“Although Adolescence Need Not Be Violent...”: Preservice Teachers’ Connections Between “Adolescence” and Literacy Curriculum

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Mark A. Lewis & Robert Petrone

The ways that teachers envision their adolescent learners has everything to do with how they will teach these learners, especially given that most teacher education programs train teachers to focus on the needs of the learner. Interpreting a learner’s needs, however, means that one must have a way of constructing the learner, a vision of who that learner is. Traditionally, this vision has come from developmental psychology, which, along with cognitive psychology, has been the theoretical linchpin for most of teacher education. However, this process of constructing the “psyche” of the learner, and the life stage of that we call “adolescence,” occurs within a social, cultural, and historical context. (Lewis & Finders, 2001, p. 102)

The central assumption underlying this article is the belief that how adolescence is understood significantly affects the ways young people are advocated for/with, intervened on behalf of, and organized and taught in schools. In fact, over the past decade, a line of scholarship reveals how conceptions of adolescence oftentimes shape and justify teachers’ thinking of their students’ and their own roles in classrooms, microlevel classroom practices, and large-scale educational practices (Brass, 2006; Finders, 1999; Lesko, 2001; Lewis & Finders, 2001; Luke & Luke, 2001; Moje, 2002; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005). For example, Finders (1999) explained how the ways a group of pre-service English teachers understood adolescence as a life stage undergirded the ways they conceptualized not only their secondary students but also their own pedagogical practices. These teachers regarded adolescence as a biologically determined natural life cycle that ensnared young people in raging hormones and rendered them incompetent. These conceptions homogenized adolescents by denying their diversity and neglecting their personal histories, thus working to produce an “invented adolescent” for these prospective teachers—one who is either an “uncivilized beast or as a disembodied hormonal surge” (p. 256). These discursive filters, Finders argued, legitimized these prospective teachers’ primary concerns with classroom management and pedagogical practices designed to domesticate, herd, rein in, corral, and tether secondary students.

Given that conceptions of adolescence significantly enable or constrain pedagogical practices developed by teachers, we believe that an important aspect of adolescent literacy education lies in understanding, making visible, and problematizing the systems of reasoning related to adolescence that literacy educators draw upon and utilize in their processes of developing curriculum and instruction. These systems of reasoning, or discourses, help to name and position young people in powerful, predictable, and problematic ways that oftentimes affect the material conditions of their lives. Our hope is that drawing attention to these discourses might help literacy educators keep in mind that their experiences with young people are always mediated and produced by discourses that authorize how adolescents are known and acted upon.

We argue that what has become known as the natural life stage of adolescence is not a universally experienced, scientifically verifiable truth as much as it is a social and historically constructed entity, or as Vadeboncoeur (2005) suggested, “a function of political, economic, educational and governmental discourses,” or “a story made universal, and as such, a time and space that adults impose on and negotiate with young people” (p. 6). In this way, adolescence is socially achieved and produced through a range of social, cultural, political, economic, and ideological factors. Examining adolescence as socially constructed does not suggest that people do not advance chronologically through the ages associated with this life stage, but rather that the ways that this period of time in people’s lives is understood is always contingent on ways of knowing and reasoning available at any one particular time and place.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the relationships between discourse, meaning, and materiality related to the lives of young people is Lesko’s (2001) poststructural examination of adolescence. She argued that high schools both assume and reify dominant discourses of adolescence by maintaining an expectant mode for teenagers that keeps them forever young and renders them as incomplete, incompetent, and in need of help. She explained how certain schooling practices, such as teacher-centered and authoritarian methods of instruction, seem reasonable and necessary given the unexamined assumptions about youth that circulate as

commonsensical. For example, she wrote, “How can teachers be expected to have in-depth discussions of, say science and the environment, with all those raging hormones in a classroom?” (p. 190). Furthermore, she argued that normalized conceptions of adolescence actually produce a variety of schooling practices, such as the natural and inevitable nature of cliques, competition, and dominance, that make schools hostile and humiliating environments for many students.

