When I taught in high school, I believed that in order to break the mold, one had to first learn the rules. I used the analogy of learning how to ride a bike properly—sitting down on the seat and holding onto the handlebars with both hands, before popping wheelies and standing on the handlebars. I have encountered this belief in all of my research sites. Rachael instructs her class: “You can only break the rules if you know what you’re doing” (HSE, 10/04/2016).
Lately, however, I have questioned this rule: Do you have to know rules to break or mysrecognize them? Of course, knowing the rules isn’t really necessary to break them or form your own. But there’s a difference between breaking rules you didn’t realize were there, and breaking rules of which you are aware.

In another class, Rachael was going through instructions on how to conduct discussions, and she brought up Bloom’s Taxonomy. The version she showed to the students is a new, revised form of the taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2000), not the original form (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). One primary difference between the two is that “evaluation” is no longer the final step, but has been made the penultimate step below “synthesis,” the former penultimate step in the original taxonomy. “Synthesis” has been changed to “creating” in the revised version (Clark, 2015). This change from evaluation, to creating, is representative of a shift towards appreciating new and different forms, over the assessment of specific forms; a change that is aligned with myspedagogy. Yet, the entire taxonomy, both new and old, emphasizes an acquisition of knowledge defined by “the recall of specifics and universals, the recall of methods and processes, or the recall of a pattern, structure, or setting,” (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956, p. 201); in other words, learning the rules before mastering or breaking them.

But what if we mysrecognized Bloom’s pyramid or line, inverting and reordering these concepts so that creating was at the bottom, or at the beginning of the process? If this taxonomy was instead interpolated through a myspedagogical frame, then we might start with myscreating as the first step. But what would that look like?

When I presented at the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts conference in 2016, I sought to explore that question through a myspedagogical activity. I began
by writing down a text of I had all taught, and knew very well, like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Then, I thought of ways this text had been rendered differently, such as Francis Ford Coppola’s film, *Apocalypse Now* (1979). It was acknowledged that when a film is made from a book, the differences in medium and production inevitably change the work. There are almost always details that readers imagined differently than they are depicted in film or another medium, for example. The teachers also agreed that the analyses provided in the Norton critical edition of *Heart of Darkness* (2006) by such writers and scholars as Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, Virginia Woolf, Chinua Achebe, and Edward W. Said, among many others, present us with different authorized perspectives and interpretations of the text.

The authors of these critical analyses, however, likely didn’t ask which framework they should use so that they could follow it, nor did they likely consider whether or not their analysis would contradict another’s understanding or interpretation of Conrad’s text. They probably took it upon themselves to analyze the text and understand it in the particular way that they did, without regard for whether that analysis was deemed “correct” or “accurate.” This is the kind of scholarly responsibility and freedom one assumes when one is not concerned that their recognition of the text matches a predetermined understanding of it; it is the kind that a recognition-based pedagogy typically denies to students.

I then explored the problem of allowing misinterpretations to proliferate about a text. Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” is notoriously misunderstood according to SparkNotes (2002), but Orr (2016) artfully captures the problem with calling the popular interpretation of the poem “wrong:”

Certainly it’s wrong to say that “The Road Not Taken” is a straightforward and sentimental celebration of individualism: this interpretation is contradicted by the poem’s
own lines. Yet it’s also not quite right to say that the poem is merely a knowing literary joke disguised as shopworn magazine verse that has somehow managed to fool millions of readers for a hundred years. A role too artfully assumed ceases to become a role and instead becomes a species of identity—an observation equally true of Robert Frost himself. One of Frost’s greatest advocates, the scholar Richard Poirier, has written with regard to Frost’s recognition among ordinary readers that “there is no point trying to explain the popularity away, as if it were a misconception prompted by a pose.” By the same token, there is no point in trying to explain away the general misreadings of “The Road Not Taken,” as if they were a mistake encouraged by a fraud. The poem both is and isn’t about individualism, and it both is and isn’t about rationalization. (Orr, 2015)

I submit the variety of ways this poem has been, and can be interpreted, are examples of mysrecognition, instead of misrecognition. A mysrecognition, using Orr’s words, “isn’t a wolf in sheep’s clothing so much as a wolf that is somehow also a sheep, or a sheep that is also a wolf.” A myspedagogical approach to the poem does not pit two interpretations against each other in order to prove by some technical aspect—be it tone, diction, form, or structure—which is “correct” in a process of elimination towards a “most accurate” recognition. Instead, it celebrates the possibilities offered by these different mysinterpretations: what has been and could be done with them. For many generations of readers, the popular mysrecognition of that poem that most Americans know and have been taught in the classroom, that SparkNotes (2002) harshly criticizes as “Hallmark happy-graduation-son, seize-the-future puffery,” has probably served as an inspiring example to those who might wonder about taking a road less traveled.

A myspedagogical approach honors these kinds of possibilities in mysreadings, mysunderstandings, mysinterpretations and myperformances. I find a creative, liberating, line-
of-flight making (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9) in the way that Sam Shepard reconceptualizes Oedipus Rex for his play “A Particle of Dread” (Brantley, 2014). Song covers are like this; some try to recreate the exact voice and tone of the song. Others change the notes and pacing to mystcreate the song into something that would be almost unrecognizable, were it not for the familiar score and words.

So, the teachers who attended my PCTELA conference presentation selected a story they taught and knew well, a story they recognized. To provide further evidence of this recognition, I asked them to provide a summary of the plot, to describe the characters, what motivated them, what their goals and perspectives were, and what the story in general was about. Then I had them mystrecognize the story. This entailed possibly changing the setting, the symbolic elements, motivations of the characters, meaning of events, and other details that were part of their summary recognition of the story. I provided some examples of plot changes to a few literary examples commonly found in high school classrooms: *Lord of the Rings* is about the terror of commitment to a single person. *Moby Dick* is about a black man growing up in the South during Reconstruction. *Of Mice and Men* is about a student who is always transferring to a different school and his imaginary classmates. *Beowulf* is about pro-wrestling.

In order to facilitate this next step in the process, I engaged these teachers in a mystpedagogical practice representative of semi-actuality. Semi-actuality, you may recall, problematizes the autonomy, completeness, and boundaries of identity and recognition as always partially constructed from and entangled intra-interactively with other influences, identities, and recognitions that each diffractively (Davies 2014) act upon and mysbecome each other. Davies’ concept of “active listening” represents one way semi-actuality may be represented:
Listening is about being open to being affected. It is about being open to difference and, in particular, to difference in all its multiplicity as it emerges in each moment in between oneself and another. Listening is about not being bound by what you already know. It is life as movement. Listening to children is not just a matter of good pedagogy; encounters with others, where each is open to being affected by the other, is integral, I will suggest, to life itself … But more than this, it means opening up the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one’s relation to it, in new and surprising ways. (Kindle Locations 184-188)

I asked them to find critical issues and events in their own lives that informed their misinterpretations of their recognized text. These influences and elements could be drawn from personal experiences, sociocultural issues, political events, or countless other areas of life. I empowered them with the responsibility of their own diffractive authority to misrecognize the text.

Pushing them to go still further, I next directed them to develop their misrecognitions of two or more characters in this mis-story. Who is our misrecognized Claudius? Who is Tybalt? Who are the witches of Macbeth? Shakespeare could tell a great story, provided someone had told it to him first (Glass & Perkins, 1996); he was a master of misrecognizing characters, plot, motivations and meanings, and transforming them into something found in nearly every school in America.

I asked these teachers to consider putting soundtracks to these stories, settings, and characters and give them visual imagery—not what they thought they actually looked like, but what they could look like. I suggested they misrecognize “villains” as people we can empathize with, and “heroes” as people who throw us off when they’re not quite who we thought they’d be;
to myscreate fatal flaws into great strengths. We might myscreate Ahab as a man in need of support, Kurtz as someone for whom you may feel deep pity. We might transform the plot into something that challenges everything we’ve come to recognize and understand about the story before us. Julius Caesar isn’t about Caesar and his demise. Romeo and Juliet isn’t about love at first sight. Of Mice and Men isn’t about men who work on ranches or loneliness. Robin Hood isn’t about some heroic rogue in the forest with his merry men, fighting governmental corruption.

We unraveled Bloom’s pyramid, turned it upside down, and put every level together in a floating cloud choir. When we mys-create, myscreants that we are, we do not ask, “What’s the model? How many words?” We find our way, meaningfully. So what if our vision looks nothing like the work we recognize? Countless historical people recognized for their contributions to our culture and society—Shakespeare, Picasso, Einstein, Freud, Coppola—mysrecognized the recognized. They transformed the recognized into a myscreation many students are being told to recognize year after year: with precision, accuracy, correctness of meaning, and interpretation. They’re taught as though none of us are willing to acknowledge it was because these people chose to challenge, question, remake, transform, and myscreate these recognitions, that we have these works that have advanced every single discipline in academia and society (Emerson, 2009).

One teacher speaks up, looking up from her writing and says, “This is hard! Do you think it is perhaps harder for us than it would be for our students, since we know what these texts are supposed to mean? Since we recognize and know them so well?” (Fallon, 2016b). Her question gets right back to what I have been pondering. Knowing the rules before breaking them reveals the possibility that knowing the rules may make it more difficult to break them.
Thankfully, this is not an either/or binary. Knowing or not knowing the rules cannot keep us from myscreating and mysrecognizing, intentionally or not, if we give ourselves permission to do so. By acknowledging the mys-ness of our own interpretations, understanding, and creations, we give others permission as well to mysrecognize and myscreate our work anew through a vulnerability that liberates us from a prison of accurate recognitions. This mys-ness is an invitation to questioning (Sullivan, 2002, pp. 195-196), to democratic, participatory dialogue and discourse (Flusser, 2013, p. 54) that is unafraid of displacement and self-preservation of one’s own being and recognitions (Bowers, 2005, p. 375).

