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Teacher Understanding of Student Understanding:

Three Teachers Thinking about their Students Reading Literature

Frederick L. Hamel

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2000

College of Education

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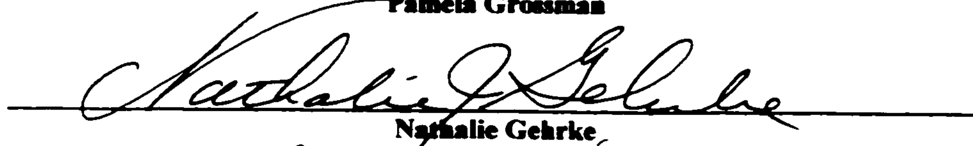

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Abstract

Teacher Understanding of Student Understanding:
Three Teachers Thinking about their Students Reading Literature

Frederick L. Hamel

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee:
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Recent studies in mathematics education suggest an important relationship exists between teacher understanding of student thinking within a subject area and student learning (Carpenter, et al, 1988; Fennema, et al, 1993; Franke, et al, 1998; Peterson, Fennema & Carpenter, 1991). According to this research, student learning depends upon more than teacher subject matter knowledge or even teacher awareness of subject-specific teaching methods. Instead, these studies highlight a relatively understudied domain of pedagogical content knowledge—a teacher's ability to think with the minds of students, to recognize the incipient strategies students may bring to a task, and to develop instruction accordingly.

Such "understanding of student understanding," however, has received scant attention in the English education community. While the research base around student on-line approaches to literature and writing has grown, studies of how teachers in fact conceptualize student understanding have been rare. This dissertation provides such an account. Using a qualitative case study approach, I examine the ways in which three English teachers understand their students' responses to literature. The following questions guided my investigation: How do three English teachers understand their students' responses to literature? What sources influence teachers' thinking about student literary response? How do such conceptions of literary understanding guide instructional planning?

Findings from interviews and class observation suggest that English teachers are curious about how students think about literature but inadequately prepared to draw upon student understanding for instruction. The teachers in this study separated issues of reading from conceptions of literary understanding and were unfamiliar with the details of their students' reading processes. While the teachers had some vocabulary to talk about students' early responses to literature, they used general, non-

disciplinary concepts for describing student performance with higher-level thinking processes. The study argues that prevailing conceptions of curriculum and subject matter knowledge play an important role in directing teacher attention away from novices' acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and toward content concerns. English teachers need opportunities to re-think their assumptions about curriculum, access to richer frameworks for understanding student thinking, contexts for examining artifacts of student understanding, and tools for connecting what they learn to classroom practice.

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Chapter 1: Problem and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Listen to Andrew, Ellen, and Caroline, English teachers from the same high school, reflect individually about their students' ways of responding to literature. Andrew, a teacher with 12 years of experience, comments about the difference between his own reading of a poem and how he imagines students would read:

> *I would probably read it through fairly quickly . . . noticing things I liked, phrases, whatever, lines, and maybe coming back and picking it up, you know, picking through it again and doing a little more thorough job. When students come to it, if they're assigned to read it, I think it works in a different way. . . . they would read through it, struggle with the idea . . . and do it as an assignment. First of all, half of them probably wouldn't read it. But the ones who did would probably be the ones who like poetry.*

Ellen, a second year teacher, reflects on her teaching of literature from the previous year. Asked about her methods for determining students' knowledge and ways of knowing with literature, she replied:

> *Last year I did not do that very well. I made a lot of assumptions because I didn't, um—I guess I didn't really know how to go about doing that. With the writing class I know exactly what to do, but with my lit classes I just expected them to be at a certain level, and then went from there. And what I had to do was adjust as I went . . .*

Caroline, the most experienced of the three and a co-department chair, explicitly points out the difficulties teachers face "reading students' minds" when it comes to their thinking about literature. She reflects below on one student's final essay for a unit her class did on Cyrano de Bergerac:

> *She understands that Cyrano and Christian care for each other but they have their differences. [But] she didn't tell me where. I'm going to have to read her mind . . . . But you know what? I can read her mind; I know where's she coming from (laugh). . . . [reading student paper] they share a special bond. He was there in the end for Cyrano, which, yea, he was. So was De Guiche. I want to know about this special bond. Tell me more, you know. What's she thinking? Is she just saying that? Because I can't tell. I have trouble reading her mind there. And maybe I shouldn't try to read kids', minds because who knows what they're thinking.*

Each day, Andrew, Ellen and Caroline work carefully with scores of students—organizing lessons, reading together, discussing, observing and assessing student work. The brief comments above, however, reflect both teachers' proximity to student efforts and the elusiveness of students' understandings of literature. Determining where students are at, how they think, why the enjoy or resist literature—each of these represents the complications of knowing how and what students in fact "learn" in a literature classroom. For Andrew, basic motivation is a central construct. Students, in his experience, often adopt mechanical attitudes toward assigned literature. Ellen, alternatively, sees a gap in her own teaching knowledge when it comes to students' knowledge with literature.

Caroline highlights a space between students' literary thinking and their efforts at communication. She puzzles over her own role in guessing at, or fleshing out, what students may have intended in their writing. For Andrew, Ellen and Caroline, experience in classrooms has not made such thinking easy to identify, support, or assess.

The purpose of this study is to place teachers' conceptions of student understanding firmly and centrally into discussions of teacher knowledge and teacher learning. Recent studies in mathematics education suggest an important relationship exists between teacher understanding of student thinking within a subject area and student learning (Carpenter, et al, 1998; Franke, et al, 1998; Fenema, et al, 1993; Peterson, Fenema & Carpenter, 1991). According to this research, student learning depends upon more than teacher subject matter knowledge or even teacher awareness of subject-specific teaching methods. Instead, these studies highlight a relatively understudied domain of pedagogical content knowledge—a teacher's ability to conceptualize student thinking productively, to recognize the incipient disciplinary strategies students may bring to a task, and to develop instruction accordingly.

Such "understanding of student understanding," however, has received scant attention in the English education community. While the research base around student on-line approaches to literature and writing has grown, studies of how teachers in fact conceptualize student understanding have been rare. This dissertation provides such an account. Using a qualitative case study approach, I examine the ways in which three English teachers understand their students' responses to literature. How do these teachers conceptualize student thinking and understanding in relation to literature? What sources

influence teachers' thinking about their students' literary responses? How do such conceptions of student literary understanding guide instructional planning?

Conceptual Framework

Recent observers of English/language arts instruction argue that students are being short-changed. Students sit through marginally interesting classes organized around a fragmented, tradition-bound curriculum. Instruction ultimately focuses on inert facts, students rarely engage in discussion, and few opportunities exist for learners to build their own theories or engage critically with texts. Stories of success and transformation exist as well, of course, and are powerful reminders of teaching possibilities (e.g. Miller & Legge, 1999; Rose, 1995), but these remain exceptions on the landscape.[1] Nystrand (1997) characterizes the teaching of language and literature in secondary classrooms as "overwhelmingly monologic," with teachers controlling the direction of discourse and students typically completing questions during seatwork time. Although most English teachers claim to use discussion in teaching, discussion lasted, on average, less than one minute per class period in the 8th and 9th grade classes Nystrand studied (over 100 English/language arts classes). Applebee (1996, 2000) argues that secondary English departments typically recreate their curricula around "catalogs" of canonical texts or chronological sequence—an organizational scheme, he argues, which has lost much of its

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1 Rose's (1995) work, in particular, challenges glib, negative characterizations of American schooling. His descriptions of classrooms across the country reflect a surprising diversity –how "different" schools look and feel across a variety of contexts and regions. In addition, he offers from within each of these contexts rich descriptions of teachers and students engaged collaboratively in teaching and learning. Broad characterizations of schools as "failing," he argues, gloss over this richness and diversity. Rose's account of a successful literature class, however, as remarkable as the account is, is taken from an AP class with an enrollment of 8 students (see Chapter 4).

power to generate spirited debate. As Applebee sees it, English teaching remains organized around specialized content, or "knowledge-out-of-context." Rather than learning ways to enter the vital conversations within the tradition, students learn instead about the characteristics or conclusions of earlier discourse (see also Graff, 1992, 1997). Hillocks (1999) argues that English teachers have great difficulty conceptualizing teaching in terms of the procedural knowledge students need to engage in complex disciplinary thinking. The teachers he studied often undertook instruction without clear ideas on how students would learn the subject matter and with few ways of gathering insight into student responses. Still others have framed their critique around the primacy of literature itself in the curriculum. According to Scholes (1985, 1998), teachers' belief in the literary text as a "quasi-sacred textual object" encourages a particular pedagogic stance—namely, that of transmitting the finest interpretations of the culture. Scholes notes an extensive gap "between our pedagogical practices and the needs of our students," and he suggests that we "rethink our practice by starting with the needs of our students rather than with our inherited professionalism or our personal preference" (1998, p.84).

Each of these observers suggest the need to re-conceptualize the subject matter of English with students' learning needs more squarely in mind. Yet, such recommendations typically occur without up-close or detailed analyses of teachers' habits of mind in thinking about student response. If teacher conceptions of students are an always present factor in enacted pedagogy (Clark & Peterson, 1986), we have little knowledge of the grooved paths, patterns, and byways of teacher thinking when it comes to considering student understanding with literature—those implicit and strategic routes of pedagogical

reasoning teachers will travel, either intentionally or by default, to make sense of their students' displays of thinking. The need for such an analysis emerges especially out of the cognitive turn in psychology which has highlighted the active mental processing learners use to construct new knowledge. For those who wish to support growth in teaching, knowledge about teachers' conceptual and strategic thinking is likewise needed. The cognitive revolution, indeed, highlights the general absence of focus on teachers' understandings of students within teacher preparation and ongoing professional development.

Pedagogical content knowledge

For much of this century teacher knowledge has been understood as an alliance between two separate domains—subject matter knowledge, on the one hand, and general pedagogical methods, on the other. General pedagogical knowledge has typically included strategies for setting content goals for students, suggestions for classroom activities, ways of organizing the classroom environment, and tools for appropriate assessment and measurement.[2] Shulman argues (1986, 1987), however, that perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of teacher knowledge has been under-represented by the polar categories of content knowledge and general methods. A teacher's craft develops around "pedagogical content knowledge"—the interaction of pedagogical reasoning with one's content knowledge of a discipline. Shulman (1987) describes this kind of reasoning as:

> ...the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she

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2 These reflect Tyler's (1949) commonplaces of curriculum. See Schubert (1986) for a discussion of alternative curricular paradigms

> possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students.... to think one's way from the subject matter as understood by the teacher into the minds and motivations of learners (15-16).

Shulman's work has highlighted both the dynamic nature of teachers' pedagogical thinking and the importance of discipline-specific conceptions of students as learners (see Grossman & Shulman, 1994). He argues that the repertoires teachers develop to represent disciplinary content for students reflect a unique professional knowledge base that can be identified and supported. In short, good teaching is not primarily a matter of individual charisma or in-class experience—both widespread beliefs in American culture. Instead, teachers need relevant contexts for constructing professional knowledge—contexts that go beyond experience in the classroom (Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985).[3] Such knowledge involves, specifically, the deepening of subject matter understanding in relation to the needs of learners.

Grossman's (1990) study of six beginning English teachers provides a more detailed explication of four dimensions of pedagogical content knowledge. At the broadest level, this knowledge includes a teacher's assumptions concerning the purposes for teaching a subject matter. For example, one teacher might conceive of teaching literature as a way to promote personal expression and imagination in students, while

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3 Attention to the influence of context on knowledge growth in teaching has also been an important outgrowth of Shulman's work. See, for example, Little and McLaughlin (1993) for a discussion of organizational influences, and Grossman and Stodolsky (1995) for an analysis of the influence of subject matter contexts.

another teacher might see the same task as a matter of exposing students to cultural artifacts (see Gere, et al, 1992, for an overview of four primary stances adopted by English teachers). In addition, teachers have knowledge of instructional strategies/representations for particular topics or texts. These may include "metaphors, experiments, activities, or explanations that are particularly effective for teaching a particular topic" (Grossman, 1990, p.9). A further component is curricular knowledge, which includes a teacher's understanding of instructional units, their sequencing, and materials appropriate for particular grade levels or courses. Finally, pedagogical content knowledge includes knowledge of student understanding, a teacher's awareness of what students bring to the classroom in relation to a subject and what they are likely to find difficult. Understanding of student understanding thus involves awareness of the strengths that students bring, the informal strategies they use to solve problems, common misconceptions in their incipient approaches, and useful next steps for instruction. Ball and Cohen (1999) thus argue that teachers must learn ways to "expand the interpretive frames they likely bring to their observations of students so that they could see more possibilities in what students could do" (8). This dimension of pedagogical content knowledge, which reflects understanding of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, has been particularly neglected as a construct within teacher education, although it may represent the sine qua non of effective teaching.

Disciplinary knowing

The explicit goal of the present study is to contribute to our understanding of this dimension of teacher knowledge—in particular, teachers' efforts to construct

understandings of student understanding in the area of literature. The emphasis on disciplinary knowing within pedagogical content knowledge reflects the insight that learning never occurs in general, but always in relation to specific texts, cases and disciplinary constructs. While learning is not confined to the "compartments" of the disciplines (Beane, 1995), neither does student learning occur in a vacuum, without reference to the accumulated tools and traditions of knowing within a culture (Gardner & Boix-Mansilla, 1994). From the perspective of psychology, Bruner's (1986) distinction between paradigmatic and narrative ways of knowing is relevant. Paradigmatic thought reflects the ideal of formal or mathematically exact description and explanation. The goal of this kind of knowing is to define and fill gaps in knowledge. Narrative knowing, on the other hand, involves "performances of meaning." Narrative texts, Bruner claims, create gaps not so much to be filled once and for all, but to allow readers to "traffic in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties" (26).

Langer (1995) describes literary understanding as a way of knowing often eclipsed in a culture that validates understanding as "making and defending points." Echoing Bruner, she refers to two major modes of discourse: In "discursive" language, the primary goal is to gain or share information. When language is "literary," readers strive to "live through a situation in a subjective manner" (25). For Langer, literary understanding involves a process of "envisionment"—imagining new worlds, exploring possible horizons, trying out roles and experiences that one might otherwise be excluded from, or fear, in everyday life. The process of envisionment is especially embodied in the stances individuals take with literature as they "step in" to a work of literature and as they "move

through" a work, more than when they step back to analyze or make conclusions about the experience. Students may be required, in the course of their literary experience, to "make and defend points," she says. However, such discursive purposes remain ancillary in a process that involves a different, namely "literary," aim—the exploration of alternative experiences. Students who understand literature learn to evoke, and temporarily live through, "secondary worlds," to use Benton's (1992) term, so that these worlds can then work back upon them, loosening, re-shaping and enlarging readers' present conceptions of reality. Rosenblatt (1938/1976) thus argues that through understanding literature one acquires not so much additional information, but additional experience (47). Discipline-specific conceptions of thinking and learning, along with recent research which emphasizes teachers' subject matter thinking within secondary contexts (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994), reinforce the need to explore teachers' thinking about students from a disciplinary perspective.

Understanding understanding

Finally, a reflection on the language of "understanding" is warranted. What does it mean to understand "understanding" itself—a student's understanding of literature, a teacher's understanding of students? This study involves the deeper philosophical question: What does it mean to understand the other? From a hermeneutic perspective, Gadamer (1996) argues that the social sciences of the 20th century have generally drawn upon Enlightenment norms of scientific rationality to answer such questions. In this tradition, objective understanding is possible through systematic doubt and controlled experimentation—methods that attempt to reduce or eliminate prejudice and false

assumption. Researchers with such assumptions might research what "really happens" when students read, for example, then report the results to teachers—who are then expected to correct their biases in relation to the new knowledge.

For Gadamer, however, understanding is not about eliminating prejudice, and our biases are not something we overcome. In Gadamer's (1996) words, "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being" (276-277). Human knowing and understanding are radically bound to finite points of view, or horizons, and our knowledge exists always within a hermeneutic circle—that is, a circle of interpretation rather than objectivity. To understand hermeneutics is to recognize that every moment of understanding occurs within a circle of given circumstances. Our "constant" task in relation to any "other," for Gadamer, is to "bring forward" or highlight our own prejudices, to recognize how such fore-conceptions shape our knowing, and to allow them to be challenged and revised by the other. In the event of understanding, then, prejudices are not eliminated but are brought forward and given a place within a larger horizon. In Gadamer's words: "Working out [one's] fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there" (267). That is, "objectivity" only occurs as we realize that our own prejudices are inadequate, that something else is there, something not constructed by us. Gadamer sees in this event a "fusion of horizons" (306). Truth, then, does not emerge from within one horizon, or from simply espousing the horizon of another. Rather, understanding is generated in the in-between spaces where horizons meet, where otherness is recognized, and where prejudices are revised.

A hermeneutic approach to understanding thus grounds the very purpose of this study. Understanding student understanding cannot be conceived as learning or adopting the student's horizon in itself.[4] Again, for Gadamer, understanding never occurs this way. All understanding of students necessarily presupposes a teacher's limited horizon and bias. Rather than objectifying "student understanding" as a thing in itself, in particular as something researchers alone can identify, and then exposing teachers' partial perspectives, Gadamer's views highlight and encourage the interplay between teacher and student horizons. Teachers' understanding of their students' understanding, the primary construct for this study, is less a matter of objectifying and testing teachers' knowledge in relation to a research base—although attention to this research base is clearly necessary. To understand understanding will involve, instead, richer accounts of teachers' starting points in thinking about students and attention to ways in which teachers identify their own horizons in relation to others. In addition, understanding student understanding implies concrete circumstances—particular teacher horizons in relation to particular students and texts. Knowledge of student understanding cannot occur in terms of general or theoretical students, but is always integrated with specific contexts and circumstances.[5]

Implications

This research holds practical and theoretical implications for teachers' professional development, teaching reform, and for literature education. Reports of literature

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[4] Grossman and Shulman (1994) note that research on teacher knowledge has tended to compare teachers' knowledge of a particular topic to the disciplinary knowledge of experts in the field (6).

[5] Both legal and theological hermeneutics, Gadamer claims, provide the appropriate model for this kind of grounded event. In law, for example, the meaning of a law never exists in the abstract but is discovered precisely in its practical application to a specific case.

classrooms suggest that the experience for students is less than ideal. Yet the research is largely silent on how English teachers think about their practice and on how teachers can change their patterns of teaching to engage students more actively with texts (Grossman, in press). Even if we accept Scholes' critique (1985, 1998) of the inflated role of literature in the English curriculum, literary texts are likely to remain a staple for English teachers for the foreseen future—the media through which the subject matter of English is conveyed. In this respect itself, attention to teachers' conceptions of student literary thinking remains critical. More importantly, though, this study echoes Scholes' sentiment that the English curriculum must connect more faithfully with students' worlds—that student processes for interacting with texts must become more present and central to teacher thinking. Understanding more about how literature teachers conceive of their work thus involves learning about the ways in which teachers map the space between their own disciplinary expertise and the incipient understandings of their students. In addition, we need ways to re-frame the notion of teacher understanding by acknowledging the teacher's role as an interpreter, rather than receiver, of knowledge about students. A detailed examination of these dimensions of teacher knowledge will address the troubling gap in the knowledge base for teaching literature, will illuminate our picture of pedagogical content knowledge in general, and can inform future models of teacher learning for teachers of literature.

