Participatory Approaches to Educator Learning: Toward Equity and Allyship in Education

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Participatory Approaches to Educator Learning: Toward Equity and Allyship in Education

by

Rebecca G. Kaplan

B.A., University of Colorado, 2008

A dissertation submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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This dissertation entitled:
Participatory Approaches to Educator Learning: Toward Equity and Allyship in Education
Written by
Rebeca G Kaplan
has been approved for the School of Education
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Abstract

Rebecca G. Kaplan (Ph.D., Education, Learning Sciences and Human Development)
Participatory Approaches to Educator Learning: Toward Equity and Allyship in Education
Dissertation Chaired by Professor Ben Kirshner

The three articles in this dissertation explore in-service educator learning through participatory approaches, with an aim toward equity in education. Combining sociocultural theories of learning as increasing participation within social and cultural practices (Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003), and the political commitments of participatory action research (Strand et al., 2003), I hope to contribute to discussions on approaches to teacher education which center equity and justice. The articles in this dissertation demonstrate that participatory approaches can support educators at different levels throughout the system- within a single school and with leaders across states. Participatory approaches to inquiry, with the intentional use of mediational tools, can support shifts in educators’ research use (Weiss, 1979), equity literacy (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015), and practice-linked identities (Nasir & Hand, 2008). While national political discourse focuses on standardization, it is crucial to consider how education research can support educator learning, agency, and action. Participatory approaches to teaching and learning can shift the focus to collaboration, inquiry, and community: ingredients to work toward social change.

In the first article, “Going on a Statewide Listening Tour: Involving Education Leaders in the Process of Research to Enhance the Practical Value of Qualitative Research,” my colleagues and I illustrate how researchers can design for practitioners’ research use by involving education leaders in the process of conducting qualitative research. We found that science leaders became more engaged with research findings from their own collaborative research projects than from other sources, and that engaging in participatory research enhanced the practical value of the research. In the second article, “From Fiction to Action: Queer Reading for Educator Equity Literacy,” I explore how educators utilized a queer reading lens to discuss young adult (YA) novels; data from a discussion about the popular YA novel Every Day by David Levithan showed how they engaged in a process of becoming literate to the structures and systems that maintain inequity. And in the third article, “Educator as Ally: Developing Identity Resources Through Collaborative Inquiry,” I share illustrative cases which demonstrate how educators began to shift their actions as their identities expanded, through allying with students and colleagues.

Key Words: Education Equity, Professional Development, Teacher Learning, Social Justice Education, Participatory Research, Collaboration
“There are a million paths into the future, and many of them can be transformative for the whole”
- Adrienne Maree Brown

I dedicate this dissertation to every educator working to choose the paths that will be transformative for the whole.
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I want to acknowledge Ben Kirshner, my advisor and committee chair, for reading and re-reading these pieces, and continuing to challenge me to become clearer, better describe ambiguity and complexity, and embrace the difficult learning journey of becoming an education researcher. Thank you also for being a guide in participatory approaches; so much of the PAR approach described in these pages come from observing your work and apprenticing with you.

I want to acknowledge each of my fantastic committee members: Elizabeth Dutro, for being an incredible force who stands up for what is right, while maintaining true compassion for others; Elizabeth Meyer, for mentoring me throughout my data collection process, and sharing your passion for working with teachers and queering education; Tim Kuhn, for your encouragement and for broadening my understanding into how everything is relational; And Antero Garcia, for inspiring me to connect my researcher self to the things I love, and apprenticing me in that process.

Article one in this dissertation was the labor of a whole team of wonderful people. I want to acknowledge: Robbin Riedy for being willing to jump into this process with enthusiasm to learn, and for being an outstanding collaborator; Katie Van Horne, for being a fantastic project leader and guide; and William Penuel, for choosing me to guide the design and facilitation of the focus group work as you planned the state science partnership, and supporting me to engage in a whole journey of learning. You helped me recognize my contribution, and understand that participatory approaches can be used in spaces that otherwise value quantitative work.

I want to acknowledge the middle school educators who appear in articles two and three. Thank you for reading queer young adult literature with me, and for all of the laughter and tears while we engaged in a community of learning. Thank you for inspiring me with your amazing commitment to your students. I have so much more hope for education justice when I think of each of you.

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# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION................................................................................................................................. 1
  Participatory Approaches to Educator Learning................................................................. 9
  Overview of the Three Articles .................................................................................. 18
  Introduction References ......................................................................................... 21

ARTICLE ONE
Going on a Statewide Listening Tour: Involving Education Leaders in the Process of Research to Enhance the Practical Value of Qualitative Research.............................. 27
  Literature Review ........................................................................................................ 28
  Project Context ........................................................................................................... 31
  Participatory Research Process .................................................................................. 32
  Leaders’ Reports of the Benefits of Participation ....................................................... 39
  Discussion ................................................................................................................... 49
  Limitations .................................................................................................................. 50
  Policy Implications ..................................................................................................... 51
  Article One References ......................................................................................... 53

ARTICLE TWO
From Fiction to Action: Queer Reading for Educator Equity Literacy ......................... 57
  Models for Education Justice ....................................................................................... 57
  Mediation Tools for Equity Literacy ........................................................................... 65
  Methods ....................................................................................................................... 69
  Claims About Queer Reading Mediating Equity Literacy ........................................ 84
  Queer Reading for Equity Literacy: Significance ...................................................... 98
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 100
  Article Two References .......................................................................................... 103

ARTICLE THREE
Educator as Ally: Developing Identity Resources Through Collaborative Inquiry ........ 110
  Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 110
  Methods ....................................................................................................................... 116
  Developing a Practice-Linked Identity: Identity Resources for Educators as Youth Allies .. 126
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 145
  Article Three References ....................................................................................... 147

CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................... 150
  Takeaways from the Body of Work ........................................................................... 151
  Implications for Future Work .................................................................................. 159
  Conclusion References .......................................................................................... 163

Combined References ........................................................................................................ 165
Appendix: Research Design for Middle School Inquiry Group ..................................... 179
Tables

Table 1. Examples of Codes and Research Use Interpretation ........................................... 41
Table 2. Amount of Time Spent on Each Component of Focus Groups ............................... 42
Table 3. Novel Selections and Descriptive Information ..................................................... 72
Table 4. Participants and their roles within the school ...................................................... 77
Table 5. Coding Scheme Examples ................................................................................. 81
Table 6. Novel Selections and Descriptive Information ..................................................... 118
Table 7. Participants and their roles within the school ...................................................... 122
Table 8. Identity Resource Coding Scheme Examples ....................................................... 125
Table 9. Data Sources for each Case ................................................................................. 127
Figures

Figure 1. Agenda Text: Introduction to Queer Reading Lens and Prompts for Every Day ........ 83
Figure 2. Mural made by Hannah’s students ................................................................. 134
Figure 3. LGBTQ+ Book Display ........................................................................ 138
INTRODUCTION

Researchers who engage in participatory action research (PAR) have found that collaboration, inquiry, and connections to identity can support powerful models for teaching and learning (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner, 2010; Stringer, 1996; Torre, 2009). Scholars in the Learning Sciences coalesce around similar principles as those who use a PAR approach, endorsing sociocultural theories of learning which assert that learning happens within relationships, through participation in investigative processes and practices, when a learner feels personally connected to an experience (Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003; Nasir & Cooks, 2009).

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act in 2001, federal policy named standards-based education reform as the solution to raising student achievement outcomes in the United States. Today, that policy focus continues through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The titles of both of these legislative policies indicate a recognition that U.S. schools are failing to serve the nation’s children in equal and equitable ways. While ending education inequity should be a priority for our nation, the solution proposed within NCLB and ESSA, requiring states to develop and give assessments in basic skills in order to receive federal funding, has not led to education equity (Rothstein, 2004; Tienken & Zhao, 2013). The result of these policies was state norm-referenced assessments of basic skills and curricular products aiming to raise scores on such assessments. The outcome of this has been the accountability movement, or standardization, which, while lucrative for testing companies and other private corporations, has significantly hurt the quality of education students receive, especially students in low-income schools (Kumashiro, 2012).

Though standards-based education reform is intended to raise the quality of education across all schools, standardization of assessments, and in turn, curriculum, has narrowed both
what it means to learn and to teach (Kumashiro, 2012.). Inquiry, critical thinking, and curiosity are difficult, if not impossible, to standardize and to test (Harris, Smith, & Harris, 2011). Further, scholarship in the Learning Sciences has recognized learning as a social and contextual process, linked to participation in cultural practices (Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003); such conceptualizations of learning cannot be supported by requiring states to develop and give assessments in basic skills in order to receive federal funding. When assessing students’ basic skills becomes a nation’s top priority, students’ learning opportunities are limited to acquisition and memorization, and a teacher’s role becomes that of a technician more than a practitioner (Richert, 2012).

Located within this problem area, I focus my work on participatory approaches to teaching and professional development that center inquiry, in order to expand both classroom and teacher learning spaces to support sociocultural understandings of learning as increasing participation in cultural practices (Cole & Wertsch, 1997; Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Rather than focus teacher professional development on learning to use scripts and curricular products which promise to raise test scores while reducing teachers’ roles, teacher professional development must center equity (Nieto, 2000) and engage active learning through collaboration (Desimone, 2009). While curricular products aimed to raise students’ achievement scores reflect heavily critiqued “process-product” research (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016), I utilize participatory approaches to engage practitioners in research on equity-focused teacher education, drawing on principles from both participatory action research (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003) and research practice partnerships (Coburn & Penuel, 2016).
Teaching from a Script: How Standards-Based Education Reform Brought Me to this Topic

My interest in this topic stems from my experiences as a secondary teacher. At one point during my teaching career, I was teaching students new to the English language in a high school in Anchorage, Alaska. I collaborated with a colleague to design engaging curricular units that emphasized collaboration, discussion, reading award winning texts from authors with diverse perspectives and backgrounds, critical thinking and writing, understanding the sociopolitical context of the literature, and connecting personally to topics. Then, a new superintendent arrived to the district with promises to close achievement gaps through standards-based education reform. My job and classroom changed completely. Essentially overnight, my PD activities shifted from engaging in complex design work around facilitating community learning endeavors, to memorizing hand motions and reading extensive scripts in order to deliver the new Language! curriculum. My students went from reading Langston Hughes and investigating the Harlem Renaissance to parroting phonemic sounds of three-letter words. The following vignette draws on this experience to illustrate the effects of standards-based education reform on both teachers and students.

The students stand silently, facing me. A large, glossy, orange teacher’s guide rests on my right hip, my right hand holding it in place. I clasp my left hand into a fist and reach up in front of the left side of my face, slightly above my head, and pull down my fist while I pronounce the words, “Say ‘bat’.” I make the same gesture, pronouncing the words again, and this time the students mirror my action and parrot the words back to me, “Say ‘bat’.” I now cross my left fist across my chest and bounce it slightly in front of my right shoulder as I pronounce “buh.” My fist moves to the space in front of the middle of my chest as I pronounce “aah,” and it lands in
front of my left shoulder as I pronounce “t.” I repeat the whole sequence: my students mirroring the motions and parroting the phonemic sounds back to me.

We will do 19 more words, just like this. I will stand up here, reading from the script balanced on my hip the exact way I was directed to balance it, saying the exact words printed in the script, gesturing the exact way the directions tell me to for the next ten minutes. The students and I know this drill well—we do it every single day in English class as part of the Language! reading intervention curriculum our newly hired superintendent quickly purchased for the entire school district to implement (for a six-digit cost, after firing over 60 teachers and many school staff).

On each of the students’ desks are four books in the same glossy orange as the teacher’s guide I hold now: three “disposables” which will be thrown away at the end of the semester—a workbook and two test booklets that the students write in, and one hardback book with short reading selections. The red heading on the page each student’s book is opened to indicates that we are on step one of the sequence, “phonemic awareness.” On each of the four walls of the classroom is a laminated display of the sequence steps, each represented by their allotted color, forming a rainbow.

A woman in a skirt suit walks in to the room—a corporate representative from the for-profit company that produces Language!, two assistant principals and a district curriculum expert in tow, as we begin repeating the sounds and gestures for the next word on our list. They each carry a clipboard, which holds a checklist with the same insignia as all of the glossy orange books that fill the room. They walk to the back of the room, checking off items on their list as they go. They note the signs on my wall, check. They note the teacher’s guide on my right hip,
check. They note the students in rows, hands mimicking mine, check. They note the students’ books open to the proper page, check.

Later, they will sit me down in the Principal’s office and tell me that I am one of the district’s “green light” teachers, who they will have other teachers observe in order to learn to perform the curriculum with fidelity. I will ask them what items on their checklist concern student learning or thinking, and they will ignore my question but refer once again to the importance that teachers exhibit fidelity with the program in order for it to “work.” They don’t want to talk about the fact that I find the curriculum completely inappropriate, inadequate, and oppressive to my tenth-grade students. My classroom looks the exact way it should, according to the scripted curriculum, and they assure me that if I just wait and see, this program will pull up my students’ reading scores dramatically.

When the superintendent from my district purchased the Language! curriculum, he invested public dollars into a for-profit private company while downsizing skilled labor—he fired teachers and required those who remained to become technicians of the new curriculum. District officials and school administrators had their job descriptions revised to become monitors of the new corporate program. Classrooms that had offered opportunities for learning were repurposed—the students and teachers becoming part of a production line whose output was not learning, but aesthetic labor. This labor centered on enacting a choreographed performance of learning and teaching, but produced nothing but an image of learning and a reality of social control. Implementing the scripted curriculum featured in this vignette did not raise students’ test scores; on average, students’ scores dropped. Additionally, the curriculum had a negative effect on student attendance, engagement, and retention.
As indicated in the vignette, the opportunities for my own learning narrowed with the adoption of the scripted curriculum. Professional development focused on using the products with fidelity. Just as there was no room for students to engage in critical thinking or problem-solving in the curriculum, there was no room for teachers to engage in such processes either. I spent one academic year experiencing the constraints and tediousness of this instantiation of standards-based education reform, before I left teaching to become an education researcher and work on solutions to such limitations.

Imagine if, rather than adopting the Language! curriculum for the district’s English Language Learner courses (ELL), a group of educators had been convened to inquire into ways to better support ELL students’ learning. Rather than removing problem-solving and higher order thinking from teacher and student learning, teachers would have been asked to engage in consequential investigation and design work. The learning opportunities for educators would have expanded, and it is likely that the solutions they developed would have opened opportunities for deeper learning for their students, as opposed to the insipid monotony of the Language! curriculum.

**Standards-Based Education Reform: Not Helping, but Hurting**

Standardization limits teaching and learning, and inhibits equity in schools. The consequences are felt most acutely in schools serving low income communities and communities of color. The accountability movement impacts our lowest scoring schools, those most affected by poverty (Carter & Welner, 2013). These schools are pressured to purchase products that standardize what happens in a classroom, including scripted curricula that dictate what teachers say, how much time they spend on any given topic, and how they assess their students (Richert, 2012).
Richert (2012) wrote, “Teachers who are monitored under such mandates become conflicted about their role and their identity as teachers, especially when they enter a profession that they believe requires independence, judgment, and personal responsibility” (p. 22). Teachers are often faced with a call to relinquish autonomy, creativity, and choice in favor of fidelity to the scripts, standards, and tests. Not only does standards-based education reform diminish teachers’ agency, there is also an abundance of research showing that these methods are both unhelpful and often harmful to students’ learning opportunities (Tienken & Zhao, 2013).

**Beyond Outcome Scores: Factors that Cause Inequities**

Standardized program structures are framed as a solution to allow teachers to overcome all other factors that impact student outcomes. NCLB and ESSA rhetoric asserts that teachers must maintain a “single-minded focus on data” in order to improve equity (Duncan, 2009). These federal policies put the onus on teachers to shift their students’ outcome scores, by studying the scores and utilizing curricular products aimed at raising students’ scores (Kumashiro, 2012). However, scholars (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rothstein, 2004) explain that in order to truly support student success, policy makers in the U.S. must take a wide-angle lens to expand how they see and understand influencing factors which impact inequities in schools. For instance, social and economic policies must shift drastically in order to close the severe opportunity gaps caused by inequitable healthcare, labor conditions, pay, childcare, and safety (Rothstein, 2004). Standards-based education reform focused on student outcome data from norm-referenced achievement tests does not and cannot shift the impact of such factors on students. Further, the disproportionate and compounded impact of these inequities on students of color specifically must not be ignored by focusing on outcome data. Rather than look to achievement scores to tell us how to close gaps, we must acknowledge
that "inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.47). It is essential to work to shift both discourse and policy in ways that amplify and refocus the discussion.

**Standardize This: Factors that Should be Equal**

Teacher education scholars (Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Johnson, 2009) support standardizing certain factors to improve equity, though these factors make a shift away from the assessment focus of standards-based education reform in the United States. For instance, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) asserted that countries which see much more equitable student achievement have standardized elements such as school funding, teacher pay scales, funding for teacher education programs and tuition vouchers to attend such programs for free, living stipends for teacher education students, and access to regular teacher mentoring and ongoing professional development once teachers begin their inservice careers. These examples shift the unit of analysis for supporting equity: from student achievement scores to school funding, teacher education, and professional development. The latter factors do, in fact, improve student achievement scores as well (ibid).

In the United States, however, teachers are the most inequitably distributed resource in terms of qualifications and preparation; “studies show that students of color, low-income and low-performing students, particularly in urban and poor rural areas, are disproportionately taught by less qualified teachers” (Darling-Hammond, Wei, & Johnson, 2009). This inequitable distribution contributes to education inequity at large (Kumashiro, 2012).

NCLB and ESSA impact inservice teachers directly (Kumashiro, 2012), constraining curricular options in order to maintain what former Secretary of Education Duncan (2009)
described as a “single-minded focus on data.” Education scholars (e.g., Carter & Welner, 2013; Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Kumashiro, 2012) have established that this focus and approach are harmful for students and increase inequity. On the other hand, preservice teacher education programs, separated from the achievement demands of NCLB and ESSA, have become increasingly focused on issues of inequity in schools, and how to prepare teachers to teach for social justice (Lee, 2011). These efforts acknowledge documented disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes based on income, gender, race, language, and ability status across both the US and the globe (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). They support an aim toward justice and fairness across education systems, including closing the opportunity gaps that perpetuate inequities (Carter & Welner, 2013).

Scholars (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Nieto, 2000) assert that social justice teacher education must work toward equity on multiple levels. While the first step of social justice teacher education involves teachers’ personal work to develop the “knowledge, skill, and dispositions to enhance the learning of students historically not well served by the system,” skilled teachers cannot realize equity on their own (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016, p. 70). Equity can only be achieved through a concerted and continuous effort of individual, collective, and institutional change (Nieto, 2000). When educators understand inequity, they can work toward change within their schools and larger systems (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015).

**Participatory Approaches to Educator Learning**

Participatory approaches to educator learning can position educators as experts on their own lives to inquire into and act on issues of social justice through democratic, participatory procedures (Kaplan & Potvin, 2017; Kirshner, 2010; Strand et al., 2003; Stringer, 1996; Torre, 2009). Aligned with my commitment to participatory approaches to research, teaching, and
professional development, this three-article dissertation explores inservice educator learning within an approach that incorporates sociocultural learning theories and the political commitments of participatory action research (PAR). I use the phrase *participatory approaches to educator learning* to describe this concept.

PAR is an approach to research that engages individuals or groups impacted by the research question to gather local evidence in order to create local solutions (Strand et al., 2003). Participatory approaches to educator learning involve educators participating in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Miller & Goodnow, 1995) that focuses on inquiry. While post-NCLB rhetoric has pushed schools to purchase professional development curricula and student curricula that are “evidence- or research-based” (Duncan, 2009), participatory approaches can serve as an entry point for educators to engage in educational research themselves. Participatory approaches to educator learning are collaborative, validate multiple sources of knowledge, and entail a goal of social action towards justice (Strand et al., 2003).

There is a rich history of teachers participating in action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teacher Action Research (TAR) has been taken up in many different ways and different contexts, however, “in its broadest sense, the emphasis of the movement is on teacher as knower and as agent for change” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 22). While professional development environments might reinforce the idea that there is a correct way of doing and thinking, inquiry-based TAR environments “regard dissonance and questioning as signs of teachers’ learning rather than their failing” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 22). Additionally, TAR has pushed back on the outside-in approach of pedagogical knowledge being produced outside schools (at universities or corporations) before being pushed into classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). TAR approaches are founded on the idea that knowledge about teaching
cannot be unidirectional, rather, it must come from both inside and outside classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

Participatory approaches to educator learning add to the important work of TAR. Focused on inquiry and action in collective teams, a PAR approach reflects TAR, while bringing additional tools and commitments to participatory, community-based action research. Educators employ TAR without outside assistance, by design, outside researchers are not involved (Johnson, 1993). Participatory approaches to educator learning entail a collaboration between researchers and educators.

I draw on PAR specifically because of the political commitments often tied to the approach, including: (a) an assertion that knowledge is never neutral or unbiased; (b) a stance that knowledge production has historically and structurally left out non-dominant ways of knowing; and (c) a dedication to social action towards social justice (Strand et al., 2003; Torre, 2009). Participatory approaches can position everyone involved as a learner, an expert, and a knowledge producer (Kaplan & Potvin, 2017; Kirshner, 2010; Potvin, Kaplan, Boardman, & Polman, 2017; Strand et al., 2003; Torre, 2009).

Participatory approaches to educator learning can support teachers in entering into a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) to engage in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Miller & Goodnow, 1995) centered on developing understanding of learning on multiple scales (e.g., personal, departmental, cross-content, school-wide, or within larger systems). Participation can be empowering; working to answer a question of interest and import in order to shift actions is a powerful process (Kaplan & Potvin, 2017).

Participatory approaches to educator learning offer an important addition to research on teacher education. The two studies which provide the backdrop to the articles included in this
dissertation draw on sociocultural learning theories to reframe inservice educator learning for state science leaders (article one) and middle school educators (articles two and three). Both studies employ a PAR approach to make additional identities available for practicing educators. When individuals take part in groups, their identity changes as a result (Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Nasir & Hand, 2006). The different aspects of a person’s identities mediate their learning, thus the identities which communities of practice afford matter in significant ways (Cole & Wertsch, 1997; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). In the participatory approaches used within these two studies, educators were positioned as experts and researchers, with the opportunity to form identities around these roles and enact these identities.

Lave (1996) emphasizes the importance of educators understanding that teaching is learning, in practice. Through engaging in an inquiry process with other educator-researchers, educators begin to expand their identities as learners. By participating in this community of practice, teachers are able to impact their students in new ways, since in this process educators gain skills to better apprentice students into a practice of learning.

Participatory approaches to educator learning center collaborative inquiry, creating supportive opportunities for growth (Kaplan & Potvin, 2017). Collaborative inquiry can preserve a focus on relational investigation in spite of structures and systems which place constraints on teachers; such constraints can transform professional development into a series of hoops to jump through (Labaree, 2004). While the focus on professional development is often on instructionism (e.g., teachers’ delivery of facts), and the procedures of instruction (Sawyer, 2006), participatory approaches concentrate on learning. When teachers identify strongly and genuinely as learners, this has a profound impact on their students (Paley, 1986; Rogoff, 1994). Educators should be regarded as consequential thinkers and knowledge producers for the field of
education, with the esteem and expectations that come with being professionals, and part of a profession (Shulman, 1998). Unfortunately, instructionism and standardization do not position educators in such a way. Educators have the capacity to be a substantial resource for working toward social change (Counts, 1978/1932), and participatory approaches aim to respect educators’ voices as necessary to shifting the education system to become more just.

**Barriers to Participatory Approaches**

While participatory approaches to educator learning are supported by contemporary scholarship and learning theories, there are barriers and challenges to implementing these approaches in schools. First, in the United States, the education system does not have standardized time or money for professional development. As described above, countries which see much more equitable student achievement have standardized funding and structures for regular teacher mentoring and ongoing professional development for inservice teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). Without such structures and supports for professional development, products that claim to reduce the complexity of teaching and get at the crux of what is needed to boost scores with minimal teacher training become appealing to schools and districts. Additionally, participatory approaches involve skilled facilitators, and the lack of money and time set aside for professional development are also barriers to training facilitators.

Second, federal policies in the U.S. are aimed at results that can be seen, and the easiest and cheapest way to see results are through norm-referenced achievement tests, which can only test basic skills (Kumashiro, 2012). Participatory approaches do not and should not focus solely on basic skills or student outcome achievement tests.

Third, participatory approaches cannot be standardized, as a central tenet to such approaches is understanding the contextual and social nature of learning (Miller & Goodnow,
If context is central to taking a participatory approach, a challenge lies in how to scale such an approach.

Fourth, participatory approaches to educator learning require an expansive conceptualization of educators’ roles and what they are capable of, and teaching is not treated as a profession in the U.S., with the trust and responsibilities bestowed upon professionals (e.g., medicine or law; Shulman, 1998). Without federal or state structures to establish the professionalization of teaching, local superintendents and administrators do not have supports to see teachers as capable in these ways, or that teaching and learning are more complex than the products of the achievement movement state.

Finally, it is hard to grasp that a human approach to PD and teaching would address a gap in achievement. A cultural shift is needed in order to address these challenges. Understanding tools and activities of participatory approaches may support their use. Participatory approaches can be implemented in schools, districts, and state systems, and RPPs and PAR can support such efforts. The articles in this dissertation demonstrate participatory approaches on two levels, and in the concluding chapter to this dissertation, I share takeaways across the body of work, and speak to how I plan to work toward building-level scaling of these approaches in future work.

**Utilizing Authentic Activities and Mediation Tools**

In participatory approaches to educator learning, all participants are positioned as knowledgeable, with differentiated expertise and roles (Potvin et al., 2017). This creates the opportunities for reciprocal knowledge sharing, and the formation of a community of learners (Rogoff, 1994). A “cognitive apprenticeship” perspective emphasizes the need for authentic learning through engagement in joint work (Brown, 1992; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989);
participatory approaches to educator learning can engage the practice of cognitive apprenticeship.

Lave (1988, 1996) theorized that learning happens all the time, without instruction. When individuals engage in a practice that is new to them, they look to individuals who have been engaging in the practice longer to see how they use various tools as they participate (Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir & Hand, 2006). Ideally, the newcomer will eventually be able to use the tools to participate fully without looking to others for guidance. In collaborative learning environments, participants together develop “new ways of participating and thus supporting learning” (Nasir & Hand, 2006, p. 463).

School structures disrupt much of what is learned in practice: for one thing, the emphasis of educators as instructors (and the only experts) is inauthentic to the way the majority of communities of practice have functioned throughout human history (Lave, 1996). Professional development also often works in opposition to Lave’s theory of learning in practice. While teachers are already engaged in everyday practices of teaching, professional development often separates them from authentic practices of planning, teaching, and reflecting. Learning involves engaging in an active community of practice, and steadily increasing participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir & Cooks, 2009), however, in professional development, educators are often told how and what to do through instruction.

Participatory approaches to educator learning engage teachers in activities that are authentic to the goal of the team’s inquiry. Engaging in activities that are authentic to a community of practice is an essential ingredient to learning (Brown et al., 1989). Polman (2012, 2015) describes three levels of authenticity: authentic to self, authentic to others, and authentic use of tools. When educators engage in PAR, they develop a research question to guide a
process of inquiry that is authentic to themselves and others. When individuals engage in activities that feel authentic and meaningful to them, they grow (Nasir & Hand, 2006). In study one, the state science leaders and the university researchers collaborated to create the research question together. In study two, I developed the initial research question with the school librarian, and the rest of our group members joined us because they were genuinely interested in the question we were posing.

Participatory approaches also support the second level of authenticity: authentic to others. One way for this to happen is for a team to orient their work toward a public audience (i.e., other teachers in the school or district, students, administrators, families and community members, or a broader online audience) and regularly discuss how the line of inquiry can lead to personal and interpersonal action and change with the authentic other in mind. In study one, state science leaders oriented their work toward changing state structures, professional development, and working with state networks to implement change based on their findings. In study two, the team of middle school educators and myself oriented our work toward personal and interpersonal action and change, as well as change within the school more broadly.

To work toward the third level of authenticity—authentic tool use—the artifacts that a group of educators produce must make use of and reflect tools used regularly within communities of practice. Cultural tools (concrete, symbolic, ideational, etc.) are present in any practice, and these tools mediate activity, thought, and learning (Cole & Wertsch, 1997; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). In study one, state science leaders used focus group transcript data as a tool for inquiry. This reflected authentic tool use because the transcripts captured the voices of the leaders’ stakeholders, and systematically analyzing transcript data is authentic tool use for communities of practice such as qualitative social science researchers. In study two,
middle school educators used fiction as a tool for inquiry. This reflected authentic tool use because each participant was interested in using young adult fiction texts in their work; for instance, the special education teacher was interested in texts for a bibliotherapy project, and the librarian was interested in increasing the inclusive titles she had available for students to read. Additionally, use of fiction for expanding knowledge and developing relationships is authentic tool use for communities of practice such as social and professional book clubs. Scholarship in the learning sciences supports the idea that tool use should move beyond artificial structures (e.g., a five-paragraph essay, often used in schools, does not appear in practices outside of schools) and engage in real world practices (Kirshner & Kaplan, 2017; Lave, 1988; Polman, 2012). In both of my studies, the tools were authentic to the communities of practice.