Let us appreciate the mystellings that surround us: the Lion King (2017) mystelling of Hamlet; the West Side Story (2017) of Romeo and Juliet; the 21st century music of Baz Luhrmann’s mystelling of The Great Gatsby (2013) and the guns of his southern Californian setting of Romeo + Juliet (1996). Let us appreciate, also, Atwood’s Hag-Seed (2016) mystelling of the Tempest; and Sherlock Holmes’ mystelling of the ancient Babylonian fable, The Merchant of Samarra (Dowell, 2017), into a story where the merchant takes a different path, goes to Sumatra, and becomes a pirate, instead of encountering Death (Talalay, 2017)—a mystelling that is itself wrapped like a Russian doll inside Gatiss’ and Moffat’s mystelling of Arthur Conan Doyle’s original stories published at the turn of the twentieth century (2017).

When one student complained about Melville’s writing, criticizing it as “wandering off-topic, sometimes unfocused,” that the “character descriptions feel like lists” to him (HSE, 10/24/2016), I mentioned Peter Jackson’s film mystelling of Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003), and ask, “How would you mystell it?” One might call this an act of revision, but mysrecognition and mystelling goes beyond the implication of improvement or correction that is part of the standard definition of that term (2007). I am not revising towards a best version, but
rather a different version, and all the possibilities that difference opens up to me. I am not sacrificing rigor or attention to the text, nor a depth of critical thinking about it when I encourage these mysrecognition and mystellings. I begin from the text before me, and transcend the boundaries and limitations of narrow, singular, “correct” understanding of that text into creative, different, transformative mysusunderstandings, that remake and renew the text with vitality.

When I asked, during a class discussion, if the students had tried reading the chapters out of order, they responded, “We’re not that creative” (HSE, 11/03/2016). One student, before I made this question and suggestion had mentioned that Moby Dick could be turned into a Choose Your Own Adventure book, because there seemed to be multiple paths through the text that could skip chapters and lead to different places. Rachael acknowledged that some scholars felt that Moby Dick was “Three books in one.” There are multiple recognizable narratives within its pages, through the revision process that went on between Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Multiple semi-actual versions of the book were created, discarded, reordered, and changed—and multiple semi-actual mysversions of Moby Dick could exist.

I may catalogue and acknowledge recognized themes and understandings of a world (Butler, 2004c, Kindle Locations 1879-1883) and symbolic order (Lacan, 2006, pp. 39, 53) that precedes me, but I want to wander into mysrecognition on and off the page, hiding in plain sight. Ours students are, in fact, creative enough to read the book chapters out of order (HSE, 11/03/2016) if we are willing to push them to do what they might never have been permitted to do before. One day they may feel empowered enough to do so without our permission, to take that responsibility and vulnerability upon themselves deliberately and willfully. Then, they may perform a defiant refusal of the call (Butler, 2011, p. 82) to hail the text just as it has been hailed to us; to exercise an agential disobedience (Butler, 2009, p. 3) that slips the confines of
conventional recognition into a liberating, nomadic line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 380).

A class of students with the capability to mysrecognize a work in meaningful ways, who give themselves the authority and permission to reorganize, revise, and reimagine the text differently, will be perhaps more aware of their capability to myscreate the world. When nobody’s looking and listening, while class is dismissing, one of the students conspiratorially confesses to me, “I actually do read the book out of order, depending on what kind of chapter I want to read for that moment” (HSE, 11/03/2016). She was a trickster (Hyde, 2010, p. 7), secretly mysbehaving, mysreading and creating her own mysunderstandings without any need to tell or show anyone until I mentioned it, honoring her clandestine activities with my words. Even so, she didn’t speak up during class—this secret remained a secret, between two who preserved the sacredness of this mystery.

I may not be able to choose all of the texts that come into my classrooms, just as I do not get to choose the standards set by state and federal governments. However, the opportunity to mysrecognize them gives me lockpicks to slip through the gates of my imprisonment and into a livable world (Butler, 2004a, pp. 12-13). Max tells me, “We’re doing Antigone, focusing on changing perspective, a very condensed version without much background. Greek archetypes. Greek mythology. How can a ninth grader connect to that?” (PDS, 10/03/2016) Connecting a text over several hundred, or in some cases, several thousand years old to students today is a surmountable challenge through mystelling, as Neil Gaiman does in American Gods (2011). From my own teaching experience, I know that most students of the twenty-first century are not familiar with Greek mythology anymore—they may know a few of the most popular figures, but
beyond that, their general knowledge of these myths is very limited. So, I tell my own version of these myths, such as one of the oldest: the story of Demeter, Persephone/Proserpina, and Hades.

In my version—which still holds to many of the original details—Hades, the darker, less famous brother of Zeus and Poseidon, was characterized as a typical high school student. He was in the goth or emo tradition, and had never had much experience with girls. Seeing all of the attention and conquests that his brothers engaged in—with a side note inviting critical commentary about what kind of model for behavior these gods provided—Hades, in all of his inexperienced intent, literally goes after and seizes the girl he wants. He speeds off in his big black gothic chariot, back into the underworld.

Once there, Persephone is understandably upset, but Hades just wants her to be happy. So he brings her food, points out how he has his own place—even if it is a land full of spirits and darkness—and makes mention of his vast stores of wealth. Persephone doesn’t care about or respond to any of these things. Realizing that things are not working out like he had hoped, he apologizes, explaining that all he wanted was for them to be together. He explains that he didn’t have any idea how to make that happen, and did the only thing that came to mind, and would she please just eat something. Barely mollified and starving, Persephone acquiesces to a single pomegranate seed, discovers they’re not half bad. She eats a few more, before she notices a spider trekking over the table and promptly loses her appetite all over again.

Of course, as the story goes, Hades is unable to let the only girl he’s ever wanted slip away when he’s ordered to return her. He invokes his right, by virtue of her eating the pomegranate seeds, to have her come stay with him for at least part of the year. I played it up as him promising, even though she didn’t choose this fate knowingly, to be faithful to her, to make her his queen, and to always see to it that she be treated as well as he could afford—it was better
treatment than his brothers delivered to the women in their lives, after all. With each performance, the details of this story changed, but the spirit of it remained alive, and many of my students listed my stories—our creative mystellings—as one of the favorite parts of their learning experience.

Our students have enormous potential for mystelling these stories themselves. In one activity, Rachael’s students had the rest of the class play charades with important themes and events of each chapter of *Moby Dick* (HSE, 11/16/2016). Another had a group engaging the class in a kinesthetic experience with backpacks and books, each armful representing a whale’s head that the Pequod had picked up. That same day, Rachael spoke of two interpretive dances that her students performed in another class that made her cry because they were so moving, “They were phenomenal!” (HSE, 11/03/2016). On another occasion, her class was broken into groups, each working on their own activities, and two groups had gone into the hallway. One group was talking about a harpooning activity, while the other, a group of three, began singing a song they planned to remix with lyrics about *Moby Dick*. These are just a few examples of students mystelling, mysperforming, and mysteaching Melville’s text.

We may subject almost any work, concept, or definition to participatory deconstruction, positioning ourselves to challenge, mysrecognize, and myscreate, rather than treating it as untouchably sacred. In my undergraduate class, three of my students structured their lessons in a recognition-based way, asking what concepts meant and then providing an authoritative definition. By contrast, Hillary put the definition first, and then asked her students to question and problematize it, opening up the possibility for the definition to be remade, altered, added to, or revised (SEED, 10/28/2016). This same approach can work for archetypes, models, and tropes, such as “princess,” “wizard,” or “hero,” by putting an archetype forward and then
problematizing it by exploring different examples, noticing not only how they may fit the archetype, but how they are also significantly different in ways that may even contradict each other (PDS, 11/15/2016). This is a critical recognizing and mysrecognizing of knowledge and concepts, and an open invitation to myscreate them anew.

When we see the order of things as susceptible to mysrecognition, the possibilities for reordering beg for exploration and experimentation. We may ask questions about lessons and activities like, “Will we put a worksheet in front of students before we read, or run through a PowerPoint while we read? Will we have our students come up with Claim-Data-Warrant instead of Data-Warrant-Claim, or Data-Claim-Warrant?” These acts of mysarrangement, just as in the reading of chapters, can have significant and profound implications on performance and learning as Rachael discovered between two consecutive classes:

The discussions formed “organically” last block, where there was discussion of text before the forming of the questions; whereas this block, questions were listed first and then discussion happened, but not as much. In effect, deciding the questions first, which the students of this block did at the outset on their own initiative actually led to less discussion than not forming the questions immediately, and simply talking about the text first. (HSE, 09/22/2016)

When each of my classes performs the same assignment differently, I don’t see it as a problem, I see it as a representation of vitality (Barad, 2007, Kindle Locations 797-799). If I am willing to reconsider my understandings as mysunderstandings, my recognitions as mysrecognitions, I may find myself mys-re-cognizing my pedagogy and texts over and over with each student, each class, each year (Derrida, 1978b, p. 295). This is repetition with a difference (Deleuze, 1994, p. 299), Nietzsche’s eternal return; a perpetual mysrecognition that invites
myscreation—each as authentic and situated in my reality as the last in their fractal iterations, but never finally recognized/recognizable, forestalling closure (Spivak, 1997, p. xliii; Derrida, 1982, pp. 24-26; 1978b, p. 295), and pausing indefinitely at the threshold of recognition (McInnes & Butler, 2008, p. 100). The Real and Symbolic (Lacan, 2006, p. 17) become entangled, and I, along with my concepts and curriculum, mysbecome wolves (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 29) that are somehow also sheep, sheep that are also a wolves (Orr, 2015); unfinalizable (Bakhtin, 2013, p. 61, 176, 284-285) mysbecomings in semi-actual superposition.

