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SUPPORTING CREATIVE COGNITIVE SPACES:
THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE
SECONDARY ELA CLASSROOM

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SUPPORTING CREATIVE COGNITIVE SPACES:
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Dedication

To all of the creative teachers who give their time and love to the students
whose very lives depend upon it.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my mom and dad for teaching me to love books and words, and for teaching me that there was strength in being educated. Whether it was reading books to me or shelling out more money for yet another degree, they have always wanted the best for me and moved heaven and earth to make it happen. Thank you!

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Abstract:

While teachers and districts clamored to discern how to combat pandemic learning losses through a focus on teaching standards and skills, few considered the role that creativity played in supporting cognitive and personal growth. Creativity fosters a plethora of skills and gives individual students the space and opportunity to explore their own interests and follow their own paths, or, as Nel Noddings would argue, to give each individual the tools necessary to live a fulfilling and satisfying life. With pressures on secondary ELA teachers to focus on standards, skills, and test scores, this study sought to explore how professional development can provide secondary ELA teachers with the pedagogical practices necessary to support students in creative thinking processes in the ELA classroom. Using post-intervention surveys and a post-intervention interview of secondary ELA teacher participants who attended a creativity workshop, this study aimed to better understand how creativity professional development impacted teachers' perceptions and practices regarding implementing creative activities within their classrooms in order to foster cognitive growth, individual satisfaction, and student engagement.

Keywords: Secondary ELA teachers, creativity, critical thinking, professional development, student engagement, individualized learning.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Creativity & the ELA Classroom

Creativity is ethereal; it is difficult to define, and even more difficult to quantify or measure. Creativity, or creative thought, is a complex process, and the mental mechanism isn't the same for every person. In fact, some of our most common notions about creativity carry connotations of that which is related to genius or the divine. For instance, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is often cited as the purveyor of this definition of creativity in which creativity can be “neither learned, nor taught, and is mysterious even to the geniuses themselves,” and Plato (4th Century BCE) believed that poetry could only be celestially inspired through the Muses (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). In sharp contrast, some have viewed creativity in terms of practicality, able to be manifested through practice and logical steps. For instance, Aristotle (3rd century BCE), described poesis, the active creative work of the poet, as “rational” and “goal-oriented.” However, there is also a long line of theorists who have equated creativity and imagination with freedom. Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673) and Émilie du Châtelet (1706–1749) argued that creativity and imagination could be utilized “to pursue freedom, overcome prejudice, and cultivate natural abilities even despite social and political oppression” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). Similarly, bell hooks (1995) contended that women's art must be protected and valued in that it is a “path leading to our freedom and fulfillment” (p.132). And then there are those philosophers who perceived creativity as being tied to what could be described as a spiritual or religious experience. For example, Schopenhauer (1788–1860) believed the greatest artists are determined not only through their

technical skill, but also by one's ability to "lose themselves" in the sublime (Schopenhauer 1859: Vol. I: 184–194 and Vol. II: 376–402). Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) contended that the greatest examples of creativity are born out of a rare intermingling between the "Dionysian spirit of ecstatic intoxication, and the Apollonian spirit of sober restraint, which tempers chaos with order and form" (Nietzsche 1872 [1967], Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). Though there have been a variety of disparate perspectives and philosophies when quantifying what it means to be creative and how creativity is accessed, one thing is clear: there has never been one widely accepted definition.

When we think of foundational skills that fall within the parameters of specific subject areas, we may not always initially consider the importance of creativity and how it supports student learning. Therefore, making an argument for why it should be considered an essential teaching and learning mode in the secondary ELA classroom becomes even more burdensome. While most people would agree that creativity is good, a valuable skill that supports people in numerous facets of their lives, it is still complicated to explain how it is an essential component that benefits students' overall learning environments.

However, when we consider the importance of creativity in the ELA classroom, Frawley's (2020) research concludes that writing instruction is often perceived by composition teachers as intrinsically creative in that there is a natural connection between the two, such as teaching students how to make stylistic syntax choices or use vivid description. Even the clever organization of an argument so that it carries a more significant rhetorical impact takes a level of creative or critical thought. Additionally, the secondary ELA classroom is a space where we encourage students to read creatively as well, to look beyond the words on the page to find the symbolism, motifs, themes, and connotative meanings that connect readers to the text on a

deeper level, or as Freire (1983) describes, “Language and reality are dynamically intertwined. The understanding attained by critical reading of a text implies perceiving the relationship between text and context” (p.5). Similarly, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism posits that language and prose, specifically the language utilized in the novel, are shaped by varying and diverse voices and perspectives, and therefore, are in a constant state of change and meaning making (Bakhtin, Holquist & Emerson, 1981). Hence, reading becomes a creative endeavor as students must be equipped with the skills to imagine the different meanings and relationships within texts and words. The secondary ELA classroom is a space where students are invited to read and write with a critical or creative lens; therefore, it is an environment that necessitates classroom practices that support students in creative thinking.

Create Tasks and Bloom's Taxonomy

Because there are numerous and varied ideations when it comes to what and how secondary ELA teachers perceive creativity and how it is best implemented in their classrooms, I propose that, for the purpose of my research, we simplify the concept of creativity by housing it within Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, with which most educators are well versed. The highest level of Bloom's Revised is “create;” therefore, when we ask secondary ELA teachers to support creativity in their classrooms, it could be as simple as including more learning activities that encourage students to perform create tasks, which, in turn, supports students in higher levels of cognition. Using Bloom's as a framework, there are a variety of ways to encourage imaginative processes through create-level tasks in the ELA classroom. It is the type of learning that allows students to intertwine Freire's (1983) “language and reality,” a space where students can find their own answers and create their own meanings, a space where those theoretical classroom concepts become an aspect of one's personal reality, or lived experience. The conceptualization

is translated from that which is distant to that which is close, and for classroom teachers, we know that content is meaningless without some kind of internalization of its importance. For instance, the student who can critically discuss Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in terms of what it means to search for or achieve the American Dream within the context of their own experience will internalize that learning experience in a meaningful way; whereas, the student who reads *The Great Gatsby* for the purpose of recalling the information from the text in order to regurgitate it to pass the reading quiz will take far less from the experience and will not be required to engage in higher level evaluative, synthesis, or creative thinking.

When discussing the ways in which educators can move students into deeper engagement and critical thinking tasks, Bloom's Taxonomy is an appropriate venue to examine. Bloom's was developed as a common framework in which educators could discuss different modes of student

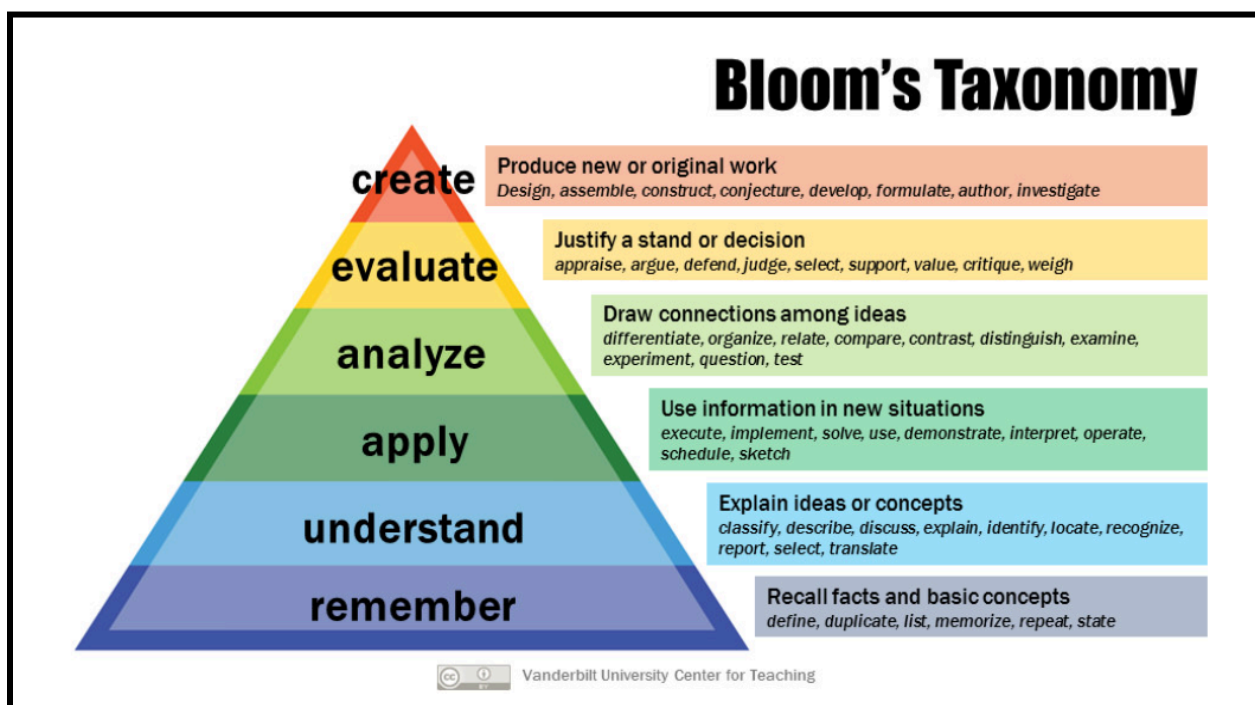


Figure 1

Bloom's Taxonomy

Note. Vanderbilt University, 2016

cognition and how to teach in order to encourage higher forms of cognitive complexity (Bloom, 1956). In 2001, Anderson and coauthors of the original taxonomy proposed a Revised Bloom's Taxonomy that highlights learning in verb tense: *remember*, *understand*, *apply*, *analyze*, *evaluate*, and

create. Additionally, “higher order” learning comprises the *apply*, *analyze*, *evaluate*, and *create* categories, and “lower order” learning, requiring recognition, memory, and comprehension, falls under the *remember* and *understand* categories. And, most notably, in the Revised Bloom's, *create* replaced *synthesis* (Agarwal, 2019).

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY DIGITAL PLANNING VERBS					
REMEMBERING	UNDERSTANDING	APPLYING	ANALYZING	EVALUATING	CREATING
					
Copying Defining Finding Locating Quoting Listening Googling Repeating Retrieving Outlining Highlighting Memorizing Networking Searching Identifying Selecting Tabulating Duplicating Matching Bookmarking Bullet-pointing	Annotating Tweeting Associating Tagging Summarizing Relating Categorizing Paraphrasing Predicting Comparing Contrasting Commenting Journaling Interpreting Grouping Inferring Estimating Extending Gathering Exemplifying Expressing	Acting out Articulate Reenact Loading Choosing Determining Displaying Judging Executing Examining Implementing Sketching Experimenting Hacking Interviewing Painting Preparing Playing Integrating Presenting Charting	Calculating Categorizing Breaking Down Correlating Deconstructing Linking Mashing Mind-Mapping Organizing Appraising Advertising Dividing Deducing Distinguishing Illustrating Questioning Structuring Integrating Attributing Estimating Explaining	Arguing Validating Testing Scoring Assessing Criticizing Commenting Debating Defending Detecting Experimenting Grading Hypothesizing Measuring Moderating Posting Predicting Rating Reflecting Reviewing Editorializing	Blogging Building Animating Adapting Collaborating Composing Directing Devising Podcasting Wiki Building Writing Filming Programming Simulating Role Playing Solving Mixing Facilitating Managing Negotiating Leading

Figure 2

Bloom's Taxonomy Digital Planning Verbs

Note. Church's, 2018

Further expanding the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, Churches (2008) developed a Bloom's Digital Taxonomy designed to address the kinds of learning and create tasks (in verb form) that better reflect the digital age. Churches (2008) added verbs such as "googling," "programming," "blogging," and "hacking" to exemplify a wider and more varied list of create tasks that mesh with contemporary teaching and learning practices. The Bloom's Digital Taxonomy Verbs are useful in that they allow educators to easily examine the learning tasks performed in their classrooms into the different levels of Bloom's. Nava et al's (2022) qualitative research reveals that some English teachers believe that Bloom's Digital Taxonomy (BDT) increases learners' engagement and motivation while also positively impacting student performance.

Therefore, in supporting secondary ELA teachers in incorporating more create tasks into their pedagogical practices, the Bloom's Digital Planning Verbs offer a concrete way to discuss how to teach, support, and encourage implementation of creative teaching spaces. Whether students are podcasting about novels, role-playing dramatic scenes from texts, or filming an example of propaganda, there are limitless possibilities in how secondary ELA teachers can utilize create tasks in their classes in order to stimulate higher-order thinking.

Background of the Problem

In my work as a secondary English Language Arts coordinator, I often meet with secondary ELA teachers in my district for the purpose of supporting them with curriculum and resources. Recently, I met with a group of 10th and 11th grade ELA teachers as we discussed choosing essential standards for our district, which serves approximately 26,000 students. It is a large suburban district in the state of Oklahoma. The foundation of our discussion was predicated on the notion that we must choose essential standards that will support students in the skills to

prepare them for not only future schooling, but for work, the military, and, overall, being successful and productive citizens. Regardless of their future paths, we want them to be well-equipped to navigate their futures, or as Nel Noddings (2013) might argue, to give them the tools to live satisfying lives within the domains of work, home, and civil life within a democratic society. As educators, it is vital to ask ourselves - are we giving students the skills they need to **survive** in the real world? Does the education I am delivering have meaning and applicability when considering what students will need in their imminent futures? Therefore, when selecting those standards that were most applicable in supporting students as members of a thriving citizenry, teachers selected those standards in order to teach in a way that, as bell hooks (1994) would argue, “respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p. 13). Our teachers want to do what is best for students; however, the pressures of performance-based accountability (PBA) systems have limited teacher autonomy (Paercherisa et al, 2020).

The reality of education today is that educators feel that their hands are tied, bound by a standardized curriculum designed to improve test scores. In fact, there is a body of research substantiating that teachers’ classroom autonomy and satisfaction lessened post-NCLB (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Faulker & Cook, 2006; Huss & Eastep, 2011). With a hyperactive focus on standardized test scores, teachers may feel as though there is little time for creativity. Unfortunately, when pedagogical practices get tied up in ensuring that students are performing well on standardized tests, the result is what Theodore Rabb (2017) describes as the “narrowing” of curriculum, meaning that content, subject areas, or practices that are not directly tested are often removed from school environments or severely limited, which could negatively impact those creative teaching practices that engage student thinking. Beghetto (2019) echoes Rabb’s

sentiments in that the culture of standardized testing steers students towards paths that forego both personalized learning and creative opportunities.

Overwhelmingly, this group of 10th and 11th grade ELA teachers felt concerned that their students were not able to produce independent commentary when writing. Teachers noted that this cohort of students is apt regurgitators of information, ready to copy and paste information when needed. However, their inability to comment or critique their findings was quite concerning. This incapacity to think critically not only influences writing, but it also stunts their ability to read. More specifically, teachers noted that students are able to read to “find the answers.” However, unfortunately, when students are asked to read a text critically, they are unable to do so. Their ability to think independently about what they are reading is underdeveloped, which could be tied to what Greene (2018) describes as the “fracturing of literature,” meaning an overemphasis on test prep passages instead of allowing students to engage in the meaningful study of extended literary works. Although standardized testing is problematic when trying to quantify student performance in the area of critical thinking, testing data does, in fact, correlate with what teachers are experiencing in their classrooms. For instance, Oklahoma saw extreme drops in areas of reading proficiency. According to The Nation’s Report Card (2022), NAEP scores reveal a 7.81 deficit in scores among Oklahoma 8th graders, which places Oklahoma 47th in comparison to other states.

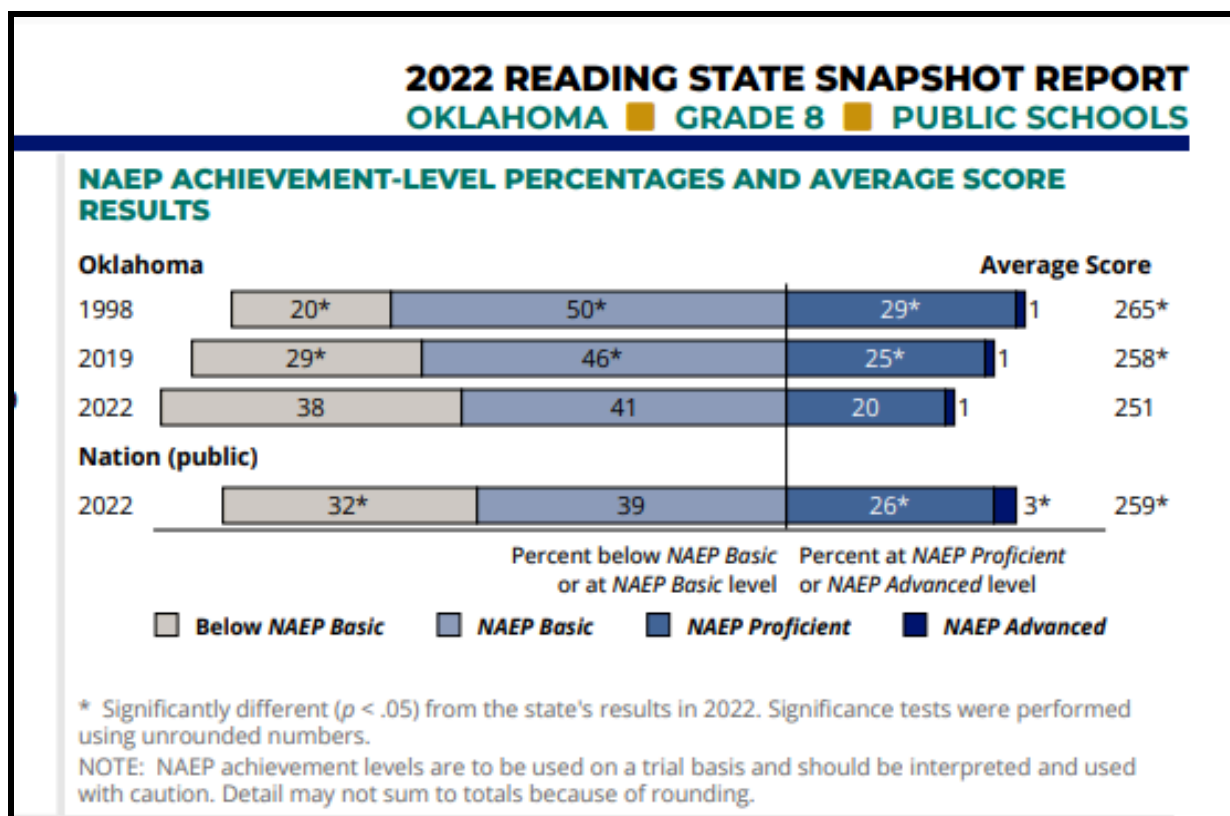


Figure 3

2022 NAEP Reading State Snapshot Report for Oklahoma, Grade 8, Average Score Results

Additionally, reading scores among Oklahoma 8th graders dropped seven points in comparison to Oklahoma scores in 2019. However, the long-term data trends reveal, much as the national trends do, that scores have been decreasing every year for over a decade. In fact, 8th grade reading scores among Oklahoma students have shown a sharp trend downwards since 2009, when Oklahoma students are compared to national data.

This information can be further examined when analyzing testing data collected by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. The Oklahoma School Testing Program (2023) revealed that only 37% of eighth graders in the state of Oklahoma are proficient in critical

reading. The majority of Oklahoma students are still far from where they need to be in order to thrive as critical readers and thinkers. Moreover, all of these reading and writing deficits reflect students' inability to think independently.

While many educational institutions and school districts continue to blame decreasing test scores and lower critical thinking abilities on pandemic learning loss, the data tells a very different story. While the pandemic may have made the public more aware of decreasing skill levels, and it could absolutely have worsened an already fragile predicament, NAEP scores reveal that reading proficiency has been dropping since 2015; however, states such as Oklahoma are seeing the deficits to a more significant degree.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves what underlying factors are contributing to drops in student skills because we cannot keep continuing to place blame at the feet of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2022 READING STATE SNAPSHOT REPORT

OKLAHOMA ■ GRADE 8 ■ PUBLIC SCHOOLS

AVERAGE SCORES FOR STATE/JURISDICTION AND THE NATION (PUBLIC)

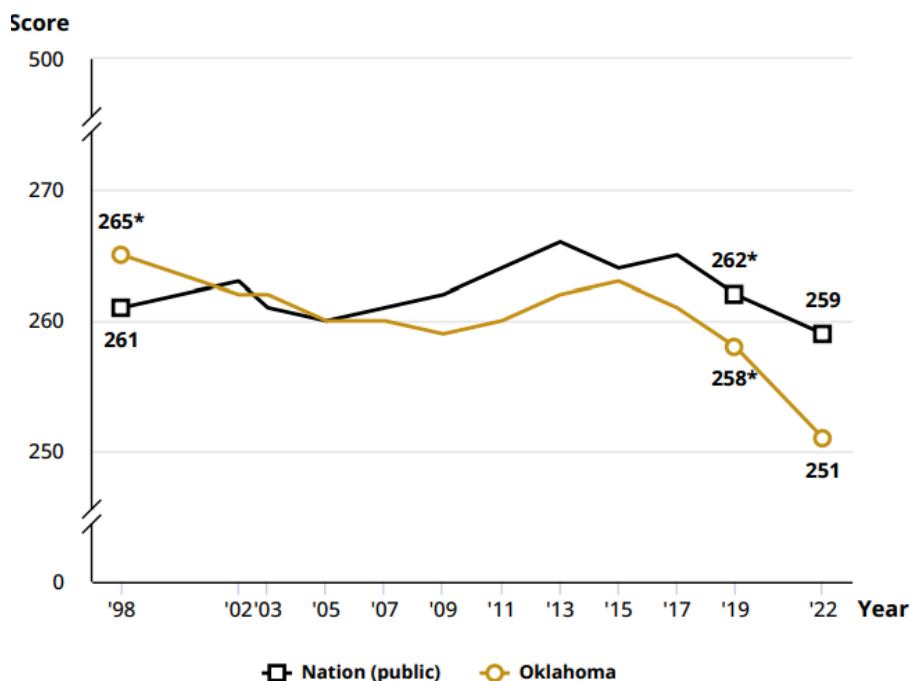


Figure 4

2022 NAEP Reading State Snapshot for Oklahoma, Grade 8, National Comparison

Note. Compares Oklahoma 8th Grade Students to National Performance

When we take a closer look at the educational landscape in the United States over the last twenty years, the focus on standardization and test scores may have played a role in pushing ELA instruction away from critical reading, writing, and thinking. Many educational theorists point the blame at No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Meier & Wood, 2004), which was signed into law in 2002. NCLB required states to introduce school accountability systems that applied to all public schools in each state. Additionally, these accountability systems required annual testing of

public school students in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 (and at least once in grades 10 through 12). Moreover, each state had to develop ratings for school performance, both overall and for specific subgroups, with regard to whether they made adequate yearly progress (or AYP) toward their state's academic goals. Notably, NCLB mandated explicit and increasingly severe sanctions for persistently low-performing schools that receive Title I funding (Dee & Jacob, 2011). As a teacher who began her career in 2003, I can vouch that NCLB shifted the landscape of public education immediately and intensely as it became abundantly evident that my students' test scores would be used to judge my performance as an educator.

Unfortunately, such a focus on testing performance sharply narrows the curricular focus. A national survey of 349 school districts between 2001 and 2007 shows that schools raised instructional time in both the tested fields of English and math quite significantly while reducing time for all other areas of study, including time for recess, art, music or physical education (Dee & Jacob, 2010). While Dee & Jacob (2011) reveal that there may have been growth in specific subgroups in mathematical performance among fourth graders, it seems that the cost far outweighs the benefit. Losing time for art, music, science, social studies, and play, as well as opportunities for intellectual freedom and creativity, creates more and longer-lasting deficits than is acceptable.

Furthermore, as Ladd (2017) explains, NCLB has led to a narrowing of what happens within reading and English classrooms. Because of the heavy reliance on multiple-choice tests that are cheaper and more easily scored, the testing in and of itself shapes the type of teaching and learning prevalent in classrooms today. Because the tests do not measure conceptual knowledge, higher-order application, or writing skills, it only makes sense that teachers will spend less time supporting these valuable skills. Similarly, research on the link between writing

and learning proposes that the greatest variety of reasoning operations occurred during essay writing, which suggests that writing activities provide students with time to think most flexibly as they develop their ideas (Langer & Applebee, 1989). Remarkably, some argue that NCLB created a crisis in which schools began “teaching to the test,” although there is no evidence proving that standardized tests gauge anything more than shallow learning or test-taking skills (Meier & Wood, 2004). Overall, two of the most common teaching strategies that “teach to the test” are providing classwork specifically designed to prepare for the exam, such as classroom assignments or homework, and intensifying the frequency with which students take practice tests (Koretz et al., 1996; Jennings and Bearak, 2014). However, in terms of both the content associated with the test as well as the general learning outside of the test content, determining if such teaching strategies actually improve student learning is a predominantly unanswered question (Zakharov & Carnoy, 2021).

Additionally, while NCLB touted that it was going to equalize the playing field, it actually created new pockets of learning loss among students who did not necessarily fit within the specified subgroups. For instance, various studies document that the incentive for teachers to focus attention on students near the proficiency cut point or “bubble kids” has led to lower growth for those students who are most behind (Ladd & Lauen, 2010; Neal & Schanzenbach, 2010). Kohn (2000) reiterates that “standardized tests tend to measure the temporary acquisition of facts and skills, including the skill of test-taking itself, more than genuine understanding. To that extent, the fact that such tests are more likely to be used and emphasized in schools with higher percentages of minority students (a fact that has been empirically verified) predictably results in poorer-quality teaching in such schools”(n.p.).

Finally, as Ladd (2017) states, while NCLB was supposed to raise standards, it actually played a heavy hand in lowering them. The accountability provisions of the law mandated that if a state chose to raise its standards without providing the additional resources and support needed to meet those standards, which is a costly endeavor for states with poor education funding, the result would be greater numbers of failing schools. Therefore, it is of no surprise that some states responded to this problem by actually lowering their standards.

NCLB altered the educational landscape, and much of the damage it inflicted on our teaching and learning practices is still with us today. The testing mandates have changed, but the effects are still very much with us. NCLB paved a path for American education that has led us far from one that offers students opportunities to learn and grow with their individual needs in mind.

Problem Statement

Secondary ELA teachers are seeing a surge in critical reading, writing, and thinking deficits in their students. Such deficits undoubtedly negatively impact students' abilities to navigate their futures. Unable to read texts critically or express independent thoughts through writing has dire consequences for students as individuals and for democracy as a whole. Additionally, when many of our teaching practices support students in the kind of thinking that focuses on finding the "right" answer, how can we be shocked or surprised when they are not able to think for themselves? Whether it is a history worksheet asking students to find the correct year or details of a historical event, or ELA prompts asking students to write down three examples of figurative language found in a text, or the science assignment that asks students to memorize the parts of the cell, this type of education is training students to find the "right"

answer; however, it is not supporting the divergent thinking needed to support a well-functioning society.

While students must learn foundational knowledge, there also have to be extensive opportunities for expanding on that type of “lower” learning. For instance, a 2019 Gallup Poll over “Creativity in Learning” revealed that while 87% of teachers and 77% of parents believed that teaching which incorporates creativity has a bigger impact on students, only 26% of students feel that they work on projects with real-world applicability. Additionally, the Gallup Poll (2019) revealed that there seems to be an over-concentration on memorization and repetition. When our pedagogical practices are overly reliant on the lowest levels of Bloom’s: remembering and understanding, to prepare students for standardized test success, we cannot expect that our students will do well when asked to analyze, evaluate, and create. Instead of asking students to find the “right” answer, they must be given activities that allow them to experience the educational journey instead of being hyper-focused on the outcome. Consistent with Dewey’s notion of a Creative Democracy, Greene (2000) theorizes that the heart of education should be the quest, the beginning, and students need to be allowed to find their own answers and solve their own problems. The experience should be an individualized opportunity to form meaning. Additionally, Greene (2000) argues that such opportunities will produce various outcomes, and unknown talents will be unearthed. Narrow expectations of what we want students to know and learn create limits and boundaries. Such pedagogical practices actually close doors. Our practices must change in order to open doors and support students in critical thinking.

Furthermore, we must analyze how an educational landscape overfocused on standardized testing and devoid of creative opportunities affects our most vulnerable communities. Paris and Alim (2017) ask the question: “What if the goal of teaching and learning

with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their cultural practices and investments?” (p. 3). So many of our pedagogical practices are entrenched in the notion that we need to “lift up” students of color so that they can perform at the same level as White students on standardized tests; however, we never admit how the testing that is performed is exclusive by nature, designed to separate the high scores from the low, the winners from the losers, with no regard for student experience or personal growth (Ford & Helms, 2012). In fact, as Au & Gourd’s (2013) research establishes, despite the claims that standardized tests such as NCLB can be utilized to reduce achievement gaps, we have yet to “reconcile the historical racism, nativism, and eugenics that lay at the roots of high-stakes standardized testing” (p.2).

Our students are inheriting a planet ravaged by climate change, extreme political polarization, a global refugee crisis, warring nations, a myriad of issues grown out of a worldwide pandemic, and artificial intelligence technologies that threaten to unravel society. These new and unusual problems will need new and unusual solutions. Mark Lieberman (2021) gathered data to discover which job skills are needed most in a post-pandemic society, and the majority of his findings placed importance on creativity, critical thinking, and cognitive flexibility. The need for creative thinking has never been more crucial. The ability to think critically and use one’s knowledge to improve one’s community is timeless. Giving our students opportunities to be apt readers who can evaluate the world around them, critical writers able to develop and share their ideas with others, and creative problem solvers ready to tackle the next generation’s problems is the best gift we can offer them. Therefore, how can we provide ELA teachers with the skills necessary to make such changes in their classrooms that will support the

kinds of intellectual thinking needed for our students to thrive? It is essential to better understand what can be done to support secondary ELA teachers in offering pedagogical practices and creative classrooms that will scaffold students in higher-level thinking, which improves critical reading, writing, and thinking skills, as well as individualized opportunities for personal growth.

OKA+ Schools Institute and Creating Creative School Cultures

Founded in 2002, the Oklahoma A+ Schools Institute (OKA+) is a nonprofit organization that is housed at The University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma, and is affiliated with the National A+ Schools Consortium. OKA+ utilizes arts integration as a means to create “an environment that values innovation, collaboration, and critical thinking” in order to meet the needs of every student (OKA+). When considering the educational landscape in Oklahoma and the growing pressures of standardization and test scores, OKA+ Schools could be one way for schools to integrate more creative opportunities for students.