In what follows, I present the results of three case studies. In chapter two I provide a literature review and describe my methods for the study. In chapter three I

introduce each teacher, describe each teacher's general orientation toward students as learners of literature, and look separately at each teacher's own reading processes. Chapters four through six involve cross-case analyses, in which I analyze teachers' views of reading in relation to literary understanding, teachers' understandings of how students gain entry to literary texts, and teacher thinking with regard to student interpretation. Chapter seven explores how teachers draw upon their own readings as a resource for thinking about student understanding. I provide a conclusion in chapter eight.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Method

This study joins together two strands of research related to secondary teachers' instructional practice. The first line of research draws on recent investigations of student response to literature. What do students do when they respond to literature? What assumptions, perspectives, abilities, and strategies do they bring to their readings of literary texts? The second line of studies focuses explicitly on teachers' knowledge of student disciplinary understanding and the role such teacher knowledge plays in instructional practice. In this chapter, I review literature in both of these relatively new branches of research before describing the method of my own study.

I. Review of Literature

Adolescents and Literary Understanding

Describing readers' responses

We can trace the origins of researchers' recent investigations of reader processes with literature to the work of I. A. Richards (1929). His study of Cambridge undergraduate students' written responses to literature examined the ways students think about literary texts. While Richards remained dismayed at the non-aesthetic character of student thinking, his work suggested that successful responses to literature are not natural performances but involve conventional strategies that require cultivation and support. Later attempts to identify different dimensions of literary thinking have followed Richards in relying on students' written or oral responses after having read a piece of literature.[6]

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6 See Beach and Hynds (1991) for a review of research studies on students' responses to literature.

Purves and Rippere (1968), for example, developed four broad categories for describing students' written responses to literature. These categories, which have been used extensively in analyzing student response, include: "Engagement/ Involvement" (efforts to make personal or emotional connections to a text), "Perception" (statements of description and summary), "Interpretation" (attempts to generalize meanings from a text), and "Evaluation" (efforts to judge the quality of a text). Beneath these categories, Purves and Rippere include over 120 specific possible elements of response. This descriptive account of reader processes is echoed in Applebee's (1978) study of children's thinking about literature, which assumed four main intellectual modes of response: narration, summarization, analysis, and generalization. In a set of detailed case studies of adolescents reading literature, Thomson (1987) used post-reading interview questions to create a taxonomy of student response. The taxonomy identifies "unreflective interest in action" as the least complex form of response. As readers' develop, they use strategies such as "empathizing" (engaging emotionally with characters and/or situations) and "analogizing" (drawing connections between life and literature) to draw themselves into a narrative. The most complex responses involve "reflecting on the significance of events and behavior," and "defining one's own and the author's ideology." Thomson suggests that such processes, which overlap in practice, occur progressively—so that "later" stages of response depend upon earlier processes. In addition, student response within any stage can occur in a "weak" or "strong" mode.

With the advent of think aloud research in the last three decades,[7] attention to student understanding has shifted to the internal dynamics of readers' strategic processing with texts. Think aloud research has provided more detailed accounts of readers' problem-solving strategies as they construct their responses, and, despite the public culture wars over reading, has lead to a broad consensus in the reading research community on what effective readers do and on the kinds of instructional activities that support growth in reading (Pearson, et al, 1992). The use of think aloud protocols are evident in the literature investigations of Langer (1995) and Wilhelm (1997) and in recent expert-novice studies of reading literature (Earthman, 1992; Peskin, 1998). Literature-oriented studies have broadened the original "comprehension" framework of reading research to include the kinds of strategies that characterize effective readings of narrative.

Langer (1989, 1995) has characterized students' interactions with literature as "stances" rather than linear processes—in other words, as positions that readers take in relation to literary texts rather than a set of intellectual activities. Langer has identified four stances students adopt: "being out and stepping in" to a literary world; "moving through" such a world; "stepping back and rethinking what one knows;" and "stepping out and objectifying the experience." She notes that the "potential impact" of the third stance—"stepping back and rethinking what one knows"—is a primary reason why we read and study literature—namely, it "helps us sort out our own lives" (1995, p.18).

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7 Kucan and Beck (1997) note that verbal protocols of reading came to the general attention of the reading research community with Olshavsky's (1977) article, "Reading as Problem Solving: An Investigation of Strategies." One of the most influential studies supporting this methodology was Ericson and Simon's (1980) "Verbal Reports as Data." For an overview of research on verbal protocols, as well as detailed suggestions for using of think aloud methods in research on reading, see Pressley and Afflerbach (1995).

Langer emphasizes, however, that literary understanding involves primarily a process of "envisionment"—entering into and exploring the possibilities of a world other than ones' own. Langer thus suggests that educators have underestimated the importance of the stances of stepping in and of moving through a literary work. This conclusion is echoed by Wilhelm (1997) who also ascribes priority to students' strategies for entering into, and dwelling within, the storyworlds of literature. Studying both proficient and resistant readers in his classes, Wilhelm found that students who were turned off by literature often bypass the strategic moves of visualizing, placing oneself within the world of the text, and elaborating on that world. He suggests more attention to drama-based or role-playing activities to promote students' access to the secondary worlds of literature.[8]

Earthman (1992) used a reader-response framework to identify differences in experts' and novices' initial responses to short stories and poems. Using think-aloud protocols, Earthman found that expert readers (graduate students in English) made inferences, or "filled gaps" (Iser, 1978), more skillfully than novices. Experts used a text's "repertoire" of signals to generate meaning more effectively. Experts were also able to assume a variety of perspectives more easily. Novice readers (college freshman), Earthman writes, were not only more interested in a single right answer, but they also wanted to get there as quickly as possible. Novices, like experts, filled gaps in texts, but they were less likely to revise their initial ideas. In addition, novices overlooked gaps that

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8 The research of Thomson, Langer and Wilhelm reflects reader-response assumptions for reading literature (Iser, 1978). Marshall and Smith (1997) claim that, despite an array of critical approaches to literature, only reader-response theory has found widespread passage into secondary schools and into the education of English teachers.

experts found extremely relevant. The freshmen readers would express confusion at obscure passages but would not employ strategies to otherwise fill the gaps. In general, the experts in this study approached literary texts in a more "open" manner, drawing extensively on prior knowledge as well as a text's signals to generate meaning.[9]

From perspective of psychology, Peskin (1998) also employed think aloud methods to compare the way experts (graduates students in English) and novices (undergraduates or high school students) responded to difficult poetry. Peskin found several significant distinctions. Novice readers activated general comprehension strategies like re-reading when faced with obscure poetic language, but they were unable to invoke the discourse-specific operations the experts did. Faced with a particularly unclear passage, for example, expert readers typically swerved away from comprehension altogether and began to comment on "how" the language was behaving in the passage. *(Examples of expert comments: "Shorter lines. They look kind of punchy, an epigrammatic effect. The tempo of the poem is sped up...." "It's becoming mysterious... This sounds like a riddle. It sounds like a nursery rhyme. It's a passage which is more pleased with ... creating a mystery than it is with making itself clearly understood"—p.251).* At such moments, expert readers focused on binary oppositions, wordplay, and structure as cues to meaning, rather than trying to figure out the plain sense (250-251). With novice readers, on other hand, "when meaning broke down, most . . . had access only to very general reading strategies experienced in the comprehension of prose" (252). Peskin thus distinguishes between "general" strategic

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9 Fielding and Pearson (1994) point out that, while activating prior knowledge has received emphasis in the reading research community, such research has shifted focus toward the role strategic text reading plays in <u>building</u> knowledge.

operations and those disciplinary strategies that reflect the unique "syntactic" modes of discourse within a discipline (see Wineburg [1991] for similar conclusions in the reading of historical texts).

Rabinowitz (1987), finally, suggests that we can't understand readers' processes without understanding the kinds of texts with which readers interact. Skilled reading processes, in other words, do not emerge automatically or developmentally in a vacuum—but only in relation to disciplinary cultures and conventional discourses. In his book, Before Reading, Rabinowitz argues that readers must learn to recognize and respond to specific rhetorical cues to properly play their role as both narrative and authorial audiences with literature. He argues that literary texts assume in their readers certain shared conventions—"rules of notice" (textual signals that cue readers to give attention to specific characters or events), "rules of signification" (signals that give readers cues to a text's intended values or meanings), and so on. For Rabinowitz, readers must learn to "read" such literary signals if they are to develop the capacity both to interpret and resist literary meanings. Hillocks (1989) and Smith (1989) have drawn on similar assumptions in suggesting that literature teachers must scaffold for students the procedural knowledge necessary for interpreting satire or irony, for example. Hamel and Smith (1998), likewise, describe a unit of instruction that supported students' in the thought processes needed to interpret an unreliable narrator. Without practice with this kind of knowledge, the authors argue, students may try to respond "personally" to complex texts but with little satisfaction and with few tools for understanding a text's rhetorical construction.

Influences on readers' responses

The above classifications of students' responses to literature have provided researchers in English education with a vocabulary for discussing the range of student thinking and potential directions for instruction. Such investigations have looked especially at shared dimensions of responses to literature and have constructed profiles that apply to adolescent readers in general. Other investigations, however, have explored the variations evident in students' responses. What factors influence and/or generate differences in students' readings of literature? Holland's (1975) in-depth study of five readers' revealed correlations between readers' psychological "identity themes" and their understandings of literature. Holland emphasized how readers' reconstruct their own personal issues, tensions, and fears in their unique responses to the texts they read. Bleich (1986) and Flynn (1983) have explored gender-related differences in student readings, suggesting that men and women respond to literature in characteristically different ways. Other researchers have suggested that reading processes with literature vary according to the "styles" or "orientations" that readers bring. Dillon (1982) argues that three distinct styles of reading characterize readers' responses to literature: "character-action-moral" (in which story action is predominant for the reader), "digger for secrets" (in which the reader believes that a single, hidden, author-intended meaning exists), and "the anthropologist" (in which readers seek to interpret potential meanings by investigating unseen personal motivations and cultural assumptions within a text). Vipond and Hunt (1984) have suggested that readers can be described as either "story-driven," "information-driven," or "point-driven."

From a Piagetian perspective, research on young readers has suggested,

alternatively, that differences in student response to literature are shaped by developmental factors (Applebee, 1978; Beach & Wendler, 1987). Applebee (1978) used Piaget's stages to analyze the divergent approaches to stories of children and adolescents. Younger readers read within the concrete world of their own experience, Applebee found. In this stage of "literalism," six year olds, for example, were unable to generalize from common sayings, such as "When the cat is away, the mice will play." Only students at the ages of 15-16 and beyond could make generalizations. Beach and Wendler (1987), using similar assumptions, have traced the shift among adolescents from a "describer" orientation to an "interpreter" orientation—a shift related to the development of formal operations. Younger adolescents are likely to conceive of characters and their actions in terms of external behaviors, short term goals and needs. Older teens, however, show more ability to evoke abstract ideas from stories, perceive larger social or psychological needs and consequences, and begin to adopt other viewpoints.

Other researchers have raised the question of social context and social knowledge, suggesting that students' reading are not solely a result of individual skill or development. Hynds (1989) studied the responses to literature of four 12th grade students and concluded that home support for reading, internal motivation to read, as well as the constraints of school literature instruction (such as "constant evaluation" and the "public setting") strongly influenced readers' responses to literature. Hynds found that one student's difficulties with writing greatly deterred his classroom efforts with literature, even though he skillfully drew connections between life and literature in think-aloud settings. Another student's discomfort with literature while in front of others (even in a think-aloud

interview) led to hesitant and unelaborated responses to literature and her teachers' attribution that she was unmotivated and lacking ability. The student, however, scored highly on measures of "interpersonal cognitive complexity" and read extensively on her own. Hynds concludes that teens may have varied competencies with literature and that teachers must find ways to enlarge their own imaginations about students' abilities with literature.

Rogers' (1991) has focused on the way interpretive communities, teacher expectations, and schools as institutions, shape readers' interpretive responses. For Rogers, literary understanding

> ...must be understood in the context of students' beliefs about how literature ought to be interpreted, including their preferences for particular ways of interpreting literature, and their instructional experiences related to literary interpretation (391-392).

School environments, for example, play an important role in shaping how students think. In studying the literary responses of ninth graders, Rogers found that students were "fairly interpretive." Students could analyze, generalize, and draw conclusions, as well as re-tell and form hypotheses. Few students, however, made extra-textual references, such as connections to other works of literature, to personal life experience, or to cultural perspectives. In other words, student readings most often focused on single passages or texts, worked within the boundaries of those texts, rarely making intertextual links (Hartman, 1995). Rogers found that such readings reflect secondary instructional practices with literature and the "Academic" and "New Critic" assumptions of English

teachers.

Teacher Understanding of Student Understanding

Difficulties understanding student understanding

Understanding the world of the student, the world of the less-experienced other, may be one of the most potent sources for effective teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Yet, this aspect of teaching knowledge remains elusive for both teachers and researchers. Grossman (in press), in a review of research on teaching and learning literature, has found a "general lack of research" on teachers of literature and their ways of thinking. Jackson (1986) has observed that "pupils' understanding" remains one of the major uncertainties that characterize teachers' experience (56). Teachers, in fact, often weigh the benefits of knowing precisely what students have learned, he claims, since such knowledge may complicate social relationships in the classroom. In addition, the typical methods teachers use to determine what their students have learned (direct observation, direct questioning, waiting for students to admit difficulties, and examining after instruction), Jackson observes, leave sizable room for doubt or misperception.

Observational studies of beginning English teachers, in fact, illuminate the difficulty teachers have bridging the gap between their own thinking and student understanding on their own. Grossman (1990) comments that all the participants in her study found understanding student perspectives particularly challenging—although this was especially true for those without English education coursework (105). These findings echo those of researchers in math education. Ball (1996) mentions that math teachers have great difficulty taking on the perspectives of students—"especially when students'

perspectives are so diverse" (501). Gomez and Comeaux (1990), in a study of the early experiences of eight new English teachers, illustrate the difficulty teachers had matching progressive perspectives and techniques, developed in English methods courses, with actual students they encountered in schools, particularly with respect to the diversity of learners. The researchers indirectly point to the teachers' understandings of students as a key area for their ongoing learning, concluding that the teachers needed "more time-intensive opportunities to think through why the multitude of strategies they brought to teaching did not work with particular learners." Knowledge of subject-specific teaching methods in itself was inadequate.

In a study of 19 community college teachers, Hillocks (1999) found that teachers had difficulty inventing instructional activities that linked students' understandings to the subject matter.[10] Hillocks observed few teachers who had ways of making student thinking available during classroom teaching. Of such teachers, he writes:

> Because their activities allow students to respond frequently in class to a variety of factors, they are also privy to what students are doing in response to the activity and what they seem to be thinking. Given this openness, such teachers are able to evaluate progress, consider possible revisions in the activity or the store of ideas available, and take action to facilitate change in their students even while they work (132).

Given the infrequency of this kind of teaching, Hillocks concludes that "changes in teacher

10 Although Hillocks' study focused on writing teachers, he has brought similar assumptions to the teaching of literature (see Hillocks, 1989).

thinking "may come with far more difficulty than anyone may have expected" (134). Holt-Reynolds (1999) suggests that teachers' difficulties understanding student understanding may be related ironically to subject matter expertise. She offers the case of one especially skilled reader of literature (a teacher education student) who had difficulty perceiving her own strong readings of literature as anything other than "average." The student thus did not see her role as investigating differences between her reading and student readings or as sharing with students the distinctive expertise she brought to texts.

Sources for understanding student understanding

Shulman (1986, 1987) proposes that multiple factors shape teacher thinking and may influence teachers' understandings of their students. Subject matter knowledge, for example, is essential for understanding the unique disciplinary problems, questions and competing perspectives that may arise with individual texts (Shulman, 1987). Without this knowledge base, conceptions of how students' current understandings "fit" within the domain of the discipline will be limited.[11] In addition, teaching experience in classrooms may play an important role in teachers' ability to interpret their students' thinking processes. Studies of beginning English teachers suggest the difficulty novices have managing the multiple sources of knowledge involved in classroom practice (Clift, 1992). Teachers with experience may be more able to incorporate awareness of student perspectives as a dimension of pedagogical content knowledge.[12] Beliefs or orientations

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[11] Grossman (1990) and Clift (1987) argue strongly that subject matter knowledge is necessary but insufficient in the knowledge base for teaching.

[12] While experience provides an important source for teacher knowledge, see Feiman-Nemser and Buchman (1985) and Grossman (1990) for accounts of the pitfalls of experience in learning to teach.

toward teaching language arts will also strongly affect a teacher's conceptions of student understanding, or what counts as learning in English (Gere, et al, 1992; Grossman, 1991; Grossman & Shulman, 1994). Teachers who orient literature class toward students' personal lives and concerns will differ from those who perceive themselves to be teaching an autonomous text.[13] Finally, teacher education courses can play a significant role in turning teachers' thinking toward the experiences of their students (Clift, 1987; Grossman, 1990).

Researchers in English education have also examined the connections between teachers' own reading processes and teacher knowledge of student thinking. Zancanella (1991) studied the reading practices of five English teachers in order to better understand why they made the instructional decisions they did. His findings suggested that teachers draw on their own reading processes implicitly—that instructional planning is guided more by a teacher's own reading strategies than by student strategies. In other words, like Holt-Reynolds' student, teachers had problems distinguishing their own ways of reading from student readings. For Zancanella, teachers must reflect more explicitly on their own particular reading practices in relation to learners.

Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz & Smith 1998) explores this distinction between student readings and teacher readings by juxtaposing "first readings" of literature and what he calls "reading against memory." "Reading against memory" represents what teachers do to

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Buchman (1985) and Grossman (1990) for accounts of the pitfalls of experience in learning to teach.

[13] While critical theory plays a central role in university literature courses, it is virtually nonexistent at the secondary level. A few efforts have been made to conceptualize high school English from a post-structuralist stance (Appleman, 1998; Pirie, 1997). Willinsky (1998) offers theoretical justification and a few concrete suggestions for enacting post-colonial perspectives with secondary students.

plan for instruction after having read a text multiple times. Reading for class, in other words, amounts typically to "re-reading" for teachers—reading in light of one's already-developed expectations, beliefs and conclusions about a text. Teachers attempt to re-imagine students' needs with such known texts, but, Rabinowitz argues, the conclusions of earlier readings become the landmarks that frame our plans for teaching and our expectations for student understanding. Our own remembered readings, in other words, tend to represent implicitly what teachers expect students to emulate.

Rabinowitz argues that such hopes for emulation are misguided and counterproductive for student learning. Reading against memory typically involves what Rabinowitz calls "readings of coherence," or readings that assume or seek to analyze the overall design of a work. First readings, however, are vastly different. Students' first readings are typically "readings of configuration." In contrast to "reading against memory," readings of configuration, Rabinowitz claims, are necessarily characterized by tentativeness and confusion, a "perplexing walk" for readers. He writes:

> The initial act of reading inevitably involves expectations that aren't met, predictions that don't work out, details that are missed, patterns that aren't completed... That sense of dislocation... is among the <u>fundamental</u> experiences the first time through a text, especially a complex one.