**Stepping back to find a way through.** When I started student teaching, my mentor gave me a piece of advice: “A good night’s rest is better than a good lesson plan.” Why? Let us assume that every lesson is subject to mysrecognition. That means that no matter the planning, details, time spent accounting for scenarios and possibilities, things will go differently than we thought. Fecho (2004) descriptively captures the pressures most teachers work under in their profession:

I have long believed that one reason teachers drag themselves home exhausted is because they are the lids that sit upon the emotional, intellectual, and physical pressure cookers we more commonly call classrooms. In teaching spaces, things happen. No matter what amount of control, consistency, and management is offered, things happen. And that’s as it should be. I don’t want to teach with every moment planned out and every response predictable. On the other hand, having to contend with all the possibility of a classroom, the attention that must be paid, is wearying to the bone. (pp. 13-14)

What then? Adaptability, flexibility, and improvisation suddenly become critically important in the moment. Each semester, my undergraduate students, during the course of
running lesson plans that they have designed and created, have encountered and grappled with these unpredictable things. One of my students described their experience in a written reflection:

For the first lesson plan specifically, I learned a lot about what it means to have to make quick last minute decisions and modifications "in the moment" in order to accommodate for unforeseen situations. In our teacher classes we are always told that our lessons plan may not run exactly as we plan them to and that it’s always important to be able to think on your feet. I’m glad I got the opportunity to have this happen because it gave me a more realistic idea of what I can expect in my future classroom. (SEED, 03/27/2017)

The reasoning goes: if you are tired, and going on less sleep than you need to be fully rested, you will be less able to perform under such circumstances. Your mind will not be able to generate alternative solutions as quickly or easily, your stress threshold will be lower, you’ll be more sensitive to and intolerant of the unpredictable disruptions and surprise occurrences that make up every teacher’s academic year. Research in cognitive and neuroscience fields support and develop this claim further (Ellenbogen, 2005, p. 25; Robertson, Pascual-Leone, & Press, 2004, p. 211), discovering ways in which a person is able to learn implicitly, away from direct practice with subject material—evidence, in my eyes, of the semi-actuality of learning as a process that occurs during and between intervals of explicit practice.

Teaching is difficult work filled with more tasks and considerations than most people realize. As Robin confessed, “I couldn’t imagine doing this [job] myself. How does one person handle this, especially with students who are unfocused or off task?” (PDS, 10/25/2016). The responsibilities of many teachers are not over at the end of the school day. With lesson planning, grading, preparation of materials, administrative work, professional development meetings, and
after hours communication taking place on a regular basis. This does not account for the personal lives, family responsibilities, community involvement, participation in after-school activities such as coaching sports, supervising clubs, leading band or theater practice sessions, teaching evening classes, or countless other activities that many teachers take part in. In fact, the after-hours responsibilities and duties of teachers are so significantly important, that unions have been known to use “working the clock”—an act of resistance that calls for teachers to work only the hours they’re paid for during the school day—as leverage to bring boards to the table for negotiations, as happened during my first year of teaching.

Given the circumstances, the importance of stepping away becomes significant, as my mentor said, “After school, find some way to get away from school. Go for a run, meditate, take an hour to just clear your mind before returning to any work or tasks you have.” Student teachers described the pressures and forces keeping their mindset locked on teaching in their after-school hours:

Greg: There were a few emails going back and forth between me and my mentor that I would’ve preferred to have done without, to be honest. “While I’m planning this, I would like your input on this. Ah! Can’t we deal with this on Tuesday?”

Leia: It’s so bad that I left all the emails for Beth (her mentor) that students were emailing me, ‘cause I said, “No!”

Robin: It should be like school time; you can reach me up to maybe 4:30-5:00 and then I’m cutting you off. It’s parents, too, expecting fast responses. You need to chill. It’s a Sunday night. No. (PDS, 11/29/2016)
Technology has facilitated these always-reachable expectations in teachers, students, parents, and beyond the world of education, as Ari Zoldan, CEO of Quantum Media Holdings describes:

In today’s culture of iPhones, Blackberrys and Droids, there is no real concept any more of “detachment” or “away from the office.” Clients expect you to respond to their emails and calls instantly, as they know you can be reached on your smartphone. Today, “the office comes home with you.” You are expected to be reachable always and everywhere — on the plane, train and during vacation. (Klimas, 2013)

It isn’t just my student-teachers that find themselves having to draw boundaries on the demands of others for their time. A number of my professors make this part of their practice, as a necessary measure, to make time for other important responsibilities in their lives. These expectations can be set down on paper and agreed upon in class as a way of respecting each other’s time and availability in an always-reachable world. But Greg pointed out, and Leia agreed, that this is not always easy or possible in certain circumstances:

I concur, that sounds like a good idea when I have my own classroom. But for now, I can’t do this; you can’t work with a workaholic and expect to have this when she responds to any email within minutes with a detailed response, and I feel like if I wait more than 15 minutes, I’m the one responsible.

The semi-actuality of working with a mentor or colleagues who embrace an always-reachable approach causes student-teachers who want to draw boundaries on their availability to feel guilty about doing so, like they’re not measuring up.

We might ask, what pedagogical approaches—in addition to preserving the sanctity and peace of mind that may come from stepping away from the work—might take an inverse
approach that reveals the value of less? I found one example in Rachael’s renamed Socratic Circles activity:

Rachael: Normally when I do this Socratic circle activity, I do 8-10 minutes.

Me: You’ve never done this type of Socratic circle before?

Rachael: No, I have, but never for just six minutes. It was much shorter than what I normally do, so it felt rushed. Of course, [since] these are shorter, we had to cut people off. But, with the 8-10 minute ones, by the time you get to the third [group] they’re like “we don’t have anything left to say.” What I thought would happen the first time I did it, I thought that the more talkative students I put last would have things to add, but [the discussion] just died, and they were like, “we have nothing else to talk about.” (HSE, 09/26/2016)

In this case, giving the students less time actually generated more discussion from them and distributed the discussion among a larger number of students.

Discussion can sometimes take up more time than other activities, so some may argue it is relatively inefficient for covering a defined set of material compared to a lecture. This does not account for the emergent topics within discussion that take it in unpredictable, yet meaningful ways, relevant to the students’ thoughts, lives and interests. A lecture is typically formatted, designed, and planned out to front-load material and understandings to students in a direct, defined manner. A discussion with less upfront content opens up a space for mysrecognized possibilities that may reach further, introduce new differences, and consider topics in a way that a lecture would not allow. Additionally, the lecture format entails that the teacher shoulder the burden of covering every recognized facet of a topic. While in a discussion, that burden is shifted and distributed among the students, with the teacher playing a more
facilitating role in the moment, as Rachael did with her student-led discussions on *Moby Dick*. This opens the door for teachers to offer less material upfront to make space for students to take on more responsibility and agency in their learning.

Robin had a student who turned in nothing all year for any of his classes, in spite of her efforts to provide him with material that he liked. In her lessons, she included materials such as a creative stations activity that utilized material from some of his favorite bands, such as *Welcome to the Black Parade* by My Chemical Romance, and favorite authors, such as Laurie Halse Anderson. She confirmed that he had read many of her books, so the problem was not one of capability in terms of reading. This student had no IEP. She was exasperated with her failed efforts and expressed her frustration, “I just don’t know what to do!” (PDS, 10/25/2016). I suggested that perhaps she had done more than enough. Instead of offering material to him, I raised the possibility of “playing dumb” and pushing him to make those connections to his favorite bands and authors.

During the initial meetings of Will Hunting, played by Matt Damon, and Sean Maguire, played by Robin Williams in *Good Will Hunting* (Sant, 1997), Sean simply sat across from Will without saying anything for the entire meeting. When later asked about the events of the meeting by his colleague Lambeau, Sean confirms that nothing happened; that he didn’t do anything, because “he’s got to start.” It wasn’t that Sean was abandoning his responsibilities; it was that he understood that he needed to make Will accept some of his own. So, instead of taking a bigger share of the agency and responsibility, we back away from that acquisition, encouraging the student to step into that space and take a bigger role in their own learning.

This is similar to remaining silent for extended periods of time in a classroom discussion. Sometimes students will be slow or reluctant to participate, and for most teachers there is a
temptation to fill that silence in an effort to generate discussion. Often, the result is that the teacher speaks more and students speak less. If I wait, and the silence gets increasingly awkward as it gets longer—for all of us—someone eventually talks, if for no other reason than that silence has become an uncomfortable presence in the room.

We might employ a learning-by-doing approach that involves exploration, and working through a problem for which you have less direction and instruction, instead of more (Dewey, 2012, pp. 62-63):

One may learn by doing something which he does not understand; even in the most intelligent action, we do much which we do not mean, because the largest portion of the connections of the act we consciously intend are not perceived or anticipated. But we learn only because after the act is performed we note results which we had not noted before. But much work in school consists in setting up rules by which pupils are to act of such a sort that even after pupils have acted, they are not led to see the connection between the result—say the answer—and the method pursued. So far as they are concerned, the whole thing is a trick and a kind of miracle.