Rooted in approaches to research that center practitioner participation, including design-based implementation research (DBIR; Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2013) and participatory action research (PAR; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Strand et al., 2003) my research examines how participatory approaches to learning through collaborative inquiry can impact research use, ontological learning - learning as becoming (Rogoff, 1995), and action. My dissertation research empirically investigates process use, mediational tool use, and identity resources, all within the context of participatory approaches to educator professional development. The overarching queries that drive my research are:

- How can participatory approaches to educator learning support equity and allyship in education?
- How can participatory approaches to educator learning transform professional development spaces to feel engaging and consequential to participants?
What implications can be drawn from these cases, for the design of educator learning experiences?

**Overview of the Three Articles**

The three articles that make up this dissertation are from two distinct studies. Both studies use participatory methods to support educator learning, with the goal of increasing equity in education. In all three articles, I designed and facilitated the processes used within the learning environment. By connecting the participatory methods I used with a large group of state science leaders to those I used with a small group of middle school educators, my intention is to demonstrate the power of participatory work on multiple scales, and the ways in which these approaches can support working toward equity within educator professional development.

In my first article, my colleagues and I explore the power of engaging state science education leaders in qualitative data collection and analysis through participatory research. Drawing on literature on the *process use* of research evidence (Weiss, 1979; Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007; Tseng and Nutley, 2014), we consider how participation in the research process supported participants to gain new insights into teachers’ perceptions of equitable science instruction within their states, and the usefulness of qualitative data at large. In this paper, we describe (1) the design process we used for engaging U.S. state science leaders from 13 states in participatory research; and (2) shifts in understanding that state leaders reported based on their participation. We demonstrate the ways in which state science leaders shifted their understanding of the value of qualitative research and made adjustments to their goals for improving equitable science education in their respective states. Our intention is to contribute to contemporary interdisciplinary discussions on how to enhance the practical value of research, ensuring that studies are relevant to the work and concerns of practitioners.
Articles two and three shift in scope, focusing on a small group of educators within a single middle school increasing equity literacy and forming dispositions as allies.

In my second article, I consider how collaborative inquiry, using fiction and queer theory as mediational tools (Vygotsky, 1978), might provide new entry points for teachers to develop equity literacy. I do this by bringing literature on queer reading (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2002; Schieble, 2012) into discussions on social justice teacher education and equity literacy (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Montaño et al., 2002; Nieto, 2000). I examine the inquiry group’s discussion of the popular YA novel Every Day by David Levithan, and consider how this novel in particular set the stage for educators to be introduced to queer reading. I then consider how the queer reading lens mediated equity literacy within the book discussion. My intention is to contribute to contemporary discussions on social justice teacher education, by demonstrating the use of queer reading as an approach to equity literacy.

In my third article, I shift my focus to ontological learning, and consider collaborative inquiry as an approach to teacher identity. I use Nasir & Hand’s (2008) conceptualization of practice-linked identities to examine how the middle school educators in the collaborative inquiry group defined and developed identities as allies to students. Drawing on Nasir & Cooks’ (2009) model of identity resources, I investigate the educators’ use and contributions of material, ideational, and relational resources which formed the ally identity. I share illustrative cases which demonstrate how educators began to shift their actions as their identities expanded, through allying with students and colleagues against systems of oppression. My intention is to contribute to contemporary discussions on justice oriented stances and identities for teachers as a vehicle for social change.
Taken together, these articles demonstrate how participatory approaches to inquiry, with the intentional use of mediational tools, can support shifts in educators’ research use, equity literacy, and practice-linked identities. Combining sociocultural theories of learning as increasing participation within social and cultural practices (Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003), and the political commitments of PAR (Strand et al., 2003), I hope to contribute to discussions on approaches to teacher education which center equity and justice. These articles demonstrate that participatory approaches can support educators throughout the system—whether at the level of classroom teachers, school specialty staff, district, or state leaders. When the national political discourse focuses on standardization, it is crucial to consider how education research can support educator learning, agency, and action. Participatory approaches to teaching and learning can shift the focus to incorporate collaboration, inquiry, and identity: ingredients to work toward social change.
Introduction References


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ARTICLE ONE
Going on a Statewide Listening Tour: Involving Education Leaders in the Process of Research to Enhance the Practical Value of Qualitative Research

By Rebecca G Kaplan, Robbin Riedy, Katie Van Horne, and William Penuel

In the field of education, research is needed that is relevant to the work and concerns of practitioners. Research-Practice Partnerships (RPP) are long-term collaborations between researchers and practitioners that can increase the relevance of research to practice (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). This study’s context is a partnership between researchers and state science leaders using Design-Based Implementation Research (DBIR; Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2013) to improve coherence and equity in science education. In this paper, we illustrate the power of engaging state leaders in qualitative data collection and analysis through participatory research. This is a form of research use that combines participation in the research process with interpretations of data that help participants gain new insight, which has been called the process use of research evidence (Weiss, 2005; Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007; Tseng and Nutley, 2014). Often we think of producers and consumers of research as different groups; in this partnership, state science leaders were both.

This paper addresses two questions:

- What are the components of a participatory process involving state leaders to identify needs to increase coherence in their states?

- What are the benefits that state leaders report from participating in participatory research?

The paper focuses on: (a) the project context; (b) the participatory research design process; and (c) an analysis of state leaders’ reflections on the process. We explicate the steps of how we engaged practitioners in the research process to give a full picture for readers interested in designing similar endeavors and to highlight potential benefits of the process for participants.
There is strong interest in research and practice informing one another within the field of education (Boaz et al, 2016; Oliver, Lorenc, and Innvær, 2014). One way policy makers have pursued this is by developing policies encouraging or requiring people to use results of randomized controlled experiments. For instance, U.S. federal education policies such as the Bush Administration’s No Child Left Behind Act and the more recent Obama Administration’s Every Student Succeeds Act emphasize the use of “evidence-based” results from randomized controlled trials that measure impact of policies and programs. However, case studies have found district leaders and practitioners report rarely using these kinds of results (Coburn, Honig, and Stein, 2009), and policy analyses have found that peer-reviewed education research oftentimes does not have an impact on education policies or practices (Eisenhart, Finkel, and Marion, 1996; Weiss, 1979). More recently, Penuel, Farrell, Allen, Toyama, and Coburn (2016) found that district leaders find other kinds of research, such as books that provide frameworks for guiding implementation of policy, more useful than peer-reviewed impact studies.

Research *does* figure in education leaders’ thinking and decision making, though not always in the form of evidence from a particular study but from ideas that circulate in educational systems which connect to research. Weiss (1980) used the term *knowledge creep* to describe how research ideas oftentimes influence policy in indirect ways, blending into a group’s collective understanding through general concepts, which gradually creep into policy decisions. Also, sometimes leaders participate in research and evaluation activities directly, in what has been termed *process use* of research (Weiss, 2005; Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007; Tseng and Nutley, 2014). When leaders are involved in this way, they are both producers and consumers of research.
Process uses of research have the potential to greatly influence leaders’ thinking and practice. Scholars found that *process use* encompasses several different manners in which participants use research: (a) instrumental use, which involves implementing practical change; (b) conceptual use, which involves a shift in understanding; and (c) symbolic use, which involves referring to research in order to influence stakeholders (Johnson et al., 2009). Consider the differences between reading a research article and conducting an empirical study. The written report may have some influence on practice, however, the act of conducting one’s own study will result in a different type of learning, deepening understanding of the strengths, limitations, and applicability of research findings. Johnson and colleagues (2009) extended the discussion of *process use* by presenting evidence from a review of evaluation use research demonstrating that participants are more likely to implement research findings if they are involved in the data collection process.

Process use can involve developing research questions and instruments, collecting data, and interpreting and using research. Participatory action research (PAR) is one approach to organizing for process use. In PAR, individuals who are not expected to be traditionally trained in research participate in research activities to develop knowledge about a topic that impacts them directly (Strand et al., 2003). PAR can engage a spectrum of participation possibilities; non-traditional researchers might engage in all aspects of research, or in only one or two aspects. For instance, participants might only collect data, as specified in some instantiations of citizen science projects (Conrad & Hilchey, 2011), or engage in collaborative data analysis (Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2014). A PAR approach encourages collaboration, centers inquiry, and validates multiple sources of knowledge (Strand et al., 2003).

Participatory research can be challenging for practitioners to undertake, because their
work contains competing roles and duties and they face pressures to make use of more readily available end-of-year data than the sort of qualitative data such research often generates (Coburn et al., 2013). Practitioners have few models for how to engage in systematic qualitative data collection and analysis. Despite the promise of process use, it is not clear what structures support it or how to streamline those structures in order to engage practitioners. Our study aims to clarify such structures. We explore how researchers’ structuring and supporting *process use* by involving education leaders in the process of designing instruments and collecting and analyzing data can enhance the practical value of research for practitioners, within the context of academic knowledge production.

While PAR studies oftentimes engage participants with less power to gain power through the research process and pressure people in positions of power through direct action (Strand et al., 2003), this study includes state science leaders who already hold positions of relative power. In this respect, our study does not reflect the traditional parameters of PAR. It does add, however, to research efforts that engage people with privilege in PAR work (Stoudt, 2009). At the same time, state science leaders are constrained in their actual authority for making decisions that affect local schools and districts, due to patterns of governance that prevail in U.S. states (Weiss & McGuinn, 2017). Leaders do play a role in vision-setting, and so an approach that supports them to inquire into the needs of local stakeholders in their states is appropriate. The state science leaders in this study did not hold positions of authority over the participants in the focus groups they conducted. This point will be further elaborated later in the text.

Ideally in the context of our project, state leaders would use newly acquired knowledge to empower those in their network. Drawing from PAR’s emphasis on respecting the expertise of diverse stakeholders, especially those not typically involved in conducting research, we
understand this particular project to be an example of participatory research within *Design-Based Implementation Research* (DBIR). DBIR is a research approach that emphasizes the importance of developing capacity for sustaining change in systems through long-term partnerships between researchers and practitioners (Fishman, et al., 2013). Of specific interest to this study is the first principle within DBIR, the importance of coming to a negotiated understanding of the problem among multiple stakeholders. Problem identification requires ongoing negotiation between participants and RPPs can benefit from intentional processes to develop understanding of the problem’s complexities (Fishman, et al.). In the next section, we show some of the intentional processes we designed and implemented to achieve this goal. Through engaging leaders in conducting qualitative research within their states, we were able to bring more stakeholders’ voices into our conversations on coherence and equity. Our team’s understanding of the problems of practice around the design for and realization of equitable science instruction was enhanced through the participatory research process.

**Project Context**

The Advancing Coherent and Equitable Systems of Science Education (ACESSE) is a project of a research-practice partnership between researchers at two large universities in the western U.S., and the leading professional association for U.S. science leaders, comprised of leaders from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories. The central problem ACESSE investigates is developing knowledge about the conditions under which *coherent* and *equitable* state systems of science education can emerge in which all students have opportunities to meet challenging new standards. The incoherence of state and local science systems are well documented, as are the ways that incoherence makes system-level improvements difficult to attain (Cohen, Moffitt, and Goldin, 2007). The project is centered on developing *horizontal*
coherence, which includes alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment policies and practices with standards, and vertical coherence, referring to a shared understanding of the goals for science learning and consensus on assessment purposes and uses. Formative assessment is the mechanism the project is leveraging to increasing both vertical and horizontal coherence. States can align their vision for science education with classroom practices through the co-design and implementation of formative assessment tools.

In addition to our focus on coherence, ACESSE focuses on the conditions for equitable science education. In *A Framework for K-12 Science Education* (National Research Council, 2012), equity is defined as more than providing equal opportunities to learn and valuing multiple modes of expression; equity entails inclusive science instruction. The Framework advised that science should be defined as a cultural accomplishment, and learning should build on students’ interests and cultural funds of knowledge. One aim of ACESSE is to support and encourage advances towards this vision of equity through developing leaders’ capacity to gather and use evidence related to the needs of their state. Our state science leader partners said that state-specific data related to stakeholders’ visions for science education was not available them. Below, we describe the process by which researchers and leaders developed protocols to investigate challenges and resources in their states and use them to formulate goals that reflect the perspectives of educators and others in their states.

**Participatory Research Process**

The participatory research process involved designing a shared protocol at our first in-person network meeting. After meeting, state leaders conducted focus groups within their respective states. In our second in-person network meeting, leaders participated in data analysis of the transcripts from their focus groups. We will now describe the details of the participatory
Step 1: Prepare for Data Collection

The ACESSE network convened our first in-person meeting in September 2016, bringing together state science leaders from 13 states, along with researchers from two universities. Before this kickoff meeting, the board of the national professional association participated in defining the broad research questions for the overall project. The ACESSE network meeting was designed to begin to explore the following overarching research question: how coherent are states with respect to their instructional guidance infrastructures for supporting the vision of science learning for all presented in the Framework? We designed this meeting to collaboratively determine the sub study questions with the network participants. In this meeting, we laid the foundation to explore this topic through three primary foci: (1) focus groups of educators; (2) teacher surveys; and (3) team-developed documents.

Develop a rationale for qualitative research and focus groups. One of the primary foci of the September meeting was to introduce participants to the process of conducting focus groups. Focus groups generate useful qualitative data because they allow for the study of social interaction (Morgan and Spanish, 1985; Halkier, 2010), eliciting comments and reactions which may not occur in one-to-one interviews. Carefully crafted questions can help surface thoughts and feelings that may otherwise have gone undiscovered (Weiss, 1994). The purpose of local focus groups was two-fold: (1) to develop relationships between members of the multi-state network through in-person training on rapid ethnographic methods, and (2) to have local science education leaders and other stakeholders gathering data to support the needs assessment work. Focus groups presented an opportunity to engage local science teachers, leaders, and other science education stakeholders to identify competing priorities for focusing efforts to implement
the Framework and to identify differences in responses to incoherence, some of which we hoped might lead to productive engagement with the vision of the Framework. By focusing on these responses, we hoped to develop initial conjectures about strategies that could be integrated into learning experiences designed to promote coherence and equity in state systems.

Prior to the meeting, state team leaders created a set of influence maps in order to identify influential members of state science networks. The research team designed these maps to help leaders locate key decision makers, potential allies, and productive connections between people, to make visible the systems of influence in each state (Riedy, Van Horne, Penuel, Bell, Neill, Shaw, Under Review). The maps were also intended to serve as a tool to identify gaps in influence that might cause problems in developing coherence in implementation. At the network meeting, we guided participants to consider influencers listed in their maps for facilitation or participation in their state focus groups.

We emphasized the co-construction of a research agenda within a partnership, consistent with our DBIR framing. While ACESSE researchers had an opportunity to develop a rationale for conducting focus groups prior to the September meeting, it was important that during this gathering the leaders had an opportunity to develop state-specific goals for conducting focus groups. We accomplished this by discussing a scenario that involved a science leader receiving feedback after conducting a professional development session on 3D assessment, which are assessments that elicit students’ integrated understanding of disciplinary core ideas, science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts, as called for in the Framework. In the scenario, a group of teachers tells the science leader:

3D assessments are impossible to do in our department. We don’t have time, we’re under pressure to teach to the state standardized test, and we don’t have anyone who
understands this stuff enough to translate it into something useful for the rest of the group. (ACESSE Network Meeting, 2016)

The scenario continued with some framing of how the state leader might respond to this feedback:

You feel concerned and you want to help. However, it seemed like other teachers in the PD, even other teachers from the same school/department were doing really well with envisioning 3D assessments, and some teachers described how they are already using such assessments. (ACESSE Network Meeting, 2016)

We asked the participants to consider how they would figure out the needs of the group in the scenario, as well as the needs of the department they represented, and the other science departments across each district within their state. We then prompted the participants to think more broadly about how, in their everyday work, they figure out the needs of different people.

Working through the scenario, state teams began to consider focus groups as the beginning steps of a ‘statewide listening tour’ to better understand assets and barriers to coherence in state science education.

**Develop focus group criteria: participants create criteria from fishbowl observation.**

We then engaged participants in an activity designed to enable state leaders to learn how to facilitate focus groups. Using a ‘fishbowl’ exercise, participants watched a mock focus group and then worked in state teams to develop criteria for conducting focus groups themselves. After participants developed the criteria, we gave a technical definition of a focus group, “the intentional effort to systematically collect data to surface local needs” (ACESSE Network Meeting, 2016).

**Participants develop focus group questions.** With this technical definition of focus
groups, their list of criteria, and the goals of the research project in mind, state leaders developed focus group questions. We asked participants to design questions to elicit understanding within the four focus categories of ACESSE: (a) horizontal coherence; (b) vertical coherence; (c) equity; and (d) formative assessment. The network participants wrote questions on sticky notes and posted them on four posters, one for each category. Participants then reviewed and voted on the questions by engaging in a ‘gallery walk’ and placing stickers to indicate their votes. The questions that received the top votes were typed into a shared Google document and were further refined. The results of this co-design process were four common questions developed for the focus group protocol.

**Discuss ethics considerations.** Broadening who participates in research necessitates training on the ethical considerations of data collection. We worked directly with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) to create a process to train practitioners and add them as investigators within our human subjects protocol. If investigators were at other academic institutions, we worked with their IRB to create IRB Authorization Agreements or to support IRB approval at their institutions. At the network meeting, state leaders addressed another scenario designed to highlight ethical considerations of conducting focus groups, such as sharing data, attending to power dynamics, and eliciting a diversity of opinions (Torre, 2009).

After the meeting, state leaders were charged with organizing four focus groups per state. Leaders recruited focus group facilitators and participants in their states. The facilitators participated in a webinar training on protecting the rights of human participants in research, led by ACESSE researchers.

While risk cannot be eliminated from the process of doing research with human subjects, the research team went to great lengths to help facilitators collect data in an ethical fashion,
aligned with the Belmont report guidelines regarding the protection of human subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1978). In addition to participating in every focus group remotely, the research team ensured that focus group facilitators were not in positions of authority over participants. All participants completed a consent process, and two out of 366 participants chose to not participate during the process. Many participants expressed excitement and gratitude for being able to share their thoughts about coherence in their state.

**Step 2: Conduct Focus Groups and Collect Data**

Each state team conducted focus groups, and a researcher from one of the universities attended, consented participants, and recorded the focus groups through Zoom, a video conferencing platform. The first focus groups were held in December 2016. To date, forty-seven focus groups have been conducted. The majority of the focus groups occurred before or after school, or during regularly scheduled meetings. Several groups met online in order to include participants from different regions across the state. Focus groups lasted 60-120 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed through a transcription service.

**Step 3: Analyze Focus Group Data**

During the second in-person ACESSE network meeting in January 2017, 39 state team members (three team members from each of the 13 states) engaged in the participatory analysis of a section of the focus group data. State leaders had little prior experience engaging with qualitative data. Most leaders were science or STEM directors in their state’s department of education, some were district level science specialists and coaches, and five were university faculty. Therefore, the January meeting was designed to both present a rationale for analyzing the data, and a process for doing so. Prior to the meeting, the research team decided to focus the
participatory data analysis on the focus group question: *How do you know when all students have good opportunities to learn science? And what makes these opportunities equitable?* We chose to focus on one question to narrow the corpus of data to a manageable size (approximately 20 pages) for each team to engage during the meeting. We chose to center equity, as it is one of the primary focuses of the ACESSE project. Four states had not completed focus groups prior to the January meeting; those states were paired with other teams during the analysis process.

**Model the coding process, then engage participants in coding.** During the network meeting, one researcher engaged in a think aloud to model the process used to surface inductive codes to systematically categorize qualitative data and create claims based on the coded data. State teams then engaged in the process themselves, using these questions to guide their inquiry:

1. How are people envisioning equity and equitable science instruction in your state?
2. What supports do people think are important for promoting equitable science instruction?

The teams read through their data, noted patterns, and marked them. They used a provided chart to name the code, and collect example data points. When they finished these steps, they were asked to consider what codes were missing, and to add to them. Then, they looked at each code and the corresponding data points on the chart to determine if there was a preliminary statement, or claim, that encapsulated the data.

**Use the Framework as an analytic lens on the data.** After this initial coding process, we asked the teams to pause and consider how equity is defined and described within the Framework, focusing on Chapter 11, “Equity and Diversity in Science and Engineering Education.” This chapter focuses on “equalizing opportunities to learn” through inclusive science instruction, and suggests that teachers relate youth discourses to scientific discourses,
and build on students’ interests and identities through leveraging their cultural funds of knowledge.

We asked the state teams to keep the Framework in mind as they considered the implications of their preliminary claims, and discussed needs and assets for promoting equitable science instruction in their state through formative assessment. Participants then shared their preliminary claims with both evidence and interpretation, with the rest of the Network.

**Reflect on the Process.** After the data analysis process, the leaders were asked to reflect on the experience of designing data collection protocols, conducting focus groups, and analyzing the data. They wrote these reflections and submitted them through a Google form. We now examine those reflections, in order to understand how state leaders described the impact of the participatory research process.

**Leaders’ Reports of the Benefits of Participation**

In this section, we describe how we examined leaders’ reports of the benefits of participation in conducting focus groups and collaboratively analyzing transcripts. We present our research methods and key themes from the analysis.

**Research Methods**

After completing the participatory data analysis process, we asked state leaders to respond to the following prompt on a Google form:

Reflect on your experience with these focus groups-- whether you facilitated some, or just analyzed data from them today, what stands out to you as interesting or important about state teams engaging in this process and considering this data? Has this process made you think about your work or your state in new ways?

Thirty-four participants, out of the thirty-nine present, submitted responses. Participants wrote
responses during a five-minute period, and the responses submitted were about one paragraph long each.

The reflection prompt was framed in a way that could be seen as biased for positive responses, in order to support our learning and collaboration goals for the partnership. The framing supported our broader aims for the process, including identifying and moving forward with collaborative ways to enhance coherence in states. It might be seen in that respect as a form of appreciative inquiry (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003) embedded within our larger project.

In February 2017, ACESSE research team members engaged in a process to create a coding scheme for the reflection data. We coded responses individually, then shared and grouped our codes. We discussed each related cluster, developed an initial codebook, and entered definitions with example data for each code (see table 1).
Table 1. *Examples of Codes and Research Use Interpretation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example Quote</th>
<th>Type of Research Utilization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data - Positive Impressions</td>
<td>Positive statement about using data to support work and facilitate discussion</td>
<td>The process was good for me because it built my empathy and thought about my own soapbox.</td>
<td>Conceptual Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data - Gives us Something Different</td>
<td>States that qualitative data offers a different viewpoint or is juxtaposed from quantitative data</td>
<td>This has made us think about how important it is to talk with teachers and gather data so that you know what they are thinking in regards to equity. Otherwise, you are assuming what teachers think and know about equity.</td>
<td>Conceptual Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Data is Actionable</td>
<td>States that analyzing data creates need or vision for some immediate or near-term action</td>
<td>I think this activity has made me rethink the PD we are planning for next year.</td>
<td>Instrumental Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informs my Work - Changes I need to Make</td>
<td>States that analyzing data illuminates something that the person or the State Education Agency needs to do or approach differently</td>
<td>This tells me that I need to take time and educate our networks so that they can really begin to internalize the Framework's Equity message.</td>
<td>Instrumental Use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After using the coding scheme to code the data individually, our team met again to rename and redefine our codes. We then used the same chart we had our participants use to conduct data analysis during the network meeting. After developing initial claims, we used the lens of research utilization to frame our interpretation of the data.
Findings

Participants found participating in research beneficial, using language that reflects how scholars have written about process use. For example, one leader described the process as an “evidence driven discussion guided by the Framework.” Leaders talked about actionable changes they wanted to make promptly, and reflected on how their understanding of research had expanded through the process of designing protocols, implementing focus groups, and analyzing transcripts. For researchers interested in using participatory research practices with practitioners, it is notable that the state science leaders described these shifts after brief exposure to these practices (see table 2).

Table 2. Amount of Time Spent on Each Component of Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Time Spent</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designing Protocols</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Includes in person protocol design, prioritizing, and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing Focus Groups</td>
<td>1-10 hours</td>
<td>Includes human subjects training for facilitators, planning focus groups, and facilitating focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing Data</td>
<td>2 hours +</td>
<td>Includes organized, researcher-led analysis and additional time spent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the deductive lens of research utilization, and specifically process use, the state science leaders engaged in conceptual and instrumental use of research. Leaders described conceptual shifts that guided them to think differently about how they wanted to engage in their work, we present our findings with respect to those shifts below.

First: state science leaders reported shifts in their understanding of qualitative data. One conceptual shift leaders described concerned their understanding of data. While the leaders
interacted regularly with data, the data they most often encountered was quantitative. Participating in a qualitative data collection and analysis process was new to many of the state science leaders. They reflected on how the qualitative transcripts they analyzed felt “more nuanced” and “more real” than quantitative data. Additionally, some leaders noted how qualitative data collection and analysis provides a different understanding of needs than conversations with teachers and administrators that are not systematically documented and analyzed.

**Qualitative data as “more nuanced” and “more real.”** Leaders explained that qualitative data was different from what they were used to engaging with in their work. They described the difference as useful for improving science education within their state. One leader explained, “qualitative data provides a different look at what is happening in state systems and allows for some more nuanced information to be shared.”

Another leader argued that qualitative data was better than survey data, which leaders engage with regularly. He stated, “An advantage of focus groups over individual surveys is that the discussion brings out more thoughtful responses through the interactions of participants and allows follow-up ideas.” Another described how qualitative data promotes a better understanding of what stakeholders need—an understanding which could not come from analyzing numbers. She wrote, “This process of analyzing the data showed me that there is information that is useful and informative for us to use to identify needs. This is an excellent way to gather data that is not just numerical but 'real' concerns from our stakeholders.”

**Qualitative research as surfacing different understanding than conversations.** Beyond expanding thinking around how qualitative data provides useful information that cannot be found within quantitative data, leaders shifted in how they thought about discussions with constituents.
While leaders might hear feedback from stakeholders within their state, they most likely do not engage in systematic documentation or analysis of this information. One leader noted, “From facilitating and then looking through the data—you miss a lot when facilitating in terms of looking for patterns.” Understanding the ways in which documentation and analysis allows for understanding patterns of needs, rather than individual opinions, is a conceptual shift that could impact leaders’ use of primary and published research. The leaders’ comments reflect a common insight about use of qualitative methods, that systematic data collection and analysis can provide information that is different from what one hears and remembers when facilitating a meeting (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 1984).

Second: State science leaders reported shifts in their interpretation of the Framework. State science leaders described conceptual shifts in: (1) how they understood the Framework, exemplifying a developing desire to reframe how the state conceptualizes formative assessment; (2) how they understood the needs in their state: exemplifying a developing desire to shift mindsets of teachers within their state.

*Shifts in how leaders understand the Framework.* One leader compared the focus groups to formative assessment, one of the primary foci of ACESSE, “Formative assessment, like focus groups with teachers, admin, etc., is about using the data to determine which students need which resources.” This leader expressed a conceptual change in how she understood both qualitative data and formative assessment. She expressed, “I think I truly understand now that changes can’t happen if we don’t have a true understanding about what people need in order to be successful.” The leader seemed to think that this “true understanding” might be made possible through conducting focus groups, and with “true understanding,” change would be possible. This leader’s statement implies that the emic dimension of participatory analysis, or reaching a sense
of true needs and desires of people, regardless of policy and structure, is useful. She continued, “Without asking, how do we know what kids need to succeed? In that same regard, how do districts know what their teachers need to succeed without asking them?” This leader described a shift in her understanding, exemplifying a conceptual use of research that emerged from her engagement in the process. She felt that understanding the needs of the teachers in her state was a crucial aspect to her ability to support state science education success, and that qualitative data, or “asking them” was the way to understand the teachers’ needs. Other leaders also described “rethinking formative assessments.”

This shift in the leaders’ thinking mirrors the shift in teachers’ thinking that is needed in order to engage in quality formative assessment. The Framework makes a case that teachers cannot support their students’ learning by solely looking at end of unit test scores, rather, they must check-in with their students’ learning throughout the process of learning. And checking-in involves collecting data that tells teachers more than what they can find on a scantron. Similarly, qualitative data allows leaders to understand the needs of the teachers within their state, in order to increase opportunities for coherent implementation of the Framework vision.

**Shifts in how leaders see the needs in their state.** The conceptual shift we describe here shows ways in which the leaders began to consider that conceptual shifts were needed in their states, specifically a systematic re-think of the concept of equity, one of the central foci within the Framework.

