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A historical examination of the tradition of experience in the teaching of literature in English education

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A HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF THE TRADITION OF
EXPERIENCE IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

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For my grandmothers,
Ethel Lee and Mary Elizabeth,
you taught my parents the value of education,
and that has made all the difference in my world

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ABSTRACT

By examining major documents for tensions regarding the teaching of literature in the field of secondary English education, this dissertation addressed the following questions: (1) What assumptions about learning and knowledge helped to shape the field? (2) To what extent does the field demonstrate consistency or change in its discourse defined-positions? and (3) How might current conversations in the field fit within a larger historical, social, and political context, thus equipping English educators to better articulate and situate their own pedagogical beliefs?

Stephen Toulmin's (1958) model of an argument served as a means of analyzing the field's ongoing conversation about the teaching of literature, as revealed in its central documents and publications. The study examined these works, which were generally offered in response to texts from outside of the field, during three periods throughout the history of English education as a profession: the inaugural era of the field, the social reform era, and the era of accountability. Analyses, which focused on asserted claims and the data and warrants supporting them, demonstrated that the field has remained relatively consistent in its claims about the purposes and methodologies for the teaching of literature, particularly with its emphasis on *experience*, a concept commonly associated with the progressive movement in education.

This study, which provides insight into the shared values among English education, serves as a continuation of the conversation in the field. It highlights the relevance of key works from the field and of the voices of major historical figures as well as of current participants, and it provides a historical lens for examining contemporary issues in English education. In doing so, it promotes a synonymous, rather than dichotomous, relationship between tradition and reform. Throughout history, when English educators have felt outward pressure to redefine their

field, they have turned to the progressive notion of experience as their guiding tradition. Despite the connotations usually associated with traditional education, this analysis demonstrates that reform or progress—typically juxtaposed against tradition—*is* the tradition for the field of English education.

Reference

Toulmin, S. E. (1958). *The uses of argument*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

CHAPTER 1

THE ONGOING CONVERSATION SURROUNDING LITERATURE IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

As we think about curriculum as it plays itself out across courses and years, the relationships among such conversations become increasingly important.

Arthur N. Applebee, *Curriculum as Conversation*, 1996

The teaching of literature has raised issues for secondary English teachers throughout the century-long history of English education as a profession in the United States. The *Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies*, published in 1892, had profound influence on education and the secondary English curriculum that would continue into the twenty-first century. The committee report called for students to read “good literature” (p. 86) and to be provided with “good models” (p. 87), though many issues were left unspecified: What constitutes “good,” in terms of literature selection? What function should literature serve in the English curriculum? How should it be presented? Through the years, English educators have grappled with the issue of literature instruction at the secondary level. Indeed, concerns about the purposes, methods, and selections of literature led to the formation of the field of English education as one distinct from the discipline of English at the college level. From the time English educators joined together in 1911 to form the National Council of Teachers of English—a move that signals the formal birth of English education as a profession—the teaching of literature has been a source of tension within the field.

I recall my own first encounter, as a public school teacher in Mississippi, with the tensions that surround literature instruction. I entered the profession full of ideas about what novels I would teach first, drawing from my college courses in young adult literature, African American literature, and contemporary female writers. However, in my first days at work, the

English department chairperson handed me “the list” for the English classes at our school. It identified the novels I would teach and the sequence in which they would be taught in each of my courses. None of these titles was on my own personal list of ideas for my students. As a novice teacher, I complied with the prescribed list of novels, though few of the literary works engaged my students. My school allowed me freedom in all other selections of literature—short stories, poetry, and nonfiction selections were up to me—and from these, my students and I entered into lively discussions of the themes, issues, and new ideas emerging from our reading. Nevertheless, when we turned our attention to the study of a novel—one that was chosen without any consideration to the relevance it held to students’ lives and experiences—my students and I were both aware of the disconnect between the curriculum and the all-too-infrequent moments of authentic discussion that surrounded the study of these novels. Once, halfway through the study of Charles Dickens’s (1859) *A Tale of Two Cities*, one of my strongest students told me he would prefer that I “beat him with a stick” rather than make him keep reading the book. The novels on the list for my senior English class were selected in order to present a historical survey of the British literary tradition, but I knew that my presentation of literature as a record of historical events was preventing active literary engagement.

Understanding that the study of literature could and should do more for my students, I began teaching thematically, using Earnest Gaines’s (1983) *A Gathering of Old Men* as my first radical departure from “the list.” My students, who were in their last semester of high school, eagerly embraced the novel, drawing connections between its south Louisiana setting and the racial and socio-economic tensions they experienced in their own lives in our Mississippi community, where there was a sharp divide between the lower-income families who had been in the area for generations and the more affluent, upper-middle class families who had moved into the area as the nearby college-town expanded. The students’ responses to the novel were

passionate, more engaged and reflective than any they had expressed all year. However, at the conclusion of our study of this novel, an administrator questioned my decision to present “less valuable works of literature.” I reflected on the quality of students’ interactions with one another as they discussed this novel, thought of the new understandings students expressed about covert oppression of those who are different, and observed that a number of students voluntarily went on to read other works by this author. How could this novel be “less valuable” if it were the instrument for a deepening of understanding and literary experience among my students?

In spite of my clear understanding of the value this novel held for my students, I could not articulate my position to my administrator. I was unable to explain that my purposes for literature study went beyond presenting students with a rigid chronology of canonized works. I knew that my students gained more from this novel than they had from my disconnected approach to works that failed to speak to or build upon their own life experiences, but I still doubted my choice in the face of this challenge. At the time, as a novice teacher of high school English, I did not realize I had entered into a longstanding, ongoing debate over the teaching of literature, a debate which confronted my teacher-ancestors a hundred years earlier.

As I began to study my profession more deeply, exploring the history of English education for the first time, I learned that my struggle with this issue was not unique. Indeed, the teaching of literature—issues surrounding the aims of literature instruction, the methods of teaching literature, and the types of literary works to be studied—is perhaps the longest-running topic of conversation in the field, and my own experience when challenged by my administrator served as my entrée into the conversation. Kenneth Burke (1974) spoke of human interactions as ongoing conversations at a dinner party:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the

discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that have gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (pp. 110 – 111)

Through studying the history of the field of English education as a profession, I realized that I had stepped into the “parlor” of which Burke spoke. For more than a century, English educators have discussed issues of secondary literary instruction, with the conversation centering around three fundamental questions: What is the purpose of reading and studying literature? What approaches best accomplish these purposes? Then, in light of the responses to the first two questions, what literature is most appropriate for study? As I became aware that generations of English teachers before me had confronted the same issues and questions with which I had grappled, the concept of conversation became important to my studies of English education.

Many have used, and are using, the term “conversation” to refer to written texts that comprise an ongoing dialogue on a topic or issue in a particular field. An important piece using this analogy was written by Kenneth Bruffee (1984), who, following Richard Rorty (1979), spoke of the discourse of a disciplinary community as a “conversation within a community of knowledgeable peers,” and, also following Rorty, pointed out that when the discourse is in a “normal” state, community members tend to share assumptions and values—there tends to be consensus about “what counts as a question.” Bruffee argued that “knowledge is the product of human beings in a state of continual negotiation of conversation” (pp. 646-647).

Discourse communities engage in conversation through the use of their own shared understandings and values, and to enter into the conversation, one must learn the nature of conversation within that community. Becher (1989), among others, has shown how differently

written “conversation” is conducted in different disciplines. Porter (1986) has pointed out that a discourse community, or a group bound by shared values and purposes, does not always reflect internal consensus. Of this he said, “A discourse community may have a well established *ethos*; or it may have competing factions and indefinite boundaries” (p. 39). I knew that deeply embedded assumptions about learning, knowledge, and the purposes of literacy lie at the heart of the issues surrounding literature instruction, and I wondered if, throughout history of the profession, English educators held shared or contradictory beliefs about these issues. Understanding this, I hoped, would enable me to articulate better my own positions, both as a teacher of literature and as a teacher educator entrusted with the preparation of other teachers. Bruffee (1984) advised that, unless we “understand how knowledge is established and maintained” (p. 640) within a discourse community, we cannot fully understand the values of that community.

Arthur Applebee’s (1974) *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* is a significant contribution to the historical record of English education as a profession, often appearing as a required reading in undergraduate and graduate studies in English education. This work is widely considered an authoritative history of the field, and it served as early inspiration for the study reported here. In it, Applebee claimed that the field of English education has been, throughout its history, characterized by periods of traditional approaches to teaching followed by periods of reform. In education, *tradition* is generally associated with a curriculum of relatively static bodies of content knowledge as well as teacher-centric instructional approaches (Kohn, 1999; Tanner & Tanner, 1990), and reform movements, which represent change, are often juxtaposed against this kind of tradition. Applebee employed these notions of tradition and reform, and in doing so, drew connections between reform in English education and educational approaches often associated with progressive education. Indeed, in *Tradition and Reform in the*

Teaching of English, reform and progressivism are used, at times, interchangeably, and the progressive movement in education is linked to the formation of English education as a profession. Applebee asserted that English education has from its beginning—which emerged out of the field’s rejection of uniform college entrance examinations—been a leader “in the reform of school programs” (p. ix), and that English educators’ resistance was a “part of the first wave of the progressive movement in education” (p. ix).

Applebee did not identify English education, or English educators, as “progressive,” though he highlighted the influence of the movement on the field. He asserted that that many English educators “thought of their teaching as progressive, though not of themselves as Progressives. Yet they had the rhetoric and the enthusiasm, and moved in many of the same directions” (p. 79). He defined these “directions” as an understanding of *experience*, often associated with the themes of progressive theorists (e.g., Addams, 1981/1910, 1920; Dewey, 1990/1900, 1990/1902, 1909; Young, 1902, 1903, 1906) as a vital facet of the educational process. In his historical account of the field, Applebee acknowledged that the field “assimilated and redefined” pedagogical movements, and that their use of the progressive concept of experience was fluid, changing from one context to another. However, he asserted that for English education and particularly for the teaching of literature, experience is related to an understanding of human experience: “In literary studies, that [experience] metaphor was realized first as a simple vicarious experience through literature, then gradually broadened to literature as ‘exploration’—exploration of self, of society, of the past and present world” (p. 80). He concluded that the field’s adoption of experience provided an “easy link” (p. 112) to ideologies commonly associated with progressive education, and that these made “solid and continuing contributions to the teaching of literature” (p. 174), thereby making his own link between the field and the reform movement. In this way, Applebee asserts that the founding of

the field serves as the first point of reform, but that the history of English education reflects a backwards and forwards movement from periods of reform to periods of tradition.

My own studies of the field's history, beginning with the 1911 founding of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)—the leading professional organization for secondary English teachers in the United States—led me to question Applebee's portrayal of a dichotomous relationship between tradition and reform in the teaching of English. I became interested in the notions of tradition and reform and how they interrelate in educational history, and how the formation of English education during a period of reform in American history might have shaped the field, and perhaps even its ethos. In exploring the ideas put forth by Applebee, I learned that NCTE held its inaugural meeting in Chicago, a location of much significance in the history of progressive education in the United States. Progressive educators including John Dewey (1890/1900, 1900/1902, 1909), Jane Addams (1881/1910, 1920), and Ella Flagg Young (1902, 1903, 1906) put their theories about learning and knowledge into practice in this city, which served as the birthplace for English education. Additionally, Ella Flagg Young served as the keynote speaker at the opening banquet of NCTE's inaugural gathering, demonstrating again the strong connection between the birth of this field and the reform movement. Since educational reform was a significant facet of the progressive movement and was also a period of importance in Applebee's argument, I wondered what role this particular reform movement might have in the historical narrative of the field.

Purpose of the Study

My growing awareness of English education as a discourse community of shared values led me to reflect on the relationship these values might have to the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature. As Porter (1986) has said, members of a discourse community are bound to tradition:

“Acceptability” includes, but goes well beyond, adherence to formal conventions. It includes choosing the “right” topic, applying the appropriate critical methodology, adhering to standards for evidence and validity, and in general adopting the community’s discourse values—and of course borrowing the appropriate traces. (p. 43)

In this dissertation study, my focus is on the “appropriate traces” and “discourse values” in English education and their relationship to critical periods of tradition and reform in the field. A detailed examination of major texts that comprise the conversation of the field should tell much about what Gee (1989b) has called “discourse-defined positions” (p. 19). By examining the themes or positions as they are present in the conversation surrounding English education, I have sought to provide currently practicing English educators insight to the teaching of literature at the secondary level.

In this way, this dissertation provides another interpretation of English education, specifically with regards to literature instruction. Many scholars engaged in historical work believe the past should be studied for the sake of the past, as illustrated by Dougherty’s (2000) assertion that educational history is “a central place for scholarship on the education of people in distant times and faraway places” (p. 17). To avoid becoming a “presentist,” the historian must not explore the connection of the past to the present and the future. Drawing inspiration from the challenges I faced as a teacher of English, and those I continue to face as a teacher-educator, it is my intent, however, to make these very connections. Unlike Dougherty, I believe educational history contributes more than a space for the discussion of schooling practices “in distant and faraway places.” Indeed, I concur with Benjamin (1968) who has gone so far as to suggest that history does not even become “History” or worthy of notation until it finds some relevance in the present:

But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops

telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. (p. 263)

Through this, Benjamin embraced the interconnection between past and present, seeing the latter as vital to the significance of the historical event. This understanding of historical work allows us to interrogate problems of the now through “listening to and contending with the wisdom of the past” (Jacobitti, 2000, p. 32), which was my intent with this dissertation.

Addams (1920) suggested that being grounded in a “historic continuity” of a profession can provide sense of purpose and dignity; this historic continuity is what I sought to contribute to the field of English education. Throughout my study, I have carried with me the experiences of my own classroom practice—including the challenge I faced over my decision to expand literature instruction beyond a prescribed list of novels—and my continued work with secondary English teachers in a public school system. It is my hope that this dissertation will position the fundamental questions about the teaching of literature within a historical context, enabling contemporary educators to draw strength from their teacher-ancestors so that they are better equipped to articulate and situate their own pedagogical beliefs within some of the political and social contexts that undergird this issue.

Method

Historical Periods

In this analysis of the conversation about the teaching of literature, my focus is on the purposes of literary study, the methodology for teaching literature, and the selection of literary works—as they are documented in key works throughout the history of the field. Though the field is almost one hundred years old, there are key periods, or turning points in which the field faced pressures to reevaluate the teaching of literature, and the key texts come from these periods. One cannot ignore the shaping influence of external pressures and outside forces on the

field of English education—English scholarship at the college level, governmental and political issues, the portrayal of education in the public eye, and quite significantly, the changing configurations and values of American society have all been important components of the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature. In the United States, English education has been a politically charged conception, shaped largely by external influences, which lends a passion to the conversation surrounding the field. This dissertation focuses on periods in which the field of English education has experienced tension, in part from outward social, economic, or political issues in American society. These periods are (1) the inaugural era for the field, or the period of time in which NCTE formed and developed itself as voice of and for English educators; (2) the era of social reform, or the period of time in which the United States turned to the public school as a political agent through curricular reform and racial desegregation; and (3) the era of accountability, or the period in American education marked by national content standards and high-stakes testing. Each period represents a defining moment for the field of English education, in which members of this discourse community sought—in response to external pressure—to define (or redefine) their field and their understandings about literature study.

Central Works

Within these historical periods of the field, I examine central works in order to unpack the conversation surrounding what it means to educate a child, particularly with reference to the teaching of literature. Bakhtin (1981) has said that true dialogue is a social interaction of voices and ideas; all of our utterances are in relation to those that have come before and those that will come after. This interconnection among texts is apparent within central works in the history of English education, and for this reason, they may be viewed as an ongoing conversation or dialogue about the teaching of literature. The works come from within the field of English

education, and are both proactive and reactionary in nature. In almost all cases, the works were commissioned by NCTE, which, as the leading professional organization of the field, is fitting; throughout history, there has never been an organized body more influential in English education in the United States. The central texts include the following:

Inaugural Era

Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English,
(National Council of Teachers of English, 1911)
Round Table Discussions of the First Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, (National Council of Teachers of English, 1911)
An Experience Curriculum in English, (Curriculum Commission of NCTE, 1935)
Conducting Experiences in English, (Curriculum Commission of NCTE, 1939)

Social Reform Era

Growth Through English (Dixon, 1967)
The Uses of English (Muller, 1967)
Literature as Exploration, second edition (Rosenblatt, 1968)
Various archived materials pertaining to the Dartmouth Conference

Accountability Era

The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language (Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1987)
The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand (National Council of Teachers of English, 1987)
Standards for the English Language Arts (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996)
Various archived materials pertaining to the Coalition Conference and the preparation of *Standards for the English Language Arts*

The significance of these texts to the field and the historical periods in which the texts are situated are highlighted in the remaining chapters. As needed, other works written prior to and following the pivotal periods are discussed to provide context for and to highlight the influence of the period on the field.

The central works are certainly not the only texts of significance in the history of English education, nor are they the only documents discussed in the remaining chapters. Indeed, in addition to other works written from within the field, there are a number of what I call “external works” of importance to the conversation, which were prepared largely by those outside the field

of secondary English education. Because these often serve as the converse of themes that emerge throughout the history of English education, they are essential to the conversation, and will be discussed in order to provide context for the central works prepared by those within the field. However, the central works serve as the major primary sources under examination throughout this dissertation. In addition to these sources, I also examine documents from the NCTE archival library. These documents, such as planning notes and early drafts of published reports, also serve as primary sources, and they provide anecdotal insight into many of the significant documents listed above.

Analysis

To analyze the conversations contained in these documents, I employ Stephen Toulmin's (1958) method of argument analysis. In *The Uses of an Argument*, Toulmin provided a model for analyzing the structure of a practical or substantial argument, widely known as the Toulmin model of argument. The model is often used by those within rhetoric and composition studies as a guide for structuring and strengthening oral and written arguments, such as those articulated in a political debate, policy statement, or persuasive composition, and also for analyzing the arguments present in those same types of documents. This approach has been used frequently as a tool for understanding public discourse of many forms, such as government policy on the war in Iraq (Chadhuri, 2005), campaigns for civil rights (Seward, 1991), rulings in courts of law (Craik, 1987), and is appropriate for the examination of the written conversation surrounding English education and literature instruction. Toulmin has called this model "the rational process, by which arguments are set out and produced in support of an initial assertion" (p. 16). This dissertation examines that rational process, as it is presented throughout central works in the field of English education, in order to provide insight into the assertions set forth by English educators about the study of literature at the secondary level.

Although the structure and form of an argument will vary from one context to the next, Toulmin identified basic elements and patterns that are found in all rational arguments. If one establishes a position and seeks to provide justification, Toulmin asserted that a fundamental process must be followed before the argument can be justified:

Let it be supposed that we make an assertion, and commit ourselves thereby to the claim which any assertion necessarily involves. If this claim is challenged, we must be able to establish it – that is, make it good, and show that it was justifiable. How is this to be done? Unless the assertion was made quite wildly and irresponsibly, we shall normally have some facts to which we can point in its support: if the claim is challenged, it is up to us to appeal to these facts, and present them as the foundation upon which our claim is based. (p. 97)

Toulmin went on to specifically identify the foundational elements of rational arguments, which include claim, data, and warrant. This dissertation examines the conversation surrounding English education and literary instruction at the secondary level by examining these three elements.

The claim of any argument is the conclusion one is seeking to establish. It is an assertion built upon the facts, beliefs, and attitudes that make up the remainder of the argument. Data are supplied to help strengthen the merits of the claim, and they may take the form of facts, statements, or reasons put forth by one seeking to justify the original assertion or conclusion. Thus, the nature of the field impacts the form data will take. The warrant is the rationale for the connection between the data and the claim. Warrants, which are also field-dependent, are the assumptions underlying the data and the claim, and though they may be explicitly stated, they are often left unsaid, because they represent inherent beliefs. Toulmin identified the claim, data, and warrant as essential elements of any argument. However, in some cases, these alone may not be enough to provide full justification for the conclusions of the argument. At times in an argument, modifications, or what Toulmin called “qualifiers,” may be needed before claims can

be established and embraced fully. When necessary, these qualifiers are included in the argument analyses documented in this dissertation.

By examining the claim/data/warrant structure of the arguments surrounding the teaching of literature, as they are presented in these central works, I seek to discern the ethos of the field during moments of tradition and reform, and thus provide insight into the teaching of literature at the secondary level. Through my examination, I attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What assumptions about learning and knowledge helped to shape the field? (2) To what extent does the field of English education demonstrate consistency or change in its discourse defined-positions? and (3) How might current conversations in the field fit within a larger historical, social, and political context, thus equipping English educators to better articulate and situate their own pedagogical beliefs?

Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation

This history places the beginning of English education at the point at which it became a subject in the formal school curriculum, even though I realize literacy instruction in the United States had been occurring since colonial times, not only in schools but also in private homes and churches. However, in seeking to understand English education as a profession and as a formal field in secondary education, I focus this study on the ways in which English educators in the United States have organized and promoted their understandings of the field. This narrows the focus of my historical study to roughly the past one hundred years or so, beginning with the founding of NCTE in 1911. Additionally, secondary English serves as the major area of concentration, though the issues cannot be discussed in complete isolation from similar conflicts in the lower levels of instruction and those in higher education.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. This chapter, “The Ongoing Conversation Surrounding Literature in English Education” provides an overview of the scope of

this dissertation, and also of the issues that led me to this study. The next three chapters focus on specific periods of conversation in English education, examining the ways in which English educators defined their understandings about the teaching of literature. Chapter Two, “The Literature Debate and the Formation of English Education as a Profession,” addresses the historical period roughly from 1911, when NCTE was founded, to the 1930s. The analysis in this chapter centers on the issue of literature instruction during the founding and earliest years of English education as a profession. Chapter Three, “Literature Instruction in a Time of Social Change,” focuses most significantly on the field of English education during the 1960s, though historical events prior to this time are included as context. This chapter addresses the launching of Sputnik, desegregation of schools, and the nature of social unrest inherent to this period in the United States. Within this context of social change, the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature is examined. Chapter Four, “Experiences with Literature in an Era of Accountability,” concentrates on contemporary issues of accountability and how those impact literature study at the secondary level. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1984/1983) serves as the starting point for this chapter, though the issues continue into the twenty-first century. Chapter Five, “A Tradition of Reform,” which serves as the concluding chapter, draws conclusions concerning the nature of the shared values held by English educators throughout the field’s history.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE DEBATE AND THE FORMATION OF ENGLISH EDUCATION AS A PROFESSION

And never in the history of America have we English teachers had more need than today to hold clearly before ourselves this great spiritual purpose of our work, that our mission is primarily to stimulate, to awaken, to quicken, to feed, for never has the nation more needed our help.

Emma Breck, *English Journal*, 1912

The founding of NCTE, the first professional organization for secondary English teachers, signaled secondary teachers' formal resistance to the control colleges held over curriculum and instruction in high school classrooms. Pedagogical differences between English educators at the secondary level and English scholars at the post-secondary level, particularly surrounding the issue of literature instruction, led to dissent, but ultimately, also led English teachers to define their field for themselves for the first time. Previously, the discipline of English at the college level had defined the field, establishing the purpose of literature in the secondary curriculum, the approaches one would take in literary instruction, and even the specific works of literature to be taught (Applebee, 1974, 1996; Graff, 1987; Nelson & Calfee, 1998). However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the field of English education was ready to establish its own identity as one distinctly different from the college conception.

English did not emerge as a “major school subject” in elementary and secondary schools in the United States until the latter part of the nineteenth century, though its roots are much older. The study of rhetoric, literature, and written expression had been taught, but the subject which would combine these—English—was not established in educational circles until the late 1800s when the Arnoldian view of cultural education began to catch on.

Industrialization and the rapid urban development it spurred “profoundly disturbed the moral

fabric of the existing social order” (Ball, Kenny, & Gardiner, 1990, p. 48), leaving society searching for a cohesive identity in the face of change. Literature was thought to be a civilizing force, a way to pull all the new faces and views of society back together and to instill traditional, unifying values. To a great extent, the work of Matthew Arnold, most notably his *Culture and Anarchy* (1957/1867), provided the justification for literature in a place of prominence.

However, as colleges began to embrace literature as an area of study and found justification for the subject in cultural education, the subject still lacked the scientific rigor it needed to be taken seriously as an intellectual endeavor. For this reason, college professors felt a need to prove the subject “to be fiendishly difficult” (McMurtry, 1985, p. 13) and thus emphasized the more scientific, analytic approaches for the study of literature which emphasized philology, literary history, and belletristic modes of analysis, all strictly academic approaches to the study of literature. Though the attention given to the mental faculties by these approaches would provide English with the legitimacy it needed to become a major course of study in schools, it would ultimately lead to a split between the discipline of English and the profession of English education, which focuses on the teaching of English at the secondary levels.

By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the postsecondary influence came largely through college entrance exams, which evaluated students’ familiarity with specific texts, which were generally announced in advance, and their ability to analyze literature through writing (Uniform Entrance Examinations in English in English Language and Literature, 1894). Consequently, the teachers at the secondary level would tailor their classroom instruction to meet the demands of the test—addressing only the designated texts and limiting writing instruction to literary analysis—thus allowing college assessment to define the field of English education, drive the curriculum, and establish what is now known as the literary canon.

However, English teachers in the secondary schools were faced with a rapidly changing student body, a result of social and cultural changes in the United States. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the United States underwent major shifts and significant growth that altered its very identity. These were times, as Smith (1980) explained, that were shaken by economic shifts and “a considerable amount of social unrest” (p. 4). This social unrest and the role of industrialization as a major force for social change and thought cannot be overlooked. (e.g., Cremin, 1961; Smith, 1979; Spring, 1979). Workers became more transient as they took advantage of railway systems, moving from rural areas to the cities in search of work in factories. These same jobs attracted immigrants from around the world, flooding the nation, and particularly urban areas, with new citizens of diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage. An economic gap widened between those riding the wave of industrial success and those left to struggle in the wake as factory workers. Additionally, amid the rapid social change, women, minorities, and other previously marginalized groups sought empowerment, and concern grew over the true nature of democracy, equality, and opportunity. Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996) has described the era as one focused upon the “reconstruction of the cultural, social, and political order for the purpose of empowering all members of society to take their places as participants in a democratic process” (p. 68), thereby highlighting the many social tensions of the era.

The rapid social change impacted the school, too, as children from many socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds began to seek education in the secondary school. More and more children were staying in school for longer periods of time, increasing the need for secondary education to provide for students who were not going to college as well as those who were. The tone of this reform movement, and the social issues that led to it, led to significant changes in public education, including the formation of English education as a profession. The importance

placed on schools as structuring agents for society provided teachers with a sense of urgency and professionalism that encouraged them to become less dependent on the needs of the colleges and more focused on the needs of the students in their communities. English teachers saw the need for students to read more texts that reflected their own life experiences, and to speak and write about issues more important to them than literary analyses. Before long, English teachers began to demand autonomy from academia.