Overall, the OKA+ goal is to offer the skills, materials, and resources to support creative school environments where students are engaged because, as most educators will agree, engaged students are successful students. Through utilizing teacher training opportunities, organizations such as the OKA+ Institute could offer solutions to the problem of giving teachers the skills, resources, and materials needed in order to become more inclusive of creative pedagogical practices in their classrooms. The framework of the OKA+ organization is comprised of eight research-based “essentials,” or a set of eight commitments designed to support student learning:

Arts

- Integrated into all content areas, the arts (drama, dance, music, visual arts, media arts, and creative writing) are experienced daily and used to engage students and support learning

- Embraced as an essential component to creativity, learning, and personal edification

Curriculum

- Utilizing curriculum and standards in order to intentionally integrate the arts
- Supporting teachers in effective and engaging instruction to enhance learning

Multiple Learning Pathways

- Embracing multiple intelligences and brain research to focus on 21st Century skills and higher order thinking skills that support the whole child

Experiential Learning

- Grounded in arts-based and hands-on learning experiences, experiential learning models the creative process and inquiry based learning in order to support student engagement and alternative assessment opportunities

Enriched Assessment

- Creates a more comprehensive image of student learning
- A reflective practice used by teachers and students to support learning and self-assessment

Collaboration

- A valued and intentionally practiced design to build relationships within and outside of the school community
- Developed through intentional opportunities for teachers to plan together

Infrastructure

- Provides relevant professional development, logistics, resources, time, support, and mentorship to allow teachers to implement the essentials intentionally

Climate

- Developing a creative, respectful, fun, and engaging community for teachers and students that supports collaboration, celebration, and focuses on lifelong learning

Henrickson's (2010) OKA+ Executive Summary highlights the research findings from a study conducted over OKA+ Schools from 2002 to 2007. Overall, the major findings from the research revealed that while the OKA+ member schools serve a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged and minority students (State Report Card Data), OKA+ Schools exhibited numerous positive outcomes including "higher achievement, better attendance for students and teachers, decreased disciplinary problems in schools, happier, more effective educators, joyful, engaged students, more parent and community involvement, and creative, focused instruction" (Henricksen, 2010).

While organizations such as OKA+ Schools may not offer solutions to every problem that needs to be addressed to ensure student engagement and much-needed critical thinking support, it is one accessible resource that could be utilized to support Oklahoma schools in empowering teachers to utilize more creative classroom practices to support student engagement and learning.

Theoretical Frameworks

Constructivism

As a secondary ELA classroom teacher, I have witnessed students interacting with texts, images, as well as with their peers, and it is clear that each student's understanding and contextualization is dependent on the individual student. Furthermore, each student's prior knowledge and experiences play a role in how they construct that meaning; they each come into

the classroom within their own spheres of understanding. Therefore, my experiences have led me to adopt constructionism as one epistemological stance. Crotty (1998) defines constructivism conceptually in that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p.43). This blends well when considering the role that creativity plays in our educational experiences. Constructivism opens the space for our pedagogical practices to support students in developing critical thinking and independent growth through creative classroom spaces in acknowledging that students will have the opportunity to make their own meanings through these creative teaching and learning spaces. Creative classroom spaces are designed for students to make meaning; therefore, constructionism is a well-suited theoretical approach when engaging in research involving creative thought.

Teachers, as well as students, are influenced by the meanings that have been defined and accepted by the culture at-large. As preservice teachers enter teacher education programs and then their new buildings, they enter cultures that already have values, beliefs, norms, and traditions. When considering how to provide teachers with the training and support to create creative classrooms, we must look at the factors, beliefs, and interactions that influence teachers as they construct their own understanding. Our cultural fascination with standardized tests and skills has played a role in shaping how teachers construct their understanding of what the secondary ELA classroom should look like, or how it should function, and what skills they want students to exhibit. As Crotty points out, “It is clearly not the case that individuals encounter phenomena in the world and make sense of them one by one. Instead, we are all born into a world of meaning” (p.54). As educators, we, too, are born into institutions of already formed beliefs about teaching and learning, and those constructions shape our own pedagogical practices.

While we may make meaning on our own, we are also always unconsciously absorbing the meanings that have already been designated and handed down to us. We can see these layers of meaning-making in our classrooms. Classroom practices are shaped by the teacher, mentor teachers, students, administrators, families, and the cultural and political climate. For instance, external pressures such as NCLB and federalized or state testing programs or laws that steal teacher autonomy shape teachers' thinking about how and what they should be teaching.

There are a variety of factors at play at all times. Therefore, for this study in researching how to implement creativity in the secondary ELA classroom, there will be many and disparate understandings of what creativity is and the role it plays in the secondary ELA classroom; hence, gleaning a better understanding of these meanings and constructions will be useful in considering what can be done to promote creative practices in the secondary ELA classroom.

Noddings' Theory of Care

Along the same veins of constructivism, Noddings (1995) argues that “selves are not born” (p. 98). Instead, she posits, we are under continual construction through our encounters with the world around us (Noddings, 1995). However, when considering how we are each shaped by the world around us, Noddings' focus turns to the ethical and moral implications of education. She argues that we have a moral obligation to care for others. In fact, it is foundational to who we are as human beings and the very fabric of what holds society together (Noddings, 2013). If we are, in fact, a product of our surroundings, then it would be beneficial for communities to do that which will produce healthy, competent, and autonomous members, and, consequently, our educational systems would be central to such an endeavor.

Noddings' Theory of Care meshes well with the study of creativity in the secondary ELA classroom in that creativity is one way to care and nurture our students as individuals. Adopting

creative classroom approaches means giving students what they need to thrive as individual learners. It is about putting each student's needs as a learner first. Utilizing caring as a mode for educating students as individuals means allowing students to learn in terms of what is most meaningful to them and allowing them to chart their own educational paths. Creative classroom spaces invite students to do just that – to make their own meanings, to forge their own paths, to speak to their own identities and experiences.

According to Noddings (1995; 2013), the four essential elements of her Theory of Care include engrossment, compassion, reciprocity, and motivational displacement. Adhikari, Saha, & Sen (2023) describe engrossment as “how the person providing care perceives and addresses the wants of the person for whom they are providing care” (p. 199). Additionally, Adhikari, Saha, & Sen (2023) define compassion as the way the teacher sympathizes with the needs of the student; the teacher must first be able to understand and consider the needs of the student and then also be willing to put the student's needs as a learner before the needs of the teacher, or motivational displacement, which embodies a learner-centered approach. Finally, Adhikari, Saha, & Sen (2023) explain that reciprocity is one of the most novel theoretical concepts when understanding Noddings' Theory of Care in that it is a relationship in which the student continues to learn because they acknowledge that the teacher cares for them, and the teacher continues to teach because they acknowledge the student cares for them. It is a mutually beneficial and meaningful relationship in which the needs of both are ethically served. Overall, Noddings (2003) argues that caring is simply responding to the needs of the student, which should be central to pedagogical practice.

Noddings' Theory of Care feels antithetical to the pedagogical practices that prioritize standardization. Creative classrooms have the capability to allow teachers to nurture students as

individuals, to feed their hearts and souls, to see them for who they are as people, not a human resource to be maximized and quantified.

Purpose of Study

Secondary English language arts teachers have felt enormous pressure from policymakers, administrators, and a multitude of groups who have touted themselves as protecting parental rights. These external forces have created anxiety, stress, and frustration as they have impacted how and what teachers were allowed to teach. Particularly, accountability and assessment-driven reform movements of the past twenty years, such as No Child Left Behind, have negatively affected teacher retention (Wronowski & Urick, 2018). The entities that exist outside of the classroom, yet desire to control the learning within those classrooms, have often pushed for the kind of learning that can easily be gauged, quantified, and used as evidence for learning and progress. Unfortunately, this type of learning seldom supports students in critical thinking or meets their individual learning needs. There are simply right answers, wrong answers, and a clear numerical score that can easily be quantified and compared against others. And while it is far from accurate, all of these easily assessed outcomes feel as though they are free of politicization. Students can either read well or cannot read well according to a standardized test. Either they know where to place a comma in a compound sentence, or they do not. As one teacher I taught with would say, “There is nothing political about grammar.” Fearful of our political climate, she chose to focus on sentence structure instead of student discussion. While it is understandable that teachers, to avoid trouble with parents and administrators, will focus on the kinds of learning that are easy to assess, show student growth, and stay out of the fray, this type of learning is often depleted of allowing students to think creatively and does little to excite or engage learners. Because secondary ELA teachers are facing so many external

pressures to focus on lower-level cognition, it is important to consider ways in which we can support them in incorporating creative opportunities for students that allow students to create, problem solve, while also advancing individualized learning opportunities that engage students. The purpose of this study was to improve local practices regarding professional development opportunities to support secondary ELA teachers in integrating creative pedagogical practices.

Research Questions

Maxine Greene (2000) posits that imagination allows students to make claims to their own projects and, therefore, find their own voices. Pedagogical practices that support students in creative or imaginative work are one way in which educators can scaffold independent thinking. However, whether it be the pressures of standardized testing or, perhaps, the lack of training, the literature available provides ample research on the variety of factors that limit creativity as an overall pedagogical goal in the classroom. There is important data to gather to better understand this issue, especially in the field of secondary English education. While creativity seems inherent to the tasks of supporting students in being apt and fluid writers and critically thinking about texts, there is not a great deal of research in regard to creativity in the ELA classroom. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to better understand how secondary ELA teachers can be supported through professional development or training in order to offer creative opportunities in their classrooms with the goal of encouraging higher-level thinking and individualized student growth. The following questions were pursued:

- In what ways, if at all, do secondary ELA teachers view the integration of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice?
- How do secondary ELA teachers describe the key obstacles they face in incorporating creativity into their instructional practices and classroom spaces?

- In what ways, if any, can a professional development opportunity foster an environment where secondary ELA teachers feel empowered to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces?

With these questions in mind, I hope to better understand how change can be enacted in secondary ELA teachers' classrooms concerning the incorporation of creative opportunities. Because this research was designed to better understand those factors influencing creativity in the ELA classroom to improve teacher pedagogical practices, it can be characterized as pragmatic, qualitative inquiry. It is hoped that the insight gathered can contribute to programs, interventions, and teacher training opportunities that will positively impact ELA classrooms and student learning through the inclusion of creative pedagogical practices, and this data can be used to drive discussion in how to support secondary ELA teachers in implementing creative opportunities for students that honors their individuality and autonomy while also offering opportunities for intellectual growth.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Defining creativity is foundational in discussing the importance of creativity in educational settings. Therefore, countless definitions come to light when examining the extant literature. As the work of Puryear (2020) describes, defining creativity as the Achilles heel of creativity research outlines the importance of a definition that assists researchers in evaluating creativity research as a whole. While Puryear calls for a definition that works in any research realm, I am focusing on definitions that work to honor the learning done in educational settings, specifically the secondary ELA classroom. However, it is important to note that there seems to be a vast and disparate understanding of not only the role secondary educational institutions play in growing creative and critical thinking skills in students, but the definitions of the term “creativity” as well.

Literature regarding creativity in schools, elementary through post-secondary and throughout a variety of subjects, has been researched for decades, and in parsing through the various definitions of creativity, the most appropriate definition for this research can be utilized for discussion in what creativity means in the secondary ELA classroom, and what can be done to support secondary ELA teachers in adopting practices that empower student learning.

Creativity: An Inherent Skillset

Creativity is often perceived as an inherent skillset (Patston, Kauffman, Cropley & Marrone, 2021). Teachers often believe that students either have it or they do not; therefore, there is no reason to train students to grow as creative thinkers. In fact, Gaut (2014) reveals that the oldest philosophies regarding creativity by philosophers such as Young and Kant is that creativity is a characteristic that one is born with, and it cannot be taught. Their theories are

grounded in the notion that true creativity is the product of genius, and it is antithetical to being taught to think in a certain way because “all learning is a form of imitation” and “all learning consists of following the rules.”

Creativity: That Which is New and Useful

In more recent history, the most popular and widely accepted definition of creativity is Runco and Jaeger’s (2012) definition, which requires “originality and effectiveness.” Similarly, Plucker, Beghetto & Dow (2004), described creativity as that which “produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful” (p.90). Rinkevich (2011) focuses on defining “creative teaching” as teaching that is individualized and meaningful for each student while also using the context of “original thinking” and “necessary.” Furthermore, Runco (1996) defines creativity in terms of how one can “transform the objective world into original interpretations, coupled with the idea to decide when it is useful and when it is not.” Creative thought must offer solutions and insights. The work of Papston, Kaufman, Cropley, and Marone (2021) analyzed the curricula in 12 countries to determine how creativity is defined, how it is used in the curriculum, and how teachers are trained to implement it. Their study adopted what they deemed the “widely accepted” definition that creativity is new or novel (original thought) and also useful, meaning it must serve a specific and necessary purpose.

Gaut also pushes back against theories that posit that one is born with creativity coursing through one’s blood, or one is not. He grounds his definition of creativity in the “making of new and useful things” as well. Gaut (2014) argues that all creative thinkers must be taught the basics as they become familiar with a particular realm. One major theme that emerges when looking closely at creativity research is that prior knowledge is integral to any creative process. For instance, a painter will need to be introduced to painting equipment, materials, and, of course, the

knowledge of other painted works. All learning, creative or otherwise, begins with experiential conditions where one is taught something. Gaut (2014) exemplifies this through describing the acquisition of language. Every person engages with others as a listener and observer as they begin to understand language. And even as they begin to use language, they do not just parrot what they have seen and heard. It is not mimicry. Even Shakespeare first had to acquire language before he could do something creative with it. He had to see a play before he wrote one. Individuals use the language in their own way to communicate an individualized expression.

This analogizes the ways in which people are taught skills and then use those skills to create something “new and valuable.” As Goethe contends, “while you content yourself with generalities, everyone can imitate you; but, in the particular, no one can—and why? because no others have experienced exactly the same thing.” No one is born innately creative, and we all have the ability to be creative because we have each been shaped by our individual experiences.

Gaut’s theory strikes me as Vygotskian in his claim that it is our experiences and interactions that play a large role in how we think. That relationship found in the cycle of teaching and learning and interactions with others can and should play a role in supporting creative thinking. Teaching should not be about “following the rules.” Instead, creativity is a way of thinking, and teachers can scaffold students to do so, or as Gaut (2014) states, “drawing one’s abilities out - and enhancing them.”

Creativity: Problem Solving & Critical Thinking

The Torrance Creativity Test was developed in the U.S. in the 1960s, and the concept of creativity has been evolving ever since (Haynes, 2020). Considered one of the founders of creativity research, Torrance researched creativity for over forty years, and grappled with the best way to define it. His overarching definition of creative thinking was the ability for one to sense

the gaps or see the problem in a given situation, hypothesize about those problems, evaluate and revise their hypotheses, and then communicate their findings with others (Shaughnessy, 1998). Similarly, Guilford (1967) posits that there is something creative about all problem solving; creative production exists whenever problem solving occurs, and Rhodes (1961) defined creativity in terms of a kind of problem solving that necessitates divergent thinking, more specifically, flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration.

Additionally, Guest and Hohn (2009) observed two elementary arts-integrated classrooms to determine the most effective ways to utilize creativity for student edification. The researchers posit that creativity is not just important when considering the arts; creativity is central to any area of study that wants to elicit analytical thinking and problem-solving in students; however, creativity must be incorporated into classrooms effectively.

Abdullah and Crammond's (2017) literature review of extant research regarding creativity definitions in educational research concluded that creativity must be viewed as a cognitive process and include the 4 Ps: problem-solving, process, product, and press (environment). Divergent thinking is also an important aspect of defining creativity in terms of Abdullah's review. The purpose of the review was to assist educators in considering the characteristics of creative students to foster creativity in all students.

These definitions are useful in that at the heart of what we desire for student learning is handing them the tools needed to be apt problem solvers. Both problem-solving and critical thinking are foundational in these definitions.

Creativity: A Means to Social Justice & Improved Equity

The work of Luria and Kaufman (2017) approaches the use of creative thinking to improve equity, for it is through intellectual thinking and curiosity that students will have the

analytical skills necessary to truly understand and disrupt inequitable systems. Therefore, their definition is hinged on supporting students in growing as intellectuals.

Overall, the literature suggests that most of the time when the term creativity is used in educational settings, it is synonymous with critical thinking, problem solving, and original thinking – strengthening students’ ability to think in new (and useful) ways. It need not be an art course to support creativity.

Additionally, there is growing work in how creativity can be used to subvert dominant practices and oppressive systems in order to support social justice opportunities for students. For instance, Evans, Cook, and Griffiths (2008) discuss how creative pedagogy gives students the space to establish group identities that allow them to mobilize and work towards equitable change, or, as Haraway (2000) states, “provoke a space of possibility.” Additionally, creative classroom spaces allow room for experimental techniques or activities that empower students to find different paths of understanding the world and their place in it (Evans, Cook, Griffiths, 2008).

Relying on trauma-informed practices, Goessling (2020) argues that art experiences give students the paths needed to work through intergenerational, transgenerational, and historical trauma. In fact, due to their cross-cultural nature, mediums such as music, theater, film, visual art, and printmaking have been used for generations to promote social change. Creating classroom spaces where this kind of work can be done promotes social justice opportunities for students to recognize and work through their trauma.

Similarly, Wright’s (2020) work reveals that creative practices can be used as a tool that offers students new ways and modes for considering their identities and their realities.

Art-making allows students a means to process and analyze their own experiences, a precious classroom opportunity for students to find power, hope, and agency.

Furthermore, Sanders' (2004) work asserts that teaching students about historic art-based initiatives is one way in which to support students in envisioning alternate social practices and possibilities. It can also create a space where students can build shared visions of equality and justice.

The importance of culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) can also be tied to using creativity to support social justice. In order to create a classroom environment where all learners feel welcome to learn, share, and participate as authentic individuals, teachers must embrace a culturally sustaining pedagogy, a pedagogy that centers teaching and learning within each student's cultural norm (Paris & Alim, 2017). CSP calls for educators to think about how to welcome different and creative forms of student learning.

Creativity: Supporting Social and Emotional Well-Being

One important area of research is the way in which art integration activities can be used to support student well-being. Art therapy has been used for decades to support trauma healing. For instance, Warren and Nash (2019) present using creative teaching activities to support counselors in learning how to use art in order to elicit awareness over one's own feelings. With this research in mind, it is interesting to consider how such strategies can be used in the classroom.

More recently, we are seeing arts integration as a tool to support Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Farrington and Shewfelt's (2020) research contends that art practices are foundational in supporting students in improved emotional self-regulation, collaboration, and confidence in sharing one's thoughts and feelings. Additionally, Farrington et al's (2019)

research revealed the value of arts integration through a variety of different experiences. Whether it is a student who feels more confident after creating a piece of art, a student becoming more emotionally adept after a theater class, or a student recognizing their perseverance through enduring a challenging learning experience in a dance class, the arts experience supports students in their overall social and emotional growth. Furthermore, Fanchini, Jongbloed, and Dirani (2019) drew clear correlations between creativity and well-being when studying French schoolchildren, particularly female students.

Stephenson and Dobson (2020) researched the effectiveness of drama pedagogy in the UK to gauge student well-being. Drama pedagogy allowed students to exercise creative freedom through imaginative work, develop their imaginative skills, contextualize learning, and support them in empathizing with marginalized or oppressed groups. Labeled as “agentic learning,” this research reveals the importance of giving students opportunities to think creatively and problem solve. This type of learning boosts confidence and creates relevance for students. When students have social and emotional health, they are more likely to thrive as learners.

Creativity: Building Safe Spaces & Community

As Bramwell et al’s (2011) work revealed, community was a major factor in creative spaces in school settings. Whether it was the school community or the classroom community, a sense of community plays a significant role in supporting creative teaching. There has to be an overall sense that creative work is appreciated for it to thrive. The work of Leggett (2017) advocates for creative early childhood classrooms in order to support young learners in creative thinking, which will positively impact their creative processing as they grow. Leggett (2017) proposes environments and teachers capable of guiding students to use their curiosity, imagination, and playfulness to develop creative potential. From an early age, it is important to

support students in feeling comfortable in creativity. Farrington and Shewfelt's (2020) research proposes that one of the most effective aspects of arts spaces is that they are often considered "safe spaces" where students feel that they can take risks, be challenged, and feel discomfort. Additionally, the work of Arrington, Moors, and Badgy (2021) proposes that classroom environments must allow space for failure in order to truly support student learning. Most educators accept that learning happens in the midst of the challenge or struggle; however, most of our grading and pedagogical practices are devoid of space for failure. Creating classroom spaces where students feel safe to fail can open doors for them to understand the goals of learning, which is often creative problem-solving and mental dexterity.

Teacher Perceptions of Creativity

One of the biggest questions that is raised throughout the literature is: Can creativity be taught? This idea is central to better understanding teacher experiences with creativity in that if teachers do not believe it can be taught, then it is doubtful that any attempt would be made to do so. In my own experience as an educator, there are large groups of people who believe that creativity is a natural tendency or a personality trait; therefore, they believe some students are just better at it than others. Even if they believe there is value in including creative activities in the classroom, they most likely do not think that those activities or environments actually support students in growing as creative thinkers. Kladder and Lee (2019) found that 51% of teachers surveyed felt that students did not have creative opportunities in school, and 89% of music teachers surveyed believed that creativity could be developed in every student. Additionally, Bowman (2019) contends that "teacher enablers" can utilize "challenge-driven ethos" to support students in becoming problem-solvers. Not only does Bowman believe that creativity can be developed in students, but he also believes this shift needs to occur immediately.

Frawley's (2020) research reveals that Australian English teachers believe that creativity is central to writing instruction because writing is, in fact, an art form. The participants in the study revealed that creativity is a natural tenet in English instruction and removing it from the curriculum is devastating to student learning. Beghetto and Kaufman (2014) reveal that teacher perceptions about teaching and learning play a significant role in creative opportunities for students. If not properly trained to effectively support students with appropriate creative activities, then those opportunities are wasted.

Beghetto and Kaufman (2013) state that there is a proper time and place to introduce creativity, but there is much that schools need to do in supporting classroom teachers to best understand why creativity is important and how it can be properly included in instruction. Overall, the literature suggests that there is much that teachers can do to elicit creative thinking in students; therefore, it is clear that educators have a role in supporting students as creative thinkers. However, a lack of training and education is inhibiting it from occurring. Similarly, Brinkman (2010) calls for more teacher training in music education programs and proposes that the Amabile framework be used to teach students to approach tasks with creativity in mind, how to generate ideas, and how to allow ideas to slowly evolve. Finally, Ritter's et al (2020) research utilized the data from a one-year creativity training program, which resulted in findings that suggested students' ideation skills and cognitive flexibility improved during the course of the program. While the research revealed that original thinking did not improve, it does suggest that such programs could positively impact cognitive flexibility.. There are very clear methods in supporting students in growing as creative thinkers.

Creativity: Suppression in the Classroom

There are a variety of issues that suppress creativity in the classroom. For instance, as the research of Kettler, Lamb, Willerson, and Mullet (2018) suggests, creativity is sometimes viewed as a negative trait by classroom teachers. Results revealed that teachers found student characteristics associated with creativity less desirable than those characteristics in opposition to creativity. The research reveals that creative students may appear more off-task, hard to manage, or unfocused; therefore, it seems likely that in the age of standardized testing, educational institutions often choose to teach students how to navigate multiple-choice tests instead of supporting them in thinking critically. As educators, we may choose compliance over creativity not only to meet curricular goals, but also to keep classrooms and students more manageable. Additionally, Westby and Dawson (1995) discuss their research, which reveals that teachers often dislike personality traits tied to creativity: impulsivity, nonconformity, and individuality.

Morris's (2022) research contends that traditional teacher-directed education suppresses creativity in that the traditional educational setting always prescribes a set outcome for student learning. The teacher does not value student creativity, and because it is not valued as a learning objective, it will not be elicited in students. Morris's (2022) work proposes that there is a vast disconnect between a desire for creativity in the workforce and the actual educational opportunities offered to students.

Similarly, Sternberg (2006) uses the Investment Theory to determine that anyone can choose to be creative; however, most people choose not to due to the fact that the costs are too high. One must be personally motivated in order to chase creative endeavors that have little reward for the pursuer. If there is low value to creativity, it is not surprising that it is difficult to attract participants.

Creativity as a Means to Combat Standardization

Much of the literature reveals that it is institutional structures, standards, and a focus on test scores that stand in the way of eliciting student creativity. For instance, Haynes (2020) posits that Australia's narrow and authoritarian standards inhibit teachers in their ability to teach and assess through creative means, which limits students' overall creative educational opportunities. Frawley's (2020) research supports Haynes' (2020) conclusion that Australian standardization is destroying creative opportunities regarding teaching and learning. Some of the participants in the study actually left teaching due to a climate that placed standardization over creativity, and those teachers refused to teach under such conditions that limited them from teaching and limited students from learning.

Noddings (2013) also determined that rigid standardization in schools steals creative opportunities for teachers and students alike. Her research also described a teacher driven from the classroom due to her loss of creative autonomy. The focus on passing tests limits student opportunities to explore and consider "outside of the box" options. Additionally, Geist and Horn (2009) assert that federal and local mandates have forced schools to remove arts and other creative opportunities to focus on improving math and reading scores. Much of the literature suggests that a focus on standardization is belittling teacher and student opportunities for creativity.

Beghetto's (2019) work supports the notion that the culture of standardized tests or Large Scale Assessments (LSAs), due to their very nature, steers students towards the same path, a path that foregoes both personalized learning and creativity. When all students are tested over the same material, their individual learning path is negatively impacted. Educators feel pressured to teach their students how to choose between four multiple-choice options instead of considering

the options that have never been explored. Standardization not only standardizes the curriculum, but it also appears to standardize the students.

Sanders (2004) argues that the arts are often challenged to justify their inclusion based on their ability to increase student performance on standardized tests; however, such a marginalized view of the arts in educating students leaves little room for understanding the powerful role that the arts and creative opportunities play in students' lives. Henricksen et al's (2021) work also stated that standardization is playing a large role in educational discourse, pushing creativity policies far from the center.

Haynes (2020) evaluated the courses and programs offered at a variety of Australian educational institutions and discovered that to better understand if creativity can be taught and what these programs actually mean when they invoke the use of the word "creativity." Haynes asserts that creative thinking, which he defines in terms of "rational creativity," creativity grounded in thinking, reasoning, knowledge, and critical reflection, can be fostered, but only in educational environments inclusive of freedom to explore, engaged teaching, appropriate curricula, and with the appropriate understanding of what creativity involves. Haynes' (2020) work also posits that institutions that narrowly focus on standardization and testing inhibit creative and critical thinking.

The focus on standardization is a clear threat to offering students creative opportunities in the classroom. Time for creative thought and activities is eaten up by test preparation and the never-ending search for improved test scores and statistical data that proves student learning.

Creativity: Modes of Fostering Creative Growth through Education

Rudienė, Volkovickienė, and Butvilas's (2016) research in early education shows that supporting young students in artistic self-expression has long-term implications in the child's

ability to listen, observe, and understand. Imagination plays a vital role in how children begin to process information and make meaning, and these abilities impact their learning for years.

Appreciating and fostering creativity in young students has long-term implications.

Evaluating creativity training in older students, Ritter's (2020) research reveals the use of a one-year college course to support students in a six-step cycle to encourage creative flexibility and idea generation. This work proved that intentional support in creative thinking could be useful, even in college-aged students.

Clifton (2022) evaluated assignments and prompts in the creative writing classroom to encourage creativity (critical thinking). This research explores the way in which creative writing elicits self-critical thinking, which is a key marker in intellectual development. Creative writing prompts can give students the space to engage with the thinking not done in traditional writing modes.

Balshaw (2004) evaluated the success of Creative Partnership (CP), a government program in the UK that used creative projects as a means to support inclusion. The CP program not only supported students in critical thinking, but also in confidence and communication skills. Balshaw (2004) argues that creative projects offer multiple points of entry; therefore, they are inherently inclusive. Government or community programs that push into schools in order to support student creativity can have positive impacts on the students as well as the school culture.

Using Amabile's (2013) theory, Kukkonen & Bolden (2022) argue that creativity can be supported through teaching educators how to support students' task motivation, domain-specific skills, and creativity-relevant processes. Moreover, Sternberg (2004) also relies on Amabile's theory to promote the concept that people are most creative when they are doing work they enjoy. Therefore, as educators, we can play a role in aiding students in pursuing personal projects

in order to encourage creative thinking. Sternberg's (2004) overall argument is that creativity is a choice, and there is much that can be done to support learners in growing their creative potential.

There are wide and varied applications for implementing creativity into classrooms, which correlates with Beghetto's position that adding creativity to classrooms does not equate to an overhaul of the educational system. There are many small and practical ways for teachers to include creative opportunities in their classrooms; creativity can be tended with gentle adjustments (Henriksen & Mishra, 2018).

Creativity: The Need for Teacher Training

When researching creativity in education settings, the theme of teacher training emerges in a significant way. Guo and Woulfin's (2016) research evaluated P21's (Partnership for 21st Century Instructional Framework) English and STEM frameworks for creativity. While the English frameworks included more creative products, the STEM frameworks lacked creativity in products. The researchers argued that educators should carefully determine how to include creativity in their classrooms and schools. While teachers do not have to be idea creators, they do need to be able to support their students with the resources to work creatively. If we are going to implement creativity as a goal, teachers need the training to support this type of learning. Additionally, while technology is incredibly important in supporting student creativity, it will not be an effective tool if it is not incorporated properly. Again, the research boils down to teacher training.

Additionally, Dr. Ronald Beghetto, a leading researcher in the field of creativity, advocates for teachers and administrators to embrace uncertainty in the search for educating for creativity. As educators, we are trained to teach students with a specific outcome in mind; therefore, it is uncomfortable when we are forced to wade into unpredictable dark waters

(Henriksen & Mishra, 2018). In the search for a concrete outcome, we can cause damage to the creative process. However, until teachers understand how to embrace this type of uncertainty, it is doubtful that it will occur with much regularity.

Patston, Kauffman, Cropley & Marrone (2021) studied the implementation of creative growth practices in the classroom in 12 countries and revealed that “There appears to be little evidence of a systemic and logical approach toward creative education, but rather an ad hoc grab bag for teachers to dip into with little understanding as to place and purpose from a broader perspective. There appears to be no effort to align the central policy directive across the disciplines” (p. 221). The issue of random usage of creative activities with no clear purpose is a practice that many teachers, including myself, have been guilty of. Without a clear initiative calling for more creativity in the classroom and the training to deliver effective creative opportunities, there will be no significant cultural change to adopt creative practices in the classroom. Similarly, Farrington and Shewfelt (2020) assert that while arts integration is a valuable classroom experience, it is not usually a skill taught in teacher training programs.

