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Investing in Literacy: Examining Who Profits from Literacy Curriculum, Research, Policy, and Practice

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Teaching Tip:

Helping Preservice Teachers Understand Fluency and the Use of Poetry to Support Fluency Development by Michelle R. Ciminelli, Niagara University, mrcim@niagara.edu

Abstract: Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression, and it is a critical skill of proficient readers (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 2014). This teaching tip describes a set of tasks designed to advance preservice teachers' understanding of fluency and the application of poetry as a tool for supporting fluency. It is based on my experience working

with preservice teacher candidates in an initial teacher education master's degree program. The five-step project includes pre- and post-definitions of fluency, scholarly readings, and creating a poetry activity. Guidelines and examples and suggestions for modifying the steps to suit various instructional settings are provided.

Papers:

Teachers' Challenges and Requests for Supports from Districts, Principals, Parents, Media by Zoi A. Traga Philippakos, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Ashley Voggt, Texas A&M, Corpus-Christi, and Katherine Blake, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine K to 5 teachers' instructional conditions of work to better understand teachers' needs and the needs of the profession. A national sample of 343 K-5 classroom teachers from 46 states and 100 K-5 teachers from a large school district participated in the study. Participants at the national and local levels responded to questions on challenges teachers faced. Teachers were also asked to share the specific supports they wished they had from states, districts, administration, parents, and social media. The findings between the national and the large local district were comparable. Common themes from teachers regarding support they needed were showing respect to them as professionals, receiving time for them to plan and collaborate, and provisions of personnel and resources to support their work. Implications are discussed. Specifically, implications are addressed about teacher preparation and professional development practices on ways to best support teachers' instruction and well-being.

Affordances, Constraints, and Collaborative Practices in E-Mentoring: A Systematic Review of the Literature by Kristina Bell, Virginia Tech

The purpose of this literature review is to catalog, explore, and disseminate knowledge developed related to the affordances, constraints, and collaborative practices of e-mentoring in order to offer recommendations for mentoring programs. Chosen studies were organized into three categories based on e-mentoring practices. Results reflect chat-room-based e-mentoring and e-mentoring with a video component both to have various affordances and collaborative features. These two types may benefit new teachers who do not have access to in-person mentors but may necessitate a component that ensures mentors and mentees alike remain consistently engaged in the e-mentoring process.

Investing in Literacy: Examining Readability and Themes in Opioid Agreements by Aimee Morewood, West Virginia University, Canyon Lohnas, West Virginia University, Monika Holbein, Penn State Health, Corinne Layne-Stuart, West Virginia University School of Medicine, and Stephanie Pockl, West Virginia University School of Medicine.

Literacy levels play an important role in patient medical care. An interdisciplinary team recognized a need to understand these documents' reading levels and content. A case study approach was used to describe readability levels and document themes. Results indicated a variation in scores and higher-grade reading levels than expected, and emerged themes generated

discussion among the team. The role of readability formulas beyond the K-12 scope and the next steps needed to support lived literacy experiences will be discussed.

Early Literacy Reform Efforts in North Carolina: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly by Marjorie W. Rowe, Kimberly L. Anderson, Elizabeth A. Swaggerty, Laurie "Darian" Thrailkill, and Terry S. Atkinson, East Carolina University

This paper describes two recent parallel, yet disparate, reform efforts focused on improving early literacy outcomes in North Carolina. The first reform effort comprises state-level Science of Reading policy initiatives, and the second is a community-based literacy initiative. The costs and benefits of each effort are shared along with implications.

"Can't We Just Enjoy the Book?": Disciplinary Literacy and Teachers of Literature by Geoffrey C. Kellogg, School of Teaching and Learning, University of Florida

This study explores four teachers' emerging understandings of topics related to disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2008; Rainey & Moje, 2012), including the goals of the discipline of Literature, the purpose of using literary texts in the ELA classroom, and the practices of literary experts. Interview data is used to derive and order concepts to aid in generating substantive theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) regarding teachers' understanding of DL in ELA and Literature. Findings include: (1) participants believe that the study of literary texts catalyzes personal development, (2) participants believe that the texts of Literature (a subdiscipline of ELA) are useful for teaching basic literacy skills, (3) some participants feel a sense of estrangement from literary experts and consider their methods irrelevant to the K-12 context, and (4) some participants feel that their district materials and high stakes testing reduce the amount of time they can spend on "enrichment" work that involves aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1982) and artistic products (Smagorinsky, 2015). Implications for teacher preparation are discussed.

ARF Members and Contributors,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you for your support of and work within our organization over the last three years. When I agreed to step into the role of ARF Chair in December 2019, I had no idea what I was getting into! Based on my experiences as both a general member/conference attendee and a board member, I knew it was a small but powerful organization whose mission included mentoring graduate students and early career scholars—a mission near and dear to my heart. I knew we had meaningful conferences filled with engaging conversations at the Sundial on Sanibel Island. And I was confident that I would learn some things as a result of the three-year term I agreed to. Did I ever learn some things.

Over the past three years, the ARF leadership came together to craft a statement on the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the social injustice and violence that plagued 2020. We critically evaluated the bylaws and voted in favor of all the updates suggested by the bylaws committee. And most importantly to me, we successfully navigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with an "Un-Conference" in 2020, the resurgence of COVID-19 with a virtual conference on a new-to-us digital platform in 2021, and the ramifications of Hurricane Ian with what felt like a last-minute scramble to hold an in-person conference in St. Pete. It was so wonderful to finally be able to be in physical proximity and have face-to-face conversations within the ARF community. Even though it wasn't on our traditional beach, the sunsets and ocean views were just as lovely.

The theme, Investing in Literacy: Examining Who Profits from Literacy, Curriculum, Research, Policy and Practice, was timely and provided multiple o to interrogate our own values and beliefs around literacy. From Dr. Rebecca Rodgers's opening keynote through to Dr. Lisa Scherff's closing keynote detailing the ups and downs of Florida's educational environment, and

Dr. Amy Stornaiuolo's lunchtime keynote orienting the membership to all sorts of varied digital

platforms to problems courts focused on policies related to censorship, media literacy, and the

"prophets" who are "saving" reading, there were so many instances for working through various

opinions and experiences together. The quality of the various sessions only added to the potential

for engagement, learning, and collaboration.

I sincerely hope that even more ARF members return and attend our 2023 conference in

St. Pete under the leadership of our new President, Dr. Jen VanSlander, and the guidance of our

conference co-chairs, Drs. Nance Wilson and Vicki Cardullo. Please know that we listened to the

voices of ARF members and plan to return to Sundial and Sanibel Island for the 2024

conference, as so many requested.

It seems as though we have weathered the challenges of the past three years, and I hope

that we can continue to grow our organization in ways that allow for the deep discussion,

powerful mentoring, and personal connections that have always been at the heart of ARF. I

appreciated the support of all the board members, officers, and long-time collaborators who

listened and offered time and insights throughout my 3 years as ARF chair. With that in mind, I

would like to offer special thanks to a handful of people who went above and beyond in helping

me navigate the challenges of the last three years. Thanks to Connie Beecher, a former board

member who spearheaded the use of Whova as the 2021 conference platform and invested so

much of her time in making the digital conference such a success. (And whom I imagine, like

me, continues to "enjoy" regular marketing messages from them, despite attempts to

"unsubscribe.") Thanks to Rachelle Savitz, who has always used her voice to challenge the status

quo and push us to think in innovative ways at the same time, she works hard to support the

organization by matching mentors to graduate students who want to write for the yearbook and

seeing that all accepted submissions get the attention they need. And, finally, extra special thanks go to Emily Pendergrass, former ARF board member, and current treasurer, who dragged me through during the times I thought I had nothing left to give.

Finally, I hope you can re-live some of your favorite moments of the 2022 ARF conference as you read through the papers included in this volume of our yearbook. And, as you remember the joy of being together, reach out to your graduate students and colleagues alike, inviting them to join us back in St Pete, Dec 6-9, 2023!

Warmly,

Amy Broemmel

ARF Past-President

Return on Investment: Reflections on Power and Promise from ARF 2022

Brittany Adams
SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY
Angela M. Kohnen
University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

When we first began crafting a conference theme focused on profit, we conceptualized it as an opportunity to reflect on the current state of literacy education. Taking up conceptions of "profit" as both a noun (a gain) and a verb (deriving benefit), we saw questions of who profits from literacy and literacy education swirling around nearly every aspect of our work. Major corporations, private foundations, and other profit-driven companies have increasingly greater influence over what is taught and learned in public schools (Kohn & Shannon, 2002; Larson, 2014; Moore & Zancanella, 2014), as well as how that learning is measured (Au, 2016; Leistyna, 2007). Meanwhile, alternative teacher certification pathways actively compete with traditional college and university teacher preparation programs (Pasternak et al., 2018; Zeichner, 2016). Outside of the classroom, online experiences are increasingly advertiser- and algorithmically-controlled, with hidden forces shaping what we see and read (Noble, 2018). Yet, simultaneously, we see a push for open learning, open access to publications and teaching resources, and the democratization of communication (e.g., Albers et al., 2015; Beetham & Sharpe, 2019; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; O'Byrne et al., 2015; Roach & Gainer, 2015; Stornaiuolo & Nichols, 2018). For university faculty, the potential to generate external funding is a factor in hiring and promotion decisions at many institutions, often to the detriment of those whose research does not require funding and/or appeal to funding agencies (Gallup & Svare, 2016). As literacy scholars, we are challenged to examine who profits from our research and its dissemination, particularly when our work engages underrepresented populations as research participants (Fine, 2017).

It was with these tensions in mind that we asked ARF attendees to consider: who profits or benefits from literacy education, research, and policy? What resources are taken up, by whom, and why? Though profit is perhaps an unusual theme for a literacy conference, we understood all literacy teaching and research to be, to a certain extent, a conversation around profit. We also recognized that interrogating capitalistic endeavors within educational contexts had the potential to alienate those who are fortunate enough to profit off their scholarship, but our intent was not to isolate or attack individuals who participate in these systems. Given the entangled ties that bind literacy and profit together, we invited attendees to reflect on the ways in which literacy curriculum, research, policy, and practice prioritize, enable, intersect with, or disrupt profit.

 To that end, we curated contributions from our colleagues who explicitly centralize these issues in their work and challenged others to consider the conspicuous and subversive ways in which their work shapes and is shaped by ideas around profit. The result was a diverse program of presentations by practitioners, administrators, literacy coaches, researchers, and scholars on topics such as writing, equitable learning opportunities, disciplinary literacy, high stakes testing, children's and young adult literature, teacher preparation, professional development, national policies, and more.

After the Wednesday evening welcome reception, where some of us met in person for the first time in three years, our first full day began with a keynote address by Rebecca Rogers, a critical literacy scholar whose work centers racial equity and community engagement. Rogers' talk, infused with video clips of students engaged in virtual literacy lessons during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, did not shy away from the challenges that we face as literacy scholars in an era of sociopolitical, environmental, racial, and health challenges. Yet Rogers offered us hope, hope in the form of the commitment of the children, parents, teachers, and community

members to use literacy as a means of human liberation. This message of defiant hope was threaded through many of the other Thursday sessions, including those that problematized standards, amplified the voices of exhausted teachers, offered innovative ways to reach all learners, honored cultural and linguistic diversity, and addressed racism and whiteness in teacher education. The day ended with another ARF tradition, Spirit of the Times, where we gathered once again for food and conversation while watching the sun set over the Gulf of Mexico.

Friday began with our second keynote speaker, Amy Stornaiuolo, a scholar whose work examines the digital literacy and multimodal composing practices of young people. After two years of scrambling to use digital platforms like Zoom, Google Drive, and Canvas to facilitate remote learning, Stornaiuolo invited us to think critically about the way these technologies act as literacy sponsors (Brandt, 1998), supporting, controlling, and even benefitting from the literacy practices of users. Stornaiuolo's talk set the stage for a day in which we were encouraged to pull back many metaphorical curtains in the world of literacy teaching and research, including teachers' unexamined hegemonic ideologies, the hidden challenges of first-generation college students, the role of corporations (and profit!) in literacy legislation, and the ideologies that run through adolescent literature. At lunchtime, we gathered again to share a meal and listen to interdisciplinary literacy researcher Gillian Mertens' talk on information literacy during a time of rampant online misinformation.

On Saturday, we turned our focus to practitioners, beginning with a keynote address by Lisa Scherff, a scholar who has returned to the high school English classroom after over a decade working in teacher education. Scherff's talk chronicled 25 years of standardized assessments in Florida schools, assessments that have been as profitable for the testing companies as they have been consequential for the students and teachers they impact. Our final day featured additional

sessions where classroom experiences were centered, as we learned about secondary ELA teachers' perspectives on effective literacy practices, literacy coaches' self-efficacy, and novice teachers' professional development needs.

As we reflect upon the conference, we cannot help but consider all that has happened since we began developing this theme back in late 2020. At the time, we did not know that the 2022 annual meeting of the American Reading Forum would mark our first in-person gathering in three years. Formal discussions and informal conversations at the conference reflected how vastly different the world is today compared to pre-pandemic meetings. And issues of profit have directly impacted our association this year, as low membership numbers provoke questions about our long-term solvency. Compounded by increased costs related to conference services and market inflation, attendees were asked to provide feedback on rising membership and registration fees. As such, this year's meeting felt like an opportune moment to reflect on the goals of this organization and its role in our professional lives. From our perspective, ARF continues to stand apart from other professional organizations in its ongoing commitment to open discussion of critical issues in literacy education, as a forum for emerging research interests and paradigms, and as a welcome space for early career scholars and scholars in training.

Looking to the future, these conversations must continue as they impact our efforts to take up transdisciplinary perspectives on literacy. We can think of no better place to push ourselves out of our own silos (Cambourne, 2001; Gee, 2013), to reframe traditional conceptions of literacy to better embrace the myriad and complex real-world applications (Puig & Froelich, 2022), and to widen the angles of our scholarship and practice (O'Connor, 2020) than at ARF.

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Brenda S. Townsend Award Recipient: Dr. Victoria Cardullo

Brenda S. Townsend: The Voice of the American Reading Forum

By three methods, we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection; Second, by imitation; and Third, by experience- Confucius.

Reflection- Reflecting upon my years at the American Reading Forum (ARF), it is easy to see the steps taken to impact the organization and myself as an educator, professional, and leader. What is more challenging is to see how my actions affected the organization's membership. As a leader, educator, and visionary, several instances during my time at ARF were influential, leading directly to the impact of the membership and organization. As a graduate student many years ago, I had the opportunity to join ARF and learn firsthand about the resources, mentorship, and collegiality afforded by this organization. During my first time attending ARF as a graduate student, I knew this was an organization that I would value for a long time. The early impact of this organization made me realize I needed to become involved; before the next conference, I began to identify areas where I could support the organization. Over the next few years, I became a board member, associate editor of the journal, graduate mentor, committee member for the Gary Moorman Award, and chair of the organization, and this year, I am the co-chair of the conference "*Teaching Beyond Silos-Transdisciplinary Perspectives of Theory, Research, and Pedagogy.*"

Winning this award allowed me to see the organization's impact on me and, more importantly, my impact on the membership. The American Reading Forum is a unique venue that supports members. Brenda S. Townsend was a leader, a role model, and a genuinely caring person. When reflecting on the impact Brenda had on the organization, it was clear that she was a pillar of wisdom; Donna Alvermann stated she was the epitome of patience and calm. She was

never too busy to respond to a phone call; she was the voice of sincerity and made everything right with the world. Brenda served the organization in multiple capacities over the years, keeping an active engagement for the long run. She was a valuable asset to the organization and the members within. Reflecting on the criteria for this award established by the organization aligns with the adventure I started my journey as a graduate student and continue to grow and enjoy as a professor in an R1 institution. In essence, the organization watched me grow as a professional, encouraged services as an individual, allowed me to benefit from the mentorship, and in return, guided me through the journey to mentor others and encouraged me to spread my wings as a leader.

Imitation-Imitation is the act of using someone or something as a model. It is easy to follow the lead that Brenda S. Townsend mapped out for this organization. She conveyed an air of openness, collegiality, and leadership, all easy to follow as a guidepost. Brenda's organizational skills and record-keeping were meticulous, making them available to anyone who asked to see them (Alvermann). These are attributes that reflect the organization and leadership. These pillars are the organization that still fights to stand behind and support. These are the attributes I tried to emulate from the strong leaders before me. Brenda positioned herself as an expert and provided research-based responses to questions that arose when the National Reading Conference (the former name of the Literacy Research Association) split and became two unique and purposeful organizations.

ARF has always held firmly to the notion that its existence is to provide a proper forum for literacy education, provide space for the translation of literacy, support new scholars and scholars in training through mentorship and exchange of ideas, share viewpoints, and provide a space for literacy to be heard and reconsidered, providing critical discussion of ideas, issues, and

research. These notions emerge from the experts like Brenda that laid a foundation of leadership, mentorship, caring, and organization. These are the attributes I value and share in recognition of this award.

Experience- Albert Einstein once said the only source of knowledge is experience. As I began my journey in ARF, I felt like such a newbie. However, seasoned ARF members took me under their wings, guiding and mentoring me to embrace leadership roles in the organization. I recall dinners during the conference where I sat across from David Reinking. Conversations that night as a grad student ranged from my research to his current study, time shared during ARF, and general chit-chat, I felt so out of the water, but the support I got from those discussions moved me forward both my career and membership in ARF. These encounters that are a part of the ARFs annual conference atmosphere helped to guide my experience- listening and supporting a new scholar. Brenda created experiences for the membership to feel welcomed at the annual conference. Further, she often would follow up with them during the months between the meeting. These leadership skills encompass the criteria for the Brenda S. Townsend Award. Her model and leadership helped to forge these experiences as I journeyed through my ARF years. Ultimately, it is about the work we do to strengthen the organization, the connections we make, and the differences we employ.

Gary Moorman Early Career Literacy Scholar Award Recipient: Jason D. DeHart, PhD

Stories Matter: A Grateful Meditation on (Early Career) Life and Literacy

When I began a doctoral program in 2015, I had no idea what would be next. I could not have envisioned life beyond the classroom, nor would I have been able to predict a pandemic, a season of politically motivated attacks on access to books, and the sheer strangeness of what life has been for so many of us over the past three years. When I reflect on being awarded the Gary Moorman Early Career Literacy Scholar Award, I am grateful and honored. I first met Dr. Moorman in print through his co-authored book about comics. He was also one of the first people who stopped by my university office to take the time to welcome me.

My path to education is perhaps not traditional. As a lifelong comics reader who did not always find interest in the prioritized texts of public school, and as a one-time high school dropout who went on to earn a Ph.D., I know the roads we travel are sometimes unpredictable and may not always adhere to expectations. I also know that adhering to expectations can be overrated and that human experiences vary widely.

I have been a librarian, middle school English teacher, adjunct professor, assistant professor, and high school English teacher. My life has revolved around texts in one way or another, and I cannot see myself being anything other than an educator. Even with the strangeness of academia, with its titles and odd ceremonies, I am standing firm in my commitment to literacy education and research.

Why?

Because there are a few parts of life that bubble to the surface when I consider what matters. Stories matter, including reading, writing, and a wide conceptualization of what counts in literary practice. When I discovered theoretical voices like Brian Street and Gunther Kress,

whose work has helped me think through the strengths that students show in a range of communication methods, I was astounded. This was one of many moments I wished I could transport back and talk to myself as a young teacher about what was possible for my students. When I discovered the breadth and depth of qualitative research methodologies, from Merleau-Ponty to van Manen and beyond, I realized that the stories I could share in research might include more than charts about testing data.