In 1910, the NEA Round Table on English set out to investigate the oppression English teachers were feeling at the hands of uniform college entrance examinations; what they found was a field in need of organization and leadership. The Round Table thus passed a resolution, calling for a national network of English teachers. In a letter announcing the organization of NCTE, James Hosis described their efforts “to create a *representative* body, which could reflect and render effective the will of the various local associations and of individual teachers, and by securing concert of action, greatly improve the conditions surrounding English work” (NCTE, 1911, p. 31). It was this representative body of English teachers that would gather in Chicago for the historic 1911 meeting of NCTE. True to their aim, the council selected a board of directors and governing body comprised equally of classroom teachers and university scholars whose first goal was to eliminate the rigid definition of English education associated with college entrance examinations—an attempt that was successful. Once the curriculum was freed of the limited nature of the exams, new approaches which aligned themselves with the educational reform movement of the era began to emerge in secondary English.

Through this chapter, I seek to reveal the assumptions or shared values that fueled English educators’ resistance to the uniform entrance examinations. I do so by examining positions or claims staked by English teachers as they sought to articulate their understandings about the teaching of literature. Those English educators present at the inaugural meeting of

NCTE, and those who continued to shape the earliest years of English education as a profession, entered into the conversation about the fundamental issues in teaching literature—the purposes for reading and studying literature, the approaches to teaching literature, and the types of literature most suited to these aims and methodologies. Analysis of the conversation surrounding these issues reveals the “acceptable traces” and “discourse values” (Porter, 1986, p. 43) held by English educators during the inaugural era, and provides insight to the teaching of literature at the secondary level.

As indicated in Chapter One, I use the founding of NCTE as the starting point for an examination of English education as a profession. This chapter analyzes the claims as they are staked in this inaugural period. For the purposes of this dissertation, and this chapter in particular, it is important to define the span of time I will call the inaugural era, though I recognize the limitations of specifying a discrete starting and ending point. The first annual meeting of NCTE, in 1911, serves as the formal starting point of the inaugural era. This chapter extends forward from the inaugural meeting in order to demonstrate that the founding of the field was both successful and influential, which is evidenced by the Curriculum Commission reports of the 1930s. However, events prior to and following these periods provide historical context, and thus, are also addressed briefly in this chapter.

In this chapter, I examine the secondary literature conversation as it is documented in central works of the era. As this chapter focuses on the founding of NCTE and its growth during a significant educational reform movement, the central documents selected for analysis provide a record of the inaugural meeting and of the maturation of the council as an influential professional organization for teachers of secondary English. Focusing on the cue words, or topics of emphasis, these documents were analyzed for the claims they established about teaching literature at the secondary level. These central documents are the following:

Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English
(National Council of Teachers of English, 1911)
Round Table Discussions of the First Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (National Council of Teachers of English, 1911)
Experience Curriculum in English, (Curriculum Commission of NCTE, 1935)
Conducting Experiences in English (Curriculum Commission of NCTE, 1939)

These works include the voices of secondary English teachers, though I recognize that those teachers present in the discussions and those contributing to the publication of the commissioned reports do not represent the views of all teachers practicing at the time. Many practicing teachers did not then, and do not now, participate in NCTE or other professional organizations. It is reasonable to assume that in this inaugural period, when communications were not aided by ease of travel and wireless networks, the average classroom teacher may not have had an opportunity to stake his or her own claim in this documented conversation. However, I believe these documents still serve as credible records of the views of influential practitioners, because their participation in these functions indicates that these teachers sought to enact change. They were the teachers making their voices known on a national scale. It is reasonable to assume they also asserted themselves in their own schools and certainly in their own classrooms, and therefore, their views reflect the aims of teacher-leaders of the time. Drawing from their voices and the conversations documented in the central works, the major claims surrounding literature instruction are analyzed using the Toulmin model.

These works document the voices and conversations surrounding literature instruction within the field of English education, though these were not the only voices in the conversation. Two “external works,” or works written by those outside of the field, are central to the conversation during this inaugural era in English education. The first of these, *Report of the Committee of Ten in Secondary Schools* (1892), predates the inaugural meeting of NCTE by nearly 20 years. However, as this chapter illustrates, its content had profound impact on the

future of English education, and thus, is discussed insofar as it is relevant to the claims staked by those within the field. The second of the “external works,” *The Training of Secondary Teachers Especially with Reference to English* (1942) was published toward the latter part of the era. This text represents the converse of the positions staked by the English teachers in the central works, and therefore, is an important counterpoint to the beliefs held by English teachers regarding the teaching of literature. However, before beginning the analysis, it is important to explore the historical context in which these texts are situated, starting with the uniform entrance exams enacted by colleges in the nineteenth century and moving into the inaugural meeting of NCTE.

Historical Context

Uniform Entrance Exams

At the beginning of the twentieth century, secondary English teachers lacked the cohesiveness and organization necessary to enact effective change outside of their own classrooms. Moreover, they did not have as much control as they would have liked even within their own classrooms, due in large part to the uniform entrance exams governing college admission processes at the time. For three decades, universities had been governing the secondary English curriculum through the literary works prescribed in their entrance examinations. This policy limited the power of secondary English teachers, but it also provided the spark necessary for teachers to seek one another out and form professional alliances.

Harvard College was the first institution of higher learning to assess prospective students’ knowledge of literature as a basis for admission. The canonization of certain literary works has roots in the 1870 entrance examination, when students were required to demonstrate their ability with spoken English by reading aloud from a literary text. Harvard’s *Catalogue, 1869-1870*, advised students to “prepare themselves in Craike’s English of Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*) or in Milton’s *Comus*” (qtd. in Applebee, 1974, 30). This clearly signified the prestige these classical

works held at the time, and the influence of colleges over school curriculum was further expanded four years later, as the university amended their examination to assess detailed knowledge of specific works. The Harvard University *Catalogue, 1873-1874*, outlined the new requirement of writing a composition whose topic “will be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time” (qtd. in Applebee, 1974, p. 30). In this year, the announced works included Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, *Tempest*, and *Julius Caesar*; Scott’s *Ivanhoe*; and Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield*. Later examinations added Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*; Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; Dickens’s *Tale of Two Cities*; and Eliot’s *Silas Marner*—works that remain staples in the secondary English curriculum over one hundred years later. The tests eventually developed into two parts: an essay of a specific topic related to one of the prescribed works, and a more quantitative test that measured students’ knowledge of specific details related to a single work of literature. Though no specific claim regarding the purpose of literary study is specifically made in this historical document, underlying assumptions are identifiable. If one believes that purposes and assumptions about learning guide all aspects of education, this type of assessment clearly indicates the college’s purposes for reading: to analyze a text and to gather and memorize information contained therein.

In 1879, a consortium of New England colleges met at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, to discuss standardizing all college entrance examinations. Prior to this, each college had its own entrance exam, and thus, its own prescribed list of literary works to be studied. At this meeting, the colleges adopted the Harvard position on the study of literature and agreed to assess prospective students’ knowledge of the books already outlined in the Harvard *Catalogue* for 1881, 1882, and 1883. Furthermore, the Commission of Colleges in New England

on Admission Examinations was established to reevaluate and prescribe additional texts in the future. The uniform entrance exam was born.

Naturally, the secondary English teacher of the time felt compelled to teach these works, regardless of their “teachability,” thus beginning the “push down” effect described previously by Nelson and Calfee (1998). The exams had the positive effect of emphasizing the importance of studying literature in school, an idea that would be further promoted by the subsequent publication of the *Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies* in 1894. In fact, the Harvard Entrance Exams may have even influenced the Committee of Ten’s decision to anoint English as a major subject of study. It is worth noting that Charles W. Eliot was the sitting college president when Harvard added the literature component to its admissions examination, as well as one of the members of the Committee of Ten. His involvement in both of these endeavors validated the study of literature.

However, in spite of the academic weight the *subject* gained through the exams, the secondary teacher, for so long on his or her own, lost autonomy as the colleges gained control over the curriculum. The colleges saw this as a victory, which Harvard President Eliot articulated when he spoke at length about the teaching of English at the secondary level and the impact uniform entrance exams were having. In 1887, Eliot discussed the evolution of the exams since their implementation in 1873 in his *Annual Report of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College*:

In 1878-79 the number and variety of the prescribed books were increased, and the list of books were announced for three years in advance; so that the schools might better plan beforehand their courses of English reading. Under the list for the 1879 appears for the first time the line: “Every candidate is expected to be familiar with *all* the books on this list.” (p. 4)

He continued, offering additional insight to the intent the college held when instituting a prescribed list of books:

The main purposes of the requirement in English are being gradually accomplished. School teachers are encouraged to familiarize their pupils with a few choice specimens of English literature . . . and to cultivate in their pupils, through correct translation and the reading of prescribed books, accurate methods of thought and expression. (p. 6)

Eliot's remarks indicate that the secondary schools were expected to tailor their instruction in order to accommodate the needs of the institutions of higher learning, though secondary English teachers were increasingly educating some students who had no intentions of attending a liberal arts college. Additionally, few English teachers at the time would argue with the importance of studying literature for thought and expression. However, the influences of the progressive reform movement emerging in education would soon lead teachers to bristle at the notion of "accurate" thought and expression, setting up the beginning of organization among secondary English teachers.

Inaugural Year of NCTE: 1911

By the early 1900s, the uniform entrance exams had been influencing secondary curriculum for more than two decades, with little fluctuation in the types of literary works included on the prescribed lists of texts. Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer remained staples, and few female authors appeared, even though respected women writers were publishing (or were already published) at this time, such as Mary Shelley and Jane Austen. However, as discussed in previous chapters, secondary classrooms were growing in diversity. No longer were high schools educating only the male children of affluent families. Urbanization brought together people from all socio-economic classes, and while institutions of higher learning were somewhat insulated from this directly, the secondary school was not (Cremin, 1961; Smith, 1980). Consequently, faced with a more diverse student body with varied needs, futures, and interests, teachers of English grew frustrated by uniform entrance examinations.

In 1911, a spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and professionalism among English teachers was not yet forged. Teaching was still an isolated affair, with little feeling of collegiality (e.g., Applebee, 1974; Cuban, 1984; Smith, 1979; Young, 1906). However, this would change as English teachers came together for the first time for a large-scale, multi-regional conversation about the challenges facing the profession of English education. One participant at the inaugural meeting of NCTE, identified in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* (1911) as John Clappe, a professor from Lake Forrest College, spoke of the prescribed lists of books for college entrance, claiming they were the only “unfortunate bond of union” (p. 38) among secondary English teachers at the time. This bond would be enough to forge a community of teachers actively articulating more experience-based notions of literature.

As discussed previously, the English Roundtable of the NEA had met in 1910 to discuss their concerns about uniform entrance examinations and the implications they had for secondary teachers of English. Participants from this meeting spent the next year studying the plight of English teachers and discovered that, in spite of existing local organizations for English educators, the teachers had no effective means of coming together to articulate their concerns, research solutions, and enact change at a national level. As a solution, the first meeting of NCTE was proposed and held in Chicago in December of 1911. During this meeting, the field of English education began to emerge as a discourse community bound by shared values concerning the teaching of literature at the secondary level.

Analysis of the Major Claims

Staking the Claims

Context of the Central Works: First Annual Meeting of NCTE

The first annual meeting of NCTE was predominantly reactionary in nature, prompted by responses to the uniform entrance examinations. Attended by English teachers and professors

from across the country, the council stood unified in their opposition to the tests. It was here, out of this opposition, that English educators at the secondary level entered into conversations about the nature of literature instruction, which are reflected in their major claims. This conversation is documented in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* and the *Round Table Discussions*, which are published in the inaugural volume of *English Journal*. The latter is a publication that remains a prominent source of professional knowledge for secondary English teachers.

The *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* appear in the form of minutes from a business meeting. The sixteen-page record documents the agenda for the two-day meeting. Furthermore, it provides a description of the council's organization, a listing of the elected officers and Board of Directors, and the bylaws governing the council. The most illuminating portion of the source, though, comes in the notes concerning the discussion of resolutions, which involved the presentation of formal papers followed by whole-group debate. The comments made by participants are quoted directly in this record, though the identifying information about the participants varies from one speaker to the next. At times, the speaker is identified in the most basic of terms, such as "Mr. Clark of Rochester, New York" (p. 43). Others are identified by last name, professional position, and place of employment, such as, "Mr. W. F. Mozier, principal of the Ottawa Township High School" (p. 45). However, if the speakers recorded in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* were also elected to serve on the Board of Directors, additional information is listed about them. For example, although Mr. Clark of Rochester is identified without any professional description during the record of the discussions, one can learn from the list of Board of Directors, on which he served, that he was also the English Department chairperson at East High School in Rochester, New York (p. 33).

The *Round Table Discussions* document the formal statements presented by participants to other participants in the round table component of the annual meeting. The preface to this

document explains that participants were asked to come to the discussion prepared to answer the following question: What problems should the council first attempt to solve? The remainder of the document records the prepared statements brought to the table by participants. Most speakers are identified by first and last name and institution of employment, though in one case, a participant is identified only by city and state. The source fails to identify the specific professional positions held by the speakers. For example, one knows that C. R. Rounds works in West Division High School, but the record does not say whether or not Rounds is an instructor or administrator. In spite of this lack of information, the *Round Table Discussions* provide a clear record of the pressing issues at the meeting.

Within these two seminal primary documents, the initial claims surrounding literature are set forth. As the records show, the first meeting of NCTE began with a passionate discussion of uniform entrance examinations; within this conversation, one finds the grounds for the claims surrounding literature study in the secondary English classroom. For example, one participant, identified only as being from New York, claimed that the uniform entrance examinations led to “a grinding-in of mere facts,” (p. 43), a statement no one opposed. Another unidentified participant articulated the harm done by the tests, which, in his or her opinion, made students dislike literature and reading by “treating imponderables as if they were quantitatively determinable” (p. 38). Again, there were no dissenting voices on this issue.

The *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* further indicate that the newly formed council wanted to make a firm statement in opposition to any examination system for admission to college, though they did concede that, *if* a test must be administered, there were ways to “obviate many of the present evils” (p. 37) inherent to the examination process of the day. To this end, the council adopted a resolution detailing the type of examination that would not violate the students’ right to experience fully literature. This resolution approved written response to

texts, so long as these works of literature had not been previously prescribed. This type of assessment would allow the student to demonstrate his or her own thoughts concerning the literature. By passing this resolution, the inaugural members of NCTE demonstrated that they did not feel testing in itself was inherently harmful. Assessments which attempted to uncover thought processes and responses to literature were legitimate, while those that quantified specific bits of information were not.

One must ask the question, why were these teachers so unilaterally opposed to the prescribed lists of literature associated with the unified entrance examinations? After all, these tests did provide a guideline for teachers to follow, a benefit pointed out in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* by James Squire, who would later become president of NCTE:

They [uniform entrance requirements] had at least one merit: they gave a certain unity and system to the English work. In my part of the country the teaching of English is largely in the hands of young women with but little experience. To throw upon each of these the entire responsibility of outlining and developing a high-school course would certainly be a great mistake. The English teachers gathered here could no doubt arrange courses highly satisfactorily; but thousands of young teachers all about the country would find the task too great. (p. 45)

The council did not disagree with him, but the consensus was that NCTE and practicing teachers of secondary English were better suited to guide English curriculum and instruction than the uniform entrance examinations and their writers. The council preferred to have a voice in the decisions regarding literature instruction, because in this way, they could present students with the type of instruction that led to the council's understanding of the purpose of reading. While the college entrance examinations of the time privileged the factual information conveyed through reading and literature, an examination of the conversation reveals that secondary English teachers revered literature for a more personal, emotionally situated reason. To the council—which was a representative body of English teachers—the primary purpose of reading was more child-centered and reflective, and could not be realized with a prescribed literature curriculum.

Thus, the field of English education first staked its central claims concerning literature amid its opposition to uniform entrance examinations.

The Purpose Claim

As the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* and *The Round Table Discussions* of this same meeting reveal, the council believed literature to be a reflection of life and human experience. This belief, which was perhaps the most central of beliefs held by English teachers, formed the main theme of the conference and serves as the foundation upon which the field established its claim about the purpose for teaching literature. Edwin Miller, a high school administrator, was one of the first participants on record in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* to speak about the purposes for teaching literature. His comments addressed the broad scope of the secondary English curriculum, and within this context, Miller's understandings about the value of literature are revealed:

The truth appears to me to be that when we undertake to teach English, we are undertaking to teach at least two subjects and possibly more. The first of these subjects is the expression of our own ideas in writing or orally. The second is the interpretation of other people's ideas, the bare understanding of them. . . . but aside from this, there is the whole content of literature in its higher and subtler aspects to be taken into consideration. Literature is a great mirror of life. It includes history, science, philosophy, religion, and, in teaching it, we are face to face with a problem as broad as life itself. (pp. 41-42)

Miller acknowledged the place of basic comprehension in reading when he speaks of gathering the "bare understanding" of writers' ideas. He recognized that it was a necessary and important part of the reading process. However, he speaks of "higher" aspects in literature, demonstrating that his understanding of literary study goes beyond comprehension of details or ideas contained within a written text. The use of "higher," indicates a more vaulted position, indicated that he privileges literature's ability to serve as a "mirror of life." In this analysis, Miller's statement serves as an early articulation of the Purpose Claim.

This same assertion was articulated throughout the founding of this essential organization. The participants in this conversation used various words and phrases to describe their understanding of literature as reflection of life, as did Mitchell, a participant identified as affiliated in some way, either as a teacher or administrator, with Jamaica High School in New York. He echoed Miller's earlier comments, and added that students should be able to see themselves and their world reflected in literature:

Books should illuminate the thoughts and aspirations of the pupils. They may do so when we get rid of the prescribed lists. This is the first step, in the East at any rate. The [literature] course must be reorganized from the point of view of the pupil. (p. 43)

Mitchell's statement and his use of "illuminate" provide support for Miller's assertion. The common theme in their statements, which were accepted without dissent by the other participants, is the notion of *reflection*. By accepting this statement, participants demonstrated that they value literature for its ability to reflect various aspects of life. Furthermore, while speaking of literature as a "mirror of life" or as an illumination of "thoughts and aspirations," the participants also shared common understandings about that which should be reflected in literature. Life, thoughts, and aspirations are all facets of the human experience, which serves as a shared understanding between Mitchell and Miller, and also among the other participants, who offered no objection.

It is this understanding of the purpose of literature—that it should reflect human experience—that emerged throughout the conversations held at the inaugural meeting of NCTE. Rather than approaching the teaching of literature by working through a list of prescribed texts, Miller, Mitchell, and the other founding members of the council asserted their belief that literature should reflect students' thoughts, aspirations, and experiences. The rest of the conversations surrounding the purposes of literature, as documented in the *Proceedings of the*

First Annual Meeting and *The Round Table Discussions*, serves as support or data for this theme, or the shared beliefs of those in the field. For this reason, the articulation that literature should be a reflection of human experience serves as the Purpose Claim in this analysis of the field's conversation surrounding the teaching of literature. It demonstrates a primary concern of the founding members of NCTE, and thus of the "teacher-ancestors" of twenty-first century educators.

Data and Warrants for the Purpose Claim

The conversation documented in *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* and *The Round Table Discussions* supported the Purpose Claim through discussions concerning the selection of literature. At four points in the conversation recorded in these documents, participants addressed literature selection and its relationship to the purpose of literary study, which provide the data for the claim, while also highlighting the desire English teachers had to regain the control over curriculum they had lost through the implementation of uniform entrance examinations. The participants at NCTE articulated ways to assure that literature remained a reflection of human experience, opposing the expectation that high school courses would be tailored to fit the lists of works scheduled to appear on a college entrance exam.

First, they tackled the question of whether it is best to teach classics or more contemporary selections. E. H. Kemper McComb, identified only as being affiliated with Manual Training High School in Indianapolis, suggested that universal themes of relevance to the students should be the focus when making literary selections, using the theme of "heroes" to illustrate his point. Pointing out that students have diverse backgrounds, he began by cautioning the council not to seek to define a rigid course of study for all English students:

No attempt should be made to establish a detailed course for the schools of the country. We must agree upon a few fundamentals. With the immense increase in the number of high-school pupils has come the necessity of providing instruction

suiting to children who come from poor environment. One boy who was asked to read *Ivanhoe*, remarked that he could not understand why a man should ride around on a horse all day. . . . But another boy declared, "Character is the thing." We must provide for all sorts of boys. Moreover, some of our pupils will never read anything but the newspaper, and books on their occupations. It is useless to try to make all literary. The colleges must recognize this. We must study the problem of adolescence. For example, a project involving teamwork will enlist all. Hence, appoint committees to do certain tasks. The love of the heroic, so marked at this time, should be satisfied with modern as well as ancient heroes. Why not F. Hopkinson Smith's *Captain Scott* as well as Homer's *Ulysses*? . . . Let us seek to put the children a little farther on, not to carry out some prescribed course. (p. 18)

McComb's comments reflect the changing nature of the American student body during this era. He suggested that studying modern as well as classical heroes in literature would appeal to the adolescent, without limiting the study to only prescribed titles, and that a college-preparatory approach to literature selection was not appropriate at the secondary level. McComb's use of specific scenarios of classroom practice is representative of the types of information that serve as data in this conversation. Although he did not use *reflection* or synonymous phrases, McComb did describe, in more practical terms, a classroom scenario that values literature which serves to highlight or illuminate aspects of life with which students can relate. Furthermore, in this context, his desire to "put the children a little farther on," rather than focusing on a prescribed course, appears to suggest placing the students and their experiences in a higher place of prominence than had been common in educational practices of the era.

Noble, identified as professor from Iowa State College, echoed the data offered by McComb when he said, "Both classical and modern literature should be studied. . . . The problem is in part ethical, and hence the materials should reflect life broadly. It is possible for the English teacher to get into closer touch with the pupils than any other" (p. 45). Although Noble was speaking specifically of the types of literature to be taught in English courses, his comments serve as support or data for the Purpose Claim. He asserted that neither classical nor

contemporary literature should be more important than the other, insofar as the selected works “reflect life broadly.” His comments are in line with those of McComb, who promoted the use of themes of relevance to students’ lives, and provide salient data to the claim that literature serve as a reflection of human experience.

The only record of dissent from the positions articulated by the Purpose Claim came from Squire. He expressed concern with limiting literature selections to those works that reflect the current life experiences of students, which, in the context of this analysis serves as a rebuttal to the earlier data. Squire explained:

In my judgment, too, it would be a mistake to confine the reading to books in regard to aspects of life with which the pupil is already familiar. The cultivation of the imagination, the leading of the mind and spirit out of itself, is one of the great objects of our work. Something is certainly radically wrong when a healthy boy cannot be interested in *Ivanhoe*. (p. 45)

His rebuttal cautioned the members not to use too narrow of a lens when considering the usefulness of literature as a reflection of human experience, though clearly his opposition was not to *experience* in general. Rather, he asserted that life-experience can go beyond those of students to reflect those of other peoples and cultures. In speaking of “cultivating the imagination” and “leading the mind and spirit out of itself,” Squire appears to embrace the power of literature to reflect life—even if it is the life one can only experience through imagination. His comments brought the notion of vicarious experience into the conversation, as he asserted the usefulness of literature to push students beyond their own lives to the vicarious experience that can come from exploring new worlds through literary study. The rebuttal Squire offered went unopposed by the other participants at the inaugural meeting and helped expand the participants’ articulation of literature’s purpose: it should reflect human experience, both the experiences of the students and of those in the world around them.

A contradiction is present, though, in Squire’s reference to the classroom example of *Ivanhoe*, offered earlier in the conversation. He used this example to demonstrate the need for leading students to reflect on diverse experiences, but in doing so, disregarded the notion that literature which fails to reflect experiences with which the students can relate may fail to meet *any* purpose of literary instruction. This issue was addressed by Vincil Carey Coulter, whose comments are documented in *The Round Table Discussions*. He spoke of the negative consequences that arise when students are unable to see experiences with which they are familiar reflected in literature:

It is a well-known fact that no description in words, however perfect it may be from a literary standpoint, will convey to the mind of the reader any definite image, unless he has previously had some sense-impression which may serve as a means of interpretation. In spite of this fact, too many of us continue to ask our pupils to read literature about places and events about which they have no images, and we are astonished that they find the reading dull. (pp. 55-56)

Later in the record, Coulter expanded his comments to include a discussion of using illustrations to create images of people and places in students’ minds, an idea that more closely deals with issues of methodology. However, his comments demonstrate an awareness by the participants—in theory if not in practice—that not only was it an important objective to present literature as a reflection of human experience but that it was detrimental to fail to establish connections between life experience and literary text, thereby providing further support or data for the Purpose Claim.

The warrant, or an embedded assumption concerning the essential purpose of literature, connects these data to the Purpose Claim. Toulmin (1958) pointed out that a warrant is rarely stated explicitly, but rather is often left unsaid. This type of unstated assumption, which Toulmin called an “implicit warrant,” is the type present throughout this conversation surrounding the purpose of literature instruction. The claim asserts that literature should be a reflection of human

experience, which is the purpose for its inclusion in the English curriculum. Each of the data mentioned above—choosing themes of relevance, using a combination of contemporary and classic literature that reflects life, and promoting vicarious experience through reading—draw largely from a desire to center the curriculum around the needs and experiences of the students, and an awareness that experience counts as knowledge, which is a tenet commonly associated with progressive education.

Applebee (1974) pointed out that this reform movement impacted the early formation of the field, and at least in regards to the Purpose Claim, it is apparent that the participants' understandings about literature's purpose led, in part, to the field's reform efforts or split from English at the college level. The participants at this inaugural meeting felt, much as contemporary participants in the conversation feel, that a curriculum of literature rooted in students' life experiences would be most effective. An expression of personal life experience is more fundamental to literature study than is an analysis of predetermined literary works. The members of this discourse group did not reject the use of classical or canonized literature; indeed, some specifically suggested that the use of classical works is desirable. However, the English educators present at this historic meeting embraced the idea that these works should not be studied merely because they were classics. Any literature, whether it was Milton or the latest popular fiction, should be chosen because the topic was compelling to students and it related to human experiences with which they could identify. It was this personal connection, the understanding that the student—and not the literature—was the focus of literary study that underscores the Purpose Claim.

Although the participants appear unified on their understandings about the purposes for literature in the secondary classroom, one critical topic is absent from the conversation. Participants argued that literature should be a reflection of human experience, though they never

addressed *why* this was of importance. Perhaps the answer to this lies in an unstated assumption, or warrant, but the data present in this conversation does not reveal enough inherent motive for one to draw conclusions about this issue. As discussed in Chapter One, Applebee (1974) asserted that *experience* became the central metaphor for this field. However, he described the function of experience, both that which is student-centered and that which is vicarious, as being connected to exploration of one's self and the world; there was a critically-reflective component. The analysis of the conversation surrounding literature's purpose, at this point in the field's history, does not reveal this notion of reflection. Instead, the early participants of the field appear to have embraced literature as a reflection of human experience simply because it allowed the curriculum to become centered on the student, rather than a prescribed list of literary works.