This puts an individual in a position of responsibility and agency to figure things out in their own way, just as my advisor did when she turned down my assistance to work through a classroom software program. If I want students to learn the value of summarizing, I might put them in a scenario where they need to summarize: “OK, so you’ve all been reading a book of your choice, but you would really like your friends to read this book. You see them on the bus one day, but theirs is the next stop! What do you say? What parts of the story would appeal to them?” Given this context, students practice and come to appreciate the value of summarizing without ever defining the concept explicitly, telling them precisely how to do it, or the form it
must take. The context helps to make learning that concept meaningful, as Gee (2007) describes in video game design:

Players are placed, by the very design of the game, in the same psychological space as Lara—learning from Von Croy but not subordinating themselves entirely to his old fashioned professorial need for dominance. The game’s design encourages the player to take on a certain sort of attitude and relationship with Von Croy—and, more generally, a certain sort of personality—that represents, in fact, just the sort of person Lara is.

When I played the game, I was a bit intimidated by Von Croy. Based probably on a lifetime of (trying to look as if I am) following the orders of authority figures like deans, I found myself wanting to follow his orders to the T. But I also wanted the treasures and found myself guiltily sneaking down paths off Von Croy’s route and thereby becoming more like Lara and less like myself. (p. 117)

This is teaching with an element of agency and mystery. The situation provides a structure that encourages the student to practice and understand certain concepts, without directly informing or instructing the student. Similar to the way Mr. Miyagi in The Karate Kid (Avildsen, 1984) instructs Daniel, we may lead our students through activities that don’t—on the surface—seem to have much to do with what we’re trying to teach them. At the end of the lesson, we may say, “So, that’s called summarizing. And that’s why we do it.” I have had students develop rubrics for lesson plans (SEED, 09/09/2016) and unit plans with me for similar reasons; by doing this, they are considering the important parts of lesson plans. Additionally, none of these rubrics are the same in their final form, because I do not require them to be: I allow them to mysbecome.

A teacher’s knowledge and understanding do not become less valuable by withholding
the transaction (Fecho, 2004, p. 46) of it from their students. It may require even more understanding and consideration to design a situation in which students may learn by doing, than to present that information directly to them. A watchful teacher can identify concepts and understandings that students demonstrate without an explicit recognition of them, as Brad did when Laura led off with a personal story about her first time in a ballet class, and he commended her for using an anecdote to support her persuasive piece. This was something Laura had not been aware of, since she had no familiarity with the term (SEED, 10/28/2016).

By not assigning worksheets and other assignments that needed to be graded every day, I was able to devote more time to assessing those assignments I did give to my students. In addition, they were ready to invest more energy and time into these assignments. Gallagher (2006) recommends that we do not grade everything either, focusing instead on no more than a few elements at a time, and leaving some assignments ungraded altogether (Kindle Locations 623-624).

Offering a choice in what gets graded, which projects students can take on, or which prompts they can answer for an essay (PDS, 11/17/2016) is another way of making more of less. If every box must be checked, every activity completed, the freedom and responsibility to choose is lost. If I try to cover as much as possible, I lose opportunities to explore the material in new and different ways, to allow students to dive deeper into sections they find meaningful, and to make extra contributions of my own.

One activity my undergraduates introduced was called “blacking out.” This activity is comprised of taking a written piece of composition and, using a black marker, blacking out some of the words to misform the poem or essay into a different one, miscreating new “works” within works (SEED, 09/16/2016). Another activity that works by reducing the visibility of text was
suggested by a friend of ours: the writer changes the font color of the composition they are writing to the same color as the background on a word processing program, making it invisible and reducing their capability to scrutinize, critique, or edit their work in the process.

By inverting my approach, I can push a flood of thoughts and words past the editorial censor (Goldberg, 2010, p. 33) with Elbow’s “looping” activity (Gallagher, 2006, Kindle Locations 452-461):

1. Start by having students write their initial thinking on a given topic. For example, in an English class, students might be asked what they think of a particular character's behavior. In a history class, they might write their thoughts about an historical period or a major political event. Students' initial writings may wander. 2. Ask students to write nonstop for ten minutes. The key is to begin with the first thing that comes to mind and to not stop writing. If students get stuck, have them rewrite the last sentence. Students must be taught that their writing might take them in unforeseen directions. This is a good thing. 3. After ten minutes, have students reread what they have written thus far. As they read, they are searching for a "hot spot"-an emerging theme, a central idea-anything that stands out and creates a spark of thinking. 4. Have students highlight or circle this "hot spot." Skipping a line or two, have the students rewrite this hot spot into a complete sentence. 5. Beginning with this new sentence, ask students to write again for ten minutes. 6. At the end of ten minutes, tell students to find a new hot spot and again write a summary sentence. 7. Keep looping until a focus or thesis emerges. Sometimes this will occur in a single loop; sometimes it takes a few loops.

I have run this activity by continuing the loop several times without necessarily searching for a particular thesis. Students have reacted to this in a number of ways. Some became
frustrated, being unable to perfect or complete their current passage, while others let themselves go, freely swimming along with the current of topics. “I just got in the flow of writing. At first I was thinking too hard about it. It got easier because you let go” (SEED, 09/16/2016). Just as overthinking can “psych us out” in other theaters of performance, there may be ways to successfully perform educational activities that depend upon less thinking, rather than more.

**Conversation through listening and questioning.** A conversation may begin with recognition: a focus topic, a text that everyone has read, or a common problem that everyone wants to address. The participants may bring their own recognitions: who they are, why they’re here, what kind of recognized authority they may speak about and to the text, problem, or topic, and what understandings and interpretations they may have about the text, problem, or topic. A class may begin in the same way: a central topic, text, or concept of the lesson, sources of information and persons of authority, positioned as they are in and outside of the classroom, established and recognized definitions, understandings, and interpretations of the concept, text, or topic. From here, we may proceed down a path of reaffirmation and recementing of all of those recognitions, along with challenges and defenses of them. Allow me to present an alternative way to have a conversation that is more aligned with my theory.

As a participant, I may enter this conversation with an implicit understanding of myself, my being and recognitions, as mysbeing-in-becoming and mysrecognition-in-becoming. My recognitions, identity, position—they are all subject to this mys-ness. To put this in plain terms, I would hold all that I think I know, all of my understandings and interpretations of this text, as subject to challenge and questioning as a path for reconsideration, not specifically for some kind of evolutionary or teleological purpose, but in the sense that I might move from where I am to someplace I do not recognize or exist as in my thinking. In other words, I would hope that my
thinking would, through questioning and challenge, transform and mysbecome into something different; not more or less, but simply different. Despret offers a possible representation of the way questioning and conversational or dialogic mysbecoming might occur:

The first and most important thing at risk in Despret’s practice is an approach that assumes that beings have pre-established natures and abilities that are simply put into play in an encounter. Rather, Despret’s sort of politeness does the energetic work of holding open the possibility that surprises are in store, that something interesting is about to happen, but only if one cultivates the virtue of letting those one visits intra-actively shape what occurs. They are not who/what we expected to visit, and we are not who/what were anticipated either. Visiting is a subject- and object-making dance, and the choreographer is a trickster. Asking questions comes to mean both asking what another finds intriguing and also how learning to engage that changes everybody in unforeseeable ways. Good questions come only to a polite inquirer, especially a polite inquirer provoked by a singing blackbird. With good questions, even or especially mistakes and misunderstandings can become interesting. This is not so much a question of manners, but of epistemology and ontology, and of method alert to off-the-beaten-path practices. At the least, this sort of politeness is not what Miss Manners purveys in her advice column. (Haraway, 2016, Kindle Locations 2604-2613).

Despret’s polite inquiry dynamics apply in an encounters with other beings, including non-human species. Conversation is one kind of intra-interaction that we may approach with a mystheoretical positionality situated in questioning, uncertainty, and an appreciation for what other participants may offer that may be mysrecognized, misrecognized, or unrecognized. Our approach and engagement in this conversational intra-interaction may affect our mysbecoming
Despret’s approach implies a kind of willingness to surrender one’s expectations and sought after recognitions, as well as pre-existing recognitions, such as they may be. I may be concerned about the survival and preservation of my ideas and understandings, but I am not interested in defending my darlings at the cost of mysbecoming and mysrecognizing them or myself. If someone from what I might recognize as an oppositional stance raises a good point in conversation, I will honor that point or interpretation and happily incorporate it into my own, even if it contradicts some of what I’m saying. By holding such oppositional ideas in internal coherence, we may experience this type of richness, compatibility, dialogue, and inquiry among, within, and between them.

Dearly held, sacred beliefs and understandings that have long been close to our hearts and souls are some of the most difficult to mysrecognize and mysbecome. If we identify with these notions, if we feel strongly about them, mysrecognizing them can feel like betrayal, of them and ourselves. It can feel as though we are abandoning them—in a way, we may be, but not necessarily in all ways. In altering our understandings, in putting them with other ideas that they may be in conflict with, we hope to find a path forward to reclaim them again, not as they were, but newly mys-re-cognized in our different understandings. This process is akin to a translator’s attempts to preserve the spirit of the work in all of its poetic, conceptual beauty and complexity. A literal word-for-word translation would not do so from one language to another, because languages are not structured the same, do not form their concepts in the same way, and do not express and convey understandings in the same way. Shall we only relegate ourselves to one text in an original language? Shall we only stick with one way of understanding a concept, problem, text, or phenomena for all of our lives?
If we are devoted only to the recognitions of ourselves and the concepts, texts, problems, and topics that we enter the conversation with, then we are not here to have a conversation; we’re here to talk or shout, drop the mic, and leave. We are here to win a war, to fight a battle, to defend our ideas to the last man, and to never waver, change, or question. We are here to maintain, preserve, and uphold our recognitions and nothing more, except to possibly eliminate other recognitions if the opportunity arises.