Students necessarily remain uncertain in their first readings, as they do not have the entirety of the text to draw upon. Teachers, however, tend to forget the origin of their own sophisticated readings and seldom distinguish reading against memory from first readings. Teachers forget that students must still experience the "perplexing walk" and

may judge student readings from the heights of their own implicitly remembered readings of coherence. Rabinowitz thus suggest that teachers' own readings of literature reflect a potentially problematic resource for understanding student understanding – one that can result in misjudgments of students if teachers are not conscious of the nature of their own readings.

Socio-cognitive research suggests that students' readings are not discrete, individual events. Likewise, teachers' understandings of students also reflect socio-cultural, as well as organizational, factors. Fairbanks (1995), for instance, analyzed two teachers who worked with one student as she read Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye. The teachers' interpretations of the student's journal writing reflected their responsiveness to the student's personal experiences as an African American female. The teachers found within the student's unelaborated responses a complex form of "resistance" related to family and cultural norms—norms she had expressed in her other journal writing. Teachers' responses to students' readings, Fairbanks argues, must not be measured simply against standards of academic discourse, but must occur in a context of social and cultural meanings as well as personal knowledge of students. Fairbanks observes that teachers must have the knowledge to "evoke readers" as well as evoke responses to readings.

The organizational structure of schooling represents another contextual influence on teachers' conceptions of student understanding. Little (1996), for example, notes that addressing student understanding has rarely been emphasized in schools or in teachers' professional learning. She writes: "Few teach in circumstances where their own observations of students and their explanations of student progress matter to anyone else,

or form part of an ongoing school-level assessment of teaching effectiveness" (4). Recent work on teacher learning communities (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2000) suggest that knowledge of student understanding is difficult to generate even in a sustained collegial setting. Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth argue, however, that teachers' own intellectual development with local colleagues is a necessary dimension of teachers' ability to understand and support student understandings.

Learning about student understanding

Efforts to promote teacher thinking about students' understandings have occurred, in fact, more often in the areas of mathematics and science. Cognitive science research in elementary mathematics education has focused attention directly on student thinking processes within a discipline and on how teachers understand their students' disciplinary strategies. Peterson, Fennema & Carpenter (1991) investigated teachers' knowledge of their students' addition and subtraction problem-solving. They asked teachers to demonstrate how randomly selected students would solve six different addition and subtraction problems. The target students had already solved the problems in individual interviews with researchers 1-2 days before. The researchers then analyzed the match between the teachers' predictions and student performance. They found that teachers consistently overestimated student use of recall of facts as strategies and underestimated the extent to which students used counting strategies (54).

The researchers also conducted a series of workshops to guide teachers through videotapes of 1st graders solving word problems aloud. Teachers then conducted their own interviews of students to test the notion that students in fact do bring problem-

solving strategies to such tasks. Researchers found that teachers from their workshops developed "principled knowledge" of how young students might think their way through such problems. Teachers came to acknowledge the "variety of informal strategies" that students bring to problem solving, even before memorizing addition and subtraction facts (80). One noteworthy finding has been the importance of teachers' understanding of their <u>own</u> students. That is, teacher understanding of student understanding involves knowledge of specific contexts and particular students, rather than of generic student processes. Teachers in these studies have come to believe "that instruction should build on [particular] students' existing knowledge" rather than on a preconceived logic of the discipline (Fennema, et al, 1993).

Other studies based on this model suggest that teachers who analyze student mathematical thinking closely learn to identify the "cognitive root" of student response—building upon students' informal knowledge of specific math topics. In self-studies designed for inservice teachers (Brinker, 1998), for example, participants learned that students brought to class extensive knowledge about certain math topics. The most noticeable practical result for the teachers in this study was that they began to reconstruct their beginning lessons to rely less on the text. Instead, teachers gave students problem-solving tasks first so that students could exhibit what they know. Such studies, the authors argue, go beyond typical "action research," because "systematic thinking about students" moved teachers beyond general learning strategies to focus on the contextualized, disciplinary knowledge students need for learning (cf Carpenter, Franke, & Levin, 1998).

Franke, et al (1998) point out, however, that for change to become "generative," "teachers must engage in practices that serve as a basis for their continued learning." Further studies of the professional learning of math teacher demonstrate that teachers interpret the purposes of student-oriented investigations differently. Teachers may come to use what they learn in workshops as a kind of static knowledge—as a kind of "conclusion" about students, rather than as an ongoing mode of inquiry. Some CGI teachers, for example, used classroom inquiry to "confirm" what the research taught them. They would repeat certain methods with students because they "worked," rather than using this knowledge and the process of inquiry "as a basis for acquiring new knowledge."

In reading education, Greenleaf and Schoenbach (1999) have examined professional development possibilities for secondary teachers. They describe changes in teachers' knowledge of reading processes, changes in pedagogical content knowledge, and changes in classroom practice resulting from teacher participation in strategic literacy institutes and workshops based on recent scholarship in cognitive science and on socio-cultural models of learning. In particular, Greenleaf and Schoenbach discuss the implicit theories teachers rely on that run counter to the theories currently espoused by research. Among these are teachers' "incomplete understanding of schema theory," in which teachers attempt to make all reading relevant to students lives and "completely avoid teaching literature or topics that are more distant from student experience." In this view, teachers misperceive low background knowledge as an insurmountable barriers to comprehension—and tend to stay with what students know, rather than scaffolding opportunities for them to make connections between what they know and what is new (7).

Another alternative theory involves a "simple view of reading." Greenleaf and Schoenbach found that some teachers use perceptions of "decoding fluency" to make determinations about student reading skills. A corollary of this belief is that students must achieve fluent readings before they can perform higher level thinking with texts (8). The authors comment:

> In each of these counter theories, what has been shown by research to be a *necessary* element of proficient reading is misunderstood by teachers as *sufficient* for reading development. These theoretical positions interact with the instructional roles teachers initially take and shape both their instructional practices and the very curriculum content available to students (8).

Greenleaf and Schoenbach conclude from their professional development work that reading across the curriculum workshops for teachers have been ineffective. Teachers who take such courses typically do carry over what they have learned into classroom practice. Educating teachers in teaching strategies for reading, Greenleaf and Schoenbach argue further, may be unhelpful if not accompanied by "ongoing inquiry into reading processes, texts, and student reading that can help teachers develop a generative conceptual framework that can assist them in making instructional sense of these strategies (9).14

In English education, again, few studies have investigated teacher learning in

14 Schoenbach, et al (1999) describe a teacher framework for creating "literacy apprenticeships" for students in secondary schools. Such apprenticeships focus on cultivating four dimensions relevant to students' reading success: the social dimension, the personal dimension, the cognitive dimension, and the knowledge-building dimension. Student metacognition in relation to each of these dimensions is considered critical to student growth in reading.

relation to student literary understanding. Lehman and Scharer (1996) found that prospective elementary teachers developed new ideas about children's ways of reading after interviewing elementary students. In this study, 129 preservice teachers read the story Sarah Plain and Tall and wrote their own responses. These adults then collected children's verbal and written responses to the story. Lehman and Scharer claim that several adult participants began to understand that children's readings were different from their own. One participant in the study remarked: "the most important thing I pulled out...was the idea that we must explore what children find in books, not force our opinion of the book on them" (31). For the authors of this study, "understanding of both children's and adult's responses to literature, along with the similarities and differences between the two, is essential grounding for teachers who want to create conversations that foster literary development..." (28).

Conclusion

A growing number of researchers (e.g. Beach & Marshall, 1994; Langer, 1995; Wilhelm, 1997) believe descriptions of readers' processes can help shape curriculum and instructional practice with literature. Such studies assume that greater knowledge of the multiple and intersecting influences on adolescent readers will help us understand and plan for student learning. However, the point of intersection between this knowledge and classroom teaching is, in fact, assumed rather than understood. Researchers in English education have developed a vocabulary for talking about student understanding. But to what extent does this knowledge relate to instructional practice or to effective pedagogical content knowledge for secondary teachers? What does it mean to understand students in

ways that support teaching? Fielding and Pearson (1994) point out that the reading research community, for example, in developing a general consensus on what effective readers do, has yet to understand why many teachers do not focus directly on comprehension strategies in their teaching routines. This study suggests that the horizon of the teacher, with respect to issues of student literary understanding at least, has been left out—a horizon that is essential to understanding what happens in classrooms.

Again, from a hermeneutic perspective, understanding student understanding does not occur as teachers displace their own prejudiced knowledge with an outside "reality." Rather, understanding student understanding emerges as teachers bring their own particular biases into play—in relation to the otherness of student perspectives. Grossman and Shulman (1994) thus argue that understanding students represents an act of interpretation:

> Students' tentative interpretations are themselves texts that require explication. It is not always apparent where an interpretation is coming or where it's headed. Teachers must draw on their knowledge of their students and those students backgrounds, their knowledge of texts, and their knowledge of common and uncommon readings of central texts, as well as their knowledge of multiple critical theories, to help them interpret student readings (8).

The studies reviewed here, however, illustrate a general scarcity of research on teachers of literature and, in particular, on how secondary teachers build interpretations of student thinking. The studies that do exist suggest both the centrality of this knowledge for effective teaching and how difficult it may be to learn. Tharp and Gallimore (1988), using

a case study of an elementary teacher teaching literature, conclude that "even at the level of beginning reading, teachers must develop professional-level skills if they are to move beyond recitation, if they are to overcome the assumption that children should learn on their own" (247). Such professional learning, I argue in this study, will depend upon frameworks, activities and contexts that recognize and incorporate teachers' starting points for understanding student thinking.

II. Method

Research Questions

In this study, I examine the thinking of three secondary English teachers as they reflect upon their students' responses to literature. Three basic questions guided my investigation. I wanted to know how teachers conceptualize what it means for their students to respond to literature; I was curious about the sources that underlie these teacher conceptions; and I wanted to know about the implications of teachers' conceptions on instructional planning. The specific questions were:

1) How do teachers understand their students' response processes in relation to literature?
2) What sources influence teachers' thinking about their students' literary responses?
3) How do such conceptions of pedagogical content knowledge inform instructional planning?

I wanted to examine these questions in as detailed way as possible—exploring the nuances of thinking through thick accounts of teacher reflection on practice. A qualitative case

study approach best suited these goals. The power of the case study design is in its thicker description of the nuances and circumstances of particular cases. The qualitative design trades off a larger sample for a more detailed picture of the "ecological circumstances of action" (Lin & Erickson, 1986, p.101) of teachers' understandings—representing local knowledge, thought and behavior, from the actors' point of view. Among the purposes of such a design, in other words, is not only to depict with care how participants make sense of their world, but to represent how these understandings "make sense" within the context of that world. In addition, small-scale case studies must be understood as a matter of theory-building, rather than as a way to generalize to larger populations. In this respect, I wanted my study to uncover specific qualities and themes that inhere strongly within a few cases—to suggest possibilities for further study and research. The strengths of this kind of method may be especially important given the relatively unexplored terrain of teacher thinking about student understanding.

Participants and Setting

In selecting participants for this study, I sought secondary English teachers who were teaching literature currently or had taught literature recently. In addition, I looked within a single English department—to make possible a follow-up study that would focus on teachers' thinking about student understanding within a collegial context. I also wanted to examine three teachers in order to identify potential variations and, through cross-case comparison, sharpen and strengthen my findings. Deciding upon actual participants, however, was a matter of both design and circumstance. A co-department head in the English Department at Shaw High School first recommended for me three

teachers, each of whom she described as excellent and committed teachers. I was not averse to this bias toward quality, since it had the potential to offer me a "best case" scenario of teacher thinking about students. However, I was interested in differences in subject matter orientation and teaching experience. As it turned out, two of the originally-recommended teachers declined to participate. To find replacements, I returned to my school contact. In the end, one of the replacements she recommended joined the study. The other I selected more randomly—by approaching a literature teacher whose name I had seen on a list of teachers in the department.

The participants in this study, then, represent a convenience sample of sorts—a collection of teachers who were willing and available. Two participants represent "selected volunteers"—or individuals who were recommended by a school insider and encouraged to participate partly because of the perceived quality of their teaching. The third teacher agreed to volunteer after being approached separately by me. The three teachers selected represent a range of experience levels – one with over 20 years experience, one with 12 years experience, and one teacher in her 2nd year. Only two were currently teaching literature courses. The third participant taught literature during the previous year. Based on responses to a mini-survey, one teacher exhibited a more response-oriented framework for approaching literature, whereas two teachers expressed New Critical assumptions.

Shaw High School is a respected school in a school district with mostly working class families—although both middle to upper-middle class families and chronically poor neighborhoods exist as well. Of the three high schools in its district, Shaw has the

strongest academic reputation. The school has ranked nationally for the number of students who take Advanced Placement examinations. The ethnic composition of the school is fairly homogenous, primarily Western European, with a small percentage of African American and Pacific Islander students. The English Department at Shaw offers courses observers of secondary curricula would not find surprising. All 10th grade students take a general sophomore English course, which revolves around gaining familiarity with various textual genres: short story, novel, poem/drama, research. At the junior and senior levels, students take electives that have either a writing, literature or communication focus. Examples of electives include Speech and Oral Interpretation, American Literature, Creative Writing, Shakespeare, European Literature, College Writing & Research, and Modern Novel. In addition, the department includes a remedial English class, called Basic English, for Sophomore students who have scored low on district exams. I had little opportunity to observe the collegial workings of this department, although nothing I observed would contradict the general profiles of work conditions and collegial relations reported in the research (Lortie, Sizer, Goodlad, Little). Time was very compressed for teachers. English teachers spoke fleetingly in the hallways and during lunch but with few sustained opportunities for shared conversations about students, teaching or learning existed. Most teachers did the bulk of their work in isolation.

Data Collection

Beyond the initial survey mentioned, the study employed two primary data collection strategies: individual interviews and classroom observation. The interviews

carried the conceptual weight, as each was designed to elicit specific areas of teacher knowledge. The purpose of the observations was to get to know teachers' teaching in action and to both corroborate and clarify the conceptions of student thinking that emerged in the interviews. While most research on teacher thinking involves statements teachers make about their own practice, Hillocks (1999) suggests that observational data plays an crucial role in illuminating the relationship between thinking and practice. My observations, however, were relatively brief, and in one case, I was unable to observe any literature teaching, since this teacher had no literature sections in the semester I observed her.

Survey

As an introductory tool, and to elicit basic information about the participants in this study, I asked each teacher to fill out an initial three-page survey [display in appendix]. The survey asked, on the one hand, for biographical information on teachers' subject matter background, teacher education background, and teaching experience. On the other hand, I also asked teachers to respond to prompts intended to elicit aspects of their epistemological orientation toward literature. Teachers wrote a paragraph response, for example, in response to the following statement: "Eliciting students' emotions and personal experiences are central to the process of understanding literature." To gain a sense of teachers' self-perceptions, I also asked teachers to rank their own subject matter knowledge and experience level teaching literature on scales from 1 to 6—and to comment upon their own rankings.

Interviews

I conducted four semi-structured interviews with each teacher. The interviews were structured to elicit various dimensions of teachers' understanding of student responses to literature. The interviews were pilot-tested beforehand to allow time to revise the protocols and ensure the questions would elicit the data necessary for the study. After each pilot, I revised, narrowed, and/or re-ordered questions to help focus teacher responses on the relevant conceptual issues. Each teacher interview was audiotaped using tape recorders.

The first interview focused on background information, getting to know each teacher, and eliciting general beliefs and practices in teaching literature. I also wanted to gain insight into each teacher's general perceptions of students and student understanding with literature. I asked teachers to identify and elaborate upon specific processes, stances, and/or perspectives they bring to reading literature themselves. They were asked about their experiences teaching high school literature and to discuss why high school literature is hard for some students. In addition, I had teachers try to compare their own understandings of literature with their perceptions of students' understandings.

The second interview focused on teachers' own thinking processes with literature. In this interview, I asked each teacher to read and think aloud about two different texts. Since I was interested in the nature of teachers' reading strategies with familiar texts (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998), I used one familiar text and one unfamiliar text for each teacher. I determined the familiar text based on my observations and discussion with teachers, and as it turned out, each teacher read a different piece for this interview. In two cases, the familiar piece we read was a text a teacher was currently teaching or had

recently finished teaching. In one case, the teacher had taught the novel the previous year. One teacher read the opening paragraphs from Richard Wright's short story, "Long Black Song;" A second read from the final act of Cyrano de Bergerac; and the third read the opening chapter of Lord of the Flies. Each teacher read the same piece for the second think aloud with an "unfamiliar" text. I used Seamus Heaney's poem, "Personal Helicon," a poem I had come across only recently myself. I did not believe teachers would recognize this poem (none did), since I had never seen it anthologized before. Before each think aloud, I explained think aloud procedures and allowed each teacher to practice using an excerpt from a fiction piece in the New Yorker (Price, 1998).[15] After the think-aloud part of this interview, teachers were asked to reflect metacognitively on their own reading processes, to described what they noticed about their own responses and interaction with these texts. Finally I asked teachers to predict how students would respond to these same texts, and to describe and explain some lessons they might use to support students with these pieces of literature. The purpose of this interview was to highlight the interaction between the experienced readings teachers construct for themselves, their conceptions of student readings, and their instructional thinking.

The third interview focused on artifacts of student learning and teacher evaluation of these artifacts. I asked each teacher to bring something concrete that might reflect student understanding of literature from their classes. Artifacts could include journal writings, papers, drawings, audiotape, videotape, or any other item by which teachers

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15 I have used data from this practice piece in some data analysis, since, as the only unfamiliar narrative the teachers read, it provided interesting data.

could evaluate a student's responses to literature. I asked teachers to bring in artifacts that they were genuinely puzzled by, or that they wanted to think about further, as well as artifacts they believed reflect a distinction between "understanding" and "misunderstanding" with literature. I did not specify what artifact(s) to bring. In the end, one teacher brought paragraph summaries; a second brought essays, and the third brought student posters. The purpose of this interview was to elicit the explicit and implicit criteria by which teachers evaluate student learning with literary texts. During the interview, I asked teachers to evaluate students' performances, to explain how and why they had assessed these artifacts as they did, and to identify, given the artifacts, what kind of teaching support students might need. Specifically, I asked teachers to plan next steps in instruction for these students.

The fourth interview involved two steps for me. First, based on my class observations and/or conversation with each teacher, I selected one student from each teacher's class for a think-aloud interview. In this student interview, I had students read from a familiar piece and an unfamiliar piece. Students read from a text they had read or were currently reading with their English class. Students also read "Personal Helicon." I used the same process as with the adult readers, explaining a think aloud procedure and giving students practice with the New Yorker piece (Price, 1998)—although I gave more explicit coaching during this practice session to ensure students would articulate their thinking. I videotaped the interviews. Later, I reviewed each tape and selected sections of the tape to present to teachers. I showed most of each reading to teachers, although given time constraints, some sections were not used.

In the second step, I brought the videotaped student think alouds to the fourth interview and used it a text for teacher evaluation. I did not prepare specific questions to direct teachers' responses to these videotapes. Instead, I gave each teacher a TV remote and asked each to pause the tape when she/he had a thought or reaction. This method worked well, and each teacher selected segments for comment. Only occasionally did I pause the tape myself to ask a teacher's reaction to a particular segment. After viewing the videotape, each teacher was also asked to make judgments about this student's literary understandings based on the concurrent think-aloud. In addition, I asked teachers to develop "next steps" in instruction based on the student's responses.