The state leaders discussed ideas about how the data illuminated the need for large-scale change. Since the data examined focused on equity, leaders left the analysis process thinking about state-wide conceptual shifts needed to understand and work toward equity. One leader explained, “It is essential to shift the deficit narrative to one of identifying and leveraging
cultural and linguistic assets as part of engaging in equitable and coherent 3D science instruction.” While this leader discussed equity as it is defined in the Framework, and 3D science instruction as a means to more equitable classrooms, other leaders described equity more broadly, outside of the ways science is taught in their districts. One leader expressed, “I see that we have work to do around helping educators to see equity as valuing the individuality of students and the strengths and perspectives they bring to the classroom.” Engaging with the data was an emotionally difficult process for some leaders, as they felt the data painted a more grim picture of their teachers’ understanding of equity than they had expected to find. One leader stated, “The data shared with us clearly demonstrates that some students [in our state] do not have teachers that have this belief [that all students can succeed in science] or possibly the teaching tools or even capacity to support them in learning in this way.” While the research process was uncomfortable for some, leaders expressed feelings of agency around changing what was missing for equitable science learning in their states. We now examine action items that state science leaders described, exemplifying instrumental use of research.

Third: State science leaders’ reported plans to adjust state activities to support implementation of the Framework. Drawing on research to inform practice or decision making is defined as “instrumental use” of research. State science leaders’ implementation of the Framework was enhanced through their experience of participating in the qualitative analysis of focus group data. This instrumental use of data influenced the way leaders envisioned their future professional development workshops for educators and the value they placed on “just listening” to teachers and community members.

Redesigning professional development. Several leaders concluded that their summer professional development (PD) plans needed to change in response to their research findings, to
include a greater emphasis on equity and inclusion. One leader wrote, “it appears as if we need to recast our PD with some stronger messaging around designing instruction for all learners, with clear evidence and examples of how this looks at all grade levels with a variety of students.” Another wrote, “I also learned that I need to do a better job of including equity discussions/strategies in the PD work I do with schools and teachers.” These comments reflect the desire to quickly make changes. Leaders planned these changes for the summer.

State leaders also described concrete plans to address these changes. One wrote, “I think through rethinking formative assessments we will be able to address [misunderstandings of equity] and help redefine what it means to be equitable.” This statement reflects how leaders were able to incorporate research findings into direct action; a retooling of formative assessment in order to address issues of equity.

*Changing practice to incorporate more listening.* As discussed, leaders expressed a general appreciation of qualitative research. Having discussions with teachers and members of the education community within their state was seen as valuable work. This theme arose in both reflections on the process of facilitating focus groups, and the process of analyzing focus group data. In a debrief directly following one of the local focus groups, one facilitator wrote that the process of facilitating had enhanced their capacity for empathy and reminded them of how often they speak, rather than listen. They explained: “[Listening] needs to be a focus of our leadership team. Never underestimate the power of just listening.”

“The power of just listening” was a common refrain throughout the reflections. The ability of leaders to “consider perspectives of small groups” was valued and it is likely that leaders will continue to make space for these conversations to take place. In a joint reflection, two leaders from the same state explained: “This has made us think about how important it is to
talk with teachers and gather data so that you know what they are thinking in regards to equity. Otherwise, you are assuming what teachers think and know about equity.” These leaders, having realized the importance of hearing teachers’ voices, are well poised to continue practices that will allow them to listen to teachers, rather than assuming they know what teachers are thinking. Conceptual research use, understanding that listening to constituents can provide different and perhaps more nuanced information than other sources, can become instrumental use in the future when state leaders are presented with the opportunity to gather data regarding an issue. The learning that took place through the process of collaborative data analysis may prove to be influential in participants’ future decision-making.

While participants found engaging with the data to be useful and informative, some expressed trepidation in their ability to fully interpret their data independently and objectively. Four felt that their background knowledge of the district inhibited their ability to review their transcripts objectively. In these cases, participants worried that their personal lens on the data would be biased. One stated, “It was also interesting to discover how difficult it is to review the data and find conclusions/claims that come from the evidence without putting our own ‘state’ lens into the statement. I'm glad we have a group that is analyzing for us!” This leader’s statement reflects her belief that data interpretation is best completed by a neutral third party. She felt that it was necessary to view the data without a “state lens” in order to arrive at valid claims and conclusions. She expressed gratitude for the support of a group in reviewing her evidence. Her use of the phrase “analyzing for us” suggests a desire to have the work of analysis and interpretation done by someone outside of her immediate state team. This statement highlights important implications for researchers who hope to engage in co-research with practitioners and administrators.
Researchers engaged in participatory research projects may find it useful to engage participants in discussions around post-positivist ways of understanding qualitative research and valuing multiple sources of knowledge (Strand et al, 2003). Further work is needed in order to shift opinions regarding objectivity and bias in order to help practitioners feel comfortable drawing conclusions from their own analysis. As learning scientists, we believe that learners are involved in sense-making within their environments on a moment to moment basis. In this same vein, DBIR encourages researchers to find not just general solutions to education problems, but particular resources for particular learners in particular situations—finding what works for whom, and under what circumstances (Fishman et al., 2013). These beliefs are contrary to conceptualizations of research that focus on finding an objective truth that applies in all situations. In future projects, work with practitioners should aim to surface intrinsic beliefs about the scientific process, what counts as evidence, and objectivity. This shift could empower participants and reduce the workload for researchers involved in these types of projects, as practitioners begin to feel more comfortable analyzing data.

Discussion

We found that through engaging in the process of conducting focus groups and analyzing the qualitative data, state science leaders shifted their understanding of the value of qualitative research. This is significant, because the majority of school and district leaders do not regularly place value on qualitative data. In a report that examined nationally representative survey results from principals and district leaders, the majority of leaders perceived little value in qualitative research studies (Penuel, Briggs, Davidson, Herlihy, Sherer, Hill, Farrell, & Allen, 2016). State and district leaders do not usually engage in qualitative data use in their systems, rather, they examine administrative outcome data such as test scores and graduation rates. Qualitative data
can support leaders to identify where in the system they can make changes. Leaders can work with information about what is happening before, and leading up to, outcomes. Consistent with the scholarship on process use (e.g., Tseng and Nutley, 2014), this supports the idea that more research should engage practitioners as researchers. Research-practice partnerships utilizing DBIR are good contexts for doing just that.

Research suggests that engaging state leaders in the research process will have a larger influence on practice than reading peer reviewed journal articles (Johnson et al, 2009). Our results are consistent with Johnson and colleagues’ (2009) findings that people are more likely to take action on the results of an evaluation if they take part in the process. There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. Research often complicates, rather than illuminates solutions to problems of practice (Weiss, 1979). Practitioners reported that reading books, rather than journal articles, was a more useful way to obtain research to inform practice (Penuel et al., 2016). In the context of this study, though the leaders were familiar with the Framework’s chapter on equity in science education, many identified a need to shift PD provided on the topic of equity after participating in the research process. Their desire to take up issues of equity after participating in the research process may indicate that process use was more effective than reading the equity-focused chapter in the Framework, mirroring Penuel and colleagues’ findings in the NCRPP report. The leaders have since planned to implement focus groups to learn about other problems of practice, aiming to apply this process to other contexts. Giving state leaders an opportunity to fully engage in the research process may result in a greater influence through the redesign of PD, and the incorporation of more listening to teachers.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations in our research design. The framing for positive responses in
the reflection prompt for state leaders is a limitation for analysis. As mentioned, we intentionally designed the reflection prompt to support learning goals for the partnership. Additionally, the findings reported remain consistent with observations subsequent to our analysis of how state leaders have incorporated the data and analysis in their state work, in terms of framing their state’s goals within the RPP. We also have seen the equity-focused discussion deepen as the ACESSE partnership engaged in data gathering and interpretation from surveys and co-developed tools to address equity needs.

State science leaders primarily have influence over teacher PD. Therefore, this paper focuses on the implications of focus group data and findings for teacher PD in states. We did not collect data from district administrators or non-profit or community workers, so we do not know at this time, the effect of our work with state science leaders on individuals who are not teachers. This is a limitation, given the importance of these groups in the STEM education ecosystem. State leaders have continued to explore how to expand their teams to include these other groups of stakeholders.

**Policy Implications**

One conclusion we draw from our study is that participants in systems can benefit from taking part in research that impacts those systems. In the context of education, district and state curriculum leaders have a number of entry points for engaging in the kind of research conducted here. For one, many districts and some states have research offices with staff who could facilitate similar processes to the ones described in this paper. Another vehicle for participation might be through research-practice partnerships similar to ACESSE, where external researchers serve as facilitators and co-analysts of data. Outside of a partnership context, stakeholders in systems at the ground level could engage in PAR efforts that are supported by leaders. Policies that enable
education leaders to participate in research, along with resources allocated to support those policies, are needed to allow for participation. Those include vehicles for leaders to serve as co-Principal Investigators on externally funded grants, as well as funding for staff time and travel to participate in research activities.

In some state and local systems, policies that restrict travel and staff time can inhibit participation in external partnerships, and they would need to be changed. For example, many systems restrict out-of-state and out-of-district travel. However, part of the benefit of partnerships like ACESSE is that they put leaders in contact with stakeholders, peers, and researchers who bring different perspectives from which they can learn. It is doubtful that the shared experience of struggling through analyzing qualitative data would have been the same for our participants, had they been working on their own.

It is important to work intentionally to ensure that the relationship between those collecting data and those acting as respondents protects all participants. Participatory work raises specific concerns about coercion, beneficence, and respect for persons. Research design for participatory work must be intentional, transparent, and iterative, in order to uphold research ethics.

Ultimately, a key benefit of engaging stakeholders such as system leaders in research processes is to enhance their understanding of issues, and skill in eliciting perspectives of stakeholders. Organized partnerships are well-suited for these goals, as researchers can scaffold the work. We described the participatory process we utilized in order to make this scaffolding visible, and we recommend others do the same in order to expand the possibilities of this kind of approach.
Article One References


ARTICLE TWO
From Fiction to Action: Queer Reading for Educator Equity Literacy

Diversity initiatives in schools often ignore, oversimplify, or speak in the past tense about equity issues, as if inequity is a problem of the past that has already been solved (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Equity literacy, on the other hand, centers “teachers’ understandings of equity and inequity and of justice and injustice” as the crucial elements for working toward more just classrooms and schools (ibid., p.36). Equity literacy is described as a shift from diversity initiatives that center understanding of cultures and multiculturalism to an approach focused on justice. When schools make efforts to celebrate diversity, without addressing felt realities of oppression, inequity remains the status quo. Celebrating diversity and multiculturalism is important, but such events, activities, or programs lose meaning without widespread recognition of and active work against present injustice (Kumashiro, 2002; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Equity literacy approaches acknowledge the irony of posting “celebrate diversity” posters on the wall, or hosting a multicultural Bazaar to share food and customs, when inequitable tracking practices are present, curricular materials represent white, middle class, male perspectives, and teachers are not trained or supported to understand or teach about justice as present societal issues (ibid.).

The purpose of this article is to consider tools and structures to support equity literacy. Within a collaborative inquiry context, I look at how queer reading, and the popular young adult (YA) novel Every Day mediated educators’ equity literacy.

Models for Education Justice

In spite of multicultural education efforts in schools, schools are more inequitable now than they were before multicultural education efforts began (Fondrie, Penick-Parks, & Delano-
Oriaran, 2017). In this literature review, I first consider prevailing ideologies within multicultural education which have limited efforts for justice. Second, I look at literature on social justice teacher education. Third, I consider the development of equity literacy as a framework for inservice educator professional development, and a necessary addition to multicultural education efforts.

**Prevailing Ideologies within Multicultural Education Limit Efforts for Justice**

Multiculturalism in education emerged as an approach through efforts to strive for educational equity for students from diverse backgrounds. However, much of the current multicultural practices found in schools stem from the intergroup education movement of the 1950s, which aimed to assimilate individuals from diverse backgrounds through reducing prejudice in classrooms (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The movement was designed to help “unmeltable” ethnic groups become a part of America’s melting pot (ibid.). While multicultural practices in schools were meant to honor difference, in many contexts they served to increase assimilation.

Several ideologies around multiculturalism have emerged through attempts to address oppression of Students of Color, LGBTQ+ students, and emerging bilingual students, including: (a) additive conceptions of culture; (b) essentialist conceptions of culture; and (c) binary conceptions of culture. These ideologies have hindered approaches to multiculturalism, ultimately supporting a stratified, segregated, and inequitable education system.

**Additive Conceptions of Culture.** Multicultural education practices occur in many US classrooms today, though they mostly appear as superficial attempts to celebrate cultural artifacts or traditions. I remember eating chips and salsa while singing *Feliz Navidad* in my middle school Spanish class, practicing and preforming a *totem pole dance* at the *pow wow* meant to
celebrate Native American peoples in third grade, reading “Sadako and the 1000 Paper Cranes” in my fourth-grade classroom, and spending many hours sewing a Japanese Kimono with my mother. What I do not remember from these multicultural activities in school is learning to question and think about the ways in which Spanish speakers are treated like second-class citizens in our country, while we sing songs and wear sombreros in our public-school classrooms. I do not remember considering the genocide of the Native peoples, or the state of current politics, health, or living conditions associated with reservation life as we “celebrated” Native Americans through appropriated ceremonies adorned in brown pillow-case dresses with beaded fringe tapping our legs as we danced. I do not remember questioning who had dropped the atomic bomb that had caused Sadako to become terminally ill, or why it had dropped at all. In other words, in the public schools I grew up attending, multicultural practices were meant to expose my peers and myself to diversity, in a primarily romanticized and exoticized manner, without complicating the way people from diverse backgrounds are actually interacted with and treated in our society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As Kumashiro (2001) stated, “educators often stop after ‘adding on’ differences as if adding, say, women here and Latinas/os there solves the problem” (p.5). Adding books or activities that feature different cultures into curricula without examining the power structures, history, and current reality for the people they refer to trivializes the identities and falls short of promoting equity in schools.

**Essentialist Conceptions of Culture.** Inclusion ideology emerged through attempts to move beyond multicultural practices of recognizing and celebrating diversity in an attempt to include voices from *all* backgrounds (Britzman, 1995). However, scholars have suggested that the aim of inclusion ideology is impossible, and oftentimes curricular and pedagogical models attempting to be inclusive end up essentializing culture (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2001,
2002; Blackburn, 2011). As Kumashiro (2001) wrote, “countless differences exist in society (such as differences based on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, [dis]ability, language, body size, and the intersections of these differences), making it literally impossible to be fully ‘inclusive’” (p.5). No curriculum could include all voices, because there is no limit to the number of identities that constitute the all. Inclusion seems to assume that differences are nameable, finite, and comprehensive. Maxwell (2012) discussed intracultural diversity, which is often ignored by “uniformist” views of culture. Even when a marginalized voice is represented in a curriculum, that voice cannot possibly represent an entire identity, as that identity is multifaceted and intersected. For instance, if a class reads a book by a Black author that features Black characters, the class cannot and should not extrapolate an understanding of “the Black experience” from one author’s voice. In part, the limitation of curricular models based on inclusion comes from the fact that naming all differences is impossible, and naming differences at all can be harmful. The very process of naming can reinforce normative expectations for the identified groups. By virtue of naming “diverse” groups, we reinforce the idea that White is the norm and everyone else is deviant from the norm. The act of adding diversity into curricula in itself is an act of othering. In this way, inclusion reinforces dichotomized thinking.

**Binary Conceptions of Culture.** Both multiculturalism and inclusion ideologies are impacted by binary conceptions of culture. Identities are defined in contrast to an Other (Butler, 1993). Binary conceptions of culture can be damaging and violent towards individuals in society, as they set one element of the dichotomy up as good, expected, or customary, and the other, by default, as evil, unexpected, or deviant. In United States society, white, heterosexual, Christian, male, English speaking, and cis-gendered have been classified as good or normal. Those who are categorized as deviant from the norm—the LGBTQ+ community, and all racial
and ethnic groups that are not white, experience the violence of the binaries that classify people in our society. This dichotomized discourse and thinking is so normative in US culture that it becomes in itself *performative* (Butler, 1993). For instance, the “compulsory performances” of gender enacted daily by individuals do not involve choice, rather, they are self-reinforcing based on social expectations that begin even before birth through media, language, marketing, and policies (Butler, 1993). Kumashiro (2001) wrote, “‘What is normal’ and ‘who we are’ are really social constructs maintained only through the Othering, the marginalization, the silencing of other possible worlds and selves” (p.5).

Even when professional development curricula are intentionally constructed to address injustice, inclusion programs presume an “innocently ignorant public” (Britzman, 1995). People of Color, women, Queer individuals, and others with marginalized identities are largely ignored as the facilitators define issues and vocabulary for a normative, dominant audience. This assumption of ignorance makes the inclusion program inherently exclusive. Conversations focus on respectful discourse and assuming best intentions. But when it comes to anti-oppressive environments, assuming best intentions is not enough; impact is far more important than intentions. Impact can be just as damaging whether the intent was good or not, regardless of whether the words were spoken politely or disrespectfully, when identities are marginalized for the benefit of teaching to those in dominant normative groups. Britzman clarified, “The problem is that the lived effects of inclusion are a more obdurate version of sameness and a more polite version of otherness” (p.160).

**Social Justice Teacher Education**

Preservice teacher education programs have become increasingly focused on issues of inequity in schools, and how to prepare teachers to teach for social justice (Lee, 2011). These
efforts acknowledge documented disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes based on income, gender, race, language, and ability status across both the US and the globe (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). They support an aim toward justice and fairness across education systems, including closing the opportunity gaps that perpetuate inequities (Carter & Welner, 2013).

Scholars have documented social justice teacher education efforts used with pre-service teachers (e.g., Boler, 2004; Jones & Enriquez, 2009; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009). Zeichner & Flessner (2009) described that teachers must explicitly address issues of oppression and injustice that are linked to social class, race, gender, and other markers of difference that are embedded in the institutions and structures in a society, as well as in the minds of individuals. (p. 27)

Additional attention has been given to white racial identity development efforts to support teachers to develop an antiracist stance in the classroom (e.g., Helms, 1995; Tatum, 1997; Utt & Tochlk, 2016). Utt and Tochlk (2016) assert that white teachers must “turn their racialized focus away from implied deficits of students of Color in the ‘achievement gap’ frame and toward the impact their racial identities have on their craft” (p.1).

Unfortunately, in empirical studies, such as those presented in Clark (2010), oftentimes only a small subset of teachers might engage with their racial identity development through justice education, taking on a stance of allyship and antiracism. The others may take on a watered-down version of being “anti” overt discrimination, such as the use of homophobic language in schools, or, more often, keep a “neutral” stance that is centered on attempting to stay “apolitical” in the classroom (ibid.). There is a need for preservice teacher education and inservice professional development to center equity and justice in profound and ongoing efforts.
Equity Literacy

Equity literacy is “a framework for cultivating the knowledge and skills that enable us to be a threat to the existence of inequity in our spheres of influence” (Gorski, 2017). Educator equity literacy is a key ingredient for social change; education policies, curricula, and pedagogies must acknowledge and address inequities imbedded throughout the U.S. education system for change to occur (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Montaño et al., 2002; Nieto, 2000). Justice-oriented inservice professional development is needed in order to address systemic oppression in schools.

The term equity literacy has only recently gained traction as a framework to consider within approaches to inservice social justice teacher education and professional development. In 2011, Swalwell wrote an article for Teaching Tolerance in which she proposed using the term equity literacy to describe a knowledge base about current inequity, connected to historical trajectories of privilege and oppression. She described an encounter at a museum, in which she watched as a group of black middle school students reacted to an exhibit showing economic disparities based on race. The students’ chaperon assured the students that the disparity was from “the olden days” and that things were different now, essentially ending the discussion before it had begun. Swalwell reflected that the exhibit clearly was based on recent data, and she considered the dangers of squelching discussions of inequity with students.

Several years later, Gorski (2014) built on Swalwell’s conceptualization of Equity Literacy:

I define it, broadly speaking, as the skills and dispositions that enable us to recognize, respond to and redress (i.e., correct for) conditions that deny some students access to the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers. Equity literacy also describes the skills
and dispositions that allow us to create and sustain equitable and just learning environments for all families and students. (p. 1)

Gorski offered several core abilities of equity literate educators, including the ability to (1) recognize inequity; (2) respond to inequity; (3) redress inequity, and; (4) create and sustain an equitable learning environment.

Building on these initial conceptualizations, alongside years of scholarship and practitioner work, Gorski and Swalwell (2015) proposed a framework for Equity Literacy, in which they added guiding principles for educators to keep in mind as they engage their own learning journeys and work to embed equity literacy into their curriculum and pedagogy. These guiding principles clarified that equity literacy was a way of approaching all curricula, in every subject area, for every grade level, and for students of all backgrounds. Deepening equity literacy, the scholars explained, involves understanding the oppressive history, systems, and ideologies present in US schooling. They advocated for PD to emphasize “issues like racism, homophobia, sexism, and economic inequality” (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015, p.36). The scholars emphasized that “teaching for equity literacy is a political act—but not more so than not teaching for equity literacy” (p. 39). When education approaches ignore inequity, oppression continues to pervade the education system.

Gorski uses the equity literacy framework to support inservice educators, and writes about these experiences in many practitioner forums (e.g., Teaching Tolerance, DiversityInEd.com, and EdChange). Education scholars have begun to use the framework in research (Aragona-Young, 2017; Fondrie, Penick-Parks, & Delano-Oriaran, 2017). Aragona-Young (2017) worked with a group of elementary school teachers to form an equity council aimed to develop participants’ efficacy in equity literacy. The equity council met to discuss
equity topics and create an action plan to address inequities. Aragona-Young found success with the equity council in developing equity abilities defined by Gorski (2017). My study addresses two of Aragona-Young’s recommendations for further research. First, the group of teachers had already worked together and established trust; she recommended research on equity literacy with a newly assembled group. Next, she suggested to include members with differing levels of equity literacy in order to see how individuals with less background knowledge engage with equity literacy abilities. Fondrie, Penick-Parks, & Delano-Oriaran (2017) authored a chapter for the *Handbook of Research on Promoting Cross-Cultural Competence and Social Justice in Teacher Education* in which they considered multicultural literature for children and young adults as mechanisms for developing equity literacy. They used the equity literacy framework (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015) to develop a list of texts and activities to use in PK-12 classrooms. My study addresses the need for empirical work that supports Fondrie and colleagues’ theoretical piece.

In this article, I join these scholars’ efforts as I consider collaborative inquiry into young adult fiction as an approach to equity literacy. I aim to add to the current scholarship on equity literacy by developing understanding of how particular mediational tools can support inservice educator professional development focused on equity literacy. Specifically, I look at how queer reading, and the popular young adult (YA) novel *Every Day* by David Levithan afforded opportunities for educators to focus on equity literacy.

**Mediational Tools for Equity Literacy**

The educators in this study used queer YA texts and a queer reading lens as mediational tools (Vygotsky, 1978) to center equity and justice in the inquiry. *Mediatational tools* (Vygotsky, 1978) facilitate human action and interaction (Wertsch, 1991); they are “carriers of social,
cultural, and historical formations that amplify certain social actions and limit others” (Norris and Jones, 2005, p. 49). *Queer young adult literature* refers to YA novels that disrupt what is perceived as normal within the genre and society (Blackburn, 2011; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014). A *queer reading lens* is an approach to reading that draws on queer theory (Britzman, 1995). The lens involves identifying and challenging categories and dichotomies presented as normal within a text, or noticing the ways in which the book challenges norms within society (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2002; Schieble, 2012).

Intentional use of mediational tools may be one way to support educator equity literacy. Sociocultural approaches to learning situate learning as a social endeavor, connected to and impacted by cultural, historical, and institutional factors (Wertsch, 1991). One of Vygotsky’s central claims within his work was that “human action, on both the social and individual planes, is mediated by tools and signs” (ibid., p.12). People act in conjunction with mediational tools, and such tools are present in any practice, mediating activity, thought, and learning (Cole & Wertsch, 1997; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, attention to the use of specific mediational tools for social justice education is needed. In this case, queer YA texts and a queer reading lens are considered.

There is a history of reading fiction to gain an understanding of social justice that has mixed results (Blackburn, 2012; Kumashiro, 2002). Here I discuss some of the pitfalls of reading fiction for this purpose, and assert how a queer reading lens can support the goals of reading fiction to deepen equity literacy.

**Re-thinking Windows and Mirrors**

One common idea that surfaces in literacy studies literature is that books should serve as *windows and mirrors* for readers (Larrick, 1965). When Larrick first wrote about windows and
mirrors in 1965, she exposed the lack of representation of people of color in children’s books, making the case that children of color needed to see themselves reflected in the books they read. Today, the windows and mirrors concept that books should expose readers to experiences different from their own (windows) and also reflect experiences readers can identify with (mirrors), is often engaged as a multicultural approach to curricula in language arts classrooms. Reading books that represent many different experiences and identities is important, but this approach is limited in that there are far more variations of human experience than can ever be portrayed in books (Kumashiro, 2015; Nasir, 2012) and the corpuses of LGBTQ+-inclusive and multicultural literature are small and limited (Garcia, 2013; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Thomas, Crisp, & Knezek, 2010). In this paper, \textit{LGBTQ+-inclusive} refers to books which feature lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans characters, and characters who experience other variations of gender, sexuality, or sex which challenge societal binaries. \textit{Multicultural literature} refers to books which feature culturally, racially and ethnically diverse characters.

Blackburn (2011) expands the windows and mirrors concept in a crucial way, by explaining how LGBTQ+-inclusive books serve as both windows and mirrors for every reader, as readers can see experiences of both LGBTQ+ people and allies reflected in these works. The mirrors and windows approach can often be enacted as an essentializing (Nasir, 2012) standpoint (i.e., children should read about ‘the Black experience’), which does not account for intracultural diversity or the constellation of factors (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) that make up an individual’s background and identity. Blackburn’s (2011) discussion of reading LGBTQ+ and ally characters within a text reminds us that characters’ interactions are important to read, discuss, and reflect on. A focus on relationships and interactions opens space to understand how identities are relationally constructed, which promotes disruptions of binary conceptions of culture. Reading,
questioning, and examining relationships – rather than trying to extrapolate universal meaning from characters’ identities – can mediate critical learning through all fiction texts.

**Reading LGBTQ+-Inclusive and Multicultural Texts in Problematic Ways**

When teachers try to read multicultural and LGBTQ+-inclusive books without reflecting on their own implicit biases, internalized oppression, and misunderstandings, they might pass these on to their students. Blackburn (2005) cautioned, “To use a Queer-inclusive text in a context that is hostile to Queer people would only make those people more vulnerable” (p. 414). Sometimes that hostility is reinforced by the ways in which teachers position students as readers of such texts. In a review of studies of LGBTQ+-inclusive classroom discussions, for example, Blackburn (2011) found that students were regularly positioned by their teachers, peers, and themselves, as straight and homophobic, and the texts were positioned as unique and non-normative. In turn, students accepted the stereotypes they identified in the literature, rather than critiquing them. This is notable, because in all of these studies, teachers were choosing to incorporate LGBTQ+-inclusive texts in their classrooms. Therefore, despite likely good intentions, and the use of LGBTQ+-inclusive texts, teachers did not disrupt homophobia or heteronormativity. Attention to positioning, however, holds promise as teachers can affirmingly position themselves and their students as LGBTQ+ individuals and allies (Blackburn, 2011; Clark & Blackburn, 2009). Additionally, using a queer reading lens can support educators to work against these pitfalls that arise when reading LGBTQ+-inclusive and multicultural texts.

**Using a Queer Reading Lens as a Tool for Equity Literacy**

relations, identity categories, and dichotomies presented as normal in texts and society at large (Schieble, 2012). This kind of reading also counters the implication that non-normative behavior is deviant. Further, through reading queer YA texts – books that in themselves push against boundaries of what is considered normal in genres, characters, and situations – readers can expand their understanding of societal structures (Blackburn, 2011; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Kumashiro, 2001, 2002, 2015; Schieble, 2012).

A queer reading lens acknowledges that all people engage in a constant cycle of reading and interpreting the world. Dominant ideologies impact how people read and interpret texts, situations, and information. In order to push back on ideologies such as heteronormativity, patriarchy, and white supremacy, critical literacies can be employed. For instance, educators can work to become literate to each system’s rules. Understanding a system’s structure and logic can allow one to recognize it as an oppressive system (so it is no longer invisible) and to envision and enact ways to shift power away from it. Blackburn (2005) wrote, “literacies are politically powerful, and as such, can be one way of getting at social change” (p.401). An important aspect to equity literacy is the ability to use critical literacies to see beyond dominant ideologies and dichotomies, and the ability to apprentice students into this practice. Educators can practice reading words and worlds using a queer reading lens (Kumashiro, 2003).

**Methods**

This study examines educators use of mediational tools in situ. The context of this study was a collaborative inquiry group made up of 8 middle school educators across roles and divisions within one school, and me, an education researcher and former teacher. The inquiry group met twice per month, during school hours, over the course of the 2016-2017 academic year. The group read and discussed queer young adult (YA) literature and inquired into the
concept of allyship. I facilitated the group’s process, participated in the inquiry, and researched the teacher learning in situ (Schön, 1983).

In this paper, I examine the following research question: how did a book discussion, using *Every Day* and a queer reading lens, mediate equity literacy? In this section I will describe the design, my positionality, the context of the study, data sources, and the analytic framework and process utilized.

**Design-based Research for Collaborative Inquiry**

Collaborative inquiry embodies core elements of successful teacher professional development (PD) including active learning and collective participation (Desimone, 2009). I designed this inquiry group to also align with the core element of duration, in that we met consistently (twice per month) and over time (one school year) (ibid.). Blackburn (2011) identified “systematic and intentional teacher inquiry” as a tool for educators to become allies, and Grossman et al. (2001) found that teachers who participate in critical inquiry can support their students to do the same.