Drawing upon and situated within this line of scholarship, this article examines the dominant discourses of adolescence a group of preservice secondary literacy teachers draw upon to develop curricular practices involving literature with young adult protagonists. By illuminating these discourses, we hope to draw attention to various ways that literacy educators’ experiences with and practices involving young people are constituted by dominant systems of knowing and reasoning about adolescence.

Research Design

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are secondary preservice literacy teachers’ conceptions of adolescence?
2. What connections do these preservice teachers make between fictional adolescent characters and their implied (Lewis & Finders, 2001) adolescent students?
3. How do their conceptions of adolescence and connections between fictional adolescent characters and implied adolescent students inform their creation of curricular activities?

To answer these research questions, Mark (first author) designed and implemented an action research study related to a course he taught during the fall of 2007 at a Mountain West university. Specifically, the course *Literature for Middle/High School Teachers* is a required course for all secondary English licensure candidates, and its primary objective is to discuss the issues and aspects of curriculum and instruction associated with the teaching of literature in secondary contexts. This university’s secondary licensure program has an explicit focus on social justice, and each course within

the program is expected to deal with issues related to equity, access, and power. This course is built around a selection of young adult and adult fiction that has adolescents as protagonists (see Table 1), except for the Steinbeck novel *Of Mice and Men*, which was used for two weeks to discuss issues related to teaching the canon.

The class read a book every week as a landscape upon which we could place our discussions and as a foundation for building sample lesson plans and curricular units. The literature selections vary between male and female protagonists as well as race and ethnicity of the protagonists. The texts vary in genre, including examples of short stories, poetry, novels, and graphic novels. Additionally, these selections are representative of the young adult literature genre in their plot lines and protagonists' thoughts and actions, which is important to our discussion on the links between teachers' perceptions of adolescents and pedagogical practices. Of the 28 students in the class, 17 participated in this study. Of these 17 predominately Caucasian participants, 14 were female and 3 were male.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The data consists of a selection of the participants' completed class assignments. Although the literature

selections were discussed in class in a variety of ways (e.g., through instructor-led discussion, student-led minilessons, and building of curricular units), for purposes of this study, the analytical focus is on one particular instructional task used to engage the students with the literature and the course topics. Over the course of the semester, the participants created five reading responses that asked them to engage with the literary selections in two ways. First, they created a curricular activity related to the particular literary text that they imagined they could use in their future literacy classroom. These curricular activities were meant to be activities that could be completed in one or two class periods before, during, or after the reading. To accompany these curricular activities, the participants wrote narratives explaining the activity they created and the significance or connection to the particular literary text. Additionally, they responded in writing to the text from the perspective of a teacher, an adolescent student, and as a personal reader. Over the course of the semester, the participants were free to choose to which five texts they wanted to respond, and as a result, their selections varied.

Eighty-five total responses (5 from each of the 17 participants) were collected and each was coded using an a priori coding scheme directly linked to the research questions (Table 2 provides the five codes and data examples for each code). Drawing on discursive

Table 1 Literature Selections Read by the Preservice Teachers

Title	Author	Date	Publisher
<i>American Born Chinese</i>	Gene Luen Yang	2006	First Second
<i>Before We Were Free</i>	Julia Alvarez	2002	Knopf
<i>Copper Sun</i>	Sharon M. Draper	2006	Atheneum Books
<i>Crank</i>	Ellen Hopkins	2007	Paw Prints
<i>Hope Was Here</i>	Joan Bauer	2000	Putnam
<i>The Kite Runner</i>	Khaled Hosseini	2003	Riverhead
<i>Looking for Alaska</i>	John Green	2005	Dutton Children's Books
<i>Monster</i>	Walter Dean Myers	1999	HarperCollins
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	John Steinbeck	1937	Random House
<i>Woman Hollering Creek</i>	Sandra Cisneros	1991	Random House
<i>You Don't Know Me</i>	David Klass	2001	Frances Foster