In order to support creativity in classroom environments, there is much that can be done to provide training to pre-service teachers as well as practicing teachers. Many practical suggestions and activities are easily integrated into classrooms.

Discussion

Overall, when looking at the vast body of extant research regarding creativity in K-12 educational settings, many themes emerged. For instance, teacher training needs to be implemented in order to support creativity in the classroom. And, as my own experience has dictated, standardization has continued to marginalize creative classroom work. However, it is clear that outside of creative writing opportunities, the literature lacked information regarding

creativity in the secondary English classroom. There was very little in the way of research or practice to support teachers in implementing creative pedagogical opportunities or approaches. It was surprising to find that there is such great depth in the field of creativity and technology, but so little in the area of English. As educators who live and breathe to support students in the art of writing and understanding the beauty of literary works, it seemed bizarre that there was so little in the way of research regarding creativity in the field of English education.

To better understand how the lack of creative teaching practices in the secondary ELA classroom can be addressed, I offered a creativity workshop to a group of secondary ELA teachers and then interviewed the teacher participants to determine what aspects of professional development, if any, could be utilized to support them in fostering creativity within their own classrooms. This research was designed to better understand the needs of secondary ELA teachers in order to provide them with the training and resources necessary to empower them in creating creative classroom spaces. Through interviewing secondary English teachers, there was much to discover about their existing beliefs and experience as secondary ELA teachers, with creativity, the factors that influenced them as well as inhibited them in offering creative opportunities for their students. Utilizing Guilford's (1967) notion that creative production exists whenever problem solving occurs, and Rhodes (1961) definition of creativity in the terms of a kind of problem solving that necessitates divergent thinking, more specifically, flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration, this research was designed to better understand ways in which change can be enacted to give English teachers the training and autonomy needed to implement creative practices to support critical thinking, as well as higher level cognitive tasks. We know that there are so many benefits to allowing creative opportunities in our classrooms; therefore, it is an issue of determining how to give teachers the resources and support to do so.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand how professional training opportunities could support secondary ELA teachers in becoming more inclusive of creative pedagogical practices. It was my hope that this research would shed light on how professional development could be used to promote secondary ELA classrooms that embrace creative practices, engage students, and support students in performing at Bloom's higher-level "create" tasks (higher-order thinking). This research was designed in order to, first, capture the prevailing mindset of how secondary ELA teachers within the district perceive of the concept of creativity and the role it plays in their classrooms. Additionally, this research was designed to seek how secondary ELA teachers perceive obstacles that hinder creativity within the secondary ELA classroom. Finally, through providing a three hour workshop to secondary ELA teachers in a large Oklahoma suburban school district facilitated by OKA+ Schools Institute, a non-profit organization that utilizes arts integration as a means to promote innovation, collaboration, and critical thinking, this research was designed to gather pragmatic data that could help determine the impact, if any, of one professional development opportunity on empowering secondary ELA teachers in becoming more inclusive of creativity within their classrooms. In seeking to better understand this issue, this study addressed three research questions:

- In what ways, if at all, do secondary ELA teachers view the integration of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice?
- How do secondary ELA teachers describe the key obstacles they face in incorporating creativity into their instructional practices and classroom spaces?

- In what ways, if any, can a professional development opportunity foster an environment where secondary ELA teachers feel empowered to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces?

This chapter illustrates the study's research methodology and includes discussions pertaining to the following areas: 1) rationale for research approach, 2) description of the research sample, 3) the OKA+ Workshop Intervention 4) summary of information needed, 5) overview of research design, 6) methods of data collection, 7) analysis and synthesis of data, 8) ethical considerations, 9) issues of trustworthiness, 10) researcher positionality, and 11) limitations of the study. The methodology chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for Pragmatic Qualitative Inquiry

There is a great deal of research regarding if creativity can be taught (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2013; Kim 2019; Kim 2020; Ritter, 2020). Additionally, research supports the notion that there are a variety of long term positive outcomes associated with creative pedagogical practices (Rudienè, Volkovickienè, and Butvilas's, 2016; Farrington and Shewfelt's, 2020; Stephenson and Dobson, 2020); however, there is little research related to better understanding how to support the inclusion of creative practices in the secondary ELA classroom through teacher training or professional development opportunities. While creativity is generally embraced as a valuable skill set (Gallup Poll, 2019), it is important to understand that in a post-NCLB educational environment, where schools and teachers are pressured to value standardized test scores over student autonomy and creativity, ensuring creative teaching and learning practices in secondary classrooms has become increasingly difficult. Therefore, this research was designed to gather data on the effects of one three-hour professional development opportunity in supporting secondary ELA teachers in incorporating creative teaching practices in their classrooms, and a qualitative approach allowed for the collection of the kind of research

that Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define as essential in gaining the understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences concerning a particular subject matter.

In the case of this research, qualitative inquiry was used to study how a professional development focused on arts and creativity integration affects teachers' experiences regarding the inclusion of creative teaching and learning practices in the secondary English Language Arts classrooms. In this case, qualitative research is appropriate as it is designed to explore and lend understanding to not only how the teachers perceive their personal relationships with creativity and the impact that the professional training has on that relationship, but this study is also attempting to acknowledge those external forces that may be shaping how creative teaching and learning practices are currently being utilized in the ELA classroom. Secondary ELA teachers' perspectives and experiences in this realm have the potential to unlock ways in which to improve student access to creative learning opportunities.

Additionally, when considering the type of qualitative research that is most appropriate for this particular subject matter, pragmatism focuses on outcomes instead of questions concerning the nature of truth (Morgan, 2014; Patton, 2015), predicated on the notion that "truth is verified and confirmed by testing ideas and theories in practice" (Patton, 2015, p.152). Early twentieth-century researchers such as John Dewey and Charles Sanders Pierce first utilized *the pragmatic theory of truth* in order to find useful answers to problems (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, instead of considering concepts of reality and truth, pragmatism acknowledges that there can be a single or a multitude of realities that can be examined (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In the same vein as constructivism, which Vygotsky theorized as the way in which individuals construct their own meanings according to their own experiences and ideas, pragmatic qualitative inquiry generally accepts that one's understanding and perception vary depending on

individual experiences (Morgan, 2014). Therefore, in regard to determining how professional development opportunities can be used to shift secondary ELA teachers' classroom practices in order to promote creative learning environments, pragmatic qualitative inquiry could serve to, as Patton (2015) describes, "seek practical and useful answers that can solve, or at least provide direction in addressing, concrete problems" (p.152). This methodology was designed to determine specific strategies for promoting creative learning opportunities in the secondary ELA classroom; therefore, pragmatic qualitative inquiry is an appropriate approach and could be used to address the concrete problem of the lack of creative pedagogical practices for secondary students in the ELA classroom, in that we must better understand the impact of professional learning in regard to creative classroom practices.

The Research Sample

In order to select this study's participant sample, purposeful criterion-based sampling was used to gather information about the issue of supporting secondary ELA teachers through professional development to shift perceptions and practice in becoming more inclusive of creative pedagogies. Bloomberg & Volpe (2012) suggest that criterion-based sampling is beneficial when all of the participants have shared experiences.

In the case of this study, the target sample participant size included nine secondary ELA teachers. All of the participants were required to fit the criteria as follows:

- All participants must be certified secondary (6-12) ELA teachers currently employed in the large public suburban school district where the workshop intervention occurred.
- All participants must be certified secondary (6-12) ELA teachers who are currently the primary teacher in a secondary ELA classroom (English).

- All participants must attend the three-hour OKA+ professional development creativity workshop on February 17, 2025.

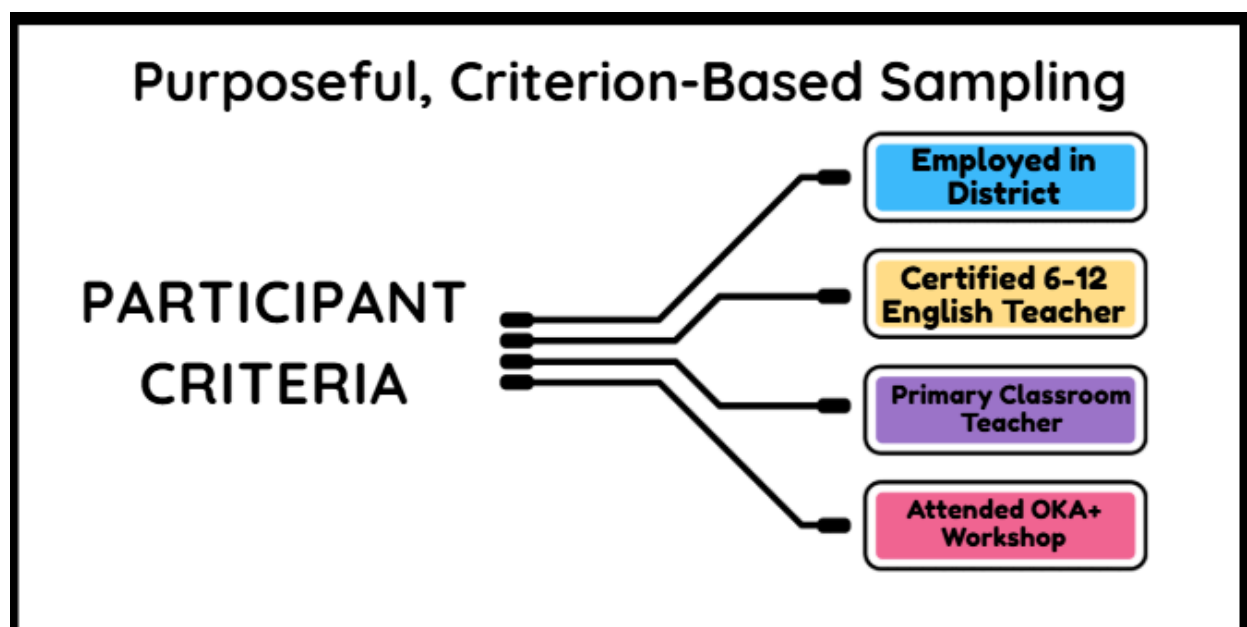


Figure 5

Purposeful, Criterion-Based Sampling Participant Criteria

Note. Participants had to meet all of the criteria to participate in the research

Because all of the participants were secondary English teachers in the same district who attended the same professional development, using criterion-based sampling should shed light on how professional development can be used to support this specific group of educators, or similar groups of educators, in adopting creative classroom practices. Although the participants were selected using criterion-based sampling, there were differences in age, teaching site, grade level, and years spent teaching. Stratified, purposeful sampling can, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) assert, be used to delineate subgroups and analyze comparisons among those subgroups. In the case of this study, I selected three early-career teachers (years 1-5), three mid-career teachers

(years 6-15), and three veteran teachers (years 15+) to better understand how one's years of classroom experience might affect each teacher's perception, training, and understanding of creative teaching practices. Utilizing these two types of purposeful sampling was selected to elicit data to potentially inform future professional development endeavors in the area of supporting creative classroom spaces, specifically in the field of English Language Arts.

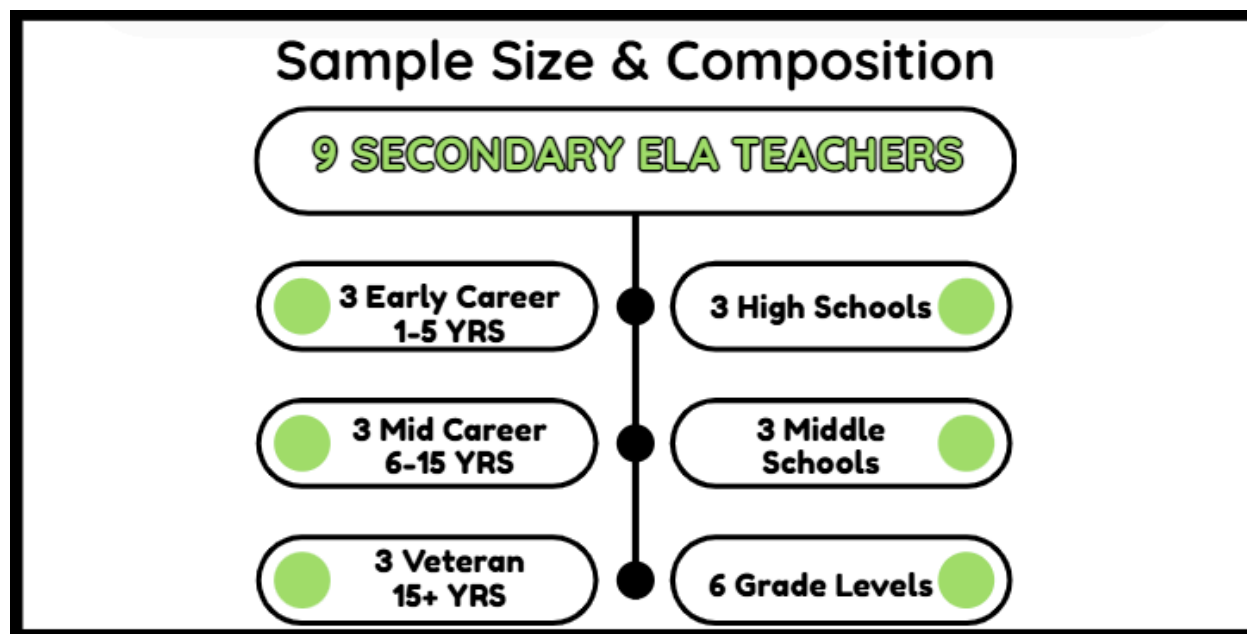


Figure 6

Participant Sample Size & Composition

Note. Stratified, purposeful sampling was used to delineate and compare subgroups

In order to first gather a pool of potential participants, those teachers who signed up to attend the workshop were sent an email inviting them to participate in the study. Workshop attendees were in no way required to participate in the research. As a way to attract participants, I offered willing teachers the opportunity to win a \$50 Amazon gift card for being a research participant. After the research interviews were completed, the participants were each assigned a number, and using the website wheelofnames.com, I entered the participant numbers (1-9) to

select one participant to receive the gift card. The gift card was then delivered to the winning teacher participant.

Teachers who were willing to serve as participants were asked to fill out a qualifying survey and consent to participate form (**Appendix A**) to ensure that they were appropriate candidates who fit the requirements of participation and were freely consenting and willing to commit to the necessary interviews and documentation needed to collect data. Of those teachers who were willing to participate and who also fit the requirements of participation in the study, nine teachers were selected as research participants: three early-career teachers, three mid-career teachers, and three veteran teachers. Additionally, the nine participants represented six different secondary sites, three high school sites, and three middle school sites, as well as six different grade levels.

Table 1
Description of Participants by Years of Teaching Experience

<i>Participant Pseudonym</i>	<i>Years Teaching</i>
Ms. Apple	Mid-Career (6-15 Years)
Ms. Brave	Mid-Career (6-15 Years)
Mrs. Crutch	Veteran (15+ Years)
Mrs. Divine	Veteran (15+ Years)
Mrs. Eager	Mid-Career (6-15 Years)
Ms. Flowers	Early-Career (1-5 Years)
Ms. George	Early-Career (1-5 Years)
Dr. Hammer	Veteran (15+ Years)
Ms. Isabel	Early-Career (1-5 Years)

Note. Teaching-experience categories were defined as follows: Early-Career = 1–5 years, Mid-Career = 6–15 years, and Veteran = 15+ years.

The OKA+ Creativity Workshop Description

As part of the school district’s professional development conference that occurs in February each year, secondary (6-12) English and literacy teachers were invited to attend the OKA+ Creativity Workshop. Approximately 150 secondary English and literacy teachers were emailed in January 2025 to notify them of the workshop and invite them to sign up to reserve one of the thirty available spots. A detailed description of the OKA+ Workshop can be found in **Appendix E**. Teachers were sent a description of the workshop to persuade them to attend:

Unleash your creativity and discover the power of writing through engaging, cross-curricular activities! In this workshop, participants will dive into the world of neologism—the art of creating new words—while exploring how to make writing fun, dynamic, and connected to other areas of learning. You'll take part in activities that bring together different subjects, helping students find new ways to spark their imagination and build their vocabulary. Learn how to integrate the arts into writing instruction and create memorable, meaningful experiences that make words come alive. Come ready to write, create, and explore!

The OKA+ presenters primarily focused on supporting four specific Oklahoma Academic Standards via the OKA+ Workshop:

- Standard 2: The reading and writing process. Students will use a variety of recursive reading and writing processes.
- Standard 3: Critical reading and writing. Students will apply critical thinking skills to reading and writing.
- Standard 7: Multimodal Literacies. Students will comprehend and communicate knowledge through alphabetic, aural, visual, spatial, and/or gestural content

- Standard 8: Independent Reading and Writing. Students will read and write independently for a variety of purposes and periods of time.

Additionally, the OKA+ presenters focused on incorporating four of the OKA+ Essentials during their workshop: arts, curriculum, multiple learning pathways, and experiential learning.

The Presenters

Naomi Rothrock is a high school French teacher at Harding Fine Arts Academy with a background in teaching Spanish and Senior Capstone. She has been an OKA+ fellow for five years. Dr. Jennifer Burris has been an OKA+ fellow for twelve years. She works with future teachers at the University of Central Oklahoma and teaches Foundations of American Education and Educational Assessment. Dr. Burris also supervises student teachers.

The Agenda

8:30 - 8:40

- Introductions, Triple Track, Essentials, OAC, CQ, FQ

8:40 - 8:50

- Questions where they move to station signs
- When they get to the station, each person introduces themselves

8:50 - 9:00

- NY Times Connections
- Explain Neologisms

9:00 - 9:20

- See think wonder collaborative poem
- Share out
- 9:25 - 9:40 - Break
- 9:40 - 10:30
- Artifact Exploration
- Share out

10:30 - 10:40

- Break if needed

10:40 - 11:00

- Vocab word brainstorming
- Create neologism for that station and collaborative poem

11:00 - 11:15

Final processing

- Vocab Tiers
- Writing Process

- Multimodal Literacy
- Multiple Intelligences

Summary of Information Needed

This study focused on nine secondary ELA teachers working in one large, suburban public school district in Oklahoma. In seeking to understand how professional development could be utilized to support these teachers in incorporating more creative pedagogical practices and creative opportunities for students in their secondary ELA classrooms, ten interview questions (**Appendix B**) were designed to gather the data necessary. The needed information to answer these research questions was guided by the conceptual framework and falls into three categories: a) perceptual, b) demographic, and c) theoretical. This information includes:

- An ongoing review of the literature provides the theoretical frame of reference for the study.
- Demographic information about what they teach and how long they have been teaching.
- Perceptual data about what factors support and inhibit creativity in the secondary ELA classroom.
- Perceptual data regarding how professional development can be utilized to support creativity in the secondary ELA classroom.
- Perceptions of how creativity functions within their classrooms both before and after the OKA+ Creativity Workshop intervention.

Overview of Research Design

The following list summarizes the steps used to approach this study. Following this list is a more detailed description of each step.

- Preceding the collection of data, a selected review of the literature was performed to study the contribution of theorists, researchers, and writers in the broader areas of creativity and education.
- In order to be prepared for data collection in February 2025, the researcher worked with the IRB office in order to draft a proposed research methodology before prospectus approval. The IRB approval process included defining all procedures and processes needed to adhere to ethical standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including confidentiality and informed consent of all participants.
- Potential research participants were invited to attend an OKA+ Creativity Workshop for Secondary ELA teachers in February 2025. All secondary ELA teachers in the district were invited to participate; however, none were required to attend.
- All teachers who planned on attending were emailed a recruitment letter (**Appendix D**) inviting them to participate in the study. The recruitment letter included all of the information pertaining to the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the interview questions. Those teachers interested in participating were sent an informed consent form to sign.
- At the end of the OKA+ Creativity Workshop, all attendees were asked to fill out a reflection survey. For those teachers who agreed to participate in the research, their reflection survey was used to collect data regarding their immediate feelings and perceptions regarding their experiences with the workshop. This data was then helpful to assess possible emerging themes.
- In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the nine participants approximately within six to eight weeks of attending the OKA+ workshop to ascertain

how participants perceived the impact of the professional development on their practices and perceptions.

- Interview and reflection data were analyzed to ascertain overall thematic developments.

Data Collection Methods

Patton (2015) describes the “fruit of qualitative inquiry” emerging from three qualitative data collection scenarios: 1) Interpersonal interviews, 2) fieldwork observation, and 3) documentation. For the purpose of this study, interviews, observations, and documentation were integrated in order to triangulate the data to form a more complete picture of how professional development contributes to secondary ELA teachers in utilizing creative pedagogical approaches in the classroom.

Phase I: Observations

It is vital to capture details to enrich the quality of the research. Patton (2015) suggests that “no skill is more critical in fieldwork than learning to be descriptive, concrete, and detailed” (p.387). For the purpose of this study, I observed and took field notes during the OKA+ Workshop held in February 2025 for secondary ELA teachers. Patton (2015) characterizes field notes as the description of “activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experiences” (p. 36). Field notes are vital to researchers in that while memories of observations and events fade, accurate field notes will help the researcher understand the context of the observation when the recollection of the moment is no longer fresh in the researcher’s mind. Furthermore, Patton (2015) posits, field notes include “insights, interpretations, beginning analyses, and working hypotheses about what is happening in the setting and what it means” (Patton, 2015, p.388).

Acting as a participant observer, I utilized firsthand observations of the activities and interactions occurring during the workshop in order to gather valuable data. In order to get a sense of the activities presented by the facilitators as well as how participants were responding to the activities, I wandered to different groups as they participated. I listened to their conversations and made hand-written notes of insights that felt important; however, I quickly discovered that I could not keep up with the conversations and activities and had to move to recording the events on my password-protected iPhone. Additionally, a video recording device was also placed at one group table where several participants were seated together, and another recording device was placed in the distance in order to capture the facilitators. All of the participants had agreed to being recorded, and recordings were used in order to keep an accurate record of the events for reviewing evidence. Field notes via recording turned out to be one of my strongest sources of documentation information when referencing the data that emerged during the interview process. When participants referenced or reflected upon a specific activity during the interviews, I could then use my recordings to further evaluate how participants were engaging with the activity and each other during the immediate event.

Phase II: Reflection Survey

At the end of the OKA+ Workshop, all attendees, participants as well as non-participants, were asked to fill out a reflection survey in order to gauge if the attendees believed the workshop had the potential to inform their teaching perceptions and practices. However, only consenting participants' responses were used in data collection for this research. As Patton (2015) states, "Written communication is a rich source of data" (p.14). Analyzing responses to open-ended survey questions was used to capture the personal experiences of those participants who attended to better understand how the participants initially perceived the OKA+ Workshop while their

thoughts and feelings were still immediate. The reflection survey was shared with participants as a paper document to be filled out before they left the workshop. The survey appears as

Appendix C. Participants were asked the following reflection questions:

1. Coming into this workshop today, I was expecting...
2. From my experiences today, my biggest takeaway is...
3. An idea from today that I would like to implement in my classroom is...
4. In what ways, if any, did the creativity workshop change/shift my thinking?
5. What are the factors that could inhibit me from using the strategies I learned about today?

This survey was designed in order to collect participants' immediate responses in regard to what they expected from the workshop, what they learned from the workshop, and what they planned to utilize from the workshop in their own classrooms. Additionally, the reflection survey asked participants if they felt that the workshop shifted their perceptions in any way, as well as what factors could contribute to them not being able to implement any of what they learned from the workshop into their classrooms. In order to gather data that is in keeping with qualitative research, the questions were posed as open-ended prompts, allowing participants to respond according to their personal experience and reveal their immediate reactions, feelings, and perceptions.

Phase III: Interpersonal Interviews

The interview is central to qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In the case of this research, participants who attended the OKA+ Creativity Workshop were interviewed to better understand how they perceived the workshop and if they felt that the workshop impacted their perceptions and/or practices regarding creating creative classroom spaces within their own classrooms. Through speaking to and listening to participants, I hoped to be able to better

understand and articulate their experiences attending the OKA+ Creativity Workshop in order to gather useful and meaningful data that could be used to shape future professional development opportunities for secondary ELA teachers that support creative classroom environments.

Creswell (2007) states that in-depth interviews are beneficial in qualitative research due to their ability to capture the participant's perspective of an experience or event. Additionally, Patton (2015) posits that interviews give researchers access to direct quotations about their "experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (p.14). Overall, interview data is often considered a substantial way in which to lend detail and depth to qualitative research, allowing researchers to see through the eyes of those who have experienced a specific event. For this pragmatic qualitative inquiry, interpersonal interviews were integral to understanding how teacher participants perceive the impact of the professional development workshop on their own perceptions and practices regarding creativity in the secondary ELA classroom.

In order to glean useful organic and unfiltered data, I utilized a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol to elicit "depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience" (Patton, 2015, p.24). However, I also included structured, focused questions useful in understanding the specific thoughts, feelings, and reactions to specific aspects of the research (Patton, 2015). Overall, the questions were designed, both narrow and broad, to allow teachers to share their feelings, perceptions, and experiences after attending the OKA+ Workshop and how they felt it impacted their perceptions and practices regarding creativity in the secondary ELA classroom.

During the interviews, participants were asked the following questions:

1. Tell me about yourself. What is your "teacher story"? What do you teach, and how long have you been teaching secondary ELA?
2. How essential do you feel creativity is in supporting students in being successful?

3. How does your understanding of creativity inform your overall teaching philosophy or approach to instruction?
4. Do you feel that you are currently inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices?
 - If so, can you give an example of what that looks like in your classroom?
 - If not, what factors do you feel inhibit you?
5. In February, you attended the OKA+ Workshop, what were your main takeaways?
6. If applicable, how did attending the OKA+ Workshop impact your perceptions about the inclusion of creativity within your own classroom?
7. When looking at your reflection from immediately after the workshop, specifically question 3, which asks if you have an idea that you would like to implement in your classroom,” were you able to implement those plans?
 - If so, can you tell me about that experience?
 - If so, do you feel that the OKA+ Workshop fostered that implementation?
 - If not, what stood in your way?
 - If not, what would be needed for you to actually enact your idea?
8. Overall, what would you say about professional development opportunities as a way to support secondary ELA teachers in becoming more inclusive of creative pedagogical practices?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences attending the OKA+ Workshop?
10. Finally, what obstacles, if any, do you feel that secondary ELA teachers encounter that inhibit them from embracing creativity as an essential teaching and learning practice in their classrooms?

In order to protect the identities of the participants, using an alphabetic schema, I assigned each participant a pseudonym: Ms. Apple, Ms. Brave, Mrs. Crutch, Mrs. Divine, Mrs. Eager, Ms. Flowers, Ms. George, Dr. Hammer, and Ms. Isabel. Additionally, interviews were held in person; however, I recorded them via Zoom on my password-protected laptop. Using the Zoom captioning capabilities, I uploaded each of the nine transcripts to my personal subscription-based Delve account on my password-protected laptop. Delve is an online

qualitative data analysis platform that allowed me to create an online codebook for the nine transcripts. For example, after transcripts were uploaded into Delve, I went through each transcript and began highlighting phrases, or snippets, in order to create codes. Each snippet was labeled using a description to capture the overall theme of the phrase, which became the initial set of codes. All interviews were deleted after transcription was completed.

While interpersonal interviews are integral to the qualitative research process, it is important to note that there are limitations to this type of data collection. For instance, interviews require skill and thoughtfulness on the part of the researcher in order to ensure that interview questions lend themselves to useful data. Additionally, the researcher must embody the communication skills necessary to help participants feel comfortable enough to share their insights and perspectives. Moreover, if communication between the researcher and participant is stilted, the researcher must be able to shift their approach to keep the conversation alive. For this study, utilizing a semi-structured interview procedure was useful in allowing the researcher to direct the conversation in a different direction or use a different method to elicit the most meaningful data, or as Merriam and Tisdale (2016) assert, the semi-structured format allows the researcher to respond to “the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (111).

Interview Process: Before the OKA+ Creativity Workshop, I sent recruitment emails to the prospective participants who attended the workshop describing the purpose of the study and inviting their participation (**Appendix D**). For those workshop attendees who agreed to participate in the research, I emailed each participant in order to request a convenient time to hold their in-person interview. Interviews took place within four to eight weeks of the workshop, with the first occurring on March 7, 2025, and the last occurring on April 4, 2025. To determine

if the workshop experience actually altered the participants' planning and practice regarding their experience with the OKA+ Workshop, this window of time allowed for teachers to put those strategies learned at the workshop in place, if they chose to do so, and reflect on the workshop's effectiveness in shifting teacher practice. Of the nine participants, seven of the participants revealed in their interviews that they had, in fact, incorporated activities learned during the workshop into their classroom spaces. Confirmation emails were sent to each participant immediately after the interview was scheduled and also one or two days before the interview was scheduled as a reminder to the participants.

Before any data was collected, including interview data, all participants were asked to review and sign a University of Oklahoma Qualifying Survey and Informed Consent Form (**Appendix A**). All interviews were conducted in person and recorded via Zoom in their entirety. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom captioning on a password-protected laptop that can only be accessed by the researcher, and recordings were deleted after transcription and coding were completed. In the case that additional information needed to be gathered, I, the researcher, requested and scheduled follow-up interviews with those individual participants. All transcripts were uploaded to Delvetool.com for inductive coding.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Rudimentary Analysis

In order to make the data analysis process less formidable, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend “doing some of the rudimentary analysis while you are in the process of collecting data” (p. 197). Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that “without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p.197). It’s imperative to write observer comments and memos along the

way (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This data analysis began as I acted as a participant observer during the OKA+ Workshop and then continued as I began to analyze the survey reflection data and, finally, the interview data.

Coding the Reflection Surveys

Because there was a 4-6 week gap between when the OKA+ Creativity Workshop took place and the participant interviews, this was an opportune time to begin analyzing the survey reflection data gathered immediately after the OKA+ Workshop. These reflections were coded in order to discover emerging themes, which were then useful in comparing and narrowing down the scope of themes before interview data was collected. For instance, the codes pertaining to the obstacles of time and PLCs both first appeared in the reflection surveys, as well as the importance of being given relevant and immediate resources during the workshop. Those themes later emerged after analyzing transcript data, and the reflection survey data were used to support the findings.

Transcribing the Interviews

After the semi-structured interviews were completed, I transcribed each one by uploading the Zoom files into my Delve Project File. Delve utilized the files to turn each one into a transcript. After the transcripts were completed, I went through each one to correct any misinterpreted text and redact any information that could be used to identify participants, non-participants, or specific school sites.