Design-based research (DBR) is an approach to research used to develop and study practical innovations in situ (Schön, 1983). I drew on DBR principles and tools to develop and iterate on the design for the inquiry group that was the context for this study. I facilitated the meetings, participated in the inquiry process and group discussions, and researched the teacher learning as a participant observer (Merriam, 2007). Our group met during school hours, twice per month over the course of one academic year.

Rather than examine journal articles or non-fiction books that explain systematic power, privilege, and oppression (oftentimes used for social justice teacher education approaches), our collaborative inquiry group inquired into the concept of allyship through reading novels written
for young adults and discussing them with shared theoretical lenses. I intentionally incorporated the YA novels and the theoretical lenses as mediational tools for learning in the inquiry group (Vygotsky, 1978).

We inquired into the overarching research question “how can we better ally with youth?” as we discussed 6 YA novels, which we read consecutively throughout the year. The novels were narrated in the first person; they portrayed diverse perspectives and experiences, and raised themes of power, privilege, and positionality (see table 3 for information on the books we read). We used field journals to record personal reactions, feelings, and observations.
Table 3. *Novel Selections and Descriptive Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Protagonist Identities</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>He Forgot to Say Goodbye</em> by Benjamin Aliere Saenz</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, told in alternating first person narratives</td>
<td>Two male teens: one Mexican-American, one white</td>
<td>Privilege/Oppression; Race; Poverty/Wealth; Addiction, Absent Fathers, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fangirl: A Novel</em> by Rainbow Rowell</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, + a book within a book (Fan fiction, Fantasy)</td>
<td>Teen straight female, white Teen male, gay, white</td>
<td>Mental Health, Independence, Family, Divorce, Writing, School, Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Every Day</em> by David Levithan</td>
<td>Magical Realism, Fantasy</td>
<td>Teen who wakes up in a different body every morning</td>
<td>Gender, Sexuality, Race, Ableism, Body Image, LGBTQ+, Mental Health, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Beautiful Music for Ugly Children</em> by Kristin Cronn-Mills</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>Teen trans male, race unknown</td>
<td>Gender identity, Music, Youth Radio, Sexuality, Family, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’ll Give You The Sun</em> by Jandy Nelson</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, told in alternating first person narratives</td>
<td>Teen fraternal twins: straight female, gay male, white</td>
<td>Gender, Sexuality, Death, Loss, Mental Health, Family, LGBTQ+, Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>More Happy Than Not</em> by Adam Silvera</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction + Fantasy</td>
<td>Teen male, queer, Latino</td>
<td>Mental Health, Suicide, Loss, Poverty, Race, Homophobia, LGBTQ+, Friendship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twice per month we met to discuss perspectives and analysis based on the novel of the month, using lenses based on sociocultural and queer theories as guides to notice and categorize emergent patterns around allyship: (a) identify cultural brokers and gatekeepers (Cooper, 2011); and (b) surface dichotomies and unspoken rules (Blackburn, 2011). By identifying cultural
brokers and gatekeepers in YA literature, I aimed for educators to note relationships between adolescent characters and adults, and how adult relationships supported or hindered the integration of the teen character’s social and institutional worlds. By utilizing a queer reading lens, I aimed for educators to surface and disrupt power relations, identity categories, and dichotomies presented as normal in texts and society at large (Schieble, 2012). Both lenses were meant to bridge discussions from fiction to real world actions the inquiry group members could take to better support students.

After three initial meetings in which the group members engaged in designed activities wherein we shared about allies from our own youth experiences, chose books from a list of texts I pre-selected, and became familiar with cultural brokering and gatekeeping through self-reflective activities, we began to meet to discuss each book of the month. Preparation was a group norm; we read one book per month and intentionally didn’t meet for two out of the four PLC time slots per month in order to have extra time to read. At times, group members would share that they weren’t able to finish the book. We would still include them in the discussion, and would not worry about plot spoiling. The conversations about the books were loosely structured; each participant would usually write down a question or two and we would read them aloud, then engage in an open dialogue, based on what came up for each person as they heard the list of questions. At times, I would frame the discussion with a prompt or set of questions at the beginning of the meeting (e.g., the central discussion examined for this article). Reading shared texts allowed our team to have a shared reference point.

**Researcher Positionality**

As an educator who benefits from white privilege, I am all too aware of how easy it is to ignore the legacy of “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2004, p.17) in
schools. That is the project of systemic power in action: to perpetuate a cycle of violence that keeps those who benefit from the violence from understanding it, and from understanding that they are able to fight against it. Compassionate and caring white teachers continue to do harm in classrooms if they do not understand the way inequities operate systemically in schools and societies (Utt & Tochluk, 2016). I feel deep pain and regret when I think of harm I caused as a young teacher, in spite of having been an equity-conscious activist. I was complicit in the school to prison pipeline, as students were moved through discipline ladders which penalized minor infractions and escalated to suspensions and expulsion when the minor infractions multiplied or detentions for the minor infractions weren’t served.

I determinedly attempt to bring racial justice, feminism, and queer theory into my teaching and facilitation of professional development, and to develop my own equity literacy. I have led workshops and taught courses on social justice and anti-oppressive action for the past 15 years. When I feel overwhelmed by obstacles to education justice, I read queer young adult literature for inspiration. I chose to utilize queer YAL for this study because I wanted to share the tools that give me inspiration to ally with students against systems of oppression. My passion for queer YAL and my ongoing practice of utilizing critical inquiry with YAL were central to the success of the study, as I was able to introduce the texts and facilitate the discussions with genuine enthusiasm, as well as apprentice group members into specific critical inquiry skills. There are therefore unexamined assumptions in this work about whether queer YAL as a tool for educator learning would be able to be utilized effectively without an avid fan as the facilitator. Following the completion of the group, some participants developed enthusiasm for continuing to explore and share YA texts; future research could examine how to
design for this process of developing enthusiasm and identifying with the fandom in a way that supports others to facilitate this work.

**Context of Design: Site and Participants**

Eastside Middle School (EMS) is located in Easton—a small suburban city in the Western United States. EMS is known for being one of the most diverse schools in the district: in terms of economics, race, and education classification. EMS has a weekly late-start day for students, in which two hours have been set-aside for teachers to engage in professional development. The time is intended to be used in two ways: for school-wide staff meetings, and for teachers to engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at EMS.** The Principal at EMS described the PLCs in a public letter on the school website as: “data-driven professional learning communities [that] focus on student achievement and school goals” (Principal’s Message, 2016). However, there were both informal and formal discussions at EMS about how this time had not been optimally spent, specifically in the humanities departments.

One educator who served multiple roles at EMS explained that while the time was set aside “with the best intentions,” many educators throughout the school felt that the time wasn’t being “fully utilized.” She described a “growing frustration” with the meetings, explaining that they often became logistics meetings rather than collaborative endeavors. Another staff member in a leadership role within the school expressed frustration about the PLCs, “I don’t think anything has changed [for the better] because of this PLC time” (personal communication, July 14, 2016).

**Participants.** The cohort for the collaborative inquiry group was comprised of a mix of educators and other professionals at EMS, including a school counselor, the librarian,
representatives from a non-profit who worked within the school, and several classroom teachers (see table 4 for descriptions of the participants and their roles within the school). Pseudonyms are used for all participants. At times when I present data that reveals particularly vulnerable content, I refrain from using pseudonyms and instead refer to “a participant” in order to maintain an additional level of anonymity for participants. Including me, the group had 9 participants.

The participants were predominantly white women, representative of US educators. All participants were women; six were in their 20s and 30s, and three were in their 40s and 50s. One participant identified as multiracial; all others identified as white. Two participants identified as queer (one identified as gay and the other identified as pansexual); all others were straight.

Seven participants consistently attended all meetings in the fall semester. In the spring semester, one consistent participant no longer attended after completing her student teaching and transitioning to another school, and another consistent participant stopped attending midway through the spring semester when she went on maternity leave. Therefore, five participants consistently attended all meetings in the spring.
Table 4.  
Participants and their roles within the school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Primary Role at EMS</th>
<th>Subject Area/Additional Roles Relevant to Group Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>School Librarian</td>
<td>AVID Coordinator, member of Instructional Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-organizer of the collaborative inquiry group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>English Language Arts and Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sponsor for junior honors society and student leadership program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Special Education Classroom for students with emotional challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Student Teacher</td>
<td>Special Education Classroom for students with emotional challenges, former Para-educator for the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Head of the school climate committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>English Language Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Director for the Visionary Foundation</td>
<td>Case management and individual support for a cohort of students, moves up with students through primary and secondary school. Former classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrinne</td>
<td>Coordinator for the Visionary Foundation</td>
<td>Case management and individual support for a cohort of students, moves up with students through primary and secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Researcher from nearby university</td>
<td>Former ELA and ELL teacher Facilitator and co-organizer of the collaborative inquiry group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources

The collaborative inquiry group met twice per month, over the course of one academic year. I collected data from each of the 18 group meetings, including audio recordings, ethnographic field notes, and artifacts (i.e., photos and participant work). I also collected participant field journals and saved group emails. I conducted and audio recorded eight
individual interviews. In order to track my iterations and analysis throughout the process, I wrote field journal entries, analytic memos, and met with a mentor for monthly consultation about group process and iterative design.

**Interpretive Qualitative Analysis**

In parallel to the work of designing and facilitating the initiative, I employed interpretive qualitative fieldwork methods (Erickson, 1986) to document how educators engaged with the mediational tools for learning about allyship and justice. I engaged in ongoing data analysis, producing monthly analytic memos and reflecting regularly in a field journal. Interpretive methods are useful when one is interested in the “meaning-perspectives of particular actors in particular events” (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). I focused on what the participants found useful or important in our inquiry work. Erickson (1986) describes the importance of considering “local meanings that happenings have for the people involved in them” (p. 121), specifically from the “actors’ point of view” (p. 119).

I discovered the focus for this paper when I examined the transcript, field notes, and artifacts from the inquiry group’s closing activity which occurred at the end of the school year. For the activity, I had arranged the start of a timeline on several free-standing whiteboards, which I rolled over to our table in the library, surrounding our meeting space. On the whiteboards, I drew a continuous horizontal line, which I then taped printed pages onto. Each page displayed the name of a month, and an image of the book we read for that month, making the timeline representative of our time spent together in the inquiry group, from the beginning of the school year in September, to our current final meeting in May. I put paper, markers, and tape in the center of the table, and asked the group members to, “Write about a book that really impacted you, a discussion that stands out to you, and/or an action toward allyship” and place
each item on the timeline. After we assembled our collective timeline, we used the timeline to
guide a reflection discussion about our work together.

In discussing the timeline, we found it interesting that there was a large concentration of
eamples around the months of December and January. In December, we discussed the book
Every Day and I introduced a queer reading lens at the beginning of our discussion. We
continued our queer reading discussion in January, when we read and discussed Beautiful Music
for Ugly Children (Cronn-Mills, 2012), a novel narrated by a trans protagonist. On the timeline,
nine examples surrounded December and January, almost half of the twenty examples total. One
said, “Every Day really made me think about my own preconceived ideas.” Another read, “[I had
a] realization that our own experiences contribute to our assumptions, even if we think they
aren’t.” And another read, “[I had a] realization that ‘knowing’ these characters is helping me
discover new advocacy and allyship opportunities within my classroom.”

Drawing on Erickson’s (1986) description of the need for interpretive research to center
participants’ perspectives of what is important and meaningful, I used the physical artifacts on
the timeline, and the transcript of the discussion that followed, to determine the focus of this
paper. In other words, since the participants described reading Every Day as important to their
forming realizations indicative of increased equity literacy, I chose to follow their lead and
examine the discussion from December, as well as later discussions and interviews that referred
back to the Every Day discussion.

The conversations were not linear. Different threads wove through the discussions,
punctuated by tangents and laughter. Likewise, I cannot trace the demonstrations of equity
literacy in a linear fashion. Using a queer reading lens to discuss Every Day supported the group
members to share our thinking, listen to our peers, revise our thinking, share our thinking, listen
to our peers, and revise our thinking again. Particular forms of revision demonstrated equity literacy through the use of a queer reading lens, including acknowledging assumptions, questioning how assumptions form, bridging to societal misrepresentations, bridging to local context, and bridging to personal context.

I utilized a queer reading lens as I coded these transcripts, looking for disruptions of binaries, discussions of hidden structures or rules, and connections of analysis of the fictional world to the real world (see table 5). I coded for instances when participants named their assumptions, and for instances when participants questioned their assumptions and considered the implications of societal dominant ideologies that their assumptions revealed. I looked for instances in which participants’ talk exemplified queering thinking, in terms of questioning binaries accepted as normal in our society, and discussing shifting or disrupting such binaries. Further, I marked instances when participants bridged conversations about the novel to make considerations about their personal lives, students, or school. Finally, I examined how participants connected and oftentimes attributed their own allyship actions with the book. I looked at instances in which participants positioned themselves, identified themselves, and discussed their stance toward equity.
Table 5. *Coding Scheme Examples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposing Assumptions</td>
<td>When participants name their assumptions, or someone helps point out an assumption.</td>
<td>“See, but then you just said, ‘his.’” “Well, I know. That's because in my mind, he's ... You know. Because he's in love with this girl” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning/Recognizing Assumptions</td>
<td>When participants question their assumptions, where they come from, and/or how they relate to dominant ideologies.</td>
<td>“Also, the number of non-hetero and non-dominant relationships that were talked about were disproportionate than in my reality. It seemed like 50% were trans or queer. And I’m thinking, is this real, and I’m missing it in my community? Or, is the book portraying more diversity than in our real world?” (Interview Transcript 12/13/16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queering thinking</td>
<td>When participants name or question binaries, and/or discuss shifting or pushing back on binaries</td>
<td>“I just think that it's astounding, the level of empathy that he, it, Z, shows for each person that Z inhabits. The restraint that it takes to be like, ‘I'm a guest here and I'm not trying to change the path of this person’s life, even though I might feel differently.’ Ooh... I don't know if I'd be very good at that. It's just really incredible and I think considering its an adolescent, too, it pushes on any subconscious things that you might think about adolescents” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging fiction to reality</td>
<td>When participants make an explicit link from the discussion of the book to discussing the school, their students, and/or themselves and their actions.</td>
<td>“Well an as an adolescent, developing these feelings that are your own and maybe different then whoever's telling you they should be, I feel like could be, it happens to a lot of kids, right? Not in the same way that it happens to A, as in being without a body, but kind of a similar theme of ... I'm not what people think I am” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action/Stance</td>
<td>When participants take an equity stance, identify themselves as allies, or refer to an action they took or want to take in order to support equity.</td>
<td>“I used to worry about stepping on toes, now I worry about being there for kids no matter what” (Interview Transcript 12/14/16).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After coding the data through this initial coding scheme, I organized the coded data into an analytic memo examining the way the conversation connected with queer theory. I then coded the analytic memo, looking specifically for examples of equity literacy, and categorized instances where the discussion turned to heterosexism, sexism, racism, and ageism. I then looked at the how each of the examples of equity literacy were brought up in the discussion, and found that while the book itself was the mediational tool used to raise and expose assumptions, the queer reading lens mediated equity literacy through raising questions of equity within the book, within the group members, and within society.

To be clear, other recurring themes threaded throughout our inquiry group meetings, which were not focused on justice, nor were they demonstrative of equity literacy. For instance, we regularly discussed how PD was perceived throughout the school, and ways to appeal to the administration about using collaborative inquiry designs. Another topic that regularly came up in our conversations was the idea of censoring books for students; teachers would raise questions about whether the books we were reading were “appropriate” for students, and whether they would use them in a classroom or recommend them to a young person. These conversations were sometimes pushed in the direction of disrupting dichotomies (i.e., appropriate versus inappropriate), but not always. I chose to focus this paper on educators use of mediational tools in situ, examining moments in the discussion when the talk exhibited equity literacy. Discussions of justice and systemic oppression were a central focus to our inquiry discussions in every meeting throughout the year, and I was interested in how the mediational tools supported these discussions. I will now discuss the process I used to introduce one of the mediational tools of focus, the queer reading lens, to the inquiry group, before turning to the results of this study.
Setting Up a Queer Reading Lens

The novel *Every Day* employs magical realism to create a world with a logic and rules that are similar to real life, except the main character, named A, wakes up in a different person’s body each morning, borrowing the person’s life, friends, and family until they fall asleep.

When the collaborative inquiry group met to talk about *Every Day*, eight of our group members were present. We began with a warm-up activity, in which we discussed how the group was working and ways in which we wanted to improve it. I had given everyone printed agendas at the beginning of the meeting, and next item on the agenda was to introduce the new lens (see Figure 1).

### New Lens—Surface unspoken rules and dichotomies (Queer reading)

- Dominant ideologies impact how we read and interpret texts, situations, and information.
- Identities are defined in contrast to an Other (Butler, 1993).
- We can become literate to each system’s rules and learn to breakdown norms and question the status quo.

**For Example: What are some of the unspoken norms that surfaced for readers while reading *Every Day*?**

- When A spoke as the narrator, what did you picture? Did A have a gender, a race, or other identifying characteristics?
- Why? Even though A insisted that they didn’t have any external identity, why do many readers picture A in a particular way?
- What other dichotomies and unspoken rules were pointed out to readers in *Every Day*?

*Figure 1. Agenda Text: Introduction to Queer Reading Lens and Prompts for *Every Day***

I introduced queer theory and a queer reading lens as the rest of the group followed along with me, reading the bullet points on the agenda. I began by asking if anyone was familiar with
queer theory, who might want to take over for me in introducing the concept. When the group members shook their heads, I explained:

In terms of a reading lens, [it] is about pulling out or surfacing, what are the rules that are dictating how things occur in the society of the book? Then also, what are the implied dichotomies? The idea is that, if you think about how dominant ideologies are impacting how we're reading everything in the world, in our real world, and then also in our books… sometimes in the books, the dominant ideologies shift and they're not the same as in our real world, and so just trying to notice those and think about how identities are defined in contrast to an imagined other or a real, named other, and we can think about those systems, rules, and learn how to question those norms. (Meeting Transcript 12/14/16)

I went on to describe queer reading as a “critical literacy tool” that is used to question norms. I then turned the discussion to Every Day, and said:

[I think you can] learn all about [queer] theory just by reading [this] book. Part of what I was thinking about was the narrator, A. What do you picture when you picture A? If you just think about that for a second, what came to mind when I said that? (Meeting Transcript 12/14/16)

At this point, I opened the discussion up to the group. In the next section, I examine moments in the discussion where the mediational tools afforded opportunities for equity literacy.

Claims About Queer Reading Mediating Equity Literacy

Drawing primarily on one particular focus conversation, the inquiry group’s discussion of the popular YA novel, Every Day by David Levithan, which I used to introduce the group to a queer reading lens, I demonstrate how the novel and the lens functioned as mediational tools that
created openings for educators’ talk to focus on key aspects of equity literacy (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). I found that the novel *Every Day* acted as a mediational tool for exposing assumptions, and using a queer reading lens for illuminating, examining, and disrupting dichotomies and unspoken rules (Blackburn, 2011; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Kumashiro, 2002; Schieble, 2012) in tandem with the novel *Every Day* opened avenues for equity literacy.

**The book *Every Day* acted as a mediational tool for exposing assumptions**

Throughout the book, the narrator A tells their story from many different experiences of gender, race, sexuality, health, family dynamics, and economic class. After I asked the group to consider how they pictured A, one participant shared: “You have to picture a character when you think of this person, right? I picture a character that is someone that, whether he is in a female or male body, to me, is a white male. I don't know why” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). The “why” this participant referred to illustrates the need for equity literacy, in that it shows implied assumptions about what is neutral and normal, without acknowledgement that those assumptions are based on societal inequities. White and male are both dominant identity categories, which benefit from power and privilege at the expense of non-white and non-male people. Exploring *Every Day* helped readers surface assumptions because A challenged known identity categories. And surfacing assumptions established a need for equity literacy.

In the beginning of the *Every Day* conversation, white female educators attributed the way they assigned identity categories to A to their own perspective and identity, saying, for instance, “I don’t know why [I see the character as white and male],” or “is that just because I’m reading the book and that's a voice that's familiar to me?” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). These questions centered the participants’ perspectives, and recognized that their perspectives were
limited, but did not acknowledge the dominant ideologies inherent in the perspectives, or how those ideologies permeate US society, maintaining oppressive systems.

Dominant ideologies led the educators in the inquiry group to assume several things about A, and acknowledging these assumptions revealed how such ideologies operate in U.S. society. First, from the very first chapter, A was attracted to a female character, Rhiannan. Heterosexism, discrimination based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, as a dominant ideology directed participants to assume that if A was romantically interested in a female-assigned character, then A must be both male and straight. Second, participants assumed A was white. Whiteness operates as a dominant ideology in US society, in that white is considered normative, and race usually refers to everyone who is not white (McIntosh, 1986). Whiteness as a dominant ideology led participants to make the assumption that any character whose race wasn’t explicitly discussed was white. Even though A resided in bodies with different racialized identities, and race was explicitly discussed throughout the book, participants assumed that A’s true race was white, because that is what would be expected and normal.

After voicing assumptions about A, participants then questioned them. One participant described the automatic process she found herself using while reading: “I initially assigned ‘male heterosexual’ to A, and then I realized that [the book] wasn't specifying. I was like, ‘Whoa! Question yourself there.’ It caused me to be like…‘what assumptions am I making?’” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). In this example, the educator explains how even before the discussion, while she was reading Every Day, the protagonist’s identity mediated exposure of her assumptions. Assumptions usually operate without awareness; in bringing awareness to the assumptions, the book mediated a process of beginning to question them.
In another example, one educator questioned if her own identity was the main factor influencing how she read the character in *Every Day*: “the relationship and the culture that I am just normalized to is what I immediately went to, but, if I had a different sexual orientation, would I put that into [my interpretation] more?” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). This question demonstrated her self-awareness and understanding that her perspective was limited. When she asked if her interpretation would change if her identity was different, she maintained an individualistic perspective that did not account for systemic dominant ideologies. However, questioning the interpretation established a need and a desire for equity literacy. I will now turn to discussing how utilizing a queer reading lens to discuss *Every Day* mediated equity literacy.

**Using a queer reading lens to discuss *Every Day* mediated equity literacy**

While the book *Every Day* acted as a mediational tool for surfacing assumptions, using a queer reading lens to discuss the novel mediated equity literacy. This happened in four primary ways. Using a queer reading lens allowed the inquiry group to (1) examine the book as a tool for equity literacy; (2) critique the book in order to strengthen equity literacy; (3) consider issues of inequity in schools; and (4) shift interpretations and ideology. I end this section by examining counterevidence to the fourth sub claim, questioning how this approach to justice education might fall short.

**Queer reading allowed the inquiry group to examine the book itself as a tool for equity literacy.** By using a queer reading lens, the inquiry group was able to consider how the queer book pushed back on issues of underrepresentation and misrepresentation in books. Recognizing inequity indicates equity literacy, and is one of the four key abilities Gorski (2014; 2015; 2017) identified for equity literate educators.
Using a queer reading lens on *Every Day*, the inquiry group noticed issues around representation of sexuality and gender that arise in societal conceptions. Hannah asked the group if we thought that the author had overrepresented queer identities in the book. She felt that the number of individuals who experienced identity outside the gender binary and sexuality norms that A’s soul occupied was larger than the number of people who identify in these ways in society. Katie, in response, expressed a thought that exemplified use of a queer reading lens, “Well and I wonder if that just is this author trying to push back against the norms.” Katie’s recognition that the book was purposefully pushing back on societal norms was a promising example of a queer understanding. Still, a further formed queer reading would also question the normative idea that queer identities were over-represented in the book, questioning the way that heteronormativity has led us to believe that the population of LGBTQ+ individuals is both small and homogenous.

Questioning initial readings of the book, and how those readings represent the way people read (and misread) society is an indication of equity literacy. Gorski (2017) denotes knowledge and skills associated with each key ability for equity literate educators, and noticing subtle bias in learning materials and maintaining curiosity about how that bias might reflect a larger policy or practice are associated with the ability to recognize inequity. Katie pondered, “Do we see the white heterosexual relationship because that's what we recognize, or because that's what is dominant in society? That's a really interesting question” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). Here, Katie used the queer reading lens to disrupt the notion that readers’ misrepresentations of A are due to their own identity, acknowledging the role that dominant societal norms play in how assumptions form in readings of both books and society.
The inquiry group also recognized issues around representation of people of color in books. Natalie, a multiracial woman, brought up that the book was queering the genre of multicultural literature, in that it featured many different identities in a way that was “subtle and normalized” and that the book wasn’t “directly” about race, class, sexuality, or gender. She said, “I just think that’s so powerful, because normally when you [read about non-dominant characters], you have to seek out a book […] that is specifically rooted in the context of race and poverty” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). Natalie’s comment queered what is understood to be the norm for representation in books.

Natalie’s comments exposed the issue of underrepresentation in young adult books, which most often feature main characters who are straight, white, middle or upper class, and male (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Thomas, Crisp, & Knezek, 2010). Readers have to intentionally seek out books with protagonists who do not fit those categories, and volumes about characters with intersectional identities, such as female characters of color, female queer characters, and queer characters of color are nearly impossible to find (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Thomas et al. 2010). The genre choices narrow, with most volumes fitting squarely within the genre of realistic fiction. As Natalie’s comment exemplifies, these multicultural realistic fiction volumes center the struggle of the main character’s identity, creating a tunnel vision for the reader focused on particular aspects of historical oppression or stereotypes (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Wickens, 2011).

YA adventures, romances, and fantasies rarely feature characters with non-dominant identities (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014). Natalie noted that Every Day, which might be found on a fantasy shelf in a library, was different from books that are “rooted in the context of race and poverty.” She explained, “I seek out those books and read them, but it was nice to have
a book exploring those themes without it feeling like…” Quinn offered a possible ending to Natalie’s statement, “this is the token book about…?” Natalie agreed with Quinn’s wording, and said it was “refreshing” to read and discuss a book that didn’t tokenize identities. This re-defining of multicultural books shows a queer reading of identity, in that it disrupts the idea of identities as singular, static, or able to be fully captured in literature.

The educators in the inquiry group noticed that *Every Day* pushed back on what is considered normal in books and society, and that reading from the character A’s perspective allowed them to reconsider their own perceptions of what is ordinary, signifying a deepening of the equity literacy ability to recognize inequity and bias.

**Queer reading allowed the inquiry group to critique the book in order to strengthen equity literacy.** The inquiry group applied the queer reading lens to consider issues within *Every Day* that illuminated limited understandings of youth due to a lack of youth voice within media that represent them. Recognizing limitations of understanding connotes equity literacy.

Quinn questioned the use of technology in *Every Day*. She noted that A would use email to contact Rhiannan from whoever’s body A was in, but that this description seemed outdated, and more similar to what adults would think about doing in A’s situation than what a teen would actually do. Quinn described the portrayal of technology as a weakness in all of the books we had read thus far in the inquiry group. She explained:

Well because to me, that’s the real unknown world of our kids. I don't know, I know they use their phones a lot and I have no idea what that world is like, I mean I went to a quinceañera on Saturday night and I watched a group of our kids that are now high schoolers, and their interaction with each other was totally, they all had their phones out.
They were video-ing each other, they were showing each other stuff. It was social, but it was all with technology. (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16)

In Quinn’s reading, she questioned the books and the ways in which they portray an adult perception of the worlds of teens. She acknowledged that she only had a partial understanding of the students’ interactions at the quinceañera. As she continued her line of questioning, she noted that the understanding of the adult authors could also only be partial and incomplete. This queer reading opened the discussion further to bridge to societal misrepresentations of youth. Natalie expressed, “I wonder too, the depth to which adult authors really understand [young people’s worlds] in a way where they could authentically create that in a book?” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). Once again, surfacing and questioning bias is an associated skill with the key equity literate ability of recognizing inequity (Gorski, 2017). The inquiry group used the queer reading lens to discuss intersectional and diverse interpretations of bias in the text.

**Queer reading allowed the inquiry group to consider issues of inequity in schools.**

The inquiry group applied their queer reading lens to their own district, specifically to ask critical questions about inequitable curriculum and power dynamics between teachers and students. Understanding injustices within schools is a crucial aspect to educators’ equity literacy. Gorski (2017) explains that equity literate educators “show curiosity about ways school policy and practice might disadvantage some students in unintentional (or intentional) ways.”

A queer reading of *Every Day* led to a discussion of inequitable curriculum in the inquiry group’s district. In one example, Katie described how a teacher from another school in the county had looked at all of the titles on the district’s high school English Language Arts book list, and found that, “eight out of ten were [written by] white men” (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16). In this instance, the inquiry group discussion opened space to recognize an injustice
within the curriculum. The educators acknowledged that not only was it an injustice to not see oneself reflected in the characters within a book, but to not see oneself reflected in the authors who wrote the books.