I resonate with Paulo Freire's focus on the transformative nature of literacy. This notion of the power of reading, writing, and composing was recently explored so well by Kimberly N. Parker in *Literacy Is Liberation: Working Toward Justice Through Culturally Relevant Teaching*. Stories can save us. When I was a child, reading comics about superheroes, I encountered characters who felt great pain and who took up their challenges in unrealistic yet inspiring ways. Stories remind us of the strength that lives inside us. Because stories matter, access is vital. Because access is vital, advocacy is so important.

Students, from pre-K to doctoral programs, are at the heart of this. Their lives are shaped by the policies we support and how we (re)envision what is valuable in literacy through our teaching and scholarship. I am in awe of my fellow scholars who represent and stand beside voices that have been historically minoritized. Students matter, from the elementary child who is using assistive technology to share what is on their mind, to the vulnerable doctoral student who is made or broken daily by a glimpse of feedback. The smartest people I have ever met have also been the kindest.

With all of this in mind, education matters. I recognize and embrace the irony of this statement coming from someone who knows what it is like to mark "GED" on a job application, as well as someone who had to get used to being called "doctor." When I say the word

"education," I mean more than the games we ask students to play to earn arbitrary numbers in what feels like a mundane *Hunger Games.* (Apparently, you "win" the game by sitting in your seat and being quiet, reading tedious words from test creators.) In sum, this game feels like another way to reify privilege. Those with means often do well, while those who need additional support are met with a curriculum that scrapes or erases, rather than nourishes, their humanity.

The reason I earned a Ph.D. was so that I could attempt to make a positive impact and learn more about this system we strive to make change in. I am so fortunate to stand on the shoulders of so many people who have been and who are engaged in critical work. Colleagues and friends who remain steadfast and collaborations that remain positive and fruitful bring life to lonely hours and cushion the pressure we all feel to publish and produce when we are often not told how much is enough.

Ultimately, the work I have been fortunate to do as an early career scholar has helped me be searchable on Google, but there is (God help me) more to all of this than that. I have had the pleasure to collaborate with scholars who are also interested in telling stories that I care about reading – like the English teacher who was looking for a way in and used a popular film or the colleague and former student who collaborated on a chapter about the beauty of language in a book I was recently able to assemble with two editors who share a vision for inclusivity.

This award is more than a polished decoration; it is a reminder to continue advocating, exploring, and disseminating ideas. It has been a pleasure to get to know Dr. Moorman over the past few years and to collaborate with him. It is now a surreal honor to be part of this community of scholarship and to accept this award, and I close once more from a space of gratitude.

Teaching Tip:

Helping Preservice Teachers Understand Fluency and the Use of Poetry

to Support Fluency Development

Michelle R. Ciminelli, Niagara University

Abstract

Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression, and it is a critical skill of proficient readers (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 2014). This teaching tip describes a set of tasks designed to advance preservice teachers' understanding of fluency and the application of poetry as a tool for supporting fluency. It is based on my experience working with preservice teacher candidates in an initial teacher education master's degree program. The five-step project includes pre- and post-definitions of fluency, scholarly readings, and creating a poetry activity. Guidelines and examples and suggestions for modifying the steps to suit various instructional settings are provided.

Keywords: Preservice teachers, fluency, poetry, teaching tip

Fluency is the ability to read quickly (automaticity), accurately, and with expression (Rasinski, 2010) and is one of the foundations of effective reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 2012). Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension; as the reader can read the words automatically and effortlessly on a page, this frees up cognitive resources to process the meaning of a text (Rasinski et al., 2012), and can lead to overall proficiency in reading (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Miller & Schwanenflugel, 2008). While various strategies can be used to advance fluency, there is solid research to support the use of poetry and repeated readings as an effective means of developing fluent reading (Bruster, 2015; Nichols et al., 2018; Calo et al., 2013). Bruster (2015) found that repeated readings with poetry improved fourth-grade struggling readers' fluency, accuracy, and motivation by providing readers with choice and ownership of their reading. Nichols et al. (2018) posit that poetry is a natural text for improving fluency due to its "prosodic, performance, and Aesthetic features" (p. 392). Additionally, Calo et al. (2013) noted that repeated reading in preparation for performance reading in front of peers increased K-3 graders' fluency, expression, and oral reading volume.

Rasinski (2014) argued that fluency is critical for reading success yet is often neglected as a necessary component of effective reading instruction. The following teaching tip is presented to support preservice teachers' understanding of fluency and provide them with a concrete example of how to use poetry to develop fluency in the hopes that fluency instruction will not be neglected in their future teaching of K-12 students. The series of steps includes pre- and post-definitions of fluency, scholarly readings, and the creation of a poetry activity. This teaching tip is not meant to be an exclusive mode of teaching about fluency, but rather one method of

teaching about this valuable topic within the context of a comprehensive teacher preparation program.

The following steps can be conducted in a face-to-face class, an online synchronous class, or even an asynchronous class with guided directions. This lesson idea is especially appropriate for initial teacher education candidates, perhaps in a foundations of literacy course. The tasks and suggested readings provide foundational knowledge about the topic and are achievable without significant background knowledge. The steps can be used for all certification levels and content areas. Additionally, the lesson may be helpful in advanced or professional certification programs as a refresher on this topic and to provide an emphasis on this often-neglected construct. The steps can occur over an entire semester or within a shorter time frame per the restraints of your calendar. In the steps below, "students" refers to the preservice teachers in your class.

1) During your first class, it is typical that you will review the syllabus, assignments, etc., for your course. Within this first meeting, ask students what they know about various literacy terms, including "fluency." This can be done through a quick-write or an online chat tool. This activity should be done without using resources and can serve as a baseline measure of their current knowledge of this construct. To alleviate any stress your students may encounter regarding answering a question they have not been taught about, remind them that this is a baseline indicator rather than a mastery marker. Let them know that you are not expecting accurate definitions at this time, but they should list any thoughts they have about the constructs. Collect and save these responses so they can be revisited at the end of step five.

2)   This step provides students with research-based information about fluency. As appropriate per your course content, provide students with several readings related to fluency. Recommendations include Collet (2021) and selections by Rasinski (2006; 2012). The Collet text is an encyclopedic reference of significant literacy terms, providing a current, research-based, succinct introduction of fluency on page 27. The Rasinski articles provide easily accessible information about fluency and fluency-rich vocabulary. These selections complement each other as, collectively, they provide an introduction to the topic as well as an application of the knowledge. However, articles of your choice can be substituted for these readings. This step can be done as homework or in-class assignments per your course schedule. Provide students with the directions and expectations for step three before they begin the reading task.

3)   Ask students to generate a written response describing at least three interesting facts they learned from the readings. They should state the facts, their thinking and learning related to the concept, and potential future application of the information. Have students discuss their responses with peers during subsequent class time. This can be done face-to-face, in a breakout room during an online synchronous class, or through a discussion board for an online asynchronous class. Use the responses as a catalyst for presenting information about automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Clarify misconceptions and provide examples of these terms to develop students' understandings further.

4)   This step is designed to help preservice teachers apply their learned knowledge about fluency instruction by creating a lesson activity specific to their certification

level and/or content area. Provide students with multiple poetry selections

appropriate for grades kindergarten through twelve. As a means of engagement,

provide poems that are absurd, silly, or bizarre (Allyn, 2011). It is also helpful if

you find poetry specific to content areas. Model for students how to select a poem

and design a learning activity to support fluency instruction, or use the following as

an example:

For grade seven, I would select the poem "I Told My Cat" (Yeats, 2018) because it
is humorous, has a great message for middle schoolers, and provides a unique
cadence that takes practice to perfect. It is short enough to rehearse during a 45-
minute lesson. I would read the entire poem to students, modeling fluent reading.
As a class, we would discuss my accuracy, speed, and expression and how that
impacted the poem's meaning. Students would be placed in groups of 3-4 to
practice reading the piece in preparation for an oral presentation to the class. They
could do a choral reading, alternate lines, or have one student read while others act
out the poem. If collaboration allows, I will have students present in another
classroom in the school.

Each student selects one poem they determine suitable for their intended grade

level and certification area. Students choose one specific grade level and create an

activity with the poem that could be used to improve fluency. The Rasinski

readings (2006; 2012) can be used to support this step since they include ideas for

activities such as reader's theater, paired readings, and choral readings. Students

submit a written response indicating their chosen poem, grade level, and a detailed

activity description. As an option, you can require students to make connections

between their activity and English Language Arts learning standards. Finally,

students write a paragraph describing their thoughts about using poetry as a tool for

developing fluency.

5) During the last step of the project, students once again submit a written response of

their understanding of the word "fluency." Provide students with their original

thinking from step one so they can compare responses and reflect on growth in

learning.

In conclusion, this teaching tip describes an accessible idea for helping preservice teachers understand fluency. Additionally, it provides a practical application of literacy knowledge by creating a lesson activity using poetry for fluency development. This approach can be used for all certification levels and embedded within face-to-face and online formats. Data from the definitions (steps one and five) and student perceptions of using poetry (step four) can be used to determine the effectiveness of the project in your course. Modifications to the above lesson steps can be made as appropriate for your students, your instructional setting, or your teaching style. For example, additional readings, variations for instruction and modeling, and various requirements of the written components for reading reflections or activity descriptions may be warranted. The goal is to present your students with knowledge and confidence to embed fluency instruction in their future classroom teaching.

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Teachers' Challenges and Requests for Supports from Districts, Principals, Parents, Media

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine K to 5 teachers' instructional conditions of work to better understand teachers' needs and the needs of the profession. A national sample of 343 K-5 classroom teachers from 46 states and 100 K-5 teachers from a large school district participated in the study. Participants at the national and local levels responded to questions on challenges teachers faced. Teachers were also asked to share the specific supports they wished they had from states, districts, administration, parents, and social media. The findings between the national and the large local district were comparable. Common themes from teachers regarding support they needed were showing respect to them as professionals, receiving time for them to plan and collaborate, and provisions of personnel and resources to support their work. Implications are discussed. Specifically, implications are addressed about teacher preparation and professional development practices on ways to best support teachers' instruction and well-being.

Keywords: Teacher instruction, teacher preparation, writing, reading, remote instruction, social and emotional learning, teacher burn out, professional development

Teachers' Challenges and Requests for Supports from Districts, Principals, Parents,

Media

The COVID-19 pandemic did not only claim human lives but paralyzed the economy and societal structures of countries. One of those systems that were significantly affected was the educational system that witnessed the transition of instruction from face-to-face to remote learning with challenges for teachers who had to adjust and adapt their instruction with minimal preparation (e.g., Hebert et al., 2020; Authors, 2022). Research findings thus far question the effects of remote learning on students' writing and reading skills; however, a concern that is progressively voiced refers to students' and teachers' social-emotional well-being.

Teachers are experiencing symptoms of burnout at an alarming rate. According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2022), the largest education union in the United States, 90% of respondents believe teacher burnout is a serious concern and 55% said they were planning to leave the education profession sooner than planned (Jotkoff, 2022; Kim et al., 2017). Indeed, based on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), 44% of public schools reported full or part-time teaching vacancies, and 61% of those schools identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason for increases in educator resignations/early retirement.

The stress of the pandemic has taken a mental and emotional toll on students, as well. In a two-year longitudinal study examining school engagement and burnout among 2,755 elementary and middle school students in Finland both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, Salmela-Aro et al. (2021) found significant correlations between students' academic well-being and their socio-emotional skills. They concluded that interventions aimed at helping students cope with stress and burnout would be beneficial. The purpose of this survey was to examine a) professional development (PD) needed to address social-emotional needs for teachers

and students, b) students' instructional needs and instructional challenges that teachers faced, c) support teachers wished they had from various stakeholders, d) teachers' instructional preparation to address writing, reading, and remote instruction, and e) teachers' confidence to teach writing, reading, and remotely.

Current Study

Considering the importance of addressing instructional needs due to the pandemic as well as teachers' social and emotional needs and their students' social and emotional as well as instructional needs, a survey was modeled after the surveys by Traga Philippakos et al. (2022a,b) that strived to better understand the conditions of teachers' instruction during the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021-2022), and we also attempted to identify the specific supports teachers wished they were provided. Specifically, we wanted to know what support they would have liked to have from their schools' administration, their districts, the parents of their students, and social media. In addition to seeking answers to these questions from a national survey, we also collected information from a large school district to examine whether the national findings were also reflected in a public school district. The survey also included questions on teachers' preparation to teach writing and reading based on support they received for their instruction and on professional development. In this work, we only report findings that relate to the following research question, "What challenges did teachers identify, and what supports did teachers wished they have in their profession?"

Methods

Participant Demographics

National sample. National data derived from Market Data Retrieval (MDR-Educator), a marketing and educational company that provides services related to education, for a fee. The

final sample included 343 PreK to 5 classroom teachers from 46 states. The largest proportion of

participants were from Texas (8%), California (7%), and Massachusetts (6%). Table 1 provides a

breakdown of respondents by grade level. The school setting participants taught in was

predominately suburban (43%) followed by rural (32%) and Urban (25%), and nearly all

participants (98%) taught in a public school setting. Over 90% of participants identified as

female and 8% identified as male, with 1.5% selecting "prefer not to respond". The majority of

participants (65%) have a master's degree, and a third have a bachelor's degree.

Table 1. Participants from National Sample

National	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pre-K	28	8.2
Kindergarten	46	13.4
First	38	11.1
Second	58	16.9
Third	73	21.3
Fourth	57	16.6
Fifth	43	12.5
Total	343	100.0

Large School District. The first author received teacher emails from a large district in

the Southeast United States after approval from the district's research office. A total of 100

participants from a large school district were included (see Table 2). The school setting

participants taught in was predominately suburban (51%) and urban/city (39%), with 11%

teaching in a rural area. We asked participants to describe the socioeconomic status of the

population they serve, and 29% identified it as "low," 43% as "medium-low," 26% as "medium-

high," and 2% as "high." Over 90% of participants identified as female and 6% as male with 3%

selecting "prefer not to respond".

Table 2. Participants from Large, Local School District

Large District	Frequency	Percent (%)
Kindergarten	19	19
First	28	28
Second	17	17
Third	14	14
Fourth	11	11
Fifth	11	11
Total	100	100

The sample consisted mainly of experienced educators. Nearly half of the participants

(49%) had 10 to 20 years of teaching experience, and 21% had over 20 years of teaching

experience. Around a tenth (11%) had less than 3 years of teaching experience, and 19% indicated having 3 to 9 years of experience.

Survey Items and Procedures

We developed survey items based on Traga Philippakos et al. (2022a) survey that included 60 to 91 questions (79 quantitative and 12 qualitative total) depending on participants' selections. The survey included the following sections: General demographic information; teachers' time and preparation for instruction; PD and supports (instructional and social-emotional); challenges faced by teachers and students (instructional and social-emotional); teacher affect toward writing, reading, and online instruction; teacher confidence to teach writing, reading, and teaching online; and open-ended questions on the overall experience of being a teacher, the teaching profession, and support received.

The survey was built in Qualtrics and was shared via email. The email explained the project's purpose, requested teachers' consent, and provided a link to the survey. Those who chose to participate and completed the survey were entered into a drawing for one of three Amazon gift cards totaling $150, $100, and $50.

Analysis

Teachers' responses are reported using frequencies and proportions. Open responses were analyzed following three phases. In the first phase, we engaged in open categorization and inductive analyses of all teachers' comments per question, allowing the initial identification of codes. Those codes were then reexamined by the first and second authors. Codes were defined and collapsed when necessary. In the second phase, the first and second authors proceeded with the categorization of all data. Finally, data were interpreted per category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldana, 2009).

Findings

Challenges Regarding Students' Needs

Teachers ranked the biggest challenges during this year's pandemic in reference to students' needs. A third (33%) of teachers ranked first students' social and emotional needs, 26% ranked student academic needs, 19% identified the biggest challenge as student engagement, 9% ranked time first, 6% parental support, 5% student computer access, and 1% other. Similar results were found for the large-school district, with over a third (35%) ranking student academic needs as first, 32% ranked students' social and emotional needs as first, 15% student engagement, 12% time, 5% parental support, and 1% other.

Challenges Regarding Teachers' Needs

Teachers ranked the biggest challenges during this year's pandemic related to their needs. Around three in ten (29%), participants ranked teacher preparation to address students' wide academic needs as the biggest challenge, 19% teacher preparation to address students' social and emotional needs, 18% school and district support to address students' wide academic needs, 16% school and district support to address students' social and emotional needs, 10% ranked teacher blaming from social groups and social media as the biggest challenge, 6% teacher blaming from parent groups, 2.5% Other, and 0.4% reported nothing as a ranked challenge. The data revealed that teachers identified as the primary challenge their own preparation to support students academically and their own preparation to support students' emotional needs before identifying district supports for academics and emotional needs.

For the large-school district, 21% ranked school and district support to address students' social and emotional needs as the biggest challenge, 19% ranked teacher preparation to address students' wide academic needs, 17% teacher preparation to address students' social and

emotional needs, 17% school and district support to address students' wide academic needs, 13% ranked teacher blaming from social groups and social media as the biggest challenge, 8% teacher blaming from parent groups, 5% Other, and 1% reported nothing as a ranked challenge.

Wishes for Supports

The following section provides findings by district, principals, parents, and media.

District. District-level supports were related to *staff support* (n = 73). While many factors echoed what was stated at the state level, teachers requested districts specific supports to address behavior, classroom management, and discipline. *Time* (n = 36; 13%), specifically teachers at the local level, requested to reduce requirements and meetings. Other requests were consistent with state responses, including *Nothing* and *Respect* (n = 30; 11%), *PD and Training* (n = 25; 9%), *Standards/Standardized Testing/Curriculum* (n = 22; 8%), **Compensation** (n = 16; 6%), *Student/Family Support* remarking that some families need far more supports than the teachers (n = 12; 4%), *Accountability* for leadership to recognize progress, not to return to pre-pandemic practices and to offer reliable, timely transportation (n = 9; 3%). *Resources* include materials to engage parents, providing reliable internet for all (n = 7; 2%), and *Politics/Safety* (n = 1; 0.03%).

At the large school district, *staff support* (19; 25%) was one of the most common themes, with *respect* toward teachers (10; 13.15%) following *standards/standardized testing/curriculum* (10; 13.15%), and *PD training* (10; 13.15%), appearing in the sequence. *Compensation* (9; 12%) and *time* (9; 12%) were also included, but they were not identified with the same frequency.

Principal and school leadership support. Out of the 257 teachers who responded, 64 (25%) did not ask for any support, while 12 (5%) of them acknowledged that their principals and leadership were already supportive, 65 (26%) requested *staff support and additional personnel*,

45 (18%) asked for ***additional time*** to plan and prepare, 37 (13.40%) requested ***respect*** for them as professionals, 17 (6.61%) asked for ***additional PD and resources***, 7 (2.28%) for less ***emphasis on standardized testing***, and 8 (3.11%) for ***accountability*** with consistency toward principals and teachers, and 2 (.77%) asked for support for parental engagement.

Responses from the large school district and the 75 responders addressed the following themes that were also reflected in national responses: *staff support* (19; 25.33%), *time* (12; 16%); respect for teachers as knowledgeable professionals (11; 15%), *PD and training* on academics and SEL (5; 6%), *accountability* towards all teachers and principals (2; 2.7%); and *support* with families and students (1; 1.33%). A total of 4 teachers (5.33%%) did *not ask for any support* from the principals, with 20 (27%) stating that they *already had support*.

Parental supports. Regarding support by parents, 146 (55.73%) out of the 262 participants asked for better ***communication, teamwork,*** *and* ***engagement*** for students' academics and behavior; 45 (17.18%) asked for ***parental respect*** and acknowledgment of teachers' work and knowledge as professionals, 35 (13.36%) commented on parents being kept ***accountable*** for students' actions and for students to be kept accountable by their parents for their behaviors; finally, 33 teachers (13 %) ***did not ask*** for any supports by parents and 3 (1.14) shared that *parents* ***were supportive***.