This is an understandable compulsion, reinforced by countless forces. We are raised to defend our answers and ourselves; to be certain of who we are, and our worth, and to make the case for ourselves. Those who know are privileged over those who don’t. We’re taught that those who speak are the only ones with something to say, and those who speak louder, more forcefully, and more often have something more important to say than others. But in the process, we’ve forgotten how to listen, how to question, and how to discuss without fear or shame. We know how to argue, justify, and deflect blame, because we’re raised in a society that prizes combat, exclusion, and demands our worth be justified, and that we have an immaculate record free of sin, mistakes, and offense. But this does not help us talk to each other. It does not help us to accept, tolerate, and forgive each other. It does not help us to look past our disagreements to appreciate what someone else brings to the table. It does not help us find salvation in our own undoing. Mystheory and its concepts, in their application through myspedagogy and other aligned approaches, offer, support, and facilitate means to address those neglected, delegitimized, undervalued ways of being.

If we are not here to hold fast with clenched fingers and closed minds to our identities, our beliefs, our recognitions, there is a possibility for valuing the way we may mysbecome with the coherent ideas in all of their diverse array with our own. This mysbecoming may feel
awkward, strange, difficult, and uncomfortable; we may not like it. That’s acceptable in the same way that not liking certain types of wine or beer is acceptable after tasting them. We are encouraged to go further; to open up not only to coherent, diverse ideas and preferences from without, but to stretch ourselves and question within, to mysbecome someone other than who we recognize as ourselves. This leads us to consider, to inquire, why others do like or dislike certain types of wine or beer, in a genuine effort to reach their perspective, to empathize with it, even if we do not agree with it.

Seen from a perspective that values learning, discovery, inquiry, and consideration, this is no betrayal. Instead, it presents us with a spirit or mind that is flexible; that may contain or reach for multitudes; that is not afraid of strangeness or discomfort. There is a courage and bravery to sailing into waters that are unfamiliar, that no map accurately identifies. We may not like what we find, but we have at least attempted to consider that which challenges or goes beyond what we know; to honor it even for a moment in its difference from our own recognitions and preferences. This is how we may listen. This is how we may consider. This is how we may mysbecome in conversation, whether that conversation is in the classroom or somewhere else.

**What myspedagogy means for teachers and teaching teachers.** Myspedagogy and mystheory do not just reunite theory and practice in literacy education; they blur, blend, and mysrecognize theory and practice into each other. Mystheory and myspedagogy revitalize the text, teacher, learner, in any form or relationship, by troubling and problematizing them with academic rigor and meaningful, justified curiosity. It moves us beyond positioning the text, learner, and teacher in structures of recognition, whether they are institutional roles or tracking
levels, writers and audience, teachers and students, or authorial intent and reader interpretation. It challenges our recognition of ourselves and our roles within these structures, in order to allow us to mysbecome and mysrecognize ourselves, our positioning, our texts, our roles, and those recognitions that have been assigned to all.

The conceptual praxis of myspedagogy does not prescribe and direct so that others may surrender their responsibility and simply follow and do, just because this or that “works.” No longer are we given permission to stop thinking, and just defer to an authoritative answer. No longer is it satisfactory or responsible to simply look up the “correct” answer and to fill in that answer without question, merely because someone or something recognized as an authority said it was. No longer is it acceptable to be content to defy and refuse simply for the sake of critical doubt and recognized positioning and identity.

This is a call to treat our interpretations of text, standardized forms and singular process of writing, and our insistence on the purpose of the language as facilitating clear communication of meaning from speaker to listener, from author to reader, from teacher to learner as, at best, a limited recognition of the capability, multiplicity, and mystery of our words. Current methods leave worlds of possibilities on the table just to begin with these hard and fast recognitions, so that we may proclaim about them once and for all, “IT IS KNOWN.” It may be known, but that does not mean that it is all we can or may know, that it is beyond questioning, that it is always accurate, timeless, universal, singular, best, or most effective. We have a responsibility to actually teach, to actually question, to actually take part in our learning as valued participants, for our own sakes and those of others around us, before us, and after us.

That responsibility is surrendered every single time we force students to an exclusive, singular understanding of the text or concept, to a particular way of reading, to what the author
meant. It is surrendered every single time we defer to assessments we did not take part in making, that reduce the result of our teaching and learning down to A, B, C, or D. It is surrendered every single time we do not push students and ourselves to question, challenge, and develop our perspectives by listening, considering, and negotiating our beliefs and recognitions with those of students, peers, and scholars. This is not about right and wrong, winning and losing, best and worst, failure and success; this is about learning by teaching and teaching by learning.

When we look at grammar, we may ask why and how it may be meaningful that there is no punctuation in the longest sentence in *Ulysses*, that e.e. cummings did not capitalize, that *Jabberwocky* has words that were not recognized as words in the English language. When we look at *Hamlet* or *Heart of Darkness*, we may meaningfully ask how and why we may myswrite it into something else, such as *The Lion King* or *Apocalypse Now*. When we look at the lyrics of a song or poem, we may wonder how many different ways it may be read, sung, and accompanied with instruments and visuals, and what possibilities those different ways offer to us, by themselves, with each other, and what ways we may mysform them again in still other ways.

If we find ourselves unable to determine a “correct” meaning for a work, to be certain about our understanding or interpretation of a passage, or to be sure of what the author meant or whether that still matters in the same way, then we are better equipped to challenge, question, and acknowledge my misunderstandings in ourselves, our sources of news, our officials, our friends and family, our social media, and our world. We are better able with our “I don’t know”’s and our “I’m not sure”’s to question our own position than generations that have been directed to write the most convincing argumentative essay about what they believe (Aull, 2016). We are
better prepared to turn the rhetorical “must” and “should” into a question that reopens lines of
dialogue, negotiation, and appreciation for alternatives, for other possibilities in the ways we
learn, teach, understand, and approach each other, our texts, and the world.

In our questioning, confusion, and uncertainty, we may find liberation, reasons to
consider, motivation to write badly as a means to write and revise well, to teach badly as a means
to push our students to offer suggestions and criticism, because like drafts, those skills are best
practiced on material that can be improved upon. We may risk failing spectacularly, so that we
may try to do something we never thought we could do, and pour our hearts and time into this
pursuit in earnest, as long as others are willing to consider our ideas, our intentions, and our
methods, and as long as we are willing to consider theirs. In failure, we find more reason to do
this than in success, as long as we blur the lines between success and failure, and mysrecognize
the meaningfulness of each. Let us no longer set them against each other exclusively in binary
opposition, structurally defined as not the other. Let us see the failures in our success, and the
success in our failures. When we can fail meaningfully, we may come to appreciate ways of
being that a mandate for recognized success cannot readily or easily offer us, ways that such a
mandate might shut down indefinitely.

It is time to start teaching our students not just to answer questions, but to question
answers—their own as well as others. We may go even further, to help them understand that,
unlike skeptics, mysheorists and myspedagogues do not stop with questioning as a form of
resistance, but as a way forward to different possibilities, ways of being and doing, opportunities
to experiment even in the face of certain failure. Questioning opens up pathways of
transformation, change, reconsideration, and mysbecoming. To help us to do that, we need
teachers who can and will teach and live this mysbeing-in-mysbecoming well. We also need
administrators, parents, government representatives and business leaders who will honor and support this mysbecoming-in-mysbeing in their schools, promote it, and resist attempts by other entities to shut it down with demands based in unquestioned recognitions of success and failure, because teachers and students practicing mysпедагогія under the current standards and in most schools will be (and are) practicing it, in resistance to this culture of unquestioned authoritative recognition.

Teachers who practice mysпедагогія may see pathways of opportunity in mysinterpreting standards, concepts, rubrics, and roles. They may see that rigid standards, traditional concepts, and canonical texts are revitalized with flexibility, creativity, and originality when they mysbecome through mysunderstandings and mystellings. They may understand that just because something is recognized, does not mean it can’t be questioned, and just because a question isn’t asked, doesn’t mean it isn’t there. Mysпедагогues learn to question as way to know, rather than knowing as a reason to stop questioning—that is our valuable product and process. We may develop, deepen, and mysform our knowledge in this way, question what we know, to know in different, other, unrecognized ways, ways that may contradict our own, and then we may question those truths and understandings as well.

To practice mysпедагогія, we may take risks that include initiating and facilitating uncomfortable conversations, allowing students to explore, develop, and present understandings, texts, and concepts that we are not familiar with, skills that we may not be good at, positions that we do not like or agree with. We may see the value in failure, our own and our students, to encourage it in themselves and their students, and to find hope and understanding in their limitations, ignorance, failures and struggles. This is not about maintaining mastery and tyrannical authority; this is about honoring each other as limited, vulnerable, and struggling in
our own ways. When things are running well, we shake things up and risk failing once more. As Scott Adams once said about engineers, “Normal people... believe that if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it; engineers believe that if it ain’t broke, it doesn’t have enough features yet,” so may we apply this to our work as teachers, and our students’ work, encouraging them to break what isn’t broken, and rewarding them for doing so.

Myspedagogues may transgress and blur the lines of binaries and boundaries wherever they find them, and endorse their students to do the same. Binaries such as right and wrong, content and form, theory and practice, evil and good, true and false, school and the “real world.” They may deviate from accepted process and teleologies whenever they find it meaningful to do so, honoring other ways to perform and practice the process of writing, other ways that we might think of history beyond a chronological, teleological account, other ways that we might perform science beyond a singular method, other ways that a math problem might be solved beyond one approach, other ways a work of literature might become meaningful a thousand years after it was written, in a culture thousands of miles away. This is meaningful, thoughtful work that transforms, develops, complicates and revises our thinking every bit as much as any other model of progress.