Discussing Every Day through a queer reading lens also led to discussion of inequitable power dynamics between teachers and students. The group had been discussing how they wanted to ask students what they thought about the book, and whether what was so interesting about the book to the educators would “go over the students’ heads.” Mary explained that she would really like to ask students the questions we had used to start our discussion (e.g., how do you picture A in your mind?). Mary referred to her thirteen-year-old son, describing how students in their early teens are “developing this sense of self and testing those boundaries and questioning norms,” and explained that she thought all adolescent students could benefit from a discussion akin to the one we were having in the inquiry group. She wondered aloud if she would be able to have that kind of conversation with her students, noting that there was a power dynamic “whether or not we want to call it that” since teachers “assign them grades.” Mary said:

I do think that they feel that we do hold some type of power against them, that I don't know that they would [speak honestly]. I think it would be really interesting to be like, ‘Let's take that off the table and just have an honest, authentic conversation.’ (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16)

When Mary acknowledged the power dynamic between teachers and students, she was noting a normative structure that oftentimes remains invisible in teacher PD. Then, as she expressed her desire to disrupt that dynamic and engage in “authentic conversation” with young people, she demonstrated use of a queer reading lens, disrupting dichotomies and structures that are considered normal within our school systems. Recognizing power dynamics between teachers
and students, and expressing a desire to disrupt these dynamics is indicative of deepening equity literacy skills, indicative of Gorski’s (2014; 2015; 2017) second and third abilities of equity literate teachers: responding to and redressing inequity.

Queer reading allowed the inquiry group to shift interpretations and ideology. The inquiry group applied the queer reading lens to their own thinking, recognizing ideology that formed the basis for their interpretations. In this section, I describe how one participant, Mary, voiced this recognition during the Every Day discussion, revising her ideology, which she had confidently voiced throughout the semester leading up to the December discussion. Mary was able to make a shift toward a justice stance without experiencing shame for expressing her initial ideology. Shifting ideology can be integral to educators’ equity literacy.

Shifting Ideology. During the Every Day discussion, Mary shared a realization that her whiteness impacted her worldview, creating blind spots around race and inequity. Mary had not self-selected into the group, but rather came to participate because of shadowing requirements she had to fulfill. In previous discussions, Mary shared examples of how she taught her children to be “colorblind” (Meeting Transcript, 11/2/16; Meeting Transcript, 11/8/16). The group members did not make shaming statements to Mary, nor did they correct Mary when she said these things, rather, they redirected the discussion to include an equity literacy lens, drawing on examples from the books or their own experiences.

Mary was only at EMS for the fall semester, so our December meeting was her last. For several minutes during the middle of the Every Day discussion, our discussion turned to the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, in which Donald Trump became president-elect. In describing her experience of watching several white students tell Latino students that they should “go home” and “leave the country” in the days after the election, Mary said:
[That was] very eye-opening for me as a white female of, I guess there's my lens, that I see it through, and I think there's a perception that I give myself that I don't think I see colors, but apparently, I live a color. (Meeting Transcript, 12/14/16)

In this moment, Mary described a realization that she was not colorblind, and that aspiring to be colorblind was not working in the service of justice. As Mary described watching white students discriminate against Latino students, she realized the colorblind ideology that she subscribed to was not protecting students from discrimination, but rather ignoring it. Mary was experiencing a deepening in her own equity literacy.

I find Mary’s realization particularly significant because Mary had not self-selected into the group with the goal of becoming an ally to youth. Mary’s goal had been to shadow her mentor teacher, and as a mother of middle school children, she felt confident about the colorblind ideology she maintained and taught to them. This makes it all the more interesting that Mary questioned her ideology, in a space that felt supportive to her. She ended the semester of collaborative inquiry understanding something about her privilege, and about what was missing from the concept of colorblindness. Mary’s revelation demonstrates promise in terms of developing equity literacy through discussing fiction in tandem with theoretical lenses. Fictional characters and situations provided the backdrop and fodder she needed to develop equity literacy, challenging her own preconceived notions, assumptions, and the structures and systems she (and all of us) operated within.

**Issues Arise: One person’s revelation is another person’s regret.** In an interview at the end of the fall semester, Natalie shared with me that she regretted not correcting or speaking back to Mary when she talked about teaching her children to be colorblind. Natalie shared this when I asked her to describe what it meant to her to “be an ally.” In her response, she discussed
her personal definition, and then some ways in which she wanted to “improve as an ally.” She explained, “I think one thing I’m trying to figure out is how to challenge or highlight things in a way that is supportive in maintaining the safe space for others while pushing them to be better allies” (Interview Transcript, 1/11/17). As an illustrative example of this challenge, Natalie referred to one of Mary’s comments about colorblindness:

There was a time in our group when someone said they don’t see color, and it still haunts me that I didn’t say anything. How could I have been a better ally? This was a problematic statement, but how to support this person and not… (Interview Transcript, 1/11/17)

Natalie moved on to discuss other examples, outside of our inquiry group context, of navigating the challenge of when and how to speak up as an ally. I felt the need to follow up on her comment about the colorblind statement; I had read that conversation as having been supportive of equity literacy without shaming Mary. It hadn’t seemed to me like the group let the comment slide, but more that they had redirected it in a way that was useful and meaningful. I was surprised to hear her expressing regret, and I wanted to hear more about what she would have rather done in that moment. Natalie surmised:

Maybe If I had said something from my own personal experience. If I had explained my own journey and what I realized about recognizing color. If I don’t speak up, I invalidate obstacles People of Color face. If I did this, making it about me, could it have felt differently to the speaker? Let’s talk about, as allies, options to work toward not alienating but offering a different opinion. (Interview Transcript, 1/11/17)

Natalie’s read on the conversation is important. It demonstrates that in allowing space for Mary to shift her views overtime, as she increased her participation with the group and the group’s
tools, Natalie experienced the bias remaining unchecked by the group. If I had spoken up against colorblindness, as I might have in another setting, Natalie may have felt more supported and less regretful. On the other hand, Natalie’s expressions of regret are also indicative of her own strengthening equity literacy and her stance on action. Natalie was identifying herself as an ally and as someone who would take a stand and not remain silent in the future.

In examining the transcript from the *Every Day* meeting, I saw that Mary did in fact shift her discourse around taking a colorblind stance. However, as Erickson (1986) notes, the meaning perspectives of the participants is of primary import to interpretive qualitative analysis. It is significant that Natalie questioned whether she had been an ally in that conversation, and that she raised questions in our interview about the exact phenomenon I had been writing about in analytic memos. Natalie said she wanted us to talk about “options toward not alienating but offering a different opinion” (Interview Transcript, 1/11/17), and I had been thinking of the way Mary shifted her ideology as an example of how our group’s use of mediational tools hadn’t alienated Mary, but had offered different entry points into equity literacy.

**From Fiction to Action: Gaining Confidence and Courage to Act**

Over the course of the academic year, group members in the collaborative inquiry group developed their equity literacy skills. Those who self-identified as having less knowledge about justice and equity began to talk about themselves as allies, and take actions toward justice. For instance, in the last months of the school year, Katie and Quinn co-taught a justice-focused unit to Katie’s 6th grade English Language Arts class. They based the unit off of curricular materials that they found online, produced by the organization Teaching Tolerance. The unit focused on talking about structural inequities through examining stories. When describing their choice to teach the unit, Quinn said, “This group has given me more confidence to speak up about injustice
and issues” (Meeting Transcript, 5/3/17. Katie added, “This group has given me courage to have tough discussions with kids” (Meeting Transcript, 5/3/17).

Katie and Quinn co-taught the unit in an effort to support students to understand and respond to inequities, which is one of the key abilities Gorski (2014; 2015; 2017) identified for equity literate educators. Gorski (2017) associated the skill of “cultivating in students the ability to analyze bias and inequity in classroom materials” with the ability to respond to biases and inequities.

In another example, Jill, the school counselor, collaborated with Quinn, the school librarian, to equip the EMS faculty with activist and revisionist posters which centered non-dominant identities and histories. Jill had asked all school staff to do an “environmental scan” in their classrooms, and to think through who and what was represented on the walls. She prompted them to consider particular identities as they did the scan, asking themselves such questions as, “if you were a Latino student, would you see yourself represented?” (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17). She then asked teachers to make some shifts in representation in their classrooms. When she didn’t see much uptake on the part of the staff, she worked with Quinn to print out a bunch of options, bring them to the faculty meeting, and pass the pile of printouts around for faculty to write their name on which posters they wanted. The posters were not typical school posters that feature “celebrate diversity” and show hands in multiple skin tones; the posters sent messages of standing up in the name of justice, and reclaiming history. For example, one poster featured headshots of ten recognizable historical figures, including James Baldwin, Walt Whitman, and Eleanor Roosevelt, under the block lettered banner “Unfortunately, History Has Set the Record a Little Too Straight.”
Jill and Quinn’s work to shift representation in hallways and classrooms is indicative of two of the key abilities Gorski (2014; 2015; 2017) identified for equity literate educators, responding to and redressing biases and inequities. Gorski (2017) associated “fostering conversations with colleagues about equity concerns in their schools” with responding to inequities, and “teaching about sexism, poverty, racism, ableism, transphobia, and heterosexism” with redressing inequities. Making the posters available to teachers to hang on their walls promoted discussion about inequities among the staff, and opened space for questioning whitewashed, heteronormative curricular materials for staff and students alike.

These examples of the use of fiction as a mediational tool for equity literacy inspiring participants in the collaborative inquiry group to take action are two of many. I explore the participants’ justice-oriented actions in more depth in another manuscript (Kaplan, under review).

**Queer Reading for Equity Literacy: Significance**

Using a queer reading lens while talking about a queer book prompted educators to question norms in the book, in personal assumptions, in the school, and in society. In the focus conversation, the educators bridged the book discussion to real world issues of representation in books, author representation, and understandings of dominant ideology.

According to Gorski (2014; 2015; 2017), four key abilities for equity literate educators include the abilities to: (1) **recognize** even the subtlest biases and inequities; (2) **respond** to biases and inequities in the immediate term; (3) **redress** biases and inequities in the long term; and (4) **create and sustain** bias-free and equitable classrooms, schools, and institutional cultures. The queer novel *Every Day*, with its protagonist who pushes back on known identity categories, and a queer reading lens afforded the collaborative inquiry group with opportunities to center
equity literacy in the conversation. The majority of the equity literacy examples from the focus conversation fit squarely within Gorski’s first ability: the ability to recognize bias and inequity. However, over the course of the year, the collaborative inquiry group members exhibited all four equity literacy abilities. In another manuscript (author, 2018), I focus on participants’ actions linked to the identity of ally, which included the equity literacy abilities of responding to and redressing inequities, as well as working to create equitable classrooms.

In the focus conversation, every participant questioned the ways dominant ideologies impacted their perceptions, and that is what a queer lens can allow one to do. Through engaging with this lens and book, educators in the collaborative inquiry group utilized critical literacy skills, and exhibited deepening understandings of inequity. By the end of the *Every Day* discussion, educators were asking questions and making statements to challenge the ways that identity categories are often assumed, implied, or assigned; they considered the impacts on themselves and their students. This demonstrates equity literacy in that systems and ideology were being interrogated in the present tense, as current and pervasive containers for inequity. This differs from discussions of racism and sexism in the past tense, which treat injustices as historic problems that have already been solved. The educators in the inquiry group exhibited a deepening equity literacy, in that they spoke about injustice as present and connected to their actions, understandings, and surrounding structures.

Utilizing YA texts such as *Every Day* for learning queer theory can work in the service of educator PD that centers civic action and justice. Scholarship on young adult literature suggests YA texts can be mediational tools for young people and educators to learn and use critical and queer theories (Blackburn, 2011; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Garcia, 2013; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014). This study is an empirical example demonstrating that process in action.
Inservice educators can benefit from collaborative inquiry, and so can their students. Katie and Quinn, for instance, used their newfound confidence and courage to act. They sought out materials to bring equity literacy into their classrooms. The two educators worked together to implement new justice-focused curricula in Katie’s classroom, and Katie described that she would not have tried the new curricula without Quinn’s support. As the librarian, Quinn had the flexibility and freedom to collaborate in this way with Katie. There are many examples of cross-role collaboration that emerged from this inquiry group; I explore these in another manuscript (Author, 2018). As this study utilized a structure already established within the school (a weekly student late start), it shows promise for what can emerge through use of contract hours for PD, including the unique opportunity for cross-role collaboration.

This study adds to conversations about teacher PD by presenting how collaborative inquiry groups of inservice teachers can be fruitful settings for deepening educators’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the service of working toward a more just education system. The mediational tools utilized in this study allowed educators to center equity literacy in their discussions and exhibit key abilities of equity literate educators. Through starting with fiction, then bridging to action, educators were able to access theories of justice in a way that could begin coherent with their initial identity, and expand through the group’s progression.

**Conclusion**

Educators must look beyond celebrations of diversity to understand and address injustices in classrooms and communities. Developing equity literacy can be a crucial step for educators to work to become aware and active in the name of justice (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015), recognizing how policies and practices have maintained an inequitable and oppressive schooling system that is much bigger than individual acts of hate.
Reading can be a liberatory practice (Garcia, 2013). When reading moves beyond essentializing identities, it opens opportunities to analyze and discuss interactions and actions of characters in order to grow (Blackburn, 2011). Engaging with critical theories alongside YA literature can amplify the use of books as valuable tools even with the limitations inherent in them as authored, partial worlds. By considering and encountering the rules and structures of a written world, educators can learn to read worlds differently. When educators read all worlds as authored and partial, we can begin to question, challenge, and expand limited perspectives. In this process, we begin to form an equity literacy that is coherent with our beliefs, which shift as we read both words and worlds.

Educators can benefit from developing a queer reading lens, which can guide them to grapple with inequitable power dynamics that play out in public and private spaces within society, including classrooms. Educators can use a queer reading lens to disrupt dichotomous language and thinking, and work to create a space where these dichotomies can be openly discussed and critiqued by staff and students alike. Realizing justice involves becoming literate about the structures and systems that maintain inequity, in order to expose and move beyond them.

Using discussions of novels to develop a queer reading lens may allow educators and students to begin the process of becoming literate to the structures and systems that maintain inequity. By noticing and analyzing both the systems within the fictional world, and the relationships and interactions between fictional characters, educators can develop equity literacy. With intentional bridging from fiction to reality, educators can bring their queer reading lens to bear on their own interactions, and the systems operating around and throughout those interactions. Readers can engage in dialogues to examine “power structures that exist: both in
the book and in one’s own society” (Garcia, 2013, p.107). There is potential, then, to gain equity literacy through use of a queer reading lens.
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ARTICLE THREE

Educator as Ally: Developing Identity Resources Through Collaborative Inquiry

Educators’ understanding of their professional role and the role of education more broadly are intricately intertwined with their identities, shaping the decisions that they make (O’Connor, 2008). Teachers’ professional development, therefore, requires a focus on ontological learning - learning as becoming (Rogoff, 1995).

This paper examines collaborative inquiry as an approach to teacher identity. I examine how middle school educators in a collaborative inquiry group defined and developed practice-linked identities (Nasir & Hand, 2008) as allies to students. Through inquiring into the concept of allyship while reading and discussing young adult literature, educators across roles and divisions gained confidence and courage to engage in civic action. Educators formed conceptualizations of themselves as allies who act in solidarity with their students and colleagues against systems of oppression.

Literature Review

Justice-Oriented Stances for Educators

Justice-oriented stances or identities are necessary for contemporary educators to work toward a democratic vision of education. Such identities involve recognition of the injustices of the education system, and both a desire and tools to actively work against them. Zeichner & Flessner (2009) write that teachers must explicitly address issues of oppression and injustice that are linked to social class, race, gender, and other markers of difference that are embedded in the institutions and structures in a society, as well as in the minds of individuals. (p. 27)
This is a tall order for educators—to understand the current social order and actively work to dismantle it and build one anew (Counts, 1978/1932). Educators must demonstrate civic participation in their schools, apprenticing students to realize agency and power in order to shift society to become more just (Kumashiro, 2002).

Conceptualizations of teachers as instructors, managers, technicians, or disciplinarians maintain an oppressive status quo in the U.S. education system (Kumashiro, 2002). Scholars have advocated for justice-oriented stances for educators to take; for instance, teachers are conceptualized as civic agents (Mirra & Morrel, 2011), teacher activists (Montaño, et al., 2002), and allies (Clark, 2010).

Mirra and Morrell (2011) advocated for teachers to identify as civic agents. They researched impacts on teacher identity development for teachers who participated in a research council alongside students, and found that participation allowed teachers to gain identities connected to being part of a collective, producing work to create change, and engagement in the broader community. They concluded that the “teacher as civic agent” conceptualization shifts the role of teachers to “public intellectuals who help students connect what they learn in school to civic agency and empowerment outside of school” (p.419).

In a second example of scholarship on justice-oriented stances for educators, Montaño and colleagues (2002) studied the process of learning to become a teacher activist, examining the impact of preservice teachers’ participation in activist organizations in order to develop into teacher activists. They defined a teacher activist as a “critical educator who defines social justice as a call to social action” (p. 267). They found that the preservice teachers who participated in their study developed conceptualizations of social justice activism as work that occurs beyond the boundaries of individual classrooms, which contributes to broader social movements.
In a third example, Clark (2010) explored three stances that preservice students took toward teaching LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students: (1) a neutral or apolitical stance; (2) an anti-stance; and, (3) an ally stance. Through examining how these stances emerged in students’ written and verbal rhetoric, Clark found that a minority of preservice teachers took on an ally stance, in which the teachers “saw a need to respond to systems of oppression and to make their students aware of these systems” (p. 707). The stance that preservice teachers observed most often in classrooms and schools was a stance against overt oppression, or, “anti-work – interrupting and silencing hate-language” (p.711). Clark explained that while an ally stance was most promising, ally-models were scarce; therefore, preservice teachers had limited conceptualizations of teachers as allies.

These examples each underscore that this process is fundamentally about identity. Identity is a relevant construct because learning and decision-making are driven by how people understand themselves and their professional roles (O’Connor, 2008). Whether focused on civic agency, activism, or allyship, scholarship on justice-oriented stances for educators links how educators understand their professional role and personal identity to their potential for enacting change within an unjust system. For this study, I draw on sociocultural identity theory to shape my analysis, with a particular focus on the construct of “educator as ally.”

**Practice-linked Identities**

There are many identities linked to teaching practices. *Practice-linked identities* encompass “the identities that people come to take on, construct, and embrace that are linked to participation in particular social and cultural practices” (Nasir & Hand, 2008, p.145). Depending on the vision of local or federal administration, and a host of other contextual factors such as curricular materials, disciplinary practices, and colleagues’ stances, educators may access a
spectrum of identities: from instructors, managers, or disciplinarians, to care takers or co-learners (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

This study focuses on identity possibilities that support a democratic vision for education, one which calls for schools that support students to become active participants in society (Dewey, 1938). In this vision, educators have a vitally important role, since historically, the US education system has not worked to support the democratic ideal. Schools have instead been both inequitable and segregated, functioning as sorting mechanisms which both reflect and maintain a stratified society (Counts, 1978/1932).

Nasir and Hand (2008) called for research that focuses on the ways in which learning settings support the development of identities that increase opportunities for learning. This study examines the construction of a particular practice-linked identity—the identity of an ally. While Nasir and colleagues (2008; 2011) discussed practice-linked identities for preexisting practices and activities, such as playing dominos or basketball, the collaborative inquiry group was developing a new practice-linked identity, one that wasn’t already available within the school context. Through centering the concept of allyship, and making the identity of ally available through practices, tools, and rhetoric, educators worked to develop an understanding of systemic oppression and the work of educating as civic activism that must work against the status quo.

**Education as Allyship**

Allyship as a stance for teaching can be a fruitful frame. Kumashiro (2002) describes a vision of an anti-oppressive education model, which involves noticing, deconstructing, and pushing back on the oppressive structures that guide the current system. Kumashiro’s model provides a strong vision to work toward, however, before educators can engage in these transformative education practices, they have to orient to their work as civic agents for change.
Before they can orient in this way, they have to recognize the need for change. Alongside the need for change, educators must have an understanding of how societal structures play out in interpersonal interactions and individual mindsets. Educators need to consider their own biases, language, and actions in relation to their students. If educators orient to their work as youth allies, they can challenge their assumptions and develop asset-based approaches to interactions with youth.

Blackburn (2011) described allies as “people who advocate on behalf of any marginalized populations” (p.83), and Clark (2010) defined an ally stance as the willingness “to actively work to change other’s attitudes” (p.707). These definitions align with the conceptualization the inquiry group in this study developed—and because all students experience the deleterious effects of an unjust system, our group advocated that educators should strive to become allies (in unique and equitable ways) to all youth in the school, positioning students and teachers as accomplices who can work against systems of oppression.

The term ally is contested within racial justice and other activist circles. One common criticism is that people who claim the identity of ally are not willing to do the difficult and ongoing work of an ally (Smith, 2016); they “glorify [themselves] at the expense of the folks [they] claim to be an ally to” (McKenzie, 2016). In a viral blog post on the popular website Black Girl Dangerous, McKenzie (2016) expressed, “It’s not supposed to be a performance. It’s supposed to be a way of living your life that doesn’t reinforce the same oppressive behaviors you’re claiming to be against.” The objections about the misuse of the term ally are valid and important. The critiques call out people for prematurely wearing the label, or wearing the label in a self-congratulatory manner, yet they maintain support of the idea that allyship is an important and necessary component to working toward change.
Some scholars have advocated for expanding and shifting understandings of allyship. Patel (2011) makes a case for shifting binary conceptions of allyship, which define allies as people in positions of power who work to end systems that maintain that power. She describes a model of allyship that envisions all people as “individual agents of allyship” (p. 86). This view encourages avenues for fighting horizontal oppression, which Patel describes as “a manifestation of internalized oppression that is projected onto those with a similar social identity” (p. 82). While Patel focuses primarily on “targeted-to-targeted” horizontal oppression, she also nods to “advantaged-to-advantaged” horizontal oppression, which includes harassment and exclusion of individuals within dominant groups who “violate the ideology of the oppressive system” (p. 82).

Patel’s argument against binary conceptions of allyship is crucial to understanding the possibilities that can come from an educator as ally stance.

hooks’ (1994) call for collective liberation also challenges a binary view of identities and allyship:

Until we are all able to accept the interlocking, interdependent nature of systems of domination and recognize specific ways each system is maintained, we will continue to act in ways that undermine our individual quest for freedom and collective liberation struggle.

Collective liberation as a model for movements, organizing, and education toward justice has gained popularity in recent years. In these models, individuals across identities and levels of power are “united by an overall vision of a free society” (Crass, 2013, p. 17). Unlike binary conceptions of allyship, collective liberation allows for more complex understandings of intersecting identities, while focusing on a common vision of dismantling all systems of oppression.
Summary

In the service of working toward a just and equitable education system, teachers must be catalyzed to work toward social change (Clark, 2010; Kumashiro, 2002; Mirra & Morrell, 2011; Montaño, et al., 2002; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009). The majority of work on this topic focuses on efforts with pre-service educators or teachers joining organizations outside of schools; more research on in-service teacher ontological learning is needed, particularly within contract hours. Additionally, while rich theoretical work has been done on the need for educators to assume justice-oriented stances and identities, empirical examples of what that formation looks like are needed.

There is a need for teacher professional development that engages an alternative paradigm, which focuses on collectivism, relationships, and civic agency (Mirra & Morrell, 2011). There is also a need for in-service educators to take on an ally stance, and model allyship for preservice and early career educators (Clark, 2010). In this study, both of these needs are centered in the following research questions:

- How can a collaborative inquiry approach open possibilities for educators to develop and access practice-linked identities that support just education?
- What tools and practices support educators in becoming youth allies?

Methods

Design-based Research for Collaborative Inquiry

Collaborative inquiry embodies core elements of successful PD including active learning and collective participation (Desimone, 2009). I designed this inquiry group to also align with the core element of duration, in that we met consistently (twice per month) and over time (one school year) (ibid.). Blackburn (2011) identified “systematic and intentional teacher inquiry” as
a tool for educators to become allies, and Grossman et al. (2001) found that teachers who participate in critical inquiry can support their students to do the same.

Design-based research (DBR) is an approach to research used to develop and study practical innovations in situ (Schön, 1983). I drew on DBR principles and tools to develop and iterate on the design for the inquiry group (Fishman, et al., 2013). I facilitated the meetings, participated in the inquiry process and group discussions, and researched the teacher learning as a participant observer (Merriam, 2007). Our group met during school hours, twice per month over the course of one academic year.

Our collaborative inquiry group inquired into the concept of allyship through reading novels written for young adults and discussing them with shared theoretical lenses. I intentionally incorporated the YA novels and the theoretical lenses as mediational tools for learning in the inquiry group (Vygotsky, 1978); I discuss these mediational tools further in (Author, under review).

We inquired into the overarching research question “how can we better ally with youth?” as we discussed 6 YA novels. The novels were narrated in the first person; they portrayed diverse perspectives and experiences, and raised themes of power, privilege, and positionality (see table 6 for information on the books we read). We used field journals to record personal reactions, feelings, and observations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Protagonist Identities</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>He Forgot to Say Goodbye</em> by Benjamin Aliere Saenz</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, told in alternating first person narratives</td>
<td>Two male teens: one Mexican-American, one white</td>
<td>Privilege/Oppression; Race; Poverty/Wealth; Addiction, Absent Fathers, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fangirl: A Novel</em> by Rainbow Rowell</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, + a book within a book (Fan fiction, Fantasy)</td>
<td>Teen straight female, white Teen male, gay, white</td>
<td>Mental Health, Independence, Family, Divorce, Writing, School, Sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Every Day</em> by David Levithan</td>
<td>Magical Realism, Fantasy</td>
<td>Teen who wakes up in a different body every morning</td>
<td>Gender, Sexuality, Race, Ableism, Body Image, LGBT, Mental Health, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Beautiful Music for Ugly Children</em> by Kristin Cronn-Mills</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>Teen trans male, race unknown</td>
<td>Gender identity, Music, Youth Radio, Sexuality, Family, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’ll Give You The Sun</em> by Jandy Nelson</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, told in alternating first person narratives</td>
<td>Teen fraternal twins: straight female, gay male, white</td>
<td>Gender, Sexuality, Death, Loss, Mental Health, Family, LGBT, Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>More Happy Than Not</em> by Adam Silvera</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction + Fantasy</td>
<td>Teen male, queer, Latino</td>
<td>Mental Health, Suicide, Loss, Poverty, Race, Homophobia, LGBT, Friendship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twice per month we met to discuss perspectives and analysis based on the novel of the month, using lenses based on sociocultural and queer theories as guides to notice and categorize emergent patterns around allyship. We maintained a flexible and broad conceptualization of allyship, with room for each participant to create their own personal definition, that fit with their
identities and roles within the school. For instance, youth allyship might look different when it comes from a counselor, teacher, or librarian. And allyship looks different depending on each person’s distinct, intersecting identities.

After three initial meetings in which the group members shared about allies from our own youth experiences, chose books from a list of texts I pre-selected, and became familiar with cultural brokering and gatekeeping through self-reflective activities, we began to meet to discuss each book of the month. The conversations about the books were loosely structured; each participant would write down a question or two and we would read them aloud, then engage in an open dialogue, based on what came up for each person as they heard the list of questions. Reading shared texts allowed our team to have a shared reference point.

**Context of Design: Site and Participants**

Eastside Middle School (EMS) is located in Easton—a small suburban city in the Western United States. EMS is known for being one of the most diverse schools in its district: in terms of economics, race, and education classification (e.g., English Language Learner and Talented and Gifted). EMS has a weekly late-start day for students, in which two hours have been set-aside for teachers to engage in professional development. The time is intended to be used in two ways: for school-wide staff meetings, and for teachers to engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

**Using Contract Time to Meet: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at EMS.**

This study utilized the school’s PLC time for the collaborative inquiry meetings. Prior to the study, the Principal at EMS described the PLCs in a public letter on the school website as: “data-driven professional learning communities [that] focus on student achievement and school goals”
(Principal’s Message, 2016). However, there were both informal and formal discussions at EMS about how this time had not been optimally spent, specifically in the humanities departments.

One educator who served multiple roles at EMS explained that while the time was set aside “with the best intentions,” many educators throughout the school felt that the time wasn’t being “fully utilized.” She described a “growing frustration” with the meetings, explaining that they often became logistics meetings rather than collaborative endeavors. Another staff member in a leadership role within the school expressed frustration about the PLCs, “I don’t think anything has changed [for the better] because of this PLC time” (personal communication, July 14, 2016).