Classroom Observation

My other mode of data-collection involved naturalistic observation in teachers' classrooms. I observed each teacher's classroom informally for the following purposes: 1) By observing students and their responses to literary texts—I hoped to sharpen questions for the later interviews in the context of each teacher's classroom experience. 2) I used observational data to create a thicker account of teachers' views of student understanding--particularly as these beliefs, and instructional planning related to such beliefs, were played out in classroom settings. In fact, I did not observe much, only once, with the teacher who was not teaching literature classes. During the time of my observations, this teachers' students were doing a research paper which included much independent time in the library, so I found little to observe in relation to my study. With the other two teachers, I observed four class periods each. I took field notes on teachers' instructional practices, activities, and interactions with students, and I wrote descriptive memos of

classroom events.

Data Analysis

My analysis focused primarily on the transcribed audiotapes of the interviews. Each audiotape was transcribed verbatim. After each transcript was made, I re-listened to the audiotape and made corrections. In addition, I "sanitized" each transcript so that teachers' actual names or other identifying information were eliminated (participant names used in the paper are pseudonyms). From each corrected transcript, I also created a summary of the entire interview. This data reduction strategy was practically helpful as I later tried to make my way around the 12 interviews. In addition, summarizing helped me distill key themes and concepts for my later memos. Within each summary I included direct teacher quotations as well as my own impressions and thoughts.

Each interview was coded to guide analysis. I had created a preliminary list of possible codes for my initial proposal for this study. In re-reading the corrected transcripts, however, I generated new coding categories based on teachers' responses to my basic research questions. I refined and reduced these codes as I continued to re-read the transcripts— both for more manageability and to better refine the issues I wanted to pursue. In the end, I grouped my codes under my three basic research questions. The first set of codes reflected aspects of teachers' conceptions of student literary understanding. Under this category I included codes for teachers' conception of

- which students respond well to the literature curriculum,
- motivating forces for students reading literature
- strengths and strategies students bring to literature

- difficulties students have with literature
- relevant social contexts for student literary understanding

The second set of codes focused on potential sources for teachers' understanding of student understanding. These codes included:

- teacher reading practices and history/experience as a student
- teacher education experience
- conceptions of teaching and ongoing teaching experience
- teacher conceptions of literary understanding

The third set of codes centered on instructional practices and their relationship to conceptions of student understanding. These included:

- conceptions of curriculum
- typical classroom activities
- nature of classroom discourse
- typical assessment tools and practice

These coding categories remained relatively general. I did not want to over-determine or fragment the data using too many categories, though I did want to group generally-related chunks of data in a way that would promote theory-building.

For my analysis, I re-read the categorized transcript passages for each teacher and noted recurrent themes as well as data that conflicted with these themes. I also used data from my field notes of class observations, which I had summarized separately, to triangulate findings. I focused, during this period in the analysis, on one teacher at a time. This approach, I thought, would help ensure that I was treating each case individually—

that I would not be tempted to make fit the nuances of one case into the themes I saw in other cases. As I analyzed each case, I made sub-categories under certain coding categories, based on what I found. Under the coding category of "difficulties students have with literature," for example, I created a chart or a list for each teacher, identifying as many as seven concepts discussed during the four interviews. I also included or alluded to specific evidence on these charts or lists.

For each case, I wrote a lengthy analytic memo (25-40 pages). Each memo provided informational background on each teacher, followed by a description of the patterns and themes I saw in each teachers' thinking about student literary understanding. Each memo incorporated a great deal of each teacher's own language, as I tried to provide as much evidence as I could to support my conclusions. I also revised these memos several times, as I shared them with my project advisor, received feedback, and continued to re-read data and review my notes. I also shared a later draft of these memos with each teacher participant, inviting their feedback or comments—although I have not received feedback from the participants as of yet.

The next stage of analysis involved cross-case comparisons of data—searching across the three memos and returning to the transcripts to identify larger patterns, themes, or discrepancies. I wrote a summary memo listing the key themes I perceived across all three cases. I then returned to the interview summaries, as well as to the transcripts themselves, to search for confirming or disconfirming data in relation to the cross-case themes. This process was essential in capturing the shades of difference in the transcripts, and helped guard against over-simple categorizations of teachers' thinking.

Methodological Concerns

A few aspects of this study should be highlighted as potential issues or weaknesses. First, since I relied on a single site, the teacher thinking I report here is subject to local contextual influences. As we learn more about the role that teaching context plays in teacher decision-making (Grossman, et al, 1999; Louis, et al, 1996; McLaughlin 1993; Newell & Holt, 1997), it becomes impossible to treat teacher thinking in solely individualistic terms.[16] This study, then, may reflect teacher thinking especially unique to Shaw High School or to the English department at this school. One teacher I spoke to, in fact, suggested that the norms of this department were toward more traditional, New Critical analysis of texts—rather than toward reader-response oriented instruction. "Individual cases" of teacher thinking, in other words, may hide context factors that may shape the ways in which teachers think about their work. Contextual factors are best illuminated by employing cases from different settings. Since I was unable to do this, I point out that generalizing about English teachers from these particular cases may be problematic. On the other hand, Applebee reports ongoing similarity within English departments, with respect to curricular choices and instructional methods. In this respect, I do not dismiss the possibility that my findings reflect wider populations of English teachers.

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16 Liston and Zeichner (1991), from a critical-social perspective, also caution against overly individualized conceptions of teacher thinking. The criticize, specifically, "the individualistic bias in the school reform movement of the 1980's, which served to direct teachers' sense of frustration with and anger about their work away from a critical analysis of schools as institutions to a preoccupation with their own individual failures" (150). I hope this study, rightly focused as it is on individual teacher thinking, is not construed to contribute to this bias.

respect, I do not dismiss the possibility that my findings reflect wider populations of English teachers.

A second issue involves the general brevity of my classroom observations. Hillocks (1999) suggests that such classroom observation may be critical to understanding subtleties of teacher thinking. While the data collection for this study centered on the interviews, the absence of longer-term observations, and the lack of any observational data in one case, may have kept the less obvious aspects of teacher thinking from view. Indeed, what I learned about each teacher from observing even a handful of instructional periods was enormous. More classroom data would have supported even richer cases. Another dimension involves the trust between researcher and participant. Each teacher was extremely gracious in allowing me into their classrooms and very open during the interviews. A lengthier tenure with these teachers, however, may have allowed the initial facades in these sorts of relationships to fade away even more. I am more aware, from this study, of the differences between insiders and outsiders in school cultures and of the need to nurture trust over time.

In the next chapter, my purpose is two-fold. I hope to familiarize readers with the teacher-participants in this study and to introduce the themes that will guide my later analysis. To do this, I provide background on each teacher and an overview of teachers' beliefs and perceptions about students in literature classrooms. I then present samples of each teacher's reading of a single piece of literature. These samples are followed by teachers' reflections on their own reading processes, predictions each teacher made about

how students would read the same piece, and ideas for lesson planning based on these predictions. For this second part, I draw especially on data from interview 2, in which teachers read and thought aloud with a variety of literary texts.

Chapter 3: Thinking about Students and Literature:

Background

Andrew Bevington

Andrew Bevington, an English teacher for over 12 years, relates well to the ambivalent, even contradictory feelings students bring to literature. Andrew has enjoyed reading literature for as long as he can remember. He grew up in a family in which college was an expectation, read consistently as a young person, and indicated that, as he put it, "reading was never a problem for me." Andrew was not always a motivated student, however. He failed English twice in high school—for reasons he claims had nothing to do with school. In tenth grade his teachers decided to place him in an honors English class to motivate him more, an effort that was unsuccessful. In fact, Andrew could recall just one English teacher who interested him and drew him toward English as a subject area—a teacher Andrew said he listened to, even if he rarely produced assignments for the class. Andrew graduated from high school with a 1.9 GPA.

Despite these academic problems, Andrew drew sustenance from literature as an adolescent. Literature held power for him outside the school setting, and it played an important role in providing avenues for coping with the stresses of adolescence. "I used to read a lot even in high school," he told me, "to the point of reading under the covers with a flashlight, you know. But it was, it was a kind of escape from other things, it was a way to be away, you know—not there. Literature, you know, I've enjoyed most of my life." Andrew added that when he went to college he took plenty of literature classes "because I enjoyed literature and read a lot." His GPA doubled during college, and, since

he found English classes easy to take, he became an English major. Andrew did not take a direct route into teaching English as a profession, however. After college, he worked as a custodian in a middle school before eventually deciding that the classroom would be a good place for him. He returned to school to get his certification in a fifth year program.

Andrew believes literature can have a powerful influence on students' ways of seeing the world—an influence Andrew himself has experienced. He believes literature has the potential to change individuals, most notably by transforming students' conceptions of what it means to be human. Reading literature, he told me,

> *...offers answers and questions about what it means to be human... It's one of those ways in which, when they get it, their life resonates it at this other level all through this metaphorical expression in language. So to get literature I think at some level is to get life.*

The nature of literary language provides questions, perspective and resonance that students might never experience in the course of their everyday lives. From this perspective, Andrew explained that reading literature was less an academic exercise than a process of self-understanding:

> *Literature is about consciousness, appreciating the universe, and mostly, although not exclusively, the social aspects since we are creatures who are constantly interacting. So literature, you know, to understand literature is, I think probably to understand themselves at some level.*

Still, Andrew sees in his students some of the same disaffection toward school literature that he felt in high school. Students, he told me, seem to have other priorities

and concerns. They typically take English classes only because they have to, Andrew observed. "They are here because they're required to be in an English class, and literature looked like it would be easier than a writing class," he remarked. To know the subject matter for these students "is to respond to what the teacher expects you to do." Andrew imagined his students' thoughts toward their literature assignments: "Why sit here with this? I know it's going to take hours to read this book. When do I have those hours that I want to bore myself with." In this respect, Andrew reflected on what he called "just the regular run of the mill students," saying:

> *I think there is just an amazing lack of interest in the curriculum. I think in a good class . . . if I get a third of them really engaged in what's going on, that that's a high response. I think a third of them never engage and the others you can drag them into it and cajole them to your goal.*

Given his own ideals, however, Andrew hopes to bring as many as possible to a richer place with literature. Specifically, he hopes students will adopt an interpretive stance toward the literature he teaches, to go beyond the obvious, the literal or the mundane in their readings, to consider texts "at a thinking level, as opposed to simply a . . . first level response to what's going on." He told me:

> *I think the major thing we do as instructors is help them toward interpretation, and I think again, if I can assume that they have read the book, then we can move towards, you know, some of the other levels of understanding that have to do with, say, philosophical issues or some of the literary play that goes on.*

Andrew has found, however, that getting kids to "read the book" can be more problematic than he would like. He feels today he has developed a strong subject matter background in English, having completed some 15 college level courses that relate to literature. Responding to a questionnaire before our interviews, Andrew rated his subject matter knowledge a 5 out of 6, commenting that he had "...a good understanding of a limited slice of literature, and [had] taught it for twelve years." Still, understanding student response to literature was often troublesome. Andrew acknowledged that he finds it difficult to know how "deeply" his students understand and what kinds of readers they are.

Andrew thus expressed uncertainty toward the primary focus of my interviews, namely his understanding of how students respond to literature. I asked, for example, in our first interview, how he went about determining what his students knew about literature, and what they needed to learn. He said:

> *I probably (slight pause), I probably don't. I mean I determine what they know about the units that we are dealing with, but I don't think I ever go into what they know about literature. You know, what level they are at. . . . I don't have any standard beginning that lets me know where they are, and I'm not sure that it would do me much good if I did. What they need to know I expect to go over with them.*

Andrew stated initially that what students "need to know" is provided for in the given curriculum, rather than in any investigation of students' actual responses. Andrew conceived his job as testing students on the curriculum he presented. It was not evident to him, for instance, how one would go about investigating student literary thinking, or how

such an investigation might support his teaching.

> *To get to what I want them to do, which is to read with understanding, I need to present them with literature and hold them responsible for knowing it. So I have tests. . . . But as far as determining what they need to learn, I have no idea what they need to learn.*

Later, before Andrew listened to one of his students think-aloud while reading, I asked him if he could imagine some of the things the student would do. Andrew responded simply: "No, because I've never tried to." These kinds of direct and honest responses were characteristic of Andrew's interviews—one of his qualities that I felt suggested an openness to professional learning in general and toward issues of student understanding in particular. In fact, Andrew expressed curiosity toward the idea that a person's responses to literature could be talked about or identified. At one point, after we had talked about directions for a think-aloud reading protocol, Andrew remarked, "Obviously you're aware of reading-thinking connections that I'm not, or that I have paid no attention to, and I suppose that you're doing is teaching me this… so that I will become more aware of it."

Caroline Daly

Caroline Daly is known at her school as an highly experienced, knowledgeable and committed teacher. The colleague who originally directed me to her referred to her as "masterful" and "remarkable" with students. At the time of our interviews, she was named by a distinguished graduating senior to be among the best teachers he had ever had. Caroline, who had 26 years of experience at the time of these interviews, also sees herself as a learner. With an impressive subject matter background (she reported having taken

over forty courses related to literature and ranked herself 6 out of 6 in terms of subject matter background), she continues to take university classes during summers "to pursue more work in literature," as she put it. She received her Masters degree in English from a major state university, has taught part-time at the local community college, and was a recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Scholarship. Currently she teaches the school's Advanced Placement course in literature and serves as co-department head in English.

Caroline came from a family of teachers and always wanted to be a teacher. She was drawn to English during her senior year in high school when literature began to open her eyes in a new way. She told me:

> *I had an English teacher who suddenly opened up the world of literature to me. It no longer was read the story, answer the questions, that sort of thing. We read Chaucer, and Chaucer suddenly had meaning on a more universal level. It was something that was deeper and more exciting and I really began to understand that literature was more. There was something really truly human that was there.*

Caroline became an English Literature major during her undergraduate years, focusing especially on what she identified as "Beginnings to 1660." Today, her identity and interests as a literature teacher are still shaped by this subject matter concentration. She has taught English Literature for 25 years, and while she has covered the gamut of high school classes both in writing and literature, Caroline refers to herself as a "medievalist" at heart. Juniors and seniors in her classes read classics such as Dante's Inferno, The

Canterbury Tales, Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur, and Don Quixote. She studied Malory's Arthuriad during her NEH fellowship.

Caroline emphasized subject matter content as she discussed her own learning as a teacher. Even in her teacher education experience at the university level, she believed that subject matter courses made the most difference. Caroline told me:

> *And mostly in these teacher training classes, I learned to write a unit and learned to write a lesson plan, and actually that's all that I felt has really helped me other than student teaching. What really helped me to be a better teacher was the classes that I was taking, Shakespeare, Chaucer, English literature, Modern American Novel, to be prepared as far as my content is concerned, I found to be most helpful.*

In college, Caroline said she took "many extra [literature] courses. . . knowing that I really needed to have that to be effective in the classroom." Even today, Caroline said she much prefers literature offerings at the university level to inservice methods courses or education workshops—many of which, in her experience, are geared to elementary-level teachers. Caroline remained very interested, however, in learning more about the teaching of secondary English. Even with "no time" for meaningful professional development during the year, she said that these interviews might be in her own self-interest as a learner.

In a survey response, Caroline identified herself as "basically a New Critic person," writing that she agreed with statements such as: "*In reading literature, students must learn to place their own preconceptions aside and analyze the text in itself.*" She described the literature curriculum as a rich repository of thought and ideals, "great works that identify western

thinking," as she put it. Her teaching goals are to help kids see "purpose and enjoyment" with great literature and to guide them, as she put it, "to read better, to read more perceptively, to read deeper."

In terms of teaching goals, one of the most important steps students can take in understanding literature, for Caroline, is to put literature on a universal level. Students should seek "the tie of humanity through all of time" when they read, she said, and look for how texts "relate to us as human beings." In other words, teenagers should not reduce classic literary texts either to localized stories or to artifacts of distant historical periods—unrelated to their own lives. Instead, literary texts yield questions and perspectives that are relevant today. Part of the job of the literature teacher, for Caroline, is to help students perceive these large-scale ideas and connections. "I like the idea of illusion and reality," she said, identifying a specific concept:

> *Wherein lies what we perceive to be true and what really is true, if there is such a thing? And also the different aspects of human beings. So I look at, all right, here are the great pieces of literature and how they relate to each other, but also how they stand as themselves, and what they have to say to us as human beings. Sancho is very pragmatic, Don Quixote is imaginative, and we have these two sides to our humanity.*

Caroline hoped to instill this kind of literary thinking in her students—moving students beyond individual texts to what texts "have to say to us as human beings." Such universal connections, she suggested, are precisely what make classic literature powerful and interesting for adolescent readers. When I asked, in a questionnaire, if Caroline felt

students' emotions and personal experiences are central to the process of literary understanding, she replied: "Perhaps it is a beginning to pull students into a work, but it's the teacher's job to keep them intellectually engaged..."

Caroline also emphasized the need to ground students in the content knowledge of the discipline. Student understanding, in this respect, depends upon external knowledge, literary history, for example, that the teacher must share with students. Caroline thus provided notes on her blackboard as students began Cyrano de Bergerac—explaining that a "romantic" play stimulates an audience's desire for "escape" and reflects a "backlash against realism." Such subject matter concerns were built explicitly into her conception of the curriculum. She explained how her curriculum was organized to emphasize connections between a text and its historical era:

> *I teach [English Lit] chronologically according to periods. The Anglo-Saxon period, and the Medieval period, and the Renaissance period, and so forth. . . . The way that I approach the class is here is the context in which the literature was produced. Now we'll look at the literature and certainly we understand that in The Seafarer, for instance, the climate is harsh and the way that they lived was very harsh and it was very important that they belonged to groups of people, and they have kings that they could serve and to protect them.*

The historical context situates a text within its time, clarifying aspects of a story that students might not understand from a 20th century horizon. Caroline mentioned that students can still appreciate a text without knowing its historical context, but she said that the context will "help students more deeply appreciate" the literature.

In addition to this attention to subject matter knowledge, Caroline brought a distinct optimism toward students and student learning. Many of her general comments reflected the fact that she kept faith with students, even if they initially take on resistant attitudes toward literature. She spoke, for example, of a sophomore she was teaching for the second year in a row:

> *He was in my sophomore drama poetry class, and he—poetry is just kind of like, phhtt, over his head. He's, as a sophomore, he was really adamant against reading the poetry. By the time we got through, he thought it was kind of cool (chuckle) and he has really grown up, so it is fun to watch him.*

Caroline expressed the enjoyment she receives observing young students change their attitudes toward her discipline. She referred to such student successes repeatedly, in fact, talking often about seemingly unmotivated students. She noted, for example, that despite their usual squirreliness, sophomore students tend to surprise her in positive ways: "That's why teaching is fun, as I said, (laughter) kids never cease to amaze you. It can go the other way, too, but not as often as the positive way."

