**Uncovering Trends in Dystopian Literature:**

**Literature Meets Technology**

**Cognate Proposal: Sonoma State University School of Education**

**Master’s Program; Projected Graduation, Fall of 2015**

**Committee Members: My committee members consist of Dr. MaryAnn Nickel, professor at Sonoma State University and committee chair; Dr. Jessica Parker, professor at Sonoma State University and committee member; and Laura Parnes, graduate of Sonoma State University, middle school librarian, and committee member.**

**Cognate Courses:**

**EDRL 524 – Literature and Literacy**

**EDCT 552 – Technology Praxis**

**EDRL 522 – Assessment and Teaching in Reading & Langauge Arts**

**My first cognate class choice is EDRL 524: Literature and Literacy. This course is a thorough exploration of youth literature extending from early childhood through adolescence. I was challenged to examine critical literacy in this course as a means of understanding the agenda of the writer and the impact on the reader. This course allowed me to examine a multitude of genres and levels from the perspective of both a reader and a teacher. This was the first time I was exposed to graphic novels, which I have seen emerge this year in my own classroom. This course also challenged me to reexamine how literature is used in my own classroom, and where I would like to see improvement. This class reignited my passion for reading and is continuing to challenge me to look at literacy through social, cultural, and multi-media lenses.**

**My second cognate class choice is EDCT 552: Educational Technology Praxis. This course was designed to expand our horizons when we think of literacy. Here we looked at the transformation of literacy over time and how we as educators have evolved and must continue to evolve our perspectives and teaching methods to meet the growing technological demands. Another aspect of this course was to expose how we view and approach technology, and to examine critically the pros and cons of using technology in various situations. This course really inspired me to examine my own fears of technology and challenged me to try new and innovative practices within my own classroom. I also gained great insight to the fact that, contrary to my belief that technology was an isolated experience, it is actually extremely interactive and relational by nature. Instead of using technology as an informational tool, the reality is that more and more, people are using it as a means of communication and exchange of ideas.**

**My third cognate course is EDRL 522: Assessment and Teaching in Reading and Language Arts. During this course, we closely examined and refined our own literacy philosophy, as well as our own approach to the methods of teaching and assessing reading, writing, and other elements of language arts within our own classrooms. This course allowed us to collectively share sound reading and writing strategies, considering which ones would be appropriate for our individual grade level and student body. By personally engaging in our own inquiry project, we were tasked to examine questions about the process such as, what part of the inquiry was most challenging, what was most rewarding, what would you do differently next time, what did we take away from the learning process that we could apply; in essence, it allowed us to reflect on the process as learners rather than teachers.**

**Big Idea:**

**I believe that students are more intuitive and understanding of society’s complexities that we often give them credit for. Over the course of my career, I have seen the evolution of literary genres, as well as a shift in student interest in book choices. I have also seen a great shift in my districts approach to technology, which was initially dedicated to low media, but is now committed to technological inclusion. I believe that these two shifts can be combined to give me greater insight into the thoughts and ideas of my students that I have not yet accessed before. Although I see myself as an accomplished teacher, I have only seen students’ responses through a single medium of oral and written responses in a classroom environment.**

**As we have now entered the world of high-speed communication, I believe there is more to be revealed in real time about my students and their thoughts and dialogue about literature. I think I have only seen the tip of the iceberg in my students written responses to me, many of which were in response to prompted questions. I want to investigate what kind of internal and external dialogue my students will have through free response blogging with each other as they explore the literary genre of dystopian worlds.**

**Rationale and Theory:**

**The very first course I took in the Master’s Program was Perry Marker’s EDCT 585, Curriculum Development; Theory Practice & Evaluation. Although much of this course was directed at exploring the multiple philosophies and philosophers instrumental in the development of education and curriculum, it was also the place that first piqued my interest in the growing trend of Young Adult Dystopian literature, and its influence within my own classroom. The critical examination of excerpts from popular dystopian novels such as The Giver and Hunger Games, motivated me to begin my journey in researching YA Dystopian literature and the social and political commentary within their themes.**