Table 2 Coding Scheme and Sample Data

Code	Sample data
Personal perceptions of adolescence	They are figuring out who and what they are, what they stand for, and what they believe in by trying on new identities and personalities frequently.
Interpretations of adolescent characters	[Steve from <i>Monster</i>] is someone who's becoming increasingly aware that the truth sometimes doesn't make a lot of difference in our society. He's painfully aware that people see what they want to see.
Connections between adolescent characters and adolescent students	[Green's characters] capture the rebellious spirit of adolescence, but also illustrate the permanent, and sometimes grave, consequences of reckless behavior.
Connections between adolescent characters and curricular activities	I chose to present a lesson based on identity, as this seems to be one of the first struggles Kristina [from <i>Crank</i>] has in the text and one that leads her down a destructive path.
Connections between adolescent students and curricular activities	I've learned that, as a teacher, I need to know my students personally in order to help them cope with the trials of adolescence. At the same time, since many teens do face similar issues, it seems to make sense to address some of these issues in class.

strategies (Gee, 2005), recurring themes connected to the research questions were established and interpretations on links between the themes and actual curricular activities the preservice teachers created were developed.

As discussed in the next section, this coding scheme and analysis were used to determine how the participants construed the relationships among the adolescent characters from the literary selections, their imagined/implied future adolescent students, and the secondary literacy curriculum, particularly related to the study of literature.

Findings

The central findings of this study are as follows:

1. The participants primarily understood adolescence as a time of important identity formation as well as an especially dangerous moment in people's lives.
2. The participants valued young adult literary texts as primarily vehicles for adolescent transformation and real-life connection.
3. The participants' curricular practices were explicitly designed to facilitate secondary students' engagement with fictional texts to help them make sense of themselves as adolescents

(at least the conceptions of adolescence held by the preservice teachers).

What follows is a more detailed exploration of these systems of reasoning the participants drew upon to develop and rationalize their curricular activities.

Conceptions of Adolescence

The participants held two dominant ways of conceptualizing adolescence: adolescence as a time of significant identity formation and adolescence as a particularly dangerous time period in people's lives.

Adolescence as a Time of Identity Formation. A central belief that circulated among the participants is that adolescence is a time of identity formation. This conceptualization is based on the understanding of young people's change across multiple dimensions—body, mind, emotion, and conviction, including growth, a shedding of childhood, and a time of trying on new “clothes” of personalities and responsibilities. In short, adolescence is a time of questioning and stress. These participants view this time of identity formation as one fraught with hectic experiences. As one participant, Susan (all names are pseudonyms), wrote, “In American culture, adolescence is a time of life that is marked by changes in one's body, identity, and emotional response.” Susan's response points not only to

This trying on of personalities implies that they are just as easily tossing away old, used personas—along with everything associated with those personas—and forgetting those associations.

identity shifts during adolescence but also to physical and emotional shifts. In other words, undergirding her response is the belief that adolescence is a time of change, often drastic change over which the adolescent has little control.

Another participant, Eli, expanded this common conception when he defined adolescence as a “tumultuous and stressful time in a person’s life as [adolescents] shed one identity and attempt to fit into the world in a new way.” He raised the idea of shedding identities, as if they were a set of clothing, and

the idea that adolescents are trying to fit into a world in which they currently do not. Other participants’ perspectives further reveal the extent to which these assumptions and systems of reasoning about adolescence persist among these preservice secondary literacy teachers. For example, Charlotte claimed that adolescence is growing up, but then further explicated what she meant by growth in that adolescents “are figuring out who and what they are, what they stand for and what they believe in by trying on new identities and personalities frequently.” This trying on of personalities implies that they are just as easily tossing away old, used personas—along with everything associated with those personas—and forgetting those associations. Jamie also indicated that adolescence is a time when “adolescents begin to question who they are in the world.” This could be interpreted that adolescents only have identity options that are currently possible socially, culturally, or politically; that they are unable to create their own personal meaning and worldviews. Furthermore, these preservice teachers thought that this tumultuous time of identity formation often leads to questionable, if not dire, decisions.