**Participants.** The cohort for the collaborative inquiry group was comprised of a mix of educators and other professionals at EMS, including a school counselor, the librarian, representatives from a non-profit who worked within the school, and several classroom teachers (see table 7 for descriptions of the participants and their roles within the school). Pseudonyms are used for all participants. At times when I present data that reveals particularly vulnerable content, I refrain from using pseudonyms and instead refer to “a participant” in order to maintain an additional level of anonymity for participants. Including me, the group had nine participants. All participants were women; six were in their 20s and 30s, and three were in their 40s and 50s. One participant identified as multiracial; all others identified as white. Two participants were queer (one identified as gay and the other identified as pansexual); all others were straight. Seven participants consistently attended all meetings in the fall semester. In the spring semester, one consistent participant no longer attended after completing student teaching and transitioning to another school, and another consistent participant stopped attending midway through the
spring semester when she went on maternity leave. Therefore, five participants consistently attended all meetings in the spring.
Table 7. Participants and their roles within the school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Primary Role at EMS</th>
<th>Subject Area/ Additional Roles Relevant to Group Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>School Librarian</td>
<td>AVID Coordinator, member of Instructional Leadership Team Co-organizer of the collaborative inquiry group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>English Language Arts and Drama Sponsor for junior honors society and student leadership program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Special Education Classroom for students with emotional challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Student Teacher</td>
<td>Special Education Classroom for students with emotional challenges, former Para-educator for the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Head of the school climate committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>English Language Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Director for the Visionary Foundation</td>
<td>Case management and individual support for a cohort of students, moves up with students through primary and secondary school Former classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrinne</td>
<td>Coordinator for the Visionary Foundation</td>
<td>Case management and individual support for a cohort of students, moves up with students through primary and secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Researcher from nearby university</td>
<td>Former ELA and ELL teacher Facilitator and co-organizer of the collaborative inquiry group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources

The collaborative inquiry group met twice per month, over the course of one academic year. I collected data from each of the 18 group meetings, including audio recordings, ethnographic field notes, and artifacts (i.e., photos and participant work). I also collected participant field journals and saved group emails. I conducted and audio recorded eight
individual interviews. In order to track my iterations and analysis throughout the process, I wrote field journal entries, analytic memos, and met with a mentor for monthly consultation about group process and iterative design.

**Interpretive Qualitative Analysis**

In parallel to the work of designing and facilitating the initiative, I employed interpretive qualitative fieldwork methods (Erickson, 1986) to document the inquiry initiative, examining how educators engaged with the mediational tools for learning about allyship, shifts in identity, actions toward allyship, and reflections on power, privilege, and relationships with students. I engaged in ongoing data analysis, producing monthly analytic memos and reflecting regularly in a field journal. Interpretive methods are useful when one is interested in the “meaning-perspectives of particular actors in particular events” (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). I focused on what the participants found useful or important in our inquiry work. Erickson (1986) describes the importance of considering “local meanings that happenings have for the people involved in them” (p. 121), specifically from the “actors’ point of view” (p. 119). Two other articles are forthcoming which utilize this data with distinct foci. Here I describe the analytic process for this article.

Initially, I used an inductive approach to data analysis to illuminate patterns and insights from my corpus of data. As I identified an exploratory coding scheme to structure the data, I began to code for references to actions that connected to allyship and justice. I found that these actions could be subcategorized in three overarching ways. The first subcategory contained references to actions that had to do with creating or manipulating material items, such as posters, books, or curricular materials. The second subcategory contained references to actions that individuals took on their own but attributed the ability to take them to the confidence they gained
from knowing the group “had their back,” as participants described. The third subcategory contained references to actions that required a shift in how the participants saw themselves positioned within their roles, or how they positioned their students. For example, one participant discussed thinking of her students as complex main characters of their own stories, and another described how she had developed confidence to talk to students about tough issues (Meeting Transcript, 5/3/17). As I sorted the references to actions into these categories, I began to see the connections to Nasir and Cooks (2009) categories of identity resources:

- material resources (the physical artifacts in the setting), relational resources (interpersonal connections to others in the setting), and ideational resources (ideas about oneself and one's relationship to and place in the practice and the world, as well as ideas about what is valued and what is good). (p.44)

I went back through my data, using Nasir and Cooks (2009) categories as a deductive coding scheme, in which I sorted the actions into those which contributed material, relational, and ideational resources to the identity we were constructing together, that of the *educator as ally* (see table 8 for identity resource coding scheme examples).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>“interpersonal connections to others in the setting” (Nasir &amp; Cooks, p. 44)</td>
<td>“I want to say, [...] moving back to something you said about all the personal stuff that comes up...that I appreciate just the safe space to say those things. And I am thinking of how to ensure that for kids, when they are saying [personal] things, that just it’s a safe space to say anything. And maybe it’s in how I would react to something they say that would help them understand that, or... something like that. But I think part of the great thing about this book club and how this kind of idea hits us all, is that it hits us all differently, and in unexpected ways, and what the rest of us say about it hits us in different ways as well, and I think that’s powerful” (Meeting Transcript, 10/12/16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideational</td>
<td>“ideas about oneself and one's relationship to and place in the practice and the world, as well as ideas about what is valued and what is good” (Nasir &amp; Cooks, p. 44)</td>
<td>“I thought a lot about teachers as gatekeepers, which the two characters [in <em>He Forgot to Say Goodbye</em>] described. [...] I really remember those popping out to me and thinking how often that is true and trying to think, when am I really being a good ally or cultural broker and when may I unintentionally be a gatekeeper?” (Meeting Transcript, 10/12/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>“physical artifacts in the setting” (Nasir &amp; Cooks, p. 44)</td>
<td>During our third meeting, we created maps of the institutional and social worlds that we inhabited as youth, and marked the cultural brokers and gatekeepers who supported the worlds’ integration or isolation from one another. We finished creating our maps, and engaged in a silent gallery walk to observe each other’s maps, before opening up a discussion about the activity. Hannah was the first to speak. She looked down at her map and said, “you know, the first meeting we had, you asked us to think about our own allies when we were youth. At first, I couldn’t come up with anyone, then I eventually came up with my grandma. But, as I look at my map, I realize my dad was one too, because he was the ‘broker’ for so many of my worlds” (Field Notes, 9/21/16). By opening up our definition of allyship through introducing the concept of cultural brokers through the mapping activity, Hannah was able to identify another ally to her younger self—her father (Analytic Memo, 10/18/16).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this analysis, I focus on in situ examples which emphasize performance of identity in practice as well as reflective meaning-making by the educators in the group. In our collaborative inquiry group meetings, the discussions often included reflecting and sharing thoughts and feelings about what participants had been doing and experiencing outside of meetings. I found these examples important, as they were shared in the group context, as part of the inquiry group’s work, rather than shared in an interview space, designed to feel more confidential and confessional. Moments when individual sharing opened avenues for collective meaning-making are at the center of my analysis.

**Developing a Practice-Linked Identity: Identity Resources for Educators as Youth Allies**

The educators who participated in the collaborative inquiry group drew on and contributed material, relational, and ideational resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009), which both defined and made available the practice-linked identity of educator as ally. While Nasir and colleagues (2008; 2011) discussed practice-linked identities for preexisting practices and activities, such as hurdling or basketball, the collaborative inquiry group was developing a new practice-linked identity, one that wasn’t already stable and available prior to our work together.

Patterns in the data exemplify how the educators drew on and developed identity resources to enact the practice-linked identity of educator as ally. Particular practices emerged within and alongside the work of the collaborative inquiry group. While, consistent with participatory research, I had planned for our group to design and execute a collective action at the end of the school year, the cases that I discuss in this section signify identity resources for the evolving educator as ally identity in ways that seem more compelling than the organized action
discussions that I facilitated, because of their personalized and emergent qualities. These cases emerged alongside our work, within and through our discussions. Here I discuss two cases that demonstrate how participants’ practices became linked to the developing identity as they took actions to work toward equity: (1) defying state structures to support students; (2) working to shift representation and resources (see table 9 for data sources for each case). For each of these cases, I discuss the associated material, ideational, and relational identity resources that educators drew on and generated. I then discuss key group practices that supported identity resource development.

Table 9. Data Sources for each Case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case 1: Defying state policies to support students</td>
<td>Field Journal Entry 2/8/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Transcript 2/8/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes 2/8/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Journal Entry 5/3/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Transcript 5/10/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case 2: Working to shift representation and resources</td>
<td>Field Journal Entry 1/4/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Transcript 1/10/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Notes 1/10/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Journal Entry 2/1/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field Journal Entry 4/19/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting transcript 5/10/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Practices that Supported Identity Resource Development</td>
<td>Meeting Transcript 10/5/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Transcript 10/12/16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 1: Defying State Policies to Support Students

Hannah, a special education teacher, drew on relational and ideational resources from the group to develop an identity as ally. She enacted this identity by taking action to challenge state testing policies and design an alternative opportunity for her students, who experience emotional
and behavioral challenges, to engage in community-based learning during testing week. During the alternative opportunity, Hannah and her students created a mural, which served as a material resource for students and faculty to identify as allies.

**Developing identity resources through collaborative inquiry.** Our inquiry group meets up on a snowy morning in February, right after the all-staff meeting has ended. I arrive to the library during the all-staff meeting; the lights are off and the staff is watching a video of a passionate speaker discussing the importance of addressing each student’s needs in order to support their learning. The speaker continues to repeat the phrase equity versus equality as he shares examples of teachers who chose to support their students in overcoming the challenges that kept them from learning. When the staff meeting ends, the women in the inquiry group gather on the other side of the library, greeting each other and grabbing a snack from the center of the high-top table (Field Journal Entry, 2/8/17).

As Hannah arrived at the meeting spot, she exclaimed, “I completely appreciated [the speaker’s] breakdown about equity. Because it’s always on the tip of my tongue, and I’ve never been able to figure out how to say, ‘equity isn’t about…’” (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17).

Quinn chimed in, “Being equal,” and Jill overlapped with Quinn, “Being the same.” (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17).

“Exactly!” Hannah gestured emphatically, “It’s about making sure every student crosses that finish line!” (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17).

The group members agreed, and several began to talk at once. Katie pulled up images on her phone to demonstrate what equity looks like, including the often-used illustration of three children of different heights trying to see over a fence into a baseball game (Field Notes, 2/8/17). I shared that I recently saw the same image, but with the fence tilted so that the tallest kid also
has the lowest amount of fence to see over, exemplifying how privilege is always at play, even when making considerations about equality. Quinn described a simulation she’d seen used to explain the concept, using a 10-dollar bill and a ladder. Hannah exclaimed:

The closest thing I’ve come to [in describing this issue to admin], is, ‘you wouldn’t ask our kids with wheel chairs to run a lap around the track without their wheelchair. So, how come you are asking my kid to do A, B, and C without their accommodation?’

(Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17)

Hannah shared that the speaker’s breakdown on equity versus equality was an argument she currently needed, because she had a student who had been in “hat jail” for the previous two weeks.

Hannah proceeded to tell us about her student who had been barred from his mainstream classes for two weeks, and forced to sit in her small pullout room all day, each day. He had had a bad haircut, and refused to take his hat off. The school has a no hat policy, so the administration told him he had to sit in the resource room until he took off his hat.

Hannah runs a small special education program that brings together students from across the district who qualify for specific supports for severe emotional and behavioral challenges. She felt this incident, which she referred to as “hat jail,” was an issue of the school not following through with the concept of equity versus equality, because her student’s disability temporarily kept him from being able to follow the particular rule of not wearing hats in school. She said:

Then I [asked the administration], ‘can we exempt this student from the past two weeks of work?’ And the admin that I talked to said, ‘no, he chose not to go to class, it wasn’t like he was sick.’ And I was he was like, ‘no, he was sick. His disability was impacting his ability to go to class!’ (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17)
The participants in the inquiry group expressed outrage when they heard about the hat jail incident, and supported Hannah’s take on the situation being inequitable (Field Notes, 2/8/17). Jill commented, “That was seriously their reaction? [The staff] just talked about equity versus equal, and then admin can’t let a kid wear a hat when the kid needs to wear a hat?” (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17). Others also commented on the hypocrisy of the timing of the equity versus equality discussion. The conversation turned to how to use the language that the administration brought to the staff meeting, by showing the video that morning, to stand up for what was right to the administration. Jill urged:

And now we have language that we can talk to admin about. Because it’s the same thing.

[…] With the girl who had cancer last year, we let her wear a hat! Equity is not equal!

We still have a stigma against mental illness, of course. (Meeting Transcript, 2/8/17)

Hannah agreed that she often had to try to convince others to accommodate her students’ “hidden disabilities.” She explained that the student who had been sent to “hat jail” was facing challenges that were invisible to outsiders, therefore he was not given an exemption. The student had been in school every day, ready to learn to the best of his ability, just while wearing a hat.

**Relational resources contribute to shifting ideas about allyship.** When Hannah shared with the inquiry group that hat jail seemed like an example of inequity, the group members supported her in naming the administration’s actions as inequity and injustice. Hannah drew on the relational resources of the group as she began to question other ways her students were losing opportunities to learn and develop, based on school structures, policies, and rules which did not support their particular needs.

Hannah reflected to the group that standardized testing weeks, which were coming up later in the spring, especially negatively impacted her students. The high pressure, little support,
and prolonged sitting in silence were difficult to sustain, and her students were often asked to sit in separate, isolated spaces from the rest of the students so as to not disturb others during testing. Because of this, many of Hannah’s students’ parents had opted their children out of testing in past instances, and no alternative option was available once opted out.

Throughout the meeting, the inquiry group supported Hannah as she considered the implications of this on her students, further developing the ideas around oppressive structures that impacted students with emotional and behavioral challenges. The students were not learning if they were sitting in isolation, they reasoned, and how often were Hannah’s students asked to sit in isolation? How often were they missing learning opportunities altogether? As Hannah thought about equity and allyship, she decided to change the opportunities afforded to her students.

**Drawing on an ideational resource to take action.** Hannah arranged a two-week experiential service-learning endeavor “out in the community” for her students, which culminated in the students creating a mural for the library. Hannah later reflected:

> My perspective on that whole scenario was that I definitely wouldn't have felt empowered enough to kind of buck the testing, and head out into the community with the kids, if I didn't run it by this group first and get a resounding, ‘Go for it.’ (Meeting Transcript, 5/10/17)

In her comment, Hannah relates that she drew on the relational resource of the group in order to feel confident that she could “buck the testing.” Hannah took a risk in choosing to create the alternative opportunity for her students rather than continue to support an oppressive practice of isolating her students for prolonged periods of time during state standardized testing. The relational resources of the inquiry group allowed Hannah to feel supported and justified in her
convictions. In the end, the school administrators were appreciative of the initiative that Hannah took—they saw it as a win-win solution to have general education students able to focus on the tests, and Hannah’s students able to engage in active learning outside of the school throughout the testing periods (Meeting Transcript, 5/10/17). However, prior to acting, it wasn’t clear that Hannah would be able to pursue this without facing repercussions from the school administration, the district, or the state.

Hannah chose to ally with her students even while being uncertain of what the consequences would be. Drawing on the ideational resource of being positioned as an ally who could choose to align herself with her students and make decisions to support their learning and experience over the directives of the state and the school, she utilized the identity resources the inquiry group generated in order to access the practice-linked identity of educator as ally.

**Building a material resource with students.** Upon entering the library, a large, colorful canvas mural catches your attention in the right side of your peripheral vision. Horizontal bands of color change from green to yellow to orange, spanning each color of the rainbow from top to bottom. The top layer, a bright forest green, has a message in Arabic. One of the middle layers, a fire truck red, has a message in Spanish. The bottom layer, a midnight blue, displays a message in English, “No matter who you are or where you’re from, we are glad you are here” (Field Journal Entry, 5/3/17).

As a culminating project for the community-based learning endeavor, Hannah partnered with Quinn, the school librarian, to create an opportunity for her students to make a mural for the school library. In one of our final meetings of the year, Quinn discussed the mural as an “unexpected outcome” of our inquiry group:
Like with Hannah and this mural, I feel like that wouldn't have happened without me feeling like I have a relationship with her because of this group, and so while I couldn't say that like, ‘We started this group so Hannah could make a mural for the library,’ what I can say, that is tangible, is that because we had this established relationship and ongoing conversations about this [inquiry into allyship] work, that made it possible for us to do something that involved her kids, and empowered them, and also allowed me to cover up this ugly spot [on the wall of the library] with something amazing that I feel so good about. (Meeting Transcript, 5/10/17)

Quinn referred to a material resource: the mural that Hannah’s students made for the library, based off the “Welcome Your Neighbors” lawn signs (see figure 2). Quinn identified the mural as an outcome of a relational resource, which was fostered through the collaborative inquiry group. In describing the project as something that “empowered” Hannah’s students, she acknowledged how the opportunity to engage in the project created an ideational resource for Hannah’s students, positioning them as allies and activists. The mural additionally created an ideational resource for others in the building, as it positioned all within the school community as allies who welcomed and supported individuals from all backgrounds.
The relational and ideational resources afforded to the collaborative inquiry group were passed on through Hannah as ideational and relational resources to her students, in that the students were positioned as allies and partners to the school and community during the service-learning week.
Case 2: Working to Shift Representation and Resources

Quinn, the school librarian, came to the collaborative inquiry group for support after experiencing an incident when a colleague expressed a homophobic response to a book cover. Quinn drew on the relational resource of the group to support her in developing the ideational resource that queer representation is needed in schools. She later put up an LGBTQ+ book display in the library, which supported an ideational resource that there were LGBTQ+ allies on staff. Educators in the collaborative inquiry group shared stories with the group about parents and faculty taking photos of the display to send to LGBTQ+ students to show support. Jill, the school counselor, described the inquiry group participants as her allies, naming the inquiry group as a relational resource for her personally, as a gay faculty member.

Drawing on a material resource to respond to problematic ideology. It’s January 2017, and the educators in the inquiry group express feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and rage as we prepare ourselves for Donald Trump’s presidential inauguration. Like many schools throughout the United States, EMS has experienced an increase in hate speech and actions throughout the year, and especially after the November 2016 election in which Trump lost the popular vote but won the presidency via the electoral college. Mary tells us that in the halls, she has seen white students telling Latino students to “go back to where you came from.” or worse. In discussing a climate survey the students took, Quinn tells us about the racist and sexist language an “overwhelming number of students” reported hearing on a daily basis. The educators in the inquiry group want to be able to battle these issues; they want EMS to be a place of support (Field Journal Entry, 1/4/17).

In the first weeks of the spring semester, a teacher came into the library and tossed a book at Quinn, as if it was something objectionable that he shouldn’t be touching. The book was titled
Two Boys Kissing (Levithan, 2013) and the cover was a photo of two adolescent males mid-kiss. Quinn later explained that the gesture made it seem like the teacher was saying, “‘Isn’t this disgusting!’ That’s not what he said, but kind of like, ‘obviously this is inappropriate’” (Meeting Transcript, 1/10/17).

When Quinn shared about the incident, she told us that she was caught off guard by the homophobic reaction of her colleague. However, she also explained that since she recognized the author of the book, because our group had just read another book by Levithan, she was able to respond to the colleague that she wanted the book. The group supported Quinn in that response—saying that it had still been a disruption to his assumption that homophobia was a normal response to the book cover. In this case, the novel Every Day (Levithan, 2011) had become a material resource that allowed Quinn to respond differently than she would have had she not read the book with the collaborative inquiry group.

After the group’s meeting ended that day, Quinn and I talked about other responses she could try when faced with similar incidents. I talked about how researchers have discussed that even simply carrying around a book with boys kissing on the cover can be an act of allyship (Blackburn, 2011). Quinn was excited by this idea (Field Notes, 1/10/17). Drawing on our relationship as a resource, Quinn was able to access an ideational resource of seeing herself as someone capable of allyship, as someone who had tools to actively disrupt heteronormativity and homophobia. Therefore, the discussion about the material resource led to discussions about how important it is to have material resources that support allyship, and that position the teachers as allies to youth.

**Drawing on material resources to form an ideational resource.** The library is a central hub for the school. It is the space that all staff meetings are held in; it houses computer
labs and materials that make it frequented by students and staff alike. As you walk into the
library, in direct line-of-sight at the front of the space is a display. Rainbow bubble letters
portray the words “sexuality,” “LBGTQ+,” and “Gender.” Handwritten quotes float beneath
and around the bubble letter signs. Below the signs, a small, modern bookshelf contains bright
colored books and magazines, their covers and titles featured prominently (Field Journal Entry,
4/19/17).

Quinn set up a display in the entrance to the library, featuring LGBTQ+ books (see
figure 3). Jill shared with the inquiry group that the display had sent a significant message of
support:

I had a parent take a picture of your display here, and it was a parent of a transgender
child, and I saw her taking several pictures of it. And then [another teacher] shared that
he has a best friend whose child identifies as transgender. He took a picture of it, and so
just the visual [resource matters]. (Meeting transcript 5/10/17)

Jill’s description shows how the display was a material resource that supported multiple groups
of people in acting as allies to queer people. For the parent of the incoming transgender student,
the display showed that the school staff and faculty acknowledged and cared for students with
queer and non-binary identities. The display provided a material backup to what Jill had told the
parent, that there were teachers and staff members who would support their child. In this
moment, the relational and material resources worked in tandem to provide assurance to a parent
that their child would be supported in this school.
For the colleague who took a picture of the display, it provided a material resource for him, a teacher who was not a participant in the collaborative inquiry group, to act as an ally to his friend and his friend’s child. In sending the picture, his friend could see that there were material resources that validated and supported his child, in a public middle school.
Jill explained that the resource was part of what created an ideational resource for her, the belief that there really were allies within the school.

Quinn reflected that the administration had also praised the library display, and told her that while they weren’t sure how parents and prospective students touring the school would react to the display, they noted that, “everybody seemed overwhelmingly pleased.” Quinn said the material resource, which allowed the administration to be positioned as allies to families and youth, was able to come to fruition because of the relational resources that the inquiry group provided. She expressed wanting to use the administrators’ positive reaction as an opening to a conversation about how important the collaborative inquiry group had been:

to me, that then is the start of the conversation where I say, ‘You know how this happened? It's not like, I didn't just all of a sudden do this. This happened because of this group. This group actually helped to make that happen.’ (Meeting transcript 5/10/17)

Katie backed up Quinn’s sentiments, saying that the resources that were gaining praise around the school were the product of “shaking up the PLCs” and piloting the collaborative inquiry group, reading young adult literature and investigating allyship to youth.

**Beyond the material: Confidence in Allies.** *Jill is one of those people who you can’t help but smile around. Constantly cracking jokes, the group regularly falls into laughing fits when Jill is on a roll. Jill is older than the rest of the group members, and is positioned as the wizened activist among us; she discusses politics and activism with ease and expertise and shares brief anecdotes about how she and her wife are experiencing the political climate of 2017 U.S. (Field Journal Entry, 2/1/17).*
At the final inquiry group meeting of the school year, Jill shared that an unexpected outcome of the group was that she felt personally supported by the group, and that she felt confident that the teachers would support students. She explained:

I just think when I have a parent come up to me and say, "I have a transgender child coming to your school," and I can feel actually pretty confident knowing that all of you, at the very least, and a few more, are totally on board, and will totally have that kid’s back, and it's not just one person or a policy, it's actually people who understand it. It's huge. (Meeting transcript 5/10/17)

Drawing on the relational resource that the inquiry group had developed into, Jill described the teachers as allies for herself and queer students, positioning the group members as allies and creating an ideational resource for them.

This positioning of the others as allies also reflected an ideational resource for Jill: her belief that there really were allies within the school. She explained:

... But like I said, for me it's really knowing that I can, in good conscience, say that this kid’s going to be okay, and I can hook them up with people who will take care of them. So, that feels really good, and I really appreciate that as a gay person, so that was big for me. Yeah. So, thank you, because it's still hard out there sometimes. (Meeting transcript 5/10/17)

In this moment, Jill repeated her appreciation for the group, and deliberately connected her own identity to why it felt important to have allies. Here she showed the group that in working to become allies to young people in the school, they had become allies to her. In multiple ways, Jill implied that this was a new experience for her. While she had worked as a school counselor for many years, she noted, “it’s still hard out there,” and later exclaimed:
It was really cool having allies for me around LGBTQ stuff, and Quinn putting up the thing in the library, and all of you being true allies is really powerful. And even though I'm an old lady at this point, it's so cool to see young [allies on staff]. (Meeting transcript 5/10/17)

When Jill emphatically described what it meant to her to have these “young allies,” it felt clear that she hadn’t expected, after all her years working in schools, to feel open, actionable support from staff members. Later she exclaimed, “I just feel so supported. Like, I could come to any one of you when stuff happens, so that's really cool” (Meeting transcript 5/10/17).

Key Practices that Supported Identity Resource Development

There are several key practices of the collaborative inquiry group that contributed to these identity resources becoming available and taken up. First, the group members expressed vulnerability through the book discussions. When discussing the books, participants shared anecdotes about their personal lives that related to the situations and experiences in the novels. For instance, during our first book discussion, one of the participants described how they related to the character Jake’s home life in He Forgot to Say Goodbye by Benjamin Aliere Saenz. Having read the book, the rest of us in the collaborative inquiry group knew that Jake lived in a household where he had all of the material comforts he could need or want, but none of the emotional supports children need from adults. The participant exclaimed:

I was in that household. I remember being left alone while my mom went out on dates, I remember my mom’s boyfriend pulling a gun on my friend, I remember what it felt like to realize I felt sorry for my mom, the way Jake felt sorry for his. (Meeting Transcript, 10/5/16)
This participant was able to speak through the book. She was able to open up and describe images and details about her life that she might not have been able to describe without the mediational tool of the book. This became a regular practice throughout the collaborative inquiry group meetings, expressing vulnerability through naming an experience of a character and describing how we related to that experience ourselves.

In addition to expressing vulnerability, the group engaged in a practice of support. There are many examples of what this support looked like in the cases presented above. After our first group discussion about a novel, in which participants expressed vulnerability, we engaged in a meta-discussion about how the first book discussion had felt to everyone in the group. As we went around the circle and shared, my turn arrived about half-way through the circle. I said:

One thing I’m wondering about is our group norms around vulnerability. I think it’s really wonderful that some of us have been vulnerable in the space, and shared personal and difficult things. I’m thinking about how with a good friend, you kind of know if they’re a friend to follow up with after they share, or if they’re a friend to definitely not follow up with, because they would rather move the conversation away from the vulnerable sharing. I’m thinking about how I’m not sure about this in our group—what our norms are around sharing and holding space for each other. (Meeting Transcript, 10/12/16)

The discussion continued around the table, and after the last person had shared, one of the participants stood up to leave for bus duty. Before she left, she leaned over the table and said,

I want to say […] moving back to something you [pointing at me] said about all the personal stuff that comes up… that I appreciate just the safe space to say those things. And I am thinking of how to ensure that for kids, when they are saying things, that just
it’s a safe space to say anything. And maybe it’s in how I would react to something they say that would help them understand that, or… something like that. But I think part of the great thing about this book club and how this kind of idea hits us all, is that it hits us all differently, and in unexpected ways, and what the rest of us say about it hits us in different ways as well, and I think that’s powerful. (Meeting Transcript, 10/12/16)

As this participant proclaimed how our space felt like a safe space to share, the group agreed, nodding and expressing verbal assent. The practice of holding a safe space for one another, and of supporting one another in both sharing vulnerable experiences and problem-solving job-related challenges continued to deepen as we developed relationships and engaged in shared inquiry.

The practice of coming together as a support network, sharing personal hopes, dreams, fears, and challenges was key to developing identity resources for allyship. Our group talked about the things that mattered most to us, and the things that we couldn’t stop thinking about because they were so frustrating. We shared a common experience of reading justice-oriented novels that pushed our discussions to be justice-oriented. We felt inspired by the books, each other, and the knowledge that we had a group of people in our corner when we tried something new. One day Hannah said, “Don’t we teach all kids?” and Quinn wrote it down, then repeated it back to me several times in a later conversation, speaking with conviction, when she was describing that her role was to ally with all students. This was an additional practice that emerged throughout our inquiry together, sharing our mottos, our bottom lines with one another to expand both our visions and our ability to work toward them. Our group concluded that for us, these were the practices needed to bring about action, acts of allyship, and long-term commitment to justice.
Discussion

The examples presented each show the development of material, ideational, and relational resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2011) that I take as evidence of the practice-linked identity (Nasir & Hand, 2008) of educator as ally. It is important to note that the same material resources could have appeared in a school without the development of the practice-linked identity. For instance, the principal could have asked Quinn to have student aides create a welcome mural. Likewise, a speaker on promoting LGBTQ+ inclusivity could have explained to Quinn that putting up a book display of LGBTQ+ books would be a supportive act. These material resources might have still made a significant impact on students and families as they encountered them. However, no one told these educators to do these things.

The material resources featured in the examples were created because of the relational resources of the collaborative inquiry group, and ideational resources of the group participants seeing that they could be allies to youth in the school, through working against systems of oppression and silence. The educators in the group developed the material resources as demonstrations of the larger practice-linked identities they were forming. They were enacting what Rogoff (1995) describes as appropriation, “transform[ing] their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation” (p. 149). The participants appropriated the concepts and practices from the inquiry group discussions into other contexts, demonstrating a shift in their participation in collaborative inquiry and allyship.