Open Coding the Transcripts

Patton (2015) describes inductive analysis as “discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s research (p.542). The findings emerged through my interactions with the data, which is also what Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe as “open coding” (p.223). I began the

analysis process through bracketing, which Hycner (1985) describes as approaching the transcripts with an open mind – a willingness to accept the meanings that naturally emerge. Throughout the process of analyzing the statements made by teachers, I removed my preconceived notions about the teachers I interviewed, as well as any beliefs I held about their experiences as secondary ELA teachers, by solely focusing on the narrative presented by the data. As I began the coding process, I began by highlighting snippets of each transcript. Those snippets were selected because there appeared to be patterns or connections relevant to one or more of the research questions. As each snippet was highlighted, I attached an initial code to each one. Coding is simply a system of classifying the raw chunks of data into words and short phrases, or as Saldana (2022) defines it, a code is “a word or short phrases that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” During the first iteration of coding, 740 snippets of transcript were highlighted, and through elimination of irrelevant codes and the combining of closely related codes, 459 initial codes were developed.

Creating Categories via Relevance to Research Questions

For this pragmatic qualitative research, the coded snippets of transcript were initially categorized in terms of how each code fit within the context of each research question. Any code that could not be clearly tied to a research question was discarded as insignificant or a one-off.

Table 2

Initial Codes Grouped Into Research Question Categories

Research Questions

Example Codes

RQ 1: Creativity as Essential to ELA Practice

Student Engagement; Student Choice; Fun; Student Autonomy; Movement

RQ 2: Obstacles to Creative Practices	Administrators, Student Behavior; Curriculum; Lack of time; Fear; Assessment Issues
RQ 3: Creativity PD to Support ELA Classroom Practices	Engaging PD, Collaboration, Easy Implementation, Relevance to Standards & Curriculum

The Winnowing and Categorization Process

After the 459 initial codes were categorized via research question, I then began the process of winnowing, which is the process of paring down qualitative data by removing redundant codes, discarding one-off or insignificant statements, grouping overlapping categories, and retaining only the most analytically meaningful units for theme development (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This initial set of 459 codes was winnowed down and combined in order to create a total of 108 codes and 14 categories. Through analyzing the codes and categories under each research question, thematization began. Two themes emerged for each research question, which totaled six themes altogether.

Table 3

Categories Identified During Qualitative Analysis

Research Question	Category	Description of Codes
RQ 1: Creativity as Essential to Teaching Practice	Student Engagement	Codes addressing students' responses, participation levels, and motivation during creative tasks.
RQ 1: Creativity as Essential to Teaching Practice	Meeting Individual Student Needs	Codes addressing ways in which teachers use creative methods in order to support students with diverse needs and interests.

RQ 2: Obstacles that Hinder Creative Teaching Practices	Time	Codes addressing the variety of factors that inhibit teachers from having the time necessary to plan and prepare for creative teaching practices.
RQ 2: Obstacles that Hinder Creative Teaching Practices	PLC Dysfunction	Codes addressing the ways in which teachers' PLCs inhibit their ability to include creative teaching practices.
RQ 3: PD as a Means to Support Creative Teaching Practices	Relevance	Codes associated with teachers' needs for creative activities to be tied to curriculum, standards, and essential learning targets.

Note. Categories emerged during the second cycle of analysis as related codes were grouped under broader conceptual labels.

Thematization and Findings

The themes were defined and named according to what was revealed within the research. Each theme emerged naturally throughout the process. After the themes were identified, I used the findings to tell the story of the data and how it related to my research questions, and how this data might be useful in enacting meaningful ways to empower teachers in utilizing creative teaching and learning practices.

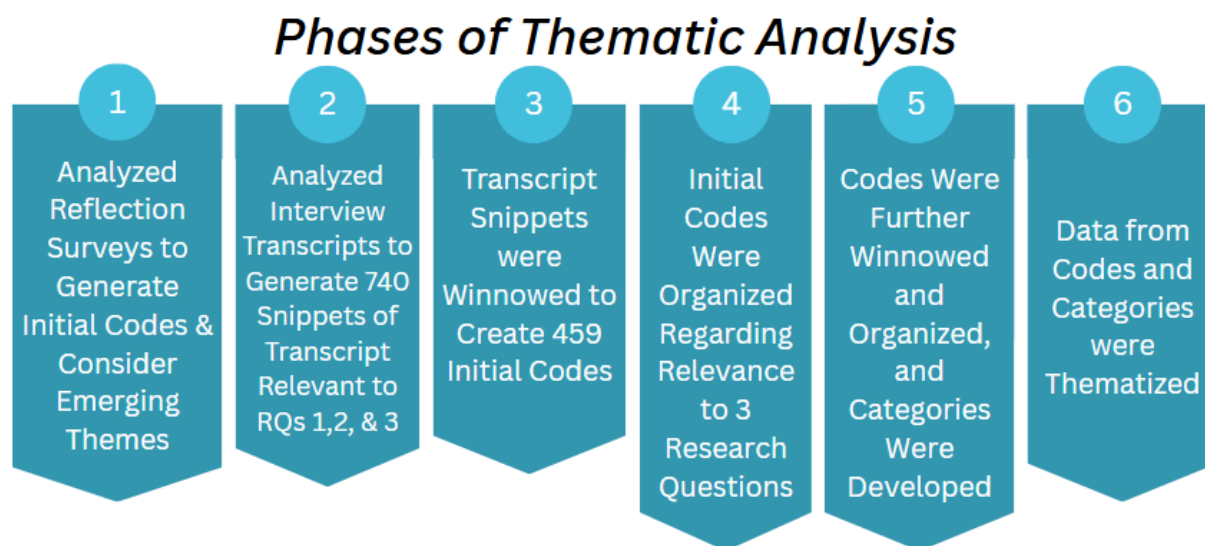


Figure 7

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Note. These six steps highlight the phases of how the themes for this research were developed.

Ethical Considerations

It has only been within the last few decades that more attention has been paid to the ethical concerns uniquely related to qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because of the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the research is heavily reliant on the trustworthiness of the researcher (Patton, 2015). To ensure that participants were treated ethically and not harmed in any way through this research, all participants needed to be fully aware of the purpose of the research, the process of the research, any potential harms or benefits from participating in the study, and how their data was to be utilized. All participants consented in writing to the terms of the research by signing the Qualifying Survey and Informed Consent Form (**Appendix A**). Participants were informed of any possible repercussions of participating in the study as well as the overall goal of the study, the research questions, and the interview questions. And while there is no reason to believe that this research poses ethical

threats to the participants, it is vital to protect the participants from any potential issue. Therefore, all identities of participants, including names or other identifying features, were made anonymous. Additionally, the school district, names of sites, and names of any individuals working in the district as administrators or team members were also kept confidential in order to protect the anonymity of the participants as well as non-participants. All research materials, transcripts, and data were secured, password-protected, and only accessible to me. And after all of the interviews were transcribed, Zoom files were deleted. Measures were continuously taken to securely store all research-related records, materials, and data.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Credibility

Regardless of the type of research that is being conducted, whether it be quantitative or, in the case of this study, qualitative, ensuring that the research is trustworthy is imperative to the integrity of any study. However, due to the indefinite essence of qualitative research, which is difficult to precisely measure, it is necessary for the researcher to put measures in place in order to secure that the study is conducted with rigor and in an ethical manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In regard to qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) refer to the terminology of *validity* and *reliability* when discussing the measures in which to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Validity and Credibility

Validity, which is often characterized as credibility in qualitative research, is measured in terms of how well the research reflects that which is being characterized (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). While Maxwell (2013) argues that reality can never truly be captured, it must be a researcher's goal to come as close to reality as humanly possible. For instance, validity can be evaluated through how thoroughly the researcher provides evidence and descriptions that

accurately reflect the reality of the event or persons being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry, I am attempting to capture the ways in which professional development might be used to foster the adoption of creative classroom experiences in the secondary ELA classroom. Therefore, it was essential that I designed and conducted this study with careful attention, as the credibility of any research depends on the researchers ability to conceptualize the study, collect and analyze data, and present findings clearly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In order to increase the credibility of this research, I employed the use of triangulation, which can be described as using multiple methods of data collection in order to cross check the data to better understand that which reflects the truth or reality of what is being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the case of this research, I first collected data from survey reflections in order to capture the thoughts and feelings of the participants immediately after the workshop. The themes that emerged from the reflection survey gave me possible points of reference as I began coding interview data from the nine semi-structured interviews. Additionally, I gathered data through acting as a participant observer during the creativity workshop and recordings of participants made during the workshop. These observations allowed me to cross check the data collected during interviews. These three data reference points served as triangulation, which Patton (2015) explains, in whatever form it may take, increases credibility and safeguards against claims that the findings of a study are based too narrowly on a single method or source or even too reliant on the notions and beliefs held by the researcher.

Finally, member checks are another important way in which researchers can lend credibility to their research. In the pursuit of gathering valid data, member checks were used in this study. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, the practice of member checks, also known as

“respondent validation,” is employed by sharing the emerging findings and preliminary analysis with several of the participants in order to determine if the researcher’s interpretations “ring true,” or “miss the mark.” Member checks are one way for researchers to ensure, notes Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), that their findings are accurate as well as not clouded by their own biases. In the case of this research, I asked the seven participants who are still currently working in the district as secondary ELA teachers to read the findings and preliminary analysis and share whether they felt the findings and analyses presented accurately captured their feelings, perceptions, and experiences, and all seven participants reported that the findings and analyses were fair assessments of their overall feelings and experiences. Of the two participants who are no longer working in the district, one retired, and the other left public education in order to make more money.

Reliability

Reliability is most often described as the “extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). However, in the field of qualitative research, which relies heavily on the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of human participants, it is important to note that human behaviors are not easily replicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In fact, in order to better accommodate the boundaries that are inherent with qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to reconceptualize the notion of reliability in qualitative research as that which is “consistent and dependable” instead of that which can be replicated. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that qualitative researchers must rely on “triangulation, peer examination, investigator’s position, and the audit trail” to ensure consistency and dependability. While triangulation has already been established as an important aspect of this research study to strengthen validity as well as reliability, I also employed an audit trail, which, as Merriam and

Tisdell (2016) define as a detailed account of “how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 252). This practice should glean insight into the researcher’s thinking process and lend credibility to the overall research and analysis process.

Transferability

Transferability, which is also referred to as “generalizability” or even “external validity” in qualitative research, is gauged in terms of “with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 253). However, qualitative research is not constructed in such a way that ensures that the findings can be precisely or exactly transferable to another setting, group, or situation. Therefore, Patton (2015) embraces the concept of “extrapolation” when discussing the transferability of qualitative research findings. “Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, case derived and problem oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic” (Patton, 2015, p. 713). Extrapolations allow researchers to utilize the information gleaned from the research and consider how it could be applied in similar, not identical, settings. Additionally, Erickson (1986) uses the term “concrete universals” to suggest that every situation is essentially an example of something else, or as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, “The general lies in the particular; that is, what we can learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered” (p. 255). Furthermore, to enhance the transferability of qualitative data, the use of “rich thick description” is considered one of the most common approaches (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Contemporarily, “when rich thick description is used as a strategy to enable transferability, it refers to a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence

presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257).

In the case of this research, the findings allowed me to extrapolate the data in order to consider the universal implications of how professional development or teacher training can be utilized in order to support secondary ELA teachers in embracing creative pedagogical approaches in their classrooms.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As a white and Cherokee cisgendered, heterosexual woman, I spent seventeen years as a secondary ELA classroom teacher, and currently, I work as the secondary English content specialist for a large suburban school district in Oklahoma.

As a classroom teacher, I taught ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades as well as university composition classes, and I have taught a variety of skill levels, including AP Language for students seeking advanced opportunities as well as summer school for students who did not receive their original English credits. In the classroom, I perceived the benefits of giving my students the opportunities to create and to problem-solve and the way in which their work flourished when they were intellectually engaged in an issue for which they were personally concerned. Additionally, I perceived the overall detrimental effect testing has on the culture of a school. Resources, time, and energy are all sucked into the endless standardized testing vortex. As a classroom teacher in the age of NCLB, I experienced the invisible hand that forced me to choose test prep over poetry, multiple choice practice over discussion. Standardized testing was the ghost at the back of the room, the knowledge that there would be judgments and comparisons of data in the future, and all of it used to determine if I was an effective teacher or not. These

experiences as a classroom teacher have influenced my views in regard to creativity in the age of standardized testing.

My experiences as a parent have also shaped my perceptions in regard to the importance of creativity in the classroom. My concern has become more intimate as I have seen how these issues impact my own children and their learning. Therefore, now, as a middle-aged mother with two school-aged children, I have been given a new lens with which to see the lack of creative opportunities and the focus on testing. In elementary school, my children were given art lessons once a month via “art on a cart,” yet they spent the last nine weeks of school preparing for state tests, even in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. At that time, our children craved normalcy, safety, opportunities for expression, and, instead, they were given screens, worksheets, and practice tests to prepare them for a test that tells us nothing about who these humans are, what they are feeling, and what they need as individual learners. These factors, as a teacher and parent, have influenced me to view standardization as a great threat that chokes out those classroom experiences that are most meaningful for our students.

Moreover, my experiences as a citizen of Cherokee Nation have impacted how I view creativity, standardization, and schooling. As a member of a tribal community, I carry with me the belief that one’s community has a responsibility to care for its people. Whether it is healthcare, housing, or education, we have an obligation to care for every member of the community to the best of our ability, and in a way that will benefit the individual as well as the overall group. Therefore, I see education as one of those ways in which we care for and nurture the next generation. Whether it is supporting students in becoming teachers, dentists, painters, or mechanics, there are a multitude of paths that will improve the lives of the individual as well as the whole.

Furthermore, there has been a great disconnect and mistrust between tribal communities and public schooling for generations. Schooling has historically been used as a means to colonize Indigenous people; therefore, creativity can be used to create a space in the classroom where students can express themselves as a reflection of their identity. Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) is one form of creative pedagogy in that it opens the space for students to tell their own stories and share their knowledge in a way that affirms cultural identity (Paris & Alim, 2017). The inclusion of creative spaces is one way to open up opportunities for students to be credited for their diverse funds of knowledge.

My experiences as a classroom teacher play a role in my ability to consider the best ways and approaches regarding creativity in the classroom. While it is harder to quantify data on the benefits associated with creative opportunities for students, the body of research tells us that creative classroom spaces have the potential to benefit students as well as teachers. Whether it is approaching teaching and learning using culturally sustaining pedagogies, adopting alternative assessment practices, or simply creating an environment that focuses on student engagement, embracing creative practices allows teachers to meet the needs of students as individuals. Creativity allows us to open up our practices to offer the kind of learning that is accessible for all. However, it is also my role as a classroom teacher that supports me in my knowledge of the ways in which culture impacts student growth. My experiences give me better insight into the role teachers play in developing classroom culture and the relationships forged between teachers and students.

Finally, my experiences make me an insider to teachers sharing their experiences with me as part of my research and assist me in knowing which questions to ask and how to ask them. However, it is important to note that I now work as an English content specialist for my district,

and I understand that teachers who used to be my colleagues may not view me in the same way. They may view me as part of the administration, which they often mistrust. When selecting teachers for my research, it was vital to make sure that the teachers participating in the study trusted me to share their honest feelings and experiences with me; therefore, it was necessary to present myself as open, honest, and authentic and clearly illuminate the overall purpose of the research and how it will be used to support classroom teachers. In order to build trust, I needed participants to feel that this research can be used to serve the needs of teachers, students, and classrooms.

My classroom experiences, my parenting experiences, as well as my role as a coordinator strengthen and limit me in gathering accurate data regarding the inclusion of creativity in the secondary ELA classroom; however, I hope my passion supports me in finding answers that can be used to impact teachers and students positively.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the nature of qualitative research, there are specific limiting factors in regard to this research. For instance, qualitative research inordinately relies on the subjectivity of the researcher. And although, as the researcher, I am making careful decisions to account for these limitations to lessen their impact, it must be noted that one of the key limitations to this study is my potential bias regarding my proximity to the district in which I am conducting the research, as well as the participants. As a secondary ELA educator who has worked within the district for over twenty years, my assumptions, interests, and perceptions have the possibility of casting a shadow over the data that emerges. In order to counter the issue of my own potential bias concerning participants, I removed the names of participants while coding interviews as well as reflection surveys. This was helpful in reducing the limitation of potential bias during the coding

process, as specific data will not be prescribed to any individual participant; however, there is no way to fully remove my biases pertaining to teachers and a district I know so well.

Similarly, another limiting factor could be the issue of “participant reactivity,” in which participants’ responses may be impacted due to their relationship with the researcher. Because I work with the secondary ELA teachers in this district, it is possible that the participants answered the interview questions in a way that they believe will be helpful to me. Essentially, they may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear. Conversely, some participants may be less likely to share their honest thoughts and feelings due to our working relationship. In order to acknowledge the issue of participant reactivity, it was important to engage in authentic dialogue with participants in order for them to feel comfortable being truthful about their feelings, opinions, and perceptions. It was integral for participants to understand the purpose of the study and how the integrity of the study relied on their honest contributions. As the researcher, it was important for me to be a welcoming interviewer while also making active choices to avoid influencing the way in which participants responded to the interview questions and reflection surveys.

Finally, the issue of transferability is always a limiting factor when considering qualitative research; however, through utilizing thick, rich descriptions and relying on the universal generalities that can be extrapolated, I hoped to gather data that will be useful when considering how professional development and teacher training could be utilized to support secondary ELA teachers outside of the district. In order to reliably be able to collect rich descriptions, the workshop and the interviews were video recorded so that they could be re-watched and detailed field notes could be taken. Additionally, I hope the data can give

researchers insight as to how to support non-ELA teachers or non-secondary teachers in adopting creative pedagogies as well.

Concluding Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of this pragmatic qualitative research methodology design. This qualitative research was designed for the pragmatic purpose of better understanding how professional development opportunities might be constructed and utilized to support teachers in embracing creative pedagogical approaches in their secondary ELA classrooms. This research study was composed of nine participants, and the primary data collection methods of this study included participant observer data, reflection surveys, and individual interviews. Using these collection methods, the data was coded in order to thematize the data. Validity, reliability, and transferability were supported through triangulation of data, member checks, extrapolation, and the use of rich interview descriptions.

Overall, the purpose of this research was to make a pragmatic contribution to the understanding of professional development or teacher training in order to promote creative classroom practices and pedagogies for current and future teachers, specifically secondary English Language Arts teachers. Furthermore, it is hoped that this work will be valuable to any and all educators who are wanting to promote creative classroom spaces.

Chapter IV

Findings

Introduction

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I interviewed nine teacher participants, who were at the time of the interviews employed as secondary ELA teachers in a suburban school district, in order to explore how professional development opportunities can be utilized to support creative teaching and learning practices in the secondary ELA classroom. The data were collected through observation of a creativity professional development workshop (OKA+ Creativity Workshop) attended by the participants, personal reflection surveys collected from the participants immediately following the creativity workshop, and one-on-one semi-structured interviews that took place within four to six weeks of attending the workshop. During the interviews, the participants discussed their beliefs about the essential elements that creative teaching and learning practices support within their own classroom settings, the obstacles they perceive in regard to creative teaching and learning practices, and, finally, how professional development opportunities could be used in order to support secondary ELA teachers in being more inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices. Seven significant themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis in regard to teachers' perceptions regarding creativity and how we can better support teachers in being more inclusive of creativity in the secondary ELA classroom: a) creativity as a means to support student engagement, b) creativity as a means to support individual student needs and autonomous learners, c) the use of creativity in order to stimulate critical thinking and problem solving, d) the obstacle of time, as well as curriculum and pacing expectations, f) the role of PLCs and collaboration, g) the importance of creative

activities that are both relevant to the current curriculum and standards, while e) also being easy and immediate to implement.

Throughout this research process, I employed methodological triangulation and thematic analysis to analyze and evaluate pertinent data points. The resources provided included peer-reviewed research regarding creativity and professional development, interview notes from participant interviews, recordings of the OKA+ Creativity Workshop, and data obtained from transcripts of in-person semi structured interviews with each participant. This process allowed me to demonstrate how the conceptual frameworks of Constructivism and Noddings' Theory of Care provided support for the emerging themes that developed during the inquiry.

Presentation of Findings

In order to come to a better understanding of the role that creativity plays in secondary ELA classrooms and how stakeholders such as educators, administrators, content specialists, and even pre-service teaching programs can empower secondary ELA teachers to be more inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices, this pragmatic qualitative study posed three research questions:

- 1) In what ways, if at all, do secondary ELA teachers view the integration of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice?
- 2) How do secondary ELA teachers describe the key obstacles they face in incorporating creativity into their instructional practices and classroom spaces?
- 3) In what ways, if any, can a professional development opportunity foster an environment where secondary ELA teachers feel empowered to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces?

Nel Noddings' (1995) Theory of Care and Constructivism are the primary theoretical lenses used throughout this study. While Noddings (1995) posits that we are under continual construction through our encounters with the world around us, Crotty (1998) similarly defines

constructivism conceptually as “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p.43). This blends well when considering the role that creativity plays in our educational experiences, as both teachers and learners are continually interpreting information, constantly in the process of making and gleaning meaning within their communities of learning. Creativity opens a space as to where both teachers and learners are given freedom to create meaning as individuals. Additionally, Noddings (2013) suggests that we have a moral obligation to care for those around us; this includes the students we teach. In fact, there is no better way to support our students than caring for them, caring for the people they are, the people they want to be, and, perhaps, the people they do not even see in themselves yet. The inclusion of creative teaching and learning practices allows students a wide lens as to which construct meaning while also creating a space in which each student is cared for as an individual learner.

The findings of this research establish a connection between the collected data and the underlying conceptual frameworks defined by Crotty and Noddings. The resulting analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the importance of providing teachers with professional development opportunities and time to plan and create lessons and activities that are inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices in which the needs of individual learners are met, honored, and celebrated.

Each teacher participant was asked a set of ten semi-structured interview questions. Using the participant responses, the findings of this research were categorized by each research question, meaning each set of themes was determined in terms of how the participants responded to the ten questions that were designed to elicit answers specific to each research question. A total of seven major themes emerged; however, while some themes are specific to one research question, some themes overlap across research questions. The findings are delivered under three

sections, which are labeled according to each research question. While there are several themes that emerged in regard to each research question, only the themes with the most supporting snippets of code will be evaluated and discussed.

Table 4

Research Question 1: Codes Grouped Into Categories and Linked to Emergent Themes

Category (6)	Example Codes (44)	Related Theme (2)
The Human Nature of Creativity	ELA = human; Connecting with students; Student collaboration; A calling; Enjoyment; Fun; Excitement	The importance of meeting the needs of students through belonging and engagement
Improving Teacher Practice	Creativity vs. tech; Gamification; PBL; Standards; Elem learning; Interactive; Movement	The value of utilizing creativity to support higher levels of cognition and learning
Increased Engagement	Student choice; Allows all students to shine; Enjoyment; Relevance; Fun; Student success	The importance of meeting the needs of students through belonging and engagement
Meeting Individual Student Needs	Learning styles; Student reflection; Student effort; Less behavior; Improved learning	The importance of meeting the needs of students through belonging and engagement
Higher-Order Cognition	Learn more; Student success; Improved learning; PBL; Interactive	The value of utilizing creativity to support higher levels of cognition and learning
Engagement	Movement; Collaboration; Student choice; Fun; Student reflection	The importance of meeting the needs of students through belonging and engagement

Note. Codes were grouped into six conceptual categories during second-cycle analysis. Each category was examined across research questions to determine thematic alignment. Two overarching themes emerged: (1) the importance of meeting the needs of students through belonging and engagement, and (2) the value of utilizing creativity to support higher levels of cognition and learning.

Theme 1: Meeting the Needs of Individual Students through Belonging and Engagement

Immediately after attending the OKA+ Workshop, every teacher who attended the workshop was asked to fill out a reflection survey. The surveys of the nine research participants were evaluated and coded in order to look for potential emerging themes. When asked what their expectations were regarding the OKA+ Workshop, five of the nine participants (56%) stated that they were expecting to “learn something new,” or they were hoping to learn more about “creativity,” “interactive” strategies, “engagement,” “fun,” and “multimodal” projects to support their teaching practices as secondary ELA classroom teachers. The concept of engagement and fun was the most common preliminary theme, and after semi-structured interviews with the participants were completed, that theme continued to emerge as a vital aspect of the essential nature of creativity in the secondary ELA classroom.

When teacher participants were asked to describe how essential creativity was in the context of teaching secondary ELA during their semi-structured interviews, approximately four to six weeks after attending the OKA+ Workshop, there was an overwhelming notion that creativity opens a space for student engagement. In fact, each of the nine teacher participants (100%) referenced engagement during their semi-structured interviews when asked to illustrate the importance of creativity in terms of their own practice. Voicing the terms “engagement,” “fun,” “enjoyment,” “excited,” “attention,” and “interest,” the nine participants referenced the essential nature of creativity in terms of engagement 46 times. For instance, Ms. Apple, a teacher of secondary ELA for seven years, revealed:

“We do bigger projects, like they research Elizabethan England, and I love that one because I have so many different, like, aspects of Elizabethan society that they can research. So the guys love, you know, the weaponry, and they create their little daggers and stuff. And the girls and guys honestly love fashion, and they create different things

about fashion. And it's just a way to, I feel like, and I tell them this, I'm like, if you can choose the right topic or the right book, you will not work at it at all. It will be so interesting that it will go by so fast, and you'll be able to get it done. And some of them just, that's their favorite thing that they do all year.” (13:57)

Ms. Apple’s first-hand observation of how creative projects engage her students reveals that the learning experience becomes something that feels organic, or natural, when they are engaged through creative production.

Throughout the discussions regarding the role creativity plays in supporting student engagement, two of the nine participants specifically referenced the way in which older students are often engaged in learning when the creative teaching practice being utilized in the classroom reminds students of the learning they did as elementary learners. In fact, Ms. Brave, a teacher of secondary ELA for fifteen years, explained:

“So I think that people see high school as just a place to be serious, and learn, and get ready for the next step. And what I found is these are just little kids in big bodies when it comes to learning... I tend to do a lot of things that are nostalgic from their elementary years, like their last Valentine's Day party, but we worked in metaphysical poetry.” (1:05)

Tapping into the creative, elementary style of learning also resonated with Dr. Emma Hammer, who has worked in public education for eighteen years and taught secondary ELA for twelve of those years. She echoed this sentiment when she expressed the way in which students are drawn to learning activities that remind them of their elementary learning experiences:

“High schoolers get so excited when they get to color or do something that's

related to an assignment, because they're so technology driven, and they're so used to just like, clickety clack on the keyboard that they get really excited to, like, use their hands, and to things that might seem very elementary, they get very excited about. And I feel like part of that is that they're not forgetting that part of their brain, and they're not forgetting that part of their education that was really fun for them, because when they get to middle school and high school, they're like, Ah, it's so serious. And it's, it's just quiz after quiz or whatever. But when they think of elementary, they're like, man, we did projects, and we had these fun days, and we got to do this, and that they were still learning, but they were more creative, with elementary than they are in secondary. And so I feel like that also helps with their success, to be able to like, tap into that part of themselves, but also to be able to use it for their own problems in life.” (3:34)

Additionally, Dr. Hammer described how her students react when given the creative opportunities to show their knowledge using her graphic essay assignment:

Graphic essays are some of the ones that I'm most proud of. I feel like I get good feedback with the students, and they just get so excited because they feel like they're not learning. And they get to, like, do stuff and present stuff like they used to. And I put them in the hallways; they get really excited, which seems silly, but they do. They get really excited.” (12:14)

Dr. Hammer's sentiments echo those of Ms. Apple's in regard to acknowledging that when students are engaged and excited about a project that they don't feel as though they are working at all. The learning becomes natural, secondary to the overall project in and of itself. Dr. Hammer teaches a variety of courses, AP, on-level, and creative writing, but her experiences in the

classroom as well as her education have supported her in embracing creative teaching and learning practices, and she sees the benefit of creativity in teaching all levels of students.

While Ms. Apple, Ms. Brave, and Dr. Hammer are more experienced teachers who have learned the value of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice, early-career teachers (years 1-5) also reported on the transformative impact creative practices have on student engagement and learning. Particularly, Ms. Isabel, a first-year teacher, described an imagination unit developed by her and her partner teacher for the last quarter in which students were given random supplies to invent a necessary product. Students were engaged in practicing a variety of ELA skills throughout the unit. Ms. Isabel revealed:

“I haven't seen that much engagement from my students probably all year...like it was a game changer. And I told the other teacher that next year we maybe can try incorporating more project-based learning in our curriculum, because it was, I mean, the kids that haven't been engaged all year, actually participated, and we were having a lot of fun” (2:43).

Revealing that the increased student engagement led to improved learning, Ms. Isabel explained:

“That is so much more engaging than having them take guided notes. I don't like doing that all day, and they really don't. They don't like it, and I don't think they learn that. They don't learn that much from it, either, because I'm just telling them, and that's the thing, because I was, like, looking at, like the district checkpoints and stuff and all of them, like, gosh, they aren't getting it whenever I'm doing it in this way.” (23:04)

Ms. Isabel then described how she and her PLC partner have been utilizing a Capture the Flag game to teach grammar instead of doing guided notes. She emphasized that “it was so much

better than me giving direct instruction” (23:04). While Ms. Isabel was finishing her first year of teaching secondary ELA, she articulated that her teacher philosophy was still evolving:

“At the beginning of the year, I just was, there were so many things going on, and so I honestly wasn't thinking about creativity in the classroom because I was trying to figure out what I was doing. And now that I've kind of gotten in the swing of things and in a routine, I think for like and I feel like my teaching philosophy is not sound either, like it's not, it's I mean, like it's still changing, evolving. It's evolving.” (12:29)

While Ms. Isabel did not have the mental bandwidth at the beginning of the year to consider the implications of utilizing creativity as an essential teaching and learning tool in her classroom, her experiences with creative practice were shifting her philosophy as the year concluded. She expressed:

“Because I always have, like, said that, like having a welcoming and positive environment is what I want to uphold for all of my students. And seeing the project and how it was fun, and it was a place where my kids were excited to come into my class, I think will help me with my decisions in the future for like, next year, how I can implement creativity, because it made it like it was so fun in here.” (13:09)

Because Ms. Isabel is an early-career teacher having positive experiences with creative classroom environments, it may make a long-lasting impact on her evolving teaching philosophy and her pedagogical practices for years to come.

Ms. Kiki George, also an early-career teacher, was in her third year of teaching at the time of the interview. Much like Ms. Isabel, she was also beginning to see the value of creativity in terms of engagement in her middle school classroom. Specifically, Ms. George views movement as an integral practice in her classroom. She explained:

“I would consider creativity in the club of teaching, like not just sitting down, learning, doing, like mundane things. I could not picture my lessons like my kids sitting still for the entire 42 or whatever minutes that we have while I instruct, and they just take notes and that kind of thing. I like to get them up and moving to inspire higher levels of thinking.” (1:02)

Ms. George feels that when her students are moving that they are more likely to be lifted to higher levels of engagement that can lead to higher levels of thinking. Embracing movement as a teaching practice is one way teachers can incorporate creativity in their classroom spaces.