The themes regarding parental support from teachers of the large school district (*n* = 75) were almost the same as at the national level, with teachers asking for ***communication, teamwork,*** *and* ***engagement*** for students' academics and behavior (35; 46.05%), for parental accountability (18; 24%), ***parental respect*** and acknowledgment of teachers' work and knowledge as professionals (13; 17%). Of the 75 teachers, 6 (8%) shared that parents *were supportive,* while 4 (5.26%) *did not want* to comment on any parental support.

Social media supports. From the 206 teachers who responded, the following themes emerged: Teachers asked for ***respect*** from social media for their role as professionals and for the social media outlets to stop blaming teachers (n = 65; 32%); teachers asked for social media to ***inform*** the public and students via positive and appropriate for students streams (n = 49; 24%), while teachers also asked for social media to ***filter*** information for its accuracy and appropriateness (n = 33; 16%), and 12 (6%) asked for media to ***support*** teachers toward educational goals and teacher shortages. Finally, 47 (23%) ***did not ask for anything*** and wished for social media to stop the attention of teachers.

At the larger district (*n* = 66), the comments teachers shared mirrored the themes for the national level as 15 (23%) asked for ***respect*** from social media for their role as professionals and for the social media outlets to stop blaming teachers; teachers asked for social media to ***inform*** the public and students via positive and appropriate for students streams (n = 15; 23%); Further, support was asked with social media ***filtering*** information for its accuracy and appropriateness (n = 33; 16%), and 6 (9%) asked for media to ***support*** teachers toward educational goals and teacher shortages. Finally, 17 teachers ***did not ask for any support*** from social media.

Discussion

The results reveal a better understanding of the challenges teachers face and the specificity of the support they need.

Most teachers stated that there was no support for their well-being and that there was no such emphasis at their locations. Teachers' social-emotional competence affects their ability to better connect with students, and establish and retain healthy relationships and communication with them (Jennings & Greenbergh, 2009). Stress and emotional distress that may be connected with an instructional setting can affect the practices of instructors (Buettner et al., 2016). Overall,

supports for students' and teachers' emotional well-being shows a lack of systematic support overall, but more support comes from school counselors and district counselors for students. However, specific practices and supports (that may involve personnel resources) may be necessary to better support teachers' instruction and students learning, as stress affects both and is manifested in both. Conclusions from this survey also suggest the need for targeted interventions to support students and teachers with academic and social-emotional skill development.

The Teaching Profession

Several themes consistently emerged across teachers' responses when asked to share comments about the profession and support they would have liked to have from different agencies and sources. Teachers' responses addressed the lack of value in the profession and in their role as teachers, the lack of respect in education and for them as professionals, the demands of the profession that were modified because of the pandemic and added to their instructional role, financial challenges related to salary, needs for social and emotional learning and support, needs to address students' learning, efforts to cover teacher shortages, teachers' preparation to address academic and other students' needs, and accountability for parents.

The information teachers shared contributed to the understanding of their burnout. However, this burnout is not to be normalized as there are indications that there is no systematic recognition of or compensation for teachers' efforts, work, and professional knowledge and professionalism. In their requests for support, the teachers consistently commented on respect, asking for the state, districts, parents, and social media to respect them as knowledgeable professionals. Teachers requested personnel to support their instruction and time to work on it. They requested to remove additional meetings that were not essential. They also requested

sincere efforts on PD connected with their instruction and addressed students' social-emotional well-being and their own well-being. The practice of preaching for them to have self-care when no such time and resources were offered was ineffective. Further, teachers asked for compensation for their work; primarily, though, they asked for them to be respected and valued.

Limitations and Conclusion

One of the main limitations of this work is the nature of this study. This is a survey, and we cannot follow up with participants to examine their instructional practices and conditions that are reported. Future research could follow-up with participants with interviews in order to develop a better understanding on their responses and the specific conditions and experiences within their setting, and their collaboration or interactions with the different agencies. Further, in this study, we did not contact principals to examine what support they needed during this time. It would have been helpful to be able to report the support principals received and their needs as leaders.

Conclusion

The current work highlights teacher burnout as a phenomenon and includes teachers' voices and requests for support. Potentially, an examination of ways to offer academic and social-emotional support to teachers could affect students and teachers. Teachers' comments and feedback reinforce the understanding of burnout. There is a need to identify the systems, practices, and processes that can support teachers as professionals. Otherwise, the alternative can have significant implications for the function of the profession and the way that this profession moves into the future.

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Affordances, constraints, and collaborative practices in e-mentoring: A systematic review of the literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to catalog, explore, and disseminate knowledge developed related to the affordances, constraints, and collaborative practices of e-mentoring in order to offer recommendations for mentoring programs. Chosen studies were organized into three categories based on e-mentoring practices. Results reflect chat-room-based e-mentoring and e-mentoring with a video component both to have various affordances and collaborative features. These two types may benefit new teachers who do not have access to in-person mentors but may necessitate a component that ensures mentors and mentees alike remain consistently engaged in the e-mentoring process.

Keywords: Mentoring, collaboration, digital

Introduction

Mentoring is a relationship that "unites experienced and (relatively) inexperienced individuals who work together over time, provides career and psychosocial support, and offers mutual benefits" (Mullen & Fallen, 2022, p. 756). Providing new K-12 teachers (five or fewer years of teaching experience) with veteran K-12 teacher mentors (over five years teaching experience) is a form of new teacher induction that can provide a variety of benefits for both mentor and mentee. New teachers involved in a mentoring relationship may experience heightened feelings of well-being (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019) and job satisfaction (Glazerman et al., 2010). Involvement in a mentoring relationship may also aid in new and veteran teachers' retention (Berry et al., 2010; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Zavelevsky et al., 2022), and both mentors and mentees may experience a shared "commitment to professional collaboration" (McCann & Lloyd, 2013, p. 106).

Additionally, Ingersoll and Smith (2004) linked teacher collaboration to increased teacher retention. A study by Shank (2005) examined a Collaborative Inquiry Group (CIG), a group consisting of both veteran and new teachers that worked together to collaborate on teaching practices and grow as educators individually and collectively. Shank (2005) concluded that these collaborative groups allowed for "'mentoring' of teachers at all stages in their careers" (p. 81). Thus, the need for support does not stop once a new teacher transitions to veteran teacher; collaboration is an important component of a mentoring relationship. Within this review, I define collaborative mentoring as mentoring that involves a dialogical process (Stewart & McClure, 2013) and includes a common goal (McCann, 2010) and shared decision-making (Stewart & McClure, 2013).

Despite its many benefits, mentoring programs are not always available or feasible in schools, and identifying potential mentors should be an intentional process (Gay, 1995; McCann & Johannessen, 2009). Kaufman and Diliberti (2021) cautioned that following the pandemic, the "teacher workforce is at risk of suffering significant declines" (p. 6), potentially impacting the future availability of mentors for new teachers. One way to address the need for mentors is to consider utilizing mentors from outside schools. This can be accomplished through "e-mentoring": mentoring that occurs online or with an online component.

This systematic literature review aims to catalog, explore, and disseminate knowledge related to the affordances and constraints of e-mentoring to offer recommendations for K-12 formal mentoring programs. A secondary purpose of this literature review is to develop an understanding of how e-mentoring practices are collaborative or can be made more collaborative. The research questions guiding this systematic literature review are as follows: (1) What does the literature indicate in relation to the affordances and constraints of e-mentoring? (2) What role does collaboration play in e-mentoring?

Theoretical framework

This theoretical framework will utilize Freire's critical pedagogy (1970) and Rosenblatt's theory of literary transaction (1995) as lenses to emphasize the importance of collaborative mentoring and reflect how mentoring can serve as a transactional process between mentor and mentee.

In a typical mentoring relationship, a veteran teacher is paired with a new teacher (Gay, 1995), and both tend to work within the same school system. A mentoring relationship like this, however, has the potential to foster an unequal power dynamic. The veteran teacher is familiar to the school system and may be viewed as an expert by the mentee, which may cause the new

teacher to feel unable to share their thoughts or experiences (Fecho et al., 2021). The impact of this compliance may be less open and willing dialogue (Freire, 1970).

While the veteran teacher has more teaching experience than the new teacher, the mentor and mentee must work collaboratively to "flatten hierarchies" (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 553) so much as they can be flattened. Flattening hierarchies might be possible through collaboration and collaborative conversations (Hollingsworth, 1992). Collaborative conversations serve "as a means of both learning and support for learning" (Hollingsworth, 1992, p. 375) while also allowing conversations to be "mutually informed" (p. 375). Both mentor and mentee have lived experiences that can be shared in a mutually transactional and dialogic space, where both can learn from and shape their own knowledge through the mentoring process. Rosenblatt's theory of literary transaction describes an individual's relationship with a text; one will interpret a text "in terms of his fund of past experiences" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 101). Transaction takes place in the way that the same reader may "come to reinterpret his old sense of things in the light of this new literary experience" (p. 101). In looking now at collaborative mentoring through this lens, we can see this form of induction as a way for dialogue to occur, where both mentors and mentees have opportunities to share and shape their lived experiences as they relate to teaching and learning. And by pairing Rosenblatt's transactional lens with Freire's critical lens, I will emphasize the importance of working to flatten hierarchies (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007) in a transactional space so that collaborative mentoring may take shape.

Data sources/methodology

I compiled this review utilizing two Boolean phrases created with my search criteria in mind. My inclusion criteria included the following: 1) U.S.-based peer-reviewed empirical

studies, 2) Primary or secondary education focus, 3) General education subject areas (English, science, social studies/history, math), and 4) New teacher mentoring emphasis.

I utilized my primary Boolean phrase, which highlighted my inclusion criteria, through EBSCOHost. EBSCOHost searched nine education databases and yielded a total of 48 search results. After sifting, I identified seven relevant studies for this review. I found an eighth study (Bang, 2013) referenced in Bang and Luft's (2014) study. I utilized Google Scholar in a second Boolean search, which yielded 1,730 results. After sifting, I identified one relevant study for this review (Legler, 2021). I have a total of nine studies.

Methods

I first divided studies based on the three types of e-mentoring (see Table 1). Each type of e-mentoring is described further in the Results section. After dividing up studies, I began coding, initially using open coding (Bailey, 2018) for affordances and constraints related to e-mentoring. Following this process, I organized codes into more generalized themes related to affordances and constraints. To respond to the research question addressing collaboration, I used selective coding (Bailey, 2018) related to three defined features of collaboration (dialogic, common goal, and shared decision-making). All identified themes are reflected in Table 1, and each will be discussed in the Results section.

Table 1

Types of e-mentoring and coding themes identified

E-mentoring type	Studies included within type	Description	Affordances (coding themes)	Constraints (coding themes)	Collaboration (coding themes)
Type #1	-Bang, 2013* -Bang & Luft, 2014	Asynchronous, chat-room style	- Relevant mentoring -Relationship/	-Lack of consistent engagement	-Common goal -Shared decision- making

	-Berry & Byrd, 2012 -Binkley et al., 2013 -Gareis & Nussbaum-Beach, 2007 -Jones et al., 2016 -Legler, 2021** -Simonsen et al., 2009		community-building -Lack of connection to school -Consistent engagement	-Non-collaborative -Issues with accessibility -Not relevant	-Dialogical
Type #2	-Bang, 2013* -Legler, 2021** -McNally, 2015	Video component	-Relevant mentoring -Lack of connection to school -Relationship/ community-building	-Lack of consistent engagement	-Common goal -Shared decision- making -Dialogical
Type #3	-Bang, 2013*	Virtual reality	None	-Issues with accessibility -Not relevant	None

* Bang's (2013) study explored three different forms of e-mentoring. As such, each of these three types falls into a different category as indicated by the table.

** Legler (2021) studied an e-mentoring platform that included multiple e-mentoring components, including an asynchronous meeting space and a video component. As such, this study is included under both Type #1 and Type #2 e-mentoring.

Results

The Results section has been organized first by type of e-mentoring. I organized further within each type of e-mentoring to discuss identified themes of affordances, constraints, and collaborative characteristics.

E-Mentoring Type #1

The first category of e-mentoring included those studies that reflected e-mentoring as an asynchronous chat room experience.

Affordances

The e-mentoring chat room experience allowed individuals to post questions, share experiences, and respond to one another in manners that allowed for discussing relevant topics. Berry and Byrd (2012) explained how the needs of the community determined content. Mentors and mentees utilized the chat rooms to share topics relevant to them and their contexts.

Another affordance of Type #1 e-mentoring was relationship and community-building. Bang and Luft (2014) described how during a school year, a mentoring partnership "developed their virtual relationship well, and became each other's life supporters, even within the real world" (p. 42). In these forums, mentors and mentees took the initiative to create and respond to posts, allowing relationships to take shape after concerted efforts on both sides. However, even if a mentee was not posting nor responding regularly, they might still experience feelings of being a part of a community (Binkley et al., 2013).

Despite mentors not belonging to the same schools as mentees, this separation presented as an affordance for mentees. Being apart from one another meant mentors were "far removed from the politics of [mentees'] local school building or district" (Simonsen et al., 2009, p. 66). E-mentoring provided an avenue to discuss topics that might be difficult to broach with mentors in the same school.

A final affordance within Type #1 e–mentoring was consistent engagement. Gareis and Nussbaum-Beach (2007) noted that e-mentoring allowed for "a multiplicity of interactions and relationships not characteristic of conventional one-to-one mentoring" (p. 239). Here, mentors and mentees had opportunities to engage with their assigned mentor/mentee and other mentors and mentees, increasing the potential for multiple perspectives and high engagement. Jones et al. (2016) shared the benefit of timely forum responses, reflecting that some problems brought up by mentees "might be solved *in the moment*" (p. 281) by mentors and mentees involved in the forum.

Constraints

Because Type #1 e-mentoring was the most widely represented form of e-mentoring in this review, the minute differences between individual studies reflected some contradictions between affordances and constraints. For instance, not all mentors and mentees engaged equally with platforms. So, while consistent engagement was one affordance identified in Type #1 e-mentoring, lack of consistent engagement was also a constraint.

This lack of consistent engagement was often related to a lack of time. Bang and Luft (2014) discussed the experience of one inconsistently participating mentee, Bradley, who found it difficult to "'stay on top of things'" (p. 43). Despite his mentor's attempts at engaging Bradley on the forum, Bradley's engagement remained inconsistent. Legler (2021) similarly brought up the "unpredictable nature of mentee Platform use" (p. 60). In these cases of inconsistent engagement, the web forums served more as nuisances than potentially helpful mentoring spaces.

Lack of collaboration was another constraint in Type #1 e-mentoring. In Bradley's (Bang & Luft, 2014) experiences as a mentee, his engagement was largely uncollaborative when participating in the e-mentoring forum. On more than one occasion, Bradley asked his mentor

specific questions and requested curriculum-related materials. After his mentor responded to questions and shared materials, Bradley often disappeared from the forum for weeks at a time.

Mentors and mentees occasionally experienced issues with accessibility with Type #1 e-mentoring. Bang (2013) explored three forms of e-mentoring. One of the forms, which fits within Type #1 e-mentoring, was a "wiki model" (p. 6), which was challenging to navigate for some mentors and mentees, requiring "a steep learning curve" (p. 8). If participants cannot figure out the functions of a platform or choose not to learn the functions of a platform, there might be a problem with accessibility.

A final constraint evident in Type #1 e-mentoring was that content was often irrelevant to mentors and mentees. One mentee found that the e-mentoring she was involved in did not give her the supports she needed: "'I wanted more K-2 things'" (Binkley et al., 2013, p. 58). In another e-mentoring program, one mentor, referred to as a "task manager," emphasized completing tasks over establishing relationships or participating in relevant discussions (Bang, 2013, p. 9). Establishing specific objectives rather than allowing for free-form conversations to develop in forum-based e-mentoring programs has shown to be a constraint for mentors and mentees alike.

Collaboration

Type #1 e-mentoring showed collaborative potential. One aspect of collaboration was the ways mentors and mentees shared common goals. In Berry and Byrd's (2012) study, a mentee posted about struggling to find support in her school for a student in crisis. She was met with the following: advice was given for the next steps, and similar experiences were shared. While not expressly written, the common goal reflected in this example showed support, advice, and encouragement for a new teacher who was "shaken" (p. 379) by this experience.

Shared decision-making was another important aspect of collaboration exemplified throughout Type #1 e-mentoring. Mentors often did not respond with a single answer or suggestion when mentees asked questions. Instead, "Without directly solving the problem, a mentor may suggest a course of action or provide a resource. The mentee then returns to the conversation to report the outcome, often indicative of negotiating or testing new knowledge" (Simonsen et al., 2009, p. 61). Negotiation is an important component of collaboration and allows mentees to explore how suggestions may fit within their current classroom contexts.

Individuals involved in collaborative Type #1 e-mentoring spaces can also engage in dialogue that will enable them to share their own experiences while taking in and allowing for others' experiences to shape their understandings. In Bang and Luft's (2014) study, they discussed the experiences of a mentee, Penelope, who engaged with her mentor in dialogical ways, where "topics, tensions, and other negotiations were noted between [mentor and mentee]" (p. 39). The two were able to share experiences about topics of concern, and even when they disagreed and had moments of tension, they could learn from one another.

E-Mentoring Type #2

The second category of e-mentoring included studies that had a video component.

Affordances

An affordance of Type #2 e-mentoring was relevant mentoring. In Bang's (2013) study of multiple forms of e-mentoring, one form included synchronous video meetings. He described how these meetings allowed mentors and mentees to engage in "topics related to science teaching and learning," which permitted mentees to attempt new ways of teaching science in their classrooms (p. 9). Transferring new knowledge and putting it into practice in classrooms was beneficial for mentees.

The lack of connection between mentors and mentees' schools was also an affordance. McNally (2015) noted how mentees videoed lessons for mentors outside of their school systems, and one mentee expressed her appreciation for this: "'[My mentor is] in another state…I didn't feel threatened at all'" (p. 493). Another mentee explained, "'It's like having an evaluation without the pressure'" (p. 494). Having this distance between mentor and school reflected a release of potential pressure that may have existed if this distance did not exist; mentees were appreciative.

A final affordance reflected in Type #2 e-mentoring was relationship/community building. In Bang's (2013) study, the use of iPads allowed mentors and mentees to be "well connected socially not only using the FaceTime app but also using social networking features such as Facebook and Twitter" (p. 9). Paired with weekly conversations, mentors and mentees communicated in various ways. Even virtually, relationships took shape.

Constraints

Only one clearly defined constraint was present in Type #2 e-mentoring: a lack of consistent engagement. McNally (2015) described how some mentees who recorded themselves teaching did not always review these recorded lessons later on. As a result, their "ability to engage in analyzing the teaching episode [was] limited" (p. 484). Engagement was also lacking at times in Legler's (2021) study. He recounted when a mentee canceled a video conference due to being "'pretty swamped'" (p. 56). Mentoring becomes limited when individuals sparingly engage or do not engage at all with content or one another.

Collaboration

Type #2 e-mentoring reflected a variety of collaborative practices. Sharing common goals was exhibited in Bang's (2013) study, where mentors and mentees shared a common goal of

engaging with one another to share and seek out information on "topics related to science teaching and learning" (p. 9). Even if conversations took on various forms, mentors and mentees were seeking and providing support and encouragement from one another.

Shared decision-making between mentors and mentees was another collaboration component reflected in Type #2 e-mentoring. McNally's (2015) study discussed a shift from "mentor feedback and mentee self-evaluation" to mentees leading "the critical discussions more than in the first observation cycle" (p. 488). This reflects a collaborative shift where mentees had more of a platform to critique and provide feedback on their recordings rather than listening only to mentors' feedback.

Finally, dialogical practices were evident in Type #2 e-mentoring. In McNally's (2015) study, mentors realized a need to provide mentees insights, experiences, and recommendations– rather than making these decisions for them. Feedback shifted to "encourage mentees to weigh their options and carefully consider their instructional decisions, not offer quick fixes" (p. 492). This encourages mentees to consider their own experiences and contexts; they can dialogue with their mentors to collaborate about how they might proceed in their classrooms while ultimately making decisions for themselves and their students.