The Methodology Claim

Having asserted and agreed to the purpose for teaching literature—the reflection of human experiences—the early participants of this curricular conversation turned to the issue of literature instruction. Within the conversation at the inaugural meeting of NCTE, English educators staked their claim about the approaches to teaching literature in the secondary classroom. This claim, or the Methodology Claim, though still connected to the curricular issues embedded in the Purpose Claim, sheds additional light on the beliefs English educators held (and still hold) concerning literature instruction. By examining the values held by English educators, as they are reflected in the claim, data, and warrant, one can better understand the ideology that helps English educators answer the most fundamental of methodology issues: What approaches are most appropriate for presenting literature to secondary students? An analysis of the conversation reveals that the participants believed literature instruction should also be placed within the context of experience; rather than being focused on technical, academic approaches to

literature, such as that practiced in the colleges and reflected on the entrance examinations, the instructional methods should lead to and appreciate more student-centered responses to literature.

A participant identified simply in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* as a professor from the Lewis Institute in Chicago, was the first documented voice in the conversation at the inaugural meeting. He commented on the various aspects of the English curriculum, including writing, speaking, and reading. In addressing literature instruction, he spoke of the tone with which he hoped English educators would infuse their instructional methodologies: “If we could at once agree upon this principle, we should be able to place literature upon a higher basis, somewhat apart. We could make literary study a joy, a progress into the life of ideals and imagination. It is easy to make students hate literature by treating imponderables as if they were quantitatively determinable” (p. 38). His comments, particularly the focus of presenting literature as “ideals and imagination” demonstrate the interconnectedness between purpose and methodology, but it is the use of “joy” that reveals a key facet of the values this speaker and other participants held about instructional methodologies. “Joy,” a human emotion, was this participant’s descriptor for literary study, demonstrating that he valued personal response over static, academic knowledge of facts or details conveyed in literature.

There is no record of dissenting voices regarding this participant’s comments, thus suggesting that the participants at this inaugural meeting agreed that methodologies should not disregard the emotional when teaching literature; indeed, making “literary study a joy”—a positive human emotion—was the focus, rather than a secondary intent of methodology. Although this speaker used “joy” as his sole descriptor, I believe, upon further examination of the conversation—which is revealed in the data offered in support and elaboration of this statement—that perhaps the deeper intent of this statement is the promotion of literature instruction that is emotionally or experientially contextualized; he privileged emotional response

to literature over an academic approach that disregarded the natural human response. This perspective solidified a distinction between the expectations of those within higher institutions of learning and those teaching literature courses to secondary students. Whereas, as expressed in the 1887 *Annual Report of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College*, post-secondary institutions valued exposing students to a “few choice specimens” (Eliot, p. 6), the participants within the field of secondary English education placed greater value on students embracing the response that is inspired by literature and in the discussions of the ideals contained within the work. Their acceptance of this perspective would impact instructional philosophies.

Data and Warrants for the Methodology Claim

The participants in the conversation spoke frequently of approaches to instruction. Typically, these discussions were broad—offering commentary on an instructional tone or general description of the types of literary activities one might implement in the classroom. Six participants are documented in this conversation, and each of them provided support for instructional methodologies that expand literary study beyond the academic to embrace an embodied, experientially situated concept of literary practice. The participants of both the *Proceedings* and the *Roundtable* spoke of not only selecting works that reflect students’ life experiences, as seen in their conversations surrounding the Purpose Claim, but also of adjusting the curriculum in response to students’ reactions to literature. Emma Breck, a high school teacher from California, urged her fellow educators to attend to the ways in which their students responded to literary works, and to use their responses to determine the instructional approaches best suited for instruction, which served as data in support of the claim surrounding methodology. “We must have a true pedagogy of English teaching and a course based upon principles, not a mere list of books. But studying the pupils and the reactions which certain books and conditions induce, we shall eventually arrive at a true basis” (*Proceedings*, p. 44).

Her comments suggest that students' "reactions," or responses, to literature should guide pedagogy or instructional methods. By not limiting "reaction" to any particular type of emotional response, she expanded the comments from the earlier participant who sought to make literature study a "joy," but her ideas still serve to support the notion of an emotion-filled approach that goes beyond the academic. Her contribution to the conversation, which places the personal response of students at the center of classroom instruction and supports an experience-based approach to methodology, was unchallenged by the participants at the inaugural meeting.

Participants built upon Breck's ideas, thereby providing additional data, by speaking of specific ways in which to elicit a more experientially, emotion-filled response to literature, whether the selection be classical or contemporary. W. F. Mozier, identified as a high school principal in attendance at the inaugural meeting, spoke nostalgically of his own experiences with reading as a child: "When a boy, I read *Les Miserables* out on the woodshed under a willow tree. Literature work would be more effective if it were carried on as a sort of club" (p. 45). His anecdotal accounting of his own childhood reading experiences—the idyllic image of a boy lounging under a tree, absorbed in a book—referred to a passionate, personal response to literature. Mozier further illustrated an approach to instruction that centers literature around positive, personal interactions, by suggesting approaches that resemble a club. Clubs and organizations incorporate multiple aspects of the human experience—personal choice or interest, reaction driven by personal response to ideas or issues, social interaction. Through promoting this as an instructional approach to learning, Mozier privileged a methodology that embraced the whole person—not just the logical—and recognized just as there are emotional aspects to knowledge, the social also plays a significant part. This approach served as an early precursor to the literature circle so popular in the conversation even now, a century later [cf. Daniels, 1994, 2002; Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Furthermore, the acceptance of Mozier's comments represents

a shared understanding among the participants of the value to be found in experience-based approaches to learning—or methodologies that incorporate natural human responses into the learning process—as his approaches did not disregard the student’s need for personal, emotional, and social responses to literature.

Several other approaches aimed at promoting experiential learning or student-driven approaches to instruction were offered at *The Round Table Discussions* held in conjunction with the inaugural meeting. Edwin Hopkins’s contribution to the conversation further expanded the notion of learning. His suggestion that instructional approaches should “substitute thinking for memorizing in all training” (p. 49) reminded participants that engagement with and response to literature should also include the intellect. However, his call for students to “think about literature and apply the results of his thinking” (p. 49) promoted an understanding of the student as a creator of knowledge, rather than the text as a static body of knowledge to be mastered. In this way, the student’s response—the intellectual response—was privileged, which aligned with the data offered by other participants.

Additional contributions in *The Round Table Discussions*, though less detailed than those recorded in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting*, provided other examples of approaches aimed at experience-based learning. Wilbur Hatfield encouraged the use of contemporary books, which he claimed were the types students would choose outside of school, thereby recognizing the value of personal interest and choice in reading. Vincil Carey Coulter and Mary Newell Easton both spoke of revitalizing the teaching of literature instruction through drama and art (p. 56), which would stimulate in students visual, oral, and auditory responses. All of these comments—drawn from personal anecdotes and specific suggestions for classroom practice—serve as data and illustrate the desire for instructional approaches that led to

experience-based responses and engagements, whether they be emotional, social, physical, or intellectual.

The conversations surrounding instructional methodologies throughout this inaugural meeting demonstrate that participants held shared assumptions or values about practices for teaching literature. A clear theme about literature instruction emerged at this meeting: the study of literature should be connected to emotional, physical, social, and intellectual responses. The implicit warrant embedded within this, I believe, stems from a concept inherent to the progressive movement in education, which, as Applebee pointed out, provided the historical background for the formation of this field. John Dewey (1990/1900) called for a “shifting of the center of gravity” (p. 34) in education from the curriculum to the child himself or herself, a concept that is commonly referred to as a child-centered approach, an approach to teaching “the whole child,” or what seems to me to describe or capture what I would call “embodied” learning. In her history of progressive orientations in education, Marjorie Lamberti (2000) has described this “whole person” or embodied approach as one that nurtures “the emotional, imaginative, sensory, and creative capacities of the human being” (p. 35). Prior to the advent of the progressive movement in education, students were generally only to listen, in a teacher-centered classroom, in order to learn. A more embodied or experientially-based notion of education emerged during this reform movement, where it was believed that true learning emerged out of creating, observing, and experiencing or feeling. Students learned through their senses, through play, and through talk. This holistic approach recognized students as active agents in their learning, and it is this approach—an approach that recognizes the “whole person” in a student—that undergirds English educators’ calls for an embodied approach to literature instruction. The participants would not have embraced instructional methodologies that seek to draw from and

stimulate responses to literature—emotional, physical, social, or intellectual—if they did not believe that learning should engage the *whole* student.

Maintaining the Claims

Context of the Central Works: Curriculum Commission

Those central to the founding of English education as a profession were indeed successful in their attempts to shape the future of the field around their central beliefs concerning the teaching of literature. In the years following the founding of NCTE, the American school faced additional transformations and challenges, including World War One, the Depression, compulsory education laws, and the increasing complexity of the study body. Throughout the changing times, secondary English teachers continued to hold steady to the claims they established at that inaugural meeting, as additional analysis of the conversation surrounding literature reveals.

The influence of the charter members of NCTE and the work they began is evidenced in the publication of two reports commissioned by the council in the 1930s: *Experience Curriculum in English* (1935) and *Conducting Experiences in English* (1939). Both works, which focus on the value of experience in the English classroom, demonstrate the success English teachers had in promoting their claims and establishing aims for the study of literature that were independent from those found in institutions of higher learning. Indeed, in a mere twenty years, they had evolved from a loosely joined group resisting uniform entrance examinations to an organization strong enough to promote ideas about curriculum throughout the country. All the while, the dominant voices in English education maintained their central claims about literature instruction, as an analysis of these two works demonstrates. Although *Experience Curriculum in English*, published in 1935, and *Conducting Experiences in English*, published in 1939, are two separate works, the latter work serves as an addendum to the former.

Thus, the conversation in the first is continued in the second. For this reason, this chapter addresses the works as one, ongoing conversation that spanned across several years, multiple voices, and two publications.

According to Wilbur Hatfield (1935), the chairman of the Curriculum Commission of NCTE and the group charged with producing the first of the commissioned reports, *Experience Curriculum in English* emerged as a result of requests from teachers and administrators for help with constructing English curriculum for districts throughout the United States. The report was intended to be a “pattern curriculum” or an outline of “the essential principles and illustrative embodiments of those principles” (p. viii). The committee charged with creating the report was comprised, much like the founding group of NCTE, of classroom teachers, professors, administrators, and editors of educational journals. The report is divided into several topical sections, including creative expression, communication, and electives. The sections most relevant to the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature are the chapters on reading and literature.

Four years after the publication of the initial report, NCTE published *Conducting Experiences in English* as a companion text. The Curriculum Commission of NCTE was again charged with producing the document, though the committee was headed at this time by Angela Broening. In the preface, Broening explained that this volume was offered to provide insight to teachers seeking to “translate the ‘experience philosophy’ into classroom activities” (p. vii). She suggested that this was important, because the previous report had been embraced not only by teachers of secondary English, but also by textbook companies, publishers of assessments, and the like. Of this she said:

Book selection committees assert that every salesman claims that his new book is in harmony with *An Experience Curriculum in English*. University students state that professors of the teaching of English are promulgating the philosophy of

English as Experience. Can all these claims, and more, be true? Are teachers, supervisors, curriculum-makers, text-book writers, test-makers, publishers, and salesmen working together to have boys and girls *experience* English? (p. v)

The report was published to help classroom teachers—and all others involved in the teaching of English at the secondary level—gain a better understanding of the principles underlying the original work, so that they might make curriculum decisions for their schools and classrooms.

Unlike the previous work, where the contributors were identified by position, the numerous people involved in the publication of this report are identified only by name and location.

However, in the acknowledgments, the Curriculum Committee referred to the contributors as “175 persons who were known to the committee to be doing outstanding teaching of English” (p. ix). As with the first work, *Conducting Experiences in English* was not intended to be an actual curriculum, but rather a guide of illustrative examples of what an effective English curriculum should be. An analysis of both works, again drawing from the Toulmin model, demonstrated that the central claims concerning literature instruction continued to be the foundation of effective English curriculum, at least to those within the field.

The Purpose Claim

In 1911, when the council first established its claim about literature instruction, the voices present in the conversation, as they are documented in these works, began by articulating their aim or purpose for teaching literature. As established in the preceding discussion, that purpose was rooted in literature’s ability to serve as a reflection of human experience. The Curriculum Commission, charged twenty years later with providing curriculum guidance on a broad scale, maintained this purpose, and even situated these texts within the concept of *experience*, as evidenced by the titles of these central works. Nevertheless, *experience* is only loosely defined in either of these texts. The Curriculum Commission defined *experience* in a footnote at the beginning of *Experience Curriculum in English*, stating that it “includes a more or

less free decision, action, and taking consequences” or that it means “meeting real situations” (p. 3). However, an analysis of the document shows that the word *experience* is used most often to refer to the expression of various aspects of human life.

For example, those within the field of English education, whose voices are present in *Experience Curriculum in English*, introduced their section on literature instruction by reaffirming the goals established earlier in the era:

The experiences through literature are the ultimate objective. The author’s sensory and social experiences, his imaginings, and his feelings are what he has tried to put into his writing, and they are what the reader wishes to get. . . . The intrinsic worth of such experiences is the only valid reason for the reading of literature. (p. 17)

In this passage, the Curriculum Commission recognized the human experience that is communicated by the author, including social interactions, imagination, and emotions, and they stated that engaging these is the only purpose for studying literature. The statement embraces the same types of life experiences embedded within the Purpose Claim at the inaugural meeting, and continues to promote experience as “the only valid reading” for studying literature.

This same concept was articulated again and again in the first chapter of *Conducting Experiences in English*, further establishing it as a continuation of the shared-values established earlier in the inaugural era. The Curriculum Commission said that “literature is read as human experience” (p. 4), “literature is the embodiment of experience” (p. 11), “literature is a reliving of whatever experience its author put into it” (p. 11), and that there is value in “seeing literature as life” (p. 13). Although little explication is offered as to the definition of experience, through their use of words like “embodiment,” “reliving,” and “seeing,” it becomes clear that English educators of the era continued to uphold the notion of literature as a reflection of human experience. However, while the Purpose Claim is maintained through these documents, these central works do offer more insight to the value of such a purpose for the study of literature. In

Conducting Experiences in English, the Curriculum Commission cited Christopher Morley

(1925) while explaining the value in presenting literature as a reflection of human experience:

In the modern classroom in which literature is read as human experience, in which pupils are allowed to choose books within their emotional maturity, and are encouraged to explore books—for self-revelation, self-expression, self-improvement, and self-realization—in this sort of classroom, teaching literature is directed toward developing the perfect readers whom Christopher Morley describes: ‘O the perfect reader! His clear, keen, outreaching mind is intent only to be one in spirit with the invisible author. As long as there are perfect reading who read with passion, with glory, and then speed to tell their friends, there will always be a perfect writer.’ (*Experience Curriculum in English*, p. 4)

This statement developed the central claim of purpose, which is supported throughout the central works. In doing so, though, it also introduced a new facet to this conversation: When literature is presented as a reflection of life, students can use their exploration of books for “self-revelation, self-expression, self-improvement, and self-realization.” In this way, the Purpose Claim has not changed, but it does demonstrate that a more transformational understanding of literature now infuses the conversation.

Data and Warrants for the Purpose Claim

The Curriculum Commission supported the claim established by the founders of NCTE, though the data offered in support of the claim differed from that presented at the inaugural meeting of NCTE. The participants at the inaugural meeting did not promote the use of any one specific type of literature, insofar as the selections provided desired experience. The Curriculum Commission offered a stronger assertion as to the types of literature that should *not* be used, if the aims for literature instruction were to be met. The authors of *Experience Curriculum in English* agreed that literature should reflect life, and suggested that this was best done through literary works and experiences “that have intrinsic worth for him [the student], now” (p. 18). They continued:

No matter how much the story may thrill us sophisticated adults who make and teach the courses, no matter how much the play may inspire us or the poem charm us, if it is beyond the intellectual and emotional range of our pupils, we are worse than wasting time to attempt to impose it upon them. . . . To argue that even though the pupils do not like it is good for them is to lose sight of the fact that their lack of pleasure is conclusive evidence of their failure to get the experience adequately. (p. 18)

These comments can be viewed as a qualifier for the data offered earlier at the inaugural meeting. Secondary English teachers were cautioned to go a step beyond selecting literature for the specific experience it might provide; they should also reflect upon the immediate relevance of the work to students' lives. This data supported the claim surrounding purpose, promoting the reflection of human experience, and maintained the position that aims for literary study are paramount when making literature selections.

Conducting Experiences in English provided more data along this same line, though it becomes clear that there was a limit to how far English educators were willing to go in presenting literature that is WAS immediately relevant to students. The authors of this second volume asserted that while literature selection should respect and value "the individual's needs and interests" (p. 12), it was also the duty of the teacher to help students discern literature from "the negative influence of pulp literature and the course entertainment which are bidding for the attention of our youth" (p. 3). They asserted, "It is, now as always, in great literature (where the subtlest and best use of language is preserved) that boys and girls are discovering their spiritual tradition" (p.3). These statements demonstrate that the field still afforded prestige to classical, canonized, or "great" literature, in spite of resisting the imposition of these works by the uniform entrance exams at the beginning of the twentieth century. While these statements do not contradict the claim as it is presented here, they do illustrate the complexity of the claim. English educators desired that literature reflect human experience, though it may be argued that,

in the eyes of English educators, some human experiences were more valuable for reflection than others.

Nevertheless, the participants in this conversation expanded the Purpose Claim by providing insight into the overall value of promoting literature as a reflection of human experience, this link between life and literature may be viewed as an explicit or stated warrant in this conversation. By returning to the earlier notion of using literature as a tool for self-examination, *Experience Curriculum in English* addresses the need for a variety of literary opportunities for students. In talking of the variety of life experiences that can be offered through literature, the authors said:

Secondly, the variety and range of experiences through literature should be as wide as possible. The easy physical conditions of modern life, the great emotional strain of it, and the new psychology have led to a revival of the old ideal of a rounded development of personality. Since the value of literature, beyond the immediate one of pleasure, is in the enlargement of the individual by means of indirect experience, the more directions the enlargement takes the more valuable the literature will prove. (p. 20)

In this scenario, the use of *experience* appears to refer to the vicarious experience addressed by Squire during the conversations at the inaugural meeting. Through “indirect experience,” conveyed through literature, the individual may be “enlarged, or, that is, may increase his or her awareness of the world. This sentiment emphasizes the need for English educators to consider thoughtfully the nature of the human experiences reflected through literature, and to make broad choices. This position embraces a transformative view of education, particularly with regard to literature. The participants in the conversation, as they are documented in these central works, promoted broad reflections of life in literature and selections of literary works that would allow students to understand human experiences in relevant ways. The purpose of these educational emphases is “rounded development” or a deeper understanding of one’s self and community. A

theme of transformation or reform—at least self-transformation, if not societal transformation—appears to be an underlying assumption for the Purpose Claim.

However, a contradiction exists between the narrative sections of these two central works, and the remaining sections, comprised of curricular plans which are intended to provide practical applications of these ideas. The descriptions are very brief, including only a statement of objectives and a few suggested literary materials, and, in the case of *Conducting Experiences in English*, brief descriptions of classroom activities. Within these documents, the reflection of human experience through literature does emerge. For example, *An Experience Curriculum in English* suggests units with an objective of “observing life under varied physical conditions” (p. 45), “enjoying hero stories” (p. 43), “participating in man’s desire to know more about his fellow man” (p. 48), and “listening discriminatingly to debates and speeches on public questions” (p. 67). However, these units do not reveal any emerging sense of using literature and its reflection of human experience as a tool for self-reflection, which was an important theme during the progressive movement in education. This progressive theme is present in the conversation surrounding the purposes for teaching literature, as it is recorded in these central works, but it is absent in the practical applications of that conversation.

The Methodology Claim

In 1911, those within the field were asserting that the study of literature should be experience-based, incorporating students’ physical, emotional, and intellectual responses. The Curriculum Commission maintained this perspective, which is evident in these two central works, though the participants in the conversation expanded this notion by articulating that a truly experiential methodology must allow the physical, the emotional, and the intellectual to emerge in the classroom, as they do naturally in life. In the discussion of the basic principles guiding the preparation of *Experience Curriculum in English*, the authors say said, “The school

of today and tomorrow seeks to bring outside activities within its walls and to step out with its students to participate in many community activities” (p. 6). They provided elaboration on “outside activities” by discussing the types of human experiences in which students engage on a daily basis:

Truly rich living, any *real* living, includes much more than such purely intellectual activity or (and) the practice of technical skills. Normal living is a composite of dynamic experiences in which the will, the feelings, memory, and reason are all exercised as a single organism. Such typical life experiences as running an errand for mother, organizing a baseball team, giving a party, producing a play, conducting an election campaign or a community drive, all have other elements quite as prominent as the intellectual. It is chiefly of such materials that the warp of life is composed. Unaccompanied by the woof of intellectual activities such as fact-learning, reflection, and acquisition of needed skills, these activities may remain separate strings, lacking the beauty and greater usefulness which a well woven fabric might have. On the other hand the academic exercises. . . if not interwoven with these emotional, volitional threads of life, just so much woof without any warp, are sure to fall to pieces the moment our grasp is relaxed. *The school must manage a functional combination of the dynamic experience of active life and the intellectual activities which have been teachers’ chief concern* [emphasis included in original text]. (pp. 11-12)

Through this passage, the participants inserted a new phrase into the conversation surrounding methodology: *dynamic experience*. Their connection of dynamic experiences to “the will, the feelings, memory, and reason” and also to “active life” leads me to understand their use of this phrase to indicate naturally emerging, purposeful, fluid life-activities. All of the specific examples provided—from running an errand for a family member to organizing a community drive—share the common threads of social interaction and personal relevance, and provide insight to the themes emerging in the conversation surrounding instructional methodologies for all of English, including literature.

Dynamic experience is emphasized again in the conversation, further connecting instruction to emotional, social, and physical life, without divorcing these from the intellectual.

In *Experience Curriculum in English*, the Curriculum Commission expanded on this notion of methodology:

A school program centering upon pupils' dynamic experiences of work and play, of joy and sorrow, will put an end to the disassociation of the practical from the theoretical elements of personality and prevent the splitting up of intellectual life into mutually repellant fragments. It will provide an opportunity to see (and live) life as a whole. (p. 14)

It is worth noting that this statement recognizes that not all emotional responses are joyful or positive. The notion of sorrow or other painful emotional experiences was absent from the conversation of emotionally contextualized instruction at the inaugural meeting. Most significantly, though, this work serves as a rearticulation and expansion of the Methodology Claim established at the inaugural meeting: instruction should engage students in the same types of experiences they encounter in life, which embrace the emotional, physical, social, and intellectual facets of the child's experience.

Data and Warrants for the Methodology Claim

The element of choice is a key piece of datum offered as support for methods that promote experience-based methodologies for teaching literature. In life, students have autonomy and agency, and the authors of *Experience Curriculum in English* described the personal relevance that is inherent to literacy experiences outside of school. There, students engage in "choosing what to read, actual reading, and voluntary discussion of what is read" (p. 17), and the participants in the conversation advocated this type of methodology. *Conducting Experiences in English* is rich source of data for the claim surrounding instructional approaches, because the report was intended to demonstrate specific methods for teaching literature to secondary students. As data, the report offers an entire chapter on "free reading," or allowing the students to choose their own reading material. Providing a well stocked classroom library with a range of levels and topics, allowing classroom time for sustained silent reading of independently selected

novels, and introducing new books to students through informal classroom talk and interaction were all offered as instructional methods that promoted literacy practices such as those one encounters outside of school.

However, the English teachers who contributed to the preparation of these reports did provide a qualification for the Methodology Claim established earlier in the inaugural era. The data they provided for a methodology that promoted experiential learning showed they supported an approach that encouraged emotional and personal responses to literary experiences, but the concept of technical aspects of literature and language—often referred to as “skills” in current discourse—was not absent from the conversation. *An Experience Curriculum in English* supported a methodology that promoted literary practices like those encountered in life through its commentary on the teaching of skills and literary elements, such as vocabulary development and literary devices employed by authors:

In daily living, techniques are essential—as instruments; consequently, in school life techniques should receive adequate attention—as instruments. Some study of principles and even practice exercises are needed, but such academic procedures must be kept in their proper place as accessories to the life experiences. . . . These technical and factual matters are incorporated in the units as enabling objectives. They are not to be left to chance, nor are they to be taught separately as valuable in themselves. They should be incidental, but not accidental. (pp. 6-7)

These comments, which serve as data for this analysis, did not contradict the Methodology Claim—the study of literature should be embodied, incorporating emotional, physical, and intellectual response—but qualified all other data surrounding the claim. Amid free choice in reading, informal classroom talk of student-selected books, and other activities that promote personal experience, explicit instruction had a place, though the perspective clearly privileged the experience over the mastery of isolated skills. The skills were simply the “instruments” students might need in order to enhance their interaction with the text. The participants in this

conversation were clear, though, about the prestige they attributed to instructional approaches that embraced naturally-emerging responses to literature:

As does ordinary social discussion of literature among cultivated adults, classroom talk should center upon the main events and impressions, upon the larger aspects of character, and upon the theme if there is any. It may touch briefly upon some matter of literary artistry, but should rarely tarry long upon such a subject The class should be a rather informal literary club in which the teacher is simply the most experienced member. (p. 22)

This perspective echoes the earlier conversation at the inaugural meeting, where the literary or social club was offered as a model for instruction. The social discussion metaphor, or the notion of an “informal literary club,” emphasized the connected between life and educational practices and between emotional and intellectual response.

The data being used to support the Methodology Claim were in stark opposition to the perspective offered just forty and fifty years earlier by the uniform entrance examinations. Instead of prescribed lists, secondary teachers of literature embraced choice and informal discussion. They placed discrete facts in the background, and foregrounded the text, the ideas expressed through that text, and the experiences students might have through interactions with text. Those within the field would not have accepted the data or the claim if they did not continue to embrace shared assumptions about the nature of learning. By accepting instructional practices which highlighted choice and the relationship between emotional and intellectual response, these English educators were again adhering to notions of educating the “whole child,” or an embodied approach to teaching and learning, a concept typically associated with the progressive movement in education. Centering the curriculum and the classroom on the responses, interests, and needs of the student—and working from that point out to the necessary skills and literary knowledge—provided a structure within which students’ experiences were respected.

Conclusion

The central claims concerning the desired purpose and methodology for literature instruction revealed a conversation that, during the inaugural years of English education as a profession, demonstrated considerable consistency. In seeking to unpack the answers to key questions about the *what*, *why*, and *how* of literature instruction, I learned that during the inaugural era of the field, English educators whose voices were recorded in these central documents situated their conversation around notions of *experience*, which served as a shared value among the teacher-ancestors of currently practicing English educators. However, it must be noted that this shared value appeared to be in a state of constant negotiation, because the nature of experience tended to shift from one aspect of the conversation to another. Although *experience* was used throughout the discourse of the inaugural years, there was not a unitary definition for what is meant by the term during this era. At times, it appeared to reference the importance of experience as a way of knowing, which led the field to center the curriculum and literature selections around experiences students could relate to their own lives or the world around them. At other times, particularly with regard to the Methodology Claim, experience was connected with experiential learning, or the progressive notion of educating the whole child. During the conversation surrounding purpose in the Commission Reports, there appeared to be an emerging understanding of experience as connected to self-transformation.