Adolescence as Dangerous Terrain. A second commonly held assumption across these participants is that adolescence, especially adolescence at this particular historical moment, is a potentially dangerous time and “terrain.” For instance, Sharon, a post-baccalaureate licensure candidate, held the belief that more high school students have been exposed to dangerous incidents

than when she was in high school. Specifically she wrote, “More Juniors and Seniors have been exposed to partying, depression, drunk driving, and unfortunately sometimes the death of a classmate.” Eli, referring to fictional characters experiencing issues with drugs and abuse, extrapolated those experiences to his future students: “The book is painfully relevant for today’s adolescents. While not every student will experience everything that happens in the book during their high school career, everything that happens in the book exists in today’s schools.” He indicated here that he believed these issues are in all schools and that not all adolescents are aware of the associated consequences.

Other participants labeled the adolescent experience with various pejorative terms. Heidi, for example, wrote that many teens dabble in a dark world that glamorizes partying and substance abuse. Gabbie, through her various reading responses, used words such as *pressured*, *depressed*, *vulnerable*, *deceitful*, *fearful*, and *lost* to describe her conception of the adolescent world. Susan wrote that “there will be many times teens are confronted and tempted with illicit, harmful things.” And Lisa stated, “Although adolescence need not be violent, the themes of loneliness, awkwardness and being misunderstood are part of growing up.”

The word choices used by these preservice teachers clearly indicate their beliefs that adolescence is a dangerous terrain. In these participants’ words, adolescents are constantly exposed to darkness and death, confronted with violence and harmful things, and are alone, confused, and misjudged. It is these conceptions of adolescence—adolescence as a time of identity formation and as dangerous terrain—that colored the frames of reference these preservice teachers drew upon to understand their future students, analyze adolescent characters, and develop curricular practices.

Linking Conceptions of Adolescence to Literature With Adolescent Protagonists

The two dominant ways of knowing and reasoning about adolescence discussed in the previous section significantly informed how these participants considered ways their future adolescent students would connect to fictional adolescent characters.

Connecting Their Students to “Real” Characters. Consistently, these participants believed that their

future students would connect with adolescent characters in literature if the characters were seen as real. They shared the belief that fictional adolescent characters were real only when these characters matched their own conceptions of adolescents. In other words, if the fictional adolescent character was searching for an identity and embarking into dangerous territory, then that character accurately depicted the adolescent world. Therefore, the participants believed that their students would connect to that character because the fictional character would match their secondary students' own personal experiences. Based on this assumption, they believed that these real characters would then be the types of characters that would make for successful curricular engagement.

Layla, for example, thought that teens reading *Looking for Alaska* would be able to relate to the characters' struggles with loss:

I think that a large majority of teens reading the novel would be able to personally relate if not to Miles then to the Colonel, Takumi, Lara or Alaska.... Unfortunately, loss of a friend or peer, for whatever reason, is an issue teenagers must face a lot of the time. This is perhaps the greatest theme of all in the novel that students will be able to relate to.

Although she explicitly stated that the characters, who experience friendship, love, and a friend's death, would resonate with her future students, she implicitly linked the theme of loss (which connects to the idea of adolescence as a dangerous terrain) to a universal aspect of adolescence, thus implying that the theme of loss is something all adolescents have experienced. Regardless of whether her analyses of the needs of adolescent students is accurate, what is significant is the fact that Layla's sense of the real characters and her future students' abilities to relate to them is rooted in her commonsense assumptions about the life stage known as adolescence.

Lisa echoed this practice of projection when she explained her belief that "the internal conflict Kristina [from *Crank*] has between being good and experimenting [with drugs] is relatable to a lot of teenagers." Both Layla and Lisa softened their notions with the clarifier *a lot*, yet they indicated that relating to these characters would be beneficial for all adolescents. Continuing in this vein, Elena thought it was

important for "students to be active in thinking about why they were able to relate to certain characters." This desire to help adolescents make connections to fictional characters was seen as vital by these participants to engage students with fictional texts.