E-Mentoring Type #3

E-mentoring Type #3 includes studies that did not fall into Type #1 or #2. However, only one identified study, Bang (2013), was a fit for the e-mentoring Type #3 category. As such, this category has been renamed to match the final form of e-mentoring in Bang's (2013) multifaceted piece, that of virtual reality e-mentoring (VRG).

Affordances and collaboration

There were no clearly defined e-mentoring affordances nor collaborative aspects within the VRG. Bang's (2013) study mentioned enjoyability and learning through play as benefits of the VRG, but for our purposes, these affordances do not connect explicitly to mentoring. Additionally, Bang's (2013) study mentioned virtual spaces where "sharing" took place (p. 8), but there was no explanation for what occurred in these spaces, whether collaborative or otherwise.

Constraints

The "most consistent theme" (Bang, 2013, p. 8) found in the VRG data was related to issues of accessibility. Teachers who utilized VRG had to deal with problems of "sudden laggings, slow connections, images loading too slowly, or data being occasionally lost" (p. 8). Participation by teachers was occasionally discouraged as a result of these and other issues.

Another constraint to VRG e-mentoring was the lack of relevance to teachers. Despite various interesting features in this form of e-mentoring, "This 'wow effect' rarely connected to any promising interactions" (p. 8). With no direct connection to their classrooms, VRG presented as a program praised more for its enjoyability than its practical implications for teachers.

Educational and scientific importance

The purpose of this literature review is to catalog, explore, and disseminate knowledge developed related to the affordances and constraints of e-mentoring to offer recommendations for mentoring programs while developing an understanding of how e-mentoring practices are collaborative or can be made more collaborative.

After analyzing the nine studies identified, I found that both Types #1 and #2 of e-mentoring have a variety of affordances and constraints. Both can potentially be relevant to new teachers' needs, may promote community, and are disconnected from mentees' school systems.

Both also show potential for meaningful collaboration that may work towards flattening

hierarchies that can exist in typical in-person mentoring relationships. One common constraint

these types of e-mentoring shared was inconsistent engagement with e-mentoring platforms.

When mentors and mentees engage inconsistently, e-mentoring has the potential to be

ineffective. To aid with engagement, I suggest the utilization of professional development

sessions, where mentors and mentees can learn about the e-mentoring platform, its functions, and

expectations for its use. Setting explicit expectations for mentors' and mentees' use of a platform

may allow for consistent engagement, especially from the start, when individuals may be

experiencing a learning curve as they grow accustomed to a platform's functions.

Type #3 e-mentoring, or virtual reality e-mentoring, had the potential for accessibility

issues and lack of relevancy to the mentoring process. However, I acknowledge that this form of

e-mentoring is only discussed in the context of one study, reflecting a limitation of this review.

The lack of studies may also reflect an opportunity for future explorations into forms of

mentoring that include a virtual reality component.

To that end, it is telling that I only found nine studies to match my search criteria.

However, in searching Google Scholar, I found several dissertations exploring the uses of e-

mentoring. This work suggests that research is being conducted on e-mentoring; I am hopeful

that these pieces will yield published studies that can be added to a literature review like this in

the future.

E-mentoring is an essential form of mentoring, especially in schools where mentors

cannot be paired with new teachers. In today's world, where there are threats of future teacher

workforce shortages (Kaufman & Diliberti, 2021), virtual mentoring should not only be

discussed but should remain a form of mentoring that is considered in a variety of spaces.

Especially in the wake of the pandemic, we now must consider practices that can support new teachers' retention in the profession and support their collaboration with other teachers. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) explained, "This moment of disruption has created the opportunity for rethinking and reinventing preparation, as well as schooling itself" (p. 463). There is much left to be explored in the realm of e-mentoring and its potential for both new and veteran teachers alike.

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Investing in Literacy:

Examining Readability and Themes in Opioid Agreements

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Abstract

Literacy levels play an important role in patient medical care. An interdisciplinary team recognized a need to understand these documents' reading levels and content. A case study approach was used to describe readability levels and document themes. Results indicated a variation in scores and higher-grade reading levels than expected, and emerged themes generated discussion among the team. The role of readability formulas beyond the K-12 scope and the next steps needed to support lived literacy experiences will be discussed.

Keywords: Readability formulas, reading levels, health literacy, interdisciplinary research

Introduction

The readability of medical materials is an important aspect of patient care. Patients must be able to understand the content within the documents provided by medical personnel to make informed decisions. Therefore, the readability of the documents must be at a level that they can understand. Dale and Chall (1949) define readability as "The sum total (including all the interactions) of all those elements within a given piece of printed material that affect the success a group of readers have with it. The success is the extent to which they understand it, read it at an optimal speed, and find it interesting." (p. 23). In addition to this definition, national and local reading levels must also be considered.

Given this need, an interdisciplinary team of literacy and medical researchers recently conducted a study to examine the readability of opioid agreements used at a university medical center. This project aimed to closely examine opioid agreements for content and functionality in the context of reading difficulty. The medical team members were concerned that if patients cannot understand opioid agreements, they are unlikely to make informed decisions about the provided medication, which is counterintuitive to patient care. As a result of this concern, medical team members sought the expertise of their colleagues in the College of Applied Human Sciences who work specifically in the Literacy Education (LE) program. This interdisciplinary team sought to move beyond the common purpose of risk mitigation in opioid agreements and dig deeper into the readability and themes in these required agreements. The specific research questions to address this deeper understanding of the agreements were:

- Based on analysis using free readability tools, what are the reading levels of opioid agreements?

- How did the reading levels vary across readability formulas and free tools?

- What themes were identified during a content analysis of the opioid documents?

Literature Review

Opioid Contracts

Despite the widespread adoption of opioid contracts in chronic pain management, prior studies have failed to consistently demonstrate the benefits of their use (Arnold et al., 2006; Fishman et al., 1999; Starrels et al., 2010). Fishman and colleagues (1999) demonstrated substantial variations in the content of these documents among academic centers.

Contracts have also been implicated as barriers to trust in the physician/patient relationship and may perpetuate stigma in an already vulnerable population (Arnold et al., 2006; Collen, 2009; Fishman & Kreiss, 2002; Payne et al., 2010). Additionally, a prior study found that most medical documents are written at a tenth-grade level or above, despite most adults reading at an eighth or ninth-grade level (Safeer & Keenen, 2005). Documentation that is difficult to read may further alienate patients. Collaborative work is needed to address Petersen and Lupton's (1996) assertion that the health research field tends to train lay people to understand medical personnel versus the inverse of training medical personnel to better understand their work contexts.

Readability and Reading Levels

Readability formulas are often used to determine reading levels. McLaughlin (1969) (the creator of the Simple Measure of Gobbledygook [SMOG] readability formula) describes what readability formulas tell us as: "the difficulty experienced by people reading a given text, and a measure of the linguistic characteristics of that text" (p. 640). There are a variety of readability formulas and tools available and different disciplines tend to gravitate towards different formulas (i.e., medicine generally uses SMOG, and education typically uses the Flesch-Kincaid Grade-

Level formula). Regardless of the readability formula used, the tool and/or software need to capture accurate information so that the information they are providing from their discipline to the public is appropriate and usable.

Generally, online readability calculators require uploading a text from a passage. The text is then run through the formula, and a grade level is provided. The grade level is often portrayed as a grade and month. For example, a formula response 8.3 would indicate that the text was written for readers in the third month of eighth grade. The reading/grade level guides those writing the documents to position the content to a specific level better. However, even with different readability formulas, they may not capture the realities of the content within the documents they assess.

Medical Readability

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2013) reports that nationally, one in five adults has difficulty comparing and contrasting information, making low-level inferences, and paraphrasing information. The National Institute of Health (NIH) recommends that patient-level documentation be written at a sixth-grade reading level or below; however, multiple prior studies have shown that patient-level documents do not meet this standard (Agarwal et al., 2013; Collen, 2009; Eltorai et al., 2014.; Haller et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2016; Orlow et al., 2003; NIH, n.d.; Para et al., 2020). Safeer and Keenen's (2005) research stated that most medical documents were written 1-2 grade levels above the reading levels of the adults in their study. Providing patients with a document that is neither reasonably comprehensible nor holistic with the information provided creates a barrier to shared decision making (Arnold et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2010).

Health Literacy

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) states, "Personal health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others" (para. 2). The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 also explains that health literacy is, "The degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions" (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, para. 3). Further, the World Health Organization (2023) defines health literacy as a way for individuals to "gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health for themselves, their families and their communities" (para. 1). Both definitions highlight the role and responsibility of the individual when it comes to understanding health services and decisions.

A concern around health literacy concepts is that these definitions encourage a deficit perspective of patients and clients (Hunter & Franken, 2012; McCormack et al., 2016). This could be because these definitions position the individual as a receiver of information versus an active decision-maker (*Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 1984). Further, Hicks (2022) suggests that health literacy and information literacy are often siloed, positing that this limits research on and the enactment of, health literacy practices.

Healthcare professionals are encouraged to present information in a way that increases patient understanding, therefore, it is important to examine the language and themes portrayed in medical documents. Every step in care should support the patient in achieving their goals safely and effectively; the opioid agreement should not be an exception. Opioid agreements are part of risk mitigation and, in some instances, a requirement for a prescription. The concern with these agreements is that they may not be easily understood by patients in their current form. The

hypothesis was that historically, medical documents are not written at a literacy level that could easily be understood by the general public. This led to the formation of a working group spanning different colleges within the university to tackle the readability issue from both medical and literacy.

Theoretical Framework

The first theoretical lens used in this research was the Methodology of Interdisciplinary Research (MIR) framework (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). This model was designed to support the interdisciplinary nature of the work. It was specifically intended to generate boundary-spanning opportunities across the natural and social science fields. This model is flexible and supports a variety of methodological approaches because it guides interdisciplinary teams to focus on the research process versus the end product. Tobi and Kampen (2018) explain that this model helps to facilitate research efforts where interdisciplinary teams have been trained to advocate for different types of findings to validate the research.

Health literacy, the focus of this research, is nested within the autonomous model framework. This framework positions literacy skills as generic in that once these skills are mastered, they can be applied to all literacy contexts (Liebel, nd). In the context of this specific research, the assumption is made that if people have reading skills, they can understand medical documents describing their care plan. The autonomous model embraces the idea of the individual being at the center of the decision-making. This theory suggests that a more literate person will be more successful with health-related documents. In other words, if a person can apply reading skills to medical documents (i.e., the autonomous model), they will be able to advocate for themselves to receive appropriate and beneficial care, and therefore their health will benefit from being literate (i.e., health literacy).

These two theoretical frames are important to this work because the MIR brings together people from different areas of expertise (literacy education and the medical field) to further explore how the readability of medical documents could impact patient care. The MIR framework is needed to support the documents' content analysis because this project's expertise is quite specific and the autonomous model is generally applied to information generated from the readability formulas.

Methodology

Context

This case study (Yin, 2009) focused on the West Virginia University Medicine hospital system that serves an Appalachian population. The average scale literacy score for the state where this medical facility is located places it 38th across the country (U.S. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIAAC], 2012/2014/2017). More specific to the local context of this work, 33% of the county residents where this medical center is located scored at nearly proficient reading levels, and 16% of the population was categorized as "at-risk" for not being able to comprehend printed materials (U.S. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIAAC], 2012/2014/2017). Given this context, it is unsurprising that a group of palliative care doctors from West Virginia University Medicine recognized their opioid agreements were difficult for patients to comprehend. WVU Medicine's *Non-Chronic Pain Contract for Use of Opioid Medications* (Pain Contract) and the *Consent to Treat with Opioid Medications* (Consent Form) were used in this two-phase analysis.

Data Analysis

The first phase included a review of the readability levels of opioid documents using three easily accessible and free tools (e.g., Microsoft Word; Readabilityformulas.com; and

Textcompare.org) to evaluate the reading grade levels of each document. Two readability formulas were used: the FK formula and SMOG. These two formulas were selected because the FK is frequently used in literacy education research, and the SMOG tends to be the medical field's preferred readability tool. Given the interdisciplinary context of this work, it was necessary to capture information from both perspectives. Again, both formulas report the reading levels by grade level and month within the grade (e.g., a score of 12.9 is the equivalent of reading abilities typical of someone in the ninth month of twelfth grade).

Both documents had different total numbers of words; the Pain Contract had 915 words, and the Consent Form had 446 words. To control for consistency in assessing the reading levels of the documents, the exact number of words was used from the beginning of each document to calculate the individual reading levels. Then the documents were combined (1361 total words) to determine an overall reading level. Each document and then both together were entered into each of the three readability tools and scored using the FK formula and the SMOG.

The second phase was a content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004). Once the readability scores were calculated, the content analysis consisted of the LE faculty first reading the documents and noting identified themes. Then through conversation, the interdisciplinary team decided that the two documents should be coded independently. The LE team independently re-coded both documents noting the themes and reconvened to establish the reliability of the coding structures. When disagreement arose, they discussed the code until agreement was achieved. The codes were then organized by color and shared with the medical team researchers. The medical team used their content-specific knowledge to verify code categorization. The final step in this process involved all team members collectively establishing grouping titles to capture the codes within each category.

Findings

Opioid documents inform patients of the risks and expectations of the use of opioids for pain management. The reading difficulty of these documents significantly impacts a patient's ability to comprehend the associated risks, benefits, and expectations of their treatment plan. Results allowed the research team to begin to organize and understand how the three free readability tools scored these agreements, the inconsistencies across the different tools, how these reading levels related to the general reading level of the community, and the topics that frequently emerged within the documents.

The first finding was consistent with the literature in the field as the reading levels of these documents were beyond the sixth-grade recommended reading level of the medical field (Figures 1-3) (Agarwal et al., 2013; Collen, 2009; Eltorai et al., 2014.; Haller et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2016; Orlow et al., 2003; NIH, n.d.; Para et al., 2020). Further, the readability scores were much higher than the national, state, and county reading levels. Another finding about the readability scores of the documents was that there was some variability in the scores across the three different free tools. This raises some questions about the accuracy of the free formulas and calculators (Figures 1-3).

Figure 1

West Virginia University's Non-Chronic Pain Contract for Use of Opioid Medications (915 words).

Readability Tool	FK Grade Level	SMOG Grade Level
Microsoft Word	12.8	N/A

https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php	10.9	10.7
https://www.textcompare.org/readability/	12.44	15.42

Figure 2

West Virginia University's Consent to Treat with Opioid Medications (446 words).

| Readability Tool	FK Grade Level	SMOG Grade Level
Microsoft Word	13.3	N/A
https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php	15.6	15
https://www.textcompare.org/readability/	13.39	15.95

Figure 3

Combined documentation (1,361 words).

Readability Tool	FK Grade Level	SMOG Grade Level
Microsoft Word	12.9	N/A
https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php	12.2	12
https://www.textcompare.org/readability/	12.69	15.61

The content analysis identified 42 unique codes in the two university documents. Once identified, the codes were classified into eight categories within three themes, presented in Figure 4. By coding the documents and placing the codes into categories, the researchers could identify and describe the most meaningful elements of the documents and capture their purpose, focus, and significance. The content analysis demonstrated a much stronger emphasis on the potential risks of opioid medication use than the benefits.

Figure 4

Content analysis categories and codes.

Category	Number of Codes
Expectations	34
Risks	7
Benefits	1
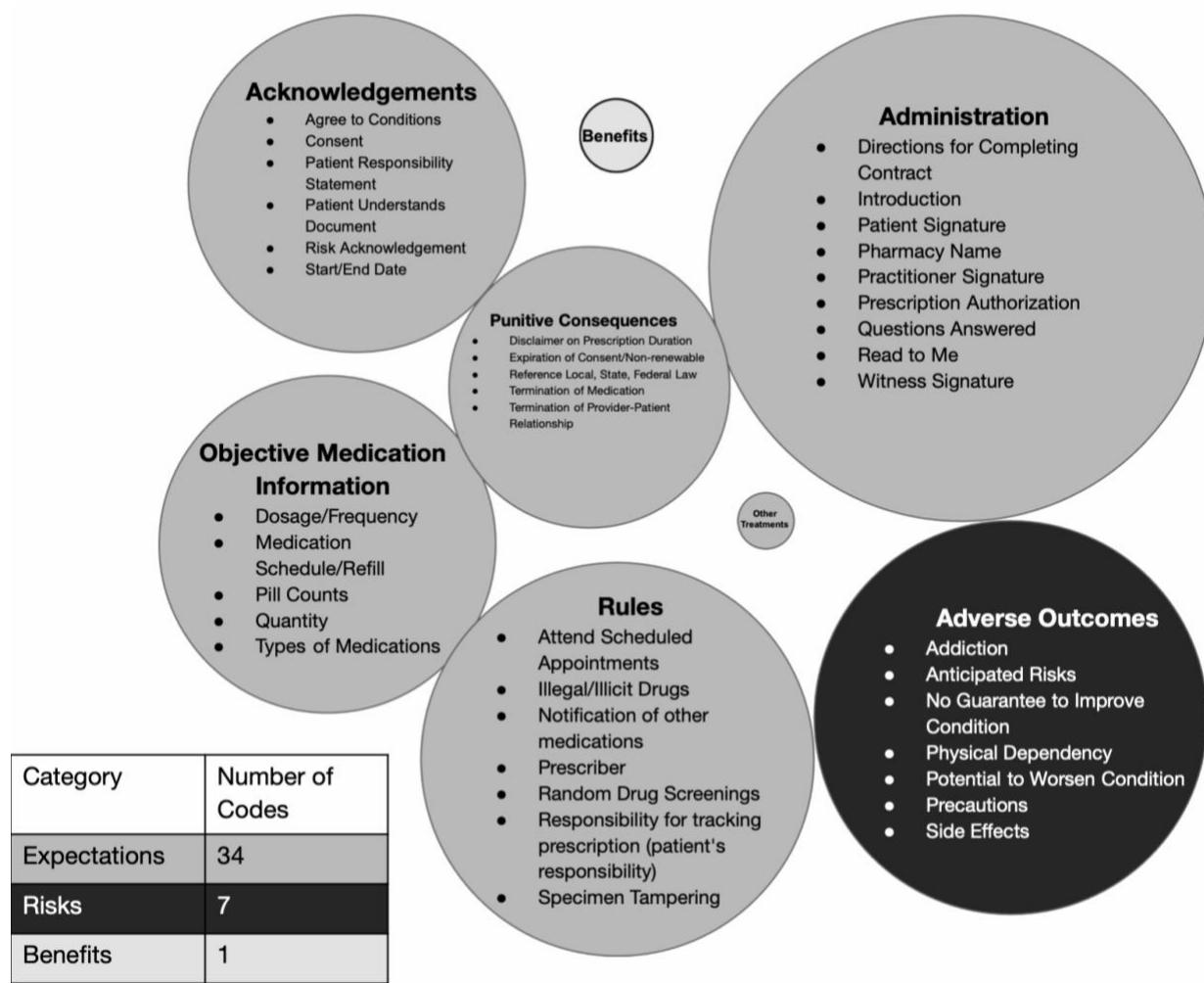
(Lohnas, et al., 2022)

Discussion

This discussion is framed around the three research questions. Each research question brings a unique piece of consideration to this overall discussion.

Based on analysis using free readability tools, what are the reading levels required of opioid agreements?