In spite of the fluid nature of this term, as it was use in this conversation, in all cases, the notion of experience reflected key themes or tenets associated with the progressive movement in education. For this reason, I believe one can agree with Applebee that during the inaugural years of English education, the field was influenced by the central reform movement in education of that time. English educators used the language of reform, rejecting traditional, academically focused understandings of curriculum and instruction as they addressed questions that would

become foundational to the ongoing conversations surrounding the teaching of literature at the secondary level: What purpose should literature hold in the English classroom? What approaches are best suited to this purpose? Are some works to be privileged over others? The answers to all of these were embedded within the arguments surrounding the Purpose Claim and the Methodology Claim. The teachers involved in this conversation advocated the use of literature that promoted reflections of human experience, provided vicarious experiences, involved embodied responses, and centered on issues of relevance to students' lives. Rather than privileging specific titles, those within the field favored works for the experience they provided through and with literature.

However, while the profession of English education was staking its claims, situating its conversation within the context of reform and growing in its influence, it was not insulated from the growing criticism directed toward progressive ideas in general. As discussed in Chapter One, progressive education in the United States came under assault in the years prior to and immediately following World War Two, and the field of English education suffered this same fate. The work of NCTE, specifically the Curriculum Commission and its *Experience Curriculum in English* (1935) and *Conducting Experiences in English* (1939), were singled out for their impact on the secondary English curriculum. In *The Training of Secondary School Teachers, Especially with Reference to English* (1942), the Joint Committee of the Faculty of Harvard College and of the Graduate School of Education critiqued the influence of these works and how they lead to an erosion of “whatever classroom monopoly the classics still enjoyed” (p. 33) and the creation of “a great deal of confusion as to what kind of book is the best kind of book for high school English” (p. 33). This report, and the committee which prepared it, did not deny the problems posed by the uniform entrance examination or the need for some expansion of the curriculum. However, the committee clearly disagreed with the same progressive themes that

were embraced by those within the field of English education, as evidenced by their critique of education that demonstrated these themes:

It is in danger of trying to satisfy the supposed needs of the pupil at the expense of the need of society for trained minds. Whatever a trained mind may be, it is certainly not a mind that demands of the world a constant opportunity for emotional outlets, or that asks of life at every turn a change to develop the personality by spontaneous imagination or free expression. (p. 68)

The Training of Secondary School Teachers, Especially with Reference to English, which was representative of the types of critiques confronting English teachers during the inaugural years, confronted notions of experience as a way of knowing, embodied learning or education of the “whole child,” and the value of instruction that is student-centered. These are the same shared values that served as underlying assumptions supporting English education’s claims surrounding the teaching of literature at the secondary level.

Toulmin (1958) cautioned that conflict arises when the supplied warrants are not valued by those to whom they are offered, which provided insight to this examination of the conversation surrounding literature instruction during the inaugural years of the field. The Purpose Claim and the Methodology Claim were accepted by those within the field because the arguments were embedded within shared values held by those dominant voices in the conversation. However, those from outside the field did not hold these same basic assumptions about the purposes for education in general, and therefore, about the purposes for literary study in the secondary school. This is evidenced by *The Training of Secondary School Teachers, Especially with Reference to English*, and even the remarks made by Harvard President Eliot in his 1873 *Annual Report of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College*. Consequently, the same data and warrants that solidified the field’s acceptance of the major claims for literature instruction would serve as the basis for critique from outside the field and would lead to continued tensions surrounding the field.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE INSTRUCTION IN A TIME OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Basic concepts in the theory of literature fortunately do not “date.”

Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1968

In 1961, the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) dedicated its sixtieth yearbook to an examination of the many social issues facing schools at that time. The existence of this volume, *Social Forces Influencing American Education*, edited by N. B. Henry, is a testament to the complex issues with which the United States, and thus the public school, grappled. Post-war America faced many economic, political, and societal changes, which led to a reexamination of what it meant to be educated. Schramm (1961), in his chapter in the NSSE yearbook, said that education was viewed by many, during this time of social change, as a tool of “international destiny” (p. 208), and the field of English education was not exempt from the challenges this new vision would bring.

Amid a changing political climate, rapidly fluctuating demographics, and the call for civil rights for all people—people of color, women, and other marginalized groups—the American public turned to the school as a stabilizing agent. Many historians, including Cremin (1961), Spring (1976), and Rury (2002), have pointed out that during the post-war period, particularly on the heels of Sputnik, a backlash against educational reforms associated with the progressive movement ensued and there were increased demands for a return to more “traditional” teaching methods in the schools, with an emphasis on a strict academic approach to the core subjects of math, science, English, and history. Educators in math and science led the way in a return to traditional approaches, though those in the field of English education felt the pressure to conform as well; they used the changing social and political climate as an opportunity to revive the

conversation surrounding the teaching of English in the secondary school. An examination of the conversations in English education during this era demonstrates that the field used the changing social and political climate as an opportunity to redefine their shared values about the teaching of literature.

This chapter focuses specifically on a period of time marked by social change, referred to herein as the social reform era. In order to establish the scope of this chapter, the launching of Sputnik in 1957 serves as a “starting point.” The central works analyzed for this chapter were published in the late 1960s, though the period from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s serves as prior and post historical context for those works.

Chapter Two revealed that various conceptions of *experience* influenced the field’s understanding of English education, particularly with reference to literature instruction. Although the nature of experience shifted from one concept to the next, the conversation reveals that during the inaugural era, English educators held shared beliefs about literature’s value as a reflection of human experience and also about instructional approaches that embrace experience-based responses to literature. Through this chapter, I examine the claims staked by a later generation of English educators, thereby providing insight to the relationship between the claims of the inaugural members of the discourse community and those of English educators during this era of social change. Using the Toulmin (1958) method of argument analysis, I again analyze the claims as they are articulated in several documents influential to the field. These central documents are the following:

Various archived materials pertaining to the Dartmouth Conference
Growth Through English, (Dixon, 1967)
The Uses of English (Muller, 1967)
Literature as Exploration, revised edition (Rosenblatt, 1968)

Prior to the analysis, though, one must examine the historical context in which the claims were articulated. The remainder of this chapter provides a brief discussion of the social climate of the period, addressing the ways in which politics, shifting demographics, and the fight for civil rights impacted the classroom. Following this, utilizing Toulmin's model, attention goes to the field's claims of purpose and methodology, as well as the key sources of data used to support the claims and the warrants inherent to them. This analysis provides insights into the field as it struggled, in a period of change, to reassert its beliefs about what English education should be and should do for a child.

Historical Context

The Influence of Sputnik

In the period following World War Two, the role of education grew in importance in the United States, both to the public and the federal government. Expanding upon earlier views of education, which saw the school as a place for "Americanization" of a diverse society and as a starting point for economic development, the school was now viewed as a vital instrument for national defense and social policy (Cremin, 1961; Rury, 2002; Spring, 2002). The launching of the Russian satellite Sputnik in 1957 was one of the most significant events leading to a reexamination of the public school in post-war America. The apparent superiority of Russian technological advancements, as evidenced by this event, embarrassed the United States government and public, and the country began seeking reasons for what they saw as a national failure. Before a solution could be found, however, a specific problem had to be identified. As the "space race" heated up, education became the target of criticism. In the introduction to NSSE's sixtieth yearbook, Tyler (1961) said of this period:

An increasing number of articulate citizens are urging a "tougher" course of study, more stringent discipline, and less attention to the pupil's individual development. The launching of the first Sputnik in 1957 stimulated a chorus of

criticisms and attacks upon the American educational system and resulted in changes in policies and practices in a number of schools. (p. 2)

The public feared that American schools were academically inferior to those in Russia, and thus sought tougher academic standards. The greatest demand came for increased rigor in math and science instruction, which was reflected in the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. The act increased federal funding for mathematics and science programs at the secondary level, as well as training for secondary teachers in these fields.

The NDEA tended to exclude the field of English education, providing it with none of the financial resources that were funneled into the other fields. Applebee (1974) has called this exclusion a “sobering experience” (p. 189) for English educators. The NDEA—and the lack of attention it paid to English education—impressed upon English educators the need to redefine the core of the field. Initial attempts at this resulted in a series of Basic Issues Conferences, funded by the Ford Foundation and cosponsored by NCTE, the Modern Language Association, the College English Association, and the American Studies Association, which highlighted a more academic, and less experientially-based approach to English education. NCTE actively sought the federal funding denied the field by the NDEA, and in 1961, Project English emerged as a federally funded program. Project English focused primarily on written communication and reading at the primary level, paying limited attention to the teaching of literature. Applebee (1974) has suggested that the fluid nature of literature instruction was the reason the field of English education received little support.

The Basic Issues Conferences and Project English were successful in reasserting the field of English into public discourse surrounding education. However, the field appeared to be pulling away from the shared values revealed during its inaugural years. Those experientially-based values for education—which promoted literature as a reflection of life and encouraged

whole-child approaches to instruction—might not address the concerns highlighted by the launching of Sputnik, but they were vital to addressing other critical issues of the period. As other social issues confronted those in the classroom, the field of English education would recognize the need to define its field in terms other than the “traditional approaches” desired by those outside of the field.

Social Change

In addition to the changes Sputnik brought to public education, the schools were confronted by radical changes taking place in the social structure of the United States (e.g., Henry, 1961; Spring, 1979; Squire, 1977). The NSSE yearbook, mentioned above, dedicated several chapters to the shifting demographics in American society, highlighting the ways in which this shift impacted education. Robert Havighurst (1961), in his chapter on the impact of social-class, identified post-war America as the place in which homogeneous communities, or communities populated largely by families and individuals from the same socio-economic range, began to develop. He highlighted three distinct homogeneous communities: (1) the upper-middle and upper-class suburban community, characterized as having very few families in the community with lower-middle incomes; (2) the working class suburb, comprised of middle to lower-middle incomes, with very few low income families; and (3) what he called the “city slum” (p. 139), populated almost exclusively by those with low or poverty level incomes. These communities were drawn along racial and economic lines, thus leading to intense segregation.

The Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* had been a watershed event in the movement for civil rights for African Americans. However, the homogenous communities, resulting, in part, from white flight, blocked genuine desegregation of public schools, and significant inequities existed, as they still do, between majority white and majority black schools. The *de facto* segregation of schools and

communities, even after legal segregation was abolished, highlighted the deeply rooted nature of racism and oppression with which the public had to contend.

The Civil Rights Movement gained significant momentum in the years immediately following the Brown decision, leaving no aspect of American culture unchanged (Berube, 1994; Park, 2000). Even with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, inequalities existed, and previously marginalized persons—including various ethnic groups—actively sought to assert their rights. The National Organization for Women formed, bringing attention to gender issues in both the public and private arena. The American school was challenged with addressing all of these critical, social issues. Unfortunately, the rigid curriculum being implemented in schools—where attention to the “whole child” was rejected—did not help teachers combat the pressing social issues of the time. A gap existed between educational policies that viewed the schools as instruments of social change and educational practices that diminished the importance of embodied, holistic understandings of what it means to educate a child. Amid this tension, the field of English education felt the need to redefine itself and to rearticulate its aims and means for the study of English in secondary schools.

Analysis of the Major Claims

Staking the Claims

Context of the Central Works: Dartmouth Conference

The Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching of English, generally known to those within the field of English education as the Dartmouth Conference, represented a significant rearticulation of the aims for English education. Herbert J. Muller (1967), the author of *The Uses of English*, a summation of the conference’s findings prepared for the general public, characterized post-war society as the “the most heterogeneous, fluid society in all of history” (p. 8). The conference, held in 1966, brought together English educators, primary grades through

university and teacher education, from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada for a month-long conversation surrounding the state of English education—in light of the fluid, rapidly changing societies in all three nations. John Dixon (1967), charged with preparing the summative report of the Dartmouth Conference for those within the profession, said of his task, “In taking from the dialogue of the Seminar what would help me make sense of English as I know it, my aim has been not to make an end of discussion (by a sort of super summing-up) but rather to propose a new starting point” (p. *xi*). Dixon’s work and the companion account prepared by Muller document this new “starting point” in the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature.

Held almost a decade after the launching of Sputnik and the public outcry it raised, the participants still felt the impact of the resulting calls for a return to traditional educational approaches, and it becomes clear that some Dartmouth Conference participants rejected the notion that education should be focused rigidly on academic content rather than the needs of the child. An examination of the documents pertaining to the Dartmouth Conference archived at NCTE’s library revealed a paper presented to one of the study groups at Dartmouth entitled “The Why of the Lifted Eyebrow” (1966). The author’s name does not appear on the paper, nor it is listed anywhere on the Seminar Program (1966). The only identifying information is the title, plus a subtitle of “Supporting Paper Seven for Working Party One.” In spite of its anonymity, a passage contained within it indicated the sentiment concerning Sputnik, and the educational reform surrounding it, that some carried with them to Dartmouth. The unnamed author addressed the public skepticism directed at progressive education:

Then there was Sputnik. A scapegoat was necessary. Back to the basics, screamed the often unknowledgeable layman. Before long scientists or statisticians who didn’t know a six-year-old human child from a rhesus monkey were telling teachers not only what to teach but how to teach. The lift of the

eyebrow is a hangover from those days when people had to have something or someone to blame, so “teaching the whole child” became the villain. (p. 3)

The paper rejected calls for education that did not center itself around the student or recognize the embodied nature of the “whole child” in the learning process, and the final documents that emerged out of the Dartmouth Conference indicated that most present were in agreement with this sentiment.

James R. Squire (1965) prepared the proposal to secure funding for this event. In the *Proposal for an International Seminar on the Teaching and Learning of English*, he said of the field of English education, “We still lack even the beginnings of a generally accepted philosophy to build on, and without this much of our effort must be arbitrary or aimless or even mistaken, however hard we try” (p. 6). Nevertheless, the documents produced on the heels of Dartmouth Conference reveal that the dominant voices in the field embraced similar values and beliefs as those held by their predecessors, at least in terms of literature instruction.

The organizers of the Dartmouth Conference, which was funded by the Carnegie Foundation and cosponsored by NCTE, the Modern Language Association, and Great Britain’s chapter of NCTE, invited only fifty people to participate in the event. Given the length of the event, and the international travel required of many participants, the low number is understandable; the cost of such a conference must have been quite high. However, the limited number of voices contributing to the conversation at Dartmouth is problematic, because many perspectives are excluded from the conversation. An effort was made to balance the participants evenly among classroom teachers, college and university English professors, professors of English education, and other specialists, such as curriculum supervisors and administrators. However, it is not possible to say that the ideas expressed at the conference reflect those of the average secondary English teacher. Indeed, an examination of the *Biographical Summaries*

(1966) of the Dartmouth participants, indicate that those in attendance were anything but typical. The participants' records of professional accomplishment—publications and positions of leadership in professional organizations, schools, and universities—led to their inclusion in the Dartmouth Conference, but also set them apart from the average classroom teacher.

Furthermore, the limited female presence is also problematic. Few of the participants were women, and only one of the fifteen “seed papers” used to initiate discussion at the start of the conference was presented by a woman. The male dominance of the seminar is evident in other, less direct ways, too. For example, the program for the conference indicates there was a cocktail reception held on Sunday, August 21. Next to the date and time for this event, was the following notation: “Cocktails at the Arthur Jensen residence. Wives and families of participants are invited.” The use of *wives* as opposed to *spouses* further illustrates the male-dominated world-view held by the organizers of this important gathering. The limited female presence is problematic, particularly given the period. At a time when women were actively seeking equality, a group of influential, well-intentioned educators failed to open their own ranks and expand the voices contributing to this important conversation.

The archived documents contain no formal record of the representation of people of color, though it is reasonable to assume that it, too, was limited. Nevertheless, in spite of these obvious limitations and the inherent contradictions, the Dartmouth Conference represents a significant rearticulation of the field's goals. Applebee (1974) has characterized Dartmouth as “a cathartic experience for all involved” and asserted that it “sharply altered the professional emphases of NCTE leaders” (p. 229). The conference is still viewed with nostalgia by those in the field, as evidenced by the session dedicated to its celebration, forty-five years later, at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in 2001. It was a foundational event, and as with the central works in Chapter Two, one can only say that the views that

emerged from Dartmouth Conference represented the dominant voices of the teacher-leaders in the field at that time.

The two works published in 1967, *The Uses of English* and *Growth Through English*, highlight the Purpose Claim and the Methodology Claim as they were articulated during the Dartmouth Conference. The two works are distinct from one another, in that the first was published for the general public, while the latter was written specifically for those within the profession of English education. However, both works document the Dartmouth Conference participants' points of agreement, making the content of the two publications very similar. The two central works were planned in the organizational stages of the Dartmouth Conference. Squire (1965) described the intended scope and purpose of these works in his proposal for the event:

One writer, to be British, will be a specialist in the teaching of English with a clear, readable writing style, who will prepare a report to the profession, to be published jointly by NATE, NCTE, and MLA. This report will be cast in a form designated to elicit the greatest possible impact on curriculum development in the countries involved. The second writer would be a highly regarded American author with academic connections in an American university who would prepare a second, quite different report on the conference designed for the general reading public in Britain, Canada, and the United States. (pp. 9 – 10)

One of the works may have foregrounded aspects of the English curriculum that the other work did not, but the two texts presented a singular conversation with the same purposes for literature instruction, and represent the dominant voices in the field of English education during the era of social reform. Because the works were based on the same ideas and published at the same time, they are analyzed together, as if they are a two volume set. An analysis of these works demonstrates that the English educators at the Dartmouth Conference embraced ideas about learning similar to those held by their teacher-ancestors and continued to speak of literature within the context of experience.

The Purpose Claim

Solidifying the aims of instruction in English was a primary function of the Dartmouth Conference, and the teaching of literature was a vital part of that conversation. In documents from the Dartmouth Conference, literature instruction is often discussed in terms of social interaction and dialogue or “classroom talk,” which is evidence of the influence British educators, particularly James Britton (1970) had at the seminar. Classroom talk—or constructive conversation used to build meaning—was central to Britton’s work, and was often mentioned throughout the central works documenting the findings of Dartmouth. It is interesting to see how his work, typically associated with facets of English other than literature, was fundamental to conversations about literature. Britton served as the discussant for the group of participants challenged with answering the question, “What is English?” In the written record of this group’s discussion, *Response to Working Party Paper One: What is English* (1966), Britton commented on the uses and purposes of literature:

Is there a body of knowledge called literature? And, here I think, is a major question. Certainly, there is a body of knowledge *about* literature – there is an historical body of knowledge, there is a critical body of knowledge. I would gather from the papers, if not from my colleagues from the United Kingdom, that there would be a strong view to resist the idea that literature itself can be regarded as a body of knowledge. Those of us who have taught in schools, in England anyway, have only to think of the difference between knowing *Julius Caesar* for an examination and whatever we may feel *Julius Caesar* is meant for. (p. 4)

With these comments, Britton began to establish a difference between *knowing* a piece of literature, which would fall under the umbrella of academic or critical analysis and *feeling* a piece of literature, which aligns more closely with the notion of experience. He continued, making it clear that experience is central to literature study:

Whenever he [the student] reads something which has tested his ability, strains his ability, he has coped with experience with the assistance of the author. He has shaped experience – entered into and altered and shaped experience – and has also

improved his skill, his ability to read. Now, we have consistently given our attention to the second of these and ignored the first of these. (pp. 9 – 10)

Within this statement, Britton spoke of *experience* multiple times, though the term appears to hold several different definitions. The first use, when the student “coped with experience,” addressed the physical act of reading, which in itself is an experience. Britton expanded upon this with other definitions of experience. He said the student “shaped experience” when he or she “entered into” experience, which addresses the human experience of both the student and the author. Through the act of reading, the student engaged or “entered into” the experience that the author conveyed in the text; from this, the student “altered and shaped” his or her own experience, thereby presenting a more complex depiction of the human experience reflected through literature.

A fuller understanding of the field’s most significant understanding of experience emerges throughout the formally reported records of Dartmouth Conference. Although Britton’s exact words did not find their way in the Muller’s account of the conference, *The Uses of English*, his thoughts on “shaped experience” and “altered” experience are foregrounded in the documented conversation. Muller referred directly to Britton’s contributions to the conversation about the purposes for English, including literature, when he said: “I for one would like to keep English broad and rich. I liked a metaphor used by James Britton when she suggested that English was the means of integrating all public knowledge and learning to live” (p. 10). The phrase “learning to live” indicates that literacy practices should provide one with insight, knowledge, or “learning” about the human experience. Rather than merely “reflecting” or “mirroring” human experience, an element of self-knowledge began to emerge as the ultimate goal of exploring human experience, thereby expanding the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature.

Muller further expanded this notion and connected it explicitly to the teaching of literature in the chapter entitled “The Uses of Literature.” A group of English educators had been charged specifically with addressing the teaching of literature, and Muller provided an overview of their general consensus:

The literature study group discussed chiefly “affective” responses, since they were wary of knowledge, explicit analysis, demands for “formulation” of responses, etc. They nevertheless assumed, at least tacitly, that literature itself is a significant way of “knowing” about life. (p. 91)

By speaking of literature as a “way of ‘knowing’ about life,” the participants in this conversation do did address the use of literature to reveal knowledge of human experience, which aligns with the Purpose Claim of those during the inaugural era. However, the possessor of that experience appears to have shifted. Previously, literature was promoted for its ability to reveal human experiences to which the students could relate, though the ultimate purpose tended to focus on simply understanding the experience the author imparted. However, Dartmouth Conference participants refined this purpose, viewing literature as “a way of knowing about life,” as a tool for “learning to live,” and as a way to “alter” experience. In this way, the participants still valued literature’s ability to impart human experience, but the focus of the Purpose Claim changed: Rather than reflecting merely an experience to which students could relate, literature served to lead students to a greater awareness of and knowledge about their own human experience.

Data and Warrants for the Purpose Claim

A fuller understanding of the field’s most significant understanding of experience emerges in Dixon’s record of the conference, and serves as data for the Purpose Claim. Within this record, the purpose of literature instruction is not separated from the overall purpose of English instruction, and within those conversations, the field’s shared beliefs about experience

become clearer. *Growth Through English*, which represents the consensus of those at the Dartmouth Conference, connects the purpose for all of the English language arts, including literature, with experience. While commenting on the various aspects of language arts activities—reading, writing, speaking—Dixon spoke of the “many possible avenues” a student may “discover in the course of a lesson” (p. 33). He expanded this concept by providing specific topics that may emerge:

What unifies such varied classroom activities in the theme or aspect of human experience on which work centers. Some of the fundamental “lessons” that pupils learn in English have already been suggested in the extracts quoted from pupils’ writing: they learn about the fascination of living things like newts; the permanence and transience of flowers, trees, and people; the sense of loss; and, inevitably, about themselves. We teachers organize the activities in the hope of effecting insight into experience, they are means to an end. (pp. 33 – 34)

This statement, which appeared in the chapter dedicated to classroom implementation of the field’s various facets and served as a summation of the conversations held at Dartmouth Conference, supported the Purpose Claim. Dixon articulated that the course should center upon “themes or aspects of human experience,” and although he did not use the same terminology employed by the founders of the field, such as “mirror” or “reflection,” the illustrative lessons he offered described a classroom where the language arts, including literature, serve as the tools for highlighting, or “effecting insight” into human experiences. Furthermore, by articulating that students also learn “about themselves,” Dixon’s summation of the conversation demonstrated that self-knowledge was a part of the reflective process.

The participants at Dartmouth Conference, as documented in the two central works, further supported the claim by turning their attention to the question of what should be taught in the classroom. These conversations, and the support they offered for experience as the greater purpose, serve as data for the claim. Muller’s (1967) account, *The Uses of English*, asserted that there was little debate among the participants over what should be taught. With the focus on

experience, those present at the Dartmouth Conference supported this facet of the claim by promoting a wide variety of literature, including contemporary and classic selections. The discerning feature in selecting literature was the relevance to students' experiences. In his summary of the participants' reports about and attitudes toward literature selection, Muller highlighted this point:

As for literature proper, it was assumed that "good" books should be assigned, but the seminar took a broad view of these too, not insisting on classics or anything like the "great books" program. Some standard works (such as *Silas Marner*) have long been assigned out of unthinking habit, without regard to the interests of students. The literature study group specifically questioned the assumption that our cultural heritage required the teaching of certain writers. While some writers, from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Mark Twain, D. H. Lawrence, and Robert Frost, have "provided rich literary experiences to readers of varied backgrounds," this heritage "is not a packet to be transmitted inert," but is alive and fluid. (pp. 79 – 80)

According to Muller, the participants questioned the challenged understandings about literature that promoted a specific body of knowledge *about* literature, and promoted instead an understanding of literature "designed in terms of experience rather than knowledge, with such criteria as variety, points of view or perspectives on life, and kinds of experience" (p. 81). In this instance, *experience* appears to refer to the expression of human experience within literature, including the "point of view" and "perspective on life" that the author includes in the text. These themes echo the Purpose Claim articulated by English educators during the inaugural era. However, Muller added that the members of the literature study group were "concerned primarily with the expansion of the child's experience, not of his formal knowledge of literature" (p. 81). In this scenario, "expansion" of experience seems to speak of building upon the students' points of view and perspective on life. This does not contradict the claims articulated by the inaugural members of the discourse community, but rather offers an expanded perspective on whose experiences literature is intended to reflect.

While the participants at Dartmouth Conference continued to articulate literature's purpose in terms of experience, they began this claim with data that did not emerge in the earlier conversation: diversity of experience. As discussed previously in this chapter, many social issues were confronting the schools. In a society characterized by diversity, there was great power in literature's ability to provide vicarious experience or a reflection of life that differed from one's own. This was an idea included in the discussion at the inaugural meeting. Dixon's account of the Dartmouth Conference also addressed vicarious experience through literature, asserting that "we look to literature to bring order and control to our world, and perhaps to offer an encounter with difficult areas of experience without exacting from us the full price" (p. 57). Dixon continued by quoting the contributions of Langer, one of the participants at the conference: "In reading literature at our highest, we come closest to the ebb and flow of everyday human activity. The 'work' becomes a 'virtual experience'" (p. 57). After establishing the power of literature to provide "virtual experience" or to allow one to grapple with "difficult areas of experience," the conversation turned to literature's power to expose students to broader, more diverse human experiences.

Building upon the assertion that literary selections should align with students' interests, Muller's account addressed the public's demand for literature with "simple, conventional morals, and the fear of books that are disturbing, 'subversive,' or 'un-American'" (pp. 92 – 93). According to Muller, the participants decided that books considered "subversive" or "un-American" by some people, (*Catcher in the Rye* was the book specifically mentioned) were desirable, when balanced with books of other perspectives, because they allowed students to engage in self-examination and exploration of new ideas. Muller spoke of the rationale used by one participant and its reception by the rest of the participants:

James Miller concluded that teachers of literature should select books embodying diverse versions of life and beliefs about values, and then question, discuss, and explore them with the students; this would lead to an awareness of moral complexity, ambiguity, and paradox. The seminar expressed no objection to this conclusion. (p. 93)

This idea, which went unopposed by those present at the Dartmouth Conference, can be viewed as supporting data for the Purpose Claim, reflecting the belief that literature instruction should expand students' understandings not only of themselves but also of differing perspectives in their world. Through an analysis of the conversation, one gets a sense that participants articulated the value of diverse experiences, though when one reflects on the lack of diverse perspectives (e.g., limited representation of women or people of color), this aspect of the conversation is problematic. In spite of this contradiction, the presence of this theme in the conversation does indicate a growing sense of literature, and its ability to reflect human experience, as transformative.