Ellen Frazier

Ellen Frazier wasn't sure she was the right person for this study when she discovered its emphasis on literature. In her first two years at Shaw High School, also her first two years of teaching, Ellen had taught primarily writing courses. She ranked her experience teaching literature a 2 out of 6 on the initial survey. Before coming to Shaw, she had completed her B.A. in English with an emphasis in writing, then had spent some time working, before returning to complete a teacher certification program in English. At

Shaw, she had taught two sections of literature the year prior to our interviews, but, she said, she felt far more confident with the writing curriculum. Her literature experience the previous year (her classes included Classical Literature and American Literature) had at times been perplexing, and she was somewhat relieved to have received all writing classes in her teaching assignment this year. In a survey response, she noted she had an "extensive background in reading, analyzing and interpreting literature;" yet, as she thought about her literature classes from the previous year, she recalled that her students' responses were not easy to predict and classes were sometimes "very difficult." She said she found herself resorting to methods she herself didn't approve in order to keep kids reading and on task. In general, Ellen felt there was more to learn about teaching literature effectively to adolescents, and she said she expected to extend her teaching repertoire in the future by taking on literature teaching assignments.

The youngest teacher in this study, Ellen referred to her own experience as a student more extensively than either Andrew and Caroline. She explained in our first interview that she "hated English in high school" and criticized patterns of teaching that relied on worksheets and made little room for original thought. Her own secondary English teachers, she recalled,

> *. . . were the kind who gave you worksheets and exercises out of the book, or they just sat at the front of the room. Or, if they were teaching literature, they would just sit in the front of the room and lecture about the piece and then your opinion, if it wasn't their opinion, it wasn't right. You couldn't have an opinion. You had to constantly search for the right answer.*

Ellen described how her own sense of purpose for literature had been shaped, negatively so, by this secondary school experience—how she "associated English" with her teachers, whose methods she resented. Only with different models of literature instruction, which she found in her university English classes, did she experience new possibilities and a zeal for literature. The teaching she enjoyed in college focused on giving students a voice with literature—not being bound by the teacher's interpretation.

Ellen's own enlightenment about English as a subject in college played a significant role in her decision to become an English teacher. She recalled meeting individuals, after she had graduated from college, who continued to hold negative or distorted conceptions of the subject matter.

> *So I get my degree. I go out and do a lot of various jobs where I'm working with, or managing, students who did not go to college, high school graduates, several of whom, whenever I said I majored in English, their reaction was always, "Oh, I hated it. I'm terrible at English." . . . So and there again I kept seeing this recurrence of associating English with this, a way that they were taught in school. . . . And I just got to the point where I couldn't stand it any more and I went back and got a teaching certificate and . . . here I am.*

Ellen's comments suggest she joined the profession, at least partly, to help young people re-conceptualize the subject matter away from both a "worksheet" tradition and from deference to the teacher's interpretation.

During her teacher education program, Ellen took several literature courses, since her earlier emphasis had been in writing. Such courses were organized chronologically

and emphasized literary era. She said she was required to take "a course from every century like colonial, seventeen hundred, eighteen hundred, nineteen hundred, contemporary, but I'm not sure exactly. . . . It was all American and British except for classical." She found that certain literature teachers in this program were especially effective, and she used her memory of such teachers to construct a conceptual model of good teaching. Effective teachers, Ellen said, integrated their substantial knowledge of subject matter with a concern that students develop skills and strategies for reading independently. Rather than simply teach a book because it's a classic, such teachers have specific content-related goals in mind, Ellen said, goals often related to the period in which the piece was produced.

> *The teachers that stand out to me always in any subject are teachers who are very—they have a lot of background about the pieces that they're teaching. They choose pieces that the students will be able to get something from on the whole, like the big picture, not just we're reading this piece because it's come down through the ages and you have to read this piece. But looking at a goal, what you're going to come away with and how you're going to understand that period or that—I guess that period mostly. And I see it as—I see literature as really important to teaching kids about, subject matter-wise I see it as important about teaching kids about the period in which it was written and the circumstances surrounding where it came from.*

Such historicist goals remain important for Ellen, but they must be balanced against other learning goals—especially giving students ways to independently "discern" things from

their reading. In other words, Ellen hoped to give students strategies they could take from the classroom to apply to a wide range of texts in a variety of life situations:

> *...but I also see it as important for kids being able to learn how to discern different things from what they're reading so they can analyze one piece of literature with me in class and go away and be able to pick up a book that's on the shelf currently, or read an article in the paper, be able to look across the board at what else is going on, and be able to understand their world.*

Ellen noted that the teachers who have such goals "are the ones that are more effective," and in classes where such goals were not evident, "I didn't come away from that class with any more understanding of anything." For Ellen, in addition, a seminar, or open-discussion format, represented the most effective and enjoyable model of classroom instruction she had encountered. Regarding her Victorian Literature class, a thematically-oriented class which she identified as one of her favorites, Ellen said. "It was a small class. You'd sit around a big table, and we read pieces and discussed them."

Ellen found her methods course for teaching literature less useful. She said she and her teacher education colleagues developed and taught lessons to each other, but the whole endeavor represented "a false setting."

> *We presented in front of our peers. That is nothing compared to presenting to a group of students who don't have to be polite. Who don't have to care. I mean I'm presenting to a bunch of people who want to be English teachers, so of course they're going to want to pay attention or be interested in the literature, whatever it is. But kids don't have to be interested. You have to turn that around for them.*

So I didn't really see much value in that class.

Ellen said that her student teaching had been a better "reality check" for her, although she provided few details about this experience.

In terms of her current goals for teaching literature, Ellen referred to the importance of helping students find "relevance" in what they are reading and to enter a "dialogue" around the questions that literature raises:

> *Well, I want them to work with me to find the relevance, and I can, you know, I was constantly bringing in, you know, things that are happening in their lives and, well, not necessarily in their personal lives, but in the world around us because—and I said on the—through the questionnaires . . . I think literature is about the human experience and is people who are questioning why things are, why people act the way they do, and what are the consequences, looking at the world around them and making statements about it. And they are creating a dialogue for people to understand and talk about and think about what's going on around them. And so that's why I—that's my goal, to try to get them into conversations where they can start to see how valuable that dialogue is.*

Ellen described how she started off teaching her American Literature course chronologically, as it had been structured in the past, but then shifted to a thematic approach to bring social and cultural issues to the fore:

> *Then I taught American Lit II, and started out chronologically and they did—it starts out around the Civil War, and when I got to the turn of the century I changed it from chronological to theme oriented, because when I studied that*

> *Victorian literature class, it was all theme oriented. And we read a lot of the same authors but their views on different things, so, um. . . We [in American Lit] did industrialization. We did discrimination. That's all we had time for, and I wanted to get into the women's issues, but I kind of blended that into discrimination as best I could because we just didn't have time.*

Ellen explained, echoing Caroline's sentiment, that she wanted students "to see how these same issues that people then were dealing with are the same issues that we're still dealing with today."

In terms of assessing how students learn with literature, Ellen said she used writing primarily. She felt she had few other valid ways to evaluate students' individual understandings, and she was able to rely upon her own background in writing with such assessments.

> *So anyway, we do a lot of writing and I haven't figured out how to teach it without making kids, making them write a lot, and I don't have—I have a better understanding of their understanding when they're able to write about it, because I can't really tell from the classroom discussions because they may understand it but just be too timid to speak. Or they may not understand it but they have developed a way of responding that makes them appear to understand. So it nearly killed me come grading, but they did a lot of writing.*

Ellen's comments suggest her commitment to getting beyond the surface with her students' understandings with literature. She finds in writing, her own forte' at the university level, the only reliable way to evaluate how well students think with literature.

Teacher Readings and Student Understanding

Andrew's Reading

In asking teachers to complete a think-aloud during our second interview, I hoped to investigate the relationship between their own expertise as readers of literature and their conceptions of student response. How do teachers interact with texts to generate meaning, and to what extent do they draw on their own processes as readers to interpret student readings or to plan for teaching? Below I provide an extended sample of Andrew's reading of an unfamiliar poem, along with my commentary on his reading. My analysis suggests that Andrew employed a variety of strategies with skill and experience: he had expectations for meaning from the start; he relied especially on personal experience; he adopted various "positions" in relation to poem—sometimes stepping into a scene, other times standing back to observe how that world has been constructed; he took a conversational stance with the text, reacting to and questioning the implied author throughout.

The poem is provided first, followed by a two-column account of his reading: Andrew's think-aloud (of 3 stanzas of the poem) appears verbatim in the left-hand column; my commentary, which describes the strategies I saw him using as a reader, runs along the right side.

Personal Helicon (Seamus Heaney)

For Michael Longley

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket
Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it.

A shallow one under a dry stone ditch
Fructified like any aquarium.
When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch
A white face hovered over the bottom.

Others had echoes, gave back your own call
With a clean new music in it. And one
Was scaresome, for there, out of ferns and tall
Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

AB'S READING	My Commentary
Personal Helicon. I don't know what a helicon is. I wonder what a helicon is? Maybe I'll find out. Maybe I should know ahead of time (laughter).	AB expresses confusion openly. He is comfortable asking questions, admitting ignorance, suspending the title like a puzzle that he can come back to later. Indicates an awareness that titles are important to a poem (conventional knowledge).
For Michael Longley. So, and who's that? I suppose I don't need to know.	Same strategy as above. AB neither ignores this potentially important line nor gets tripped up by it. AB knows how to play this kind of moment in the poem—knows how to "table" something for a while.
As a child, they could not keep me from wells... We had a well at my house. I grew up with a hand-dug well. I remember watching people down the bottom of it digging it deeper at one time because we were running out of water every summer.	AB stops mid-sentence to draw on his own experience. He builds imagery for himself, connecting personally and visualizing. AB has little sense where this poem is going, but "enters" the piece through his own experiences, makes it relevant to himself by accessing prior experiences and knowledge.
As I child they could not keep me from wells, and old pumps with buckets and windlasses. Well, I never had a well like that. We always had a pump	Continues to draw on prior knowledge. This time, AB differentiates the wells described in the poem from the well he's conjured up from his own experience. The personal association thus helps him clarify the distinct image in the poem.

in the basement. *I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky.* That's a nice image, the trapped sky in the bottom of the well. *The smells of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.* Not sure I'd want to drink out of that one. (Chuckle) *One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.* I have an association there because in my neighboring acreage there was a well with rotten logs across it and one time some kids were playing there and the top broke. Nobody fell in but their owners were forced to come get it filled in immediately. *I savoured the rich crash when a bucket plummeted down at the end of the rope.* Can you plummet up? I mean why would you put plummet down?	A brief moment of what Langer calls "stepping out and objectifying the experience" (I think). AB steps back to converse with the artist. Shows an awareness of the language as chosen and constructed. AB enters the world of the poem again—elaborating the scene for himself, experiencing the feel of waterweed and dank moss. He "lives through" this scene, imagining how he might act if he were there. AB continues to use personal experience to construct a poem he can relate to. AB is willing to "digress," to dredge up his own connections, even if he does not know where the poem's heading or what it's "about" as he reads. Through such digressions, AB generate a context within which meaning can develop. For example, his connection opens possibilities for literary exploration--the history of this well, why it was covered, how it rotted, why children play there, danger/safety around such wells, ownership/ responsibility for wells, that such wells can be "filled," etc. AB is both in and out of the poem here. His questions imply he is visualizing the buckets descent —and he steps back to critique the writing, to question the writer about a possible redundancy.
.... [LAST STANZA] *Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime.* To pry and to finger slime. Or is it to finger slime. Yea, it must be it. *To pry into roots and to finger slime, to stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring is beneath all adult dignity.* I don't think	AB plays with the image in his mind to make sense of it. He separates "pry" from "finger slime" and is satisfied. AB is unwilling to go forward until his mental image makes sense. AB disagrees— a great deal of thinking is hidden here, but AB moves beyond relating to the text, visualizing, and clarifying to criticize an idea he perceives (steps back and objectifies). AB takes a

so. *I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing.* That's—that's—that's a wonderful finish. *I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing. Big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring.* I don't agree with him there. I don't think it's beneath adult dignity to stare into a well and enjoy looking at things and smelling them and hearing the sounds of it. I think he's playing with me here. I think he's setting it up so that his final image counters that, that now I play with rhyme, or now I play with—in poetry than in wells. But you know a poem is a well, or it should be. A good one should be. This one certainly has some nice resonance's to it. Why can't he be doing this additionally instead of in place of?	conversational stance, rather than a recipient's stance, in relation to meaning in the poem. Steps back to admire, without elaboration. Rereads key lines and continues conversation with the author, criticizing, suggesting it is not beneath adult dignity to show childlike curiosity so openly, to have a rich sensuous experience. AB is stepping back and working with abstracted ideas (the importance of curiosity, importance of the senses, staring into the "unknown"). His personal experience seems to play an important role here—he's drawn on his own experience enough to have confidence to resist the speaker's suggested idea. Alternately, AB gives credit to the writer, suggesting the poem may be rhetorically "setting up" the ending. Shows conventional knowledge (that writer is "playing with me here") and uses his own experience / common sense to suspect irony. AB makes the metaphorical connection directly. AB is not critiquing here but reflecting to himself, considering the metaphor—how poems and wells are alike (stepping back and rethinking what one knows). To do this , AB implicitly draws on his knowledge/experience with poems. AB reiterates his earlier disagreement—continuing —as if to say, "you're right about writing poetry, but why are you so insecure about experiencing life resonantly like a child—openly, physically?" AB showing "textual power"—resisting, reshaping the text's implications.
You said it was a wonderful finish. Do you want to elaborate on why you said that or what you were thinking?	
Well, I like to write poetry. In fact I've been writing a series of sonnets myself this spring . . . and in a sense I'm sure I rhyme to see myself, you know, to find out how well I can jump	AB connects his own experience as a poet—recognizes himself in the poem, since he sees the poem as about writing poetry. Draws on personal experience in a different way here—not shared experiences with the speaker – but drawing on his beliefs about or reasons for writing poetry ("I'm sure I rhyme to see myself...) He rethinks, clarifies and elaborates his views on

to the next unknown, because so much of poetry comes out of what you hadn't anticipated but which is there. And that's how he ends—"*to set the darkness echoing.*" Because, you know, the poem comes out of this darkness. It comes out of this well. You can catch some surface reflections of it ahead of time, but mainly it rises, I think, from some other source. So, *I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing.* I just think that's a—"seeing myself" is , you know, seeing darkness echoing in some respects, and certainly in writing that's what a writer does.	what it means to write poetry, using the poem's metaphor ("...so much of poetry comes out of what you hadn't anticipated but which is there... [a poem] comes out of this darkness ...out of this well." AB extends the metaphor, building a sort of incipient theory of writing poetry. Creates new concepts from the images in the poem ("catching surface reflections ahead of time"). Returns to text Continues to refine his theory using images from the poem, reflecting on the role of the other or the unknown ("the darkness echoing") in self 'understanding – how writers sound out some aspect of this unknown.

Reflections on Reading

I asked Andrew at the end of his think-aloud if he could reflect metacognitively on his own reading of the poem. To what extent was he able to identify his own approach, strategies or perspective? Of course, Andrew did not have the luxury I had to analyze a transcript of this reading; not surprisingly, his analysis was briefer and less detailed than mine above. Andrew was especially aware of the role personal connections played in his encounter with the literature, although he indicated that he may have emphasized such connections artificially for the think-aloud.

When I read I make associations to my personal history. Very importantly. And to my experiences. . . . You know, reflect out of our experience. I may do it just a

little more consciously, because I've been asked to do it out loud here, than I would if I was reading this for the first time myself. I would probably read it through fairly quickly, not thinking too much about what I was thinking, noticing things I liked, phrases, whatever lines, and maybe coming back and picking it up, you know, picking through it again and doing a little more thorough job.

Andrew suggested that the response strategies he employs with texts usually occur implicitly. On first reading, he typically will "read through fairly quickly, not thinking too much about what I was thinking." But he recognized that his reading is recursive, that he would go back to the poem to do "a more thorough job," as he put it, in later readings.

Andrew explained that he looks for "surprising language," especially in poetry, when he reads. "I like to be delighted by the use of words," he said, "and sometimes I'll stop over that or pause when I think I've found a particularly savory passage . . . something that just sounds really neat." He also referred to "connecting ideas" as he reads. Andrew noted that he attempts to find a structure in what he's reading:

Um, I try to connect the ideas that are going on. This was pretty simple because it was a listing of different experiences with wells, until he gets to the end, when he seems to—well, when he makes his big metaphorical change from the wells as myself, you know, and looking at it. Um, what else do I do when I'm reading? ... Well, I'm trying to make sense of one thing, a progression of idea—in the story, for instance, it's linear. Here, it's not. It's like one well, another well, another well. I didn't—I didn't feel that there was a real growing in what was going on

> *toward a point until we get to the end, when he does then make that shift to the—to the point he has.*

Part of that shift involves time, from the "As a child..." signal in the first stanza, to the "Now..." signal in the final stanza. Andrew seems to have picked up readily on such structural signals, although he didn't mentioned them in the think aloud. His comment also indicates that he expected the development of an idea in the poem—that he was looking for meaning beyond the visual imagery of the text: "I didn't feel that there was a real growing in what was going on ... until we get to the end." In other words, Andrew was anticipating throughout his reading for "the point [the poet] has." In this poem, he was aware he had to wait until the very end for that point to materialize.

Predicting Student Readings

I asked Andrew how he thought his students might interact with "Personal Helicon." Andrew said first, "That's a good question. I think they would read it, first of all, and try to understand it." I took this to mean that Andrew felt his students would not automatically reject the piece because it was a poem. They would probably try to get something from it, in other words. Andrew pointed out, though, that his students would have a much different experience than he had just had. Student readings would likely break down in specific places. They would not understand some of the vocabulary, he indicated, pointing to words like "windlass," "foxglove," and "scaresome." They would not make the same life associations he made either.

> *They—some of them have never seen wells. Water has come to them through, you know, out of a spigot all of their lives. They've heard of wells. They all know*

> *what a well is, but most of them are probably not too familiar with wells. . . . most of them wouldn't know what a "brickyard" is.*

Andrew also noted that students would not make connections within the text in the same way he does. He pointed out that the third stanza was a difficult one for him, and that students may not have found a way through it.

> *The third stanza is a difficult one. . . I think by the end of it it is not clear exactly what's going on, that's the one that reads, A shallow one under a dry stone ditch fructified like any aquarium. When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch, a white face hovered over the bottom. I don't think there is any clear connection between the dragging out the long roots and the white face hovering the, you know, the dry stone ditch and an aquarium. I mean those don't seem—neither of those seem to have strong connections. I think it's a confusing stanza myself to some degree. I think I can think myself through to why he might of said it, but I don't—I wouldn't expect a relatively inexperienced reader to make those same kind of connections. Oftentimes it seems once they trip they, you know, they stay down.*

Students would have similar difficulty with the ending, Andrew explained. He knew the poem made a suggestive metaphoric leap, a leap he had drawn on extensively in his own reading. Most students were unlikely to make it this far with the poem, he said. Overall, Andrew expressed uncertainty about how students would respond to the end of the poem:

> *I'm not sure what they would make of the ending. I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing. Some of them write, but I'm not sure how many would*

make that connection in the same way that I do, or with the well. . . . I don't know what they would do with the ending, frankly. I would expect to take them through it, for one thing. See, a lot of them would have been lost before then. They would have been reading this about the well. I'm dealing now with an average class of students. And a lot of them don't really like poetry to begin with. They get in and after a while they see all this writing about wells and they either skim through it, read it real quickly, and say, "Oh, that's nice," or "That's bad," but they aren't thinking connections to it as they go. They're just reading to get it done so they can say, "Yes, I know what it's about. . . . It's about a guy who liked wells and no longer likes them but likes to write poetry instead." If they get that far and understand it. I'm not sure all of them would.