Our results support the findings of prior studies that the documentation is written beyond the recommended reading levels (Agarwal et al., 2013; Collen, 2009; Eltorai et al., 2014; Haller et al., 2019; Hutchinson et al., 2016; Orlow et al., 2003; NIH, n.d.; Para et al., 2020). More specifically, the analyzed documents were written at a twelfth-grade level or above (see Figures 1-3). This is double the recommended reading level (NIH, n.d.). When documents are written above the reading level of the local community, medical professionals lose the opportunity to engage their patients in conversations around specific medical topics (Arnold et al., 2006; Payne et al., 2010). Patients must be a part of their healthcare conversations so that mutual decisions can be made and understood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). This will help doctors provide necessary medical care and keep patients informed so that healthcare needs can be maintained and advanced (World Health Organization, 2023).

How did the reading levels vary across readability formulas and free tools?

There was variability across the three readability tools used in this study. As McLaughlin's (1969) definition demonstrates, a readability formula should provide information about the difficulty a person may experience when reading a particular text or document. If discrepancies among reading ability formulas about the grade level at which a person would need to be able to read to comprehend the text occur, then those creating these field patient resources may be misinformed. Dale and Chall (1949) state that if the readability of a document denies a group of

readers success while reading it, then the level is too high. Thinking through this definition, if the readability tools and formulas provide different reading levels, then the writers of these documents may not have a clear path on how to write content that targets a specific reading level that aligns with the community they are working to serve.

What themes were identified during a content analysis of the opioid documents?

In our content analysis, we found that administrative content, failing to adhere to the contract/agreement's expectations and risks of opioid therapy were emphasized over potential benefits from therapies, a finding that was also noted by prior studies (Arnold et al., 2006; Payne. et al., 2010). An opioid agreement intends to facilitate understanding of the risks and benefits of and the rules associated with opioid medication use. There may be unintended barriers to understanding the information contained within these documents when literacy levels are not considered during their design. Therefore, consideration should be given to creating opioid agreements at or below the average patient's literacy skills to indeed facilitate understanding of the benefits, risks, and expectations related to the use of opioid medications. Changing these documents to use more average skills will necessitate the education of physicians and those involved in designing and disseminating these documents in the realm of patient health literacy (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; World Health Organization, 2023).

Implications

Readability formulas must be consistent to trust the desired outcomes. The findings from this study demonstrate how documents must be written at levels that the general population can read and understand. For patients to truly advocate for themselves, they must have access to documents they can read and understand. Medical documents must be written at the reading

levels of their communities. Those writing the documents and the patient-facing medical personnel need to have knowledge of the literacy levels within their communities.

The free readability tools that other disciplines have access to must be consistent, accurate, and easily understood so that documents curated by other disciplines can be impactful in our communities. Since readability formulas are used across disciplines, it is important for these formulas to clearly explain what they do and do not evaluate within the documents. Literacy professionals should be more involved in the conversations around these documents and the creation of these documents so that this area of expertise is also a part of these documents.

Furthermore, the content analysis revealed that these agreements predominantly focused on the expectations associated with taking opioids. This is an essential aspect of these agreements. However, our interdisciplinary team agreed that it would also be helpful to patients to include more specific content about the risks and benefits.

Finally, an implication beyond the specific research questions is directed at literacy educators. It seems incredibly important for literacy educators to understand the scope and impact literacy levels have on people's lives beyond the K-12 (and even college) settings. This case demonstrates how having a reading level high enough to comprehend medical documents can impact people's lives. Understanding these documents is necessary so that they can advocate for themselves and their loved ones on health-related issues. In addition, literacy researchers need to move their work and expertise beyond the PK-12 boundary and work across disciplines to impact areas of life outside of the traditional school system. Literacy is everywhere, so literacy educators need to be everywhere.

Next Steps

This interdisciplinary research project is innovative because of the collaboration across both disciplines. The content knowledge both disciplines bring to the table provides ways to view literacy through different lenses. It is important to recognize that health literacy impacts all of us, and having literacy educators and researchers aware of how tools in our field are being applied within our communities is important. Our next steps include furthering our research by expanding this research to include opioid documents from other hospital systems to gain a broader knowledge of opioid agreements currently in use nationwide. Other areas that we also intend to explore are to expand our interdisciplinary work to include other disciplines that focus on legal and insurance requirements, provide comprehensive education on the risks and benefits of opioid therapy, and to present the necessary information to patients in a manner that facilitates understanding so that they may make well-informed decisions regarding their care.

In addition to replicating what was done in this case with other university hospital opioid documents, we also want to take a more critical look at different aspects of the agreements. For example, we intend to look more closely at the vocabulary used in these documents and also at the text features. As literacy researchers, we recognize these areas are important aspects of readability that readability formulas may not capture. Investigating these areas will help us to better think through how to support professionals in other disciplines beyond the PK-12 system.

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Early Literacy Reform Efforts in North Carolina: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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Abstract

This paper describes two recent parallel, yet disparate, reform efforts focused on improving early literacy outcomes in North Carolina. The first reform effort comprises state-level Science of Reading policy initiatives, and the second is a community-based literacy initiative. The costs and benefits of each effort are shared along with implications.

Keywords: Early literacy, science of reading, engaged scholarship, community partnership, literacy policy, LETRS

Introduction

As a team of literacy researchers/teacher educators at a public university in North Carolina, we describe the evolving tensions, intersections, and missed connections between two contrasting early literacy reform efforts situated within the political and pedagogical pressures of the current Science of Reading (SoR) policy context (see Figure 1). These two early literacy reforms represent disparate streams of efforts, with different origins, implementations, and priorities for improving children's early literacy outcomes. State-level SoR policy initiatives that have taken place over the last decade to align elementary literacy instruction with the priorities of the SoR movement are presented first, including the creation of state literacy frameworks for K-3 (NCDPI, 2020) and educator preparation programs, or EPPs (UNC System, 2021), an EPP self-study, and an external audit of early literacy courses at all public and some private EPPs. Further, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training (Moats & Tolman, 2019a & 2019b) was required for all K-5 teachers and offered to university faculty as a result of SoR legislation. The second reform effort is a community literacy coalition called Read ENC or Read Eastern North Carolina. This community-based literacy innovation works to promote family and community literacy by expanding young children's opportunities for book access, text comprehension, and reading enjoyment in a largely rural, economically disadvantaged county.

Contrasting what we were required to do with what we chose to do to improve children's early literacy outcomes, and in view of the considerable human, social, and financial capital invested in these two distinct streams of literacy reform efforts, we offer our perspectives on their respective costs (financial and non-financial) and benefits.

Figure 1

Overview of Two Literacy Reform Efforts in North Carolina

Background
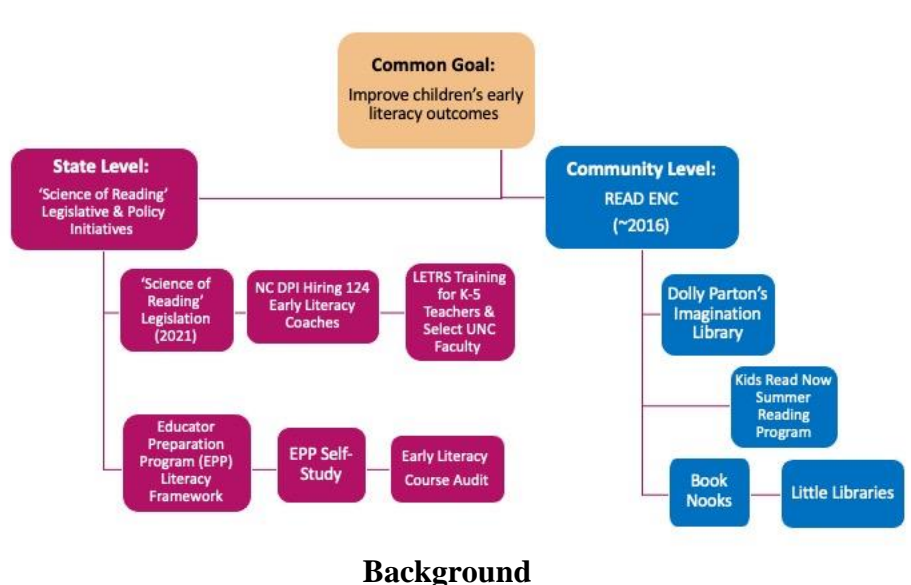
The current Science of Reading (SoR) movement is grounded in research from psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience that analyzes the brain activity of proficient adult readers while reading, rather than research about which literacy instructional practices are effective for which children under which circumstances (Shanahan, 2020). Almost synonymous with SoR is the Simple View of Reading (SVR), a theory of reading positing that reading comprehension is the product of word recognition and language comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, (1990). Although the SVR serves as a key pillar of LETRS training (Moats & Tolman, 2019a & 2019b), Gough and Tunmer (1986) cautioned against conflating understanding the reading process with understanding how to provide reading instruction, and other theoretical models of reading have argued for more complex, nuanced conceptions of the reading process (e.g., Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Further, SoR movement priorities do not address long-standing, systemic race-and class-based societal inequities, which

are the root causes of disparities in students' literacy and educational outcomes (Durán & Hikida, 2022).

Limited access to books in the home and community restrict young children's opportunities for shared reading and rich conversation about texts (Neuman & Moland, 2019), experiences that help to prepare them for formal school entry and are linked to long-term literacy achievement (Mol & Bus, 2011). Our county has general and childhood poverty rates of 20% or higher (USDA, 2015) and many areas are identified as "book deserts" (Unite for Literacy, n.d), that is, places in which few books are present and access to books and other reading materials is difficult to obtain, particularly without readily accessible forms of transportation (Neuman & Moland, 2019; Unite for Literacy, n.d.). Acknowledging that quick fixes do not yield sustained change to highly entrenched social problems as low literacy achievement and inequitable educational opportunities (Bradley & Katz, 2013), we worked to address this problem through a collaborative, cross-sector effort with community partners, volunteers, educators, and parents to build a literacy coalition to increase access to books and promote reading enjoyment (Atkinson, et al., 2019; 2022). The community coalition's goal is for all children to read on grade level by grade 3; reading proficiency in grade 3 correlates with later school and career success (Hernandez, 2012). Investing in early childhood literacy is critical for children's academic attainment and available life choices; every dollar appropriated to services for children aged 0-5, a period of rapid brain development, brings a greater return on investment than do all the monies devoted to K-12 schooling and job training (Heckman, 2008).

What counts as effective reading instruction has long been debated in the US, and the current political climate for literacy policy and instruction is particularly divisive and contentious. The code-based skills of early literacy are necessary but insufficient for growing

capable, life-long readers. Skills are essential for becoming literate, but any conception of literacy that begins and ends with skills is impoverished and damaging to students, families, and educators. Holistic reading instruction approaches consider reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking to be interdependent language processes that are interrelated with engagement and social and cultural contexts. Yet in the current SoR policy context, skills-oriented instructional approaches receive a disproportionate investment, while initiatives that focus on reading comprehension, student motivation and agency, teacher decision-making and agency, family engagement, and community literacy are overlooked or de-prioritized.

Approach

We describe and discuss two parallel early literacy initiatives with which we are involved: a statewide initiative aligned with the SoR movement and a community-based, collective impact initiative to form and sustain a local literacy coalition. Beginning with the state level legislative and policy actions, we share timelines for the two initiatives, each unfolding across multiple years. Then we take a close look at one aspect of each that has particularly captured our attention, time, and effort. For the SoR initiative, we share the perspectives of university faculty participating in LETRS professional development, using an interpretive (Erickson, 1986) approach that draws on discourse analysis (Gee, 2014). For the community literacy initiative, we describe our involvement in efforts to put high-quality books in children's homes and support shared book reading in families. In closing, we analyze the costs and benefits of each initiative for a variety of stakeholders including and consider the ways in which these initiatives have the potential to shape literacy instruction and practices for years to come.

A range of qualitative and quantitative data informs our analysis of the benefits and costs of the two early literacy reform efforts. One data source is a chronological timeline and

description of the major state actions used to promote and implement SoR policy initiatives, along with their costs (when known). LETRS PD forms the backbone of state-wide SoR initiatives. Data sources for the analysis of LETRS PD include researchers' notes in response to individual work and virtual group training sessions design and content and researchers' video recorded debriefing sessions following each group training.

The community early literacy coalition enlisted multiple community partners for developing sources of funding and to implement programming to promote access to books and enjoyment of reading. We will share a chronological timeline and description of the major community coalition actions and data sources documenting the benefits and costs of the coalition's early literacy programming, primarily through expanding book access in homes and community (Atkinson et al., 2022).

State Level Initiatives

The timeline in Figure 2 represents only a portion of the literacy policies and initiatives that have been enacted in NC over the past several years. We focus here on just the latter half of the timeline, beginning with the Resolution on Teacher Preparation, (B.O.G. Res. (N.C., 2020)) passed by the UNC System Board of Governors in 2020. This resolution tasked the UNC system with developing a Comprehensive UNC System Literacy Framework for teacher preparation that would be adopted by all 15 EPPs in the system (a similar framework was eventually adopted by most private EPPs). As stated in the resolution, the Board of Governors shall: "ensure that the literacy framework is based on the abundance of evidence on effective reading instruction, complies with state law and regulation, and ensures that teaching candidates receive explicit, systematic, and scaffolded instruction in the essential components of reading" (Board of Governors Resolution, p. 2). A co-author on this paper was one of eight faculty members from

across the UNC system selected to develop the framework during the fall semester of 2020. The following semester, spring 2021, all 15 UNC system EPPs were required to engage in a self-study process to determine elementary education and special education general curriculum alignment with the new literacy framework and develop an action plan for program improvement, as determined necessary by the individual campuses. Also, as part of the Resolution on Teacher Preparation, plans for in-service teacher professional development were to be made, with those efforts leveraging the expertise of faculty from within the UNC system. Specifically, the UNC System Office would "work with leading programs in the System to identify or create a professional development model for in-service teachers that is aligned with the literacy framework, with the intention of piloting that model by summer 2021," if funding was available.

Figure 2

Statewide Timeline of Reading Education Legislative and Policy Initiatives

As EPPs were engaged in this mandated work, revisions to the Excellent Public Schools Act of 2012 were making their way through the state legislature. Those changes, resulting in the Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021 (S.L. 2021-8 (N.C. 2021)), essentially nullified the work that had been accomplished by university faculty at the UNC System level. The responsibility for

in-service teacher professional development was shifted from university faculty to an external, for-profit vendor (ultimately determined to be LETRS). Shortly thereafter, a related provision charged the Board of Governors with contracting an external consultant to evaluate the progress EPPs (both public and private) were making integrating SoR priorities into their coursework. The UNC System Office issued a request for proposals (RFP) to engage with an external evaluator in December 2021. After two extensions to the RFP deadline and with no proposals received, the System Office consulted with (unnamed) national literacy experts for recommendations and ultimately approached the Teacher Preparation Inspection-US (TPI-US) group, who agreed to complete the evaluation (Interim Report on Science of Reading EPP Coursework Implementation, University of North Carolina System Office, 2022). TPI was awarded $500,000 for this contract. Why this particular group was recommended or by whom remains unclear. It is also unclear how much more has been appropriated (if anything) for aspects of the review that have extended far beyond the original timeline.

In the sections that follow, we explore two avenues North Carolina has taken to support reading development for young children. Though not formal findings, below we discuss the results of, and our experiences in, these two paths. These are structured in the following manner: First, we discuss the state-level SoR policy initiatives by describing (a) our experiences with LETRS and the non-financial costs associated with that training, (b) SoR policy initiatives and the financial/non-financial costs associated with those initiatives, and (c) benefits of those initiatives. Then, we discuss the community literacy coalition by describing (d) an overview of the coalition, (e) the costs associated with the coalition, and (f) the benefits of the coalition. Here we conceptualize "cost" as any expenditure (be that effort, sacrifice, or financial) made to

achieve an objective – in this case the objective is for young North Carolinians to become better readers.

LETRS Professional Development

In response to changing legislative expectations, in July of 2021, the UNC System invited its EPPs for a limited number of faculty to participate in LETRS professional development. Though not mandated, several faculty members from our institution, East Carolina University (ECU), volunteered as we thought it would be helpful to understand what our graduates and current and future students would be expected to know to successfully support students in public schools. In addition to reading two manuals (LETRS Volumes 1 and 2; estimated reading time: 18.5-28 hours), completing online modules (estimated online time: 50-61.5 hours), and the eight day-long live training sessions that correspond to each of the eight units (estimated live session time: 60 hours) required to complete the two-year training program (Voyager Sopris Learning, n.d.), those of us from ECU met as a study team. We documented our reflections on the content, our participation in the online modules, and the synchronous trainings. For every day-long training, we conducted a debriefing session to report on our individual and collective experiences during the training and to reflect on the corresponding unit. Through our study team debriefing sessions, we identified several concerns about LETRS that we conceptualized as non-financial costs: the quality of the training design, the validity of the content, the effectiveness of the program, and a pattern of deficit language use regarding students from non-dominant communities.

Non-financial Costs of LETRS

Though the experiences of ECU faculty members and our UNC System faculty colleagues differed in some meaningful ways from the average classroom teacher, including our lack of a classroom of elementary-aged students with which to practice the skills we were taught

and use the materials we received, we experienced the same primary content and delivery systems as every classroom teacher. Across two years, we completed the following units: The Challenge of Learning to Read; The Speech Sounds of English; Teaching Beginning Phonics, Word Recognition, and Spelling; Advanced Decoding, Spelling, and Word Recognition; The Mighty Word: Oral Language and Vocabulary; Digging for Meaning: Understanding Reading Comprehension; Text-Driven Comprehension Instruction & The Reading Writing Connection (Moats & Tolman, 2019a, 2019b).

While there are some positives to the design of LETRS' training program worth noting, such as the expectation that participants use what they have learned in their classrooms (Charner-Laird et al., 2016; Main & Pendergast, 2017), the training diverges in consequential ways from established research on how adults learn (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Clark & Hollingsworth, 2002; Mezirow, 1991; Sparks, 2002), such as a lack of opportunity to critically engage with the materials and research base for the delivered content. That content is then delivered repetitively (distinct from spiraling) with limited opportunities to work collaboratively during the training sessions (although the degree of collaboration depended somewhat on individual facilitators' choices about time use). A considerable portion of the online work either directly repeats the information provided in the physical textbook or focuses on repetitive, low-level skill-focused tasks (e.g., sorting pictures and vocabulary). Furthermore, the in-person/virtual sessions frequently repeat nearly verbatim information from the book and online modules. During these in-person/virtual sessions, participants also have very limited time to inquire about or construct meaning around literacy development and instructional choices.

Our concerns about the validity of the content derived from persistent patterns of research misrepresentation, research overreach regarding the connections between study findings and

classroom practice, and omission of salient research. Research cited by LETRS is often decontextualized and/or misrepresented. For example, LETRS frequently promotes the idea that only 33/34% of students are proficient readers, but 95% of students could learn to read on grade level if teachers used effective teaching practices (Moats, 2020). The implication is that implementing practices as outlined in the LETRS program will move us toward 95% of children reading. This implication can be seen on the Lexia LETRS Professional Learning homepage (Lexia® LETRS®, n.d.), where those statistics are closely followed by the statement, "Teaching reading requires a deep understanding of the processes and science behind it. LETRS is the professional learning program rooted in the science of reading that empowers teachers."

What is obfuscated in this discussion is how reading proficiency is defined. The 33/34% figure represents the average proficiency at fourth grade reported on the NAEP, an exam that measures a complex interweaving of literacy skills and strategies associated with language, decoding, and comprehension. Meanwhile, the 95% claim—which LETRS implies is achievable if the practices promoted within the program are implemented with fidelity—draws on several studies carried out with students who were experiencing reading difficulties or who were receiving different instructional interventions (Mathes et al., 2005; Torgesen, 2004), without clear guidance on what is defined as successful reading. Is it accurate decoding alone? Does it require specific comprehension strategies like inferring or being able to synthesize and use information effectively? LETRS is unclear. The juxtaposition of student success on a measure like NAEP against the ill-defined expectation that 95% of students can learn to read is effectively comparing apples to orangutans. Torgesen (2004), in fact, who is cited by Moats and Tolman (2019a) to support the 95% claim, cautions that estimates of success based on word reading

accuracy in the primary grades may be overly optimistic when used to project success on a group-administered reading comprehension measure at the end of third grade.