The conversation surrounding literature, as it is documented in these central works, demonstrates that during this era of social change, English educators continued to hold shared assumptions about the nature of knowledge and education. By highlighting literature's purpose in the curriculum as a tool for expression of human experience, which would lead, in part, to a greater self-knowledge, Dartmouth participants appeared to embrace an underlying purpose for education that went beyond the academic. They articulated throughout the conversation a desire to see the study of literature become more than an examination of a static body of knowledge. Rather than studying specific works of literature, the literary works should become—according to the voices present in this conversation—a tool for understanding “diverse versions of life” and for providing “insight into life,” which may be evidence of a lingering presence of progressive themes in English education. Progressive education—as part of a reform movement—valued critical reflection of life as a means of changing the individual, and of society (e.g., Addams,

1981/1910; Dewey, 1990/1900; Young, 1902). While the sense of societal transformation did not fully emerge during the conference, participants' promotion of literature's value as a tool for self-reflection may be considered an appropriation of this central progressive theme, which was also present during the inaugural years. Participants' reassertion of literature as a reflection of life, as means for self-examination for understanding human experience, continued to embrace progressive themes, demonstrating that English educators of the social reform era held much in common with their teacher-ancestors.

The Methodology Claim

Once the English educators at the Dartmouth Conference established their purpose for the teaching of literature, they turned to the issue of how best to teach it. By analyzing the conversation surrounding instructional approaches to literature at the secondary level, one gets a deeper understanding of the types of knowledge those within the field privileged. The approaches to instruction, including the types of response one solicits from students and the opportunities one provides for students to demonstrate their understandings, provide insight into philosophies guiding instruction. The participants at Dartmouth Conference, much like those who lent their voices to the earlier conversation in the field, described instructional approaches that embraced experiential learning.

In his record of the Dartmouth Conference, *The Uses of English*, Muller acknowledged an influence of the progressive movement on education as he began with his accounting of the conversation surrounding instruction. He spoke of the work of Frank Whitehead (1968), one of the participants at Dartmouth Conference and a contributor to this conversation, and in doing so, he briefly addressed the influence of progressive educator John Dewey on the instructional understandings articulated at the conference:

As Frank Whitehead put it, the teacher should “nudge” the young along the path of their natural development instead of instructing them in prescribed subject matter – an attitude expressed in the title of his recent book, *The Disappearing Dias*. He prefaced this book with a quotation from John Dewey, father of “progressive education.” (p. 12)

Muller did not cite the quotation from Dewey, though additional explication throughout his account seems to connect these comments with the progressive theme of educating the “whole child.” Muller addressed the “principal aim” of instructional approaches to the teaching of literature in the chapter of his work dedicated to literature, titled “The Uses of Literature.” The consensus reached by the participants, as reported by Muller, was that classroom activities ought to be experience-based, and the emphasis on experience provides additional insight into Muller’s earlier use of “natural development” in education:

The immediate object of the teacher should be to get the child actively ‘involved’ or ‘engaged’ – a favorite theme at the seminar. In simpler terms, the teacher should make or keep literature alive, as it naturally is for little children. He should as naturally assist the growing child to read with more understanding, or to achieve the “proficiency” that appeared as a primary aim in the statements of several groups, but most at the seminar actually wanted more than this. If they seldom put it first in so many words, their principal aim was that students acquire not merely an ability to read well but a lasting desire to read books. (p. 79)

Muller spoke of some dissent on this issue when acknowledging that not all participants held the same primary aims for instruction, which is to be expected with a body of participants from diverse levels of English education. However, he asserted that the consensus among participants was that the instructional approach should be “involved,” “engaged,” “alive,” and should develop life-long readers. In spite of Squire’s (1965) assertion that no ideological consensus existed at the time, analysis of this conversation reveals that the participants at Dartmouth Conference—the dominant voices within the field of English education during this era of social reform—shared with their teacher-ancestors similar beliefs about experience-based literature instruction.

Data and Warrants for the Methodology Claim

In search of an instructional methodology that would engage students in the classroom, the participants at the Dartmouth Conference turned to the concept of reader response, which WAS being developed in the late 1960s by such theorists as Bleich (1972), Fish (1970), and Holland (1975). Muller, in his accounting of the conference, said that a number of participants were, at first, uncomfortable with the issue of response to literature. For them, the word “response” was too undefined, with the connotation of “passive, merely verbal, or immediate response” (p. 78). However, over the course of the month-long conference, they arrived at a fuller understanding of response to literature, one that was “active, with deep, lasting effects” (p. 78). Drawing from response methods that include active engagement, the participants provided the data that would support the Methodology Claim.

Dixon’s record of the conference included a discussion of methodology that promoted the value of response that emerges out of students’ natural connections with the literature. Dixon used the word “talk,” perhaps indicating, again, the influence of James Britton and other British scholars, but it is clear that “talk” represented the participants’ notions of response. He began his summation of the participants’ consensus by saying, “When talk [in the classroom] does arise, at its best it springs from the pupils,” (p. 59). The image of classroom talk “springing” from the student aligns with the assertion that literature study should be authentic or natural, thus providing support, or data, for the claim. Dixon continued his discussion of student-initiated talk, with an extended classroom vignette provided by one of the participants:

It [student-initiated talk] may be quite primitive: “That’s me!” said a college student, listening to a reading about Clavinger in *Catch 22*. “Are we still at that stage?” was his friend’s reply. What would ours be? *That’s me* has two components, and our aim is to move dynamically from the *me* of personal identification to the *that* of the poem or the object in the poem. The discipline lies in the attention to the *that*, and it should be made plain that there is no real dichotomy here, but a natural movement from subject to object and back again.

The *That's me* may reveal a very partial and too selective attention to the work, but the teacher will get nowhere in the attempt to make the work meaningful if he does not begin with *me*. . . The reference to life is not purely illustrative but confirms the affective experience of literature, and is of course its foundation. (p. 59)

This illustration, situated within a college classroom, demonstrated that without “affective experience,” or the personal connection with literature, the literary text has no meaning for the student. If personal response—grounded in a student’s own experience—were to be denied, then meaning, and arguably enjoyment, would be stripped from the literary experience. The classroom vignette, used to support the importance of personal engagement and experience-based response, can be viewed as supporting data for the Methodology Claim.

In their support of instructional approaches that are experiential or engaging in nature, the participants at Dartmouth Conference did not stop with a purely introspective response to literature. Dixon, in his record of the shared views of those present, said that personal, naturally-emerging response “may really be the way in” (p. 62). In their conversation about best practice in the teaching of literature, the participants at Dartmouth Conference recognized that for literature to be a reflection of life—the major claim of purpose for those in the field—the instructional approach must begin with response, but also include active engagement with the text. The participants’ conversations on this topic served as additional data for an instructional methodology that was experience-based. Dixon’s record discussed numerous forms of instruction that provided ways for the student to actively engage the text and the ideas explored in the text, including classroom experiences “in drama, in choral readings, in the preparation of tape recordings and live recitals” (p. 60). *Growth Through English* provided an additional classroom vignette, which demonstrated how one of these approaches, drama, can engage the student in both self-examination of experience and interpretation of text, in an active, authentic, enjoyable manner:

Interpretation however implicit should mean bringing our living experience to bear. Sometimes, it is not so much the line as the whole situation that demands this. If we look at Portia before the assassination (in *Julius Caesar* – II, iv), we see in part what it is for a woman to suffer while the man acts; a group would do well to improvise this scene, to engage for themselves in the struggle to contain oneself, passive in the moment of crisis. It is a beautiful scene for what is not said, but implied. Without an inner awareness of this, the lines mean little. But as they consider how Calphurnia too feared for her husband (with an irony characteristic of the play) a maturer group will want to talk about the particular way that Portia, Cato's daughter, responds. When we interpret in action, there is less danger of explication becoming an end in itself, or a disconnected, rational appraisal of what has never been personally felt. (p. 61)

The classroom example, a common and valid source of data within the field of English education, supported the claim that the study of literature should include active engagement. The example calls for students to delve into the emotional aspects of Portia's response (though, in contradiction to the growing social awareness of the time, the gendered-construction of this scene is absent from the discussion), thereby activating emotional engagement. Furthermore, the dramatic representation of the textual interpretation combines physical and intellectual experience—a combination that suggests a more holistic approach to education. This discussion of students actively engaging the text, exploring the motivations and emotions of characters, demonstrated that experiential-learning would lead a student to a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the literary work than would a “desk analysis” (p. 61). This approach embraced personal response, though acknowledged the value of critical engagement with the text. This example, which serves as data, not only supports the Methodology Claim, but also returns to the overall aim established in Purpose Claim: reflection of human experience.

This aspect of the conversation, including the Methodology Claim and the data used to support it, demonstrates a continued shared assumption about the value of educating the whole child, rather than strictly focusing on the academic aspect of human experience. This theme of embodied or whole-child education underscores the conversation documented throughout these

works. The participants could not embrace a response to literature that starts with *me*, as they did in the classroom vignette of a discussion about *Catch 22* (Heller, 1961), if they had not accepted the notion that personal experience is a valid source of knowledge. Furthermore, they would not have accepted an instructional approach that get students out of their desks, on their feet, and actively engaged with the lives and emotions of characters, if they did not privilege embodied and whole-child approaches to learning. The “desk analysis,” or approach that treats literature as if it is a source of data for classification, which was critiqued by Dixon in his report, would be an easier, more time-efficient approach, but it would treat literature, and education in general, as a static body of knowledge to be mastered. The participants’ rejection of this latter approach demonstrates that the shared values among this discourse community of English educators had remained fairly consistent throughout the years between the founding of NCTE and the Dartmouth Conference.

Reaffirming the Claims

Context of the Central Work: Louise M. Rosenblatt

A renewed sense of purpose for the field of English education emerged out of the Dartmouth Conference. The conference was structured to address the perception that the field lacked a central focus or an agreed-upon foundation from which to build. The seminal reports of the conference, *Growth Through English* and *The Uses of English*, demonstrated that the dominant voices in the field embraced assumptions about learning and literature that were similar to those articulated during the earliest years of English education as a profession. The purposes for literature, approaches to literature instruction, and their interconnectedness to issues of literary selection continued to be articulated within the progressive theme of experience. During the Dartmouth Conference, some participants spoke directly of the influence of progressivism on their understandings for teaching literature, and as an examination of that

conversation revealed, there were indications that the field had continued to adopt and adapt themes inherent to the reform movement.

The influence of Dartmouth Conference on the field and the lingering vestiges of progressivism within the field were evidenced by the republication of a significant work dedicated to the teaching of literature. Louise M. Rosenblatt's (1968) revised edition of *Literature as Exploration*, originally published by the Progressive Education Association in 1938, had new relevance to English educators after the Dartmouth Conference, and it served as a continuation of the conversations initiated at that conference.

In the preface to the first edition of *Literature as Exploration* (1938), Rosenblatt acknowledged the insight offered to her by the teacher-participants at the 1937 Summer Workshop for Teachers of the Progressive Education Association. In that edition, and again in the revised edition, Rosenblatt cited pragmatic philosophers, including Peirce (1935), Dewey (1922), and Whitehead (1929), and adhered to conceptions of learning widely associated with progressive education. Though the first edition of *Literature as Exploration* was an important publication during the progressive era, the post-war critiques of education in general, and progressive education and "whole child" approaches specifically, minimized the immediate impact of this work.

However, after Dartmouth Conference, Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, with its emphasis on experience, provided insights for a new generation of English educators. The foreword to the second, revised edition was written by James Squire (1968), who had also served as an organizer of the Dartmouth Conference and who noted the connection between Rosenblatt's theories and the articulations of those at Dartmouth:

During a year in which the reports of the Anglo-American Seminar at Dartmouth College reaffirm the significance of the reader's engagement with literature as central to the imaginative development of young people, *Literature as*

Exploration demonstrates that engagement with or involvement in literature is not antithetical to critical reading. This then is a timely book, as significant now as when it was first published, for it illuminates the essential relationship between critical response and human response. (p. vi)

Literature as Exploration served as a refinement of the conversation surrounding literature at the Dartmouth Conference. Like those English educators at the conference, Rosenblatt articulated her understandings of the fundamental issues related to literature – purposes, methods, and selection. In this work, she deeply explored their interconnectedness.

Rosenblatt’s preface to the revised edition noted that the basic concepts in the work did not change from first to second edition. She maintained the essence of the first edition, changing only the method of presentation and the specific illustrations or vignettes she used to elaborate upon her ideas. However, her preface included an acknowledgment of the fluidity and diversity of society, an awareness that was absent from the first preface. She asserted that she hoped to make literature accessible to all students, “including those born outside the mainstream of American culture, those whose tempo of growth is fast or slow, those disadvantaged by the narrow life of the urban ghetto or the affluent suburb, and those who are alienated or seeking new goals” (p. viii). Her prominent acknowledgment of the social issues confronting teachers and students during this era—regardless of the socio-economic status from which they come—set this edition apart from the first, and broadened the perspective offered at Dartmouth Conference.

The Purpose Claim

Rosenblatt (1968) opened the first paragraph of *Literature as Exploration* with a clear articulation of her understanding of the purpose for education. She said students faced, during this era, “unprecedented and unpredictable problems” in a “turbulent age” (p. 3). Learning to address these problems was, according to Rosenblatt, a key goal for students:

He [the student] needs to understand himself; he needs to work out harmonious relationships with other people. He must achieve a philosophy, an inner center from which to view in perspective the shifting society about him; he will influence for good or ill its future development. Any knowledge about man and society that schools can give him should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life. (p. 3)

It was the school's responsibility, she asserted, to aid the student in his or her development of self-awareness or an "inner center from which to view" the world, and to promote "harmonious relationships" with others and society around them. Rosenblatt's aims for education, as she articulated them here, went beyond mastery of academic subject matter. Instead, education should equip students, she asserted, to influence society. It was within this broader context that Rosenblatt situated her aims for the teaching of literature at the secondary level.

Like the participants at the Dartmouth Conference and like the founders of the profession and the teacher-leaders who served on NCTE's Curriculum Commission, Rosenblatt embraced the study of literature for the experiential value it held. Indeed, her own articulation of the goals for literature instruction echoed long established values shared by those in the field, as evidenced by her comments surrounding the purpose of literature:

Certainly to the great majority of readers, the human experience that literature presents is primary. For them the formal elements of the work—style and structure, rhythmic flow—function only as a part of the total literary experience. The reader seeks to participate in another's vision—to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his own life more comprehensible. (p. 7)

Rosenblatt's assertion that "the human experience that literature presents is primary" (p. 7), placed experience at the center of literature study. However, she expanded this understanding to articulate the ultimate purpose for centering literature on human experience: to "reap knowledge," "fathom resources" and to "gain insights" of the world and of one's own life. The attention Rosenblatt gave to using the "human experience" inherent to literature as a means for building insight matches the previously articulated claim surrounding the purpose of literature.

Through this articulation of her Purpose Claim, Rosenblatt embraced the power of literature to provide an understanding of human experience, both that of the experiences of others in the world and of one's own life experiences; her comments, though, demonstrated that she embraced the self, and perhaps societal transformation that can come through literature's reflection of life. This was an emergent theme during early moments in the ongoing conversation, and Rosenblatt's work serves as a further development of that belief.

Data and Warrants for the Purpose Claim

In 1938, Rosenblatt had stated in the preface of the first edition that she hoped the book would "serve [her] fellow teachers" (p. x), and the tone of the revised edition suggested in 1968 that she still saw this work as a resource from which she hoped teachers would draw. The specific examples she used to support her purpose for literature instruction were the kinds that would have many literature teachers nodding their heads in agreement. She used classroom examples and discussed the benefits specific works of literature brought to students. These examples were (and still are) powerful to practicing teachers. Furthermore, they solidified her claim and can thus be viewed as data in this conversation surrounding the purposes of literature.

For Rosenblatt, the greatest value in literature was the knowledge it could bring to the reader, both in terms of self-knowledge and new understandings of other people and issues in society. In further support of her claim, she talked of literature as a "living-through" rather than a "knowing about" (p. 38). She said that "students valued literature as a means of enlarging their knowledge of the world, because through literature they acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience* [emphasis included in original]. In this instance, experience, which is connected to "knowledge of the world" appears to mean vicarious engagement with life, as it is presented in a text. Literature, as she articulated it, could allow a student to experience the world vicariously, which is much different from passively listening to a

lecture or reading a textbook. She elaborated on this topic by contrasting literary experience with the static, disembodied knowledge that comes from other forms of learning. She said that literature provides “not theories about Rome, but a living through of the conflicts in *Julius Caesar* or the paradoxes of *Caesar and Cleopatra*” (p. 38). The example provided highlighted the differences between historical study and the experience of a classical piece of literature, which secondary teachers would find familiar and embrace. Rosenblatt added to this, though, by speaking of specific works that might expand the spectrum of literature in the classroom:

In contrast to the historian’s generalized and impersonal account of the hardships of the pioneer’s life, they share these hardships with Par Hansa and Beret in *Giants of the Earth*. The sociologist analyzes for them the problems of the Negro in our society; in Wright’s *Native Son*, Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time*, and Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*, they themselves suffer these problems in their human dimensions. (p. 38)

She spoke also of Bulosan’s *The Laughter of My Father* (1944), and Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), all of which provided reflections of life that would be relevant to the social issues of the era. The literary examples supported the Purpose Claim by demonstrating the specific ways in which literature might lead not only to self-examination but also to insight into human experiences other than one’s own. Her contribution moved the conversation beyond “joyful” experiences with literature, though she did not address the ethical issues a teacher must consider when presenting reflections of “human dimensions” that are complex and politically charged. Furthermore, can one “suffer” oppression or “share hardships” through literature? Rosenblatt does not recognize the limitations of vicarious experience, or the ethical considerations of using literature for these purposes though there was still power in the numerous examples she provided—examples that, in my analysis, serve as data for the Purpose Claim. Her examples included, in addition to those commonly taught at the time, works by African-Americans, women, and authors from non-Western heritage. While supporting her purpose for literature

instruction, Rosenblatt was also able to provide support for the cause she stated in the preface—that literature is for everyone, even those whose voices had previously been marginalized. It was a subtle approach, and though she used these examples as simple illustrations of the human experience to be found in literature, the sub-text behind these examples is worth noting.

Rosenblatt cautioned teachers not to use literature as moral indoctrination, but argued that one cannot deny that literature “inevitably deals with the experiences of human beings” (p. 5). In order to embrace the power of literature as a tool for increased knowledge of ones self and the world, without moving into the realm of promoting one set of moral codes, Rosenblatt advocated the use of a wide selection of literature. In this way, the question of what to teach became linked with the purpose for teaching literature in the first place: the purpose was self-exploration and a broader understanding of society, and thus a variety of experiences must be present if one is to develop that deeper, more complex understanding.

She said that providing the many alternative views of society one can find in literature may help students understand that their own environment—home, school, community—was only one of many ways to live. She talked of literature’s power, when paired with reflection, to reassure a child struggling with issues of identity, including gender roles. Rosenblatt provided an example that highlighted, in a subtle way, issues of concern to young women:

The young girl may need to be liberated from the narrow view of the feminine role imposed by her milieu. . . . Through literature an extraordinarily broad range of feminine temperaments and a great variety of views of a woman’s place in society may be encountered: Pamela’s determination not to offend the social code, the common sense conformity of Elizabeth Bennett, the passionate struggles of Meredith’s Diana, the striving for independence of Hardy’s Sue, or the merging of feminist aspirations with the broader struggle for human rights that characterizes lesser-known heroines of recent fiction. (p. 203)

She concluded by saying that both sexes, male and female, could broaden their understanding of gendered roles in society through the study of a wide variety of literary works in the classroom.

She expanded this discussion to include diverse experiences of a more general nature:

Literature is the means by which the youth discovers that his own inner life reflects a common experience of others in his society. He finds that the impulses and reactions he feared are “normal,” that they are shared by many others in our society, and that there may merely be a convention (or conspiracy) of silence about it. (p. 204)

This comment strongly supported her earlier statement, articulated in her assertion of the Purpose Claim, that literature provide students with “insights that will make his own life more comprehensible” (p. 7) In her view, for the purposes of literature study to be met, schools should embrace literature from multiple cultures, from past and present, and from multiple perspectives. She asserted that students should not “be limited to one literary diet” and that through literature, they should “be permitted an insight into ways of life and social and moral codes very different even from the one that the school is committed to perpetuate” (p. 215). These comments and specific examples, which highlight the transformational power of literature which reflects life, served as data for her claim and strengthened the Purpose Claim established by others before her.

The assumptions or embedded warrants within Rosenblatt’s articulation of literature’s purpose align closely with that inherent to the conversations held among English educators at the Dartmouth Conference. She asserted, as did earlier participants in the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature, that students should examine the roles, rules, and precepts that govern their communities and lives. This assertion reflects a broader conception of education than held by those who sought a return to the basic issues of quantitative knowledge. Clearly, a desire for social transformation through the study of literature undergirded Rosenblatt’s articulation of the Purpose Claim, and served as an expansion of the positions articulated earlier in the social reform era.

The Methodology Claim

Rosenblatt addressed the interconnectedness between the purpose of literature instruction and the instructional methods one used to teach literature. She noted that well-intentioned teachers often defeat their overall purpose for literature instruction, simply because they employ the wrong methods, assignments, and assessments. In this way, she clearly linked the dual claims of purpose and method. One could not, according to Rosenblatt, use literature for the purpose of exploring human experience if the instructional methods did not support that goal. For Rosenblatt, instructional methods that promoted experience-based interactions with literature were those most likely to foster her claim of purpose for literature. She said teachers should allow students to approach reading in the contexts of their “own emotions” and “own curiosity about life and literature” (p. 66). She continued:

The youth needs to be given the opportunity and the courage to approach literature personally, to let it mean something to him directly. He should be made to feel that his own response to books, even though it may not resemble the standard critical comments, is worth expressing. Such a liberating atmosphere will make it possible for him to have an unself-conscious, spontaneous, and honest reaction. (p. 66)

In introducing her broad understanding of effective instructional approaches, Rosenblatt spoke of a student’s “emotions,” “curiosity,” and “honest” reactions, all elements of natural human experience. She recognized the need for methods that embraced students as whole beings, in possession of spontaneous and emotional responses, thereby aligning her own ideas about instruction with the claim of methodology long established—and recently reaffirmed—by those within the field of English education.

Data and Warrants for the Methodology Claim

Throughout the revised *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt argued that the literature classroom should have an atmosphere of trust where “informal, friendly exchange” (p. 70) could

occur. As with her support of the Purpose Claim, Rosenblatt inserted specific examples of classroom practice—some she approved and others she disapproved—into her discussion of instructional methodology. These illustrations, which focus on the choice of literary selection, classroom activities, and even assessments, serve as data for her assertion that the study of literature associated with schooling should replicate the authentic, natural enjoyment of literature a reader experiences outside of school.

For Rosenblatt, choice of literature could not be separated from consideration of instructional methods. She was careful not to promote a body of literature that emphasized classics over contemporary works or contemporary over classics; the “both-and” approach was favorable to “either-or.” The focus, Rosenblatt asserted, should not be on when the literature was written, but rather on the quality it demonstrated and on its connection to the students’ lives.

Like the beginning reader, the adolescent needs to encounter literature for which he possesses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment. He, too, must draw on his past experiences with life and language as the raw materials of which to shape the new experience symbolized on the page. (p. 26)

Within this statement, Rosenblatt referenced the dual nature human experience reflected by literature—that of the students, which they then uses to understand the human experience conveyed through the text. According to Rosenblatt, in order to facilitate the use of literature as a tool by which a student will “shape new experience,” the teacher must first make literary selections that are relevant to the student’s “intellectual, emotional, and experiential equipment” (p. 26). Literature that met this standard could lead to experience-based responses.

Rosenblatt asserted that the “stilted, academic approach” (p. 210) to literature found in schools was more responsible for students’ dislike of “good” literature than the actual literature itself. To elaborate upon this point, Rosenblatt offered a specific classroom example:

The teacher may be interested in, let us say, *Pride and Prejudice* from the point of view of the history of the novel form in England, or he may be eager to discuss

the relation of style and theme. The student, however, may be impressed by the revelation that then, even as now, the business of finding a mate was no simple matter, and that then, even as now, personality clashes and the gap between generations were important. In many cases there is an unbridged gulf between anything that the student might actually feel about the book, and what the teacher, from the point of view of accepted critical approaches . . . thinks the pupil should notice. (p. 61)

She continued with the assertion that “this often leads the student to consider literature something academic, remote from his own present concerns and needs” (pp. 61-62). The problem with an instructional approach that disregarded the student’s personal connection, she said, was that it could lead students to reject literature of the past, and even “comparably good literature of the present” (p. 62), because they might feel those works could only be read with an academic, critical approach.

Rosenblatt spoke of the influence of New Criticism on the instructional methods for teaching literature, and argued that this academic approach to literary analysis tended to depersonalize the text: “Analysis of the technique of the work, concern with tone, metaphor, symbolism, and myth, has therefore tended to crowd out the ultimate questions concerning relevance or value to the reader in his ongoing life” (pp. 29 – 30). However, she did not advocate a methodology that focused only on the students’ personal responses. She asserted that for a student to experience literature fully, there must be a balanced interaction between the reader and the text, including the author’s stylistic choices. Literature, as a form of art, was viewed by Rosenblatt as a work that “embodies verbal stimuli toward a special kind of intense and ordered experience – sensuous, intellectual, emotional – out of which social insights may arise” (p. 32). The structural elements and stylistic features would become a part of the experience, which Rosenblatt has articulated as embodied, including the intellection, emotional, and social.

However, Rosenblatt asserted that structural and literary elements were only important in their relationship to the text as a whole. She advocated an instructional approach that prompted an expression of ideas and an appreciation for the manner in which the ideas were expressed in a literary selection. Instead of isolated “labeling of devices or an analysis of forms” (p. 48), she advocated helping students recognize authorial techniques, and the impact they had on the reader’s experience. One way to do that, she suggested, was for students to produce their own creative written expressions:

They will themselves be involved in wrestling with the materials offered them by life or by their reaction to it; they will discover that problems of form and artistry are not separable from the problems of clarifying the particular sense of life or the particular human mood that the work of art is destined to embody. (pp. 48 – 49)

Her example of this instructional approach supported the experiential learning of her Methodology Claim. Through creating their own literary texts, students are physically engaged in creation—an engagement that would entail “wrestling with the materials offered them by life” and responding emotionally and intellectually in the literary experience. This classroom example supported her privileging of experience over a static, isolated demonstration of knowledge.