Stepping back, and stepping to the side, are potentially as important as stepping forward. Silence may speak louder than words, something may be and not be simultaneously, and knowing more may not always mean you know more. We may never have enough time to teach our students as much as we would like, but that does not necessarily mean we do not have enough time to make our lessons meaningful. Rather than attempt to check all of the boxes or more boxes than anyone else, we may explore questions and concepts meaningfully, mindful that there will always be exploration and questioning to be done, even in the answers and knowledge
we already have. We may accept and find a sense of completion and fulfillment in not knowing, finding continuous inspiration (along with frustration, at times) in the perpetual “I don’t know” upon our lips and in our minds (Szymborska, 2007, p. 147). Similarly, we may find an inverse value in putting our ideas together in coherence with others, and realizing our semi-actual potential to achieve certain wonders together, even as we may also achieve other wonders surrounded by silence and the peace of our own being.

Just like their students, and yet different from their students, myspedagogues are learners and teachers. They contribute to and offer the understandings, concepts, texts, and work that was there before them, while at the same time encouraging their students to challenge and question these standards, ways of being, models of knowledge, and authoritative definitions. They honor disagreement with empathy, understanding with difference, and the responsibility that acknowledges the inverse dangerousness of any doing or being, regardless of objective or intent. They realize that there are no best practices, but that does not make all practices equivalent. We may step through that binary of the one and the all to practices that will always trouble us with questions and wonderings, “What if I did it otherwise? Another arrangement? Another order? Another approach?” They don’t ask these questions to get to a practice free of problems; every practice is problematic and they embrace this along with failure and struggle.

Teaching in this way may be beautiful, vital, frustrating and difficult at the same time. Teaching well is as difficult as rocket science, nanotechnology, robotics, quantum physics, genetic manipulation, and neurosurgery, after all. It is uncertain, unpredictable, uncomfortable, and unappreciated because its difficulty is that of the athlete who makes a feat of performance look surprisingly effortless, or the physicist who reduces volumes of intricately complex calculation into a seemingly simple formula. Despite efforts to standardize, patent, replicate,
profit from, and decide once and for all which approaches “work,” teaching has remained confoundingly and blessedly resilient to these attempts by everyone to solve its mystery, once and for all. Myspedagogues honor the mystery of teaching and learning, and find humility and possibility in their perpetual knowing that is also not-knowing, in their mysinterpretations, misunderstandings, mystellings, myspellings, and mysbecomings that lead us to different, challenging, and contradictory perspectives, insights, and secrets within and beyond what we always already know.

**What this means for Research**

Beyond this dissertation, I believe there is a need to provide a compelling alternative to standardized tests in the form that they are offered to us. Volumes of research and criticism against standardized testing have not succeeded in stemming the tide of application of these tests in their current form, so I am more hopeful that a different approach may effect change. To that end, I’m calling for research studies that put mysпедagogically designed assessments alongside the state standardized assessments currently in use. One way such a study could be carried out is by working with teachers who are willing to adopt such assessments and pedagogy in their classroom, either alongside recognition-based pedagogical methods, or adjacent to teachers who run with standard recognition-based methods. Ultimately, since the tests are required to be taken in most, if not all public schools, the test group of students will likely have to take both tests.

The standardized test examination analysis that I conducted for this dissertation made an initial step towards introducing and highlighting the differences between a mysпедagogical assessment and a traditional standardized assessment exclusively using a standardized test sample; these studies will take this further by putting a mysпедagogically designed test alongside the standardized tests used by the states and testing companies and analyze the differences in their
design, outcomes, types of thinking and learning valued and recognized by each type of test. Given the possibilities for alternative approaches to standards and waivers opened up by the newest revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as “Every Student Succeeds,” passed in 2015 under the Obama administration to states (Klein, 2016), there is now room to consider and implement alternatives to previous and existing exams and standards.

A portion of this dissertation was devoted to the analysis of current pedagogical practices and the elements and aspects within them that are aligned with a myspedagogical approach to teaching in a secondary literacy classroom. There is a need to explore current practices further in other classrooms through observation and cataloguing of practices, and the elements within them that may be aligned with myspedagogical and mystheoretical concepts. There is also an opportunity to analyze which elements and practices are opposed to or depart from a myspedagogical approach, and how they may be changed to better align with myspedagogical concepts and approaches. In addition, there is an opportunity to explore new and different secondary literacy education practices that are designed from the start specifically with myspedagogical concepts and approaches in mind, and how they may work in the classroom when put into practice.

Since this dissertation was focused on the secondary literacy classroom, in the preparation of teachers for teaching in one, as well as the practices actually carried out by teachers in such a classroom, there is room to also explore other disciplines of secondary teaching, and how myspedagogical concepts may be applied to social studies, art, music, science, math, and others. Likewise, within the discipline of literacy and language arts, there is an opportunity to apply myspedagogical concepts and practices in college, middle school, elementary school, and pre-k programs and settings and analyze the ways in which these
applications may differ from secondary education classrooms, and how they inform each other across grade levels.

Along with these disciplinary crossings, there is an opportunity to pursue ways to restructure and transgress traditional barriers and divisions between students through pedagogical practice, such as activities which involve different tracking levels of students. This can occur in an inclusion classroom, but if teachers are willing to work together across tracking divisions, there may be pedagogical possibilities for assignments and activities that incorporate and bring together students from different levels in meaningful participation and dialogue with each other. Furthermore, these possibilities extend beyond grade level and school location with current technologies available to us that allow students to participate in the same activities from different locations. This analysis could explore, observe, and analyze what happens when different levels of tracked students, different grade levels of students, and students from different locations come together in coherence to participate in academic activities.

Ultimately, I see all of the possible explorations and analyses as facilitating alternatives to pedagogical praxis within education. These will offer more diversity of effective approaches, more ways to mys-re-cognize education and pedagogy, and offer the possibility of assessment and learning that moves our current application of standardization from sameness to fairness through options and differentiation. This research path is about practices and approaches that we may already have, that we may think about and do differently, about different and new practices and ways of thinking we have not considered or pursued before, and about the possibilities we may unlock by mysbecoming and mysrecognizing ourselves, our students, and our pedagogy.
29. The tone of this passage is one of
   a. childish petulance
   b. cynical despair
   c. wistful condescension
   d. ironic wisdom
   e. unflappable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing.
   a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
   b. annoyance at people not believing her
   c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
   d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
   e. awareness of the teacher's obliqueness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
   a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
   b. the tin Band-Aid box
   c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
   d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
   e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny one in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
   a. revert to infancy
   b. approach death
   c. become invisible

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT
   a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life
   b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day
   c. it portrays the repetitiveness of life
   d. it characterizes Rachel as childish
   e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
   a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
   b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age
   c. the general population
   d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
   e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes
   a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
   b. Rachel's dislike of school
   c. an adult's cruelty
   d. the teacher's rejection
   e. the teacher's desire to assert authority

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
   a. they add to the vividness of the passage
   b. they symbolize the youthful diction of an eleven-year-old
   c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
   d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
   e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
   a. it creates complexity in the character of Rachel
   b. it illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
   c. it depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old
   d. it shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
   e. it gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT
   a. expression of poignant hyperbole
   b. desire for the wisdom of adults
   c. a cry for external help
   d. example of figurative exaggeration
   e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
   a. immature and childish
   b. extroverted and dignified
   c. intelligent but juvenile
   d. wise but youthful
   e. insightful but insensitive

40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 15-16) is used to depict
   a. a distorted perspective
   b. naive thought
   c. an appreciation of nature
   d. an unexpected comprehension
   e. a complex and refined imagination

41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
   a. to prove that Rachel is immature and basing life experiences on more numbers
   b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
   c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
   d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
   e. as a means of escaping her present situation
29. The tone of this passage is one of
   a. childish petulance
   b. cynical despair
   c. wistful condescension
   d. ironic wisdom
   e. unfathomable grief
30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing?
   a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
   b. annoyance at people not believing her
   c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
   d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
   e. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness
31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
   a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
   b. the tin Band-Aid box
   c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
   d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
   e. the birthday cake Mama is making

2. The "tiny c in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
   a. revert to infancy
   b. approach death
   c. become invisible
   i. only
   b. II only
   c. I and II only
   d. I, II, and III only
   e. 1, II, and III

3. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT
   a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life
   b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day
   c. it portrays the repetitiveness of life
   d. it characterizes Rachel as childish
   e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

4. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
   a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
   b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age
   c. the general population
   d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
   e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes
   a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
   b. Rachel's dislike of school
   c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays
   d. ironic cruelty
   e. adult justice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
   a. they add to the vividness of the passage
   b. they symbolize the youthful diction of an eleven-year-old
   c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
   d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
   e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
   a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
   b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
   c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old
   d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
   e. gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT
   a. expression of poignant hyperbole
   b. desire for the wisdom of adults
   c. a cry for external help
   d. example of juvenile exaggeration
   e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
   a. immature and childish
   b. extroverted but dignified
   c. intelligent but juvenile
   d. wise but youthful
   e. insightful but insensitive

40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 15-16) is used to depict
   a. a distorted perspective
   b. a naive thought
   c. an appreciation of nature
   d. an unexpected comprehension
   e. a complex and refined imagination

41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
   a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
   b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
   c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
   d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
   e. a means of escaping her present situation
The image that best symbolizes Rachel is the little wooden dolls that fit inside each other. Rachel describes herself as being not only 11, but every age before 11. In the introductory paragraph, Rachel establishes that she still is all of the ages before eleven, "underneath the year that makes [her] eleven" (Line 17). She also talks of moments where she does not act her age; sometimes you're 10, or 3, or 5.