When research results are accurately represented, the applicability of the results can be overextended. This is most notable in how often LETRS promotes instructional practices designed for and evaluated with students diagnosed with disabilities for application with typically developing students in general education classrooms (e.g., Brady, 2011; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Kilpatrick, 2015). This, in and of itself, would not be problematic if LETRS provided evidence that these additional, specialized supports are appropriate for all students.

Another issue is how LETRS is developed from a research base that mostly omits the contributions of qualitative research (Moats & Tolman, 2019a & 2019b). Even research that could be considered "high quality" per the metrics typically used by the SoR movement (see NRP criteria) has been omitted. For example, "invented spelling," or phonics-based spelling, promotes phonemic awareness as well as (or better) than other practices (e.g., Chapman, 2003; Ouellette et al., 2013; Vernon & Ferreiro, 1999). However, encouraging teachers to use this practice with students is barely mentioned in sections of the manual devoted to spelling and writing instruction and omitted entirely from sections on phonemic awareness.

Perhaps surprisingly, little research has been published about the effectiveness of the LETRS program. Further, the handful of existing studies have reported that LETRS training sometimes positively impacted teacher knowledge but did not produce desired outcomes in students' reading achievement. To our knowledge, there are no peer-reviewed publications of LETRS professional development and its impact on student achievement. In an Institute of Education Science study, the largest published study of LETRS to date, Garet et al. (2008) used an earlier version of the LETRS PD to compare student reading achievement across three

conditions - LETRS PD, LETRS PD plus coaching, and business-as-usual. Across 270 grade two classrooms in 90 schools, the researchers found that teachers who participated in either of the treatment conditions scored significantly higher on a post-test of teacher knowledge and both groups were more likely to use explicit instruction than were teachers in the business-as-usual condition. However, these improvements for teachers did not translate into improved reading achievement for their second-grade students in either the implementation year or the year that followed. The absence of a substantial body of research on LETRS and the mixed results of those studies suggest we should approach widespread implementation more cautiously.

Finally, the worldview demonstrated in LETRS materials is Western culture-centric, monolingual, and mono-dialectical. One clear example of this is in the form of the texts included in the training materials. Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1914), Atwater and Atwater's *Mr. Popper's Penguins* (1938), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (Skeat, 1900), and Jacob's *The Fables of Aesop* (1902) are just a sampling of the texts included in LETRS. These texts represent a corpus of literature often called "classics" but are also considered an "uncritical rehash of the traditional power culture" (Christenbury, 2000, p. 15).

Further, we identified a pattern of deficit lens language applied to multilingual learners, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and speakers of English whose dialects differ from mainstream "school" dialects. LETRS often frames children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities as deficient in their knowledge and use of language. For instance, in the unit on vocabulary and oral language, LETRS (Moats & Tolman, 2019b) asserts that "some children come to school already suffering from word poverty" (p. 9) and later advises that "classroom discourse—teacher talk and student talk—can be a powerful antidote to the effects of impoverished home language environments..." (p. 58). The implication is that

multilingual learners and students from non-dominant communities need to be cured by teachers of their diverse linguistic, communicative, and cultural repertoires.

Financial Costs of LETRS

In addition to the substantial non-monetary costs of LETRS to educators and their students, the financial cost of LETRS training is staggering and continues to grow, as illustrated in Figure 3. What started as a $12 million appropriation in 2021 has now swollen to over $90 million as the State required LETRS training for not only K-5 teachers but also school administrators, instructional coaches, and NC Pre-K teachers (Fofaria, 2023). In addition to enrolling all these educators in LETRS, the State and many school districts have incurred costs for such things as LETRS kick-off parties, teacher stipends for participation, and substitute pay for teachers completing LETRS training during the school day. Although these various teacher incentives have been well publicized in media accounts of LETRS training (e.g., Doss Helms, 2021; Fofaria, 2022), their total costs have not yet been reported. While not directly related to LETRS, significant monies are also being appropriated by school districts across the state for new SoR-aligned commercial instructional programs, and at least $500,000 has been expended for the external evaluation of early literacy coursework conducted by TPI-US. As noted above, that figure has likely ballooned as TPI's involvement has continued well beyond the original December 2022 timetable. These costs, of course, tie directly back to North Carolina educational policy initiatives related to SoR.

Figure 3

Financial Costs of LETRS Training
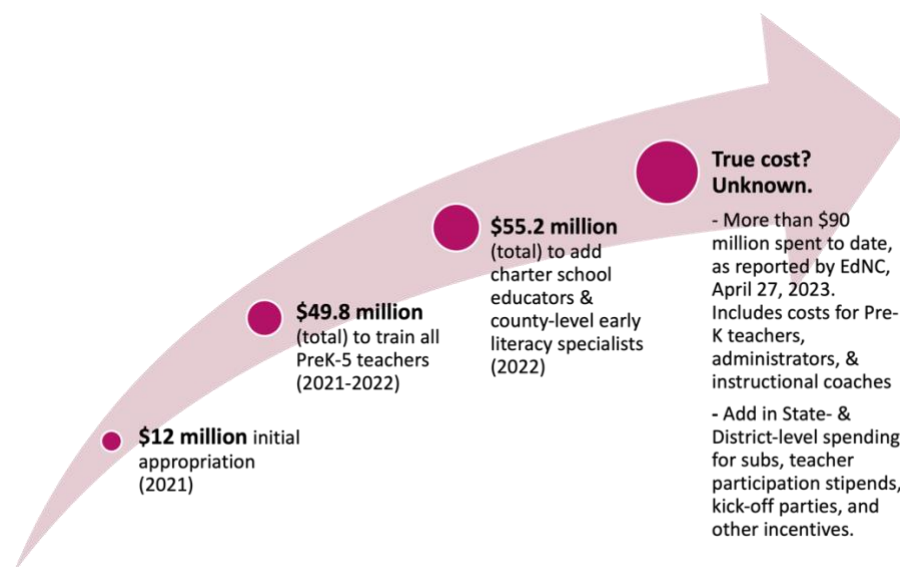
Science of Reading NC Policy Initiatives

Non-financial Costs of NC Reading Policy Initiatives

There are numerous costs of the SoR policy initiatives detailed above, including LETRS. As noted above, we have concerns about some of the content of the LETRS PD, what has been excluded and included, and the lack of empirical evidence that teachers' participation in LETRS will yield improved outcomes for students. At the K-5 classroom level, we are concerned about research-to-practice issues, with recommended instructional practices often presented as "one size fits all" to accomplish a particular learning goal. There are potential emotional costs when teachers are expected to adhere to the sweeping requirements of SoR initiatives while they are overtly told in the introductory LETRS module that their EPPs inadequately prepared them. Echoing this message, one fourth grade teacher remarked, "I've said to my colleagues a couple of times, I wish I had this information as a beginning teacher. I wish that it were a requirement for beginning teachers as a college level class," (Fofaria, 2022). Related to these sentiments are the feelings of guilt and regret some teachers express in media coverage of the SoR movement about their instructional decisions prior to participating in LETRS training, such as this third-

grade teacher: "But that was because I didn't know... We didn't have the training that I'm getting now. So you have that guilt and that coulda, woulda, shoulda, but I just did not have the knowledge that I have now," (Fofaria, 2021).

Through our work with in-service teachers, we hear about many cases in which teachers are asked to follow scripted programs "with fidelity" rather than relying on their expertise and knowledge of their students. This guidance includes a heavy emphasis on decodable text, particularly for K-1 students, with scarce opportunities for these young students to read any other types of texts themselves. We also have concerns about the new K-3 reading assessment, [mCLASS DIBELS 8](#) (North Carolina mClass, n.d.), adopted by NC as part of these SoR initiatives. While North Carolina used the mCLASS assessment in the past, it included a measure of text reading and comprehension at that time. In its current iteration, the text reading and comprehension part of the assessment has been eliminated, and it is, at this point, essentially DIBELS 8. Problematically, as of the 2021-22 school year, the state has used DIBELS 8 growth data for teacher evaluation purposes in kindergarten through grade 5, making this a high stakes assessment for teachers. Therefore, teachers and schools are under pressure to show improved growth scores, which are reported regularly in statewide publications. Across these grades, we hear that significant time is devoted to improving students' scores on the DIBELS assessment versus instruction.

In practice, this means many are teaching to the test, including using instructional time to teach and practice reading nonsense words in kindergarten. In some cases, this has resulted in a de-prioritization of literacy instruction beyond explicit, systematic phonics instruction and can undermine early readers' understanding of the purpose of reading and the importance of constructing meaning from text. Further, such teaching to the test can artificially inflate students'

scores on high-stakes tests such as the mCLASS and can mislead policymakers (Westfall & Cummings, 2023). In North Carolina, the Department of Public Instruction has pointed to kindergarten gains on mCLASS from the beginning to the middle of the year as early evidence that the state's Excellent Public School Act of 2021 and its investment in LETRS training are beginning to pay dividends (McClellan, 2023). While this may be the case, early impacts on highly discrete reading skills such as the ability to read nonsense words do not necessarily translate into the long-term, sustained literacy improvements the state desires.

Significant educational costs are being borne by higher education as well. In North Carolina, as part of the current legislation, continuing approval for EPP teacher preparation is dependent upon a finding that the EPP is addressing SoR in their teacher preparation curricula, with that determination tied to the external audit by TPI-US. As of January 2023, nine of 15 UNC System EPPs were rated as "needs improvement" or "inadequate" by TPI-US and have been required to make significant changes in their teacher preparation programs, such as creating brand new SoR courses. The remaining six EPPs are making less substantial changes. According to a [January 2023 Board of Governors resolution](#) (B.O.G. Res. (N.C., 2023)), all UNC System teacher preparation programs in elementary education and special education general curriculum will address areas identified in the audit as needing improvement by July 1, 2023. The chancellor, provost, and dean from any EPP not providing evidence that areas in need of improvement have been addressed will be called upon to present to the Board of Governors Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs which will, in consultation with the university President, "decide what remedies are appropriate to ensure compliance" (Resolution of the Board of Governors of North Carolina, January 19, 2023, p. 2). It is not currently known exactly how it will be determined that the mandated changes to EPP courses have been made,

nor is it clear who will make that determination. What is clear is that this is an unprecedented intervention by the state government into teacher preparation, with an external, private company wielding significant power over what gets taught in teacher preparation courses and how that content is organized and delivered across a program by university faculty.

It is worth noting that this review, with such tremendously high stakes for EPPs, was not even considered to be a "full review" by TPI-US. According to their executive report to the North Carolina Board of Governors, "Full TPI-US reviews include interviews with an extensive set of stakeholders (teacher candidates, recent graduates, school principals from placement schools and those hiring program graduates, classroom mentors, program faculty, and district administrators) as well as analysis of key data on candidate academic and clinical performance; completion and employment rates; survey feedback from graduates and their employers; and the impact of graduates on student learning. That additional evidence—part of the typical TPI-US review of EPPs—would be useful for determining how well North Carolina teacher candidates can apply their SoR knowledge and skills in classrooms across the state..." (NC Board of Governors, 2023, p. 35). Thus, without even the benefits of a full review, the time of many teacher educators is being drained to address the audit, and entire departments have been threatened into compliance or risk losing their ability to grant teaching licenses.

Benefits of NC Reading Policy Initiatives

We reflect on the potential benefits of the intense focus on early literacy development and instruction by these state-level reforms. The steps imposed by the State did yield some benefits for us as faculty members. For instance, we found working across literacy studies, elementary education, and special education programs during our EPP self-study helpful for identifying places of overlap across courses and gaps in addressing particular skills and understandings

across degree programs. The self-study resulted in an action plan that will be used to support continued collaboration across our departments and programs, and we acknowledge that this level of collaboration would not likely have evolved on its own. Working from the [UNC System Literacy Framework](#) that had been developed via SoR reform efforts, we collectively identified several important areas for improvement, including more attention devoted to oral language and reading fluency, more time for students to engage in practicing instructional routines, and more "accountability" in some coursework for pre-service teachers' learning. We promptly began work on these course revisions and did not need an external auditor to compel us to do so.

Community Early Literacy Initiatives

In addition to these significant state-level literacy policies and initiatives in North Carolina, recent community-level literacy initiatives have been launched and strengthened across the state under the leadership of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation in collaboration with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading. The following paragraphs describe one of these initiatives in which the authors have been involved.

In our rural, eastern North Carolina county, collective community stakeholder discussions began in 2014 (see Figure 4 for a timeline of community initiatives) about how to increase the percentage of children who come to kindergarten ready for school learning, increase the percentage of children who are reading proficiently by the end of third grade, and ultimately improve high school graduation rates. Discussions led to forming an early literacy coalition meant to promote and accomplish these goals (Atkinson et al., 2022). Through the coalition's efforts, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) book distribution program was made available to babies and families in 2016, funded locally at first, then by the state in 2017. At DPIL startup, several of us conducted a study to investigate the baseline relationships between

at-home shared reading (SBR) practices and children's language/literacy abilities and skills at kindergarten entry (Anderson et al., 2018). Findings included significant correlations between SBR and a number of language/literacy measures including children's reported interest in reading, outcomes on narrative retelling, print concepts/reading behaviors, and letter naming/phonemic awareness composite. In a follow-up research study, when compared to parent reports from the baseline year, Year 1 parents of rising kindergartners reported greater frequency of shared book reading (SBR), greater engagement with their children during SBR, and greater children's interest in being read to (Anderson, et al., 2019). Findings also revealed the need for additional strategies to support DPIL enrollment and maximize family SBR experiences.

An important next step for the community coalition included the creation of a Community Solutions Action Plan, endorsed by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading. The coalition then launched organized efforts related to Little Libraries, Book Nooks, and another book distribution program for older elementary students at nine local elementary schools called Kids Read Now. DPIL newsletters and preschool parent/guardian sessions were designed to encourage and support family-shared reading at home, especially with babies and Pre-K children, and focused on DPIL books. Fifteen quarterly newsletters were created, published, and sent to DPIL enrollees for four years. Each newsletter reached approximately 5,000 families and included a message of encouragement from a community leader, tips for reading with a child, DPIL book highlights, parent/guardian testimonials, and resources/links. Two Parent/guardian mini-sessions on "Reading to Get Ready for Kindergarten" were offered at the school district's early childhood center for families with children enrolled in NC Pre-K (state-funded preschool). Session leaders demonstrated interactive reading (modeled after READ Charlotte's ABCs of Active Reading: Ask questions, Build Vocabulary, Connect to Kids' Worlds) using the DPIL

books that families received. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted and prevented the completion

of school-based research efforts, newsletters, and parent mini-sessions, but DPIL, Little

Libraries, Book Nooks, and Kids Read Now remain ongoing initiatives.

Figure 4

Timeline of ENC Community Literacy Initiatives
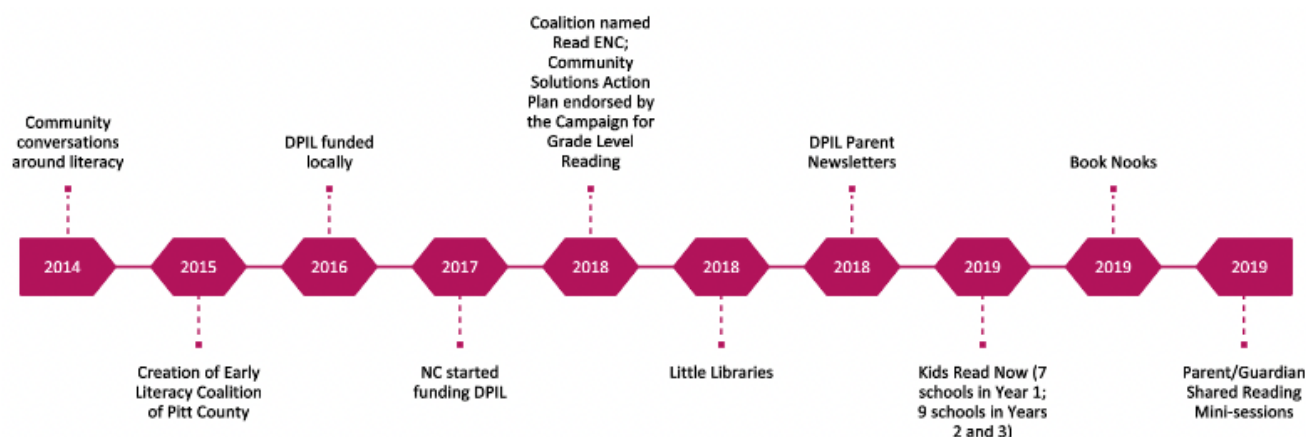
Costs of Community Early Literacy Initiatives

The yearly financial cost of community initiatives has evolved over the years. The

leadership of the community coalition costs approximately $30,000 and is paid for by our

university, in alignment with ECU's commitment to public service and regional transformation.

The book distribution programs—DPIL and Kids Read Now—cost approximately $40-50 per

child per program and are currently funded almost completely by the NC State Legislature and

the Pitt County Public Schools, respectively. The public library supports a part-time Imagination

Library Coordinator position. Some minor costs are associated with the Little Libraries and Book

Nooks, but they are primarily volunteer provided and run. Other costs include volunteer and

intern time, book donations, and office space and supplies.

Benefits of Community Early Literacy Initiatives

Investment in consistent, multi-directional collaboration and communication has resulted in numerous benefits impacting our university and community. First, the community experienced an enhanced awareness of and interest in early literacy initiatives (e.g., local school district, ECU Community School, social media, newspaper). Additionally, early literacy efforts were examined and documented to avoid duplication, leading to the identification of critical systems and processes that could bolster early literacy efforts (e.g., engaging the hospital in newborn DPIL enrollment). Finally, additional community partners such as the post office, bookstore, businesses, school system, were engaged in early literacy efforts, resulting in increased book access for children and families through DPIL, community Little Libraries, and Book Nooks, as well as the Kids Read Now summer reading program.

Table 1

Book Access and Distribution

Program	Purpose	Time Frame	# Books Distributed
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library	Books mailed monthly to enrolled children 0-5 years old. 72% enrollment rate in Pitt County.	2016-2022	452,417
Little Libraries	Books placed in 40+ locations county-wide, covering 650 sq. miles. Continued installation of new units, especially in rural areas, and promoting public access with online LL map.	2018-2022	Thousands

Book Nooks	Books placed and replenished in 7 public locations, including restaurants, barber shops, and laundromats, to encourage family reading.	2019-2022	Thousands
Kids Read Now	Self-selected books mailed in summer to economically disadvantaged K-3 students to mitigate the "summer slide."	2019-2022	47,993

Discussion

Thus far in this paper, we have discussed separately two approaches to supporting early literacy in North Carolina. In our discussion we will share our perspectives on these two initiatives, juxtaposing the associated costs and benefits of each. We hope to share concerns about SoR policy implications for educator preparation programs and K-3 classrooms, particularly for teacher educators in states that have not yet embraced the SoR movement as comprehensively as ours. At the same time, we aim to spark conversations around alternative literacy initiatives in pursuit of similar goals and how localized, grassroots initiatives can empower families and communities through expanded access to books and promoting children's motivation for reading and writing.

Even from the beginning of our state's SoR policy initiatives, it was clear where these reform efforts were headed: more emphasis on phonics in elementary reading instruction, with blame for the state's reading woes placed on teacher education. We made multiple efforts to participate in related conversations and serve as voices of reason and moderation within state-

wide forums, yet our cautions went unheeded. In a state noted for its higher education system, the legislature and UNC Board of Governors opted not to engage with university faculty as true partners to achieve desired educational reforms nor capitalize upon their expertise for leading teacher professional development in literacy instruction.