Just as important as the way in which teachers lead students to a deeper understanding of literature, Rosenblatt cautioned, was the manner in which the teacher asks the students to express their new insights. This, too, should be experience-based. To illustrate this point, she gave an example of what a teacher should *not* do. She recounted a story told to her by the father of a twelve-year-old girl. He said that his daughter had read and engaged deeply with *Great Expectations*, and he had enjoyed the “unusually mature interpretation” she had expressed in her conversations with him about the novel. Rosenblatt continued with this account:

Later, he found her in despair before a blank sheet of paper with only the title of the book written on it. To his remark that surely she had much to say, she replied

that none of those ideas would serve; she had to write a book report – summarize the plot, sketch the setting, describe any two characters, write a brief opinion or blurb. The little formula provided by the teacher as a guide had instead divorced the youngster from her actual experience of the novel. The book report she finally ground out revealed none of this response. (p. 68)

Rosenblatt's reference to the student's "experience of the novel" addressed the emotional engagement the child had with the text, and it is this level of engagement—passionate, leading to spontaneous "unusually mature interpretation"—that she believed methodologies should promote. Instead of book reports and summaries of plot, Rosenblatt suggested student-centered classroom talk, which might be initiated by such means as anonymous "comment cards" written by students, and various forms of personal, written response. All of Rosenblatt's examples situated the literature within the "matrix of personal response" (p. 71), and recognized the holistic nature of knowledge.

Although Rosenblatt never mentions progressive education, I believe one may draw connections between the revised edition of *Literature as Exploration* and progressive themes. Her claim of methodology, evidenced by these specific examples of instructional practice, embraced an academic study of literature that did not remove the reader's experience-based response. The examples, which may be viewed as data or support for Rosenblatt's claim, supported progressivism's emphasis on "whole-child" learning. Even appreciation of structural features of literature fell into the realm of students' experiences and personal connections. In Rosenblatt's view, literature allowed a student to "think rationally within an emotionally colored context" (p. 228), and this connection between the cognitive and affective may be viewed as an explicitly stated warrant in Rosenblatt's work. English educators at Dartmouth Conference, and even those from the inaugural era, also shared an understanding of embodied or experientially based knowledge that was not removed from the realm of emotional experience, thereby

demonstrating that, during the era of social change, this value had been a longstanding shared value among those in the field.

Conclusion

At a time when the United States faced significant social and cultural change, those within the profession of secondary English education sought to reexamine the purposes for teaching English. Amid calls from the public for a return to the “basics,” or a rigorous curriculum focused solely on academic achievement, without regard for social development, the field initiated a renewed conversation about the benefits of literature instruction in secondary education. Applebee (1974) has said this period in the history of English education was marked by “winds of change” (p. 225). While I agree that social changes influenced the nation and the American school, the conversations analyzed throughout this era demonstrate that, amidst the social changes, the field of English education was marked by fairly consistent values.

Participants in the conversation again addressed the questions posed by their teacher-ancestors from the inaugural era: What is the aim of literature instruction at the secondary level? Are certain works to be privileged over others? What form should instructional methodology take in the literature classroom? In their attempt to address these issues, English educators reaffirmed the claims established by the founders of English education as a profession. They built upon the data supplied in the inaugural era, emphasizing the use of literature that broadened students’ understandings of the human experience. They promoted the use of literature that expanded cultural understandings and gender roles, and allowed students to experience vicariously the lives of those different from them. Led by Rosenblatt, English educators began for the first time to articulate more clearly the transformative nature of literature.

Among these many facets of the conversation, various notions of experience formed the cornerstone of the field’s shared-beliefs. English educators during the social reform era sought

to redefine their field, in response to decades of social, political, and economic change, and they did so by rearticulating experientially-based themes of education similar to those expressed by their teacher-ancestors. However, the unification of purpose and methodology found at the Dartmouth Conference and further articulated in Rosenblatt's work did not insulate the field from further—and perhaps even more strident—calls for a return to the “basics.”

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIENCES WITH LITERATURE IN AN ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

I must confess that I have been dubious about the entire idea of national standards for English.

Robert Fulkerson, NCTE archived correspondence, 1995

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*, prominently connecting the public school system to the future of economic prosperity in America. The widely circulated and hotly debated document asserted a need for higher academic standards with a focus on core subjects, and warned that American students were falling behind their peers in other industrialized nations, leaving these students, and thus the future of American society, at risk of economic and political failure. Berube (1994) has said that this document “officially initiated the debate over a common culture” (p. 114), and more significantly, the push toward a common curriculum in American schools. It may be argued that the culture of high-stakes testing and standardized measures of accountability, pervasive in American education today, emerged out of the public sentiment that both led to and resulted from *A Nation at Risk*.

The field of English education still grapples with both the concerns expressed by this document and the various responses to those concerns. Multiple federal policies have emerged since the publication of *A Nation at Risk—America 2000*, *Goals 2000*, and *No Child Left Behind*—all seeking to address the challenges facing American society and culture. Through *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education warned that schools demonstrated a “weakness of purpose” and “confusion of vision” (p. 18). The field of English

education drew from this warning to reinitiate the conversation surrounding the aims for English education—and literature instruction—at the secondary level.

This chapter focuses specifically on a period of time marked by the standardization of American schools, which may be called “the era of accountability.” For the purposes of this dissertation, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 serves as the “starting point” of this era, though it is clear that standardization of education has much deeper roots. Indeed, the uniform entrance examinations discussed in Chapters One and Two are not far removed from the issues addressed by this chapter. The central works from within the field of English education during this era were published in the late 1980s and mid-1990s, though the historical context for these works spans from 1983 to the present.

Chapters Two and Three demonstrated that the field of English education had turned to experience as a unifying theme throughout the ongoing conversation in the field, specifically with reference to the teaching of literature. Central claims about the purposes of and methodologies for literature instruction were articulated by inaugural members of the field, drawing from the progressive notion of experience as an important part of the educational process. Similar claims were rearticulated during the era of social reform, demonstrating a consistency that emerged as English educators confronted external pressure to redefine the nature of the field. This chapter examines the Purpose and Methodology Claims as they were articulated in the era of accountability, thereby providing further insight into the nature of shared assumptions held by English educators during pivotal moments in the field’s history. Drawing from Toulmin’s (1958) method of argument analysis, this chapter examines the ways in which the Purpose Claim and Methodology Claim continue to be reflected in documents of importance to the field. The selected documents demonstrate the issues privileged by the field in a time

when most outside of the educational arena privileged only that which can be quantified. The central documents are the following:

The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language (Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1987)

The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand (NCTE, 1987)

Standards for the English Language Arts (NCTE and IRA, 1996)

Various archived materials pertaining to the Coalition Conference and the preparation of *Standards for the English Language Arts*

However, prior to analyzing the central claims as they are presented in these documents, one must consider the historical context in which the documents were produced. The next sections of this chapter provide a brief discussion of the social climate of the period, paying attention to the ways in which continuing demographic shifts impacted American society, leading to calls for a unified “cultural literacy.” Then, drawing from Toulmin’s model, my analysis focuses on the central claims of purpose and methodology for literature instruction, including the key sources of data used to support the claims and the warrants upon which the claim and its data rest.

Historical Context

The decades following the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the 1960s and 1970s, were marked by an increasing awareness of and pride in ethnic diversity (e.g., Berube, 1994; Parks, 2000). Previously marginalized groups moved further into the mainstream discourse of American culture. Women continued to voice their autonomy. Diverse ethnic groups felt less pressure to assimilate themselves into a common culture, and thus embraced their ethnic heritage and other facets of their uniqueness. Universities began offering ethnic and gender studies programs. All aspects of culture – music, literature, visual art, food, dress – were infused with the experiences and expressions of a diverse American population, finally foregrounding the authentic, multi-ethnic culture of the United States.

However, the new-found emphasis on difference was not embraced by all. Berube (1994) has suggested that the shifting dynamics of American society and culture led to the publication of documents such as *A Nation at Risk* and E. D. Hirsch's (1987) *Cultural Literacy*. Berube called these works, and the desire for a unified, discrete American culture that led to and emerged from them, a "rear guard action" (p. 113) or an attempt to halt the changes being brought about by a continuing shift in demographics. Increased immigration, particularly from Asian and Latin American countries, reshaped the student body of American schools and sparked discussion and concern about identity, culture, and curriculum.

In addition to the cultural issues rising to the forefront of public discourse, the United States was dealing with a changing economy. As transportation and mass communication became more efficient, a more global marketplace opened up, placing industries in the United States, and thus the American economy, in competition for both foreign and domestic business. Several have spoken of the rising economic power of European and Asian nations (e.g., Berube, 1994; Rury, 2002), and the impact this development had on education. As industry and the government in the United States looked to the schools as "engines of economic development" (Rury, 2002, p. 174), curriculum and instruction once more became significant topics of conversation for those outside of educational fields.

A Nation at Risk

These cultural and economic changes led, once more, to calls for a return to the "basics" in education. In 1981, then U.S. Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education to study the quality of teaching and learning in American schools. The study resulted in *A Nation at Risk* (1984/1983), which, according to Nelson and Calfee (1998), brought the current wave of accountability measures and "a dramatic increase in statewide testing" (p. 37). This report issued by the National Commission on

Excellence in Education incited public alarm over educational practices, linking these to the diminishing status of the United States as a world power and leader, much as we saw following the launching of Sputnik:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others matching and surpassing our educational attainments. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 5)

Couched in terms more commonly associated with warfare and weaponry, *A Nation at Risk* linked education to national security, and spoke of the public's "fear of losing a shared vision of America" (p. 15).

A Nation at Risk addressed curriculum issues in mathematics, science, history, computer science, and English. The report identified two major goals for the study of literature: Students should learn to "comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read" (p. 70), and understand "our literary heritage and . . . how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture" (p. 70). These purposes were not contradictory to those previously established by the field of English education, but they did not include everything, especially personal response to or engagement with literature. However, the implementation of these—by the government and by others outside of the field—was problematic for teachers of secondary English. The first of the

articulated goals—comprehension, analysis, evaluation, and use—was easily quantifiable, and the second goal—literary heritage—was narrowly interpreted to indicate a singular body of knowledge. Both became complex issues for the field, providing another point of conversation for English educators.

Cultural Literacy

In 1987, E. D. Hirsch published *Cultural Literacy*, promoting the idea that all literate Americans share a singular culture, comprised of knowledge of literary, artistic, historical and other cultural references. Hirsch defined cultural literacy as the knowledge one needed to “thrive in the modern world” (p. xiii), or as the “network of information that all competent readers need to possess” (p. 2). He spoke of reading processes, noting that cultural references embedded in the subtext convey meaning; only a reader with knowledge of the cultural reference would be able to comprehend fully the intent of the passage. *Cultural Literacy* included a listing of “what literate Americans know” (p. 146). The list spanned nearly seventy pages, and included works of literature and art, dates of historical events, aphorisms, people, geographical locations, organizations, and other words and phrases.

This list, or “national vocabulary,” that Hirsch articulated formed the shared knowledge that he believed schools should impart to students. He claimed that a national core curriculum was “neither desirable nor feasible” (p. 139), though he went on to suggest that “American schools should be able to devise an extensive curriculum based on the national vocabulary and arranged in a definite sequence” (p. 139). He suggested that textbooks and other literature studied in school should focus more on this national vocabulary, to be achieved by shifting “the reading materials used in kindergarten through eighth grade to a much larger base in factual information and traditional lore” (p. 140). Instead of literature books with an emphasis on short stories, chapters from novels, or “essays about human feelings” (p. 140), Hirsch said, “What is

needed are reading texts that deliberately convey what children need to know and include a substantially higher proportion of factual narratives” (p. 140). In this way, *Cultural Literacy* impacted all of American education, but the field of English, especially with regards to the teaching of literature, was particularly threatened. It was within this context that the field felt the need to rearticulate the aims of the subject of English.

Analysis of the Major Claims

Staking the Claims

Context of the Central Works: Coalition Conference

In 1987, English educators across all grade levels, including those working within post-secondary and graduate programs, gathered for a three week Coalition Conference, in part to discuss the common challenges facing them, and to chart the direction of the field for the twenty-first century. These educators viewed the calls for and movement toward standardization and prescribed curriculum as a complex problem for the field, and, as articulated in the 1986 *Proposal for a National Conference on the Teaching of English* (the Coalition Conference), those within the field were compelled to “confirm or redefine values in English studies” (p. 5). The Coalition Conference, held at Wye Plantation in Maryland, served as the first formal rearticulation of the goals for teaching English, by those within the field, since the Dartmouth Conference. The coalition was formed loosely in 1982 at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA). Educators from all levels of English—elementary, secondary, university—met together to address their concerns over the growing criticism being directed at English education, no matter the academic level. The coalition of those dedicated to English education at the elementary and secondary levels and those dedicated to English studies at the university level grew, representing a coalition of professional organizations, including NCTE, MLA, the Association of Departments of English, the College English Association, the College

Language Association, the Conference of Secondary School English Department Chairs, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the Conference on English Education. Finding that brief gatherings at various professional conferences allowed only enough time to articulate common problems, without an opportunity to identify possible solutions, the members of the coalition desired time to collaborate closely with one another for an extended period. Jointly funded by the Andrew W. Mellon, Rockefeller, and Exxon Education Foundations, the Coalition Conference brought representatives together for a three-week conference on the aims for teaching English. Wayne C. Booth (1989), a participant at both the Dartmouth Conference in 1966 and the Coalition Conference in 1987, called the Coalition Conference the “most profitable conferring-time” he had spent, finding it “more exhilarating than the weeks spent at the Dartmouth Conference on a similar subject twenty years before” (p. vii).

Indeed, the two conferences addressed similar subjects, though the participants in the conversations differed in several key ways. Unlike the Dartmouth Conference, where those representing the voices of practitioners generally were no longer practicing teachers, the coalition included significant numbers of classroom teachers. Roughly two-thirds of the coalition were currently practicing in elementary and secondary schools, although their voices, again, may not have reflected the experiences of average classroom teachers. According to the *Proposal for a National Conference on the Teaching of English* (1986), the organizers of the conference actively sought participants whose professional accomplishments demonstrated they would be “capable of speaking and writing about the conference after it is over” (p. 26). This proposal included brief biographical sketches of a few teachers already selected as participants, and their accomplishments demonstrated the type of teacher included in the coalition. Included in their sketches were publications, distinguished teaching awards, and national conference

presentations. The teacher-participants were selected by NCTE, using a process of nomination and review, and their status as teacher-leaders in the field led to their inclusion in the coalition.

The participants from the university levels were also well respected in their fields, much like their counterparts at Dartmouth. However, efforts were made, according to the *Proposal for a National Conference on the Teaching of English*, to assemble a group with significant numbers of people still in the earlier years of their career so that a more lasting impact might be observed in the field: “Because we hope that this conference will influence the teaching of English in this country through the end of the century, we are trying to ensure that a significant number of conference participants will be people who have not yet reached the mid-point in their careers and who have a strong interest in teaching” (p. 26). This did not mean that those present were not highly accomplished; rather, it meant a participant need not be a “venerable sage,” as Peter Elbow (1990) said in his reflection of the Coalition Conference.

In addition to striking a balance among elementary, secondary, and post secondary interests and between relative youth and experience, the Coalition Conference represented the plurality of American society. Slightly more than half of the participants were women, unlike Dartmouth, where there were only a small number of women present. The formal, published account of the Coalition Conference, *The English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (1987), indicated that the participants also “represent[ed] social groups of the country” (p. 67), with attention to racial, regional, and ethnic balance. However, the lists of participants contained in this record provide no specific information concerning the minority representation of this coalition. Nevertheless, the stated desire of having more balanced representation may indicate that, at the very least, more diverse voices contributed to this conversation than did those at Dartmouth Conference.

This group of sixty educators met for three weeks, twenty-one days in a row, questioning, evaluating, and ultimately, articulating the purposes of English education. On the opening day of the conference, the Assistant Secretary of Education, Chester Finn, addressed the group, drawing heavily from Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*. Wayne Booth, in his foreword to *The English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (1987), spoke of Finn's call for the coalition to "embrace Hirsch's list of nearly 5,000 'cultural literacy' terms, or to come up with a list of their own" (p. viii). According to Booth, Finn's address became a rallying point for those present:

I've never seen an audience more effectively united by a one hour-long speech. We all knew that whatever else we might want to say to each other, we must repudiate that spokesman's narrow, misinformed, programmatic vision of ourselves, our history, and our charges. To be asked to impart bits of isolated information, to be asked even to think about that kind of goal in isolation from all the difficulties and complexities every teacher faces, simply trivialized the work we all do and love. . . . We knew that the last thing American education needs is one more collection of inert information, a nostrum to be poured raw into minds not actively engaged in reading, thinking, writing, and talking. (pp. viii – ix)

The coalition did not take up the call to define the field as a list of content to be mastered by students. Instead, they focused their three week-long conversation on questions surrounding the purpose of the field, questions they found richer and more complex than the creation of a list of discrete bits of knowledge.

Two key documents provide a record of their conversation, and the consensus they reached concerning secondary English education. One of them, *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (1987), documents the consensus reached by participants on major issues facing the teaching of English at all academic levels. This work, edited by Richard Lloyd-Jones and Andrea A. Lunsford, is divided into four major sections: report of the elementary strand, report of the secondary strand, report of the college strand, and a concluding section of "additional resolutions," which addressed broad issues and concerns. An examination of the report from the secondary strand demonstrated that this coalition of educators drew from

experiential themes commonly associated with progressive education to articulate their aims of and methods for literature instruction.

A second, more concise work also documented the key issues related to literature instruction at the secondary level. Following the Coalition Conference, each strand produced an informational brochure to be distributed to teachers, administrators, and the general public. *The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand* (1987) provides a second source of data for analysis. Although this text is brief, when examined alongside the more complete report, it provides insight into those issues and beliefs most salient to the conversation. These two documents serve as the central works for this rearticulation of the purposes of and methods for teaching literature in the secondary setting.

The Purpose Claim

The participants at the Coalition Conference focused on English instruction in all of its many facets, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Because they focused on language activities as a whole, the conversation surrounding literature at the coalition was generally situated within this larger context, which reflects the manner in which the field is frequently addressed in contemporary discourse. The claim is signaled by its prominent placement – upfront, stated as one facet of the first aim for English education in *The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand* (1987). The statement focused on language practices in general, though literature is one of the major components of these language practices. Thus, claims made about “the arts of language” are also claims made about the more focused subject of literature.

In this brochure, which represented the most fundamental agreements to emerge out of the Coalition Conference, representatives of the field asserted that the aim of all facets of the English curriculum was “to empower students . . . as active inquirers, experimenters, and

problem solvers who are able to use the arts of language as means of gaining insight into and reflecting on their own and others' lives" (p. 1). As did the English educators during earlier periods in the field's history, the participants in the conversation spoke of "the arts of language," which includes literature, as a tool for "gaining insight" to or "reflecting" either their own or other's life experiences. This sentiment resembles closely the Purpose Claims established by the inaugural members of the field and those who helped to define the field during the era of social change.

Data and Warrants for the Purpose Claim

The support offered for this claim was also situated within conversations about all facets of English language arts. However, by noting the points in which reading and response to text become the topic of conversation, it is possible to identify the sources of data that relate explicitly to literature instruction. The "Report of the Secondary Strand," found in *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (1987), offered—as the more complete report of the coalition's findings—elaboration of the Purpose Claim. In this chapter dedicated to English education at the secondary level, the participants echoed the ideas of their teacher-ancestors when they spoke of literature as a tool for vicarious experience: "Literary study offers students insights into human values expressed in times and places far removed from their own and helps them interpret experiences within their immediate worlds" (p. 20). In this way, the participants recognized literature's ability to "provide insight" or to reflect human experiences, though they emphasized the nature of vicarious experience, rather than self-examination of one's own experiences through literature.

This report, which dedicated a section to reading and literature instruction, expanded the conversation about purposes for literature—reflection and new insights—by addressing the issue

of literature selection. In the report of goals for literature instruction, the *why* and the *what* were meshed:

They [students] should be invited to read deeply in our diverse literary traditions, including writing by men and women of many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Literature makes real the cultures we inherit, as well as those of people different from us; it raises fundamental questions of value. Because literature by its very nature presents various views of reality and truth, some people or groups will inevitably try to mandate reading lists to “fit” some particular political or social agenda. The obligation of the English teacher is to represent a range of social reading sufficient to exhibit multiple human possibilities and to demonstrate a broad sweep of American cultures as they are embodied in literary texts. (p. 20)

This statement, a clear rejection of prescribed lists of works that represent any singular “cultural literacy,” focused on selection of literature for instruction, but can also be viewed as data for this Purpose Claim. The Coalition Conference participants did not deny the presence of “cultural literacy,” though their emphasis on “our diverse literary traditions” demonstrated that they privileged a more pluralistic cultural literacy than that promoted by Hirsch. In speaking of literary traditions, they used numerous phrases to support the claim that literature serves as a reflection, including the assertion that literature “makes real,” “presents various views,” and “exhibit[s] multiple human possibilities,” thereby providing additional promotion of the Purpose Claim.

An interesting aspect of this data is the reference to the political nature of literary heritage. The participants asserted that, because literature is a reflection of “reality and truth,” one may appropriate literature studies in order to present a particular political or social agenda. In stating this, the participants did not seem cognizant of the fact that they, too, were presenting purposes for literature that serve a particular agenda. They asserted that it is the English educator’s “obligation” to present a diverse, varied selection of literature, in order to demonstrate “a broad sweep of American cultures,” thereby stating their own angle on literary study: awareness of cultural diversity. Although the participants at the conference embraced this

notion, allowing it to serve as data for the Purpose Claim, they were taking a stand in opposition to that of Western traditionalists who promoted a common American culture rooted in Anglo-American traditions (cf. Berube, 1994). Nevertheless, this datum was not unlike that offered by Rosenblatt in the era of social change, in that it highlighted literature's ability to "raise fundamental questions of value" or to inspire personal reflection and insight to diverse life experiences and perspectives.

In *The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand* (1987), the secondary section of the conference identified several key assumptions undergirding their conversations. One of these addressed issues of social justice, stating that the awareness and acknowledgment of diverse life experiences was "necessary to a democratic society" (p. 10), which, I believe, serves as an explicit warrant for their articulation of the Purpose Claim. The participants supported this claim by privileging literature's ability to reflect diverse perspectives and multiple experiences. They would not have accepted this understanding of literature if they did not understand the purpose of education to be larger and more complex than a series of academic exercises. For the English educators present at the Coalition Conference, purposes for literature instruction were closely connected to reform.

The Methodology Claim

The participants at the Coalition Conference did address instructional approaches to literature specifically, but most of their conversations surrounding methodology were broad, addressing the larger issue of methods for teaching the English language arts. As with the Purpose Claim, the coalition's central claim concerning the approach to teaching literature at the secondary level fits into the larger statement of methods for all language instruction, whether it was read, written, or spoken. *The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand* and *English Coalition Conference: Democracy*

Through Language both elaborated on the types of instructional approaches most appropriate for meeting the field's established purposes for teaching literature. These documents focused on broad issues of curriculum, but explanations of classroom practices were present. The "Report of the Secondary Strand," located in *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (1987), discussed instructional approaches and the role of the teacher, first in broad terms:

The group concluded that because language is inherently social, classroom procedures should be interactive, supportive, orderly, individualized, and varied. The teacher is primarily a coach, a skilled practitioner of the arts the students need to acquire. At times a coach simply offers information as in a lecture, but usually a coach sets tasks, comments on performances, encourages the weary and fainthearted, identifies sources of information, and finally holds the course toward general goals, giving order to many variations. (pp. 22-23)

This understanding of instructional approaches demonstrated a respect for the ways in which language practices, and thus experiences with literature, are embodied or experience-based; the participants spoke of language as "individualized," but also "social" and "interactive," and of classroom activities as "tasks" and "performances" requiring active engagement.

The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand provided a more concise articulation of the field's understanding of instructional methodologies, in which they said the study of language arts (and thus, the study of literature) should "empower students as lifelong learners." (p. 1)

This statement, when coupled with the extended discussion in the account by Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford, appears to embrace methodology that promotes literate practices as they are encountered in life: by supporting socially-constructed and individualized approaches to language, English educators demonstrate that literacy is a "lifelong" quest, and a part of the daily human experience. This approach to instructional methodology is not dissimilar from the Methodology Claims offered by earlier participants in the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature. Through analysis of the data offered in support of the field's instructional

methodologies, it becomes apparent that English educators at the Coalition Conference recognized that instruction could not be separated from the human experiences of everyday life, including social interaction and active engagement.

Data and Warrants for the Methodology Claim

In support of their claims concerning instructional approaches, *The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand* provided recommendations for teaching English at the secondary level, and their recommendations promoted methodology that privileged experiential interactions with language arts, rather than a focus on skills: “Process is taught in a holistic way, stressing skills as part of an overall process, not in isolation or as ends in themselves” (p. 2). The word “holistic,” offered here, did not appear in the earlier conversations, though the notion of teaching literature as a complete process and not a study of isolated skills was not new. This understanding reflects similar themes articulated in the Curriculum Commission documents during the inaugural years, and again in Rosenblatt’s (1968) revised edition of *Literature as Exploration*. The teaching of literature at the secondary level should not be, according to those present at the Coalition Conference, divorced from issues of form, structure, and literary devices, but an examination of these elements was not viewed as the ultimate goal of instruction. An understanding of these matters promotes engagement with text, though in authentic literacy practices these are not important apart from the experience with literature. This statement, prominently included in the published recommendations for the teaching of English at the secondary level, supported an approach to literature study that was situated within a larger experience, and can be viewed as data for the Methodology Claim.

Although the participants at the Coalition Conference offered explanations of classroom practices similar to those of their teacher-ancestors, they expanded upon earlier ideas concerning

the literary selections most appropriate for experience-based and holistic classroom study. Earlier conversations about the selection of literature focused on the debate between classical and contemporary works. However, just as the development of mass communication had altered the way in which Americans lived—reflecting, for the first time, a truly global marketplace—technological advancements in communications altered the field’s understanding of “texts.” Literature continued to hold a place of importance in the curriculum, but *The English Coalition Conference: Assumptions, Aims, and Recommendations of the Secondary Strand* presented a broader selection of texts from which teachers should pull, including “a variety of complete works of literature, as well as a variety of other texts, such as student writing, television, advertising, video, specialty magazines, film, and technical reports” (p. 2). This sentiment was echoed in the “Report of the Secondary Strand” in *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language*: “Learning is a process of actively constructing meaning from experiences, including encounters with a broad range of print and nonprint texts (films, videos, TV and radio advertisements, and so on)” (p. 17). The call for literary selections at the secondary level to expand beyond literature, as it had previously been defined, to include technical and nonfiction texts, as well as non-print media, represented a significant change in the data offered by English educators. The expanded notion reflected a growing desire to provide students with classroom interactions with text that replicated the literate practices they would engage in outside of school, thus offering an approach more rooted in real-life experiences.