Furthermore, the participants indicated that adolescents can learn valuable life lessons from fictional characters. Brittany, although glibly stated, thought students would relate to John from *You Don't Know Me* because he "is truly an enigma...an achievement any adolescent would be particularly proud of I'm sure." Debra articulated the idea of adolescents learning from characters more seriously and more clearly:

In my opinion, Kristina [from *Crank*] portrays herself as an average adolescent; who happens to make unfortunate choices. I also think that most students could relate to the fact that Kristina makes most of her choices out of curiosity and the desire to be liked and try something new. Although I don't think that most high school students can relate to Kristina's addiction to crank, I do think they can relate to the process of making one choice over another, or a wise/good choice that is boring versus a bad choice that is exciting.

Emblematic of other participants' responses about learning and choices, Brittany and Debra construe the teaching of adolescent characters as a chance for adolescents to learn about themselves—to help them with identity formation and navigate dangerous terrain—and that this personal learning could ultimately include, if not lead them to, personal change.

Adolescent Characters as a Vehicle for Transformation. Rooted in their commonly held assumptions of adolescence, these participants thought that literature with adolescent protagonists could be used as an opportunity for personal growth and transformation for their future students. They continually referred to adolescents' beliefs, values, goals, and desires, as well as how adolescence is a natural time to examine these aspects of viewing the world. Reading about fictional characters' decisions on these aspects, therefore, would be an excellent way for them as future teachers to assist their future adolescent students through this process.

For instance, Trevor wanted to build curriculum that afforded his students time to consider the

experiences of the characters from *Looking for Alaska* in light of their own lives: “Students will have to reflect in great depth about the three main characters in the book and the relationship between them.... It also provides hope and encouragement for teenagers dealing with the pain of regret.”

Susan believed that she could play a role in this process of transformation with her students. She hoped that through engagement with the literature that “we as a class could discover some new things about each other and ourselves; who we are, who we want to be, who we wish we weren’t.” She implied that her beliefs, values, goals, and desires could become clearer as she helped her students consider their own beliefs, values, goals, and desires.

In another instance, Charlotte wanted her students to think about the tough issue of prejudice in conjunction with the reading about the character Steve from *Monster*:

After they read the novel, I want students to consider not only how bias plays out in the text, but also how it plays out in their own lives. Also, I want them to consider how complicated the issue of personal bias is. Is an assumption about someone else always harmful? If not, when is it ok or even helpful and when is it harmful? Mostly, I really want students to begin to look at how the issues affecting Steve play out in their own lives all the time. Maybe the stakes aren’t as high for students as they are for Steve. That is to say, maybe students won’t put someone in jail or end up in jail themselves if they fall victim to negative assumptions (or maybe they will). Still, assumptions and biases exist. I want students to consider what impact these assumptions and biases are having on their lives.

Clearly, Charlotte wanted to use the character’s experiences in a representational manner for her adolescent students to transform their own lives and their worldviews in particular ways. Similarly, other participants viewed the reading of adolescent characters as a possible transformative experience for adolescents on myriad issues from child abuse to homophobia.

Creating Curricular Activities

Drawing upon the connections between their conceptions of adolescence and the value of young adult literary texts, the participants developed a range of curricular activities, from vocabulary development

to extended journaling to action on social justice issues. Taken together, these activities demonstrate the links they made among conceptions of adolescence, beliefs about the school subject English, and teaching practices. Specifically, the following three curricular activities are emblematic of a certain type of activity—one that asked students to consider their own tumultuous lives and mercurial beliefs—the participants created to engage students with the course’s literary texts. While we recognize that the particular texts chosen for the course, as well as the university’s umbrella focus on social justice, might have influenced the curriculum developed by these preservice teachers, we see these texts as representative of the genre of young adult literature and, therefore, invited them to develop these types of curricular activities. Also, as the course instructor, Mark focused his comments on the viability of their ideas for instruction and curriculum in secondary literature classrooms, and not the relationships between these curricular ideas and conceptions of adolescence. Figures 1, 2, and 3 present a preservice teacher’s activity and her narrative explanation (in italics) of the activity.