Additionally, Mrs. Eager, who taught early elementary for two years before moving to secondary ELA, also made the connection between the importance of creativity in terms of movement and engagement. In her seventh year of teaching middle school, Mrs. Eager stated:

“It's not just the writing. Even if it's something simple and we can change it to a task that's not on a Chromebook or even on a piece of paper, something in the hallway, or something that people can move around, and that's an area I'm trying to grow. For me, creativity is definitely the writing, but also maybe just having physical ways to interact with the material.” (5:24)

Movement is one aspect of creative teaching and learning practices that secondary ELA teachers feel supports engagement.

Finally, when evaluating the theme of engagement and the essential nature of creativity in the secondary ELA classroom, many participants acknowledged that creativity often opens the door to “fun.” When students are having fun, students are engaged, and learning becomes a natural or even enjoyable process. For instance, Ms. George explained, “Anytime that someone's willing to give me feedback that's going to engage the kids, that's going to excite them about

learning, because that's what makes it more fun. Yeah, you know, like, I'm so excited for this, I know my kids are gonna be so excited for this" (16:37). Ms. George sees creativity as one way to not only excite and engage students, but a means to also excite and engage teachers. Fun, while an ethereal quality, has a mighty impact on one's classroom environment and the experience of both the teacher and learners.

Mrs. Eager also highlighted the role of fun in the creative classroom when she expressed, "I thought it was very appropriate for middle school that there were creative things we could do to teach the curriculum in middle school that could be fun for them, like the playlist." In this instance, Mrs. Eager was referring to the playlist activity she learned about during the OKA+ Workshop. Knowing her middle school students enjoy music, she felt that the playlist activity would resonate with them while also supporting their evaluative skills. Ms. Apple reiterated the importance of creative fun when she stated, "I think if kids are having fun, that they're going to work for you a little bit more on certain things." She sees fun as a way in which to make her students actually enjoy their ELA classroom experience, which, in turn, supports them in learning.

Additionally, Ms. Brave shared, "I love to hear kids say, That was fun. That's one of the best feelings I think you can have, because you know that not only did they enjoy it, but they also learned at the same time. And they'll remember it. Ms. Brave makes the connection that when students are having fun during the learning process that they are more likely to remember what they learned. The fun, creative experience stays with them in a more meaningful way compared to many traditional modes of learning where students "sit and get."

When discussing the theme of creativity, engagement, and the importance of fun, Ms. Isabel remarked, "I mean, most of my pretty, like, hard behavior kids had a really fun time. I

loved it.” Ms. Isabel shared that even her students with the toughest behavior issues and lack of engagement thrived during the Imagination unit she and her teacher partner developed for the last nine weeks of the school year. Again, creativity created a space where teaching and learning became easier and more enjoyable for both the students as well as the teacher.

Additionally, another aspect of this theme that emerged via the semi-structured interviews with teacher participants was the role that creativity allows for secondary ELA teachers to meet the needs of individual learners. Eight of the nine teacher participants (89%) referenced the terms “individual,” “student choice,” “learning styles,” or described the value of allowing all students to “shine” within their transcripts. This theme also emerged in the reflection surveys filled out by participants at the end of the OKA+ Workshop. Dr. Hammer stated, “There are so many ways to teach the same concept. Students, of course, learn in different ways, so lessons should be constantly evolving to meet those needs.” Mrs. Crutch also made the connection between creative teaching practices and individual learners when she conveyed, “Giving students choice helps increase motivation.” Embracing creative teaching and learning practices can mean offering students different ways in which to show their knowledge of a specific skill while also accommodating the strengths and needs of the individual.

Ms. Fiona Flowers was in her third year of teaching secondary ELA at the time of her participation in this research. The concept of student choice as an essential creative practice was reiterated throughout her interview. Ms. Flowers conveyed, “Because language arts is so perception-based, there is a lot of room for interpretation. I feel like it's essential for them to have a chance to express what they are feeling so they can figure out what their own set of values are and like what they work well with, what they don't work well with” (2:37). Ms. Flowers

additionally shared her desire to incorporate multimodal teaching practices to support her students as individual learners:

“I try really hard to keep in mind, like, the multimodal aspect, and that everyone's brains just work a little different. So, you know, some people are such kinetic people. Some people are so paper, and some people are words versus, like, audio versus visual and all that. So I feel like that's like, I always try to come back to just how many options, like, how many different modes can we go down, or at least offer.” (3:54)

Furthermore, Ms. Flowers stated, “allowing there to be more choice for the students, I feel like, is a big thing, because seeing their understanding can come in so many different ways, and then even as like an individual student, they can find different ways to present that same information” (1:03). She added, “So like different modes and like different mediums are definitely a big part of it. I feel like, choices and how they can show their learning” (1:03).

Also discussing the implications of creativity and student choice, Ms. Apple supported the concept of allowing students to express their learning as autonomous learners with specific needs and strengths. She explained, “I think it's essential. I try to provide different opportunities for the students to express their knowledge in different ways. I see kids being successful in different types of ways, and so each of them has a different way of expressing themselves and their strengths” (6:53). Additionally, Ms. Apple shared, “There's different ways for them to show their knowledge so they could incorporate all of their research into, like, a visual project. Sometimes, some of them are making different types of visual items, like posters or physical objects” (7:58). This type of instruction allows for students to show their learning over required skills while also empowering the student to learn in a way that best suits their individual needs.

Ms. Brave was in her 15th year of teaching secondary ELA when interviewed. At this point in her career, Ms. Brave is an integral member of her department and overall school community, and she teaches mainly advanced courses in upper grades. She explained the vital role creativity plays in meeting the needs of her individual students:

“There are 30 kids at any given point in my classrooms, and when I think about my lessons, I think about, how am I going to cater to 30 different learning styles? And I think that's what brings success, because when kids are interested in what they're doing, when it feels good, when they can grasp the material, and especially difficult material, like poems from the 1600s, when they can see that and do that in their own way.” (1:22)

Even with teaching advanced students who are often considered skilled at meeting the expectations of traditional classroom expectations, Ms. Brave felt that her students had benefited from the role creativity has played in meeting their individual needs. Ms Brave’s experience with the OKA+ Workshop supported her in addressing the needs of her students who are more science and math-minded:

“So over the years that I've been a teacher, data has been a big thing. And like I said, data's kind of always scared me off because it's numbers, and I'm an English teacher, and I don't do numbers....And again, when we talk about the inclusivity of learning styles and creativity, you know, I've got my stem kids. I've got my kids that made 36s on the ACT when they were 10th graders, and they're terrible writers, and they struggle with English because it's not exact. And I love the idea of reaching out to those kids in particular and bringing numbers and bringing that kind of research data into my lessons to also speak to them and open up their creativity as well.” (6:25)

Mrs. Rita Divine had been teaching for 17 years at the time of her interview. She taught in many different school settings and grade levels, and while she currently teaches a younger group of students in the middle grades, she also sees the value of creativity in terms of reaching every learner. In fact, Mrs. Divine sees creative inclusivity as a means to build belonging in her classroom. She illustrated, “It can be something really cool, and then you can share it with the class, and they're like, oh my gosh, you're so good at drawing, you know. So I feel like instead of thinking like... that should just be in a different class, just honoring that and welcoming it in your classroom, like in various forms, is really powerful” (8:02).

Moreover, Mrs. Divine explained how creativity is a mindset that she embraces as a teacher to reach every student:

“All my daydreamers, my little artists who would rather sit and doodle than do anything. I was talking to them about how much they're going to love this unit, because there's illustrations woven all throughout it, like the whole eight weeks, and they were just so excited. So that's kind of their time to shine. And I think finding ways to get those the fringe, you know, get them involved, and a lot of times it is through creativity, but you have to be, you have to have a mindset of, like, I think it takes the level of creativity to even just have the mindset of engaging different types of learners, like, in different methods of showing, because they can show they've learned that through a different, you know, a different way.” (8:02)

Mrs. Divine feels that her own creativity opens a space for her to meet the needs of every student. Not only does she feel that creative thinking makes her a better teacher, but she also acknowledges that her students benefit from creative thinking as well.

Dr. Hammer, another veteran educator, sees creativity as a means to assess student learning in a way that is most student-centered. Creative teaching and learning practices allow for her to let every student show learning in the way that best meets their individual learning styles. She describes:

“They can express themselves visually, but they might have a hard time putting that into sentences. So I try to incorporate that anytime I can, especially when it comes to assessments. To give them an option, they're still doing the same thing, the same assessment, the same skills, but you know two, three different ways to get there, so I try to incorporate that.” (7:14)

Similarly to Mrs. Divine, Dr. Hammer feels that she, as the teacher, must also exert creative thinking when considering how to meet the needs of her students. The creative thinking is necessary for both the students and the teacher:

“Every kid can become more confident in their skills. To have a safe and facilitating environment is all essential to making sure that they feel successful and that they see their own growth, because every kid comes in at a different level, so knowing where they're at, being able to meet them and to do that, I, as a teacher, I have to think outside the box first. What if I have an ELL student who this is not their first language, and they're struggling with basic grammar, or I have kids that don't, you know, they don't feel uncomfortable presenting because they're very insecure about their accent or pronunciations and things like that? I'm going to have to think of different ways to approach them, or different alternatives to assignments.” (7:14)

Dr. Hammer values that creative teaching and learning practices open the space to fully educate students with a variety of specific needs. She understands that her own creative thinking allows for her to better instruct the diverse learners in her classroom.

Theme 2: The Value of Utilizing Creativity to Support Higher Levels of Cognition and Learning

The third most essential theme that emerged during this research is the way in which creative teaching and learning practices lend themselves to scaffolding students in critical thinking. Seven of nine teacher participants (78%) referenced “critical thinking,” “problem solving,” “higher depths of knowledge,” and described the importance of learning how to be an independent thinker in order to navigate life and adulthood through their interviews. While the participants did not reference the concept of critical thinking and problem solving in their post-workshop reflections, twenty snippets of code alluded to the value of creative teaching and learning methods as a way to cultivate higher levels of thinking during their interviews.

Dr. Hammer was the most passionate teacher participant in regard to creativity as a means to support critical thinking. Creating a classroom space where students learn to think for themselves and problem solve is integral to her teacher philosophy. She explained:

“No matter where they're going, whether it's higher ed or not. I want them to feel confident that they can do whatever is put in front of them, even if it's something they don't know. If they feel confident, they know how to approach it, and they know that if they can get better at it, they're not going to give up. So to me, that's what success means in the long run, is that they can carry it into their lives and be able to say, Well, I've never been, you know, a mechanic before, but I'm training for it, and I'm gonna figure out these problems, and I'm gonna ask questions, and I'm gonna be the best mechanic I can be, like whatever job that they go into.” (3:34)

Regardless of what her students' paths might be, she wants them to be successful. Whether it is higher education, or career training, Dr. Hammer sees critical thinking as a means to success. She argued:

“So I want them to feel confident, so with creativity. I mean, that's pretty much everything. You can be book smart, but if you can't figure out problems on your own, if you can't see the gray in an analysis, if you can't interpret and have your own thoughts and opinions and not just regurgitate what people give you, you're not going to be a better citizen. You're going to be a more well-rounded person. I think you'll be happier because you'll know how to find different routes to success, whatever that means to them.” (3:34)

Dr. Hammer's philosophy can be succinctly summed up: “ They don't know what life's going to give them. They need to be able to look at it from different perspectives... Critical thinking and creativity. Those are synonymous. You can't be a critical thinker if you don't have creativity in mind” (3:34).

Additionally, Dr. Hammer sees student choice as being an intrinsic component of critical thinking. She explained:

“I think critical thinking and student choice go hand-in-hand with creativity in the English classroom. So being able to give them choice so they can let different parts of themselves be highlighted, their different strengths, letting them have opportunities to shine... and also with critical thinking, there's so many, there's no one way to get there. So I feel like that's a creative process. You know what the end goal is, but they have to figure out how to get there.” (2:33)

As students work through the individual process of showing their learning in their own way, Dr. Hammer argues that they are working at the highest level of thinking as they are having to create their own path in finding the answer.

Mrs. Crutch, a veteran teacher of thirty years, also drew a connection between creativity and preparing students for adulthood. She noted:

“I think it's [creativity] really important, especially at the senior level, because they're about to go off into college, and they're not going to be given things. They're not going to be told how to write an essay or even what to write in an essay, so they have to be able to start thinking on their own. And so I think it's really important” (3:43).

Much like Dr. Hammer, Mrs. Crutch equates creativity with independent thinking, which is a necessary skill as students go into the world of college, work, and adulthood.

Ms. Apple sees creativity as a means to scaffold her students to higher level thinking and more complex tasks. For example, she illustrated:

“I think it's just successful overall to incorporate creativity, because that's the highest level of thinking when you're creating something, whether it be something visual or writing in a different mode, or connecting ideas through writing and producing something, whether it be a podcast or paper or piece of art. I just think that's the highest level of thinking. So I think it's essential.” (6:53)

Similarly to Dr. Hammer's philosophy on how student choice correlates with the creative process. Ms. Apple and Dr. Hammer are both positing that the problem-solving component to the learning is the most integral aspect of the activity, more important than the product or outcome.

Ms. Apple elaborates:

So what I'm interested in is for them to go through that creative process where

they're finding information and they're creating something from that information, because that's what all higher order thinking level jobs are doing. You have to come up with a question. What is the question? What is the problem? How do I solve the problem? How do I put all of those pieces together into a solution? So I think that that is the creative process.” (9:46)

Ms Apple’s teacher philosophy encourages students to work through problem-solving skills and creative practices so that they are working at the highest levels of cognition. Moreover, Ms. Apple revealed how she utilizes a visual essay in order to scaffold students to more complex tasks. She explained:

“I give them a prompt, and they have to write a thesis statement. But then they're also, like, incorporating visuals into their work in terms of like...this is their thesis statement, and then they have to come up with some visual examples of various aspects of what they're writing about, putting it together in a creative way. I think it sort of like breaks down the intimidation factor of analysis. So they're not having to incorporate all of putting together a paper, it seems less intimidating as an entry point to analyzing a text.” (13:57)

In using this multimodal visual approach to analysis, students feel more confident in engaging in a higher level academic exercise. Ms. Apple sees the value of focusing on the level of student thinking instead of an end product. Embracing creative teaching and learning practices allows for her to recognize the level of thinking as her primary learning objective for students. The learning target is the level of thinking, not the final product in and of itself.

Much like Ms. Apple, Mrs. Divine sees the correlation between using visual media to encourage students in analytical skills. She described:

“One thing that's current is we do, like character sketches. And so some of my kids are really good at drawing, and some aren't. But getting them to be able to express a concept, so they have to on this tiny page. It's not very big. They have to express the concept from the entire chapter. They can use some words, but they also have to draw. So getting them to think about how to do that, and it's so interesting to see what kids come up with, because some are just so caught up in the drawing. They're caught up in the art. Some are like, Hmm, they're problem solving, yeah, you know, they're thinking outside the box, like, how I'm terrible at art. How can I do this where it gets across and I can only use so many words, you know? So I feel like that really, like, pushes them to a different level of thinking, too. It's not just even about their creativity. It's also about, like the problem solving piece.” (10:28)

While Mrs. Divine sees creative practices as a way to support students in problem-solving, Ms. George feels that creativity allows her to gauge where student learning is being mastered, Ms. George illustrated the connection between creative tasks and higher order thinking:

“I think of like, the depth of knowledge and like the highest or, yeah, the highest depth is, you know, being able to create something of their own. So I think it's extremely important. I think working towards that in all standards is, like, should be a priority. Like, I feel like once students start showing creativity, including the information that they learned, and they're like, reaching for that, they're going outside the box, then you know that they know the content very well.” (1:40)

Finally, when evaluating the theme of critical thinking as a byproduct of creative teaching and learning practices, Ms. Brave expounded on how she uses creativity during her Frankenstein unit in order to have philosophical conversations with students:

“We create little monsters, and then they have to raise that little monster and they have to, they have to take it on trips, and they have to do things with it. Because when reading *Frankenstein*, we talk about the importance of nature versus nurture, and those kinds of philosophical or psychological concepts, and what happens when we don't nurture our monster, how do they turn out? And we have a good conversation about that.” (3:50)

Whether it is creating and raising little monsters, character sketches, or visual essays, secondary ELA teachers often see creativity as an essential component of pushing students to higher levels of thinking and better preparing them for the future.

Table 5

Research Question 2: *Codes Organized Into Categories and Aligned With Emergent Themes*

Category (4)	Example Codes (27)	Related Theme (2)
PLC	Shifting PLC; PLC has stolen autonomy; PLC does not function well—goes through motions; PLC is not open to change; New teacher is low in hierarchy; Feels unsupported by other teachers	The Problematic Issue of PLCs and Stolen Autonomy
Teacher Concerns	Classroom management; Students not ready; Teacher philosophy is developing; Political environment; Some students do not like creative projects; Teacher is stuck/not creative; Parents; Admin; Technology; Teacher fears/stress/comfort	The Obstacle of Time and Other Pressures
Assessment	Doesn't know how to assess; Takes more work to assess; Curriculum tie-ins/standards; Tying to standards; PD is selling something; Is not relevant	The Obstacle of Time and Other Pressures

Time	Time to create lessons; Kids are out of class; More time spent on data/standards; Curriculum constraints; Other priorities that steal time; Skill priorities; PD is overwhelming	The Obstacle of Time and Other Pressures
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Note. Codes were grouped into four major categories during second-cycle analysis. These categories aligned with two overarching themes: (1) the persistent obstacle of time and other pressures that limits teachers' capacity to incorporate creative instructional practices, including concerns related to assessment, instructional expectations, and institutional contexts; (2) the problematic nature of PLC structures and the resulting loss of teacher autonomy.

Theme 3: The Obstacle of Time and Other Pressures Hindering Classroom Creativity

As educators, we are all too familiar with the problematic nature of finding time to serve our students to the best of our abilities. Whether it is fire drills, pep assemblies, or state testing, there are always circumstances that shorten the time we have to create and enact engaging, creative, and purposeful lessons. In order to better understand how we can support teachers in being more inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices, it is vital to also acknowledge those factors and issues that hinder such practices. Only through better understanding these obstacles can we then enact practical solutions to support secondary ELA teachers in embracing creative classroom practices.

The most significant obstacle revealed during this research was the issue of time; however, the problematic nature of time is not just all of the constraints that are built into the school day, but also the curriculum in and of itself. In fact, nine of nine teacher participants (100%) referenced time as an obstacle. All nine of the coded transcripts suggested that teachers are significantly impacted by a plethora of factors that limit the time needed to plan, create, and include creative pedagogical practices.

Additionally, this data first emerged in the reflection survey filled out by participants following the OKA+ Creativity Workshop. The survey asked teachers, "What are the factors that

could inhibit me from using the strategies I learned about today...” Dr. Hammer’s response revealed, “Time constraints - of having enough time to work on making these ideas work for my grade/content areas.” Similarly, Mrs. Eager answered, “Even though activities can be simple, running out of prep time might hinder me from following through.” All of the time constraints, whether related to district or state mandates or curriculum pacing, impact the way secondary ELA teachers are able to plan, design, and deliver meaningful instruction.

Additionally, she revealed:

“And sometimes the more creative things are harder to get the kids caught up on than just like, let's say, a worksheet or something easier. So sometimes it's just survival mode. And honestly, if you're not as creative, it's probably less stressful, to be honest, because you don't have to think as a teacher, you could literally just do what you've always done, and that's very not time consuming, and it's not so stressful when I've done this for 10 years, you could do with your eyes closed, but if you try something new, that could be stressful and it takes time, and what if it doesn't turn out, and you feel like you wasted that time because you don't know if it's gonna work the way you planned.” (33:10)

Considering that there is an ease that comes with teaching in a non-creative way, Dr. Hammer thoughtfully illustrates how time constraints can encourage teachers to stick to teaching methods that are simpler for the teacher to assess and for students to make up instead of venturing into more creative activities.

Specifically, when asked what obstacles, if any, do you feel that secondary ELA teachers encounter that inhibit them from embracing creativity as an essential teaching and learning practice in their classrooms, Hammer explained:

“Time, I'd say, is the main thing creativity takes time to be able to explain what you're thinking and to build the assignment, to match it to the objectives, to think about all the potential things that could go wrong. You know, there's a lot that goes into lesson planning, and if you're doing it from scratch, it's not something that's been done before at your site, or it's something you just thought of that first year, that first time it's it's going to take time, and sometimes we just don't have time.” (33:10)

Dr. Hammer illustrates that creative pedagogical practices can not be easily introduced into one's lessons. While creativity may be essential to her practice, the lessons and activities must be thoughtfully interwoven to support objectives, standards, and essential skills. Ms. Apple reiterated this point as she explained the way in which teachers attend professional development trainings, and then they do not have time to plan and enact what they have learned. Ms. Apple explained:

“I want to have time and make time for this stuff. And it made me think about, what can I cut? Where can I put stuff in?... But again, it's just like, once you're in the thick of coming back and trying to finish all this stuff and finish out this nine weeks, it's tough to know how to incorporate that stuff.” (17:29)

Ms. Apple's illustration depicts the discouragement that teachers feel when trying to make the best choices for their students while also feeling inundated by the “stuff” they are required to include within their school day.

Additionally, Mrs. Eager substantiated this point when she described her own experience with finding the time to implement creative instructional practices in a thoughtful and pedagogically appropriate way:

“So I think, and sometimes I wonder if time, because of my age, like I feel like, sometimes I feel like I need to process it, like I gotta have time to think about it and how I want to implement it, because I definitely am not willy-nilly, like I can't just, hey, we're going to do this. I want to be to a degree that person, but I multiply, and so I have to have time to figure it out, how I'm going to use it in a way that's going to actually have a good outcome, that's going to be a practical thing, right? That's beneficial. Not just, hey, we got to play a game today” (12:57).

Mrs. Eager clarifies that creative activities can not be added until the teacher has had time to process the most effective way in which to incorporate them with a clear pedagogical purpose. Furthermore, Mrs. Eager also described the daily chaos that can interfere with the time she needs to plan and implement new teaching strategies when returning to the classroom after a professional development training. She illustrated, “And we're not going to get it [time] when the next day we're back on campus, right? And I'm grading, behavior, and kids are running a swap meet out of my classroom” (28:51). Mrs. Eager also suggested that building time into professional development trainings for time to plan and process could be one way to combat the lack of time teachers experience when enacting creative teaching and learning practices. She explained:

“I think what would be great is if we had that time to let's go to this workshop, and then now you have the rest of the day to think or to work on, and some of that's a function of what I'm involved with. Maybe other people have more time in the classroom in the afternoon, but I'm on this committee or that committee.” (21:26)

Experienced teachers often wear many hats in their buildings, and they are seldom given opportunities to learn, think, process, and plan. Through building that time into the professional

development session, teachers might feel as though they have the time to actually enact creative pedagogies.

Additionally, Ms. Flowers echoed the sentiments of other participants when she stated, “there's just a lot of like, you got all these like eligibilities every week. You got the CFAs. We've got our post assessments, our pre assessments. We got to do our bell work. We got to do the tests over the bell work like, so it's just hard” (9:00). Again, she reiterates the notion that secondary ELA teachers have many expectations to meet that often take away time in their classrooms that could be used for more meaningful creative work, and often those expectations are curricular in nature.

Similar to Ms. Flowers, Ms. Kiki George also struggles to balance time between creative pedagogies and the curriculum expectations that focus on standardization and improving test scores. She expressed:

“Because I'm so worried about data-driven and producing, there is no time to balance that with incorporating creative activities. There's just not enough time, you know, because it's to not to say that there isn't overlap, you know, I'm not saying that creativity doesn't like help our kids reach those higher test scores. But I feel like there's been a significant shift in tests, like, since I graduated from the district.” (19:16)

Even in the few years since Kiki George graduated from high school in the district, she sees a shift that prioritizes test scores over creativity. While she acknowledges that creative practices can benefit student learning, she feels a tension between serving both of them adequately within the time she has available.

Theme 4: The Problematic Nature of Dysfunctional PLCs and Stolen Autonomy

While professional learning communities (PLCs) often support teacher collaboration, the downside to working in a tight collaborative setting can be a loss in individual autonomy. Five of the nine teacher participants (56%) discussed the ways in which their PLC practices can serve as an obstacle to incorporating creative teaching and learning practices. This is mirrored in the data supplied in the post-workshop reflection surveys. When asked what obstacles participants felt could interfere with implementing the creative workshop activities, Mrs. Crutch expressed, “My PLC wasn't here, so I do not know if I would be the only one to implement the strategies. While Mrs. Crutch was a well-established teacher, it was primarily teachers who were new to their teams that felt that they did not have the leverage to shift their PLC team to attempt a new lesson or activity.

For example, Ms. Fiona Flowers illustrated her own experience as a third-year teacher in her PLC when she conveyed:

“When you have a group of people and you're all supposed to do kind of the same thing, or at least have the end goal be the same, but the end goal is not main until the unit's over. Well, yeah, there's a lot of things. And then, as an individual, I'm constantly trying to, like, what about this? What about this? What about this? What about this? But I'm not assertive enough with the like half peers, half co-workers, half friends.” (6:34)

Ms. Flowers values her relationships with her PLC members; however, she finds it difficult as an individual to direct her peers into attempting something new. Additionally, Ms. Flowers shared:

“So the person who's been teaching the longest in our PLC has such an understanding of all the material and has already made all the material from years and years and years. It's easy to kind of just keep going with what is sometimes less creative,

boring for me, maybe less engaging for the kids. Does it have value? Yes. But is it the values that I want to focus on? Probably not all the time.” (7:09).

Ms. Flowers expressed frustration, revealing that while she does not feel that the overall plans developed in the longstanding PLC reflect her values as an educator, she feels pressured to acquiesce to the veteran members of the group. She continued, “So I think like, we're trying really hard to focus on consistency across all the teachers and consistency across the district by following that district curriculum, but it's still like there's just so much involved in all of that, that it just feels like we're all just kind of going through the motions” (33:56). Ms. Flowers understands the way in which the PLC system was designed in order to support equitable teaching across not only her building, but also as the district; however, she doesn't feel that the process is actually producing the best quality of instruction. The way she expressed “going through the motions” connotes that the PLC is more concerned about just completing the task quickly instead of taking the time to thoughtfully build out meaningful lessons.

Moreover, Ms. Isabel, a first-year teacher, also describes the complicated dynamic of being a new member of a PLC team. She revealed:

“Being a first-year teacher, I kind of was just like, I'm just gonna go with the flow, because I didn't want to. I already had so many things on my plate, so I was like, I'm not gonna go and just change everything. I don't know my English partner that well yet and so, but next year, now that we have a relationship, and I've had experience doing what we had planned and what they had done in previous years, I know I can change it to make it more creative and engaging.” (4:45).

While Ms. Isabel entered her PLC as a first-year teacher who relied heavily on her partner teacher for planning, she does feel encouraged that she will have more of a say in planning for future

collaborations. Ms. Isabel did not have much say in the instruction that she delivered during her first year; however, she also felt that losing her autonomy in designing instruction allowed her to focus on other aspects of her teaching.

Unlike Ms. Flowers and Ms. Isabel, Mrs. Eager had been teaching for many years at the time of this research study. While she did not have the issue of losing her autonomy to her PLC team, she was in the constant state of losing and gaining new PLC partners, a revolving door of teachers that she was responsible for training and supporting. Mrs. Eager explained, “I still sometimes lack the confidence to implement some of those decisions, like, Is this okay? Am I gonna, like, stunt a kid academically because I didn't do something right?” (27:36). While many teachers desire more autonomy, Mrs. Eager wanted the opportunity to collaborate with another teacher. Being the veteran teacher responsible for making the plans for her entire team was stressful.

Finally, Mrs. Crutch, a thirty-year, retiring veteran teacher, conveyed a much different perspective than most of the participants interviewed. When Mrs. Crutch began teaching thirty years ago, the PLC model had not been developed. Teachers worked individually and were not expected to plan together, share lessons, or support one another in terms of instruction. She revealed, “I just feel, over the years, I've had less freedom in my class to do, to teach the way I want to, or to teach what I want to teach. And so I just kind of feel chained to that” (5:13). Furthermore, she explained, “Sometimes parents complain that, well, Mr. X is doing this, or Mrs. Y is doing this. Why are you doing this? Why are you doing something completely different? And so we've tried to keep close to what we're all doing” (5:45). At this point in her career, Mrs. Crutch feels as though she has lost her autonomy and that she must stay in lock step with her PLC or suffer scrutiny for diverting from the team. Mrs. Crutch felt that this impacted

her overall ability to offer creative instruction. She argued, “I really don't [teach creatively], because I feel the attempt to make all classes more equitable has stifled my ability to be creative” (4:57).

While some teachers feel that the loss of autonomy is worthwhile in exchange for the collaboration and support a PLC can provide, especially for early-career teachers who are still negotiating their teacher philosophies and tackling classroom management, more experienced teachers may feel that a rigid PLC community stifles the kind of teaching with which they would like to provide their students. When one is not a member of a PLC that is inclusive of creative practices, it makes it very difficult for an individual teacher to push forward in adopting those teaching methodologies.

Table 6

Research Question 3: Codes Organized Into Categories and Linked to Emergent Themes

Category (4)	Example Codes (37)	Related Theme (2)
District PD	District-wide initiative; Cannot be another requirement; Overcoming bad PD experiences; Timing of PD is important; PD must be ongoing; District needs to include time for planning	The Importance of Relevant and Supportive Professional Development
Relevance to Teachers	Supports curriculum; Supports standards; Specialized for ELA; Supports other curriculum areas; Flexible application; Creative way to teach; Multimodal reading and writing skills; Using AI	Meeting Teachers' Needs Through Resources and Time
Teachers' Needs as Learners	Felt accessible/doable; Free resources; Easy & immediate resources; New ideas; Many takeaways; Felt supported; Challenged; Reaffirmed beliefs about creative practices; Jogging creative brain; Lit passion	Meeting Teachers' Needs Through Resources and Time

Collaboration	PLC could work together; Was important to learn from others; Modeled collaboration; Presenters were supportive; Trainers were good teachers; Modeled classroom experience; Supported different modes of learning; Movement; Engaging	The Importance of Relevant and Supportive Professional Development
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Note. Codes were grouped into four conceptual categories during second-cycle analysis. These categories informed two overarching themes: (1) the importance of relevant and supportive professional development and (2) meeting teachers' needs through accessible resources, collaboration, and adequate time for implementation.