There are many other examples from the collaborative inquiry group that I could have discussed in order to show the same phenomenon of the practice-linked identity educator as ally. For instance, Katie and Quinn co-taught a unit on justice to Katie’s sixth grade English Language Arts class. Katie said she would not have had the “confidence or courage” to tackle the tough
issues discussed in the unit, had she not been in the ongoing conversation about allyship within
the inquiry group. In another example, Natalie brought a concern to the group that no Students
of Color had turned in applications for a free trip to a Visionary Foundation national conference,
which she said students often described as a life-changing event. While the majority of the
students who were eligible to attend were students of color, only white students had applied.
Natalie was able to use the relational resources of the group to problem solve and ask for
nominations and letters of recommendation for students to get to attend. As these and the
aforementioned examples demonstrate, as the educators in the inquiry group began to orient
toward their work as allyship, and to see themselves as allies, resources for themselves and
others to take civic action began to multiply.

Conclusion

It is important to consider what practice-linked identities are available to educators within
current professional development models. Models that reduce the role of a teacher to that of a
 technician or manager narrow the possibilities and purpose of education (Kumashiro, 2002).
Models such as the collaborative inquiry group discussed in this paper, which encourage
deliberation, complex problem solving, and practices that center inspiration and support, should
be examined as a step toward realizing democratic ideals for education.

Further consideration of how learning contexts can be designed to afford particular
practice-linked identities is needed. Designing teacher professional development to purposefully
include practice-linked identities connected to allyship and justice may be a promising avenue
for DBR. If educator as ally is an identity that can bridge educators from thinking about
relationships to thinking about justice, then further scholarship is needed to see how this
practice-linked identity can be made available within more school contexts. Whereas I used
Nasir and colleagues’ (2008; 2009) frameworks to engage in analysis of practice-linked identity resources, a promising avenue for additional study would be to engage design-based research to design a learning context with attention to their framework from the start.

As this study utilized a structure already established within the school (a weekly student late start), it shows promise for what can emerge through use of contract hours for PD, including the unique opportunity for cross-role collaboration. Additionally, this study contributes to research on wraparound supports (Eber, Sugai, Smith & Scott, 2002), and positive school culture in that the partnerships across rolls within the school played an instrumental role in creating the resources that educators contributed to the identity of ally, and in making that identity available school-wide.
Article Three References


CONCLUSION

The three articles in this dissertation explored in-service educator learning through participatory approaches, integrating sociocultural learning theories and the political commitments of participatory action research (PAR) to increase equity in education. In this final chapter, I give a concise summary of the key findings of each article, discuss three takeaways from my body of work, consider limitations of participatory approaches, and describe implications for future research.

In the first article, “Going on a Statewide Listening Tour: Involving Education Leaders in the Process of Research to Enhance the Practical Value of Qualitative Research,” my colleagues and I illustrated how researchers can design for practitioners’ process use by involving education leaders in the process of conducting qualitative research. We found that science leaders became more engaged with research findings from their own collaborative research projects than from other sources, and that engaging in participatory research enhanced the practical value of research for the practitioners. In the second article, “From Fiction to Action: Queer Reading for Educator Equity Literacy,” I reported how educators developed a queer reading lens through their discussions of young adult (YA) novels; data from a discussion about the popular YA novel Every Day by David Levithan showed how they engaged in a process of becoming literate to the structures and systems that maintain inequity. And in the third article, “Educator as ally: Developing identity resources through collaborative inquiry,” I shared illustrative cases which demonstrated how educators began to shift their actions as their identities expanded, through allying with students and colleagues.
Takeaways from the Body of Work

Across these three articles, the process of collaborative inquiry was engaging and rich professional development for educators. Three takeaways from this body of work are significant to understanding affordances of participatory approaches to educator learning. First, when practitioners engage in inquiry alongside researchers, their contribution to the profession and field of education is strengthened. Second, when mediational tools are intentionally brought into collaborative inquiry approaches, the object of inquiry becomes important to the participants. Third, equity and justice can be the goals for all professional development endeavors; collaborative inquiry into any topic can maintain an aim toward equity.

Takeaway 1: Professionalization of Practitioners through Participatory Work

The first takeaway involves the professionalization of practitioners when they engage in participatory work with researchers. Shulman (1998) looked to history and philosophy to assert what it means to engage in a profession. He drew on Dewey’s works to make a case for technical and moral aspects to professionalization, advocating that teachers should not be expected to immediately become skilled practitioners, rather, they should become “reflective professionals disposed to examine their teaching and their students' learning critically” (p. 514). Shulman’s work on what it means to be a reflective professional within a profession is useful for understanding one of the consistent outcomes I’ve seen across participatory approaches to educator learning: the professionalization of participating practitioners. Shulman outlined six attributes of a profession: “service, theory, practice, judgment, learning from experience, and community” (p. 521). Participants engaged in each of these attributes during participatory PD.

Participatory approaches establish practices of a profession. The first attribute Shulman outlined, service, involves the “obligations of service to others, as in a ‘calling’” (Shulman,
Inquiry-based PD with an aim toward justice can support Shulman’s first attribute of a profession, in that the question for investigation can frame the work as being in service to a more just world, aligning the work with the calling teachers might already feel, or framing the work as a calling for those who don’t already see their work in such a way.

Next, participatory approaches which center inquiry usually engage participants in some kind of systematic practice that promotes thinking and understanding “of a scholarly or theoretical kind” (ibid.), the second of Shulman’s attributes to a profession. For instance, the state science leaders engaged in a scholarly practices of data collection and analysis. Simultaneously, the middle school educators also engaged in scholarly practices, in the way they used sociocultural and queer theories as lenses on the fictional texts they read and discussed.

Third, educators are already situated within a “domain of skilled performance or practice” (ibid.), which is the next attribute. Unfortunately, some forms of standardized curricular products reduce the expectation for skilled practice. On the other hand, participatory approaches position educators as being situated within such a domain.

Fourth, educators’ work requires them to “exercise judgment under conditions of unavoidable uncertainty” (Shulman, 1998, p. 516) regularly, which is the next attribute to a profession. While standardized curricular products attempt to replace the need for teachers to make judgements and choices on their own, participatory approaches purposefully bring “conditions of unavoidable uncertainty” into the inquiry space. For instance, the process of data analysis is open to interpretation, and state science leaders in study one had to grapple with the challenges of the process. In study two, the middle school educators inquired into a question that had no clear answers. As I discussed in article three, when Hannah decided to change the opportunities for her students during testing week, she was making judgments in the face of
uncertainty (attribute four). There were no guarantees that the administration would support her choice, yet she took the action because she felt the equity goals of the school were on her side, and it was the right thing to do for her students.

Additionally, participatory practices involve learning through praxis, connecting theory to action through reflection, which aligns with Shulman’s (1998) fifth attribute, “the need for learning from experience as theory and practice interact” (p. 516). An example of learning through praxis is when, in article one, state science leaders took their theoretical learning from sessions with the research practice partnership (RPP), and connected that theory to the data patterns they surfaced from their focus groups in order to make changes in their states. They reported a desire to redesign the PD for their state science teachers to focus on equity in science education, and as the RPP has progressed, many have engaged in making these changes.

Finally, participatory approaches such as collaborative inquiry groups become a “professional community” which share and create collective knowledge, exemplifying Shulman’s (1998) sixth and final attribute. For instance, in article one, the state teams worked to “aggregate knowledge” (p. 516), as they engaged in qualitative analysis activities. In study two, the middle school inquiry team shared thoughts and analysis on the fictional texts, but also on actions and choices of allyship. Group members shared additional non-fiction texts which related to our discussions, and brought in problems of practice and challenges from outside the scope of my facilitation to discuss with the group. In this way, the inquiry group became a “professional community.”

Participatory approaches engage educators in Shulman’s (1998) six practices of a profession, involving: “service, theory, practice, judgment, learning from experience, and community” (p. 521). This is significant, because it indicates that participatory approaches to
PD may shift and strengthen the role educators are able and expected to take on in their work. Unlike forms of PD that can narrow the role of educating to that of a technician or manager, participatory approaches may widen the role of educating to that of a professional, someone who contributes to and shapes the profession.

**Takeaway 2: Objects of Inquiry Become Important to Participants**

The second takeaway involves how participants spoke about the object of their inquiry after engaging in participatory practices. In article two, I discussed the intentional use of mediational tools with the middle school collaborative inquiry group: queer YA fiction texts and two theoretical lenses, based on sociocultural and queer theories. In article one, I discussed qualitative data, specifically focus group transcripts, as a mediational tool for the state science leaders. In both studies, participants made comparative judgments about the object of inquiry, or the mediational tool, as more useful than others they had experienced. Having the vantage point of seeing this occur across cases made me wonder if the process of the participatory approach is what allowed the object of inquiry to feel significant to participants, rather than the object itself.

In study one, state science leaders made comparative judgments about qualitative data as “more nuanced” and “more real” than quantitative data. Leaders also made comparative judgements about qualitative research and focus groups surfacing more useful understandings than other group conversations they engaged in with stakeholders. These comparative judgements are explained in more detail in article one.

In study two, middle school educators made comparative judgements about young adult fiction as “more valuable” and “more authentic” than education research articles and books (meeting transcript, 5/3/17). One participant explained that a colleague of hers was interested in joining the next instantiation of the collaborative inquiry group for the following school year,
and that they would “also want to read professional books […] like more about grit and stuff” (meeting transcript, 5/3/17). The participant explained that her own reaction surprised her, which was “‘Ehhh, I’m so over that!’” She went on to explain:

I found this to be so much more valuable in terms of taking what I’ve read, and bringing it into my work, than something about grit from a professor. And I would definitely only read fiction again, for that reason. I mean supplemental articles, sure, but I would stick to fiction. (meeting transcript, 5/3/17)

Another participant joined the line of thinking, comparing fiction to “something about grit from a professor.” She exclaimed:

There’s no face to that, no personality, no family story, no emotion, it just doesn’t have that humanity that fiction brings to the work. Literally, I’ve watched kids walk down the hallway and I’ve thought, what’s going on for you?

While the participants made comparative judgements about fiction being more useful than nonfiction, their justifications raise the question of whether the element that is most important is the mediational tool itself, or rather, the process of collaborative inquiry. Examining these participants’ comments may reveal the importance of the collaborative inquiry process as the vehicle which imparts meaning, more than the tool itself.

First, the comment, “I found this to be so much more valuable in terms of taking what I’ve read and bringing it into my work” implies that the act of engaging in discussions that connected the text to practical applications within her role was important to the participant. Had we done collaborative inquiry into a single topic and read both fiction and non-fiction, that comparative distinction privileging fiction texts might not have surfaced.
Second, a key component of the process of inquiry involves praxis. The justification for using YA fiction in the following comment could be read as an endorsement for the process of praxis: “Literally, I’ve watched kids walk down the hallway and I’ve thought, what’s going on for you?” The participant described taking the fiction texts we used, applying the takeaways from the book discussion to their thinking as they observed their students, and then reflecting on how the process informed how they now saw their students. If we had used nonfiction in the group, and had emphasized praxis, similar sentiments might have been shared.

Third, the comment “There’s no face to that, no personality, no family story, no emotion, it just doesn’t have that humanity that fiction brings to that work” could be seen as a justification that the fiction texts really were significant to the work. On the other hand, the same comment could be read as a list of attributes to look for in both fiction and non-fiction texts for PD. Texts by researchers that utilize personal, emotional, relatable storytelling might feel as impactful to educators inquiring into them through participatory approaches as the fiction texts felt to the inquiry group participants. Additionally, texts that feel otherwise unrelatable and dry can become personal and enlivened through intentional framing and entry points into discussion.

In the two studies that comprise this body of work, educators spoke about the object of inquiry, or the mediational tools used for the inquiry process, as more useful than comparative counterparts. As I make sense of this theme across cases, I suspect it is an important finding that participants elevated the importance of the object of study, because it leads me to believe that intentional use of other tools in participatory approaches can lead to experiences of those tools as important as well. This is significant, because it indicates that participatory approaches to PD may position the object of study as meaningful. The process of collaborative inquiry allows
participants to take a deep dive into the tool, and to apply their takeaways to work they do in schools, districts, and states.

**Takeaway 3: Equity and Justice can be Goals for all Professional Development**

The third takeaway involves the goals of PD using participatory approaches. Collaborative inquiry into any topic can maintain an aim toward equity. While there are countless options for premises or starting points for collaborative inquiry, equity and justice can and should be purposefully centered in the design of all participatory approaches to PD. Intentional use of mediational tools, including objects of inquiry, facilitation prompts, and overarching research questions can support entry points into making the work center equity.

In study one, I used my experience guiding participatory data analysis as an entry point to support centering equity. I designed the prompts for the participatory data analysis session to make equity the focus. As state teams engaged in collaborative inquiry into their focus group transcript data, I framed the analysis, asking the teams to use the following questions to guide their inquiry:

- How are people envisioning equity and equitable science instruction in your state?

- What supports do people think are important for promoting equitable science instruction?

Both questions led the state leaders to look for patterns in how the participants from their focus groups envisioned equity and supports for equity. After they surfaced these patterns, I asked the state teams to look back at the *Framework* section on equitable science instruction, to consider the implications of the preliminary claims, and to discuss needs and assets for promoting equitable science instruction in their state. These questions centered equity in the analysis and the implications.
Had I started the PD with a workshop or talk about equity, or even just an invitation to discuss equitable science instruction, the topic may have felt distant or disconnected from the state science leaders’ work. By having the participants inquire into data they collected from their own constituents, and reference the *Framework*, a tool which they regularly encountered in their work, science leaders were able to gain entry into the topic of equity as something they felt personally connected to and able to work toward. Using a participatory approach enabled state leaders to feel personally invested in working to center equity in PD for science educators within their states.

In study two, I used my experience guiding literature discussions (as an English teacher) and my knowledge of contemporary queer young adult literature (as an active fan), to guide our collaborative inquiry group to center equity in our discussions. Rather than starting with an equity and justice focus, I initially framed the collaborative inquiry group with the overarching question:

- How can educators be allies to youth?

While the term ally implies equity and justice, the group formed more around the idea of thinking about improving relationships with students. In our first several sessions, we talked about allyship by thinking about our own allies when we were young, and their actions and inactions. We mapped our own cultural brokers and gatekeepers from adolescence. In this way, I had the participants enter the idea of allyship through their own experiences. In order to bring equity into the group as the goal and focus, I chose fictional texts that featured protagonists with intersectional identities, engaged in plots that raised questions of inequities and justice. Thus, as we discussed each book, new equity issues were raised, and the lens of considering who were cultural brokers and gatekeepers in the books allowed the concept of allyship to become more
focused on equity. Additionally, the queer reading lens allowed us to center equity literacy, which I focus on in detail in article two.

In both studies, educators engaged in collaborative inquiry into texts (i.e., transcript data and queer YA novels) with an aim toward equity. This is significant, because it indicates that initial entry points into collaborative inquiry can center a set of practices or concepts familiar to the facilitator or participants, before mediational tools shift the practices to center equity. Grounding the inquiry with the three levels of authenticity specified by Polman (2012, 2015), facilitators of participatory approaches to educator learning may be able to center equity through intentional use of mediational tools (e.g., objects of inquiry, facilitation prompts, and overarching research questions).

Equity and justice should always be the goals for educator professional development, and participatory approaches to educator learning can center these goals. In article one, I discussed participatory research as a generative method for engaging practitioners in work toward equity. In article two I discussed equity literacy as a useful framework, and queer reading as a promising tool for equity literacy. In article three I discussed educator as ally as a fruitful practice-linked identity for justice-oriented action. Collaborative inquiry can leverage any topic to work toward equity.

**Implications for Future Work**

There are several limitations and unexplored themes in this body of work that have implications for my future work as a scholar.

In both studies, I designed and facilitated the processes used within the learning environment. By connecting the participatory methods I used with a large group of state science leaders to those I used with a small group of middle school educators, my intention was to
demonstrate the power of participatory work on multiple planes, and the ways in which these approaches can support working toward equity within educator professional development. However, my role in the studies is also a limitation, as it is a challenge to scaling.

What will it take to have more participatory approaches to educator learning in schools and districts? First, it will take skilled facilitators on the district and building levels. The knowledge, skills, and disposition for facilitating participatory approaches can be learned through participating in collaborative inquiry and apprenticing with an experienced facilitator. In future work, I aim to design collaborative inquiry with an additional goal to train facilitators. This could be a fruitful focus for a research practice partnership (RPP), to engage educators and researchers in participatory research, with the secondary goal of training facilitators to design and lead participatory approaches in schools.

I aim to investigate the process, practices, and tools of a dual-purpose collaborative inquiry group in which participants engage in participatory work for one academic year, then pair up to facilitate collaborative inquiry groups within their school the following academic year. In terms of building level-change, I believe this model could support large-scale change in how a school approaches professional development and in educator learning overall. I would like to explore this process within a school PD model where inservice contract hours are set aside for teacher PD, like the weekly late-start design in study two. In this context, I plan to recruit educators from across roles within a school to participate in a dual-purpose collaborative inquiry group in order to study the following research question:

- What are the practices, tools, beliefs, values, and norms that are needed to support participatory approaches to educator learning in our school, with an aim toward equity and justice?
I plan to facilitate this inquiry group, as they aim to learn about and create the conditions needed to support scaling this work for a larger portion of the staff the following year.

A limitation within my three-article dissertation is the lack of specifics on the practices and tools needed to establish distributed expertise among collaborating participants. My colleagues and I describe some of the structures, tools, and talk moves we use to establish distributed expertise within collaborative groups in other pieces (e.g., Arreola Peña et al., 2015; Kaplan & Potvin, 2017; Potvin, Kaplan, Boardman, & Polman, 2017; Jordan & Kaplan, 2013).

Another line of inquiry that I aim to pursue in future work is around educator enthusiasm and passion. The middle school educator collaborative inquiry group was a joyful space where educators felt supported, inspired, and authentically engaged. Drawing on Vygotsky’s (1978) conceptualization of the role of the more knowledgeable other (MKO) in supporting learners to grow within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), I wonder about the role of a more enthusiastic other in supporting learners to develop passion around new concepts, tools, and approaches to learning.

Additionally, I plan to examine the data from the middle school educator collaborative inquiry group further to explore the role the queer YA novels played in encouraging understandings of intracultural diversity and intersectional identities. Another theme within this data that I plan to track is the way time for PD was constrained by a myriad of forces. Even with the progressive weekly late start structure for educator PD, the “sacred time” (personal communication, May 30, 2016) set aside for PD was rarely uninterrupted and often minimized by other competing institutional needs.

As a field, sociocultural researchers in the learning sciences have gained many valuable insights into learning, especially in out-of-school spaces. Interdisciplinary work across divisions
within education research is needed in order to bring discussions of learning into policy spaces, teacher education, and public-school settings, and vice versa. Insights about learning from out of school settings become more impactful when they are brought into work which has the potential to influence the education system through policy, teacher education, and professional development. Likewise, learning scientists have much to gain from researchers and practitioners who are more current with the education policy landscape and the impact this has on learning environments, teachers, and students. While sociocultural learning theories surfaced from social design experiments, out-of-school settings, and youth activism groups have the potential to influence schools, that potential is limited when such theories and their applications are not tried and tested within the constraints of the system, when they are not aiming to change the system, or when they only examine contexts outside the system. My commitments as a researcher include continuing to work side-by-side with inservice educators, in their buildings, engaging as professionals who structure the profession together. I think change happens starting with individuals and relationships, and that rather engage in “mile wide inch deep” work of standardization, my work must center “inch wide mile deep” endeavors, or, “work that prioritizes depth […] and understands that meaningful scale depends on deep transformative work, rather than surface widespread work” (Brown, 2017, p. 20). Participatory approaches to educator learning can support learning, agency, and action, and shift the focus of PD to incorporate collaboration, inquiry, and identity with an aim toward equity; together, these are essential components to shape a just education system and society.
Conclusion References


Polman, J. L. (2015, October 17) What’s authentic, more or less? [Blog post]. Retrieved from composeourworld.org

Combined References

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Meyer, E. J. (2007). "But I'm Not Gay": What Straight Teachers Need to Know about Queer Theory. *Queering Straight Teachers: Discourse and Identity in Education*


Polman, J. L. (2015, October 17) What’s authentic, more or less? [Blog post]. Retrieved from composeourworld.org


Appendix

Research Design for Middle School Inquiry Group

Design-based research is an approach to research used to develop and study practical innovations in situ (Schön, 1983). I drew on design-based research principles and tools as I developed and iterated on the design for the collaborative inquiry group. The group was conducted in partnership with Eastside Middle School (pseudonyms are used for all places and people). This study engaged educators in participatory action research in order to explore and develop an orientation toward allyship and civic agency as central to the work of educating.

Several years ago, EMS redesigned its professional development strategy, moving from a top-down approach to a professional learning community (PLC) method in which teachers learn from one another. Eastside instituted a weekly late-start day for students, to allow teachers to engage in PLCs. While this structure supports teacher collaboration, and the STEM departments had been using this structure in a way that teachers recognized as productive and supportive, Eastside teachers in the humanities departments described their PLC time as being used to plan or grade individually, or for department meetings which focused on logistics, rather than to engage in constructive collaboration to improve their practice. This collaborative inquiry group served as a pilot alternative structure for the PLC timeslot for the 2016-2017 school year. The team of educator-researchers on this pilot investigated the following research question: What tools and practices support teachers in becoming youth allies? I refer to this study as the middle school collaborative inquiry group.

In parallel to the work of designing and facilitating the initiative, I employed qualitative research methods to document the initiative. I refer to this study as the “Ethnography of the collaborative inquiry group.” My primary research questions were: (a) What does the process of
inquiry look like in a PAR approach to teacher learning? and (b) In what ways do educators’ professional identities (interpretation of their role as educators) shift over the course of the project? I kept a qualitative record of the team’s process, and I drew on Erickson’s (1986) description of Interpretive Research methods for research on teaching. In this appendix, consistent with DBR, I introduce a high-level conjecture which I aimed to investigate through the ethnographic study of our team of educator-researchers as we piloted and iterated on this design for a collaborative inquiry group. I then explain how I drew on the PAR inquiry process to design the first iteration of the initiative structure. I subsequently present the context of the design, describe the design tools and activity structures for collaborative inquiry and analysis, and clarify the methods used for data collection and analysis.

**Conjecture for Investigation**

This design engaged an inquiry process based on the philosophical commitments of PAR, in which a cohort of educator-researchers worked to identify and utilize tools and practices to develop as youth allies. I used a conjecture map (see Figure 1), a tool from design-based research, to illuminate my preliminary ideas about how to support participants’ learning, the collaborative activities that scaffolded learning, and desired outcomes (Sandoval, 2014). The high-level conjecture for this study was: through reading and discussing YA novels, and participating in a PAR process, educators can orient toward their work as youth allies and civic agents.

The team of educator-researchers used two primary tools: young adult novels and field journals. The team read six young adult novels throughout the academic year. We had planned to read seven books, but were unable to get to the final book. We encountered challenges to our plan during the spring semester, with testing schedules and other barriers. We agreed that we
might plan to read one less novel in the Spring semester for future endeavors, in order to adjust
for the busy spring schedule. The novels we read were written in the first person; they portrayed
diverse teen perspectives and experiences, and raised themes of power, privilege, and
positionality. The team used field journals to record personal reactions, feelings, and
observations that arose while reading, planning, teaching, and interacting with students.

However, it is important to note that field journals were not used consistently across individuals
or time. The task structure for our meetings involved collaborative inquiry and analysis, based
on a PAR approach. I introduced this structure to the team, which included using three lenses to
guide us to notice and categorize emergent patterns: (a) identify cultural brokers and gatekeepers
(Cooper, 2011); (b) surface dichotomies and unspoken rules (Blackburn, 2011); and (c)
recognize community cultural wealth and opportunities to value it (Yosso, 2005). We ended up
only using two of the lenses in our work: (a) identify cultural brokers and gatekeepers (Cooper,
2011); (b) surface dichotomies and unspoken rules (Blackburn, 2011). The first lens extended
through all of our discussions and was regularly referred to as one of the “most important” parts
of our work by participants. I did not focus on the use and impact of this lens within the
dissertation articles; this is important future work to attend to. The second lens was also
impactful, and I wrote about the use of that lens in article two of the dissertation.

I designed this initiative with a specific mediating process for the team to engage in data
collection and analysis. In this process, educator-researchers would read the young adult novel
of the month and keep a field journal throughout the month. At the team meeting, the team
would engage in collaborative analysis using the activity structure, develop a consensus
conclusion based on the analysis, and choose an action to commit to trying. Educator-
researchers would then implement the action over the following month, documenting their observations about the action in their field journal as they read the next young adult novel.

Through use of the aforementioned tools, activity structure, and mediating processes, I hoped to see evidence of two primary outcomes: (a) educators’ conceptualizations of their identities would expand to include an orientation toward allyship and civic agency; and (b) educators would feel more equipped to foster positive relationships with all students, and could identify tools and practices that support youth allyship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conjecture</th>
<th>Embodiment</th>
<th>Mediating Processes</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Through reading and discussing YA novels, and participating in a PAR process, educators can orient toward their work as youth allies and civic agents</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tools</strong></td>
<td><strong>Read Young Adult Literature</strong></td>
<td><strong>Educators’ conceptualizations of their identities expand to include an orientation toward allyship and civic agency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Structures</strong></td>
<td><strong>Core Ideas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Implement action</strong></td>
<td><strong>Educators feel more equipped to foster positive relationships with all students, and can identify tools and practices that support youth allyship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Young Adult Novels • Field Journals</td>
<td>• Cultural brokering • Queer reading • Valuing community cultural wealth</td>
<td><strong>Identify action to implement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAR approach</strong></td>
<td><strong>Develop consensus conclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Keep field journals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Inquiry and Analysis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Meet with team</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAR Team Data Collection and Analysis Cycles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Conjecture map*

**Drawing on the PAR Process for Design**

Over the last several years, I have had the opportunity to participate in several PAR initiatives, and to apply a PAR approach to other educational and professional development settings. For instance, I co-directed a summer internship with high school and undergraduate student-researchers studying access to higher education, and I advised a small group of undergraduate student-researchers studying experiences of Students of Color on campus. Ben
Kirshner was the principal investigator for both of these PAR initiatives, and he introduced me to several activities and structures to support guiding newcomers through the process of inquiry. In one of the introduction activities, a facilitator passes out a card to each person in the group that has one possible step that could occur in a PAR process of inquiry. The group members are asked to silently arrange themselves in an order that makes most sense to them. Once the group has formed an order, they go through the steps chronologically and each person will discuss why they chose to put their step in the spot they did. The facilitator then opens up a discussion about the position of the step, and whether the step might need to be repeated within the process. I like this introduction to the PAR process, because it shows participants that the research process is fairly intuitive, and because it positions everyone as a researcher from the start.

When I have applied a PAR approach to educational settings, including professional development sessions for educators and the undergraduate course I teach focused on social justice and civic engagement, I have used the same process card shuffle activity. As I began to think about how to structure the process for this proposed study, I thought back to the steps on the cards. While some steps might be repeated and others might be omitted, there is a general flow for the PAR process that surfaces during the card shuffle activity (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. PAR process, as portrayed in card shuffle activity](image)

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**Figure 2. PAR process, as portrayed in card shuffle activity**
The process intended for this study was an adaptation of the PAR process (see figure 3). In the first month of our collaboration, I facilitated activities to lead our team through the first 6 steps of the PAR process, and introduced the team to the three lenses to guide our collaborative analysis process (two of which we ended up engaging with). Our group discussed protocols for our meetings, and for our field journals. The team then began the second part of the PAR process, collecting data: we read the first shared text and kept field journals with observations and reflections. When we met at the end of month two, our team engaged in analysis, developed a conclusion through consensus, and identified a corresponding action, utilizing the remaining steps of the PAR process. I planned to have the second half of the PAR process repeated each month, for each text we read. My thinking was that repeating the process in this way would allow the educator-researchers to implement actions in an ongoing matter, and to build on previous months’ conclusions and actions. It was my hope that by repeating the analysis cycle, our team would continue to deepen our understanding of the inquiry process, the three core ideas which guided our collaborative analysis, and youth allyship. In the final month of our study, my plan was to complete the last PAR step as a group, engaging in dialogue with stakeholders about our findings. I planned for our team to collaboratively design this step after we engaged in several data collection and analysis cycles.

While the team did not follow the process of developing consensus conclusions and agreeing on actions to test out in the way I had originally intended, we did engage in ongoing inquiry, which was deepened as we added new texts with new themes into our discussions (see article two in the dissertation for more information on themes in our discussions), and participants did engage in actions that related to our discussions (see article three in the dissertation for more information on actions).
Figure 3. PAR process adaptation for PAR PLC: Developing as Youth Allies

Context of Design: Site and Participants

Eastside Middle School

Eastside Middle School (EMS) was located in Easton—a small suburban city in one of the Western United States. In online materials, EMS was often described as a “true neighborhood school, representing the entire [Easton] community.” EMS was known for being one of the most diverse schools in the district: in terms of economics, race, and education classification. Note that the term “diverse” is often applied to racially segregated schools with populations of Students of Color, while racially segregated schools which serve populations of white students are just called “schools” (Kozol, 2006). Of course, classifications concerning race
and economic status are problematic in their own right, as they do not account for intracultural diversity (Maxwell, 2012), or the “countless differences [that] exist in society” (Kumashiro, 2001). Still, EMS differed from many schools referred to as “diverse” in that it served multiple populations within the one school. In order to dispel the harmful idea that white and middle class students are the norm while students of color and poor students are “diverse,” I will list both the non-majority percentages and the majority percentages as I describe the population that made up EMS (Kumashiro, 2002). The following descriptive statistics are from the 2014 October Count Day, therefore the population has most likely shifted in the years since. On the 2014 October Count Day, the total student population at EMS was 562 (Student Demographics, 2014). In terms of economic diversity, 44% of students qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch, and 66% did not. In terms of racial diversity, 47.1% of students were Students of Color, including 40.3% Latino students, and 52.9% were not. In terms of educational classification, 22.2% of students were labeled as “English Language Learners,” 22.2% of students were labeled as “Talented and Gifted,” and 14.4% of students were labeled as “Special Education” (Student Demographics).