In Figure 1, Lisa developed this chart so that her students could “dress” the stick figure so that the illustrations would symbolically represent them in some way. The students could also add words to the head, body, or limbs to describe themselves. In her words, it would “allow for students to name themselves or reflect on how they feel about issues in their lives.” For Lisa, this would be a way for her students to connect to the characters in *American Born Chinese* since her assumptions of adolescence are such that her students would be experiencing the same identity issues as the characters in the novel.

In Figure 2, Susan created the alter ego poetry activity to engage students with the conflicted character Kristina/Bree in *Crank*, who is in dangerous terrain. Her activity suggests that adolescence is a time of conflict and contradiction. Both Lisa’s and Susan’s activities, however, will only work if adolescents are open and ready for this type of exploration. In other words, their conceptions of adolescence, reinforced through their reading of adolescent protagonists, provided the exigency for the curricular activities they developed to extend their students’ literary engagement.

Figure 1 “Who Am I?": Sample Curricular Activity for *American Born Chinese* Created by Lisa

Adolescence is clearly a time of identity exploration and trying out new and different roles and attitudes. It is important for teachers to embrace the feelings behind our students' desires to fit in and be popular. It is equally important to help students explore these emotions in a safe environment. I would use this activity as an introduction to American Born Chinese. I would have the students fill out two charts—one for themselves on that very day, exactly as they are feeling in class, and another for either a role model that they have or for what they one day hope to become.

In Figure 3, Becky designed an activity in which students would implicitly describe their past lives. Although Becky describes the questions as linked to particular instances that occurred in *The Kite Runner*, her choices are revealing. She states that the questions are meant to remind her students that they (and everyone else) have experienced certain emotions—such as jealousy, pain, guilt, and anger—and made potentially dangerous decisions based on those emotions. Becky implies that adolescents are not able to control their emotions and are unable to make decisions logically. She also states that these emotions and poor decisions are universal, and wants to show the “commonality of all of our lives.” It should be noted that Becky did not plan on participating in the step-to-the-line

portion of the activity. This separates her, as an adult and someone who can control her emotions in a time of a dangerous decision, from her adolescent students. These emotional decisions are something affecting their lives and not her own.

Again, this is a way the conception of adolescence as a period of dangerous terrain (including topics such as peer pressure, social cliques, and prejudice) informs the development of curricular activities in which secondary students are asked to reconsider their own beliefs and values. To be clear, we are not trying to imply that this type of activity is wrong for English classrooms. In fact, we would argue that emotional engagement with stories is an important aspect of the literature classroom. Rather, we offer this as an example

Figure 2 “Free Verse Poetry”: Sample Curricular Activity for *Crank* Created by Susan

Although Kristina and Bree are the same person, they have very different, often opposite, personality traits. For this activity, you need to think about who you are, and who your alter ego is.

- 1) Who are you?
For example: How do you identify yourself? What things are important to you? What do you want to do with your life? How do others perceive you?
- 2) Who is your alter ego?
For example: Do you play different roles? Are you one type of person at school and a different type of person at home? Or with your friends?
Are there traits you would like to have but don't? Or things you do that you wish you didn't? Are you one type of person on a good day, and another type of person on a bad day?
- 3) Look at the poem “Home Sweet Home” on page 191 of *Crank*. Notice the last 10 lines are made up of a series of contradictions the main character has within her. Use this as a model for writing your own poem, using the contradictions you've noted between your own identity and your alter ego.

As a teacher, I would be prepared to have some open, blunt conversations about these sensitive topics [divorce, detachment, identity, addiction, sex, and teenage pregnancy], and make sure I have set up a safe respectful culture in my class before taking these on. It would also be important to have a list of resources available where students could go and receive help for specific problems. It would be easy to build a unit around [Crank], covering each topic in more detail or assigning research projects.