Theme 5: The Importance of Relevant and Supportive Professional Development

When approaching the concept of using professional development to empower teachers in enacting creative practices, the theme of relevance emerged as being one of the most essential. Even before teacher participants were interviewed, the concept of relevance was emerging as a theme when looking at the data derived from the reflection surveys filled out immediately after attending the OKA+ Workshop. For instance, Mrs. Divine reflected, "It gave me direction and a clear plan. I know how to implement graphing as well as why I should!" Mrs. Divine was able to take the information she learned from the workshop and felt confident about immediately implementing it. Mrs. Eager revealed, "It helped me to realize adding creativity and inventiveness that involves movement in the classroom doesn't have to be complicated." Both teachers walked away from the OKA+ Workshop feeling as though they had new and immediate creative classroom activities that could be used to boost student learning.

Utilizing transcript data, eight of the nine teacher participants (89%) voiced that they needed professional development that is "specific," "beneficial," "applicable," and gave them "direction" when discussing how to integrate more creative teaching and learning practices into their classrooms. Quite frankly, if professional development activities are not relevant to the

standards, objectives, and curriculum already in place, then teachers will not see any reason to shift their teaching in order to include them.

For instance, Dr. Hammer indicated, “It was one of the best workshops I've been to in a really, really, really long time, and it was actually applicable” (31:13). When asked to elaborate on that point, Dr. Hammer illustrated:

“You can tell they are actual teachers, current teachers, a lot of them are teaching and doing this, or they are, at least in the educational realm of public school. It's not just theory, it's actual application, like they actually know what they're talking about and they are in the classroom, or have been recently, which is not something we often get” (31:26).

Dr. Hammer’s experience revealed that she felt that the presenters brought applicability and relevance to the training, which made it feel all the more meaningful. Additionally, Dr. Hammer remarked on the importance of attending a professional development designed specifically for secondary ELA teachers. She stated, “And it was very specialized to us, to the English, but they could easily have done that, like specialize it to the science, specialize it, you know. So it was very well thought out and very applicable” (31:26). Relevance and applicability to secondary ELA were integral to Dr. Hammer’s experience attending the OKA+ Workshop. As a secondary ELA teacher, she felt that she was being presented with information that fit the needs of her students.

Moreover, Dr. Hammer conveyed the way in which the workshop highlighted specific secondary ELA skillsets during the training:

“I really liked the graphics, how to incorporate the charts into the classroom, because it is data, and you can analyze a graphic, just like you can a photograph, or you can an article or a novel, and I feel like we don't spend enough on how to analyze visual things and to

see those discrepancies and be able to ask those critical thinking skills...especially AP, going into the test, because... one of their sources, is always visual, and a lot of times they have no idea what to do with that. What do I do with this graph? What do I do with this picture? How does this have an opinion, like they just don't know what to do. So I feel like that's critical and also fun and engaging, to get multiple perspectives... So I liked that they gave me a different idea, a different approach.” (14:56)

While Dr. Hammer discussed the way in which the workshop was applicable to preparing her students for an AP exam, Ms. Apple, who teaches students in the lower high school grades, also drew connections between supporting students in critical thinking through the use of analyzing graphs during the OKA+ Workshop. She revealed, “The graphs appealed to me as well. I feel like they are a little bit weak at interpreting graphs and analyzing graphs and writing about data, like just looking at data and then putting it into words, like, what does this mean? Yeah. So that was another one that really appealed to me” (22:42).

The concept of utilizing the OKA+ Workshop activities in relation to the relevance of what their secondary ELA students were learning appeared during several interviews. For instance, Ms. George was struggling with an engaging way to teach her middle school students about MLA citation. She revealed, “We were working on MLA citations... I feel like it's hard to incorporate creativity whenever it comes to teaching, you know, format and like, just like the nitty gritty of what writing is, because that's kind of like we're building that foundation for this grade” (5:06). However, after attending the OKA+ Workshop, Ms. George utilized the Gallery Walk activity in order to teach MLA citation. She explained:

“But I was able to take this and immediately apply it to what we were doing in class, so like we were working on MLA citations, and so I kind of mixed it. I couldn't exactly do

what this workshop had imagined for this assignment specifically, but I was able to grab pieces to where my students, you know, did a version of a gallery walk for MLA citations.” (5:06)

When asked how successful she felt the activity was with her students, she answered:

“It went really well...It was like a source walk, source, gallery walk. So I put like, different sources out. I had them gather like, okay, look for the author, look for all kinds of information, and then you're going to come back and you're going to consult with this like guide, and then you're going to build your citation. But like, these sources are, like, all in the pod and stuff like that. And I was able to get that idea from the creative workshop, so it was just the big takeaway that I got... it kind of like lit my passion for creativity, which in turn, I feel like pushed more creative assignments.” (5:06)

Ms. George was able to immediately use the activities learned at the OKA+ workshop and utilize them in her own classroom.

Additionally, Ms. Flowers stated, “I feel like it was like the best PD I've been to in a long time. Because not only was it run like a successful classroom, like all the transitions, the breaks, the like, the slides were super clear of what we needed to do, what we're gonna do” (19:00).

When describing some of her favorite takeaways from the workshop, Ms Flowers saw an applicable connection between the OKA+ activities and teaching her students about characterization. She explained the way in which image analysis could be utilized in her high school classroom:

“I want to use it first as, like, just the thought process of, like, what do you gather based on what they're wearing? Like, you know, just the visual, and then kind of interpret or take that to, like, how would you write a character if you wanted them to be interpreted

this specific way, like, what features, what could you give them? And then, in some capacity, I kind of get into indirect characterization. And I've wanted to do a characterization lesson for the last four semesters.” (17:43)

Ms. Flowers has been wanting to introduce an engaging characterization lesson with her students for two years. Attending a professional development that was particularly relevant to secondary ELA standards and skills could make the difference in the likelihood that she will actually enact a new and creative activity in her classroom.

Ms. Isabel, a first-year teacher at a Title I school, shared her perception of the OKA+ Workshop and the importance of relevance when she stated, “I am actually getting things out of this one where sometimes other professional developments, I go, and I'm like, that's not realistic for my students and at my school. And I felt like, this is so flexible that you can change it with your students” (29:46).

Furthermore, Ms. Isabel shared the way in which she felt that the workshop activities could be applied in classrooms in different ways. She shared:

“I can use multiple strategies at one time to create engagement in and with using creativity, because there were so many different activities that you all had for us.

But you could also, like, intertwine them all together, like you could take some parts from this one, some parts from that one, to make your own. It's not you have to do it this way. So that was one of my biggest, my biggest takeaways.” (17:50)

Ms. Isabel felt that the flexible nature of the activities was an important element in considering how professional development activities need to be able to be utilized with flexibility in order to be relevant. Even though all teachers in attendance were secondary ELA teachers, they teach students of different levels, abilities, and backgrounds. Finally, Ms. Isabel noted that “I felt like it

was modeled very well for us in the way, like moving around the area, moving around the room, using, having the station set up for us, and working collaboratively” (17:50). The interactive and well-modeled activities supported this new teacher in considering how to implement creative practices into her own ELA classroom.

Relevance, usefulness, and applicability are foundational elements when considering using professional development as a means to encourage teachers to implement creative teaching and learning strategies.

Theme 6: Meeting Teachers’ Needs through Accessible Resources, Collaboration, and Adequate Time for Implementation

When considering that the most problematic issue to embracing creative classroom experiences is time, ease of use and immediate application emerged as a primary theme in utilizing professional development as a means to foster such practices and spaces. In fact, when analyzing the reflection surveys filled out immediately after the OKA+ workshop, teacher participants noted the importance of ease and immediacy. Ms. Brave revealed that her biggest takeaway from the OKA+ Workshop was “Practical hands-on lessons that I can use tomorrow!” In fact, she utilized the Dear Data activity with her AP Literature students. Students created postcards over texts they were reading in class. On one side of the postcard, students had creative, symbolic representations of events that occurred in the text. On the other side of the postcard, students created keys that explained the symbolic stories.

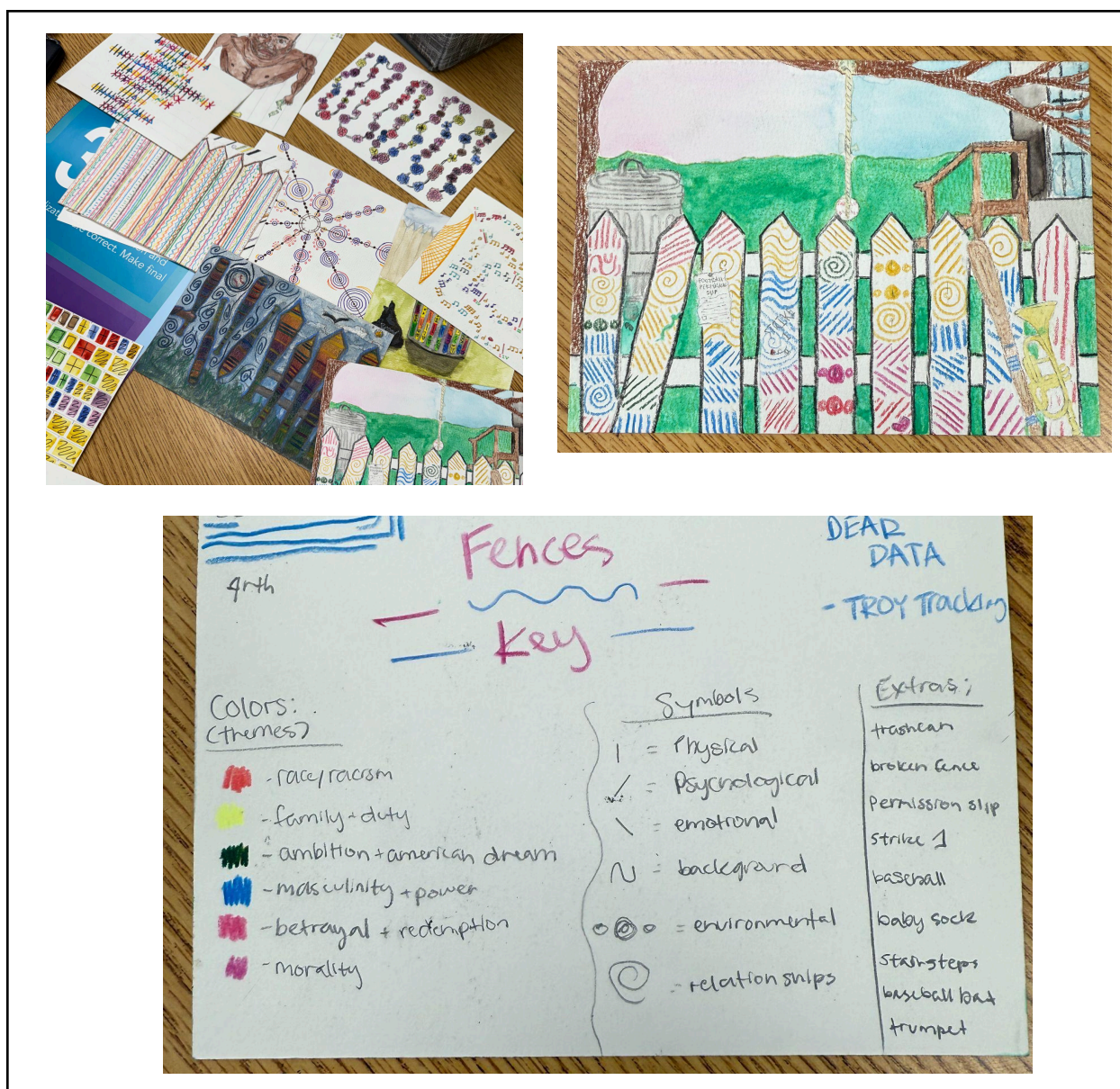


Figure 8
Images of Ms. Brave's Dear Data Activity

Note. Ms. Brave's students created data postcards to track the themes experienced by specific characters in the texts read during class. One example tracks the character Troy in the play *Fences* by August Wilson.

In addition, Ms. Flowers stated, "There are so many more resources beyond just text and videos, and it's easy to use." During the interview process, the importance of ease of use and immediacy when implementing skills learned during professional development was referenced

23 times, and seven of nine participants (78%) voiced the importance of ease of application when incorporating new teaching strategies. With teachers being pulled in so many directions and bearing the brunt of so many obstacles and constraints, ease of implementation becomes a major factor in supporting creative teaching and learning practices.

When discussing the importance of utilizing professional development as a means to foster creative teaching practices during her interview, Dr. Hammer noted, “They had handouts there. We had digital here. You know, I loved that. Whether you're a brand new teacher or a veteran teacher, you could walk away and say, “I could do this chart tomorrow, like I could do this visual analysis, literally, tomorrow, and be good to go” (31:26). Furthermore, Dr. Hammer described the specific materials that she felt that she could implement immediately:

“So when we can, we try to be as creative as possible, and just don't have time. So I liked that with those there were takeaways, like I could literally use it the next day, and that's how we're building our playlist. I literally used what they had, the graphs, they were already done. One of them was, like, a photo analysis. They already had the sheets. So like most workshops, they don't actually have stuff that you can use, right then. It's still stuff you have to spend hours and hours planning...I mean, it's great, so I'd say it just made it more attainable and got me excited, and just kind of reinforced what I love about teaching, that sometimes you forget or feel like you don't have time for something.”
(19:35)

Dr. Hammer appreciated that there were takeaways that could be implemented in her classroom with very little prep. Ease of use and immediate applicability is vital in encouraging creative classroom spaces. In fact, she did implement the playlist activity when teaching her *The Things They Carried* unit. She reflected:

I'm actually trying it next week with my AP for *The Things They Carried* playlists for Vietnam, where they have to, that's going to be one of their final assessments, because we've done quizzes, of course, reading comprehension checks. But that tends to be very level one, but I want to see them apply. And they have to analyze, like, why this song? They have to connect it to... They can be from the 60s. They can be modern. There's so many modern wars and conflicts and things that we could easily incorporate into protest music. So I'm very excited to do that.” (14:56)

Even though some of the activities may need to be modified, overall, teacher participants felt that they were still easy to implement. For instance, Ms. George also revealed:

“One thing that I really appreciated is that even though I kind of felt like it was more geared towards, like high school, because of the autonomy that they have compared to middle school, I was able to still, like, take things away in modifications, if that makes sense. So I probably won't have my students actually build a Spotify playlist or Apple playlist or music playlist, but maybe they can go home and look and like, think of songs and stuff like that, and then come back and like, draw it. You know what I mean, which would be hitting that creative outlet that I'm hoping to incorporate.” (8:07)

Additionally, Mrs. Eager, also a middle school teacher, noted, “I felt it was a good use of our time, and that there were good ideas that could be easily implemented, not too much, not having to learn a whole new program, right. And cost-effectively, too, like, not having to ask the principal or somebody, yeah, I need \$5,000” (16:40). Additionally, Mrs. Eager explained that she, like many of the participants, was drawn to the simplicity of the playlist activity. She stated, “Specifically, to me the simplest thing right off the bat was the playlist (19:49). And, in fact, Mrs. Eager did use the playlist activity with her students during the last quarter of school.

Mrs. Divine also conveyed the importance of ease and immediacy when considering incorporating creative teaching strategies learned through professional development. She revealed:

“My biggest takeaway was a different, a completely different way to approach a subject, but also the ease with which it would be to just incorporate it, because sometimes when you go to those it's like, oh, another new thing, and then how am I going to somehow fit this in? But that wasn't like that.” (13:07)

Mrs. Divine's comments reveal that she not only desires professional development trainings that are easy to incorporate, but she also mentions the frustration of attending PD sessions that are difficult to enact. Mrs. Divine utilized the Dear Data activity with her middle school students as a collaborative class project while reading the novel *Refugee* by Alan Gratz. Students tracked the emotions felt by the three main characters during their refugee journeys.



Figure 9
Images of Mrs. Divine's Dear Data Activity

Note. Mrs. Divine's middle school students tracked the emotions felt by the characters while reading *Refugee* by Alan Gratz

As the characters were having experiences that led to feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, or happiness, the data collection allowed students to think more profoundly about how the refugee

experiences shaped each character and consider how these experiences make people feel as they endure them.

Additionally, Ms. Apple echoed these sentiments. She expressed, “I don't want another initiative. I don't want any more stuff. Like, I want something that's going to address the needs right here, right now, that can be incorporated and implemented, that is not wasting our time or the kids' time, like that's what we need” (25:49). Finally, Ms. Isabel articulated:

“So I think it sparked a lot of ideas for what I can change for next year and how I can implement creativity by using all of these different tools and like strategies that aren't and they're like, easy, they're applicable, they aren't like some crazy like where you have to spend money, like it's all something that you can do for free, and it's not going to take a whole lot of extra time, which I appreciate.” (13:09).

As an early-career teacher, Ms. Isabel has spent her first year teaching being overwhelmed as she learned about classroom management, district and state requirements, and her site's daily and weekly schedule filled with PLC, team, and intervention meetings. Additionally, there is the mental toll of caring for the emotional and educational needs of 150 middle school students. Therefore, ease and immediacy are vital components for her in being able to implement creative teaching strategies.

Conclusion

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry underscores the powerful role that creativity plays in shaping meaningful secondary ELA classroom experiences. By listening closely to teachers' voices and situating their perspectives within the frameworks of Constructivism and Noddings' Theory of Care, the study highlights both the promise and the challenges of embedding creativity in everyday classroom practice. Teachers recognize creativity as essential to engaging students,

honoring individuality, and fostering critical thought, yet they also illustrate the problematic obstacles that interfere with their practice and must be addressed. The findings suggest that when teachers are given sustained district-level professional development, time for collaboration, and practical yet relevant tools aligned with curriculum demands, they feel more empowered to create caring, imaginative spaces for learners. Ultimately, the integration of creative practices is not simply an instructional choice—it is a reflection of our commitment to nurture students as thinkers, problem solvers, and human beings who are continually constructing meaning in the world and who deserve the skills needed to be successful adults in the world.

Chapter V

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to first, better understand how secondary English Language Arts teachers can be empowered, specifically through professional development and teacher training opportunities, to utilize creative teaching and learning practices in their classrooms to support student learning. However, to do so, one must also understand how teachers perceive creative teaching and learning practices as valuable or even essential to their personal pedagogical philosophies. Additionally, one must also assess those obstacles that hinder secondary ELA teachers from adopting creative classroom practices. Only through investigating how teachers currently perceive creativity as a beneficial classroom practice and those factors that they feel are inhibiting them from utilizing such practices, researchers can suggest practical changes necessary that would support wider implementation of creative classroom spaces. Through analyzing the data that emerged during this research, the information can be used to incorporate the kinds of professional development that have the potential to empower ELA teachers to embrace creative teaching and learning practices. Grounded in constructivism, this research stresses that creative teaching and learning practices open the door to classroom spaces where students are openly invited to construct individual meaning. As Crotty (1998) suggests, “There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed.” Creative classroom spaces allow the construction of meaning more fully, in that each student's mind is invited to make their own meanings of the world.

Additionally, this research was conducted through the theoretical framework of Nel Noddings’ (1995) Theory of Care, which posits that foundationally, not simply as learners, but, in essence, we, as individual beings who live in community, have a moral responsibility to care

for one another. Part of caring for one another can (and should) exist in the classroom, where teachers care for students by teaching them in the way that best honors each of them as individuals. Through extrapolating the data that emerged during this research process,

Discussion

Student Engagement & the Individual Learner

The first research question addressed in this study was: In what ways, if at all, do secondary ELA teachers view the integration of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice? This particular question yielded several important themes that can be used to create the kinds of professional development opportunities that meet the needs of secondary ELA teachers in terms of creative pedagogies. Overall, the most significant findings were related to student engagement, meeting the needs of individual learners, and pushing student thinking towards problem-solving and critical thinking.

When taking a closer look at the themes of student engagement and meeting the needs of individual students, it can be argued that these two themes overlap in how they function within the secondary ELA classroom and can be discussed simultaneously. Utilizing creative teaching and learning practices as a means to support student engagement was a primary factor when secondary ELA teachers discussed the essential nature of creativity in their classrooms, and in the most simplistic terms, this finding can be boiled down to one premise: students who are not engaged are not learning. However, we can assert that when we meet the needs of our students as individuals, we are also engaging the individual student. Creative classroom spaces allow for the secondary ELA teacher to both engage all learners and meet all learners' needs. In a sense, it is about allowing the teacher to think and engage creatively with her curriculum, within her classroom, and with her individual students. Engagement and learner-centered teaching may be

two sides of the same creative coin. In terms of Nel Noddings' Theory of Care, creative classroom spaces, in meeting the needs of each individual student, are spaces where every student is cared for, honored, recognized, and taught accordingly.

As Sternberg (2004) notes, creativity is a choice, and there is much that can be done to support learners in growing their creative potential. However, teachers may need the training or be given the freedom, or perhaps permission, to make such choices to support learners through creative practices. Kukkonen & Bolden (2022) argue that creativity can be supported through teaching educators how to support students' task motivation, domain-specific skills, and creativity-relevant processes. When teacher participants conveyed that they believe learning becomes easier for students who are engaged through creative projects in which students are given choice, this relates to Sternberg's (2004) concept that people are most creative when they are doing work they enjoy. Whether it is Ms. Apple's multimodal Elizabethan project, Ms. Brave's monster project, Dr. Hammer's amusement park book project, or Ms. Isabel's invention project, secondary ELA students were given a wide variety of options to meet the criteria of these assignments, and each of the teacher participants perceived this as a factor that benefited individual student learning. The teacher participants in this study mirrored those sentiments in that they felt that when they encouraged students to engage in active learning projects and activities where students were required to create, they were able to see students doing advanced levels of thinking, versus lower-level work that may require students to merely mimic or memorize a specific skill or fact.

The role of student choice as a creative practice is at the heart of both engaging students as well as meeting their individual needs. In this sense, as educators, we must acknowledge that creative spaces that offer students many means to show their learning support them in both

engagement and honoring individualism. When we consider how secondary ELA teachers conceive of the essential nature of creativity in their classrooms, we must be inclusive of empowering teachers to aid students in pursuing personal projects. This is reflected in Rinkevich's (2011) work, which defines "creative teaching" as teaching that is individualized and meaningful for each student while also using the context of "original thinking" and "necessary." Therefore, when considering the professional development and teacher training opportunities we offer our secondary ELA teachers, designed to encourage the adoption of creative classroom practices, we must offer trainings that support teachers in learning how to include project-based learning, multimodal activities, and other practices that will both engage students while also meeting their individual needs.

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

After addressing the essential nature of creativity in the secondary ELA classroom in terms of engagement and meeting the needs of individual learners, the importance of using creative teaching practices as a means to support critical thinking emerged as the third most significant theme. Guilford (1967) posits that there is something creative about all problem solving; creative production exists whenever problem solving occurs, and Rhodes (1961) defines creativity in terms of a kind of problem solving that necessitates divergent thinking, more specifically, flexibility, fluency, originality, and elaboration. More recently, Wimmer (2016) argues that problem solving is inherently a creative act in that all problem solving requires the problem solver to think outside of what is known to them, which can be construed as novel thinking.

The Obstacle of Time

The second research question asked secondary ELA teacher participants to describe the key obstacles they face in incorporating creativity into their instructional practices and classroom spaces. It is of no surprise to anyone to discover that a lack of time was by far the obstacle referenced most by teachers when discussing what hinders them from being more inclusive of creativity, or as Dr. Hammer described, “Time, I'd say, is the main thing creativity takes time to be able to explain what you're thinking and to build the assignment, to match it to the objectives, to think about all the potential things that could go wrong” (33:10). The time constraints experienced by teachers fall under two categories: the external curricular constraints that occur outside of the classroom (i.e. weather, pep assemblies, class meetings, and weeks of spring testing) and the internal curricular constraints that occur due to the amount of content teachers feel they are required to cover due to district pacing or standardized test preparation. While there is little that can be done to quiet or slow the external constraints that interfere with the time teachers have to learn about, plan, and design creative activities, there is much that can be done in regard to those internal curricular constraints.

The public education system at large steers educators toward performance-based learning and “teaching to the test.” While it is easier to quantify student learning when there are specific outcomes in mind, this type of learning is often at a lower level of knowledge. When teachers are considering how to spend the limited time they have with students in the classroom, it can feel more attainable to choose those assignments that are easy to deliver as well as quantify. Henriksen and Mishra (2018) argue that educators are trained to teach students with a specific outcome in mind; therefore, teachers can struggle when the learning outcomes are not precisely defined or delivered. Instead of burning up their precious time on planning and delivering

creative lessons or activities that must be graded in accordance with how each individual student has chosen to meet the expectation of the assignment, there is an ease and comfort in delivering lessons or worksheets that have a clear answer key and the belief that the skill has been learned because the box has been checked. As Dr. Hammer described:

“And sometimes the more creative things are harder to get the kids caught up on than just like, let's say, a worksheet or something easier. So sometimes it's just survival mode. And honestly, if you're not as creative, it's probably less stressful, to be honest, because you don't have to think as a teacher, you could literally just do what you've always done, and that's very not time consuming, and it's not so stressful when I've done this for 10 years, you could do with your eyes closed.” (33:10)

Additionally, Ms. George described the issue of working under administrators who care more about data and less about depth of knowledge when she revealed:

“I think it's administrative constraints... I feel like, if your admin isn't open to, you know, if they're just focused on test scores instead of actual student learning depth and depth of knowledge and experience, and all the things, then I feel like you're at the shorthand, so I think that's one thing.” (17:53)

Ms. George feels the pressure of preparing her students for performing on tests and gathering concrete evidence of student growth, which makes her feel as though she has less time for creative activities.

When thinking about how we can better serve secondary ELA students in offering professional development opportunities that empower teachers to adopt creative practices, giving them actual time to plan and build the activities is one of the most important investments that can be made. Regardless of how important teachers may perceive the benefits of creativity in their

classroom may be, they simply do not have the time to do the work necessary to incorporate creativity in a thoughtful way that is designed to support student learning. While it is unclear why some teachers find or make the time to include creative teaching and learning practices, it appears that building time for such planning on the district level would make an impact on teacher practice. As Ms. Apple illustrated, “But without time just to collaborate. Otherwise, it's useless. Yeah, if there's no time to make something, then it's just, that's great, but I have no, I don't have time” (27:06). Planning and building time must be included in professional development opportunities to empower significant change in being inclusive of creative practices.

The Collaboration Dichotomy

The most surprising theme that emerged during this research was the obstacle that Professional Learning Communities (PLC) can initiate when considering how to be more inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices. While it is widely understood that participation in PLCs results in improved teacher practice and increased student achievement (Doğan & Adams, 2018), this pragmatic qualitative research revealed that the PLC process can be a double-edged sword. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes that through collaboration and dialogue with others, learners construct understanding and identity. However, what happens when the PLC is not actually offering true opportunities for collaboration? The participants in this research revealed that a dysfunctional PLC can be unhealthy to one's autonomous creative process.

The teacher participants in this study reported positively when describing their experience with collaboration during the OKA+Creativity Workshop. Overall, the teacher participants revealed that it was both helpful and stimulating to talk to teachers from other sites

and other grade levels about how they planned on incorporating the creative activities they were learning about into their curriculum. For instance, Dr. Hammer illustrated:

“So when you're doing all this and rotating and learning, you're with people that aren't necessarily from your site, maybe not necessarily right? And I think that's, I think that's important at first, I feel like that's really important to like, have those other kind of get out of your comfort zone, see how other people are doing, things you know, vertically across the district.” (29:53)

In this sense, the collaborative process was working in accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) explanation of social learning: “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). More recently, the work of DeFelice et al (2023) utilizes neuroscience to argue that whether discussing learning in children or adults, “learning in interaction with others may be a key factor supporting acquisition of new knowledge in the real world.” Therefore, by situating professional development within collaborative frameworks that support creativity, districts can empower secondary ELA teachers to utilize creative teaching and learning practices within their own classrooms. In other words, offering professional development opportunities to secondary ELA teachers which focuses on collaborative learning could make creative practices more attainable.

However, many teachers reported that the way in which their PLCs currently function makes them feel as though there is little room for being inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices. While several teachers who attended the OKA+ workshop felt as though their PLC would be supportive and accepting of new activities and ways of thinking about creative

teaching methodologies, there were those who felt that their PLC would not be open to change.

As Ms. Flowers explained:

“The person who's been teaching the longest in our PLC has such an understanding of all the material and has already made all the material from years and years and years, that it's easy to kind of just keep going with what is sometimes less creative, boring for me, maybe less engaging for the kids. Does it have value? Yes. But is it the values that I want to focus on? Probably not all the time.” (7:09)

It is apparent that Ms. Flower's PLC is not actually working collaboratively as they are not working as a group to continuously improve upon thinking about what their students' immediate needs are and what can be done to meet those needs. Instead, as Ms. Flowers described it, this PLC team is “going through the motions.” Therefore, for those individuals who are feeling stifled by their PLCs, it is vital to consider how professional development could be used to support, not only the individual, but, the entire team in becoming more inclusive of creative practices. In order to improve the obstacle of the dysfunctional PLC team on creative classroom practices, educators, administrators, and content specialists must make efforts to train entire PLC teams when providing creativity professional development. Including the entire team in such training is one way in which we can empower teachers to be more inclusive of creative practices. Additionally, administrators and teachers must be mindful that when a PLC is not actually being collaborative, action must be taken to reset the norms and practices of the group in order to open the space for the kinds of teaching that benefits student learning. If teachers aren't given the opportunity to collaborate and work together to build engaging and meaningful lessons that meet the needs of students, then, quite frankly, such meetings are wasting everyone's time, which is already incredibly strained.

Relevance & Immediacy

The third research question posed for this study was designed to better understand how secondary ELA teachers can be supported in incorporating creative teaching and learning practices through teacher training: In what ways, if any, can a professional development opportunity foster an environment where secondary ELA teachers feel empowered to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces?

In understanding that time was the most referenced obstacle for teachers, it makes sense that the themes of relevance and immediacy would emerge as being one of the most effective ways in which professional development can support teachers in implementing creative classroom practices. When discussing the importance of relevance, it is fundamental to acknowledge that creative teaching and learning practices must be integrated into the curriculum in order to support the learning goals and objectives already in place. For instance, Patston, Kauffman, Cropley & Marrone (2021) studied the implementation of creative growth practices in the classroom in twelve countries and revealed that when supporting students through creative educational practices, there was little use of systemic approaches of how to use creativity with true purpose. This is reflected in Mrs. Eager's assessment when she stated, "I have to have time to figure it out, how I'm going to use it in a way that's going to actually have a good outcome, that's going to be a practical thing, right? That's beneficial. Not just, hey, we got to play a game today" (12:57). The creative teaching and learning practices must be relevant to the curriculum, skills, and standards central to the classroom.