We acknowledge the potential value of in-service teacher professional development. A long-standing and robust body of research supports the value of job-embedded professional development that extends across time, engages teachers in communities of learning, and is connected to the daily work of the classroom (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1995; Desimone et al., 2002; Penuel et al., 2007). While we have our disagreements with the LETRS PD, we do not reject it in its entirety. We understand that teachers cannot learn everything they need to know about literacy instruction in their preservice programs. Ongoing, job-embedded PD is an essential aspect of growing as a teacher, and we are hopeful that two years of professional development will result in some positive outcomes for K-5 students. This assumes that someone is available to support teachers' understanding of how this information can be best used to meet the needs of individual students in their classrooms at various grade levels (not a given). Our participation in LETRS, while a constant source of consternation, has also helped us understand the expectations of our teacher candidates as they enter NC classrooms, has allowed us to make connections between course content and SoR terminology, and has provided some direction for us as we work to help our students understand literacy research and what we know and do not yet know in terms of how this applies to instruction.

Although we cannot present causal evidence that our community literacy coalition's initiatives improved early childhood literacy in our county, we know that the cost for LETRS training state-wide *to date* is $90 million. $90 million channeled to promoting early literacy and

family literacy engagement during the birth-5 period of greatest cognitive development could potentially yield a much greater return on investment of state monies meant to impact reading achievement. While we acknowledge that teachers can gain some beneficial knowledge and practices through participating in LETRS training, genuine investment in children and teachers would mean developing teacher expertise and decision-making capacity in view of the complexity of learning to read and write. Literacy difficulties in children persist at what we agree are unacceptable levels because there is not a one-size-fits-all solution for the nuanced, challenging work of literacy instruction and intervention that will work for every learner.

Conclusion

After analyzing and sharing our perspectives on the financial costs to date of the state's SoR initiatives, the corresponding costs of time and effort for university faculty and K-5 teachers, the potential long-term reputational and emotional costs of disparaging teacher preparation programs, and most importantly, the potential cost of long-term changes in early literacy preparation, instruction, and practices that may not all prove to be in the best interest of children, their families, and our communities, we have far more questions than answers.

The goal of the SoR policy initiatives is to yield improved early literacy outcomes, with LETRS serving as the chief pillar of state-wide efforts in North Carolina. What do we currently know about the active ingredients at work in North Carolina's SoR initiatives? To reiterate, there is limited existing research on LETRS, with mixed results at best. Further, although we have never seen a previous systematic, intensive reading professional development program for all elementary teachers implemented statewide in such a brief timeframe (three years), there have been many historical education reform efforts in North Carolina and beyond that privileged phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and encoding in K-3 literacy instruction.

The most recent example is Reading First, a major federal initiative that allocated $6 billion for improving K-3 reading education, with a preference for awarding grants to schools serving students living in poverty and with low reading test achievement. Between 2002-2007, Reading First promoted "scientifically based reading research" aligned commercial programs, teacher professional development, and instructional coaching that emphasized a "phonics first and fast" approach in grades K-3. The aim of this approach was to inoculate students against short- and long-term reading difficulties by prioritizing word recognition in the early grades over other components of the reading process, such as the development of language comprehension, engagement, and self-regulation (Afflerbach, 2022; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). However, a large external evaluation of the program found that the reading comprehension of students in Reading First schools was no better at Grade 3 than that of comparison students in non-Reading First schools (Gamse et al., 2008).

The outcomes of the Reading First program suggest that word recognition skills, while essential for reading development, are insufficient for producing readers able to construct meaning from text. Instead, comprehensive approaches to literacy instruction that include a high volume of experiences reading and writing connected texts are needed (Cunningham, 2017). Considering the results of Reading First, we continue to wonder if students will benefit from North Carolina's SoR policies, and if so, which ones? Will the outcomes be equitable for students? How this all turns out remains to be seen, but we are skeptical that we will see the gains anticipated by legislators and policy makers, in view of history and the wide body of research on effective comprehensive literacy instruction.

North Carolina was one of the early states (after Tennessee) to fund DPIL on a state-wide basis, helping to set the standard for other states to follow. We would be unable to maintain the

strong implementation of DPIL in our rural county without the financial support of state funding. There is ample evidence of the positive impact that early exposure to books and shared reading experiences in the home have upon young children's mastery of school-based literacy (e.g., Anderson et al., 2018), suggesting that the state's investment in DPIL is money well spent. Meanwhile, the state has spent $90 million to date for LETRS training with no research to suggest this commercial program will help improve children's early literacy outcomes. We are struck by this stark contrast and wonder if we might someday see a parallel $90 million investment in effective early childhood education and family outreach programs.

In view of these lingering questions, we call upon the state to make robust financial and political investments in birth-5 literacy and language development. We call for funding high quality preschool programs and early educators, family engagement in and empowerment through literacy, expanded access to books, and championing children's life-long motivation to read and write through supporting and expanding dynamic community initiatives, such as our community literacy coalition.

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"Can't We Just Enjoy the Book?": Disciplinary Literacy and Teachers of Literature

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Abstract

This study explores four teachers' emerging understandings of topics related to disciplinary literacy (Moje, 2008; Rainey & Moje, 2012), including the goals of the discipline of Literature, the purpose of using literary texts in the ELA classroom, and the practices of literary experts. Interview data is used to derive and order concepts to aid in generating substantive theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) regarding teachers' understanding of DL in ELA and Literature. Findings include: (1) participants believe that the study of literary texts catalyzes personal development, (2) participants believe that the texts of Literature (a subdiscipline of ELA) are useful for teaching basic literacy skills, (3) some participants feel a sense of estrangement from literary experts and consider their methods irrelevant to the K-12 context, and (4) some participants feel that their district materials and high stakes testing reduce the amount of time they can spend on "enrichment" work that involves aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1982) and artistic products (Smagorinsky, 2015). Implications for teacher preparation are discussed.

Keywords: Disciplinary literacy, English education, literature, teacher education

"Can't We Just Enjoy the Book?": Disciplinary Literacy and Teachers of Literature

Disciplinary literacy (DL) is a theoretical framework that emphasizes reading experiences as taking place in the context of disciplinary communities' culture and practices (Moje, 2008; Wiesner et al., 2020). According to DL, disciplinary communities are marked by specific ways of knowing, doing, thinking, and acting (Gee, 1996). They use particular discourses, methods of inquiry, epistemologies, and genres (Moje, 2008). The variation of literacies across school subject areas that align with academic disciplines presents special literacy challenges for students and teachers (Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010).

DL has garnered significant interest among scholars of literacy education (e.g., Goldman et al., 2014; Lee & Spratley, 2010; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010; Rainey & Moje, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2015). Also relevant are several interview studies focusing on reading literary texts (e.g., Chapman, 2015; Rainey, 2016; Warren, 2011). What these and other studies related to DL in ELA have in common is their focus on expert literacy practices and how they differ from novice practices. However, it is not clear how disciplinary literacy in ELA is conceived of by teachers, who are responsible for applying the knowledge generated by literacy scholars in their classrooms. Therefore, there is a need to give an account of teachers' understanding of DL. This will help teacher educators, school leaders, and policymakers to assess the potential for DL to aid classroom teachers and to design teacher preparation, teacher professional development, and teacher certification accordingly.

Disciplinary Literacy in ELA

The application of DL to ELA has some history in the research literature. In addition to studies such as Rainey (2016), which explicitly invokes disciplinary literacy theory, our understanding of DL in ELA is based partly on several expert studies (Eva-Wood, 2004; Graves

& Frederiksen, 1991; Harker, 1994; Peskin, 1998; Warren, 2011; Zeitz, 1994) that document the literacy practices of professors and graduate students in the discipline of Literature. Taken together, these studies reveal a set of goals, values, and inquiry methods specific to the discipline (see Table 1).

The goals of the discipline of Literature are based in the study of literary texts, specifically those that are both difficult to interpret and packed with multiple layers of meaning (Rainey, 2016; Warren, 2011). The study of these texts, therefore, involves an effort to probe beyond literal or "plain sense" meaning and reveal the text's "poetic" meaning (Harker, 1994; Zeitz, 1994). These efforts may produce new knowledge about how literature "works" (e.g., Fish, 1990; Richards, 1930; Rosenblatt, 1982), and they may also provide insight into big questions about human psychology (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Campbell, 2008), personal development (Malin, 2018; May, 1975), and cultural transmission (Applebee & Purves, 1992; Elliott, 2020; Purves & Pradl, 2003).

"Interpretation" in the context of Literature refers to a mode of inquiry involving copious rereading and cross-text reading (Chapman, 2015; Rainey, 2016; Warren, 2011; Zeitz, 1994). In the course of interpreting a challenging literary text, expert readers of literature must apply not only their deep knowledge of genres, conventions, and literary devices, but they must attend to their emotional involvement with the text, as this provides clues to the text's deeper meaning (Eva-Wood, 2004; Rainey, 2016). Additionally, expert readers find it necessary to bring a wide range of knowledge from other disciplines, for example, psychology (Bruner, 1986) and mythology (Chapman, 2015). The product of this disciplinary inquiry is an interpretation of the "poetic significance" of the text (Harker, 1994), which is essentially an argument for a particular reading of the text in question. The purpose of sharing interpretations is to invite reactions and

contestation--literary experts understand that interpreting a literary text is communal work, even as much of it is done in solitude (Chapman, 2015). This social element is crucial to refining the disciplinary community's understanding of any text (Rainey, 2016).

Table 1

Disciplinary Literacy in the Discipline of Literature

What does disciplinary literacy (DL) look like in the discipline of Literature?
● Focus on texts that defy attempts to interpret them (Peskin, 1998)
● Attention to structure, paratext, patterns, puzzling sections—linger and reread (Rainey, 2016; Chapman, 2015)
● Deemphasize excerpts; prioritize full-length texts and interpretations drawing on multiple texts and interdisciplinary knowledge (Rainey, 2016; Chapman, 2015)
● Emphasis on collaboration as opposed to lecture; revise interpretations based on peers' contributions (Rainey, 2016)

Disciplinary Literacy and Teacher Preparation

Masuda (2014) analyzed data collected during a course designed by the author to educate pre-service teachers about the importance of disciplinary literacy. Participants were preparing for careers as teachers of various subjects (Science, Math, History, ELA, and Physical Education) at the secondary level. Data included participants' lesson plans and written reflections. Masuda identified trends in the participants' understandings of disciplinary literacy and articulated several opportunities for improvement of the course. Overall, that study found that the pre-service teachers understood that disciplinary differences meant that what texts and ideas are emphasized must change depending on disciplinary context. Among the things students struggled

with were conceiving questions that would precipitate discipline-specific thinking and analyzing how texts represent the practices of a given discipline. With regard to the English education students in the study, Masuda (2014) found that they emphasized analysis, evaluation, and interpretation concerning reading, and they believed that respecting cultural diversity was important to interpretation. They also recognized that their ability to bring discipline-specific vocabulary and concepts (e.g., text structures, literary devices) to bear in their reading, writing and discussion was a key part of what made them more expert than their students, and they planned to engage their students in learning about these things. These teachers stood in contrast to the rest, who did not intentionally design instruction through a disciplinary lens.

Similar to Masuda (2014), this study aimed to explore gaps in teachers' emerging understandings of disciplinary literacy. In contrast to Masuda (2014), this study's participants were in-service teachers working at the elementary level. Additionally, the interview protocol (Appendix A) focused on the teaching of literature. Generally, DL is associated with secondary grades: secondary teachers are expected to mentor students in engaging with texts in discipline-specific ways (Lee & Spratley, 2010). To what extent it is desirable and practical to promote DL in elementary classrooms remains an open question. Students who read well at the elementary level often struggle with reading in middle and high school due not only to the increasing complexity and amount of text but also because, at that level, texts vary more across disciplines (Council, 2010). It may be that the "adolescent literacy crisis" (Council, 2010, p. 10) could be alleviated in part by more systematic instruction in DL at the elementary level. Disciplines are not simply a collection of information, so promoting DL at the elementary level would not necessarily require students to engage with complex disciplinary texts but could focus on their development of what Masuda (2014) describes as a "disciplinary perspective": an understanding

of how knowledge is constructed, produced, and contested in the disciplines that students will study at the secondary level (what was found to be lacking in the participants in that study).

Given this relatively novel line of inquiry, this qualitative study aims to make inductions grounded in data collected from questionnaires and interviews conducted with a small number of in-service teachers. Research questions are (1) What are teachers' emerging conceptions of ELA and Literature? (2) What do teachers think the role of Literature in K-12 education should be? (3) How do teachers plan to apply DL in the teaching of Literature, if at all?

Methods

Participants and Setting

The four participants volunteered for the study after taking an asynchronous online graduate-level course on DL at a flagship public university in the southeast U.S. The course provided an overview of adolescent, academic, and disciplinary literacy. It familiarized students with strategies for supporting disciplinary literacy development and specific strategies for supporting English learners. Students were familiarized with the Common Core State Standards. They ultimately produced a plan for a unit of instruction that integrated reading and writing to promote content area learning for all students. The author was the teaching assistant for the class; all communication with potential participants made clear that their grade in the course was in no way dependent on their choice to participate in the study and that once enrolled, they could opt-out at any time with no penalty.

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 44 years and ranged from three years experience in the case of the least experienced teacher to 20 years for the most experienced, with the average being 9.25 years of experience. Two of the participants had experience at the elementary level, one had experience at both the elementary and secondary level, and one had experience

exclusively in early childhood education (1st grade). All four participants have experience

teaching ELA (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participants

Name	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender identity	Grade(s)	Subject(s)	Previous Subjects	Teaching experience (years)
Angela	31	White	Woman	1st	All core subjects: Math, Social Studies, ELA, Science	N/A	10
Corinne	28	White	Woman	4th, 1st, and 2nd (emotional and behavioral disorder)	Math, Social Studies, ELA	N/A	3.5
Britney	25	Black	Woman	Grade 2-10 (interventionist)	Reading and Math	6th Grade ELA; 7th Grade ELA	4
Delia	44	White	Woman	5th	Social Studies	Reading, Writing, Language Arts, Math, Science, Grades 1-4	20

Note: All names are pseudonyms

Procedure

The participants filled out an online questionnaire which collected the information in

Table 2. Subsequently, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol

based on Spradley (1979), which included six open-ended questions in four domains (see Appendix A). Data collection took place over two weeks in June 2022. Participants were interviewed individually; all interviews took place via Zoom and were conducted by the author, who wrote a reflective research memo after each interview (Tracy, 2020). Interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes; they were recorded by the author and transcribed.

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with Sarah Tracy's (2020) phronetic iterative approach. First, the protocols were read once through. Analysis of the data then began with open coding, with special attention paid to the segments of the protocol(s) which contribute most to understanding the research questions (Yin, 2009). At this point, analysis was limited to low-inference codes following phronetic iterative analysis. For example, Corinne said, "For ELA, they have a mixture of different texts that are read…you can use all the skills that are taught in ELA. You can use them in any subject." This was coded as "Interdisciplinarity/supporting other subjects" because of the explicit reference to using ELA skills "in any subject." While speaking about her classroom practice, Corinne said, "…one of the stories could have a main focus on problem-solution, and then the next day or week we would focus more on cause and effect…. the main goal is that the students can practice those skills…you can do a lot more skills with literature." This was coded as both "Personal development of students" and "Enculturation" because of Corinne's reference to "problem-solution," which was a thinking skill she associated with building up students' ability to resolve conflicts in their personal lives as well as in the classroom.

Reflective journaling involved recording incipient claims about the data, e.g., that the participant(s) believed Literature had a role to play in the personal development and socialization of youth. Throughout several more read-throughs of the interview data, these codes and claims

were tested by making comparisons across protocols and were gradually refined (Tracy, 2020).

As the goal was to uncover "new concepts and…to systematically develop categories" (Strauss

& Corbin, 1998, p. 71), the author considered as many meanings and purposes for word choices,

etc., and thereby avoid as far as possible imposing onto the data notions that were not intended

by the participants (e.g., Harker, 1994). Axial coding produced a hierarchy of codes in somewhat

higher-inference categories based on data convergence areas (see Table 3). Participants were

provided with an early draft of this report which featured these codes; one participant provided

feedback corroborating the author's interpretations.

Table 3

Axial Coding

Category	Associated codes
Purpose of ELA	1. Essential literacy skills
	2. Interdisciplinarity/supporting other subjects
	3. Multimodality
Purpose of Literature	1. Support fundamental literacy skills
	2. Personal development of students
	3. "Imaginative play"
	4. Writing literary text
	5. Learning literary analysis
	6. Building background knowledge
	7. Media literacy
	8. Criticality
	9. Creating excitement around reading and writing

	10. Appreciation
	11. Enculturation
Assessment and accountability	1. Administrators and coaches
	2. Time pressure
	3. Assessment
Literary experts	1. Literature as an inflexible discipline
	2. Literature as irrelevant
	3. Literature as exclusive
	4. The study of "high-level" works
	5. Canonical works

Findings

Given the study's design, the findings presented below and the subsequent discussion must be interpreted as respecting these particular teachers and cannot be generalized. Examples of data coded in each of the four major categories are presented below; the research questions and implications are discussed in later sections.

The purpose of ELA

ELA was considered by the participants to be practical for life outside of school, as well as crucial for academic advancement.

One purpose of ELA that came up in all interviews is the subject's role in imparting **essential literacy skills** necessary for communication, such as reading signs and periodicals and interacting with new people using established genres. Angela, a 1st grade teacher, described ELA as "the active teaching of communication and processing information and comprehending the

things that they need to become functioning members of society." She described her efforts at

teaching reading as preparing each student to be "a real person." Angela even suggested that

without ELA instruction simple literacy tasks such as completing a transaction at the grocery

store or reading road signs would be "nearly impossible." This represents how the participants

embraced the idea of ELA as an eminently practical school subject that is necessary to teach

students how to engage in society.

Participants also considered ELA a subject with a significant element of

interdisciplinarity--not only in terms of the texts it uses, but also in terms of the way "ELA

skills" lay the foundation for and ultimately transfer to the study of other subjects. Britney said

that ELA class needs to teach students how to "apply what you have read to other disciplines,"

while Delia said it involves reading a wide range of genres from a wide range of time. Britney

made a point of saying that images should be used in the ELA classroom, and Delia also spoke

of **multimodality**, saying the range of texts used in ELA should include electronic and online

texts.

The uses of literary text

The participants articulated many benefits of studying literary text and expressed many

goals that teaching literature at the K-12 level can help achieve. These were often distinct from

the goals they associated with ELA more generally, although there was some overlap. Broadly

speaking, there was consensus about the multifaceted nature of studying literary text, but there

were areas of divergence regarding how literary text helps students and what goals teachers

should emphasize.

As in their discussion of ELA, the participants stated that studying literary text **supports

the development of literacy fundamentals** (e.g., motivation and comprehension). Angela spoke

of how one of her goals in using literary text is to build students' ability to make inferences. Similarly, Corinne said that reading literary texts gives students practice making inferences of a particular type: "You are able to go into the story and solve things that the character doesn't just come out and tell you; you can put together so much more in the story." Echoing the data on the purpose of ELA, Delia said that literary text has a place in the curriculum because it can help students prepare for academic success in general. She said that literary text could often ease the work of **building background knowledge** that will help students to achieve in other subjects.

Another goal of using literary text that the participants shared was to catalyze **personal development** in their students. This consisted of socialization, enculturation, and socio-emotional growth in general. For example, Angela referred repeatedly to using literary texts to practice "problem and solution" with her students, and Corinne also used this term in the same context. Angela and Corinne each explained that this consists of students considering and potentially adopting the problem-solving strategies of characters they read about. Corinne spoke of the benefit to students of solving problems alongside characters, of going through the process of imagining and considering different solutions. She said that literary texts could help students learn "life lessons" that they can use outside of their engagement with text. Angela described literary text as "growing their worldview."