Figure 3 “Common Experiences”: Sample curricular activity for *The Kite Runner* created by Becky

Answer the questions below individually. Write yes or no next to each question. Take the time to think of each question and how it applies to your life. You will need to keep this paper while we read our next novel.

1. Have you ever lied to someone you care about?
2. Have you ever regretted a decision?
3. Have you ever tried to make amends for something you did in the past?
4. Have you ever been jealous of someone?
5. Have you ever made your parent or guardian proud?
6. Have you ever disappointed your parent or guardian?
7. Have you ever felt guilty about something in your past?
8. Have you ever hurt someone you love?
9. Have you ever been angry at someone you love?
10. Have you ever done something for a selfish reason?

This prereading activity for The Kite Runner can be used for reference while reading the novel. It is a quiz with questions that pertain to actions and emotions felt by the main character throughout the novel. It is meant to remind them that everyone has acted on or felt emotions like those of our main character. After all of the students answer the questions, the teacher should ask them to stand and come to the front of the room and divide in half, with everyone standing across from one other person. The same questions used in the quiz are then read aloud to the class. The students should step to the line for every question that they answered “yes.” As they look around and see how many of the experiences they share it will remind them of the commonality of all of our lives. This shared experience will help them to share the story with the characters of The Kite Runner. As they read the novel, this quiz should serve as a reference every time they come across a character's actions or emotions that they have trouble understanding. The quiz is written with Amir in mind, but the same questions apply to many of the characters in the story. Each one has a past and each one has made decisions that affect the course of their life.

of the ways Becky and her fellow preservice teachers make sense of the life stage adolescence and the curricular consequences these ways of reasoning have.

Rethinking Conceptions of Adolescence to Rethink Literacy Teacher Education

In tracing the linkages discussed throughout this article, we highlight the salience that conceptions of adolescence have on the systems of reasoning used by preservice teachers in order not only to interpret and evaluate literary texts but also to develop and rationalize pedagogical practices. Specifically, these practices were designed to facilitate the development of secondary students' abilities to cope with—physically, emotionally, psychologically—the seemingly normalized difficulties of adolescence. In short, how these participants made sense of young people are constitutive with dominant discourses of adolescence, which have consequences for how they, as educators, will interact with and teach their future students.

Furthermore, this study illustrates how the preservice teachers' beliefs about adolescence as a period of important identity formation and dangerous terrain led to their reasoning of how to engage their future students with characters in young adult literary texts. The participants imagined ways their future students could relate to adolescent characters to assist them to navigate the dangerous terrain of adolescence and to use the classroom as a way to help their students transform their own beliefs, values, and goals. In other words, the characters were used as guides through the tumultuous time of adolescence, and the preservice teachers used the guides to lead the students toward certain goals of personal transformation.

We are not necessarily interested in arguing whether the systems of reasoning about adolescence and the function and purpose of secondary school English classes, particularly the use of young adult literary texts, are good/bad, useful/unproductive, or dangerous/liberating. We do believe, however, that there are a variety of ways of knowing and coming to understand young people, all of which might lead to different, if not equally problematic, ways of understanding the secondary school English and pedagogical and curricular possibilities.

For example, rather than relying upon conceptions of adolescence such as those discussed within this article, preservice and practicing teachers might benefit from developing instruction and curriculum by beginning with the perspective that young people are producers of and participants in varied and rich cultural practices. Likewise, literacy teacher education might benefit by reconsidering how learning about the power of discourses to name and position adolescents in problematic ways affects preservice teachers' reasoning about pedagogy. In fact, even using the word *adolescence* has a bearing upon how teacher educators, practicing teachers, and preservice teachers view, think, and talk about middle and high school students. In these ways, we advocate a view of teaching young people and preparing teachers to work with young people that begins by calling into question the very nature of how we come to know who it is we are setting out to teach.

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