The English educators whose voices were present in *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* defined the students they would like to see emerge from their classroom as those “individuals who find pleasure and satisfaction in reading and writing and who make those activities an important part of their everyday lives, voluntarily engaging in reading and writing for their own intrinsic social and personal values” (p. 3). They promoted

classrooms that incorporated “purposeful talk and listening, as well as periods of silence for individual writing and reading” (p. 23), which recognized the experiential nature of learning. To further demonstrate their understandings about the nature of education as holistic or experience-based, *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* offered three classroom vignettes that illustrated “methods approved by the secondary strand” (p. 51) at the conference. Each incorporated active engagement with text, individual inquiry, and social-construction of knowledge. For example:

Mr. Thompson has put a poem, a short one, on the overhead projector. Students enter the class and cluster in circles to read the poem, perhaps reading it aloud for each other. . . . Students write responses in their journals. Students are invited to share their responses with others in their clusters or anywhere in the room. Mr. Thompson identifies the poem as one written by a student the previous year and asks whether that fact would change any of their responses, and why or why not? A lively general discussion follows. Once again, students return to their journals and pose questions engendered by the poem experience (not just the poem itself). Then they written on their inquiry cards. . . ideas engendered by the experience they wish to pursue (“research”) during the rest of the two hour time block. . . . Students may want to write a poem in response, write their own essay versions, find other poems on the same subject, locate a poet who writes in this style or on this topic, question others about their responses to the poem, find out more about the poem. . . or simply talk with those who wish to discuss the project. Tomorrow, students will share their strategies with Mr. Thompson and each other. The actual project may take several days. (p. 52)

This example, which is representative of the others offered, demonstrated classroom practice that embraced experiential learning. Through its emphasis on student-selected topics of inquiry and methods of presentation, as well as personal and collaborative reflection of literature, the classroom vignette offers insight to the type of learning encompassed within the Methodology Claim, and also serves as data for this same claim.

The Methodology Claim, and the data used to support it, reflected a shared value among English educators concerning the nature of experience in education. The data offered in support of this claim promoted interactive classrooms, where students would work collaboratively to

construct and reflect upon meaning. Rather than locating a singular meaning or identifying a technical skill in literature, knowledge was presented as dynamic, and both personally and socially constructed. Had they had not held the assumption that experience is a way of knowing, and that learning involves the “whole child,” both of which are themes associated with the progressive movement in education, the participants in this conversation would not have accepted these approaches. As documented in these central works, those in the field appreciated that authentic learning emerges out of students’ active engagement with one another and with text.

This assumption, which demonstrates an appropriation among English educators of progressive notions of experience, serves as the warrant for this claim. Booth, in his foreword to *English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language*, cautioned the reader not to view the findings of the coalition as mere echoes of progressive ideologies. He acknowledged that the coalition “echoed” the sentiments of progressive theorists, but said their articulated understandings should not be viewed as “falling back into the tired formula, ‘Teach the child, not the subject’” (p. x). He sought to strike a balance between progressives and their critics, though an examination of these central works demonstrated that the field of secondary English instruction embraced the progressive concept of educating the whole child.

Emphasizing the Claims

Context of the Central Work: National Standards

Although the field of English education during this era demonstrated consistency in shared understandings about the purposes for education, those outside of the field held a decidedly different view. One of the recommendations set forth by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in *A Nation at Risk* was greater accountability, demonstrated through standardized tests, “administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to

another” (p. 28), which are now—at the time of this dissertation’s preparation—a federal mandate for public school systems. While the field of English education rallied around the notion of experience, a more quantified conception of education dominated political discourse and the movement towards national standards began. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics published voluntary national standards for mathematics in 1991, and other core content areas followed suit.

In 1991, NCTE and the International Reading Association (IRA) offered to be a part of any federally-funded standards project. Alan F. Farstrup and Miles Myers (1996), presidents of IRA and NCTE, explained the rationale behind their desire to participate in standards production, stating that they believed any language arts standards “must be grounded in what we know about language and language learning” (p. vii), and they preferred to join this movement than have a standards document prepared without their input. Funding was granted in 1992, for what was to be a three-year project, involving the two organizations and the National Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois. Two years later, the federal government withdrew funding of the project over disagreements concerning the resulting document. According to an NCTE press release, “NCTE/IRA Say Standards Efforts Will Continue,” the government opposed, as it related to literature, the document’s emerging emphasis on process over a “list of learning outcomes” or “a particular canon” (p. 2).

The U. S. Education Department intended to seek proposals for federal funding of a new standards project, though NCTE and IRA refused to endorse any document produced without their participation, and vowed to continue with their own statement of standards for the field, despite the loss of outside funding. According to the press release, “NCTE executive director Miles Myers said any English standards-setting project that does not have the support of the two largest subject matter associations faces dim prospects from implementation in the classroom”

(p. 2). Eight months after pulling its funding, the federal government abandoned its plans for a new English standards project, leaving NCTE and IRA to independently draft and produce national standards for the teaching of English on their own.

The document, *Standards for the English Language Arts*, was released in 1996. It presented twelve broad standards for the teaching of English at both the elementary and secondary levels. The document asserted that the standards were meant to be “suggestive, not exhaustive” (p. 24) or “starting points” for dialogue among educators, students, parents, and community leaders. The document presented the twelve standards on one single page, and then elaborated upon each standard individually. Additionally, two chapters addressed the educational assumptions upon which the standards were built, and a concluding chapter provided classroom vignettes of the standards in practice.

The participants contributing to the preparation of this document, numbering in the thousands, formed a diverse group. Farstrup and Meyers (1996) said the collaborative effort was “field based” and “inclusive” (p. viii). They continued:

Thousands of K – 12 classroom teachers have been involved in writing, reviewing, and revising the many successive drafts of this document and have guided its development every step of the way. . . . Hundreds of parents, legislative leaders, administrators, researchers, and policy analysts in English language arts have played critical roles. . . .In generating this document, we have sought to reflect the many different voices, interests, and concerns of these diverse contributors. (p. viii)

The Appendix for *Standards for the English Language Arts* listed all of these many participants, including basic information about their residence and professional affiliation; this basic list of individuals, organizations, and professional associations filled thirty pages in the document, which highlighted the enormous response and participation from those in the field.

After more than a decade’s worth of hindsight, many have come to critique NCTE and IRA for their own complicity in the current era of standardization and accountability in

schooling. Nevertheless, in spite of the view one holds about national standards, the work remains a significant and highly influential document concerning English education in this era. *Standards for the English Language Arts* represented a significant rearticulation of the field's goals for and approaches to the teaching of English. The authors of this document said, "We believe the act of defining standards is worthwhile because it invites further reflection and conversation about the fundamental goals of public schooling" (p. 1). The remaining section of this chapter draws from Toulmin's method of argument analysis to examine that conversation, revealing a continued tradition of shared values or discourse-defined positions concerning the goals for and approaches to literature instruction at the secondary level.

The Purpose Claim

Chapter Two of *Standards for the English Language Arts* addressed the understandings that informed the preparation of the standards document. According to this chapter, titled "Perspectives Informing the English Language Arts Standards," those involved in the standards project considered four major aspects of literacy learning: content, or what students should know; purpose, or the uses of language and literacy; development, or how people acquire language; and context, or the awareness that all literacy practices are situated socially or culturally. Within this chapter, which serves as a rationale for the whole standards document, one finds a rearticulation of the Purpose Claim surrounding the teaching of literature.

This document spoke of all of the facets of English language arts—combining the multiple facets of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing—thus not isolating the teaching of literature from the context of other language or literacy practices. This perspective had been evident in documents related to the Coalition Conference. Nevertheless, a section within this foundational chapter regarding standards is dedicated to literary response and expression. The document introduced this section by addressing the function of literature study:

“The acts of responding to, interpreting, and creating literary texts enable us to participate in other lives and worlds beyond our own and to reflect on who we are” (p. 17). Although the phrase “reflection of human experience” is not directly used, this understanding of literature’s purpose is, I believe, embedded within their statement of purpose. In speaking of response to and interpretation of “lives and worlds” and of reflecting on “who we are,” the document promoted literature as a tool for examination of life or human experience. The emphasis on self-knowledge, reflection, and understanding of the experiences of others—articulated in the foundational chapter of the standards document—closely resembles the Purpose Claim long-established and reaffirmed throughout the ongoing conversation of the field.

Data and Warrants for the Purpose Claim

Two of the twelve stated standards documented in *Standards for the English Language Arts* specifically addressed the purposes for literature study:

Standard One: Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, or themselves, of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. (p. 3)

Standard Two: Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. (p. 3)

Both of these standards spoke of purposes for the teaching of literature, which went beyond understanding the texts, to students understanding “themselves,” “the cultures of the United States and the world,” and “the many dimensions. . . of human experience.” Within this context of knowledge of self and society, the standards also stated that literacy should lead students “to respond to the needs. . . of society,” thus implying that these standards of literacy may be viewed as a tool for social transformation. This concept emerges more fully throughout the continued support of the Purpose Claim.

Within these two standards, purpose was deeply connected to the selection of literature. An examination of this conversation, as it was documented in the *Standards for the English Language Arts*, demonstrates that those within the field of English education believed a wide and varied selection of texts was vital, if the established purpose for the study of literature were to be achieved. The connection between purpose and selection was clear in “Perspectives Informing the English Language Arts Standards,” the chapter that served as the foundation for all of the standards:

Language learning depends on the exploration and careful study of a wide array of texts. In particular, students need to read literature, including classic, contemporary, and popular narratives, poems, songs, and plays. Exploring literary worlds gives students a new perspective on their own experience and enables them to discover how literature can capture the richness and complexity of human life. Broad reading also includes informational and academic texts, . . . mass media and other visual texts, including films, selected programs, magazines, and newspapers, . . . and socially significant oral and written texts, such as speeches, radio and television broadcasts, political documents, editorials, and advertisements. (p. 15)

This statement, which provided support or data for the claim, addressed literature broadly, focusing on genre. It expanded the notion of literature to include nonprint texts, reinforcing the ideas expressed by those at the Coalition Conference, connecting these to literary study’s capacity to “capture the richness and complexity of human life” and to lead students to “new perspectives on their own experiences.” As discussed previously, *experience* had been a fluid concept throughout the conversation, though within this purpose claim, the term clearly related to the life experiences brought into the classroom by students and the life experiences conveyed in literature. Insight into the self and insight into the “complexity of human life” were both addressed by this portion of the document, indicating the vast array of texts that those within the field believed were necessary for the teaching of English, and particularly literature, at the secondary level.

The document continued to support the claim, moving beyond calls for a broad selection of literature to the point of advocating the types of perspectives that should be presented through these various genres. Through the elaborative section for Standard One, the document called for students to explore works that reflected American culture with attention to balancing “gender, age, social class, religion, and ethnicity” (p. 28) in the perspectives offered through these texts. This exploration, the document elaborated, would allow students to understand their “society and history” and to “appreciate difference and diversity” (p. 28). The intent for literature from diverse perspectives, though, went beyond comprehension of cultural difference. Rather, the document advocated a more critical stance:

Through experience with texts, students deepen their knowledge not only of themselves, but also of the world. Self-discovery and cultural awareness are intertwined. Extensive and varied reading provides a lens through which to view and critique American and world history and contemporary social life. Thus, as students read widely, and as they discuss and reflect on what they read, they develop an understanding of themselves both as individuals and as parts of a larger social whole. (p. 29)

In this way, the *Standards for the English Language Arts* connected “self-discovery and cultural awareness,” and promoted literature as a tool for the “critique” of society. This statement, which served as data for the claim, reflected a contrasting view to the view offered in Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy*. Rather than promoting cultural understanding simply for the sake of defining a unified culture, the *Standards for the English Language Arts* asserted, here in the elaboration for Standard One, the importance of understanding culture and self in order to make critical decisions concerning one’s role in society.

The document elaborated further upon this idea in the narrative supporting Standard Two. This standard focused specifically on teaching literature with the purpose of exploring “the many dimensions of human experience” (p. 3). While explicating this standard, the document mentioned a number of texts as examples of what is important to “a literary education” (p. 30).

The examples included Shakespeare's works, which were privileged on the uniform entrance examinations prepared a century earlier. However, this document also included works by women and by people of color, such as Hurston's (1937) *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and works from the relatively new genre of young adult literature, including Hinton's (1967) *The Outsiders* and Cormier's (1977) *I Am the Cheese*. According to *Standards for the English Language Arts*, and support provided for Standard Two, the study of a wide range of literature would allow students to "reflect critically on alternative ways of knowing and being" (p. 29).

This would, it was asserted, lead students to:

Learn to think about and to question their own perspectives; they learn to assume different, critical stances toward events, circumstances, and issues. Readers of literature come to recognize and evaluate human experiences as well as the literature in which those experiences are represented. (p. 30)

The ideas offered in support of Standard Two, which also serve as data for the Purpose Claim, further demonstrated the transformative view of literature held by those within the field. In stark contrast to calls for the promotion of a singular cultural history, this document supported the power of literature to expand and alter one's perception of self and community. Cultural understanding and acceptance of difference were valued, but an emphasis was placed on reflection, critique, and evaluation.

All of the elaboration on the purpose for teaching literature, or the data for this aspect of the conversation, was situated in the context of education as more complex and socially-oriented than transmission of cultural literacy or academic knowledge. The contributors to *Standards for the English Language Arts*, comprised of thousands within the field of English education, could not have accepted the data offered in support of the Purpose Claim if they had not shared assumptions over the transformative nature of education in general and literature in particular.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the field of English education was born out of a

significant movement of reform in American society and education. The movement was heavily influenced by progressive educators' (e.g, Addams, 1981/1910; Dewey, 1990/1900; Young, 1902, 1906) beliefs that critical, independent thought should be balanced with an understanding of one's responsibility to society. This theme of critical reflexivity coupled with communal responsibility, often associated with the progressive movement in education, was embedded throughout the conversation surrounding the purpose of literature at the secondary level, and served as the warrant for the Purpose Claim. Had those involved in the standards project not held this assumption, they would not have offered or accepted the data. Yet again, the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature presented education as more than merely an academic exercise; again there was the strong emphasis on the role of experience in learning.

The Methodology Claim

The *Standards* document addressed methodology, as it did with the discussion of the purposes for literature study, within the larger context of language or language arts. In the chapter, "Perspectives Informing the English Language Arts Standards," the preparers of this document spoke of their understandings of how one experiences language growth over time. In this context, "language" meant all aspects of the English language arts—reading, writing, speaking, listening. Within this conversation, one finds the central articulation of the field's views on methodology. The beginnings of this articulation can be found in this supporting chapter, starting with a discussion of the acquisition of language:

All language learners—whether they are infants just beginning to speak, older children learning to read and write, or adults acquiring a second language or a new professional vocabulary—learn language by using it purposefully and negotiating with others. Language users "make" meaning, constantly revising their initial understandings of what they read, hear, view, and create In other words, the processes of language use are active, not passive. We learn language not simply for the sake of learning language; we learn it to make sense of the world around us and to communicate our understandings with others. (p. 19)

The conversation, with its focus on active, purposeful acquisition of language skills, situated literacy within the context of life experiences. The explanation continued, linking language acquisition, in general, to instructional methodologies for the teaching of all aspects of English, including literature:

This view of language development has clear and profound implications for teaching and learning. If we accept that language occurs through purposeful use, then English language arts instruction must nurture this development by giving students the opportunity to engage in a wide array of experiences with language, and it must ensure that students perceive the value of these experiences. (p. 19)

The *Standards for the English Language Arts* connected language acquisition, occurring naturally within a social context, to the methodological approaches one should take in teaching the arts of language. Although literature instruction was not explicitly mentioned in this conversation, the conversation addressed approaches to teaching English of all kinds, at all levels. With a focus on “engagement,” which included purposeful, meaningful, and socially-situated literacy experiences, this document served as a formal articulation of an experience-based methodology, which aligns with the Methodology Claim established during earlier periods in the ongoing conversation.

Data and Warrants for the Methodology Claim

In the chapter dedicated to explicating the perspectives inherent to the preparation of the standards, the contributors spoke of literature study, saying, “Literary response and expression are aesthetic acts involving complex interactions of emotion and intellect” (p. 17). The perspective of literature as intellectual and emotional, which promoted an experiential and embodied understanding of learning, was present throughout the data offered in support of the Methodology Claim. Two of the twelve standards included in *Standards for the English Language Arts* addressed specifically the types of literacy experiences in which students should engage while studying literature and language:

Standard Three: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics). (p. 3)

Standard Eleven: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. (p. 3)

By acknowledging the relationship between “prior experience,” “interactions with other readers,” and the comprehension, interpretation, evaluation, and appreciation of texts, and also of the importance of participation in “literacy communities,” these standards supported experientially-based approaches to literacy instruction. The standards, particularly Standard Three, did not disregard more “academic” approaches to teaching literature. Structure and skills needed for comprehension were not absent from the conversation, as the standard’s inclusion of “textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics)” demonstrates. However, in the elaboration provided for these standards the emphasis was on an emotionally and socially contextualized experience with literature, as opposed to isolated instruction on form and structure.

The explication of Standard Three urged the teacher to incorporate personal response and reflection into classroom study of literature, and said that practices which go beyond basic comprehension of structure, form, and content are “more sophisticated” (p. 33). This section of the document privileged reflection and personal response, which were portrayed as more authentic approaches to literature study than a focus on skills:

One of the most important functions of English language arts education is to help students learn to interpret texts—that is, to reflect on textual meaning from their own perspectives—and to evaluate texts—that is, to use critical thinking to identify particular text elements, such as logic, emotional appeal, and purpose. As students interpret and evaluate texts, they explore their own feelings, values, and responses to the ideas presented. Thus, they make their own responses to texts an integral part of the reading experience. (p. 33)

The approach promoted by this standard, and by the elaborative support for it, clearly acknowledged the role of structural or feature analysis of text. However, the standard demonstrated that this analysis emerges out of students' reflections on "their own perspectives" and exploration of "their own feelings, values, and responses to the ideas," thereby promoting an approach that centered on human experience, rather than academic knowledge. In addition to serving as data for the Methodology Claim, this perspective on the teaching of literature connects the Methodology Claim to the Purpose Claim. As seen in previous snapshots of the conversation surrounding literature instruction, the purpose for teaching literature often influences and shapes the methods of instruction, or the Methodology Claim.

Standard Eleven presented other approaches to the study of English language arts, including literature. It did so by acknowledging the socially contextualized experience of language acquisition. Because language serves a social purpose, and emerges naturally in social contexts, so too should the instruction. The extended discussion of this standard spoke of collaborative approaches to teaching language and literature, including story-telling, collaborative inquiry, and the sharing of personal responses to texts. The explication of Standard Eleven concluded by connecting approach to purpose once again:

The concept of literacy community emphasizes the collaborative nature of much language learning. Whether students' participation in a given community is face-to-face (as in the case of friends and classmates) or technologically mediated (as in the case of popular media and computer networking), it is an essential part of their coming to view themselves as effective language users. (p. 45)

In allowing students to engage in literate practices as they would encounter them naturally in life—through conversation or other social context—the approach enhances the aims of the Purpose Claim, specifically by helping students expand their view of themselves. Additionally, this statement provided additional support for an experience-based approach to instructional

methodology by offering specific examples of how classroom practice could employ the use of collaborative or socially-constructed learning about and from literature, including “face-to-face” student conversation or “technologically mediated” conversations. There was thus, one again, an emphasis on real-life experience.

As the introduction to the *Standards for the English Language Arts* discussed, this document represented the voices and contributions of thousands of English educators. These shared values held by these participants shaped this document, and demonstrate that contemporary English educators embrace assumptions similar to those held by their teacher-ancestors, and these assumptions serve as the implicit warrant for the Methodology Claim. Whole child instruction had been a central theme in this ongoing conversation, and inherent to the privileging of personal experience over the study of literary form and structure. This approach centered the study of any text on the student, rather than on the specific features of the text. Although textual analysis was not ignored, the assumption that teaching and learning should emerge from the experiences of the student provided the foundation for this data. Furthermore, the *Standards for the English Language Arts* embraced the understanding that experience is a valuable way of knowing, and this link between experience and knowledge was a theme commonly associated with the pragmatic underpinnings (James, 1997/1907; Peirce, 1934) of progressive education. In promoting socially-contextualized learning, including the sharing of perspectives and ideas, the contributors to this document demonstrated that they valued students’ own experiences, but also saw that students could learn from the experiences of their peers. One would not offer or accept instruction of this form if he or she believed there was a static body of knowledge to be passed on to students. By offering collaborative study as an appropriate and desired method for teaching literature, the document privileges personal experience through interactions with both the text and other students. In these ways, the *Standards for the English*

Language Arts, and the understandings presented about the teaching of literature at the secondary level, demonstrate a continued tradition of shared values among English educators.

Conclusion

Through the Coalition Conference and the preparation of the *Standards for the English Language Arts*, those within the field of English education sought to redefine the field. They rejected the position that static bodies of knowledge, or a single cultural literacy, should be passed on to students, and that economic and political power are the central purposes for education. They significantly rallied the field, centering the conversation surrounding literature at the secondary level around the theme of experience and its relationship to learning and knowledge. However, the efforts of the participants at the Coalition Conference could not prevent the coming of a more standardized conception of education. The publication of *Standards for the English Language Arts*, which sparked controversy on two levels, was evidence of the field's inability to stave off the era of accountability.

The document itself presented the first controversy. The publication of *Standards for the English Language Arts* resulted in a firestorm of public criticism, which was not unexpected by those within the field. An in-house email, sent from Alan Farstrup (1997), president of IRA, to the organization's Board of Directors just days before the release of the document, indicated that those involved in the release of the document were prepared for the controversy:

We recognize that we are now part of a much larger political battle, the "culture wars" that will inevitably surround the U.S. Presidential election process. . . . Education is one of the key issues. Standards will be a part of that debate. The conservative right will portray most standards documents (ours being the most recent example) as weak or inappropriate and emblematic of the "failure" of the public schools. The Democrats will likely adopt aspects of this perspective in order to insulate themselves and to co-opt the right wing agenda, establishing themselves as leaders of school reform based on "measurable" standards and accountability. . . . We could (and most likely will) become a pawn in the overall political process. (pp. 1-2)

The concern expressed by Farstrup was accurate, as the standards were harshly critiqued in the public arena. In an article published in *The Wall Street Times*, Michael Cohen, senior adviser to then Secretary of Education Riley, was quoted as saying, “The English standards are so remarkably vague, most of the time I don’t even know what they’re saying.” The media embraced this criticism, and the document became the target of numerous syndicated columnists. Private citizens joined in the criticism, as evidenced by a letter sent to NCTE’s headquarters in the month following publication:

Dear Sir or Madam,

If our nation expects members of your group to teach young people the art of precise and persuasive rhetoric, and the understandably anonymous author of the attached gibberish is typical of your membership, then may God help us all. Scarcely could your critics hope for evidence more damning.

Sincerely,
Alan Dawkins

The greatest object of critique of the standards document, as pertaining to the teaching of literature, was the lack of endorsement of any specific list of literary works, or a grade-level breakdown of when certain works should be taught. No one from within the field would argue that the standards were not “vague,” though they did not see this as a negative aspect of the standards, but rather an asset. A rigid list of literary works, delineated by grade level, would contradict the dual claims asserted and embraced by the field for one hundred years.

The field was prepared for the critiques from outside, leaving the most controversial criticisms to come from within. The initial response from those within the field was largely positive. However, with implementation, the field’s cooperation with the standardized accountability movement could not be ignored. Nor, it would seem, was it unforeseen. In an email dated October 31, 1995, Janie Hydric—the first elementary school teacher to serve as president of NCTE (1994)—offered her perspective on a draft of the standards document.

Although she was supportive of the standards, in theory, she made a comment that would foreshadow events to come:

As for all the charts and boxes, I can tell you *exactly* what my district would do with them. They would list each separate little square, number it, plug in textbook pages and specific skills, and then assign a criterion-referenced test that we would have to teach to. Kids not scoring 80% or higher for each little box would be administered remediation. And teachers would be evaluated and real estate bought and sold on the basis of the scores on the tests. Your worst nightmare, brought to you courtesy of NCTE / IRA. (p. 1)

The charts and boxes to which she referred did not appear in the final version of *Standards for the English Language Arts*, though everything else she predicted came to fruition. Although outside critics of the standards said they were too vague to be of practical use, the standards were highly influential, finding their way—in whole or in part—into state standards for teaching English throughout America. The modified versions of these standards, as they appear in fifty state documents, were often more explicitly delineated, broken down into smaller benchmarks, and they have been used as measurable objectives in high-stakes testing. For example, the state of Louisiana embraced these twelve standards, though they were rewritten to include benchmarks, and eventually, individual grade level standards. The following, taken from the *Louisiana English Language Arts Content Standards* (2004) and representing the application of a standard at the eleventh and twelfth grades, demonstrates the evolution of one of those broad, experience-based standards:

National Standard Two: Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

Louisiana Content Standard Six: Students read, analyze, and respond to literature as a record of life experiences.

The two standards, offered as an illustration of how individual state departments of education adopted the *Standards for the English Language Arts*, are similar in content. However, the

additional explication of the standard at the state level, also illustrative of the ways in which the standards were implemented throughout the country, seemed to lose the emphasis on experience that was in the national document:

Louisiana Content Benchmark ELA – 6 – H3: Analyzing, and synthesizing a variety of classic and contemporary fiction and non-fiction literature from many genres (e.g. epics)

Louisiana Grade Level Expectation 7: Analyze and synthesize in oral and written responses distinctive elements (e.g., structure) of a variety of literary forms and types, including:

7a: essays and memoirs and early and modern essay writers

7b: epic poetry such as *Beowulf*

7c: forms of lyric and narrative poetry such as the ballad, sonnets, pastorals, elegies, and the dramatic monologue

7d: drama, including ancient, Renaissance, and modern comedies and tragedies

7e: short stories, novellas, and novels

7f: biographies and autobiographies

7g: speeches

The benchmark and the grade-level expectations into which the standard was divided, represent little of the “human experience” indicated in the national standard, though it is from this standard that the benchmark and grade level expectations have been derived. The implementation of the standard is more prescriptive, and it is this type of implementation issue that has fueled the controversy surrounding the field’s involvement in the preparation of national standards for English.

Once published, NCTE, IRA, and all of the thousands of contributors to the *Standards for the English Language Arts* lost control over how these standards were used. The same standards, initially prepared to reflect and redefine the field of English education, became an instrument by which the field could become defined from the outside. The standards were broad and, as an examination shows, were experiential in nature, and states throughout America have aligned their language arts curriculum to them. However, as states adopt curriculum standards, they also

adopt measures to assess them, and in many ways, the assessment instruments lack the flexibility inherent in the original standards. While some exceptions to the rule do exist, most of these state assessment instruments now—as a result of *No Child Left Behind* (Elementary and Secondary Education Act – reauthorized, 2002)—are being tied to student promotion, teacher evaluation, and school funding. Even on tests employing more authentic, integrated measures of reading and writing, the assessment instruments are still overwhelmingly quantitative, stripping the desired usefulness and vitality from the standards. Although the field of English education did not intend that the standards be used in this way, participation of the professional organizations in the writing of standards implicated English educators in the accountability movement.