Naive goodness: Rachel describes growing up to be "like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next," therefore making answer C correct (Line 16-17).

The incident with the ugly red sweater (while it may symbolize ironic cruelty) could symbolize adult justice. In the passage, Rachel refers to the adult status of Mrs. Price: "Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not" (Line 46). Mrs. Price continually refuses to believe Rachel because she believes herself to be correct. By forcing Rachel to wear the sweater despite her denial, Mrs. Price is enforcing her sense of "adult justice" over Rachel.
29. The tone of this passage is one of:
   a. childish petulance  
   b. cynical despair  
   c. wistful condescension  
   d. ironic wisdom  
   e. unfathomable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing:
   a. anger at being given a dirty sweater  
   b. annoyance at people not believing her  
   c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her  
   d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible  
   e. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is:
   a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese  
   b. the tin Band-Aid box  
   c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside another  
   d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing  
   e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny o in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to:
   I. revert to infancy  
   II. approach death  
   III. become invisible  
   a. I only  
   b. II only  
   c. III only  
   d. I, II, and III  

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life  
   b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day  
   c. it portrays the repetitiveness of life  
   d. it characterizes Rachel as childish  
   e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
   a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays  
   b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age  
   c. the general population  
   d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life  
   e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes:
   a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel  
   b. Rachell's dislike of school  
   c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays  
   d. ironic cruelty  
   e. adult injustice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT:
   a. they add to the vividness of the passage  
   b. they symbolize the youthful diction of an eleven-year-old  
   c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker  
   d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven  
   e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel  
   b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful  
   c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old  
   d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and nature thoughts  
   e. gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. expression of poignant hyperbole  
   b. desire for the wisdom of adults  
   c. a cry for external help  
   d. example of juvenile exaggeration  
   e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
   a. immature and childish  
   b. introverted but dignified  
   c. intelligent but juvenile  
   d. wise but youthful  
   e. insightful but insensitive

40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 35-36) is used to depict:
   a. a distorted perspective  
   b. naive thought  
   c. an appreciation of nature  
   d. an unexpected comprehension  
   e. a complex and refined imagination

41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
   a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers  
   b. to show that Rachel is nature in understanding that age is only a number  
   c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other  
   d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories  
   e. a means of escaping her present situation

Using process of elimination, we know that this sentence talks about repetition, which covers B & C. This observation shows that she has insight into some of life's realities, which covers A & E.
The first and second choices are both explicitly supported with textual evidence. In one, she says, "I wish I was one," referencing infancy. In another, she implies a desire of invisibility by expressing she "would say so," if she had the sweater. Since that announcement would draw attention to her, she avoids it, thusly proving a desire of invisibility. Death, however, is near explicitly stated. She expresses wanting to be "one-hundred and two," for she needed the wisdom to know how to deal with her tender. However, this is an old caye, not finite.
29. The tone of this passage is one of
a. childish petulance
b. cynical despair
c. wishful condensation
d. unfathomable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing:
a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
b. annoyance at people not believing her
c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
e. awareness of the teacher's chilblains

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is:
a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
b. the tin Band-Aid box
c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny one in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
a. revert to infancy
b. approach death
b. become invisible
c. only I and II
b. I and III only
c. I, II, and III

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT:
a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life
b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day
c. it portrays the repetitiveness of life
d. it characterizes Rachel as childish
e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
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c. the general population
d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes:
a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
b. Rachel's dislike of school
c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays
d. ironic cruelty
e. adult justice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT:
a. they add to the vividness of the passage
b. they symbolize the youthfulness of an eleven-year-old
c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
e. they link certain ages to certain actions

The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT:
a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old
d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
e. gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT:
a. expression of poignant hyperbole
b. desire for the wisdom of adults
c. a cry for external help
d. example of juvenile exaggeration
e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
a. immature and childish
b. exuberant and intelligent
b. intelligent but juvenile
c. wise but youthful
d. insightful and insightful

The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 9-10) is used to depict:
a. a distorted perspective
b. naive thought
c. an appreciation of nature
d. an unexpected comprehension
b. a complex and refined imagination

44. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
e. a means of escaping her present situation
29. The tone of this passage is one of
a. childish petulance
b. cynical despair
- c. wistful condescension
d. ironic wisdom
- e. unfathomable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing?
- a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
- b. annoyance at people not believing her
- c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
- d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
- e. awareness of the teacher's obliqueness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
- a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
- b. the tin Band-Aid box
- c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
- d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
- e. the birthday cake Mama is making

12. The "tiny o in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
I. revert to infancy
II. approach death
III. become invisible
- a. I only
- b. II only
- c. I and II only
- d. I and III only
- e. I, II, and III

3. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following except
- a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life
- b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day
- c. it portrays the repetitiveness of life
- d. it characterizes Rachel as childish
- e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

4. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
- a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
- b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age
- c. the general population
- d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
- e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes
- a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
- b. Rachel's dislike of school
- c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays
- d. ironic cruelty
- e. adult justice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
- a. they add to the vividness of the passage
- b. they symbolize the youthful diction of an eleven-year-old
- c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
- d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
- e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
- a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
- b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
- c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old
- d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
- e. gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT
- a. expression of poignant hyperbole
- b. desire for the wisdom of adults
- c. a cry for external help
- d. example of juvenile exaggeration
- e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
- a. immature and childish
- b. introverted and dignified
- c. intelligent but juvenile
- d. wise but youthful
- e. insightful but insensitive

40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 15-16) is used to depict
- a. a distorted perspective
- b. naive thought
- c. an appreciation of nature
- d. an unexpected comprehension
- e. a complex and refined imagination

41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
- a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
- b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
- c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
- d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
- e. a means of escaping her present situation

For 33, E could easily be the answer. Because she is saying that there isn't a difference between each day, she obviously does not observe the special differences between each day.
36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
a. they add to the vividness of the passage
b. they symbolize the youthful diction of an eleven-year-old
c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
d. they portray the speaker’s satisfaction at being eleven
e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
E. a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old

Answer E is incorrect because the tone of the passage is sad and gratitude.

d. shows the contrast of Rachel’s childish actions and mature thoughts

38. The quotation “I wish I was one hundred and two” expresses all of the following EXCEPT
E. a. expression of poignant hyperbole
b. desire for the wisdom of adults
c. a cry for external help
d. example of juvenile exaggeration
e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
E. a. immature and childish
b. extroverted but dignified
d. intelligent but juvenile
b. wise but youthful
e. insightful but insensitive

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E. a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
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d. to depict Rachel’s desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
e. a means of escaping her present situation

I chose answer E because her making the comparison between immature objects and humans on a deep level shows her complex and refined ability to understand things. She can make the connection between things that seem to be completely unrelated, which is complex & refined.
29. The tone of this passage is one of
   a. childish petulance
   b. cynical despair
   c. wishful condensation
   d. ironic wisdom
   e. unfathomable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing?
   a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
   b. annoyance at people not believing her
discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
e. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
f. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
   a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
   b. the tin Band-Aid box
c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny dot in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
   I. revert to infancy
   II. approach death
   III. become invisible
   a. I only
   b. II only
   c. I and II only
d. I and III only
   e. I, II, and III

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT
   a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life
   b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day
c. it portrays the repetitiveness of life
d. it characterizes Rachel as childish
e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
   a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
   b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age
c. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
d. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes
   a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
   b. Rachel's dislike of school
c. the teacher's dislike of birthdays
d. rude cruelty
e. adult injustice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
   a. they add to the vividness of the passage
   b. they symbolize the youthful diction of an eleven-year-old
c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
   a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
   b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old
   d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
   e. gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT
   a. expression of poignant sentiment
   b. desire for the wisdom of adults
c. a cry for external help
d. example of juvenile exaggeration
e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
   a. immature and childish
   b. extroverted but dignified
   c. intelligent but juvenile
d. wise but youthful
e. insightful but insensitive

40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 15-16) is used to depict
   a. a distorted perspective
   b. naive thought
c. an appreciation of nature
da. an unexpected comprehension
e. a complex and refined imagination

41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
   a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
   b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
e. a means of escaping her present situation

Answer C is correct because all of the others (A, B, D, E) wrongly apply. Answer A is incorrect because Rachel is using an exaggeration that is advanced for her age as well as adding the wisdom of elders which eliminates Answer B. Answer D is similar to Answer A in that it is also an exaggeration and so Rachel uses the exaggeration in the quotation, it cannot be correct. Also, she expresses her wish in the passage on her tone so it is unhappy with her birthday. There is nothing in the passage that supports Answer C with textual evidence. Even though it could be assumed which is why C is the correct answer.
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28. The tone of this passage is one of
a. childish petulance
b. cynical despair
c. wishful condensation
d. ironic wisdom
e. unfashionable grief

29. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing?
- a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
- b. annoyance at people not believing her
- c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
- d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
- e. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
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- d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
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32. The "tiny o in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
- I. revert to infancy
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- III. become invisible
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- b. II only
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- d. it characterizes Rachel as childish
- e. it characterizes Rachel as observant

34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that they don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
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- b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age
- c. the general population
- d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
- e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes
- a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
- b. Rachel's dislike of school
- c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays
- d. a new maturity
- e. adult justice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
- a. they symbolize the youthfulness of an eleven-year-old
- b. they symbolize Rachel's intelligent speech
- c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
- d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
- e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
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- c. intelligent but juvenile
- d. wise but youthful
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40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 15-16) is used to depict
- a. a distorted perspective
- b. naive thought
- c. an appreciation of nature
- d. an unexpected comprehension
- e. a complex and refined imagination

41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
- a. to prove that Rachel is immature and basing life experiences on mere numbers
- b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
- c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
- d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
- e. a means of escaping her present situation
A. When Rachel uses the words "not mine, not mine, not mine" (46) when the teacher insists the red sweater is hers, she is displaying discomfort over the unwanted attention. When the sweater is placed on her desk, Rachel pushes it as far from her as possible hoping to separate herself from the attention drawing sweater. Later, she emphasizes that the teacher berated her "in front of everybody" and then she cried "in front of everybody." The previous sentence "I wish I was invisible" shows Rachel is embarrassed and would rather avoid the attention brought by the red sweater.