This research also revealed that one of the successes of the OKA+ Creativity Workshop is that it was specifically designed to meet the needs of secondary ELA teachers. Guest and Hohn's (2009) work posits that creativity is not just important when considering the arts; creativity is

central to any area of study that wants to elicit analytical thinking and problem solving in students; however, creativity must be incorporated into classrooms effectively. Therefore, when implementing creative and learning practices, it must be meaningful to the specific area of study. In the case of the OKA+ Workshop, all of the stations and activities were designed with secondary ELA standards in mind. For instance, the graphing station struck many of the teacher participants as applicable in that they were able to easily adapt graphing into the ELA reading standards they were currently meeting in their classrooms. The graphing station was presented as another way for students to practice critical reading in that reading graphs is, in fact, a form of critical reading in that it is information that must be analyzed and discussed in order to better understand it. Whether it is reading texts, images, or even graphs, secondary ELA teachers were able to take the graphing activities and easily implement them into the work they were already doing and planning. When thinking about utilizing professional development as a means to encourage creative practices in the secondary ELA classroom, ensuring that the professional development is content specific and relevant to their practice is essential. This is echoed in Dr. Hammer's sentiments when she stated:

It's not just theory, it's actual application, like they actually know what they're talking about and they are in the classroom, or have been recently, which is not something we often get. And it was very specialized to us, to the English, but they could easily have done that, like specialize it to the science, specialize it, you know. So it was very well thought out and very applicable.” (31:26)

Additionally, it is important to note that several participants made note of the fact that the workshop felt effective because the facilitators were current classroom teachers. The participants perceived the activities to be relevant and easy to use because they were designed by practicing

classroom teachers. In fact, many of the participants commented on how the presenters did not “talk down to them” and were considered “approachable.” The issue of relevance was not just pertinent to the activities presented, but also regarding the presenters. The secondary ELA teacher participants felt that the presenters were offering them activities and strategies that were relevant to their classroom experiences presented by knowledgeable and supportive facilitators with first-hand experience.

Moreover, similar to the importance of relevance, immediate application was cited as a primary focus when considering how to support teachers in adopting creative practices. Because secondary ELA teachers endure the obstacles of limited time as well as material resources, creative teaching and learning practices that were immediately applicable received the most positive response. For example, the playlist activity presented to teachers during the OKA+ Workshop was immediately utilized by a number of participants. The playlist activity required absolutely no additional resources, it could be created both digitally or physically, and it could be applied to any grade level or specific student group. Additionally, as the activity required students to illustrate why each song on the playlist was appropriate to the reading selection, students were supported in reaching the evaluative levels of Bloom’s because students were required to argue their stance as to why each song was an appropriate representation of the text. The playlist activity was perceived by participants as the easiest to incorporate into their already existing curriculum, and, in fact, it was the activity most utilized by participants after they attended the workshop. Dr. Hammer, Mrs. Eager, and Ms. Apple each incorporated the playlist activity into their curricular units. In fact, Mrs. Eager illustrated this point when she reflected, “I thought it was very appropriate for middle school that there were creative things we could do to teach the curriculum in middle school that could be fun for them, like the playlist” (15:11).

When considering how to use professional development as a means to empower secondary ELA teachers in adopting creative teaching and learning practices, relevance to their curriculum and standards as well as activities that can be easily and immediately incorporated are crucial.

Recommendations for Practice

Leggett (2017) proposes creating educational environments capable of guiding students to use their curiosity, imagination, and playfulness to develop creative potential. Therefore, in order to better serve our secondary ELA teachers in order to empower them to be inclusive of creative classroom spaces through teacher training opportunities, it is advised that such training must support teachers in using creativity in a way that is currently meaningful to their practice; we must utilize professional development to support teachers in learning about how to incorporate projects that will not only engage their learners and meet the needs of students as individuals, but they also need to understand the power that creativity lends to supporting students as critical thinkers and problem solvers. If we want teachers to shift their practice to be more inclusive of creativity, it must be tied to the values that they already hold dear as educators. It must tap into their current teacher philosophies regarding engagement, meeting the needs of individual learners, and supporting critical thinking.

Additionally, the obstacle of time must be addressed in order to encourage teachers to incorporate creativity as a classroom norm. Professional development opportunities will need to allow teachers the time to process and reflect on what they have learned as well as time to actually plan and build creative lessons and activities. Teachers need time to make changes to their pacing guides and create meaningful lessons that support creative thinking as well as the skills and objectives already established.

While collaboration is integral to the learning process, educators and administrators need to be aware that when PLC teams are not truly collaborating as part of their practice, then actions must be taken to steer the team towards actual discussion and planning where all members of the team actively participate. Additionally, when planning professional development events regarding creativity, it is important to consider how to ensure that the entire team receives training. When the entire team experiences the training collaboratively, they may be more likely to make shifts to their pacing and planning as a group.

Finally, professional development designed to empower secondary ELA teachers in adopting creative classroom practices must be ELA content specific, tied to ELA standards and skills, and be facilitated by classroom practitioners. If the training does not feel relevant or easily implemented into the structures that are already in place, such trainings are perceived as pointless and a waste of their finite time.

Recommendation for Future Research

The issue of dysfunctional PLCs and how those communities can disrupt the implementation of creative teaching and learning practices in the secondary ELA classrooms was one of the most surprising themes that emerged. As Vygotsky notes: “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers.” In essence, people, whether they be children or adults, learn best when they are in social collaboration that challenges them to push through their current level of mastery. Theoretically, collaborative learning should push teachers to higher levels of understanding and support them in growing as practitioners.

Therefore, further research should be done in order to better understand how, if at all, secondary

ELA teams or PLCs could be supported through professional development to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces.

Additionally, more research could be done to address how standardized testing may impact creative teaching and learning practices. For instance, Ronald Beghetto's (2019) work supports the notion that the culture of standardized tests or Large Scale Assessments (LSAs), due to their very nature, steer teachers and administrators away from the type of teaching that supports individualized learning and higher level thinking. While standardized testing was a relevant theme that emerged during the collection and review of literature, it was interesting that it only emerged as a minor theme addressed during this study when teachers shared that they have little time to incorporate creative lessons because they are required to focus more on data or they lose actual class time to testing. There is work to be done to better understand how much our desire to see data trends and improved test scores may affect the offering of creative experiences in the secondary ELA classroom.

Finally, further research is needed to better understand how the experiences of secondary ELA teachers practicing in schools that have implemented OKA+ as a foundational element of their school culture compare to those secondary ELA teachers who are not practicing in buildings that are highly invested in creative practices. For instance, Henricksen's (2010) research regarding OKA+ Schools revealed a number of positive outcomes for those schools that had fully implemented creative teaching and learning practices schoolwide: "higher achievement, better attendance for students and teachers, decreased disciplinary problems in schools, happier, more effective educators, joyful, engaged students, more parent and community involvement, and creative, focused instruction." Further research to determine if OKA+ school communities are still seeing positive outcomes in comparison to non-OKA+ schools in a

post-2020 setting could inform our understanding of what changes may need to be made to meet the needs of today's students. Schooling has changed and our students have changed much after the Covid-19 pandemic. Could creative teaching and learning practices benefit our post-Covid students and children?

Conclusion

Rooted in care, community, and the construction of meaning, at its heart, the crux of this research reminds us that both teaching and learning are profoundly human endeavors. As Dr. Hammer illustrated during her interview, "There's something innately human about creativity in English, and I think we need to hold on to that. If not, we kind of lose ourselves." This pragmatic qualitative study illustrates for all of those working in education and concerned for the needs of our secondary ELA teachers that there are meaningful and applicable ways in which to offer practitioners the training necessary to transform their classroom communities through creativity.

Drawing from Constructivism, this research reveals that creativity is not simply a supplement to instruction; it is an essential classroom component that allows for both students and teachers to construct meaning. As Crotty (1988) reminds us: Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. When teachers are empowered to think creatively about their curriculum and the needs of their students, as well as the time to process and make thoughtful decisions about enacting change, they are capable of creating those classroom spaces where students are invited to actively participate in the making of meaning, instead of merely receiving it.

Through the lens of Nel Noddings' (1995) Theory of Care, creative teaching becomes an act of relational engagement, one which acknowledges that caring for students involves honoring their individuality, interests, and ways of knowing. Creativity, then, becomes a form of pedagogical care, which recognizes that students thrive in environments where they are seen,

valued, and invited to express themselves as authentic members of their community. Professional development and teacher training that nurtures teacher creativity, in turn, also offers this same standard of care, giving teachers the time, collaborative community, and resources they need to flourish as educators.

Creativity and its power to support teachers in caring for their students should not be viewed as peripheral ideals but as essential components of an educational system that seeks to nurture both the individual student and society as a whole. Empowering teachers through purposeful and relevant professional development is not merely an investment in strong pedagogical practices, it is an investment in the intellectual as well as emotional well-being of our school communities, both students and teachers. Noddings' (2002) believes, "We learn to care by being cared for. The relation itself is the foundation of ethical caring" (p.22). Creative teaching and learning practices are symbolic of the hopeful reminder that when we care for one another as individuals who were designed to think, create, and work in collaboration with others, we create the conditions where all members of our community can thrive and reach self-actualization.

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Appendix A

Participant Qualifying Survey & Consent to Participate

Would you like to be involved in university research? You are invited to participate in my research entitled **Supporting Creative Cognitive Spaces: The Importance of Creativity Professional Development & the Secondary ELA Classroom**. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a certified ELA teacher who is planning on attending the OKA+ Creativity Workshop. Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions you may have BEFORE agreeing to participate in the research.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to gather data about how secondary ELA teachers perceive the importance of creativity in their classrooms and the impact of professional development opportunities on supporting secondary ELA teachers' in becoming more inclusive of creative pedagogies in their classrooms.

How many participants will be in this research?

About 10 people will take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will attend the OKA+ Creativity Workshop on February 17, 2025. This workshop will be video recorded in order to collect research data; however, this recording will not be shared with anyone outside of the researcher.
- You will be interviewed in person in March to garner information regarding your perceptions about creativity in the secondary ELA classroom and if the OKA+ Workshop shifted your perceptions regarding creativity in the secondary ELA classroom (one hour). This interview will be recorded via Zoom. The recordings will be deleted after they are transcribed.
- I may need to reach out to you for follow-up questions or additional interviews after our initial interview (15-30 minutes).
- Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be anonymous.
- After removing all identifiers, I might share your data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.
- Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time and for any reason.

How long will this take?

Your participation will take about one hour for the interview. There is a possibility that I will need to contact you with follow-up questions from your initial interview, which will take about 15 minutes to 1 hour of time. If you are not able to make time for the interviews, you will be removed from the study.

_____ I give permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

What are the risks and benefits of participating in the research study?

There is minimal occupational risk associated with participating in the study due to the fact that if you were to be identified as a participant in the study, colleagues, administrators, or community members might disagree with statements you make during the interviews. There are no benefits to participating in this research.

Audio and video recorded data collection: There is a risk of accidental data release if I collect your data using audio or video recordings. If this occurred, your identity and statements made during the interviews would become known to people not on the research team. To minimize this risk, the researcher will transfer any and all data to a secure platform approved by the University of Oklahoma's Information Technology Office.

Will I be compensated for participating?

One participant will be randomly selected to receive a \$50 Amazon gift card.

Who will see my information?

Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

You have a right to access the research data that has been collected about you during the research. However, you may not access this information until all of the research has been completed and you consent to this restriction.

Do I have to participate?

No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized in any way. Additionally, if you decide to participate, you do not have to answer any questions, and you can stop participating at any time.

Will my name be anonymous or confidential?

Your name will not be linked or retained with any responses.

Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree for data records to include my identifiable information _____ yes _____ no

I agree to be quoted directly without the use of my name _____ yes _____ no

I agree for my research data to be archived for scholarly and public access _____ yes _____ no

What will happen to my data in the future?

We might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

Will my records be accessed?

If you approve, your confidential records will be used as data for this research. The records that will be used include your reflection survey and any materials or artifacts produced during the OKA+Creativity Workshop.

These records will be used for the following purposes:

- To evaluate the impact of the OKA+ Creativity Workshop on your perceptions or pedagogical philosophies and/or practices.

I agree for my records to be accessed and used for research purposes _____ yes _____ no

Audio and video recording of research activities:

To assist with an accurate recording of your responses, interviews will be recorded via Zoom. You have the right to refuse the allowing of such recording; however, you will not be able to continue as a participant.

I consent to audio recording _____ yes _____ no

Who do I contact with questions, concerns, or complaints?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact me at 405-203-4035. You can also email me at jackie@rasnic.com or jackie.rasnic@edmondschools.net. You can also reach my advisor, Dr. Crag Hill, at the University of Oklahoma at crag.a.hill@ou.edu.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

Qualifying Questions (highlight or circle answers)

6. Are you willing to participate in this research?

YES NO

7. How many years have you been teaching?

1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 20+

8. Are you attending the OKA+ Workshop on February 17, 2025?

YES NO

9. Are you willing to be interviewed in person and recorded via Zoom as part of this research?

YES NO

10. Are you willing to be potentially interviewed with any follow-up questions after the primary interview?

YES

NO

11. Do you consent to your Zoom interviews being video recorded?

YES

NO

12. Do you consent to have your post-workshop reflection shared with the researcher for research purposes?

YES

NO

13. Do you consent to being video recorded and photographed during the OKA+ Workshop?

YES

NO

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature: _____

Print Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent: *Jacqueline Rasnic*

Print Name: **Jacqueline Rasnic** Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate. This research came to fruition because I am interested in stimulating creative pedagogical practices in secondary ELA classrooms. Particularly, I am trying to understand how secondary ELA teachers perceive the importance of creativity in their classrooms and how professional development opportunities can be used to support secondary ELA teachers in shifting their perceptions and practices in adopting creative pedagogical approaches.

In a few weeks after this interview is transcribed, I will reach out to you and request that you look over the transcription to verify the content.

My specific research questions are:

RQ1	In what ways, if at all, do secondary ELA teachers view the integration of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice?
RQ2	How do secondary ELA teachers describe the key obstacles they face in incorporating creativity into their instructional practices and classroom spaces?
RQ3	In what ways, if any, can a professional development opportunity foster an environment where secondary ELA teachers feel empowered to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces?

You can decline to answer any question at any time. Please feel free to let me know if you need any clarification regarding any questions. I can be reached at jackie.rasnic@edmondschools.net or jackie@rasnic.com.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. What is your “teacher story”? What do you teach, and how long have you been teaching secondary ELA?
2. How do you define creativity in the context of teaching secondary ELA?
3. How essential do you feel creativity is in supporting students in being successful?

4. How does your understanding of creativity inform your overall teaching philosophy or approach to instruction?
5. Do you feel that you are currently inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices?
 - a. If so, can you give an example of what that looks like in your classroom?
 - b. If not, what factors do you feel inhibit you?
6. In February, you attended the OKA+ Workshop, what were your main takeaways?
7. If applicable, how did attending the OKA+ Workshop impact your perceptions about the inclusion of creativity within your own classroom?
8. When looking at your reflection from immediately after the workshop, specifically question 3, which asks if you have an idea that you would like to implement in your classroom,” were you able to implement those plans?
 - a) If so, can you tell me about that experience?
 - b) If so, do you feel that the OKA+ Workshop fostered that implementation?
 - c) If not, what stood in your way?
 - d) If not, what would be needed for you to actually enact your idea?
9. Overall, what would you say about professional development opportunities as a way to support secondary ELA teachers in becoming more inclusive of creative pedagogical practices?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences attending the OKA+ Workshop?
11. Finally, what obstacles, if any, do you feel that secondary ELA teachers encounter that inhibit them from embracing creativity as an essential teaching and learning practice in their classrooms?

Appendix D

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear ELA Teachers,

I am currently researching how to increase creative pedagogical practices in secondary ELA classrooms. Particularly, I am trying to understand those factors that support and/or inhibit teachers in adopting creative pedagogical approaches in order to .

I am looking for ELA teacher participants who are attending the OKA+ Creativity Workshop and are willing to share their thoughts and feelings about how attending the OKA+ Creativity Workshop might impact their perceptions about teaching as well as their pedagogical practices.

Additionally, I will interview you in March to gather data about the impact of attending the OKA+ Creativity Workshop. Interviews will be recorded via Zoom and will last for about one hour. After your interview, I may need to reach out to you with follow-up questions. You can decline to answer any question at any time.

Additionally, your reflection and artifacts from the OKA+ Creativity Workshop will be used to gather data about your experience and the impact it had on your pedagogical philosophies and practice. All of your information will remain confidential, and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity and the identity of the district.

One participant will be randomly selected to receive a \$50 Amazon Gift Card.

My specific research questions are:

RQ1	In what ways, if at all, do secondary ELA teachers view the integration of creativity as an essential component of their teaching practice?
RQ2	How do secondary ELA teachers describe the key obstacles they face in incorporating creativity into their instructional practices and classroom spaces?
RQ3	In what ways, if any, can a professional development opportunity foster an environment where secondary ELA teachers feel empowered to be more inclusive of creative classroom spaces?

If you are interested in participating in the study, please email me at jackie@rasnic.com or jackie.rasnic@edmondschools.net. My faculty advisor is Dr. Crag Hill at the University of Oklahoma. If you have any questions or concerns about my research, please feel free to contact Dr. Hill at crag.a.hill@ou.edu.

If you would like more detailed information about the information being gathered during this research, the research questions have been included below.

Thank you for your consideration!

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. What is your “teacher story”? What do you teach, and how long have you been teaching secondary ELA?
2. How essential do you feel creativity is in supporting students in being successful?
3. How does your understanding of creativity inform your overall teaching philosophy or approach to instruction?
4. Do you feel that you are currently inclusive of creative teaching and learning practices?
 - a. If so, can you give an example of what that looks like in your classroom?
 - b. If not, what factors do you feel inhibit you?
5. In February, you attended the OKA+ Workshop. What were your main takeaways?
6. If applicable, how did attending the OKA+ Workshop impact your perceptions about the inclusion of creativity within your own classroom?
7. When looking at your reflection from immediately after the workshop, specifically question 3, which asks if you have an idea that you would like to implement in your classroom.” Were you able to implement those plans?
 - e) If so, can you tell me about that experience?
 - f) If so, do you feel that the OKA+ Workshop fostered that implementation?
 - g) If not, what stood in your way?
 - h) If not, what would be needed for you to actually enact your idea?
8. Overall, what would you say about professional development opportunities as a way to support secondary ELA teachers in becoming more inclusive of creative pedagogical practices?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences attending the OKA+ Workshop?

10. Finally, what obstacles, if any, do you feel that secondary ELA teachers encounter that inhibit them from embracing creativity as an essential teaching and learning practice in their classrooms?

Appendix E

Description of OKA+ Creativity Workshop

The OKA+ Creativity Workshop: The Intervention

As part of the school district’s professional development conference that occurs in February each year, secondary (6-12) English and literacy teachers were invited to attend the OKA+ Creativity Workshop. Approximately 150 secondary English and literacy teachers were emailed in January 2025 to notify them of the workshop and invite them to sign up to reserve one of the thirty available spots. Additionally, teachers were sent a description of the workshop to persuade them to attend:

Unleash your creativity and discover the power of writing through engaging, cross-curricular activities! In this workshop, participants will dive into the world of neologism—the art of creating new words—while exploring how to make writing fun, dynamic, and connected to other areas of learning. You'll take part in activities that bring together different subjects, helping students find new ways to spark their imagination and build their vocabulary. Learn how to integrate the arts into writing instruction and create memorable, meaningful experiences that make words come alive. Come ready to write, create, and explore!

After thirty secondary English and literacy teachers reserved spots to attend the OKA+ Creativity Workshop, all secondary English and literacy teachers in the district were notified that there were no more spots available. Teachers who reserved spots were notified of the time and location of the workshop. Each of the thirty attendees were contacted and asked if they would like to participate in the research study. From the pool of teachers who responded, nine ELA (English) teachers who fit the parameters of the research requirements were selected.

The OKA+ Workshop began at 8:30 AM on Monday, February 17, 2025. All of the thirty teachers attending the workshop, including the nine research participants, were asked to find a table to sit at for the duration of the professional development session. Seating was not pre-arranged and all of those in attendance chose where and with whom they wanted to sit. Tables were arranged for collaborative work, with seating for 4-6 teachers at each pod. There were a total of six table groupings or pods.

Each table grouping was decorated with brightly colored centerpieces and fidgets in order to prepare attendees to have fun and tap into their creativity. The OKA+ facilitators, Dr. Jennifer Burris and Naomi Rothrock, played cheerful pop music as teachers arrived. The overall mood of the room was intended to encourage a fun, comfortable, and collaborative environment. The workshop occurred in a large conference room space. On the north side of the room is where teachers worked in seated, collaborative table settings. On the south side of the room, the OKA+ presenters arranged six different learning stations where teachers would engage with different kinds of learning materials, which were referred to as artifacts during the training. The two different areas, collaborative tables and learning stations, were separated by a large snack table in the center of the room, which was decorated with colorful table coverings. The snack table offered donuts, snacks, coffee, water, and soft drinks for attendees to enjoy throughout the session. The presenters also created eight areas around the entire workshop space for teachers to meet in groups to collaborate and participate in discussion with people outside of their table groups. These areas were marked using numbers printed on white letter-sized paper.

The OKA+ presenters primarily focused on supporting four specific Oklahoma Academic Standards via the OKA+ Workshop:

- Standard 2: The reading and writing process. Students will use a variety of recursive

reading and writing processes.

- Standard 3: Critical reading and writing. Students will apply critical thinking skills to reading and writing.
- Standard 7: Multimodal Literacies. Students will comprehend and communicate knowledge through alphabetic, aural, visual, spatial, and/or gestural content
- Standard 8: Independent Reading and Writing. Students will read and write independently for a variety of purposes and periods of time.

Additionally, the OKA+ presenters focused on incorporating four of the OKA+ Essentials during their workshop: arts, curriculum, multiple learning pathways, and experiential learning.

The Presenters

Naomi Rothrock is a high school French teacher at Harding Fine Arts Academy with a background in teaching Spanish and Senior Capstone. She has been an OKA+ fellow for five years. Dr. Jennifer Burris has been an OKA+ fellow for twelve years. She works with future teachers at the University of Central Oklahoma and teaches Foundations of American Education and Educational Assessment. Dr. Burris also supervises student teachers.

The Agenda

8:30 - 8:40

1. Introductions, Triple Track, Essentials, OAC, CQ, FQ

8:40 - 8:50

1. Questions where they move to station signs
2. When they get to the station, each person introduces themselves

8:50 - 9:00

- NY Times Connections
- Explain Neologisms

9:00 - 9:20

- 1) See think wonder collaborative poem
 - Share out
 - 9:25 - 9:40 - Break
 - 9:40 - 10:30
 - Artifact Exploration
 - Share out

10:30 - 10:40

- Break if needed

10:40 - 11:00

1. Vocab word brainstorming
- Create neologism for that station and collaborative poem

11:00 - 11:15

Final processing

- Vocab Tiers
- Writing Process
- Multimodal Literacy
- Multiple Intelligences

After introducing themselves, the presenters began the OKA+ Workshop with the statement, “You are the experts of your classroom!” This was both said aloud and presented on screens in both the north and south sides of the conference room. The presenters shared that the workshop would be conducted using a Triple Track Agenda model in which the learning would take place with three modes in mind:

- Track 1 - The Content: Do I know this or is it new information for me?
- Track 2 - The Classroom: I know this, but how could I adopt, adapt, or create from this for my class?
- Track 3 - The Facilitation: I know this. I do this with my class. What can I learn from how the facilitators are conducting this experience?

* There are examples today that we will model for you knowing that you are adults and would adapt for the specific needs of your students.

The OKA+ facilitators then went over the OKA+ research-based “essentials,” or a set of eight commitments designed to support student learning:

- Arts
- Curriculum
- Multiple Learning Pathways
- Experiential Learning
- Enriched Assessment
- Collaboration
- Infrastructure

- Climate

The facilitators then began with the overarching concept of “Connection” and asked the conceptual question for the attendees to discuss: “How does writing create connections?”

Teachers at the pods then discussed the question and what that means to them as English Language Arts teachers. For instance, research participant Dr. Hammer noted that “Writing helps students to get to know each other and see each other as people.” Additionally, Mrs. Brave explained that she felt that student writing helped her to better understand her students and their personal experiences.

The facilitators then asked the Focus Questions:

- What could writing look like in an OKA+ classroom?
- How can the A+ essentials support writing instruction and learning?
- How does multimodal literacy connect to your curriculum?

8:40 - 8:50

- **Questions where they move to station signs**
- **When they get to the station, each person introduces themselves**

With those Focus questions in mind, teachers were asked to split into eight different groups to discuss the questions as well as introduce themselves and share where they work. Attendees were asked, “What could writing look like in an OKA+ classroom?” Attendees split into groups according to the grade level in which they taught. While in their first set of groupings, teachers introduced themselves to each other and they shared with each other how writing could look when thinking about the eight OKA+ Essentials.

For the second grouping, teachers were asked to group themselves in accordance to which medieval baby represented them on that day. Eight baby images pulled from medieval art were posted on the screens, and teachers joined the groups according to which baby they were

drawn to. After introducing themselves to each other, the teachers were asked to discuss: How can the A+ essentials support writing instruction and learning?



For the third grouping, the teachers were asked to move to the group according to their favorite New York Times puzzle. Again, after introducing themselves to each other, they were asked to discuss how multimodal literacy connects to their curriculum.

This grouping activity was an engaging way to shift teachers out of their comfort zones while also encouraging them to discuss and collaborate with secondary ELA teachers they perhaps didn't know. This activity grouped teachers of different schools and grade levels together, which opened up opportunities for discussions that may not have occurred if they were only meeting with the teachers of their building or grade level. For instance, Dr. Hammer reflected:

“And weirdly enough, I liked how they put us into groups with having the Renaissance babies. It was a funny way to, like, explain how you're feeling that day, because maybe you don't feel great. But also it was funny, and it really made you think, like, what is

wrong with these babies? It was great discussion starters, and I got to be in groups. I didn't know. And it was just kind of fun instead of like, Okay, number off. It was just another creative way to, like, get, get us to not be within like, our comfort zone, or like the books that you relate to. Like, I thought that was really fun. So I would like to incorporate that, because I get, I want to get kids in different groups and have them working with different people. And I thought that would be a really fun and engaging way to do that.”



The grouping activities modeled for teachers the benefits of grouping students in different ways to produce novel points of conversation while also focusing the overall group on the focus questions, which is in line with what Vygotsky (1978) would argue, “the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the socialised, but from the social to the individual.”

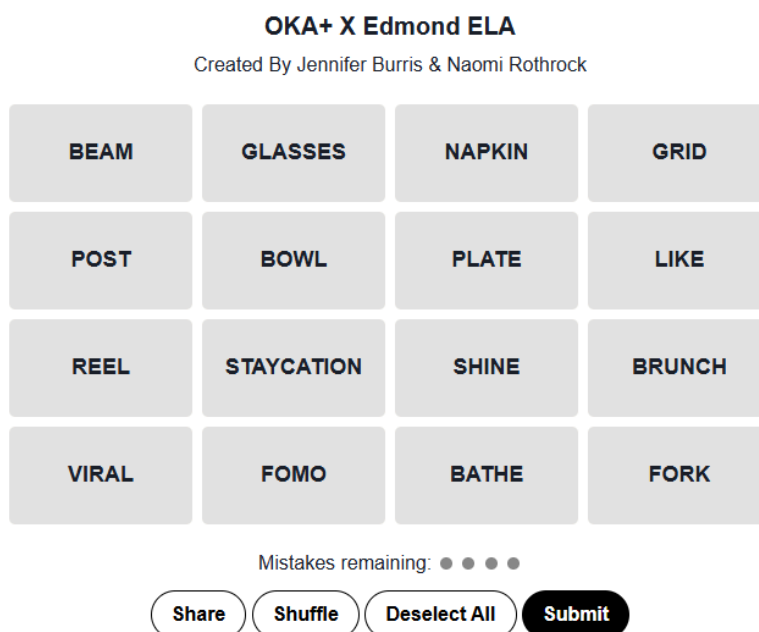
8:50 - 9:00

- **NY Times Connections**
- **Explain Neologisms**

After the third grouping activity, which segued into an activity using the New York Times Connections puzzle, teachers returned to their collaborative table groups to work on a Connections puzzle designed for the OKA+ Creativity Workshop. Additionally, a “how-to” video was included for those attendees who were not familiar with Connections.

The facilitators utilized the Connections puzzle to reveal the way in which word puzzles can be used to engage students in collaborative discussions regarding language and vocabulary. Additionally, because Connections puzzles are about how different words can be connected to each other, students are being asked to work at the “analysis” level in Blooms as they are drawing connections among ideas.

After working through the Connections puzzle, this led to the facilitators walking the attendees through the concept of Neologisms, defined as “a newly coined word, phrase, or expression that has recently entered the lexicon or gained popularity. These terms are often created to describe emerging concepts, technologies, or cultural phenomena.” Workshop attendees were then taught about 4 different kinds of neologisms:



Compounding	Putting two words together, such as liveblogging (from “live+blog”) or homeschooler (from “home + school”)
Acronym	Using the first letter of each word in an expression to form a word, such as laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation)
Borrowing/ Loanwords	Words that existed in another language for a long time but were imported into English more recently, such as schadenfreude, tsunami, and algebra
Derivation	Creating a new word by adding a prefix or suffix to an existing one, such as unfriend (from “un+friend”) or podcaster (from “podcast”)

After learning about Connections and Neologisms, teachers were told that they would return to the Neologism activity later during the training.