Noting that we had focused primarily on student difficulties with this poem, I asked Andrew, finally, what positive strategies he thought students might bring to literature. He said: "Well, I think they would draw on their experience. I think we all do as readers. You know, reflect out of our experience."

Lesson Planning

After discussing students' potential readings of "Personal Helicon," I asked Andrew how he might approach teaching this poem to students. I acknowledged with him that he did not have much time to consider this issue, given our interview constraints. In addition, Andrew and I both recognized that this kind of planning was out of context—that typically, such instructional decisions are connected to a larger unit or in relation to other works recently taught. Still, Andrew felt he could speculate about possible teaching

moves he would make. He noted four possible strategies. First, he might try an "introductory anecdote," he said. He referred to his own experience with wells, suggesting a memory he had of his neighbor's well. He mentioned the importance of "saying something about wells" or discussing something related to the poem ahead of time. Andrew said he didn't always do this with unfamiliar poems, though. Secondly, Andrew said he might give students adjunct questions to go with the poem, a strategy he found moderately successful: "I've given them some that have questions following them, too, that they are then supposed to try and figure out on their own. Sometimes those are helpful, and sometimes they're as confusing as the poem."

Andrew pointed to a third technique he might use, one he often employed to get students thinking about a text for themselves—having students write paragraph responses about their reading. Andrew explained that he has students "discuss in a long paragraph or maybe a half page, how [the poem] works and what they get from it… through their understanding of what the author has said." Andrew indicated that he remained opened to a variety of interpretation at this stage.

> *And of course sometimes they see it very differently than I do. . . . I've had students occasionally in class say, 'Oh, I didn't see it that way,' as we're talking about it, knowing that they've handed in something that is very different than what the class is bringing up through my goading.*

As the comment implies, Andrew found it important to interact with students around the poem. In fact, Andrew placed the most pedagogical emphasis on this fourth dimension:

reading with students. He suggested that leaving students on their own with a poem like "Personal Helicon" risks turning them off from literature:

> *If I was going to teach this—with most poetry what I do is read it with them; I very seldom give poetry as something for them to do on their own and then write tests on it. Poetry, I think, is too special for that kind of, I don't know, almost a (pause) crass type of treatment. . . . I don't want poetry to become something for students that they have to "study" in the sense that it's difficult for them to get into. I want them to be able to go in there with me and see it, and a lot of them will not have seen in the same way I did until after we talk and I goad them toward further insights.*

Andrew did not discuss the details of these teacher/student interactions, although his final comment suggests he uses such discussions to help students see insights he has seen in the poem. In the end, though, Andrew said he hoped students would "make some connection out of the poem—bring something out of it to themselves. . . using some kind of written response."

Caroline's Reading

Caroline began her think aloud interview with a practice piece—an excerpt from a fiction piece published in the New Yorker. I provide this reading below to suggest Caroline's ways of interacting with an unfamiliar piece of literature. Caroline, like Andrew, reads fluently and strategically, continually associating the text to her own experience and extending the text beyond itself. Perhaps the most obvious shared characteristic of these "unfamiliar" readings—especially compared to their students'

subsequent reading of the same text—is how much each teacher enjoyed the piece of literature they read. Caroline's reading appears on the left side of the page; my commentary, an interpretation of the strategies I saw her using with the literature, occurs on the right.

Caroline Reading "Runner"	***Commentary***
At ten past ten in the evening, the stains that dappled the cement steps of the tenement stoop were still vivid, uncongealed, and Jesse Haus's first thought was that her timing was off, that she had made the scene too early. On the other hand, although a Dempsy County police cruiser was still slant-parked in front of the building, the crowds were gone and the bright plastic crime-scene tape already lay in a discarded tangle atop a balding shrub.	Caroline's oral reading is fluent and efficient.
(chuckling) I guess I'm not sure that I know what you want me to do, but as I'm reading this, the first thing that popped into my mind was cop scenes, television scene, law and order type of thing. And	Caroline *acknowledges and uses initial impressions* ("the first thing that popped into my mind") and *accesses prior knowledge* to make sense of the opening scene, connecting the reading with "cop scenes" from television.. Also, Caroline *raises a question* about the narrator ("I was wondering why....")

also I was wondering why she was there too early… And *Dempsy County police slant parked* made me think that this is not in a city, although it's a tenement, which that threw me to thinking, all right, where are we? I'm trying to set myself in time and space-wise.	Caroline *uses associations to gain access* to setting. Dempsy County ‘ not city; tenement ‘ urban, the details conflict, so she *reconsiders her picture* ("all right, where are we?") Caroline *allows herself to be unsure* of setting temporarily but is actively "trying to set myself in time and space." In addition, she *observes herself* metacognitively, recognizing the stage she is in.
She had heard about this shooting over an hour ago, but if she had shown up as soon as the call came over, the cops would have been too cranked to talk, too shut down.	
And I like this word "cranked." That's an interesting word, and it also tells me something about the character, the main character, by the language that she is using.	Caroline *steps out* of story to appreciate language then steps back in and *makes an inference* about Jesse. *Plays the "authorial audience"* (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998)—identifying what the text might expect readers to notice. Caroline's stance is less a matter of having an impression or making wild speculation, but instead recognizing how the text expects her to read (the language "tells me something").
Like?	
Oh, like she is younger. That she is not really a formal person. That she has the parlance of the street kind of thing.	Caroline *elaborates a vision* of the main character, based on her associations with "cranked." *Brings her own associations* to this speculation (slang or "parlance of street" ‘ "younger" and "not really a formal person").
The neighbors would be either in the dark or, if they knew anything, talking to the cops themselves. (Laughter) I am laughing	

about that too, because often we think that our neighbors just don't have a clue about life or else they want to get themselves in the news and on the television if they can. Two different kinds of people, the ones that have no clue and the other ones that are really nosy and they always (laughter). . . . . . *[reads more]* Okay, and now I'm thinking, ah-hah, I know who she is . . . This is a reporter who knows that late-breaking news, it—right there and what's important, and off she goes, but here, well, she can take her time, and she is early, but she still has time to look around and see what's going on and talk to the people. I like this.	Caroline *draws on personal experience* again to relate to the character's thinking. Caroline *identifies with* the narrator's/character's take on the neighbors, seeing a sort of put-down of clueless or vain people. *She connects this with a schema she has* about "two kinds of people." Like AB, Caroline builds on personal experiences to generate a context within which meaning can develop. Confirms "access" to story by describing main character and situation. Still in process of *formulating a picture* – her language is incomplete and fragmented (characteristic of "entry" stage). Her imperative act is *"setting myself in time and space,"* by making personal associations, questioning, speculating. Notes her enjoyment of the piece.

As with Andrew's reading, my comments above rely on a cognitive-psychological approach to literary interpretation. I was especially interested in the initial strategies she used to construct a story she could relate to, rather than, for example, ideological or cultural assumptions that filter what she saw or failed to see. In my reading, Caroline is extremely active "setting herself in time and space," as she puts it—trying to figure out

where she is and what's going on. Most noticeably, she experiences and tolerates uncertainty early on—has learned how to handle the dislocation readers often feel early on (cf. Rabinowitz 1998). She makes guesses. She asks questions. She draws extensively on her own associations, bringing confidence that such associations will yield something worthwhile. These strategies help Caroline build up a context for both caring about and making further conclusions about the story and its central character. Caroline is also able to recognize rhetorical moves in the text that guide her reading, and she occasionally steps back from the text to objectify the design – even as she continues to build her picture of the story. Perhaps obviously and predictably at this early stage, Caroline is not making universal connections, tying structural elements of the story together, thinking symbolically, or otherwise commenting on the overall significance of the piece. In her reading of "Personal Helicon," however, Caroline did read for such significance, analyzing symbolic meanings and developing an interpretation of the piece as a whole, like Andrew did, after her first reading. She concluded that the poem is about someone "going into the very essence of his being" and "reflecting on who he is . . . trying to figure out who he is."

Reflections on Reading

Caroline provided somewhat less detail than Andrew in reflecting on her own reading processes. She noted that when she reads literature, she attends especially to sensory images: "Imagery. I always like imagery. If a poem doesn't have very good imagery, then right away I think it stinks. . . . I want to see, hear, taste, feel and smell it. You know, I just want to, just suck it up into the essence of my senses." Caroline also said she typically will "associate my experiences" with a text as she reads—"yea, just

minor experiences and my own connotations that I bring to this, but always back there I have what kids have brought." Referring to "Personal Helicon," Caroline alluded to a child's excitement around water: "And who can walk past a ditch or water when you're a little kid without throwing a rock in it or stomping in it, you know? Because water and that sort of thing draws children. I think it is just—it's a primal thing." She said she looks for some kind of structure, following "the progression" of ideas in a piece. Caroline also noted that, as an English teacher, she brings some specific, teacherly or expert concerns. She said she looks explicitly for point of view. "That's the teacher in me, I think. Looking at first person, third person . . . . I try to train my students to write from an objective point of view when they're writing their essays, so I'm keyed into this 'you' thing, and as a reader . . . I'm always looking for it." She also said she likes to focus on an author's use of "words," and that she is "always looking for symbols too." Finally, Caroline pointed out that her knowledge of an author will rouse curiosity when she reads: Referring to "Personal Helicon," she said: "First, you told me that it was Heaney's poem, and I knew he won the Nobel prize, and I didn't know—I had never read any of his poems, so I was curious right away to see what kind of poetry he wrote—writes, since he's still alive."

Predicting Student Readings

I asked Caroline to tell me how her students might read the poem, "Personal Helicon," at the end of this interview. She responded by distinguishing two kinds of readers. Referring to her European Literature class, the class I had been observing, she said:

That's interesting, because in that class I have everything from next to the nonreader to AP students. Um, I would say, thinking about all of the students as whole and how each individual will look at it, once they got the idea this is about wells, they would miss—okay, I'm talking about those who don't read very well. They would read the wells, and they would see the images, and they would think, what the heck (laughs), you know, what is this? First of all, they wouldn't understand Narcissus, and helicon wouldn't mean anything.

Such students, those with weaker reading skills, Caroline observed, "would be more literal" with the poem. "I think they would have trouble with the symbolism of the words, and the double meanings, the double entendre', but I think they would see that this is a guy who is looking at different kinds of wells." Some of these students, Caroline explained, "would say, 'I hate poetry. I don't get it. I'm not going to try.' . . . and I could just about tell you who the kids are in the class that would do that."

Other students, those with more advanced reading and language skills, Caroline said, would have more success. She referred to students I had heard reading aloud from Cyrano de Bergerac earlier that day:

Now the kids who were reading today—I'm thinking about the girl who read Roxane and the girl who read De Guiche, and let's see, who else, the boy that was the First Cadet, and then, there's another girl over here who didn't read very much; she just read a light part. They would see this because they are sensitive to words. Some of them are debaters, and they understand how words can be used to sway and make people feel. Others in there I know are, they like poetry and

they read a lot of poetry, and I think they would respond to the language and imagery in that.

Caroline said that such skilled students would have an especially easy time with the early lines in the poem—visualizing and experiencing the sensory images as she had. "They would see the wells and pumps and picture those things, and the well and the dark drop. They'd get that. And the smells. They would find this in the poem." Regarding the ending, however, Caroline was less certain. She felt comfortable, however, not being able to predict students' responses here:

Boy, I don't know. That's part of—of teaching that is always new. Well, I anticipate that students are going to have a certain kind of reaction, and you know, there's always a segment of the class that surprises me (laughs). . . But I don't know, that last line.

Students responses to this poem, Caroline concluded, depends a great deal on the students' reading ability. "Yea, I think their skill in reading has a lot to do with seeing things in poems," she said.

Lesson Planning

I asked Caroline to describe how she might approach teaching "Personal Helicon," how she might open up the experience of the poem for students even more. Caroline, like Andrew, pointed to four possible strategies. First, like Andrew, she said she would address students' initial access to the poem, though, instead of an introductory anecdote, she explained that she would help weaker students visualize images:

What I like to do is say, okay, since this [poem] is so full of imagery, how many

> *pictures can you draw from this? I want you to draw this for me. And kids who can't draw, they get all bent out of shape, but they usually get into it, and when they look at each other's bad pictures why then they have fun with it. So draw what you see in this poem. And they do okay. And then let's, okay, then let's get together and see who has drawn what and compare them. And that's fun. I like to do that.*

Second, Caroline said, that after having students compare their visuals, she might have them write. "The next thing I'd have them do," she said, "because it's an English class, is somehow verbalize this, either what did you see and what did you see that others have seen? Write me a little paragraph as to your conclusion of—and I don't know, I'd have to think about it because I can't do this off the top of my head! (laugh)" Third, Caroline indicated that, were she to actually teach this poem, she would carefully consider its placement in relation to other readings in the same unit. She noted, for instance, how, in European Literature class, students' earlier reading of Don Quixote helped them with specific allusions in Cyrano de Bergerac:

> *And when I do lessons like this, I do sit and think for awhile and ponder this and that for a topic, because I want it to be meaningful. . . . Going back to what they have just completed or experienced, and then I want it to be a kind of foreshadowing of what the next thing is going to be, because I want all the lessons that they do to have connections. That's why it's so nice in Cyrano that Beatrice and Dulsinea are there. It's just fleeting, but they all look up.*

Finally, especially in order to address the symbolic shift near the end of the poem, Caroline said that she would likely involve her class in discussion. "Oh, I think that we would do it in—I like to do large discussions, and so I—just by Socratic questioning, that's what I use. . . a kid makes a statement and somebody else says something and I can go from there."

Ellen's Reading

Ellen read "Personal Helicon" in her second interview, a poem she had not seen before. Her reading reflected several aspects of Andrew's and Caroline's reading, both in the strategies she used to engage herself with the text, and in the metaphoric conclusions she drew. Like her colleagues, she identified her own confusion and used imagery to "experience" the secondary world of the text. Ellen relied less on associations to her own personal experience than Caroline and Andrew, however. Instead, she re-stated or summarized chunks of the poem in her own words. Like Andrew and Caroline, Ellen was extremely active generating conclusions about the poem —constructing metaphoric meanings in the process. I provide her think aloud below, with my commentary to the right.

Okay, well I notice the first thing I would do is look up "Helicon," is that how you pronounce it? And the word is unfamiliar to me. So I would look up that up. *Personal Helicon. As a child, they would*	Ellen expresses her lack of comprehension. Like Andrew, takes note of what she doesn't get and suggests a strategy for dealing with it. Like Andrew, assumes that title is important.

(sic) not keep me from wells and old pumps with buckets and windglasses. (Chuckle) I'm starting over. *As a child, they could not keep me from wells and old pumps with buckets and windlasses. I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.* Well, he's, as a child, he's—I'm assuming it's a he—is obsessed with just the atmosphere he finds at a well or a pump. Um, the moist and water, something about it. I can smell that fungus and dank moss.	Fixes up her initial miscue. Ellen paraphrases the scene for herself—using her own language like "obsessed." She experiences the sensory images herself, suggesting she has already entered into the physical world of the poem.
One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top. I savoured the rich crash when a bucket plummeted down at the end of a rope. So deep you saw no reflection in it. There's that idea of hearing the end point but you can't see it. *One, in a brickyard, with a rotted wood top. I savoured the rich crash when a bucket plummeted down at the end of a rope. So deep you saw no*	Ellen connects the image of this well with an "idea" she has or has heard—again paraphrasing the stanza in terms she can relate to. Her idea extends, possibly metaphorizes the image, and implies she has felt the visual and aural sense of the words. Ellen seems to focus on what distinguishes this well from the previous one. Re-reads stanza.

reflection in it. So you can't see the water, I'm assuming, or you can see the water but it's so far down and dark that you can't see a reflection in it.	Clarifies her visual sense of the well.
A shallow one under a dry stone ditch fructified like any aquarium. I'd have to look that word up, too. *When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch a white face hovered over the bottom. (Re-reads)*	Noting confusion.
When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch a white face hovered over the bottom. (Pause)	Re-reading.
I'm thinking that I want to know what fructified means. Um, I'm having a hard time visualizing long roots and soft mulch.	Works to solve the unknown vocabulary word. Notes her difficulty visualizing—suggesting the importance of this strategy in her reading.
Dry stone ditch. Okay, I'll continue. *Others had echoes, gave back your own call with a clean new music in it. And one was scaresome, for there, out of ferns and tall foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection. (New stanza) Now to pry into*	Like Andrew, seems to know when to move forward, when it's OK to let her comprehension be incomplete. Suggests she's exhausted a few strategies.

roots, to finger slime, to stare, big-eyed Narcissus into some spring is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme to see myself, to set the darkness echoing. Okay, he's using poetry to satisfy this curiosity he had before which he satisfied by staring at his reflection and looking into water but he can't do that anymore because it's immature, but he is still curious about who he is, so he uses the rhyme, he uses the poetry for his art to	Ellen paraphrases a prose version of the poem for herself—putting the language of the poem into her own words. A few unspoken moves: Ellen easily translates "rhyme" to mean "writes poetry." She draws on her earlier statement that the speaker was "obsessed" with wells – here stated as "curiosity." Draws a connection from this childhood obsession/curiosity to the writing of poems.
hear, to make sound in the darkness, maybe to make some sense of it. What he did as a child, maybe he sees some connection	Extends or elaborates the metaphoric connection
between the—what he did as a child maybe without knowing it until he became an adult and still curious or maybe even obsessed with seeing into the darkness, looking beyond just the surface of obvious.	Extends and elaborates the connection.

Ellen continued to work through the poem, looking recursively through its lines and stanzas. In doing so, she saw more relationships between various parts of the poem, and she further explored metaphoric connections between "rhyming" and looking into wells.

She noted that she had "skipped over the rat" on her first reading, now reading the rat symbolically as some "underlying unknown" or something "scary" under the surface of one's life. Ellen drew a relationship between "the darkness" of the wells and seeing into the darkness of the self. She noted that the images in the poem "have walls," explaining that "when you can't see the edge like in some of these deep, dark wells, echoes help you see where the end is. . . . So maybe he wants to set the darkness echoing because of this scary—to think that there aren't limits or any boundaries." The speaker, Ellen said, "is digging deeper" and has learned that "it isn't all just what's there on the surface." The speaker rhymes "to understand what's inside of me—to understand the limits of the darkness of my soul maybe."

Reflecting on Reading

In reflecting on her own reading, Ellen spoke only briefly, referring to four strategies she uses with literature. First, Ellen noted that she visualizes consistently and tries to refine her picture as she goes. "I think I create images and then continually add to them." Second, she said that she pays close attention to individual words. She referred to her persistence with the word "fructified," saying that she knows that "words are not just thrown in there willy-nilly; they're chosen for a reason. So that's why it really bothered me that I didn't know what they meant because I knew that would make a difference." Ellen's comment suggests that she considers texts from an authorial perspective, thinking with the writer, trying to determine why one word may have been "chosen" over others. In this respect, Ellen noted a third strategy—that she typically will "look for repetition of ideas or repetition of words," and that she tries "to make connections between words."