Delia explicitly named empathy as one quality of her students that literary text helps develop, saying that they have the opportunity to read "outside of [their] limited life experiences." In contrast, they might have read about people like themselves if left to their devices. At the same time, Delia spoke of how studying literature can increase students' understanding of their own culture and appreciation of it; as an example, she explained how her

experience with the film *O Brother, Where Are Thou?* was "deepened" and "enriched" by her knowledge of *The Odyssey.*

Angela suggested that literary text can spark connections among students by encouraging them to share out loud experiences they have had that relate to those in the texts they study. In her opinion, this contributes to a healthy classroom dynamic. Corinne spoke of what is in some sense the obverse: the way literary text presents an opportunity for students to "get away from themselves" and "in other people's shoes." Britney described a roleplaying activity that she had participated in as a student: while studying the book *Mississippi Trial, 1955* (Crowe, 2003), which was inspired by the murder of Emmett Till. She and her classmates acted out some of the scenes from the book; Britney described the feeling in the classroom as tense and emotional but said that the activity led to conversations that precipitated growth and which would not otherwise have happened. She referred to this sort of activity as "enrichment" and explained that she feels there is too little of it in ELA classrooms. Delia said that she would often plan her use of literary text with community building in mind and that her school emphasizes book clubs and partner work based on discussing literature.

Angela described literary text as involving **"imaginative play"** whereby students can live through the story (as in Rosenblatt's transactional theory). Similarly, Corinne spoke of a unique way of going "above and beyond" using literary text. When pushed to clarify, she struggled, but she suggested that literary text allows readers to "add ourselves to the text" and "put myself more in the shoes of a fictional story." Delia spoke of strong readers achieving a level of immersion that amounts to "living it with the characters."

Literary experts in the academy write criticism that explicates the **literary analysis** they have done. They present their interpretations of literary text and offer it up to the disciplinary

community to be contested (Chapman, 2015). Corinne acknowledged that there is a skill set that is explicitly used to read literary text, and she spoke of practicing the skill of putting oneself in the author's shoes in order to understand why the text was written the way it was. In a bit of a contrast, Angela emphasized that people with a high level of skill in reading literary text are identifiable by their ability to comprehend the plot of a narrative and retain information from the text. However, she acknowledged that there is a "higher level" of reading that depends on the work done at the elementary level and may lend that work a "deeper purpose." Similarly, Britney talked about how literary text should be read for "a deeper level of comprehension," which she said involves an understanding of "what the text is saying [and] what the text isn't saying" and going "far beyond the basic, oh, what did that author say again?" Britney said that the ultimate product of this sort of thinking is an argument in favor of a particular understanding of the text as well as a consideration of what understanding(s) was intended by the author.

Delia spoke of literary text as sensitizing students to patterns in text. She talked about skills in reading literature as making connections between different texts and genres, as well as between texts and background experience. Skill in reading literature requires flexible thinking, according to Delia. Delia also suggested that literary text can be used to teach **critical media literacy**, saying that studying literature would help students to be critical consumers of plays, commercials and TV shows, among other things.

In terms of driving **excitement around reading**, Angela expressed her belief that exposure to realistic fiction and fantasy works can show students "how incredible reading can be." Corinne said that after learning to read literary text, students may find reading nonfiction text "less dry." For Delia, class time devoted to literature represented an opportunity to cultivate what she called students' "natural engagement with reading." This includes guiding students as

they choose books, read widely, develop preferences, and experience enjoyment/appreciation. However, she also expressed her sense that this sort of engagement fades as students progress in school.

Assessment and accountability

As explained above, the participants emphasized that their respective curricula tend to encourage a study of literary text that prepares students for academic success in ELA and other subjects. For the participants, this means administration and assessment may discourage emphasis on personal development and "enrichment," which they perceive as having a domino effect. This was especially true for Britney and Delia, who had experience with upper elementary students (as well as secondary students in Britney's case).

Delia stated that many of her upper elementary and secondary students have done only what is required for school and may only realize the more non-academic benefits of engaging with literary text in the event they "circle back" to literary text later in life when the pressure of meeting academic goals or performing on exams has passed.

Delia felt that the trend toward an "academic" emphasis over the "authentic" or "applicable" side of literature speeds up even more in the high school grades. This prevents literature reading from crossing over into their lives outside of school. Britney made a similar observation, saying that the intermittent "enrichment" activities that she experienced as a student helped her to apply what she was learning in her "real life." In contrast, today's students are often focused on getting the skills they need and moving on to the next stage of the curriculum. This means that students have fewer opportunities to participate in the sort of "difficult conversations" Britney had concerning *Mississippi Trial, 1955* and which she feels are unavoidable in adulthood.

Delia explained that one manifestation of this academic emphasis is the prevalence of canonical works in secondary ELA. Britney echoed this, saying, "I would say currently the goal of teaching certain literature is to be prepared for the end of year assessments typically." According to Delia, the centering of such literary texts not only discourages students from developing their preferences and reading identity but also focuses the class around a "very in-depth academic-style analysis" built around applying specific disciplinary terminology and methods of inquiry.

In contrast to Delia and Britney, Angela and Corinne mostly felt they were allowed to emphasize enrichment and personal development to the extent they wished to. When she was asked about how literary text should be used, Angela responded, "I guess I think it should be used similarly to how, at least in my experience, it already is," and talked about how it has a role to play in setting the purpose for reading generally and increasing motivation. This data would seem to support Delia's claim that the amount of time spent on "enrichment"-type activities and school work concerned with reading for reasons other than test prep decreases as students progress through the elementary grades.

The community of literary experts

The participants' comments about the community of literary experts in academia converged and diverged in interesting ways. Once again, some convergence was seen in the data from the interviews with Britney and Delia, whereas those protocols diverged from the other two. Angela and Corinne spoke of literary experts as benevolent and as doing relevant and helpful work to their efforts as elementary school teachers. In talking about those who study highly complex literature, Corinne offered, "They're actually really important." She went on to

say that the work these experts do helps elementary school teachers understand "other skills out there that we are not aware of that could help students become better readers."

Angela said that the "higher-level works" that experts deal with are "intrinsically boring." However, she added that it is important for someone to read them, and that this work helps direct teachers toward the deeper purposes of studying literary texts with students. Angela also sees the existence of a literature professor career as providing some standing for keeping literary text in the curriculum, and she expressed that producing people that can pursue that work is an important function of the ELA curriculum.

Britney mentioned some similar functions of the role of a literary expert. She said that one function they fulfill is explaining to people how literary works written in a different context may still apply to today's world. She also expressed that they have a role in correcting people who have incorrectly interpreted any given work of literature (including other experts).

More than the other participants, Delia pointed to a disconnect between her work and the work of literary experts. As mentioned, she associated the work of literary experts with "canon-style" reading that is focused on repeating specific procedures for interpreting texts. She spoke of a plethora of terminology and rules and described them as taking the fun out of reading once students are exposed to them at the secondary level. She described this as contributing to "readicide" (Gallagher, 1994). She shared a personal anecdote about how her daughter had greatly enjoyed reading for school before she was initiated into the "academic" type of reading with its focus on "in-depth, prolonged analysis" that "beat the book to death." "Like can't we just enjoy the book?" she said. "And I don't think that's the goal of a literary expert [to prevent enjoyment], but I do think it's sometimes a side effect of their desire to be so thorough."

Delia also associated this type of work with a distinct disciplinary culture and values. In contrast to her description of the benevolent book clubs of her school, she described the community of disciplinary experts as "the book club that they're not gonna invite everybody to" and said they have an air of superiority. She described literary experts as "entrenched" and pedantic, eager to correct others, and said that their bearing alienates people outside of their community. Accordingly, Delia found literary experts to be isolated in general and from educators in particular. While admitting that this seemed overly negative and might not correspond to reality, Delia said that she believes these ideas may turn away people who might otherwise engage with literature and suggested that her ideas about literary experts are widespread.

Discussion

Disciplinary Literacy and the Work of Literary Experts

While they didn't consistently identify them as expert practices or use the term disciplinary literacy, the participants made multiple references to specific knowledge and skills that researchers have identified as crucial to the literacy practices of professors of Literature. The participants did not go as far as naming discipline-specific vocabulary and concepts that they would share with students as the pre-service teachers in Masuda (2014) did. However, they nevertheless articulated a belief that literature reading is concerned with reaching a level of meaning beyond the literal. This reflects the findings in expert studies such as Harker (1994) (wherein the distinction is made between "literal" meaning and the deeper level of "poetic significance") and Zeitz (1994) (which makes a similar distinction between "basic representation" and "derived representation"). Both of those studies found that experts and novices share an understanding that the purpose of reading literary text is to uncover a deeper

"point" about life that the author wishes to make. (This was articulated by Britney in the current study when she talked about the need to read on "a deeper level" than normal comprehension.) However, experts in the aforementioned studies were shown to have knowledge and skills that allowed them to read on this deeper level more consistently and with better outcomes. Moreover, the participants in the current study acknowledged those skills and that knowledge as well: specifically, the participants mentioned pattern recognition (Rainey, 2016), cross-text reading (Chapman, 2015), extensive background knowledge (Chapman, 2015; Zeitz, 1994), and knowledge of genre and conventions (Harker, 1994; Peskin, 1998; Zeitz, 1994) as playing a significant role in reading literature on this more profound level. In terms of practices, the participants discussed the importance of discussion in their classrooms--specifically, all except Corinne mentioned the importance of debating the merits of competing interpretations, which is fundamental to the practices of literary experts (Chapman, 2015; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010; Rainey, 2016).

Personal development

The personal development of students was often associated with emotional engagement with literary text. For example, their development of greater empathy, their learning of "life lessons," and the continued growth of their "reading identity" were described as contingent on having fun or experiencing some other type of emotional entanglement with a literary text. Additionally, much of the language the participants used when discussing the potential for literary text to catalyze personal development (e.g., talk of walking in a character's shoes, talk of entering the story in some sense) reflected the language of Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory of reading. Like the participants, Rosenblatt (1982) speaks of living through an experience while reading literature--what she calls "aesthetic reading." Rosenblatt's theory has

had a major impact on the culture and methods of Literature as a discipline in the academy

(Beach & Swiss, 2011), and it was meant to have a significant impact on K-12 education, per the

1966 Dartmouth Conference (Squire, 2003). However, the participants' conception of literary

experts as reading in an unemotional way suggests that their teacher training and/or the curricula

they use may have enmeshed them in a view of the discipline of Literature as primarily

promoting text-based theories such as formalism. Similarly, Harker (1994) found that novices

think of interpretations of texts as falling into a right/wrong binary, and as they read, they worry

they will produce the "wrong" interpretation. In each case, this might be explained by the fact

that the AP Literature exam exalted the strict text-based analysis associated with formalism (as

opposed to the more reader-oriented theories of Rosenblatt and others) in the mid-20th century,

which had implications for the entire K-12 curriculum (Squire, 2003). While studies show that

literary experts focus on form, they also draw on various disciplines and contextual knowledge

(Chapman, 2014; Peskin, 1998) and improvise strategically based on their emotional reactions to

literary text as they read (Eva-Wood, 2004). In contrast to Delia's description of literary experts

as pedants, many of the participants in expert studies express joy while reading literature and

strongly assert their belief that multiple perspectives are crucial to the success of literary analysis

(Rainey, 2016). These seem to be the exact things that the participants would like to do with their

students, yet they have somehow learned that the culture of literary experts is esoteric and

exclusionary.

    While the sort of student-centered pedagogy (i.e., focused on personal development and

students' practical needs) articulated by the participants may typically be associated with

progressive education and concordantly seen as standing in defiance of academic content and

literacies (Applebee, 1974), personal development is associated with the most fundamental goals

of ELA (Purves & Pradl, 2003; Squire, 2003). Therefore, what may seem like a line in the sand may be more accurately construed as an area of confluence between student-centered/reader-oriented frameworks and the cultivation of DL in Literature.

Assessment

Britney and Delia, in particular, expressed that assessments exert a constant pressure on the curriculum such that teachers are encouraged to teach to the test. One result they highlighted was the diminishment of activities that encourage aesthetic reading and personal development.

Recognizing that standardization is unlikely to promote disciplinary literacy in Literature classrooms, McConachie and Petrosky (2010) recommend that teachers focus assessment on students' habits of inquiry, problem-solving, and discussion,

Assessment is a necessary part of schooling. If assessments that instantaneously quantify skill in reading literature relative to a standard must be used, then they should at least be prevented from determining the content of the ELA curriculum completely, if it is at all possible. If this line is not drawn, then much of the literature that emphasizes ambiguity in interpretation may be on the chopping block, and expert practices such as cross-text reading and revising one's interpretations may be deemphasized for the sake of efficiency.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The small sample size used in this study means it is more difficult to describe the results as typical of all ELA teachers or any single subgroup. All the teachers who participated in the study volunteered and taught in the same state, which also has implications for transferability. Additionally, it may be that these participants were unusual in that most elementary teachers do not take courses in DL. While this sample was appropriate for an exploratory study, future studies would benefit from using a larger sample to reinforce this study's findings about

teachers' conceptions of Literature and ELA. Additionally, drawing on multiple sources of data (e.g., district curricula, classroom artifacts, and observations) in addition to interviews would allow for triangulation (Yin, 2009) and avoid this study's reliance on interview data.

As suggested above, this study has implications for teacher preparation and professional development. For example, assuming ELA teachers as a group are reflective of the participants and have strong feelings about the potential of literary texts to support personal development, then teachers and pre-service teachers who are expected to be frequently using literary texts in their classrooms should be allowed to discuss these beliefs amongst themselves during their training and professional development in a manner consistent with DL in Literature (Rainey & Moje, 2012). This might include a discussion of how literary texts have been used for personal and moral development in the past (Applebee & Purves, 1992; McClellan, 1999; Purves & Pradl, 2003) and the affordances and weaknesses of various lenses associated with reader-oriented theories. To be truly novel and effective, these discussions should aim for more than just developing cross-cultural competence in teachers and students (e.g., Keengwe, 2010) and delve deeply into questions of how literature interacts with the need of human beings to construct meaning out of the raw materials of their lives (Newkirk, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1991).

Additionally, pre-service and in-service teachers would benefit from a better understanding of the work of literary experts. In developing a better understanding of the work of literary experts and the disciplinary culture they operate within, classroom teachers may be able to better use literary texts to facilitate DL in Literature. Secondary teachers and literary experts should be responsible for educating their elementary colleagues on this topic (Masuda, 2014). Clarity about the literacy practices of disciplinary experts may also help teachers of Literature to

effectively advocate for increased time for "enrichment" work with literary texts at the K-12 level.

Along with replicating the results of this study, future research might seek to understand where K-12 teachers' ideas about the discipline of Literature and literary experts originate (i.e., are teachers learning that there is an emphasis on right/wrong thinking among literary experts, and if so, where?). Additionally, partnerships between researchers and classroom teachers could focus on how disciplinary ways of thinking can be productively emphasized in elementary grades.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Opening script:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I am going to repeat some information

from the informed consent form you completed.

I am a researcher interested in learning more about how pre-service teachers understand and

make use of disciplinary literacy theory. To prepare for analysis, identifiers from all data will be

removed. Names will be replaced with pseudonyms on all class work. The names of participants

involved in the research will not be included in any written or oral presentation of this work. It is

highly unlikely that you will be identifiable in any presentation of this research. What was your

preferred pseudonym?

Domain: The Purpose of ELA and Literature

Question 1: What is the purpose of ELA as a school subject?

Question 2: What is the role of Literature in ELA as you understand it today?

Domain: Using Literature in the Classroom

Question 3: How are you using literature in your ELA class?

Potential Follow-ups

- What is the goal of teaching Literature per your curriculum?

- How do you think Literature should be used in schools?

- What specific goals do you hope to accomplish with the use of literature?

- How does Literature/literary text contribute to your goals as a teacher?

- What challenges, if any, do you experience when teaching with literary texts? How did you cope with these challenges?

Domain: Skills and Goals of the Discipline

Question 4: What does it mean to be literate/skilled in Literature?

Question 5: What are the goals of literary experts as you understand them?

Domain: Literature in Life

Question 6: What skills that students learn through studying Literature would they most benefit from using outside of school?

Closing script:

Thank you for your time. I may contact you if there is a need to clarify information, ask additional questions, or perform member checking (i.e. to solicit your feedback on my findings). If you have any questions about the study, please contact me. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Institutional Review Board.

Teaching Tip

Peer Tutoring for Students with Disabilities: Study Buddies in Middle-Grade Settings

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Abstract

This teaching tip describes a tutoring program that pairs high-performing high-school students with middle-school students with learning disabilities in after-school tutoring. Tutees gain academic skills as grades improve over the school year, and they have an increase in self-advocacy. Tutors also gained self-confidence. The program has expanded to other schools. The first author intends to research the findings to validate this approach.

 Key Words: Tutoring, Learning Disabilities, High School Students

Peer Tutoring for Students with Disabilities: Study Buddies in Middle-Grade Settings

This teaching tip describes pairing high-performing high-school students and middle-school students with learning disabilities. Study Buddies of Miami, a peer tutoring after-school club, expanded into a nonprofit organization. From a sociocultural theoretical framework, peer tutoring is a flexible, peer-mediated strategy involving students serving as academic tutors and tutees (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2001), studies have proven that tutoring improves self-confidence about reading, motivation for reading, and behavior among tutees and tutors.

When Study Buddies first opened in 2018, students in honors classes tutored students with varying exceptionalities, such as Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Other Health Impairments (OHI). We wanted to know how peer tutoring by high school students would help middle school students with disabilities improve their academic achievement and self-advocacy skills.

We began collecting data and analyzing tutoring patterns based on scholarly articles and studies. All these articles indicate the benefits of peer tutoring and its correlation with the Special Education community. What makes it so effective? How much tutoring needs to occur to see academic progress? Those are just some of the original questions that provided the impetus for this project. The first author and other students established procedural information with the CEO of the Study Buddies, Alan Mancebo. All tutors must have a 3.5 GPA or higher and take a minimum of two honors or AP courses. Once their academic standing is confirmed, the tutors need to obtain a letter of recommendation from three teachers stating that they believe the students are capable of being part of the program. Some key points that are considered are service, character, scholarship, and examples of model citizenship. One letter must be from a

teacher of the subject they will be tutoring. The final step in the selection process is the

interview. Students meet with Mr. Mancebo to share their resumes and answer questions about

being a tutor. Some interview questions asked are "Why do you want to tutor?" and "What

difference can you make in the life of the child with whom you might tutor?"

Tutees register in one of three ways: parent request, teacher request, and student request.

A parent may email Mr. Mancebo or their child's teacher asking about tutoring services. The

parent then confirms a time to meet in person, via Zoom, or through a telephone conference with

Mr. Mancebo. Teachers also contact Mr. Mancebo regarding a student performing below grade

level or failing a course. Finally, a student can visit the classroom and request tutoring services.

Once they make the request, Mr. Mancebo contacts the parent for permission.

The administrators check weekly with the tutors and tutees to see how they feel they are

doing. We ask about progress and how they think the program is benefiting them. We then tailor

the program depending on their needs and suggestions.

According to Nickow, et al, (2020) over many years and across multiple studies, tutoring

has positively affected students of all grade levels. Nickow et al. (2020) state tutoring sometimes

reaches students at a different level than they may receive in the classroom. For example, this

suggests that a student with A Specific Learning Disability (SLD), a disorder in one or more of

the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, including spoken

or written language, which affects the ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, and spell (IDEA,

1975), may benefit from the relationship in peer tutoring. This further emphasizes the benefit of

peer tutoring among students of varying exceptionalities.

Thus far, the program has expanded into other schools, primarily due to COVID, to provide free tutoring by high school students working not only with middle school students but also with students from K-12.

In the future, the first author proposes to complete a research study to provide data to substantiate this approach.

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