B. Question 41's answer should be C. Many of her metaphors suggest this. Trees and onions grow in rings where each new ring grows off of old rings. She also acknowledges that, as an adult, you can lean on the experiences and emotions of your young years but as you can't be 102 or an adult and lean on experiences or emotions you haven't felt yet.
The tone of the passage is one of ironic wisdom. D. When Mrs. Breet confronts Rachel about the sweater and insists Rachel takes it, Rachel responds, "Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not." Rachel points out she, the child, is in the right while the adult is stubbornly in the wrong. This is ironic as conventional wisdom suggests adults are wiser and right than children.
The correct answer to question 35 is ironic.

Firstly, Mrs. Price forces Rachel to take the sweater, claiming it belongs to Rachel. Rachel justifies Mrs. Price's actions, "Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not." Later, Mrs. Price orders Rachel to put on the sweater even though it does not belong to Rachel. Mrs. Price's irony to Rachel demonstrates her treatment and Rachel's treatment, she is in the wrong.

For question 34, Rachel can easily be referring to the general populace. Firstly, "they" is a very general pronoun and indicates a wider group of people. Secondly, the general population is comprised of "people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced," suggesting that it should not matter which answer is chosen.

This is the one on why my answer is right.
39) The answers "intelligent but juvenile" and "wise but youthful" have the same connotations. Depending on how the reader interprets the passage, the word "juvenile" might suit Rachel better than "youthful." "Youthful" gives a happier, more frame of mind, whereas juvenile has a different connotation.
29. The tone of this passage is one of
   a. childish petulance
   b. cynical despair
   c. wistful condescension
   d. ironic wisdom
   e. unfathomable grief
   
30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing
   a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
   b. annoyance at people not believing her
c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
   e. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
   a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
   b. the tin Band-Aid box
   c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
   e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny pin in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
   I. revert to infancy
   II. approach death
   III. become invisible
   a. I only
   b. II only
   c. I and II only
   d. I and III only
   e. II, I, and III

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT
   a. it portrays Rachel's understanding of life
   b. it characterizes birthdays to be just another day
   c. it characterizes Rachel as childish
   d. it characterizes Rachel as observant

34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
   a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
   b. elders who celebrate the coming of a new age
   c. the general population
   d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
   e. people who forget that a birthday is also a celebration of the years that a person has already experienced

35. The incident of the ugly red sweater symbolizes
   a. the teacher's dislike of Rachel
   b. Rachel's dislike of school
   c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays
d. ironic cruelty
   e. adult justice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
   a. they add to the vividness of the passage
   b. they symbolize the youthful fiction of an eleven-year-old
c. they portray the intelligence of the speaker
d. they portray the speaker's satisfaction at being eleven
e. they link certain ages to certain actions

37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
   a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
   b. illustrates the sadness of Rachel on a day that is usually joyful
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   d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
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38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT
   a. expression of poignant hyperbole
   b. desire for the wisdom of adults
   c. a cry for external help
   d. example of juvenile exaggeration
   e. dissatisfaction with her birthday

39. How could Rachel be characterized?
   a. immature and childish
   b. extroverted but dignified
   c. intelligent but juvenile
d. wise but youthful
   e. insightful but insensitive

40. The simile "kind of like an onion or the rings inside a tree" (lines 15–16) is used to depict
   a. a distorted perspective
   b. naive thought
   c. an appreciation of nature
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41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
   a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
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d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
   e. a means of escaping her present situation
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29. The tone of this passage is one of
   a. childish petulance
   b. cynical despair
   c. wistful condescension
   d. ironic wisdom
   e. unfashionable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing?
   a. anger at being given a dirty sweater
   b. annoyance at people not believing her
   c. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
   d. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
   e. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
   a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
   b. the tin Band-Aid box
   c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
   d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
   e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny one in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
   I. revert to infancy
   II. approach death
   III. become invisible
   a. I only
   b. II only
   c. I and II only
   d. I and III only
   e. I, II, and III

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT
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34. In line 1, Rachel points out that there is something that "they" don't understand. Who is "they" referring to?
   a. other children who feel it is necessary to celebrate birthdays
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   d. mothers and fathers who feel that birthdays are simply a passage into a new year of life
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   a. Rachel's dislike of school
   b. Rachel's dislike of Rachel
   c. Rachel's dislike of birthdays
   d. ironic cruelty
   e. adult justice

36. All of the following are effects produced by the imagery in the passage EXCEPT
   a. they add to the vividness of the passage
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37. The irony in the short story does all of the following EXCEPT
   a. creates complexity in the character of Rachel
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   c. depicts Rachel as an intelligent eleven-year-old
   d. shows the contrast of Rachel's childish actions and mature thoughts
   e. gives the passage a sarcastic tone

38. The quotation "I wish I was one hundred and two" expresses all of the following EXCEPT
   a. expression of poignant hyperbole
   b. desire for the wisdom of adults
   c. cry for external help
   d. example of juvenile exaggeration
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39. How could Rachel be characterized?
   a. immature and childish
   b. extroverted but dignified
   c. intelligent but juvenile
   d. wise but youthful
   e. insightful but insensitive

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41. What is the author's intent in repeating numbers throughout the piece?
   a. to prove that Rachel is immature and bases life experiences on mere numbers
   b. to show that Rachel is mature in understanding that age is only a number
   c. to exemplify that throughout one's life, experiences build upon each other
   d. to depict Rachel's desperate wish to rid herself of childhood memories
   e. a means of escaping her present situation
29. The tone of this passage is one of
a. childish petulance
b. cynical despair
C. wistful condescension
D. ironic wisdom
E. unfathomable grief

30. The repetition of lines such as "not mine, not mine, not mine," and other expressions of denial illustrate which of the following emotions Rachel is experiencing?
A. anger at being given a dirty sweater
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C. discomfort because unwanted attention is being drawn to her
D. eagerness to be heard in any way possible
E. awareness of the teacher's obliviousness

31. The image that best symbolizes Rachel is
a. the sweater that smells like cottage cheese
b. the tin Band-Aid box
c. the little wooden dolls that fit inside one another
d. the runaway balloon that is disappearing
e. the birthday cake Mama is making

32. The "tiny o in the sky" represents Rachel's desire to
I. revert to infancy
II. approach death
III. become invisible
A. I only
B. II only
C. I and II only
D. I, II, and III
E. not directly reference image, so I would not choose

33. The statement in lines 5 and 6, "You open your eyes and they only everything's just like yesterday, only it's today," achieves all of the following EXCEPT
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e. a means of escaping her present situation
Answer E is correct because all of the other answers are incorrect. A is incorrect because Rachel's characterization includes that of gifted intelligence for being eleven. B is incorrect because the story depicts Rachel as disheartened by her birthday experiences. C is incorrect because it is similar to A; Rachel's complexity or intelligence is not ironic. D is incorrect because Rachel's mentality is advanced while her physicality is that of an eleven year old. Therefore, Answer E is correct by means of process of elimination.
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Lesson Plan for 12/14: AP Test Prep
Lochran Fallon

In this class, you have completed and practiced analyzing films and text through theoretical lenses, such as psychoanalysis, archetypal theory, and queer theory, among others. There are literally dozens of critical lenses and theories of analysis through which you can interpret and understand a text. You have also had lively discussions and written explorations from a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, reflecting your own feelings, opinions, and understandings of the texts you’ve read, often with textual support to back up your claims. In all of these ways, one thing has become clear: there are many equally valid ways to analyze and critically interpret the meanings and significance of a text, all of which provide rich perspectives and understandings about what may be found within the words of the text.

By contrast, the College Board testmakers do not endorse finding multiple meanings in a text. Instead, they believe there is a single “best” answer to each of the questions they will put to you about a particular passage, according to their test design.

As teachers, we face a dilemma: On one hand, we are tasked with preparing you so that you may succeed on these tests. On the other, we are tasked with preparing you for college where a deeper, multifaceted critical analysis that draws on many theoretical lenses and honors each of those for the particular understandings they illuminate is generally valued. F. Scott Fitzgerald (author of The Great Gatsby) once said, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” We’re going to practice doing that today.

First, we’re going to engage in some practice to help you “game” the “gamemakers.” You will practice by reading and answering questions about a prose passage (curates). On your own, select one or more answers that appear to be potentially “correct.” Then, in pairs, you will be given the correct answer to one of the questions, and then write a paragraph explaining why the correct answer is correct, using textual evidence.

Next, I have two questions for each of you: 1) How many of you chose a different answer than (or in addition to) the “best” answer (according to the testmakers)? 2) How many of you could support your choice with literary critical theory, textual evidence, or other resources at your disposal? (this is one way to “misrecognize” a text)

Now, we’re going to challenge that “best” answer and honor other answers. Go back to all of the answers you originally selected and provide a brief explanation of why the answer(s) you selected are valid in a critical way. You are welcome to select additional answers, or even to write in answers that are not in the list of answers provided. You are free to draw on what you know about literary critical theory, textual evidence, or other resources at your disposal to support your selections and additions, to honor each of them for what they reveal about the text.
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