**My tour through the philosophical world of postmodernism was definitely one of the most confusing. My interest was piqued, however, at the idea of the “evolution” into an ideal postmodern world. In my investigation, I came up with the working definition that postmodernism is where reality is constructed by each individual and his/her life experiences and interactions. Each individual has to interpret those experiences in order to create his/her own reality, relying on the concrete experience over abstract principles. After watching Howard Zinn’s “Zombie Politics” on Bill Moyer, I was even more interested in how this philosophy was playing out in the world of our youth and I saw it being played out in YA dystopian literature. Although I don’t consider myself a practitioner of postmodernism, I feel there is a definite influence in place.**

By marrying the continued exploration of the trends in dystopian literature to a newly added element on my classroom blog in the form of a reader’s response section, I would like to allow my students to become active directors in the literature circle discussion format. This idea was again supported through a recent reading in my EDRL 522 Course, Assessment and Teaching in Reading and Language Arts. Frank Serafini in his own reflection states,

But, I had the nagging sense that I needed to orchestrate it all with much more intention. The information I gathered had to do something for me and my students. I needed to learn how to use this information to make better instructional decisions and to design more effective lessons and learning experiences in my reading workshop. This led me to investigate the concepts of reflection, reflective practices, and how to assume the role of ‘teacher as researcher’ (Serafini, p. xv).

Through our literature circles, the students in each novel group would have an open forum to communicate through blogging bi-weekly about their novel. Through this commentary, I hope to find evidence from the students’ own, unsolicited responses supporting the claim that they are indeed able to find the social and political themes running through these novels, as well as connections to their own societal experiences.

**Proposal and Plan for Implementation:**

I knew I wanted to investigate my students’ reactions and connections with dystopian literature, and combine it with my newly incorporated classroom blog; however, my vision was realized through a meeting with my Committee Chair, MaryAnn Nickel. One major goal I want to achieve with my students is their ability to become active directors in their own academic growth when it comes to examining literature critically.  Although I may initially supply the guidance and direction, I am looking for them to become self-directed learners as they transition from 8th grade into high school.

My students should be able to approach increasingly more sophisticated text with a set of tools and the confidence to engage in meaningful dialog with one another.  Students need to dig deeply into complex, difficult text.  This encompasses reading, finding evidence, discussion/debate, expansion of initial impressions and ideas (multiple perspectives on a piece of text), and written reflections in specific areas.  Furthermore, the added technological piece will push me toward a new perspective where the students become the informants as to what connections and ideas within the text need to be explored, rather than having me be the director of that conversation.  I’d like to see where the addition of a technological piece might take them in facilitating that discussion.

I will be implementing my cognate project in the fall of 2015. My plan is to organize book clubs, which will focus on the genre of dystopian literature. Over the course of 6-8 weeks, my students will be asked to blog with their book club members through my classroom reader’s response blog corner. My task will be to take on the role of researcher and examine my students’ reflections and conversations about their novels.  My goal is to examine that data for underlying trends that may reveal why students are continually drawn to that genre, if they are making connections to the social/political commentaries that are prevalent in dystopian literature, and evidence of students feeling more or less hopeful during and/or after reading the novels.  I am also excited to see if there are other observable trends that I have not yet considered. One of the main objectives in my cognate is allowing the students to become the directors of the inquiry so as to build their own sense of confidence and autonomy as they leave middle school and enter high school.

**Potential Significance of My Cognate Project:**

As a veteran teacher, I have always been the one to organize, plan, and implement the lesson. It wasn’t until my discussion with Dr. Nickel, that I began to recognize my own need to orchestrate my student’s instruction. It was a novel idea to allow them to be the drivers of their own inquiry. If I indeed want to foster and nurture my personal philosophy and commitment to instilling a love of life-long learning in my students, I need to start listening to what their questions and comments in a more authentic forum. By taking on this “passenger” role, I ultimately hope to become a better facilitator of meaningful instruction by helping the students to recognize the importance and validity of their own voices. In turn, I hope to see this foster confidence within discussions and debates both in other language arts forums and across curriculum lines.

I will be the first teacher to implement a student-centered blog, and I am excited to share this with my school colleagues. Furthermore, I also hope to implement various blog corners for other projects as well.

**Proposed Timeline:**

**April 22, 2015**: GS01 Advancement to Candidacy Meeting

**September – November 2015**: Engage students in Dystopian Literature Cirlces; gather and analyze data based on the students’ blog entries.

**December 2015**: GS02 Present findings to committee and participate in a showcase to colleagues and SSU cohorts.