However, in spite of the fate to which the *Standards for the English Language Arts* fell, this document, along with the coalition documents of the same era, represented a significant rearticulation of the field's aims for and approaches to the teaching of literature at the secondary level. These documents answered key questions in the field: What is the purpose for teaching literature at the secondary level? Are specific types of work to be presented? What approaches are best? In addressing issues of *why*, *what*, and *how*, the field of English education found the answers to those questions within the context of experience. By embracing the role that experience plays in the educational and emotional development of a child, the field of English education continued, with the *Standards for English Language Arts*, to embrace understandings of education that emerged in the inaugural era of the field, a period which was, as Applebee (1974) pointed out, characterized by reform.

CHAPTER 5

A TRADITION OF REFORM

It would be as dangerous to neglect the very real risks which accompany any attempt at reform as to assume that, because Progressivism “died,” everything which progressivism stood for is necessarily dead, too. We hope not.

Dartmouth Conference, *Report of Working Party No. 3*, 1966

The educational practices which guide English classrooms, from curricular plans to instructional implementation, are shaped by the fundamental beliefs the field and its members hold about what it means to be truly educated. Deeply embedded assumptions about learning, knowledge, and the purposes of literacy lie at the heart of these practices, and when there is disagreement over these assumptions, tensions arise. My interest in the teaching of literature, and the tensions secondary English teachers face concerning the purposes, the methods, and the selections of literature in their classrooms, led me to investigate the nature of the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature throughout the history of English education as a profession. This examination reveals that the fundamental issues facing contemporary English teachers are not new. English educators have, throughout history and across time, held shared values, situated within the progressive theme of experience, about the nature of literature instruction.

In *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English*, Applebee (1974) claimed that the field of English education has been, throughout its history, characterized by periods of traditional approaches to teaching followed by periods of reform. In education *tradition* is generally associated with a curriculum of relatively static bodies of content knowledge as well as teacher-centric instructional approaches (Kohn, 1999; Tanner & Tanner, 1990), and tradition is juxtaposed against reform movements, or change. Furthermore, Applebee drew connections

between reform and the progressive movement in education. And, since progressive themes have often been associated with change—centering education on students, their experiences, and the experiences of others—tradition is juxtaposed against them as well. However, I believe it can be argued that the field of English education, rather than being marked alternating periods of reform and tradition, as Applebee indicated, is characterized by a consistency, a firm adherence to tradition. Through an examination of the field of English education and its approach to the teaching of literature throughout the history of the field, it becomes clear that the dichotomy between tradition and reform, or, as suggested by Applebee, between tradition and reform through progressivism, is not a dichotomy at all. This dissertation, which is offered as a response to Applebee’s history of the profession of English, demonstrates that reform and tradition are one and the same, rather than dichotomous, in the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature.

A Progressive Tradition

Chapters Two, Three, and Four examined the field of English education during three significantly defining moments in the history of the field: the inaugural years of the founding of English education as a profession, the period of social change followed the post-war years in America, and the era of accountability, ushered in by *A Nation at Risk* and continuing even today, at the time of this dissertation’s publication. In each period, English educators found themselves challenged to articulate their understandings of their profession, in response to outward social or political issues, or even from the influence exerted by their English counterparts at the post-secondary level. During the inaugural era, discussed in Chapter Two, English educators sought to define themselves for the first time, demonstrating through their opposition to uniform entrance examinations that the field of English education was distinctly different from the discipline at the college level, and that their purposes for literature instruction

were student-centered rather than content-driven. Through the inaugural meeting, documented in the *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting* and the *Round Table Discussions*, they staked their claims about the teaching of literature and grounded them in the progressive theme of experience, and they reaffirmed their beliefs through the influential reports of the NCTE Curriculum Commission. Throughout the social reform era, addressed in Chapter Three, the field struggled to maintain its traditions, in spite of the political issues—brought about, in part, by the launching of Sputnik—that sought to define education in more academic, less experiential terms. The United States was undergoing significant social change, as school desegregation began and previously marginalized groups actively asserted their autonomy and equality, and English educators valued the insight and reflection that literature could bring to students seeking to find their place in a rapidly changing society. The Dartmouth Conference and the republication of Rosenblatt's (1968) progressive work, *Literature as Exploration*, originally published by the Progressive Education Association, demonstrated the field's determination to remain grounded in their traditions and influenced by progressive understandings of education.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter Four, the era of accountability challenged English educators to articulate firmly, once more, their core beliefs about the teaching of literature, or else, risk being defined by those from outside the field. Immigration in the United States continued to shift racial demographics, and America's economic status in the world dominated political and public discourse, leading to the fear that the nation was at risk of losing not only its place as a world power, but also its cultural heritage. English educators responded to these fears by rearticulating their goals for the teaching of literature, which they did by maintaining the claims long-established in the field. Even as standardized conceptions of schooling took hold, those present at the Coalition Conference and those involved in the preparation of the *Standards*

for English Language Arts continued to define the field of English education as one firmly grounded in experience.

Drawing from central documents produced by the field during these periods, I employed Toulmin's (1958) method of argument to analyze the ongoing conversation in the field, specifically with reference to the teaching of literature at the secondary level. At times, the process was a complex one, due largely to the nature of experience in the field. Though the term *experience* is used throughout the discourse in English education, there is inconsistency in what is meant by this term from one seminal work to the other. It would seem that, although experience is a recurring, key theme of English education, it is a "fuzzy concept." However, through careful examination of the conversation surrounding literature, I have come to believe the nature of experience, as articulated in English education, stems from progressive notions of educating "the whole child," in which education is viewed as holistic, embodied, or inclusive of the many dimensions of life. Nevertheless, as this dissertation shows, at times this term conveyed different definitions, and because it is a central facet of the conversation under analysis, this complicated the use of Toulmin's model.

The nature of "data" in the field of English education also led to complications with Toulmin's model. Toulmin noted the field-dependency of data when he said "the criteria or sorts of ground required to justify such a conclusion vary from field to field," (p. 36). For English educators, data often take the form of personal anecdotes about teaching and learning, rather than the form of irrefutable facts. In the conversations I analyzed, personal experience, either as a teacher or a reader, was often used to support English educators' claims, a move that is fitting in a field that embraces experience as a way of knowing. The complications arose during this analysis as I sought to discern—from personal, reflective anecdotes—what served as actual data in this conversation. I believe that any other type of data would have negated the claims made

by the field, because it would be contradictory to talk of the study of literature as something that cannot be easily quantified, but then defend that position with the quantifiable. By focusing on references made specifically to reading experiences or interactions with literature, I was able to identify the personal reflections and observations about classroom practice that supported the field's claims. This textual examination revealed a field that maintained its central claims concerning literature study—claims that were rooted in themes of progressivism and reform throughout its nearly one hundred year history. In spite of the associations *tradition* carries in educational conversations, the claims serve as the tradition for the field of English education.

As illustrated in the preceding chapters, the conversations surrounding the teaching of literature at the secondary level have continued to assert consistent claims about the purposes for literary study. These claims are represented in this dissertation as the Purpose Claim. The claim embraced literature as a reflection of human experience, and it stood in contrast to the ways in which literature was promoted by postsecondary institutions at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. In their opposition to prescribed lists of literary works, perpetuated by the uniform entrance examinations, those within the field of English education embraced the study of literature for its power to provide insight into human experience, both that which one has experienced personally and that which has not been a previous part of one's life experience. The ultimate goal of this Purpose Claim was not fully articulated throughout the conversation, although during the social reform era, and then again during the era of accountability, a sense of transformation of the self as well as societal transformation began to emerge in the conversations surrounding the purposes for teaching literature. These transformations would come as a result of critical reflection on the human experiences conveyed through literature. Bowers (1997) has suggested that tradition itself may be fluid and changing, and I believe this to be true within the context of this conversation. English teachers maintained

a consistent position on inclusion of literature as a tool for reflection of human experience, thereby demonstrating a tradition in the field. However, the actual value of that reflection evolved over time, from serving the simple purpose of providing the students with relevance to promoting critical examination of one's world. Nevertheless, in each era, the Purpose Claim remained constant in its promotion of literature as a reflection of human experience, thereby demonstrating long-standing shared values, or traditional positions, throughout the history of the field.

The data for this claim were often situated within the answers to a fundamental question about the teaching of literature: What works of literature should be presented to students at the secondary level? Those within the field, as present throughout the conversations documented in these central works, continually provided an answer to this question that served as data for the Purpose Claim. Teachers during the inaugural era first articulated that both classical literature and more contemporary works would be fine, provided the works presented issues or themes of relevance to students' lives and experiences. Those English educators who entered the conversation during the era of social change expanded on this topic by promoting the use of a wide variety of literature, with an emphasis on presenting diverse experiences. Finally, the dominant voices in the field during the era of accountability continued to promote the use of diverse literary selections, offering a rejection of prescribed lists of works that offer limited cultural perspectives. Each of these forms of data reflected the pressing issues of the individual periods in which they were expressed, but all provided support for an unchanging claim about the purpose of literature instruction at the secondary level.

Likewise, the conversations surrounding the teaching of literature continued to promote a central claim about the approaches for literary study at the secondary level, which Chapters Two, Three, and Four identified as the Methodology Claim. The claim promoted instructional

approaches that embraced the experiential nature of learning: Methodologies should incorporate and promote emotional, social, physical, intellectual responses to literature. This understanding of approaches to teaching literature rejected the ways in which literature was assessed by uniform entrance examinations. Rather than limiting the study of literature to textual analysis or literary criticism, English educators during the inaugural years asserted that literary experiences in the classroom ought to reflect meaningful engagement with texts—the kind of experience one has in the reading done outside of school settings. This claim, which centered the study of literature around interactions *with* the text, rather than on discrete knowledge *about* the text, remained the central claim about the teaching of literature throughout these defining periods in the history of the field.

In supporting the Methodology Claim, the participants in this conversation provided insight into a fundamental question facing English teachers, then and now: How should literature be taught to secondary students? The answers to this question are often situated within conversations about the types of literature most appropriate for secondary students, and were also closely connected to the purposes for teaching literature in the first place. Within these conversations, the participants provided data for the claim of methodology. During the inaugural years, those within the field of English education focused their conversations about instructional approaches on the emotional connections and responses students made to works of literature. They promoted approaches that encouraged and privileged personal responses, including students' choices of literature and the use of "book clubs," deemphasizing the academic approaches highlighted by the uniform entrance exams. In the era of social change, participants in the conversation continued to value approaches that promoted individual responses to literature, though they began also to emphasize the socially constructed nature of knowledge. They encouraged talk-rich classrooms, where literary form and structure were not ignored, but

were presented only as tools for a deeper engagement with text. Finally, during the era of accountability, English educators continued to promote approaches that valued the emotionally and socially constructed responses to literature. They offered, as new data, a broader definition of “literature,” recognizing media and other nonprint texts as worthy works for study in the literature classroom. All of these data continued to emphasize the types of literate engagements students would experience in the world outside of the classroom, thereby offering support for a consistent methodology claim.

In 1958 Toulmin asserted that all logical claims are rooted within an embedded assumption or a warrant. These are the fundamental beliefs that provide the link between the claim and the data offered in support of it. As this dissertation has shown, personal observations and classroom anecdotes often served as data for the claims about the teaching of literature at the secondary level. For those within the field of English education, I believe the warrants offered in support of the data were progressive in nature, embracing themes of progressive education, particularly with reference to the experiential notions of student-centered curriculum and whole-child instruction. However, Toulmin cautioned that the nature of the warrant, like that of data, is field dependent, and one’s acceptance of the claim rests upon his or her willingness to acknowledge the warrant:

Even after we have produced our data, we may find ourselves being asked further questions of another kind. We may now be required not to add more factual information to that which we have already provided, but rather to indicate the bearing on our conclusion of the data already produced. . . . The question is now one about the nature and justification of this step. . . . Unless, in any particular field of argument, we are prepared to work with warrants of some kind, it will become impossible in that field to subject arguments to rational assessment. The data we cite if a claim is challenged depend on the warrants we are prepared to operate within that field, and the warrants to which we commit ourselves are implicit in the particular steps from data to claims we are prepared to take and to admit. But supposing a man rejects all warrants whatever authorizing (say) steps from data about the present and past to conclusions about him, then for him rational prediction will become impossible. (pp. 98 – 100)

An examination of the central claims surrounding the teaching of literature at the secondary level demonstrated that the field of English education displayed remarkable consistency for nearly one hundred years. Situating its beliefs about literature study within the context of experience, the field has, throughout its history, accepted warrants embedded with themes commonly associated with the progressive movement in education, thereby defining itself as a field that is progressive in nature. However, those from outside of the field, often rejected (and continue to reject) progressive understandings of what it means to be educated. Thus, the claims articulated by the field are rejected by those from without, and conflict emerges.

Through this dissertation, I sought to understand the ongoing conversation over literature instruction at the secondary level, in an effort to shed light on the contemporary conversations surrounding this same topic. Now, as in 1911, when the profession first organized in an attempt to reject rigid understandings of the purposes and methodologies for teaching literature in the secondary school, English educators struggle to articulate their beliefs about the why, what, and how of literature instruction. However, I believe that the argument—or the conversation—will continue, because of continued developments in various arenas that threaten to strip the field of its shared assumptions concerning the teaching of literature. Applebee (1974) said that teachers of English suffered a “crisis of identity” (p. 246), because of outward pressures for them to define the subject of English as a discrete body of knowledge.

In my opinion, a crisis, or conflict, does exist, though the conflict is not one of identity. The internal conversation, or that among English educators throughout the history of their field, has remained fairly consistent in its acceptance of claims with progressive themes, and has thereby maintained its identity as a discourse community with shared-values for the aims of literature instruction. The crisis or tension in the field surrounds the external conversation about

teaching literature. The field did not reject the notion of a body of knowledge for its field, but rather disagreed over what comprised this body of knowledge. Documents produced by those outside of the field of English education, including Harvard's 1873 - 1874 *Catalogue, The Training of Secondary Teachers Especially with Reference to English* (1942), or Hirsch's (1967) *Cultural Literacy*, promoted a body of knowledge comprised of specific, canonized literary works. Those within the field did not reject these works of literature; indeed throughout their long-standing conversation surrounding the teaching of literature, those within the field have embraced the place of classical literature in the secondary curriculum, and continue to do so. However, through the claims about the teaching of literature, it is clear the field does not define its "body of knowledge" as a prescribed list of literary works. Rather, for those within the field of English, the body of knowledge is found within experience: Human experience—as it is expressed by literature, lived by students, and transformed by the relationship between text and reader—is the content knowledge of English at the secondary level.

Both of the claims about the field, expressed at moments during which the field felt pressure from social and political forces, centered the field on experience. The Purpose Claim, which articulated literature as a reflection of human experience, privileged the study of literature as a tool for expression of experience, rather than as something important simply for its own sake. Furthermore, the Methodology Claim, which asserted the need for holistic or embodied response to literature, valued the connection between literary works and students' life experiences. Neither of these claims, which have manifested themselves in the conversations surrounding literature throughout the history of the field, promotes an understanding of literature as a static body of knowledge. Instead, by staking their claims of purpose and methodology, the dominant voices in the field of English education have proclaimed experience as the core of their content. This understanding of the teaching of literature at the secondary level has shaped the

very nature of the field, situating the contemporary field of English education within a tradition of progressivism.

Contribution to the Field

Understanding this tradition can shed light upon the tensions currently practicing teachers of English face in the secondary literature classroom. Applebee offered his 1974 history in an attempt to examine “the past on its own terms, rather than using it to provide ‘perspective’ on contemporary issues” (p. x), though knowledge of the field’s past, and the perspectives highlighted throughout that past, can provide teachers with a historic base from which to articulate their own understandings. One of the greatest debates surrounding the teaching of literature continues to be over the types of literary works most appropriate for inclusion in the secondary school; and, as this dissertation has demonstrated, the crux of this debate centers on one’s understanding of the purpose of and methodology for literature instruction. The conflict surrounding literary choice is but one area in which I would hope that greater understanding of the field’s history will support current participants in the conversation.

I entered into the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature during my earliest years as a secondary English teacher, as I sought to move beyond a rigid list of literary selections, and learned of the tensions one faces when those outside of the field hold different assumptions about the nature of literature. Now, as a teacher-leader in a public school system, I see others facing the same challenges I faced as a teacher—over their methodological approaches, the literary selections, or, even more fundamentally, over the central aims they hold for their education of students. English teachers with whom I have worked have been questioned about their decisions to teach young adult literature, or to allow significant blocks of class time for the independent reading of student-selected novels, or to privilege students as creators of their own knowledge through the use of literature circles (cf. Daniels, 1994, 2002) or other

student-centered instructional approaches. “Please talk to my principal,” they say, or “How do I answer this parent’s letter?” they ask. I was hired to provide professional development for struggling teachers, though I have found that I spend as much time helping experienced teachers articulate the educational philosophies that provide support for their instructional choices. However, just as the field of English education has asserted the transformative experience a student may have through engagement with texts, I believe that there is transformative power in a teacher’s being able to connect his or her own experiences, ideas, and challenges and with those of his or her teacher-ancestors.

The issues facing contemporary teachers of English are not new. The founders of the teaching of English as a profession resisted uniform entrance examinations and attempts to define the field as a prescribed list of literary works. Teachers during the era of social reform rejected an emphasis on academic skills over the value of emotional and social development of students. At the end of the twentieth century, English educators saw schools march toward a standardization of curriculum aimed at maintaining America’s political and economic status in a rapidly shrinking global economy.

Currently, practicing teachers face contemporary manifestations of these same issues, as evidenced by prescribed curriculums, standardized assessments of these same curricula, and measurements of both students’ achievement and teachers’ effectiveness that pay scant, if any, attention to the experience one derives from reading. The problem facing contemporary teachers of English lies in the competing assumptions about the purposes of education. Alfie Kohn (1999) has discussed the ways in which this problem impacts all of those within the various fields of education, not just English educators:

The current demand for Tougher Standards, particularly by politicians and businesspeople carries with it a bundle of assumptions about the proper role of schools, the nature and causes of failure, and the way students learn. . . . People

from parents to presidents have begun to sound like cranky, ill-informed radio talk-show hosts, and almost anything can be done to students and to schools, no matter how ill considered, as long as it is done in the name of “raising standards” or “accountability.” (p. 14)

Because the assumptions that underlie the central claims about the teaching of literature do not easily lend themselves to quantification, tensions exist between contemporary teachers of English and the standards-driven purposes for education held by many outside of the field. English educators have faced this same tension for nearly a century, and, by understanding that, teachers who feel that they are alone in their resistance to these issues may gain confidence, persistence, and support. By highlighting the shared values of the field, and the relationship of those to themes of progressive reform, including the central claims surrounding literature that have been present since its inaugural years, I hope to foreground a historic continuity within the consciousness of English teachers.

James Husic, in his editorial to December 1912 edition of the *English Journal*, commented on the future of English education, saying that the success with which the field continued to serve society would “be found on the side of those who look to the future, rather than on that of those who look to the past” (p. 640). While I do not disagree that the field must continually anticipate the changing needs of American students, there is value, too, in examining the past. This dissertation examined three points in the history of the field of English education, each illustrating a significant rearticulation of the field’s aims. As the preceding chapters demonstrated, each of these defining moments was in response to complex social issues facing American society. As demographics shifted, as traditional structures of power were challenged and expanded, and as society became more diverse, schools were confronted with calls both to ease the transition and also to serve as a stabilizing agent. Pulled between two diverse purposes, those within the field of English education had to focus the conversation on the aims and ways of

their unique content area, including the teaching of literature. Each time, they did so in progressive terms, which served as the “discourse-defined positions” (Gee, 1989b, p. 19) discussed in Chapter One. By drawing from the progressive theme of experience to support their claims, participants in the conversation established and maintained a tradition of reform.

It can be argued that the tradition of reform—specifically in reference to themes associated with the progressive movement in education, illustrated throughout this dissertation, serves as the central identifying feature of English education as a profession. The participants involved in the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature represent a discourse community of English educators, and as such, this community illustrates Gee’s (1989a) concept of “identity kit” (p. 7), or the collaboratively acceptable modes of articulating and supporting the field’s positions. Gee asserted that discourse communities, such as that represented by those within the field of English education, assume a socially constructed identity that “comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (p. 7). An analysis of the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature has demonstrated that, for those within the field, the recognized position or the tradition for English educators is that of progress and reform. Through understanding the past, those presently involved in the conversation will be better able to contextualize and present their own understandings about literature and how those fit into a larger conversation about what it means to be educated.

Areas for Further Study

For this dissertation, I examined the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature in the secondary school, drawing from Toulmin’s method of argument analysis. In doing so, I learned that the field had established and reasserted the same two claims about literature instruction for nearly a century. The data used to support these claims changed from context to

context, but the claims remained the same, and the warrants were embedded within tenets of progressive education. From this, it can be argued that the traditional perspective held by those within the field of English education is progressive in nature. One might say then that, within English education, there is a “tradition of reform.” Nevertheless, additional areas of inquiry serve as potential areas for future study.

This study focused on the conversation surrounding the teaching of literature, though similar examinations of the conversations about other aspects of the English curriculum would also be of value. In *Tradition and Reform*, Applebee has said that the understandings about the teaching of literature have “moved in parallel” with understandings about other facets of the field. This parallel movement could serve as a topic of inquiry into the tradition and history of English at the secondary level. All of the central works examined in this dissertation, with the exception of Rosenblatt’s (1968) *Literature as Exploration*, also documented primary conversations about the teaching of oral and written communication. An analysis of the claims asserted about these facets of English education, and the warrants in which the claims are grounded, would shed light on contemporary issues in the teaching of writing and oral communication. It would be worth noting if the claims surrounding these issues also remained constant throughout the history of the field. If so, one might be able to draw connections between those claims and complex issues facing currently practicing teachers of English, including process approaches to writing, dialectical issues in the language classroom, and teaching English as a second language.

Additionally, it would be of value to examine the connection between asserted claims and actual classroom practice. As noted throughout this dissertation, the conversation about literature, as documented in the central works, represented the dominant voices within the field of English education. The concerns and opinions of classroom teachers were present, in part,

throughout this conversation, though as Munro (1998) cautioned, narratives that do not fit within the dominant discourse are often suppressed, thus distorting the accuracy of historical work. For this reason, this dissertation cannot claim to represent the actual classroom experiences of teachers throughout these various points in history. The claims asserted in the central works represent just that—*claims*—and, as such, they may or may not represent the daily, practical application of these purposes and methodologies in American classrooms (c. f., Cuban 1984). A study focusing on the oral histories of teachers who are currently practicing, who practiced during the period of time in which the Coalition Conference documents (Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1987; NCTE, 1987) were produced, and—if possible—who practiced during the era of social reform, would provide insight into the implications these claims had on teachers and students. I believe that many teachers of English would articulate their understandings of the field in the same terms expressed by the Purpose Claim and the Methodology Claim. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to learn if teachers are (or were) aware of the claims being asserted in central documents from within the field, and, whether aware or not, if their own claims about the teaching of literature at the secondary level actually played out in their instructional practice.

Finally, as noted throughout this dissertation, when disagreements exist between the warrants or assumptions underlying educational philosophy and practice, no practical argument will be convincing. If one supports his or her understandings about the teaching of literature by situating them within progressive ideologies, and those warrants are not accepted, tension remains. For this reason, the forms of agency teachers can embrace and have embraced are an important area of inquiry. Once teachers articulate their aims for the teaching of English, and then find those in opposition to aims held by those from outside of the field, what paths are available for change? Do teachers do as I did, and retreat into their closed classrooms, silently

resisting? Or, do they seek to resist publicly, in efforts to promote systemic change? What recourse is there, if assumptions about the teaching of literature, or the aims of education in general, remain contested? Additional scholarship in this area would be valuable to teachers consciously aware of the warrants underlying their own claims about the purposes and methodologies for teaching literature.

Conclusion

In 1986 Porter spoke of the ways in which professional communities are bound by traditions maintained by members by who do not necessarily come into direct contact with one another or even know one another. Through ongoing conversations, documented in books, journals, speeches, and the like, members of the field of English education have identified with one another—across time—through their acceptance and promotion of shared values and practices, as demonstrated by the common understandings about the purpose of and approach to the teaching of literature. As this dissertation has illustrated, the distinguishing characteristic of English education, as a field and discourse community, is experience, a theme derived from the progressive reform movement in education. In any historical study, it is important to understand “attitudes, values, or modes of thought,” as Burke (1974) pointed out (p. 440). It is my hope that this dissertation, through its examination of claims presented in central works throughout the history of the field, provides additional insight into the values held by those in English education, demonstrating that those values represent a tradition of progressive thought. In this way, this dissertation may serve as a continuation of the conversation surrounding the field of English education. It would do so by highlighting the relevance of these central works, and the voices of those present within them, to the current participants in the conversation. The conversation that began nearly a century ago is ongoing, and provides a tradition from which those within the field may draw. Through its major spokespeople, the field of English education has, throughout its

history, rooted its understandings about the educational role of literature within notions of experience, which serve as the ethos, or shared values and beliefs, of the field.

My work furthers the conversation by presenting a synonymous, rather than dichotomous, relationship between *tradition* and *progress* in the field of English education. Throughout the many points of tension in the history of the field—when English educators have felt outward pressure to redefine the nature of their work—they have turned to the progressive theme of experience as the guiding tradition of English education. In 1912, James Hosisic described the field as “distinctly spirited, optimistic, and progressive” (p. 47). My examination has demonstrated this characterization of the field as progressive to be as true today as it was then, and it may provide a historical perspective from which English educators may draw as they continue to define themselves and their field.

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APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF TEN ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDIES, WITH REFERENCE TO ENGLISH

First Secondary School Year

English Literature: three periods per week
English Composition: two periods per week

Second Secondary School Year

English Literature: three periods per week
English Composition: two periods per week

Third Secondary School Year

English Literature: three periods per week
English Composition: one period per week
Rhetoric: one period per week

Fourth Secondary School Year

English Literature: three periods per week
English Composition: one period per week
English Grammar: one period per week

VITA

Deborah Davis Reed was born in Gulfport, Mississippi, but moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, as a child. She returned to Mississippi after high school, in order to attend college at the University of Southern Mississippi. There, she earned degrees in English and in curriculum and instruction, and followed her mother into the teaching profession. She began her professional life at Oak Grove High School, a public school in Lamar County, Mississippi, where she taught English for three years.

Deborah returned to Baton Rouge for her graduate studies at Louisiana State University. There, she became interested in the historical patterns present throughout the teaching of English at the secondary level, and also in the work of female educators, including Ella Flagg Young, Jane Addams, and Louise Rosenblatt. It was most interesting to Deborah to see how current policies and issues in teaching, including the challenges she faced as a public school teacher, were also critical issues to her teacher-ancestors. In this way, she began to see the power of historical examination as a lens for understanding contemporary issues in education.

Throughout her graduate studies in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Deborah worked with the LSU Writing Project, mentored student teachers, and taught courses in English methods. Additionally, she taught at the LSU Laboratory School, and became a teacher-educator with the Lafayette Parish Public School System. All of these professional experiences kept her rooted in the classroom issues that sent her to graduate school in the first place, and provided inspiration for her historical examination of the field of English education. Deborah continues to work as a mentor to secondary English teachers in public schools, and her professional goals remain centered on providing instructional support and professional empowerment for classroom teachers.