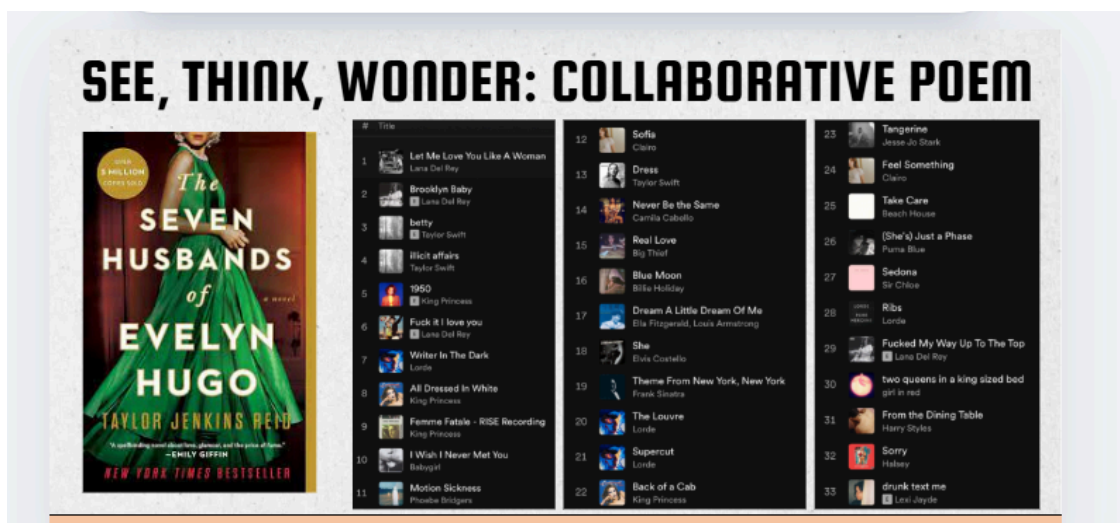
9:00 - 9:20

- **See Think Wonder Collaborative Poem**
- **Share out**

Teachers were then asked to go to one of six artifact stations in order to do the See, Think, Wonder Collaborative Poem activity. The attendees were not given any background information pertaining to the images at each station. They could only use their senses and prior knowledge to see, think, and wonder. During this activity, each member at the station was asked to use a marker to write on a white sentence strip a See: a description of a visual element they see, a Think: something they think or feel about the images at the station, and a Wonder: a question they have about the images at the station or something the station makes them consider or connect.

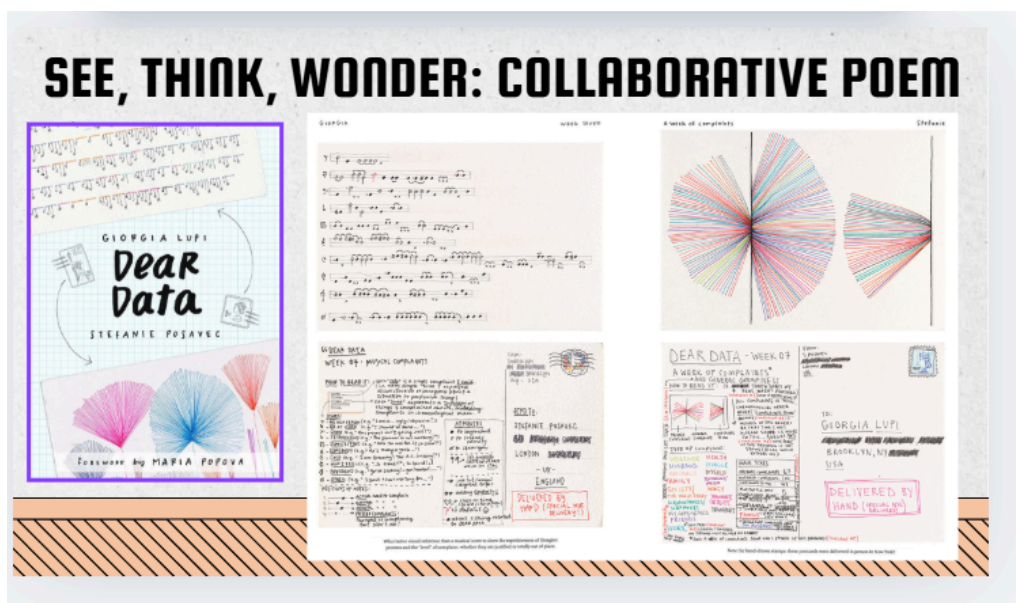
Description & Images of Stations for See, Think, Wonder Activity

Station 1: The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo



This station showed the cover of the book *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Next to the image of the cover was a playlist of songs.

Station 2: Dear Data



This station included the cover of the book *Dear Data* and two pages from the book that shared data images.

Station 3: Napalm Photos

SEE, THINK, WONDER: COLLABORATIVE POEM



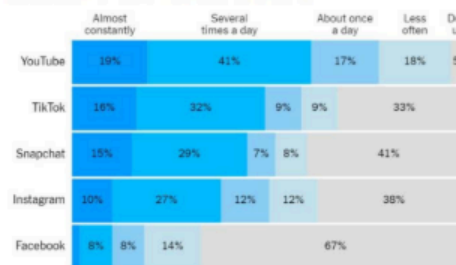
This station showed the image of a nude Vietnamese child running in the street after her village had been napalmed and a second image of the Vietnamese child transposed into a modern art image where she stands between Ronald McDonald and Mickey Mouse.

Station 4: Turner's Graph of the Week

SEE, THINK, WONDER: COLLABORATIVE POEM



How Often Teens Say They Use Each Platform



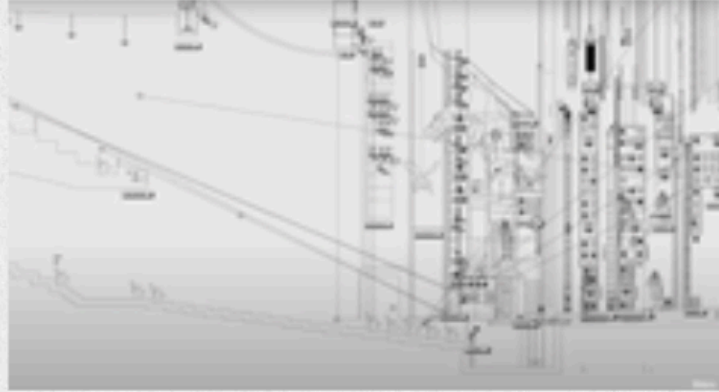
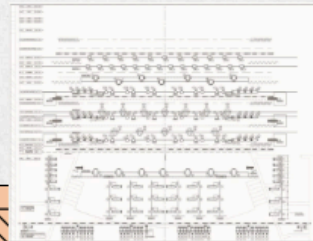
Note: Among teens ages 13 to 17. Those who did not give an answer are not shown. Figures are rounded. Source: Pew Research Center survey conducted April 14-May 4, 2023. The New York Times

TURNER'S
GRAPH OF THE
WEEK

This station shared the image of two graphs pertaining to social media usage and mental health from the website Turner's Graph of the Week.

Station 5: Stage Lighting Design

SEE, THINK, WONDER: COLLABORATIVE POEM



This station shared one photograph of a moment from a stage production of *Wicked* and two other images pertaining to diagrams of the lighting used during a stage production.

Station 6: The Kermess & The Dance (Painting & Poem)

SEE, THINK, WONDER: COLLABORATIVE POEM

The Dance

by William Carlos Williams

In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess, the dancers go round, they go round and around, the squeal and the blare and the tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles tipping their bellies, (round as the thick-sided glasses whose wash they impound) their hips and their bellies off balance to turn them. Kicking and rolling about the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those shanks must be sound to bear up under such rollicking measures, prance as they dance in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess



The Kermess by Peter Paul Rubens

This station included the image of the painting *The Kermess* by Peter Paul Reubens and William Carlos Williams poem "The Dance."

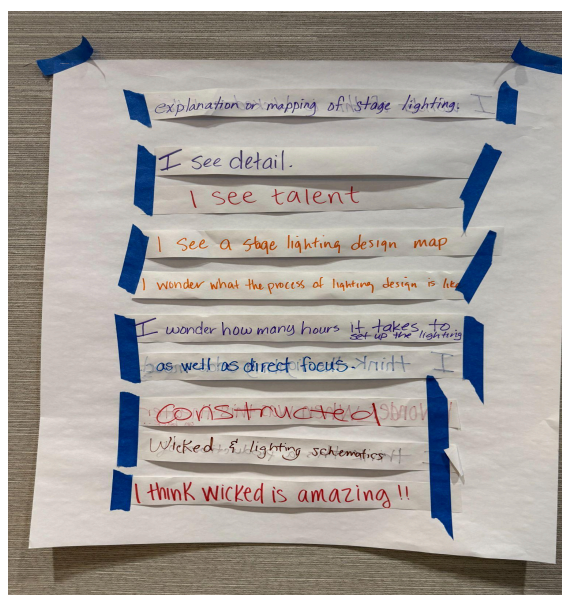
After writing their Think, See, Wonder strips, the teachers were asked to work in their groups to turn all of those See, Think, and Wonder strips into collaborative poems. They could tear the strips into smaller pieces or leave them intact. However, they were asked to work together in order to create a final product.

Images and descriptions of the Think, See, Wonder Collaborative Poem Activity



In this image, teachers at the Turner's Graph station are tearing their strips into smaller pieces and arranging them into poetry form.

In this image, teachers at the Wicked Lighting station have created their finished Think, See, Wonder poem using their sentence strips.



After writing down their Think, See, and Wonder strips, the attendees were asked to collaboratively use those strips to create lines of poetry. This simple activity gave teachers an easy way to support students in accessing poetry in their classrooms. It revealed that students can use See, Think, and Wonder over most any image in order to create poetry. Again, the teachers were engaged in experiential learning that modeled how they could integrate it within their own classrooms.

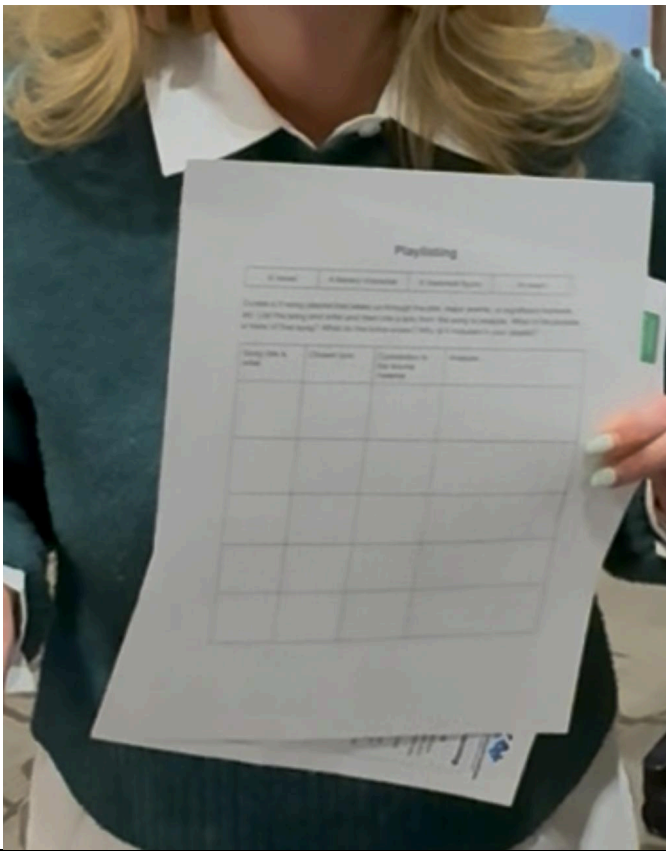
After creating their collaborative poems, the facilitators asked the attendees to share their poems. After each group shared their poem, the facilitators then explained the images at the station, where they came from, and the creative activity associated with each one. For instance, the attendees then learned that Evelyn Hugo artifact station was an example of a playlist activity where a spotify playlist was created to exemplify the events from *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. Additionally, the facilitators shared that they would add books and resources to each station for the attendees to explore later in the workshop.

- **9:25 - 9:40 - Break**
- **9:40 - 10:30**
- **Artifact Exploration**
- **Share out**

After the break, attendees had thirty minutes to explore all of the artifact stations in order to learn more about all of the stations or spend the majority of the time learning more about one artifact station. The facilitators added more resources to the artifact tables for teachers to feed their ideas on how they might utilize these artifacts and activities in their own classrooms. For instance, the facilitators added sample playlists planners at the Evelyn Hugo station that attendees could take to use in their own classrooms. Additionally, they left the copy of the *Dear Data* book at that station for attendees to look through the entire book in order to better understand the different ways in which the writers used data throughout the book to tell stories.

Image and description of Playlist Activity Planner

This attendee picked up a copy of the playlist activity from the *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* table and shared how she planned on using it in her classroom.



After the exploration time, teachers were asked to group up for the last time according to the book cover that resonated with them each personally. The books included titles such as *The Monster at the End of this Book*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Junie B. Jones*, and *The Giving Tree*. In these groups, attendees shared how they might use the activities and resources within their own classrooms. The members of these groups represented different courses at different grade levels; therefore, it gave attendees the opportunity to think, share, and discuss the diverse ways in which to utilize the activities. After discussing ideas at their book cover groups, they shared out to the whole group. For instance, Mrs. Eager shared that she was considering how to use the playlist activity that was highlighted at the table featuring *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*

and the accompanying playlist. She stated:

“I, as an older person, was nervous about the playlist and knowing what the students would pick or if it was appropriate. We talked about this at our table, about guidelines to help them with their playlist, and also the Turner graph. We loved the Turner graph and implementing it as a writing prompt to help with critical thinking skills.”

While Mrs. Eager had initial concerns regarding the playlist activity, the collaboration allowed her to think through structures or “guidelines” that would make the activity accessible in her specific classroom.

Additionally, Ms. Brave shared out from her group:

“We chatted about the *Dear Data* here for a bit. I’m scared of numbers because I’m an English teacher. So when I hear the word data, I just kind of, no, shut down. What I found interesting, and what we kind of talked about is that the kid that struggles with the abstract...a lot of those kids are kind of STEM-minded like kids, and so asking those kids to talk about symbolism or anything thematic, is a struggle for them. So sometimes they need something visual...We are starting an independent novel soon, and having them, you know, each week track something, like how many times a symbol appears and you mark that with a certain color of how many times does the theme represent itself...to put that abstract idea into a physical representation of what they are seeing.”

Ms. Brave discovered that data was not as intimidating as she had once perceived and was considering ways in which she could use data to support her “STEM-minded” students. Each group shared ways in which they discussed how they could implement the artifacts and activities within their own classrooms and then shared with the larger group.

10:40 - 11:00

- **Vocab word brainstorming**

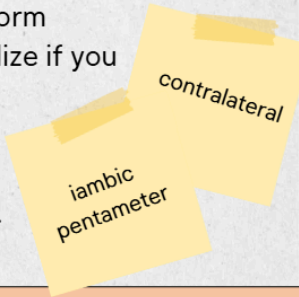
- Create neologism for that station and collaborative poem

After attendees had time to explore stations and share their thoughts about how they can foresee using them in their classrooms, they returned to their collaborative table groups to work on Vocab Word Brainstorming as well as returning to the Neologism activity.

Images and Descriptions of the Vocabulary Brainstorm Activity

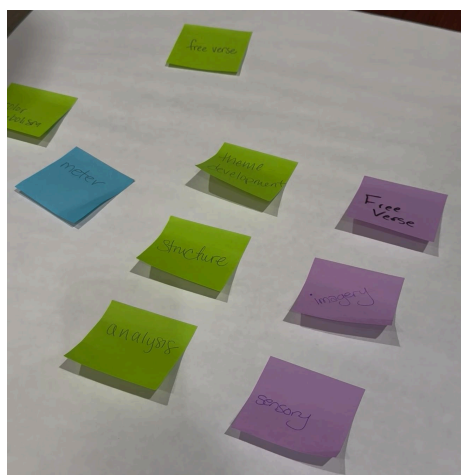
VOCABULARY BRAINSTORM

1. For your first station station, brainstorm vocabulary words that you would utilize if you were teaching this topic
 - a. Arts vocabulary?
 - b. Academic vocabulary?
2. Put one vocabulary word per post-it.
3. Put those post-its at the station

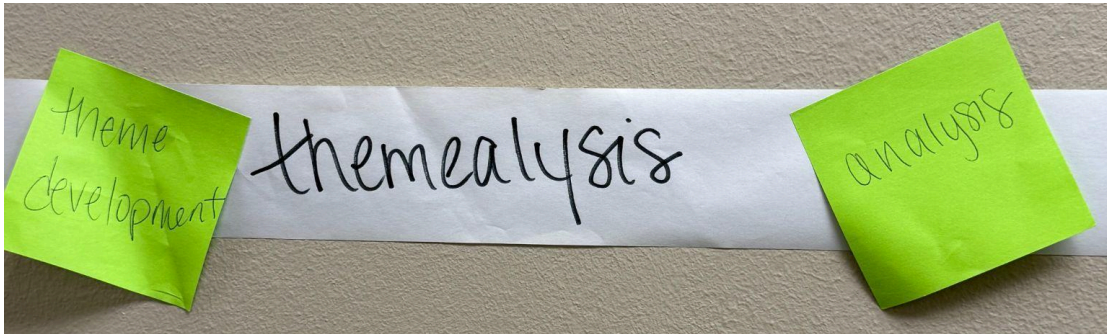


Directions provided by the facilitators for the Vocabulary Brainstorm activity.

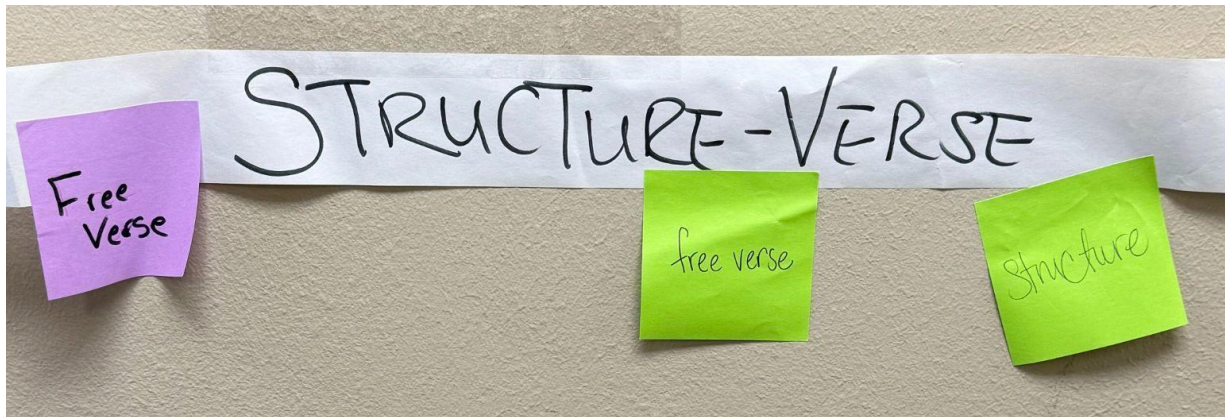
In this image, attendees have written down key vocabulary words that attendees would utilize when teaching *The Kermess* image and “The Dance” poem. They have written the terms “meter,” “theme development,” “structure,” “analysis,” “free verse,” “imagery,” and “sensory” on post-it notes.



Images and Descriptions of the Neologism Activity



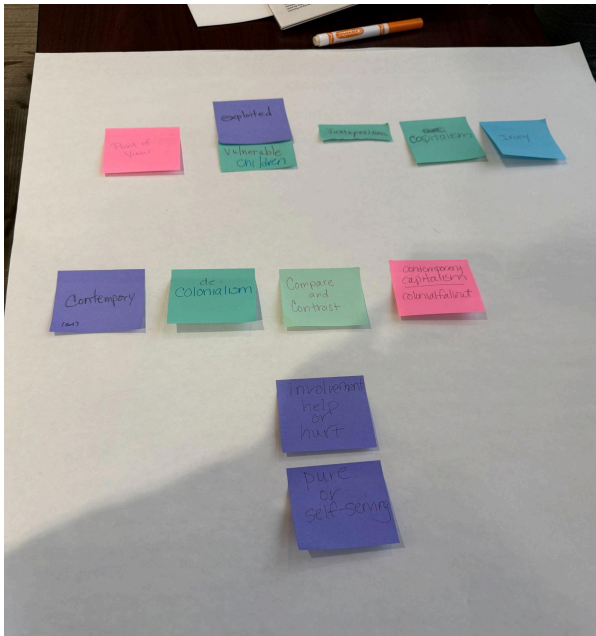
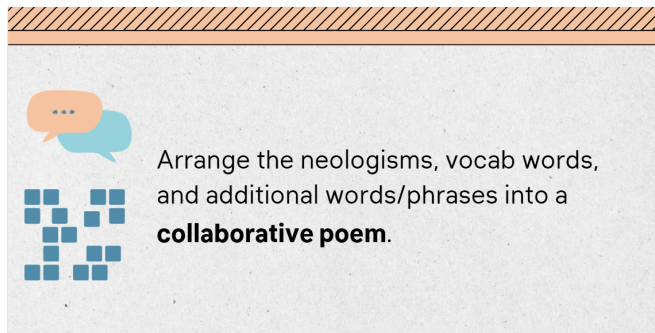
This image shows one of the neologisms developed by one group who combined “theme development” with “analysis” to create “themealysis.”



In this image, the group created the neologism “structure-verse” by combining the terms “free verse” and “structure.”

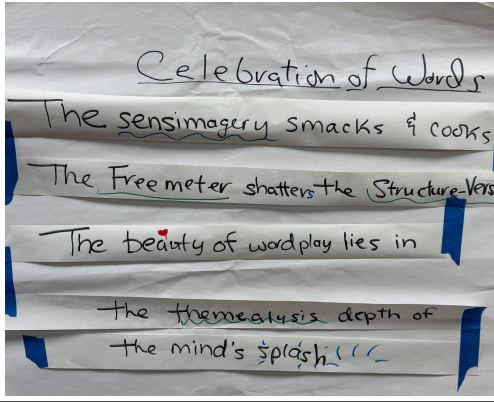
After the attendees created neologisms, they were instructed to use their vocabulary, neologisms, and any extra words they wanted to use to write a collaborative poem.

Images and Description of the Vocabulary Collaborative Poem



point of view
 exploited
 vulnerable children
 juxtaposition
 capitalism
 irony
 contemporary
 de-colonialism
 compare and contrast
 contemporary capitalism
 colonial fallout
 involvement
 help
 or
 hurt
 pure
 or
 self-serving

The napalm photo group utilized their vocabulary terms to construct the poem above.

	<u>Celebration of Words</u> The <u>sensimagery</u> smacks & cooks The <u>freemeter</u> shatters the <u>structure-verse</u> The beauty of wordplay lies in the <u>themealysis</u> of the mind's splash
This group included four neologisms in the poem they titled "Celebration of Words."	

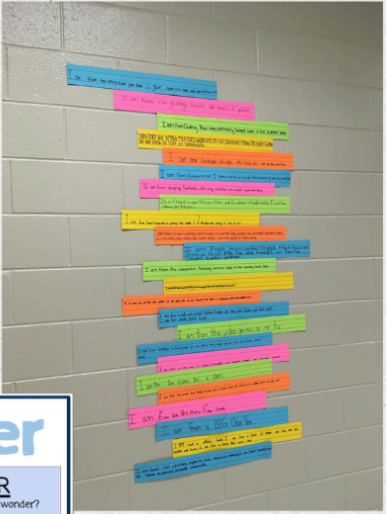
11:00 - 11:15 - Final processing

- Vocab Tiers
- Writing Process
- Multimodal Literacy
- Multiple Intelligences

At the end of the workshop, the facilitators walked teachers through how the activities they experienced during the workshop can be tied to the pedagogical frameworks of vocab tiers, the writing process, multimodal literacy, and multiple intelligences. The teachers experienced the

HOW CAN YOU USE:

- See, think, wonder
- Organizing sentence strips
- Collaborative poetry
- Provided artifacts
- Neologisms



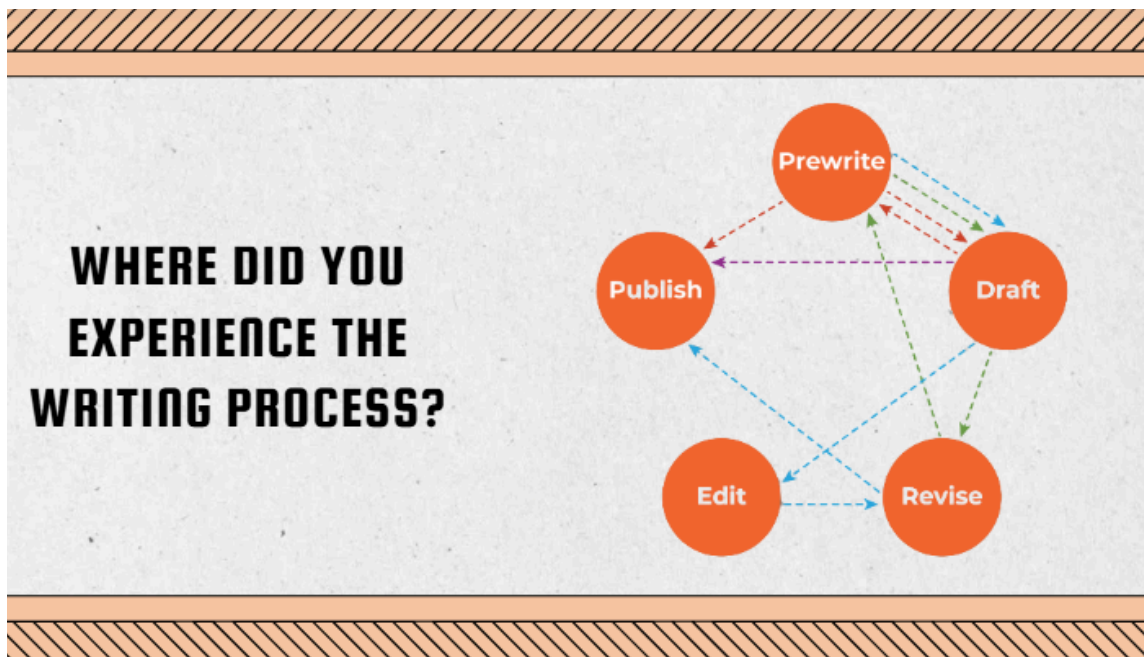
See Think Wonder

SEE What do you see?	THINK What do you think is going on?	WONDER What does it make you wonder?

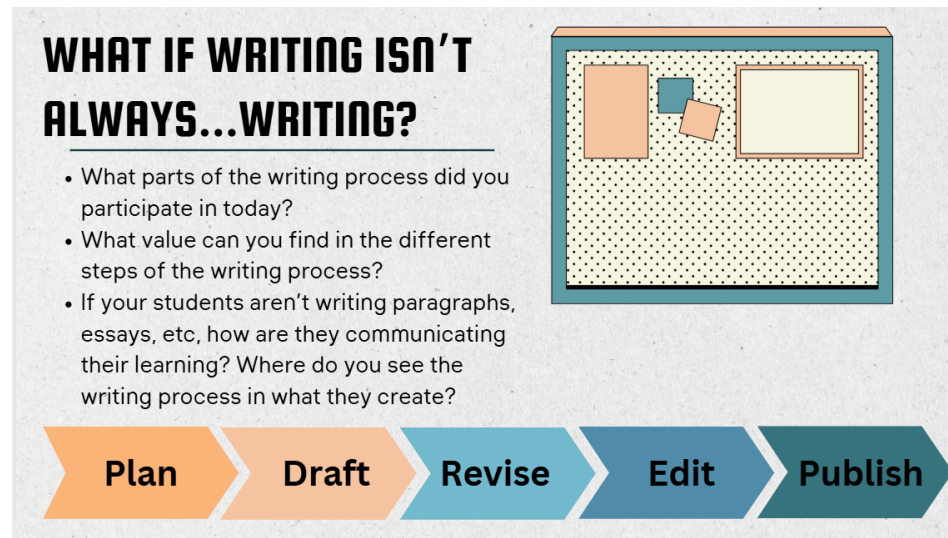
activity first, and then were asked to respond to how those experiences have clear connections to important ELA concepts.

For instance, attendees were asked how they might utilize the See, Think, Wonder activity, sentence stripe, collaborative poetry, any of the provided artifacts, and the neologism activity within their own classrooms and within the units they already include as part of their curricular requirements. One research participant, Ms. George, explained that she was planning to use the station activity to teach her students MLA citations. She envisioned students rotating to different stations and receiving an artifact from each station to garner information that could be used to create a citation for a works cited page.

The facilitators then asked attendees, “Where did you experience the writing process?” While attendees did not do any extended alphabetic writing during the workshop, this question encouraged attendees in thinking about how to support their students in the writing process in different ways. For example, attendees experienced the writing process in both instances where they wrote collaborative poems. Even though they wrote down simple vocabulary words on



post-it notes or short statements on paper strips, they had to pre-write, draft, revise, edit, and publish in order to create their final products.

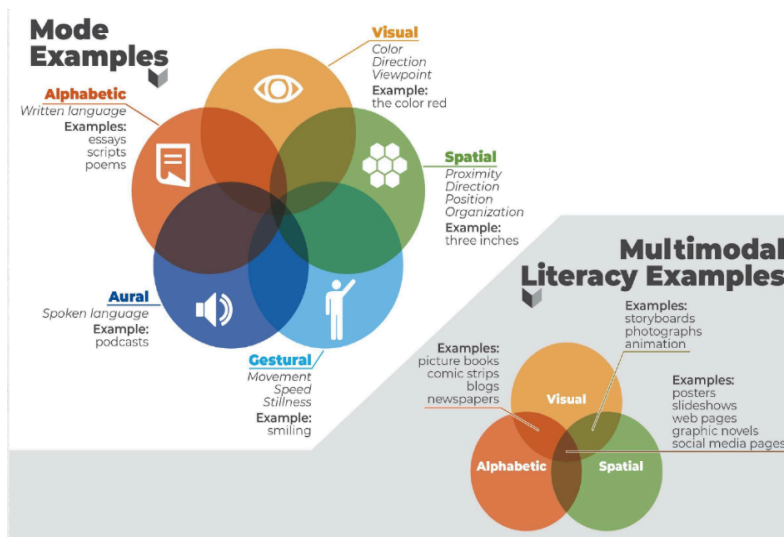


Additionally, the facilitators walked the attendees through how the creative learning practices they experienced

exemplified both multimodal learning as well as the kind of pedagogical practices that honored multiple intelligences. Much in the way that Ms. Brave had discussed how data activities could be used to meet the needs of “STEM-minded” students, the facilitators echoed her sentiments in presenting the importance of using creative teaching and learning practices to meet individual student needs.



Finally, in closing out the OKA+ Creativity Workshop, the facilitators asked the attendees to consider the ways in which this kind of learning that focuses on multimodal activities and other forms of reading and writing support students in reaching the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. For instance, one attendee noted that when integrating activities where



students are making connections between images and writing, they are working at the analysis tier of Bloom's. Another attendee recognized that the collaborative poems exemplified create tasks in

that the activity required the participant to author a poem as the final product.

At the end of the workshop, all attendees were asked to fill out the survey reflection that I created to gather data for my research (**Appendix C**). The OKA+ facilitators went through the surveys and made feedback notes for themselves. The reflection surveys filled out by research participants were flagged to gather emerging themes data before the interview process began.