Finally, Ellen said she looks for "some kind of organization—like are we going in chronological order or is it divided. Somehow I look to see how the organization is set up." Ellen thought to herself silently for almost half a minute before saying she was out of ideas. She observed, though, that she found herself feeling tentative about her interpretation—wondering "You know, am I totally off the wall here?"

Predicting Student Readings

Ellen predicted that some of her students would react to this poem the same way she would have as a high school student. Such students believe that poetry is overly obscure and not worth the effort. They would be unlikely to even begin the process of working out possible meanings:

> *A lot of the students I had last year had that same kind of approach that I did—that they just didn't get poetry and they weren't going to get it, so if it wasn't like a story, if it wasn't real obvious that it was talking about an event or a particular—one particular scene, they didn't try. They didn't go back and say, "Why is this here? Why does this-- what is the connection between these?"*

Ellen's answer suggested that students are often "narrative" or "event" oriented in their reading, although she did not elaborate on this point.(footnote Vipond & Hunt). She attributed student resistance more often to motivational factors—to the fact that students are taught to defer to the teacher's perspective and hence they no longer "trust themselves" with literature, especially poetry. She explained:

> *Very few would trust themselves enough or feel comfortable enough with themselves to interpret it in some way and then expose themselves in a way,*

> *because they. . . I think with poetry, if you have that idea that there is one right answer and you come up with something, you are exposing . . . and I think a lot of people in general, not just kids, think that they're stupid if they don't understand a poem. Oh, I must be stupid. Or they think that poems are just puzzles that are supposed to trip them up.*

I asked Ellen, however, how such students might read a poem like "Personal Helicon" if they had the freedom to read it on their own, away from the encumbrance of an "expert" interpretation. Ellen was puzzled at first. She said, " I don't know if I can really answer that." She then ventured the following: "I think they would probably do much the same thing that I did. Take it apart piece by piece and try to figure out what they think that means or look for connections. How does it all fit together?" In other words, shorn of the trappings of their school scripts for reading, Ellen saw her students as natural problem-solvers. She also assumed that students, in this mode, would likely analyze the poem as she herself had.

Ellen continued to refine these ideas, however, as we talked. Students, she said, probably would not make the kinds of connections she makes. In fact, she noted that some students often fail to make any connections. Most students, for example, typically fail to take notice of repetition in the way she does with literature:

> *...and a lot of times when they see something like this, where somebody is dwelling on something, they will, instead of trying to figure it out, they'll say, "What is this person on? What do they—," you know, "Why are they so obsessed with this? Who cares?" you know, "Who cares about the bucket plummeting,*

who cares about--?" They notice things, and they don't make the connections. If it requires more work than just what's on the surface, seeing what's on the surface. Now this isn't everybody.

Ellen's answer thus hovered between an emphasis on strategic knowledge (whether students recognize and have strategies for dealing with repetition) and an emphasis on effort or motivation (students won't work for what's beyond the surface). When I asked Ellen how students might respond to the ending of the poem, she paused for ten seconds, then suggested that students would know, in general, where they are supposed to arrive, but they would have difficulty getting there on their own. Students, she explained, would apply the basic approach she had used, because they know a poem is "supposed to mean something."

I think they would wonder (pause) and try to find some message in there, try to relate it back to what they had already read. I think that the little bit of poetry that I taught last year, they were—some of them were very good at questioning, and specifically the things that seemed to lead somewhere, that didn't quite—I mean they seemed to be able to pick out the lines that must have some meaning, but they just don't get it, so that I think that they understand for the most part how to look at a poem. No, I don't mean how to look at a poem. I mean I think they understand for the most part that a poem is supposed to mean something and it is supposed to, um, cause some kind of reaction.

For Ellen, students do bring important knowledge to their reading of poems. Besides expecting that a poem will mean something, her students were able to raise good

questions, to identify lines that are potentially rich in meaning. But Ellen's students were less able to construct a coherent interpretation. They often "just don't get it," she said. In the end, Ellen concluded that students know a poem is "supposed to mean," but she questioned whether students know "how to look at a poem."

Lesson Planning

Ellen pondered the question of teaching activities awhile before answering, possibly due to the fact that she was not teaching literature during the time of my interviews. After pausing some forty seconds, she said she might do "some small group activity" related to the poem. "I might get them into small groups to try to come up with interpretations," she said, "and then have each group then be able to discuss their interpretations with the whole class." Ellen said that she goes back and forth about small grouping, but she said had recently let students pick their own groups, "because… they tend to group themselves by ability." Ellen perceived a positive dimension to such self-tracking:

> *The ones who need more challenge tend to gravitate toward each other, and they are going to have more discussion, while there are other kids who will read it and just get to the point where they understand on a surface level. And they need to do that too. But if they're in a group with these higher level kids, then the higher level kids will do all the interpreting and the lower level kids will just go along with it.*

Ellen understood that students in a lower-level group would likely remain on the surface level. She claimed that this surface reading might be appropriate for their level ("and

probably that would be as much as they can get"), and that a surface reading "is still better than someone telling them what it is." Ellen admitted, though, that she found the diversity of students in her classes a tremendous challenge. "And the classes I have, I'm telling you—I'm sure you have the same thing—kids that are so low and so high, it is just too hard to try to challenge them all."

The fact that Ellen's small groups would report their interpretations to a large group implied she would use large group discussion with the poem, although she didn't go into detail about such all-class discourse. She did say she might use adjunct questions with the poem, as Andrew did. She indicated that such questions would function both in terms of content and management, helping students with the poem and keeping students on task:

> *So I might attach some questions to it as well, make them answer specific questions which I would come up with. I don't know if I could come up with them off the top of my head right now, but I would give them some kind of goal to finish their group session with. Yea, they need to have to write something down. I found that, too. They have to be accountable.*

Finally, Ellen, like both Andrew and Caroline, said she would probably have students do some writing. She indicated that such writing would be connected to the topic of a large group discussion. "Depending on what the group discussion was going to be focused on," she said, "then they would have to maybe, um, come up with a paragraph." She said the paragraph would focus on students' interpretations of the piece.

Conclusion

A few initial observations are possible from this initial look at each teachers' literary and pedagogic thinking. First, Andrew, Caroline and Ellen are skilled readers who actively generate "resonance" and meaning from literary texts. Each teacher used multiple strategies for connecting to the other world of the text—visualizing, drawing on personal experience, asking questions. Each successfully navigated the metaphoric leap of the last line of "Personal Helicon," and each developed a satisfying conclusion to poem. The poem elicited from Andrew thoughts about his own writing of poetry and an internal debate about the "immaturity" of childlike seeking or looking into wells. For Ellen, the poem initiated thoughts about the importance of sounding out the limits of one's own life, going beyond the surface to explore elements of darkness in one's self.

In addition, the teachers, given the context of a think aloud, were able to identify many dimensions of their own strategic processing with literary texts. Although the activity was an unfamiliar one for each teacher, as a group they identified shared dimensions of their readings: the importance of envisionment—creating visual images and using personal associations, attending to word usage, making intra-textual connections, using structure as a cue to meaning, reading for a point or with the text as a whole in mind. On the other hand, the teachers did not refer to their own theoretical orientations—for example, that each teacher had assumed an "organic unity" to the pieces they read.[17]

More difficult for these teachers was seeing a way clear for student learning. Each

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17 Caroline, however, had identified herself as a "New Critic person" in her survey. In his survey response, Andrew also pointed out that he had little background in "critical theory."

teacher anticipated that students would have major difficulty with a text like "Personal Helicon." This judgment, it seems to me, is entirely sensible and reflects these teachers' knowledge of students' typical responses to obscure texts. Some students, they said, would have motivational problems—resisting poetry or not trusting themselves enough to try. Most students, each teacher suggested, would not make personal associations as effectively, and they would likely stay on a surface level. No teacher, for example, confidently claimed that students would arrive at a metaphoric interpretation of the last line. While strong readers might have such success, the teachers seemed to agree with Ellen that many students "don't know how to look at a poem." Less evident in interview 2, however, were statements about students' informal or incipient strengths—students' stances, experiences, or knowledge that teachers might draw on to create bridges to complicated texts like "Personal Helicon." The teachers' initial way to conceive student response was in a deficit mode—in terms of what students' can't do, or don't know, compared to an expert standard. One rhetorical tendency, as we saw in Caroline's case, was to divide readers into two general categories: readers and non-readers. The difficulty for teachers, then, emerged in conceptualizing student understandings in ways that might lead to direct teaching support.

The teachers' thoughts about instructional planning were, in fact, remarkably similar. Roughly put, they would employ an introductory set (anecdote, drawing), use written questions to promote comprehension and keep on task (either alone or in small groups), and invite both discussion and writing to generate thinking. Andrew and Caroline also indicated that they would try to draw links between the poem and other

texts students had read. The most striking point here is the general disconnect between teachers' awareness of the specific reading strategies in their own understanding, their sense of student difficulty, and the general nature of their instructional plans. In other words, teacher thinking progressed toward "generality" as it moved away from individual reading processes toward planning for teaching. Of course, instructional detail is necessarily lost in these quick sketches of teaching practice. One way of looking at the general nature of teachers' instructional remarks is that they emerged in a decontextualized interview. The teachers were speculating about teaching an isolated text outside the particularities of a classroom context or real students.

Another way, however, is to consider these teaching plans in light of the teachers' predictions about student understanding. The predictions/conceptions of student understanding offered little ground upon which to create specific scaffolding for learning. The planning episodes above, while especially brief, suggest that literature teachers do not approach teaching in terms of the strategic thinking/reading processes students may need, and that teachers themselves employ, with difficult texts. Andrew's, Caroline's, and Ellen's brief teaching plans suggest a tendency to give students venues for interpreting rather than scaffolding thinking processes. In this view, less able students may be expected to learn how to read literature on their own.

In the next four chapters, I explore how Andrew, Ellen, and Caroline construct their students as readers of literature and the relationship between these constructs and instruction. My chapter organization grew from what I perceived as teachers' points of emphasis during the interviews. I was surprised, for example, at the prominence of

teachers' talk about "reading," as a general construct, throughout our discussions. I thus begin my analysis (chapter 4) by examining how teachers' conceptions of student reading ability shapes their approach to literature learning. Using Langer's (1995) model, I also noted that teachers emphasized two stances toward literature—"stepping in," and "stepping back and objectifying." As I saw it, Andrew, Caroline and Ellen focused on "beginnings" and "endings" of student literary response. The teachers, in other words, emphasized 1) engagement/comprehension and 2) analytic interpretation. They had less to say about what students do as they "move through" a text. I thus created one chapter on teachers' conceptions of students' initial responses to literature and one on teachers' sense of student interpretation (chapters 5 & 6). I conclude my analysis (chapter 7) by exploring of the nature of teacher subject matter expertise and its influence on teacher understanding of student understanding.

Chapter 4: Reading and Literary Understanding

"They could read--they could read anything, but they could get to the bottom of the page and they have no idea what they just read." Ellen

Introduction

For Andrew, Caroline and Ellen, "reading ability" was a common concern as they considered their students' responses to literature—an initial but potent framework for understanding student performance with literary texts. This emphasis came as a surprise to me—given my explicit focus on "literary" understanding. Yet, the concern became apparent as each teacher partitioned literature students, in some fashion, into "readers" and "non-readers," and as each highlighted poor reading skills as an obstacle to literary understanding. The teachers together felt that a growing number of students need significant help with what might be called "basic" reading. Identifying who might provide such support, and how, however, were more difficult questions. Indeed, if concern for reading skill remained consistent across cases, less clear was how these teachers understood reading—what it means to be a "skilled reader," for example—and how basic reading is related to literary understanding or to the literature curriculum in general. In addition, each teacher acknowledged having limited confidence, opportunity, and, to some extent, motivation for examining the processes of their students as "readers" of literature. This chapter, then, aims to explore the terrain of students' reading, as these teachers conceptualized it, in relation to the teaching and learning of literature. Most basically, how did the literature teachers in this study make use of the notion of general reading? In what ways did they configure a relationship between reading ability and literary

understanding? What specific conceptions of reading did these teachers use when considering students' reading in action? Finally, to what extent did such conceptions influence their instructional thinking?

Reading as Foundation

One of the most persistent characteristics shared by the teachers in this study was the tendency to represent "reading ability" as a foundation for literary understanding—to characterize reading as a pre-requisite skill or set of tools that lay the groundwork for disciplinary thinking. In this respect, each teacher recognized "reading" to be integral and irreplaceable in relation to his or her subject area. Each referred to general reading skills consistently as we discussed student understanding. Yet, each also placed "reading" as conceptually separate from, or prior to, the actual subject matter concerns of literature. Each teacher, for example, detached issues of student reading from their own literature curriculum. Such sentiments arose especially as we discussed the difficulties students have with literature. In each case, talk about student reading emerged as talk about something other than literature—most often as talk about remediation. When I asked Andrew what makes literature difficult for his students, he replied:

> *The ones who are having problems usually it's—the statement is "It's boring." ... but it turns out "Well, I can't understand it." Now we have no reading program at the high school level and this is something, in fact, the department has been trying to work on for years to get. We literally have people in the high school reading at a fifth grade level. You give them Gatsby, they're not going to be able to understand much of it. This is one problem, just skill level.*

Andrew's comments often relegated reading to lesser academic status ("just skill level") and characterized reading as a set of technical, non-literary, skills. His own ability to deal with lower readers, he indicated, was limited, and he felt he had neither expertise nor significant responsibility for student learning when it came to reading level. Some students "usually don't get through the first chapter" with texts like The Great Gatsby, he said. "It may not be their fault. . .but we have no reading program. We have very limited basic English, and I don't know how to bring the lower end particularly through the literature to the level that I appreciate it." Andrew's concern, as his remark implies, went beyond teaching reading. He suggested, in other words, that an implicit goals of his teaching includes helping students learn to read texts as he does.

Still, for Andrew, reading skills were simply not his area of expertise. The reading difficulties presented by "lower end" students, he claimed, were particularly difficult to sort out. He explained that, as a teacher, he often had difficulty distinguishing reading problems from lack of motivation. "Sometimes I think they really don't understand it," he said. "They read a sentence that doesn't—[they] don't know the connections that are being made between this sentence and the next, and why we're going there. Sometimes I think it's just an excuse for not paying attention." He acknowledged that students' reading processes were often hidden from his view. "I know they're reading," he said, when we discussed his students' independent reading in class. "I have no idea how deeply they're understanding." Andrew felt more certain, however, that whatever reading issues exist are not genuinely "literary" concerns. He concluded: "The ones who are trying to read and not getting it, I often feel are having just trouble reading. That it's not an issue

of literature. It's a matter of just decoding words and putting them in the right order mentally."

Ellen's comments echoed these divisions as well. She explained that she had been rudely awakened her first year when she discovered her students could not read well. She had assumed that students in high school classes should be independent readers: "Well, first I assumed that everyone in my class could read, which is not the case. . . . Well, they could read but not the level of literature that we were reading. They could read the words but they couldn't comprehend them." Discussing one of her classes, she observed that the lower readers probably needed to be in "Basic," a remedial course, instead.

> *We just had kids in there who belonged in AP English, but they didn't want the responsibility, and I had kids in there who could barely read, belonged in Basic, so it was very difficult to do a lot with that group. The kids who belonged in AP, you know, they couldn't take the pace. They needed it to be faster. . . . The other kids were just clueless*

Ellen, like Andrew, felt that problems in understanding literature could be attributed to low reading levels—to students who can "barely read." She, too, separated out issues of reading from those of literature—suggesting, for example, that better tracking of low readers might make a difference. She also remained uncertain about her own efforts to monitor and support students as readers. As a new teacher, she said she ended up using teaching techniques she was not sure she even believed in. She described her efforts:

> *Well, I had to give quizzes, had to give reading quizzes because they wouldn't read it unless they knew they were going to be responsible for a quiz. Um,*

vocabulary quizzes, and I don't what all else I did, but I don't--you know, I feel like in time I will develop better ways to do it, but last year I was just kind of thrown in there and I didn't--I just did what I had been taught, and that's how I did it.

Caroline, like Ellen and Andrew, separated learning to read from the literature curriculum. Referring to her own English Literature and European Literature courses, she explained: "Usually kids who can't read will not choose those courses because they know they're harder. We have other courses for kids who don't read well." Low readers may not survive a challenging literature course, Caroline indicated, and the teaching of reading, she implied further, is not the objective of literature classes. Literature students, in other words, are expected to be independent and relatively proficient readers of texts. Like Andrew and Ellen, Caroline also expressed limited confidence in her own ability to judge students and their reading processes. Discussing one student's poorly written literary essay, Caroline speculated: "Yea, I have a feeling she doesn't read well. Well, I don't know, though. When she read out in class . . . she read fine. But it wasn't long—... Now when she gets to paragraphs and that sort of thing I don't know. And I haven't looked up her reading score—to tell how well she reads." When I asked Caroline what she expected from the reading scores, she said: "comprehension, reading speed, all that you get on those reading tests."

Caroline, Ellen and Andrew each saw "reading" as something that creates the basis for literary understanding. The "foundation" notion, however, reflected an underlying ambivalence—an "integral to / separate from" tension—with reading central to student

understanding, but peripheral to literature teaching itself. Teachers thus situated "reading" ultimately as a separate academic task—to be dealt with outside of, and usually prior to, the work of the literature curriculum itself. Such beliefs echo those of the elementary teachers studied by Walmsley (1992), for whom literature was "what you do after you learn to read, not as something to help you learn to read" (quoted in Burroughs, 1993). The implication for each teacher, though not stated explicitly, was that adequate reading skills are a given for literature class. This assumption itself left teachers little impetus to examine or investigate their students' ways of processing texts. Interestingly, given their experiences in English classrooms, no teacher actually expected every student to be an successful reader. Rather, the teachers' conception of reading as foundation left them with a substantial "reading" dilemma. They assumed independent readers in theory, knew they would get problem readers in reality, and remained at a distance from reading difficulties pedagogically.

Practical Conceptions of Reading

Andrew, Ellen and Caroline each acknowledged a distance separating them from the details of their students' reading practices—a distance, I have argued, which fits, or follows from, their conception of reading as "foundation." Although they recognized that reading was crucial to the event of literary understanding, they had little experience, and perhaps more importantly, little motivation, for examining their students' processes as "readers" of texts. Before Andrew listened to one of his students think-aloud while reading, for example, I asked if he could predict what the student would do. Andrew responded simply: "No, because I've never tried to." Yet, what happened when these teachers observed their

own students' reading in action, or when they evaluated artifacts intended to reflect the results of student reading? How did they make sense of the act of reading—of student successes or breakdowns with texts? What dimensions of reading did they notice? My analysis below focuses especially upon conceptions of reading that emerged as teachers observed the student think alouds.

Exact Reproductions: Andrew and Caroline

I found two general patterns at work. The first focused on accurate decoding and comprehension. Andrew and Caroline, who reflected this view, both assumed that strong readers have skills to reproduce the text exactly as it occurs on the page. They took their measures of reading largely from the results of decoding and emphasized reading as a technical activity. The oral reading of strong students, according to Andrew and Caroline, tends to be fluent and without significant error. Such students have strong word recognition skills. They are able to create written summaries of texts without significant error. The reading of weaker students, on the other hand, is characterized by miscues.