On its public-facing website, EMS described itself as a “student-centered middle school with an emphasis on academic achievement and social learning.” Additionally, EMS offered a pre-engineering program, a visual arts program, and musical arts—including choir, band and orchestra programs, as well as what they called “practical arts,” which they described as an “exemplary consumer and family, science and technical arts department.”

**Professional development at Eastside Middle School.** The administration at EMS had set aside two hours per week for teachers to engage in professional development, starting the school day late for students. The administration intended for the time to be used in two ways: for
school-wide staff meetings, and for teachers to engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The Principal at EMS described the PLCs in a public letter on the school website: “Our talented teaching staff engages in data-driven professional learning communities that focus on student achievement and school goals.” However, there were both informal and formal discussions at EMS about how this time was not being optimally spent, specifically in the humanities departments. In a letter of support about this project, school librarian and media specialist Quinn wrote:

> While this time is carved out with the best intentions by teachers and administrators, many educators at [EMS] feel as if this time isn’t fully utilized. There has been growing frustration that these meetings lack direction and often become dept. business meetings. Many teachers are under engaged and/or a little frustrated during this time. (personal communication, May 30, 2016)

Quinn was a member of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), and she described the discussion in the ILT meetings: “I have proposed to change the structure of PLC time to our administration, who are interested. However, old habits die hard and I haven’t gotten very far on my own” (personal communication, May 30, 2016). Quinn went on to explain some of the needs she and others at EMS believed should be addressed during the school’s PLC time. She wrote:

> Concurrently, our UIP goals for [EMS] include both academic and affective goals. While our climate committee aims to support the needs of our student population, we don’t meet regularly, and teachers often have so many other things going on that the affective work within the climate committee gets left on the back burner. […] As teachers, we know that we need to do more to support the emotional needs of [our] students, but don’t often feel like we have the time or the skills to do so. (personal communication, May 30, 2016)
Jill, school counselor and head of the school’s climate committee, similarly expressed, “I don’t think anything has changed [for the better] because of this PLC time” (personal communication, July 14, 2016).

**Relationship to Easton.** My relationship with Easton began ten years ago, at Eastside High School (EHS), which neighbored EMS geographically, and was the local public high school that EMS fed into. I was a volunteer coach for the Public Achievement program, working with first generation, Latino students to develop and execute civic engagement projects within the town of Easton. After a year and a half of working as a coach at EHS, I applied to work as a student teacher in the EHS English department. As a student teacher, I taught two sections of “regular” English 10 and two sections of “honors” English 11. This teaching assignment exposed to me the intra-school segregation of EHS—my “honors” classes were majority white while my “regular” classes were majority Latino. Likewise, the stratified tracking system created two tracks on the teaching staff. Teachers taught either “honors” or “regular” courses—almost no teachers taught both. The tracks had entirely different attitudes about learning and teaching—teachers on the “regular” track would express deficit views of their students, referring to their job as ‘babysitting,’ while teachers on the “honors” track more often discussed rigorous teaching and learning practices. It was the staff policy to have student teachers take on two different teachers’ courses that allowed me to see into both tracks.

At the time of my student teaching assignment at EHS, Quinn was teaching 9th and 10th grade “regular” English courses at EHS. It was her first-year teaching. Quinn and I had grown up in the same town, and we started to talk about the way our 10th grade “regular” classes were going. We wanted to better serve our students, majority of whom were English Language Learners, with curriculum that supported critical thinking and complex problem solving. We
began to meet daily, designing curricular materials and problem solving together. Several times each week, we would use our planning periods to observe each other teaching the materials we were creating, in order to analyze the learning environment and support each other in doing better.

When I ran into Quinn in spring of 2016, she was getting off a public bus with about twenty EMS students, who were coming to the university to showcase their Public Achievement projects. Quinn was now the teacher-sponsor for the same program that originally introduced me to Easton. Soon after, we met to talk about how her work was going at EMS—as the librarian/media specialist, the AVID sponsor, and a member of the Instructional Leadership Team. Quinn shared with me the concerns on the Instructional Leadership Team about how PLCs were being implemented, and that she had just recently been describing our work collaborating together back at EHS as a memory of a strong, informal PLC. I shared with Quinn my interest in teacher learning through collaborative inquiry, and we began to discuss piloting an alternative structure for the PLC time at EMS.

**Relationship to PAR and teacher learning.** Since student teaching at Eastside High School, I have taught middle, high school, and undergraduate students. I began my doctoral studies when, after a year of teaching courses to in-service teachers, I realized that teacher learning and teachers identifying as learners were crucial aspects to students’ educational experiences. Within my doctoral studies, I have participated in a number of participatory action research projects with undergraduate and high school students. I have seen the participants on these teams learn to do consequential research and present our findings to audiences of stakeholders. I have found this work to have significant impact on the schools and structures our research teams have aimed to improve, and I have been struck by the impact that the process has
had on the student researchers. When individuals see themselves as knowledge producers, their confidence and their work grow in powerful ways.

I believe that when teachers do this kind of work, they can gain insight into their teaching and begin to think about learning in new ways, which can have a positive impact on both teachers and their students. My own teaching has improved immensely as I’ve engaged in PAR.

Before beginning my doctoral studies, my own understanding of research was minimal. As a teacher, the terms “research-based” and “evidence-based” were used to describe expensive scripted curricula that we were to use “with fidelity,” making research a bad word that indicated that teachers would be losing our agency and ability to be creative and take risks to improve our teaching. I designed this study with the belief that collaborative inquiry for educator learning could change teachers’ relationships with research and evidence-based practices, increasing agency, innovation, and practice.

**Participants**

The cohort for the PAR for teacher learning pilot was comprised of a mix of educators and other professionals at EMS. Quinn and I discussed the need to open an invitation to any interested staff members within the humanities program within the school. This open invitation occurred in August 2016. However, in order to spark interest, and to make sure there would be a sufficient number of initial participants to design the pilot, In May 2016, Quinn discussed our idea for piloting an alternative PLC with various educators at EMS.

Five EMS educators originally expressed interest in the group, and Quinn introduced the group to me by email. We began to discuss our interests and ideas for the group via email in May 2016. Katie was a 6th/7th grade English language arts teacher who also taught drama. In describing her interest in joining the group, Katie expressed, “I think that the potential for
empathy building through YA lit and Drama is huge” (personal communication, May 27, 2016). Hannah was a special education teacher who worked with students who were labeled as having emotional disorders. Hannah explained that her interest in the alternative PLC was tied to the reading of YA lit. She wrote, “I planned to write a grant to have a bibliotherapy project next year with some of my students so I imagine work with you all will strengthen that effort” (personal communication, May 26, 2016). Hannah’s student teacher was Mary. Mary had worked at EMS for years as a paraprofessional educator, and at the time of the collaborative inquiry group, was working on her teaching credentials to teach special education. Jill was the head of the EMS climate committee and a school counselor. Jill explained that she had received a grant to “infuse social emotional skills into the core curricular areas,” and that she “was hoping this PLC might be an avenue to not only help teachers become allies, but to help them bring that allyship into their classrooms” (personal communication, May 26, 2016). Natalie and Corinne were the coordinators for the Visionary Foundation, which provided services to cohorts of low-income students from the time they were in 2nd grade through their high school graduation, and then supplied tuition assistance for college. Natalie described the alternative PLC as “relevant” to their work, and expressed that she was “excited to see the power of literature!” (personal communication, June 4, 2016). Quinn was the teacher librarian, media specialist, and AVID teacher. Quinn described her desire to help with this pilot, “Our baseline need is that we need better PD, and a better way to work together and not burn out” (personal communication, May 11, 2016). In total, our group was comprised of eight participants, including me.
Design Tools and Activity Structures

**Young Adult Literature**

I designed the collaborative inquiry to include reading shared texts with the hope that the texts would allow our team to have a shared experience and reference point. My plan was to use the characters as fictional case studies, or “personas,” as they are referred to in design-based research. The intention was to use our three core ideas as lenses for text and interaction analysis, and as a deductive coding scheme for group discussions. We did use the books and two of the lenses in this way.

Our texts all fell under the umbrella category of young adult literature (YAL). The YAL category is broad, and there are important critiques to consider when selecting YAL titles. For instance, YAL has been rightfully criticized for the genre’s serious lack of diversity, for reinforcing dominant and oppressive views, and for having been subsumed by corporate giants focused on serializing books in order to increase consumption, land large movie contracts, and boost profits (Garcia, 2013). I aimed to choose novels for this project which differed from those that received these critiques. The texts I originally chose (and that the group chose from) portrayed diverse teen perspectives and experiences, and raised themes of power, privilege, and positionality in intersectional and complex ways (see Table 1). Garcia (2013) wrote, “While corporate book publishers largely have a strong grasp on the market of popular books, several authors have developed strong followings that critique various aspects of hegemonic definitions of identity” (p. 4). Our book list included such authors, and each of the texts on our list could be considered a Queer text. When scholars (Blackburn, 2011; Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Britzman, 1995; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014; Kumashiro, 2001, 2002, 2015; Meyer, 2007; Miller,
2015; Schieble, 2012) describe books as Queer, they are asserting that these are books that push the boundaries of what society has constructed to be considered normal.

While Queer books might include LGBTQ characters, they don’t always. I use the word Queer as distinguished within Queer Theory, which “signifies actions, not actors” (Britzman, 1995, p. 153). In this way, Queer can be used as a verb—for instance, Queering a text (disrupting the dichotomies and unspoken rules in a text) or as an adjective—for instance, a Queer reading lens (see article two in the dissertation for more on queer reading and the use of the queer reading lens).

Table 1. *Novel Selections and Descriptive Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Protagonist Identities</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>He Forgot to Say Goodbye</em> by Benjamin Alire Saenz</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, told in alternating first person narratives</td>
<td>Two male teens: one Mexican-American, one white</td>
<td>Privilege/ Oppression; Race; Poverty/ Wealth; Drugs, Absent Fathers, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Every Day</em> by David Levithan</td>
<td>Magical Realism, Fantasy</td>
<td>Teen who wakes up in a different body every morning</td>
<td>Gender, Sexuality, Race, Ableism, Body Image, LGBT, Mental Health, Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’ll Give You The Sun</em> by Jandy Nelson</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, told in alternating first person narratives</td>
<td>Teen fraternal twins: straight female, gay male, white</td>
<td>Gender, Sexuality, Death, Loss, Mental Health, Family, LGBT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My Name is Not Easy</em> by Debby Dahl Edwardson</td>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>Teen male, Iñupiaq.</td>
<td>Cultural Assimilation, US Boarding Schools, Race, Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fangirl: A Novel</em> by Rainbow Rowell</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction, + a book within a book (Fan fiction, Fantasy)</td>
<td>Teen straight female, white Teen male, gay, white</td>
<td>Mental Health, Independence, Family, Divorce, Writing, School, Sexuality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More Happy Than Not by Adam Silvera

Realistic Fiction + Fantasy

Teen male, queer, Latino

Mental Health, Suicide, Loss, Poverty, Race, Homophobia, LGBT, Friendship

Beautiful Music for Ugly Children by Kristin Cronn-Mills

Realistic Fiction

Teen trans male, race unknown

Gender identity, Music, Youth Radio, Sexuality, Family, Friendship

Field Journals

My intention was for our team to use field journals to record personal reactions, feelings, and observations that arose while reading, planning, teaching, and interacting with students.

Erickson (1986) wrote:

fieldwork research on teaching, through its inherent reflectiveness, helps researchers and teachers to make the familiar strange and interesting again. The commonplace becomes problematic. What is happening can become visible, and it can be documented systematically. (p. 121)

I hoped the educator-researchers would use field journals to jot notes as they read, and document shifts in their thoughts, actions, and interactions with students. They would take notice of their own everyday behavior in light of the frame of our work—making the “familiar strange.” In this way, they would collect and keep track of qualitative data – when they noticed how our group’s conversations or content from the books were emerging in the ways they interacted or thought about interactions with students. As a group, we determined norms and goals for these journals, and continued to iterate on them regularly. The tool was intended to allow educator-researchers
to document how they experienced themselves changing as they participated in this process, and how their ideas about what it meant to be a youth ally shifted over time. Some of the participants used the journal consistently, and in the way intended, but others found themselves “always forgetting” to write in the journal. It seemed that the journal felt more like homework and less like the active and exciting work of reading and discussing the books, and trying out new actions to ally with students. I reminded participants to write in the journals, but I didn’t push them to do so. The work was so lively without the journals, and the group members were so diligent with reading and engaging with the group, that I didn’t feel it was necessary to emphasize.

**Collaborative Inquiry and Analysis: Utilizing the Three Core Ideas**

In designing the tools and activity structures for the PAR for teacher learning initiative, I drew on scholarship from within Queer theory, critical race theory, and sociocultural learning theory to identify three core ideas to support the collaborative analysis process. I conjectured that these core ideas could support educators in the process of developing tools and practices to grow as youth allies.

**Using Core Idea 1: identify cultural brokers and gatekeepers.** By identifying cultural brokers and their adversaries—gatekeepers—in young adult literature, my hope was that educators would begin to appreciate the importance of fostering linkages between social and institutional worlds youth encountered, and strategize on how to do so. Additionally, I hoped the young adult novels would allow educators to see into a protagonist’s multiple worlds, and their experience navigating between those worlds. As a group, our team of educator-researchers would analyze adult characters’ interactions with youth characters. Importantly, the novels were meant to be used as a reference point, a springboard for educator-researchers to think about their actual students. As educator-researchers considered the actions of cultural brokers and
gatekeepers in the texts, we also thought about the ways in which the characters were supporting or hindering the linkages between their students’ worlds. This core idea was used by the group in the way I had intended. Participants discussed how important and central this idea was to all of the work we did together and separately during the inquiry group.

**Using Core Idea 2: surface dichotomies and unspoken rules.** In the design for this project, I drew on scholars who suggested using a Queer reading lens with both LGBTQ-inclusive and straight texts in K-20 classrooms, as well as using a Queer lens to read and interpret situations, structures, and systems (Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2014). I centered the idea that including multicultural or LGBTQ-inclusive texts in classrooms without changing how we read them could be problematic, and learning to read canonical, white, and/or straight texts in different ways could be fruitful (Britzman; 1995; Kumashiro, 2001; 2002; 2015). This was an important justification for using YAL as a tool within our collaborative inquiry group—I wanted our team of educator-researchers to practice using a Queer reading lens. A Queer reading lens can work to surface and disrupt power relations, identity categories, and dichotomies presented as normal in texts and society at large (Schieble, 2012). Britzman (1995) explained, “Queer Theory offers methods of critiques to mark the repetitions of normality as a structure and as a pedagogy” (p. 153). In this way, I hoped our team would use a Queer lens to shift more than discourse around textual analysis, but to also shift discourse within participants’ classrooms, the school, and other everyday institutions. This core idea was used by the group in the way I had intended. I discuss this lens in detail in article two (see article two of the dissertation).

**Using Core Idea 3: recognize community cultural wealth.** In the design for this project, I drew on the idea that educators must work to structurally and interpersonally recognize
and value non-dominant forms of community cultural wealth in their classrooms in order to counteract oppressive norms. I was aware that this might not come easy to a great many teachers—especially as so many U.S. educators were educated in the U.S. school system that values dominant forms of cultural capital. My hope was that using young adult literature to surface discussions of characters’ community cultural wealth and the ways this wealth was or wasn’t recognized institutionally and interpersonally would potentially help teachers learn to disrupt norms and value community cultural wealth in their daily lives. In the texts we read, readers were able to glimpse the narrator’s thoughts, home, experiences, and backgrounds. Readers were able to see what the character was interested in and passionate about, through their first-person perspective. I thought surfacing community cultural wealth from books would be helpful, since educators cannot often see into their student’s inner thoughts or out-of-school worlds. In this way, the YA texts could be used as a starting point. Educator-researchers could use this lens to recognize community cultural wealth of characters, and discuss how to structurally and interpersonally value community cultural wealth in the classroom. While this theme was a part of our discussions by virtue of thinking about the character’s and their thoughts, desires, challenges, and relationships, we didn’t use the language of community cultural wealth as purposefully as I’d initially planned. In the transcripts from the inquiry group discussions, I am the only speaker who used this term. However, the themes of this core idea were present, therefore designing for this theme seemed to still have an impact, even though I didn’t integrate this concept or language into the group as intended.

**Introducing the three core ideas: setting the stage for the activity structure.** While each of the three core ideas drew on particular theoretical scholarship, it was not my intention to ask the team to read the scholarship. I introduced the first core ideas through activities I
designed to make the theoretical personal, and I introduced the second core idea through prompts for the discussion on the novel *Every Day* (see article two in the dissertation).

To introduce Core Idea 1 (identify cultural brokers and gatekeepers), we created maps of the social and institutional “worlds” we traversed when we were young people. We drew lines to link worlds that felt integrated, and identify the person or policy that helped broker that integration. With worlds that were left isolated, we considered whether any gatekeepers were possibly at play. We observed one another’s maps through a gallery walk, noting themes. At the end of this and other activities that introduced the lenses, we discussed a shared definition of the core idea, and how it might be a useful lens as the educator-researchers read, observe, and reflect. We also considered what we might need to change in order to make it useful—opening space to iterate on the core ideas.

**Collaborative Inquiry and Analysis: Activity Structure.** I designed an activity structure for collaborative inquiry and analysis, which I intended for us to use as we met to discuss each of the young adult novels that we read. The activity structure was meant to engage in repeated cycles of PAR Process Part 2 (see Figure 3). The structure would begin with time to write in field journals, move to a group go-around in which individuals selected an entry from their field journals to share, then open room for discussion. Within the discussion period, anyone could pose a question or topic. On the wall or on the table would be 3 chart papers, one for each of our lenses. Sticky notes and writing utensils would be available to everyone. As we talked, if anyone noticed that the discussion has surfaced something that could be examined through one of our lenses, they could write a note on a sticky and put it onto the appropriate chart paper. This way, we would begin to notice emerging patterns. The structure would continue with time to focus on the charts to enter additions, and move to a consensus-decision making model.
Everyone would jot down an idea for a conclusion that could be drawn from the data surfaced during the discussion, and share out in a go-around. The group would then decide on one shared conclusion. The process to determine the conclusion would then be repeated, in order to determine an action that the educator-researchers would implement over the following month.

We did not use this process in the precise way I envisioned it. Participants expressed that they enjoyed the book discussions not feeling too procedural, and explained that they felt that the majority of PD was “overly structured.” The majority of our book discussions involved each of us writing down questions or ideas on flash cards, then passing the cards around, reading them aloud, and forming a list to talk about. We’d then engage in open discussion about the questions, without any particular order. Sometimes I would guide the discussion with some prompts (see article two in the dissertation), but usually I would just put my ideas onto an index card and place it in the pool with the rest of the groups’ cards.

**Consensus Conclusion and Corresponding Action.** I intentionally left room to determine with the team what kinds of actions we would employ. It was my intention that everyone would try to implement an action we agreed upon, then observe and reflect on what occurred in relationship to the action.

Here I’ll describe my original plan for this aspect of the project. An example conclusion and corresponding action might look something like this: a theme arises in our current novel, in which the protagonist, who feels unsafe at home, continually thinks about asking an adult for help. He makes plans to talk to a teacher he trusts, but when he gets to the teacher’s class, she is busy and the class period is packed. He doesn’t know how to get her attention, and he feels embarrassed, so he leaves the class having not asked for help once again. Our team of educator-researchers draws a conclusion that teachers need to create avenues for students to ask for help.
We then discuss ways we might do this, and come up with an idea of having "advocacy letters" located somewhere in the classroom, where students can write to us to advocate for themselves when they need to. Each educator-researcher then tries out this action, and reflects in their field journal about what they notice about trying out using advocacy letters, and what they might shift or adjust and why.

I planned that each month, we would aim to plan a new action. The actions could build on one another. We could expand the same action each month, or we could try seven new actions, one for each month. Our team would continue to decide how to approach this, and iterate on the process as needed.

The route to educators’ actions was less structured than my plan. Educators all had different roles, and would see students in different contexts due to their roles, therefore the idea that we would all choose one action together did not work for the group. Still, there were several times that we did decide on things we would all try, for instance, saying hello to every student who walked into our spaces, and purposefully asking one student every day how they were doing, opening space to talk. I describe the emergent way in which individual and collaborative actions arose in article three of the dissertation (see article three).

**Tools That Allow for Comparative Perspectives.** I hoped that young adult novels would allow our team to take on a comparative perspective—comparing one novel to the rest and comparing the messages about allyship portrayed within each one. Additionally, I hoped that keeping field journals with reflections and observations would allow educator-researchers to take on a comparative perspective between what our team identified in the books and what they individually see in their respective classrooms and interactions with students. Erickson (1986) wrote:
By taking a comparative perspective people can distinguish the spuriously distinctive and the genuinely distinctive features of their own circumstances. That can lead them to be at once more realistic and more imaginative than they would otherwise have been in thinking about change. (p. 122)

Ultimately, I designed this project to focus on change. Educators chose to join this group because they were interested in changing the way they engaged in professional development, and changing the way they engaged with students. Becoming both “more realistic and more imaginative” about change felt like a worthy goal the aforementioned tools could support.

**Ethnography of the Collaborative Inquiry Group**

**Sources of Evidence**

In order to answer my research questions about educator civic agency, allyship, and the role mediational tools play in educator learning, I collected data from multiple sources (see Table 2), including an ethnographic record, semi-structured interviews, educator-researchers’ field journals, and meeting artifacts. In the following section, I describe each of the aforementioned data sources.
Table 2. Research Questions and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Ethnographic Record</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Field Journals</th>
<th>Consensus Conclusions and Actions</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does the process of inquiry look like in a PAR approach to teacher learning?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what ways do educators’ professional identities (interpretation of their role as educators) shift over the course of the project?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do YA texts and critical and queer analytic lenses mediate teacher learning in a PAR approach for teacher learning?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Documenting the Process: Keeping an Ethnographic Record. Interpretive research includes research methods that center human meaning (Erickson, 1986). This study sought to understand how teachers perceived various identities available to them, and how they understood the ways in which the process of group inquiry interacted with these identities. Therefore, it was important to use methods that considered “immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actors’ point of view” to be the “basic validity criterion” (Erickson, p. 119). Interpretive research is another term for participant observation, which is a method well matched for my study as I was engaging in the group as a participant, facilitator, and researcher.

I now describe my facilitator-researcher process, in order to explain my ethnographic data collection processes. First, I planned the activity structures for our team’s meetings and facilitated the structures when we met as a group. During the meetings, my primary focus was to facilitate and participate, but I also jotted a “condensed account” of what occurred onto a copy of
the meeting agenda (Spradley, 1980). Before I left the meeting, I collected any artifacts created or used during the meeting, and took photographs of each. Directly following the meeting, I drove to a café a few minutes down to the road and wrote an “expanded account” of what occurred during the meeting (Spradley, 1980). I used the meeting agenda as the organizational structure for the account, and embedded photos of artifacts throughout. I included concrete details in this account, and explained what I was thinking or feeling in the moment in brackets. In the days after the meeting, I reflected on my personal reactions in my field journal. I also added to my field journal periodically throughout the month to track my reflections on the process. Once per month, I wrote an analytic memo to record ongoing data interpretations and analysis of the emergent process. I then considered all of these aforementioned aspects of the ethnographic record to iterate on the design of activity structures and adjust plans for meetings.

**Interviews.** I planned to conduct two semi-structured interviews with each of the educator-researchers on our team, one during the fall semester and one in spring, after we had completed our final team meeting. These interviews were planned to be about 60 minutes long, and take place either during non-meeting PLC periods, teacher’s lunch periods, or before or after school, depending on the participant’s preference. For the first interview, I asked the educator-researchers about their perspectives on professional development, EMS’ PLCs, personal learning, allyship, and relationships with their students. For the post-participation interview, I planned to ask the educator researchers about the same topics, and to additionally ask how they perceived any changes in their perspectives due to their participation in the collaborative inquiry group. I did not end up conducting the formal post-participation interviews for two primary reasons. First, I ended up having several informal interviews with individuals or pairs toward the end of the semester, when group members began reflecting back on the year and sharing
takeaways with me. I recorded and used these discussions as data. Second, the participants were extremely busy during the spring semester, and I didn’t want to ask them to find more time to meet with me, when I had heard their reflections in multiple settings, including but not limited to our final reflection meeting (see article two of the dissertation). I used the formal and informal interviews to learn more about teachers’ meaning-perspectives (Erickson, 1986). As Maxwell (2012) asserts, asking people about their own interpretations about what is happening within the process is a way to gain subjective validity.

**Educator-researcher Field Journals.** I described how educator-researcher field journals were designed to be used as a tool in the above section titled “Design Tools and Activity Structures.” Throughout the PAR for teacher learning initiative, educator-researchers held on to their field journals in order to continue adding to them, and brought them to team meetings to share for collaborative analysis. After the school year and the initiative ended, I collected the field journals to use for independent data analysis.

**Consensus Conclusions and Corresponding Actions.** I described the activity structure for determining conclusions and actions in the above section “Design Tools and Activity Structures.” As a group, we discussed individual, collaborative, and collective actions that connected to the inquiry group’s discussions. Our team also developed recommendations for the EMS administration about PLCs, including a detailed look at the time that was meant to be used for PLCs, versus the time that was actually available after other competing meetings were scheduled. I examined these discussions and references to actions as part of my ethnographic study.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts included documents created by the educator-researchers during meetings, and photographs. For instance, I collected educator-researchers’ maps of worlds,
cultural brokers, and gatekeepers. When educator-researchers brought documents, art, or posters to meetings to share as part of an action or relating to our work and interests, I photographed these and included them as artifacts.

**Interpretive Framework**

I engaged in ongoing data analysis throughout this study, producing monthly analytic memos and reflecting regularly in a field journal. In this way, my analysis was circular, iterative, and oftentimes occurred simultaneously alongside data collection.

I created a metadata scheme to log all data collected according to date, method of data collection, and documentation type. I organized the data in digital folders, which I stored on dropbox. I used Rev.com to transcribe complete recordings from select meetings, and transcribed sections of additional meetings myself.

I used both deductive and inductive approaches to my data analysis. I used a deductive approach to examine how the core ideas we used to guide collaborative inquiry were taken up in ways that promoted and demonstrated allyship. For example, my coding tree included codes such as *references to cultural brokering* and *moments of queering discussion*, which reflected ideas from the core ideas. I also used a deductive approach to examine resources and barriers to maintaining the core features to effective teacher learning identified by Desimone (2009). For example, my coding tree included codes such as *coherence*, with sub-codes such as *references to alignment to beliefs*, and *references to misalignment to beliefs*.

Additionally, I used an inductive approach to data analysis to illuminate patterns and insights from my corpus of data. I identified an exploratory coding scheme to structure the data. An example inductive code in my coding tree was *sharing “personal stuff,”* which surfaced when one of the educators in our group mentioned that she felt the group was a safe space
because you could share “personal stuff,” and that she wanted her classroom to feel the same way for her students. Based on this comment, I read through my field notes, looking for instances where individuals shared personal stories, and coded each story as sharing “personal stuff.” I then looked at each coded story and looked for explanations of what prompted the sharing, whether it was an activity based on the core ideas that we were doing, a discussion prompt, or a scene from the current book we were reading. By “comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories,” I surfaced and tested assertions (Creswell, 2005, p. 406).

A further area of focus was on the teachers’ connections to other social and institutional worlds. This focus was important, as it connected with the concept of cultural brokering, which included discussions on the need to integrate multiple social and institutional worlds. This group was intended to be a safe and generative space for the teachers, and for the teachers to connect this work to their work with students. When teachers indicated connections from our group to other professional development endeavors, classroom activities and discussions, personal life, or school or societal structures, I noted this. Additionally, I looked for cross-text discussions, from texts within our collaborative inquiry group and texts outside the group (for instance, the entire staff was doing a book study on teaching children in poverty). I looked for moments when teachers discussed how their participation in our group was making them think differently about their students’ participation in the classroom. I looked for uptake of tools and participant structures which mediated learning (i.e., teachers sharing personal experiences through utilizing the lenses or themes in the YA texts). I considered group interactions, links to identity, and increased participation as evidence of learning. Grossman et al. (2001) wrote: “The degree to which discussion brokering is distributed among individuals, the degree to which it is shared
rather than monopolized by one or two people, is itself an indicator of group equity and maturity” (p. 979).

The analysis methods for the two articles in this dissertation are explained in detail in the articles (see article two and article three of the dissertation).