As he listened to two students think aloud, Andrew drew consistent attention to accurate decoding and word recognition. He made brief observations of fluency as he listened to one student read, for example: "She's misreading occasionally. She's missing words." When the student finished commenting on a short chapter from a novel, Andrew observed:

> *Yea, there was—there were several things she didn't understand in there. She paused on that car, the "Marmon," which I certainly didn't recognize when I ran into it either, but she didn't seem to know what a "switch engine" was. She went*

> *right over that without making the comparison that this meant it was a very large car. She went from "vases" to "vase" on her last pronunciation.*

After listening to a second student's think aloud, he concluded: "First of all, he's reading better than she did. He seems to—I haven't seen him miss a word yet."

For both Andrew and Caroline, vocabulary was a first line of response in conceptualizing the sub-skills of successful reading comprehension. Reading breakdowns, both pointed out, often occur at the word level. Andrew thus imagined how students might read a particular poem:

> *I think it's pretty clear they might not know what "windlass" is. . . . most of them wouldn't know what a "brickyard" is. A place where they make bricks, I presume, but-- What else would they do here? . . . You know after about the third stanza this--(10 second pause)—they about wouldn't know what a "foxglove" is. "Scaresome" might be an easier word for them than it is for me.*

Yet, Andrew showed some uncertainty, as well, as to the importance of exact word recognition and surface decoding. He continued to point out miscues as he listened to his students read, but he occasionally downplayed their significance:

> *She, again, reads sometimes missing words or kind of reconstructing sentences I think, but I don't see any major thing there other than she didn't understand what, I think she said "irreverent" tomfoolery instead of "irrelevant," which might have helped her to understand tomfoolery if she had read the "irrelevant" and knew what irrelevant meant, but not knowing the word, she skips over it, and I think that is pretty common. . . . I don't see anything, any special points here.*

Caroline, like Andrew, drew strong connections between word recognition and overall reading ability. When I asked Caroline why young people find literature difficult, for example, she speculated, "Maybe they can't read very well. Their vocabularies are really shallow." Observing the videotape of one of her students reading literature, Caroline focused first on vocabulary and exact oral decoding: "He doesn't have a very good vocabulary, does he?" she said, after her student stumbled on the word "perpetually." After I had prompted the student to "articulate his thinking," Caroline stopped the tape: "I'm wondering if he knows what the meaning of the word 'articulate' is. Because if he doesn't understand 'dappled' and 'uncongealed' —then 'articulate' would be maybe difficult for him, too." The student had mispronounced both words in the first paragraph of his reading. Later, after more reading miscues, Caroline commented again: "The vocabulary is getting in his way . . . Yea, I think the vocabulary is clouding his perception of what's going on. And it is tough vocabulary. And particularly as I suspect that he's a kid who doesn't read a lot."

Effective readers, for Caroline, must pay attention to the exact details of the print. For example, as Caroline listened to her student read aloud, she pointed out problems he was having following the marks on the page. One sentence read ". . .the cops would have been too cranked to talk, too shut down." Caroline commented: "He is confused because he's not watching the punctuation. . . Right, too cranked to talk to and then shut down. See, he's not seeing the difference between t-o and t-o-o." Caroline perceived effective reading as representing words and sentences accurately—saying them precisely as they are written on

the page. Caroline noticed, for instance, that her student modified the text as he read. Caroline called this "extemporizing."

> *I've noticed that he extemporizes.... I can't remember exactly where, but he, for instance, "later I dreaded the thought of seeing mockery." He says "I dreaded seeing mockery in the eyes." He skipped something over there. . . And where he just read, he's got the meaning but he is reading it as he understands it rather than what's on the page.*

Caroline expressed discomfort with this student's inexact decoding. He tended to "skip" things, she said, and although he had grasped the passage in general terms, he was in danger of seeing only his subjective vision rather than what was actually "on the page."

As they made comments about supporting students pedagogically with reading, both Andrew and Caroline focused on word recognition and word level breakdowns. Each emphasized vocabulary help, for example. Vocabulary development was important for Andrew because students skip over potentially important words when they read. Yet, Andrew realized that supporting student vocabulary development was not simple. When I asked him how he might support his readers, he said:

> *Vocabulary. It's specific. A lot of them don't know the words and miss meanings because they skip over words they don't know. . . . I mean the best thing would be for every of them to keep a personal vocabulary list of words they've run into they didn't know. But I can't monitor that.*

Andrew found vocabulary useful because it's "specific"—a concrete oasis in otherwise amorphous territory. However, he admitted that his own approach, quizzing students on words

selected from classroom texts, was not motivating for students. Most students "look on it as drudgery," he told me.

As Caroline thought about instructional support for the student she had observed reading, she said: "If it were a one-on-one, whew, I don't know, I'd have to think about it, but I would do something about helping him improve his reading and looking at the words." After listening to the think-aloud, she regretted not having spent more teaching time on unfamiliar terms:

> *I would have vocabulary. I would do more with the vocabulary . . . and that's something that I, during this whole course, I thought oh, [that's] really what I ought to do, and that's a part of preparing students for reading any piece is to go through and pick out unfamiliar vocabulary and having that as a lesson, and that's something that I didn't do here.*

Caroline remained more optimistic than Andrew about vocabulary lessons. She elaborated on her own instructional approach, picking out words ahead of time, going over them in class, then holding students accountable in an exam. Caroline explained, though, that students come to internalize new words over time:

> *--and I've had this happen to me before, that when we hit it in the play, if it's a really strange word, like "quintessential," then they either, "Oh, I know that word. I recognize that word." And if they've forgotten the meaning, then they always stop and, "What was that word again?" Or—and then somebody in the class will say, you know, "Well this is what it means."*

Such lessons are not a constant emphasis for her, Caroline admitted. She believes,

however, that if students exhibit difficulty decoding literary texts, vocabulary lessons are often needed.

Reconsiderations

Observing students reading aloud, Caroline and Andrew emphasized that vocabulary is important and that students have difficulty reproducing texts exactly as they are written. However, Caroline and Andrew also found phenomena they hadn't predicted—reading practices that didn't easily fit an exact reproduction theory. One issue which caused reconsideration for Caroline, for example, was her students' continued "extemporizing"—his tendency to read words differently than they were written. Caroline had criticized this practice initially, yet as she listened to the student's verbalized thoughts and reactions, she found that he was understanding a great deal of the text. Despite several reading miscues and stated confusion at the start of one passage, for instance, the student stopped soon after to summarize what he had read. The student concluded:

> *The scene was done. All that was left was the body bags. There was nothing left for him there. Everybody [has] already been talked to, but it didn't matter because it was—tonight's news was over and it was going to be for tomorrow. . . . I'm starting to piece it together.*

Stopping the tape herself, Caroline commented on this summary—suggesting some dissonance between her own picture of reading and the student's observed practice:

> *Yea, he's getting the general gist of this even though (laughter) he doesn't know what it's all about. Well, that he—I find that amazing that he's having a terrible time getting through this. He's not interested in it, but it's still saying the core of what the story is about, but he's not intrigued enough to want to go on.*

As she worked through the dissonance, Caroline's conception of the student's reading shifted from poor skills "clouding his perception" of the text to his not being "interested" or "intrigued" enough with the text. Later in the videotape, however, the student criticized, with pointed emotion, the main character's approach to her newsreporting job:

> *[student] It says right here she was a stick-and-move artist moving from a* [text=living off the] *police scanner and hitting the scene, getting a few names and a few quotes, and a little local color. She's just there for the glamour. She's not there because she wants to know about the news, and she's not there because she wants the people to know about the news, she's just there because it's like, well, that's my job, or I have to do that. I'm a reporter, I have to get a little bit. It's unimportant to her. I mean I would be a little bit more concerned if I was her-- people had died and there's been an assassination. I mean I would be a little bit more concerned, a little more in depth for the people that have just died.*

The student had generalized about the main character's attitude, provided some evidence, placed himself into the character's role, compared his own potential reaction with hers, and proceeded to critique the character's behavior. Caroline reacted with some surprise and re-formulated her conception of the student's "interest" level—making this now more of an open question.

> *I am impressed that he does understand pretty much what this is on, and he hits this about she is a stick-and-move artist. He hit that, he likes that. Or at least he understands it. I'm not sure he likes it but he understands it and so, yea. . . Even though he thought it was a man, you know, still he understood the basic characteristics of the character.*

Observing her student read, however, Caroline felt torn in her evaluation. She recognized that he was "going for the meaning," as she put it, and that he was having success in the process. Yet she still suspected his decoding problems would result in distortion. Caroline acknowledged in the end, however, that this student's way of reading might differ from her own.

> *I don't know (chuckle). As this follow-the-rules type of person, I like to read what the translation tells me here because that's the piece of literature. But I guess I'm more of a left brain person that's not quite that creative. I kind of like to stick with what's here, and then do my interpreting from what is there, but . . .I think that that is the way he reads.*

A different issue arose for Andrew, as he listened to one of his student's reading a passage from Richard Wright's collection, Uncle Tom's Children. The student read aloud a description of a woman nursing her child and remarked to me, her interviewer, that it was awkward to read about breastfeeding in front of a male:

> *[student] I don't know, I just—like reading it, especially you being a guy and talking about a woman's breasts. She was breast feeding the child. I think that's odd. But I mean it's the literature so you just keep on reading it, but that one I felt uncomfortable.*

Andrew responded to the videotape, wondering aloud about the social context of the reading interview and its effects on his student's reading: "Her comment at this point is addressed to your presence rather than her reading of the story, as I'm hearing it... so does this change how she is reading in some way?" Andrew initially separated my "presence" from the student's "reading of the story," although he recognized there was some

interaction between the two. Andrew felt, in fact, that her reaction was a fairly common one: "You don't usually talk about our private body parts to relative strangers," he explained. Common or not, his observations raised issues that had not emerged in our earlier talk about student reading. Andrew noted that "she's aware of this environment around her...as she's reading." His comments, at least momentarily, focused less on a single individual's processes and more on the question of public and social readings. When we talked about whether my presence was creating a different kind of reading, Andrew concluded: "Well, I mean it must be a different process since she's reacting differently than she would if she was alone." Such observations raised issues with potentially significant consequences. Is a school reading a public or a private event? How are students' responses influenced by their perception of social environments? What kind of reader—individual or social—does Andrew assume in teaching literature? Such implicit questions offered new dimensions on student reading—beyond the measurement of literal accuracy.

Working at it: Ellen

In discussing her classes from the previous year, Ellen observed that some students "could not figure out what was happening from one minute to the next" with classic texts like The Odyssey. The primary distinction she made, however, was between those students who "read for understanding," as she put it, and those who "read to get done." Students who read for understanding are aware when they are confused and will re-read until they understand. Students who read poorly, Ellen explained, typically decode

without attending to their own thinking processes. They often mistake decoding with the larger processes of reading itself.

> *There are some kids who will just read through the whole thing and not understand what they're reading, but they'll come to class and say, "I read it." And you'll say, "Well, what did you think about this?" "Oh, I didn't really understand that." "Why don't you read it again?" It doesn't ever occur to them to read something twice because they don't get it the first time.*

For Ellen, students who read to "get done" may decode efficiently, but they usually don't understand the work involved in making sense from texts. Students often "notice things [but] they don't see the connections, if it requires more work than just what's on the surface," Ellen explained. Many simply avoid the effort involved in reading.

> *They could read—they could read anything, but they could get to the bottom of the page and they have no idea what they just read. . . . Some kids, and this is I think typical of most kids, will not stop and look up a word, so they could go through a whole piece with 50 words in it that they didn't know and not think twice about getting to the end, waiting for someone to tell them what it meant. I found that a lot, too, kids were waiting for me to tell them what it meant.*

Successful readers, on the other hand, put forth individual effort with texts. As she observed one student read the opening chapter of Lord of the Flies, Ellen admired the student's tendency to puzzle over grammatically complex sentences and difficult vocabulary:

> *I'm just thinking that she's reading for understanding because I think I've seen a*

lot of students read aloud where they just go through the words, and this is not making sense to her because it is—it can be, that can sound like a fragment if you don't read it right. So she's working very hard to figure out how it makes sense. Um, and I noticed that before in the first couple of sentences. She stopped, when she stumbled on a word, to make sure she had the right word. . .

This student, Ellen noted, was "very aware" of her confusion and became "bothered" when language didn't fit or make sense, and she paused on lines or words that were unclear to her. The student sometimes didn't resolve such difficulties immediately, but Ellen felt that she was strategic in occasionally leaving difficult sections behind and waiting for future clarification.

As we observed the videotape of her student reading, Ellen identified visualizing as one strategy this reader used, emphasizing how the student monitored her own visual picture. She commented again as the student struggled with a passage:

She seems to be relying very heavily on visual, and when she stumbles on these things like the scar, that "it" is referring to the cabin, and she couldn't quite figure that out. . . . I think she's—she's kind of been making a movie in her head. And it's running. And when she comes across a sentence or a new piece of information that she can't make sense out of, it bothers her because she thinks it's supposed to be part of the picture.

This student knew to keep a visual narrative running in her head, Ellen felt, and that everything she reads is supposed to fit in the visual narrative. Ellen stopped again as the student met with another confusing passage:

I think she's not distinguishing between what each of the two characters is doing. She's putting actions of one boy onto the other boy . . . but she's—she's visualized what she's read but for some reason she hasn't separated them clearly enough in order to understand that sentence. But she's working very hard to understand that sentence, I think. Because I think the idea about the confusion with the fair boy is—will work itself out.

Ellen realized the student's visualizing had not yet clarified the passage, but she focused on efforts to monitor comprehension over accuracy of conclusions. Such comprehension problems, in other words, would work themselves out for the self-monitoring reader. The fact that the student was "working very hard"—re-reading, puzzling, visualizing—distinguished her as an effective reader, Ellen felt.

Ellen explained, however, that this student's reading was more an exception than the rule. She acknowledged that the student was "a good reader and a strong reader," and that she reads "a lot like how I read and a lot like how I would expect somebody to read." More often than not, Ellen indicated, students do not apply monitoring strategies, either consciously or unconsciously. She saw in her weaker readers a lack of initiative with texts. Ellen used the metaphor of "work" consistently, in fact, to describe the success or failure of student reading. As we finished the videotape interview, Ellen commented:

I don't necessarily assume that my students read that way. I don't assume all my students are going to stop and question, like she had that questioning technique. I think that was part of her, part of the way that she reads. She'll stop and question what she doesn't understand, and I don't think, I don't think most of my

students do that. And I can tell that from discussions. Because they haven't worked to figure it out. . . . And she worked at it.

She remembered, from her first year teaching literature, the difficulty she had communicating this kind of reading ethic to students:

They think—and I had this discussion with one of my classes . . . they didn't understand a particular piece we were reading so they just thought it was not well written or stupid, and then when I worked them through it, they said, "Oh, well, you just--it's because you're the teacher," and I said, "No, it's because I worked at it."

Ellen's observations of her student's think aloud focused especially on processes for comprehension—on tendencies to "work at" literature, to "stop and question" while reading. She elaborated the metaphor of "making a movie" in one's head as one reads. She showed tolerance for miscues and confusion, if students used them to re-read and puzzle over meaning.

Ellen felt less confident, however, explaining why most students fail to monitor in this way, and what she as a teacher might do about it. Discussing her teaching from the previous year, Ellen recalled that she had felt frustration with students' failure to monitor effectively. She indicated further that she had difficulty assessing where students were at with reading:

Last year I did not do that very well. I made a lot of assumptions because I didn't, um--I guess I didn't really know how to go about doing that. With the writing class I know exactly what to do, but with my lit classes I just expected

them to be at a certain level, and then went from there. And what I had to do was adjust as I went . . .

Ellen explained that when she realized her students weren't following the text successfully, she slowed down the process to focus on comprehension. "They couldn't keep track of the characters. So that's why . . . we just went through it chapter by chapter, here's what's happening. . ." Her practice focused on making sure students got the content of the plot—teaching goals Ellen characterized as "very simple." She described a few in-class activities, such as writing different story events on separate strips of paper and having students work together to place them in chronological order. The activity, she felt, gave students a way to configure the chronology of the story for themselves. She used another activity to help students identify characters:

With The Odyssey, all those characters it was so confusing to the kids, so I had them keep a log of all the characters. And... a couple of times we had a name game, and had two teams and each kid from each team had to take a turn on the panel... I would show them a name of one of the characters, and each of the sides had to ask questions to find out who the character was... So they would ask: "Are you a guard?" . . . "Did you help Odysseus or hurt Odysseus?" And I was pretty amazed at the way they were able to ask the questions and what kinds of questions they asked.

Such activities, Ellen indicated, were quite basic, but they were helpful in keeping students involved and connected to the storyline. She said: "My goals were just for them to understand plot structure and to understand what happened in the book, and that was as

much of a goal as I could have with some of my students." Ellen felt less comfortable, however, with other practices she resorted to. She said felt compelled to use vocabulary quizzes, even those these conflicted with her own ideals for teaching literature.

> *So it's hard, because I see myself sometimes forced to do certain things like I--for some of the pieces that had really difficult vocabulary, I made them weed those out and look them up and I had to give them a quiz because they wouldn't study them if I didn't quiz them, and I had to have grades for them. So, I don't really like that. I liked the college courses that I have where you wrote papers and you had an essay final....a midterm and a final.*

Ellen felt trapped by this dilemma, explaining that her own attempts to help students read successfully ended up producing negativity in some students and reinforced for them the artificiality of school literature—something Ellen hoped to avoid in her teaching. "It was very difficult," she said. "...and that's when I make kids start to hate English, because they see English as this thing you do in the classroom and not what they do in their everyday lives." In other words, despite her conception of reading as a process, Ellen found it difficult to provide pedagogical activities that students found supportive and interesting in relation to reading literature.

Conclusion

I have tried to characterize the intense concern teachers in this study had for student reading ability, the assumptions embedded in their talk about reading, as well as uncertainties or dissonances that emerged around these conceptions. The differing views of reading represented by Andrew, Caroline and Ellen are not especially surprising in light

of prevailing paradigms of reading research in the past century. Andrew's and Caroline's views reflect skills-based models which focus on observable responses. Ellen's concerns, which emphasize metacognitive awareness in responding to texts, echo the cognitively-oriented research of the last three decades (see Kucan & Beck). Such differences in orientation might be explained simply by the experience levels of the teachers in this study. Caroline and Andrew, veteran teachers in the district, are less likely to have met with cognitively-based research in reading during their teacher education programs, while Ellen, in her third year of teaching, is more likely to have had such exposure. The study suggests, in the least, that English department colleagues may harbor diverse orientations toward "reading"—a dimension of English teachers' thinking currently neglected in studies of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Moreover, given teachers' shared conception of reading as foundation, such differences may run well beneath the surface and not emerge as a topic for professional dialogue. English teachers, in this respect, may have little chance to benefit from the "distributed cognition" of their colleagues or from professional discourse about reading as a dimension of student learning (Wineburg & Grossman 1998; Putnam & Borko 2000).

Recent studies in professional development have directed attention to student thinking within a discipline. This study suggests, however, that English teachers may have limited language for examining the details of students' processes for understanding—if we understand "reading" to be central to such understanding. Andrew and Caroline's emphases on word recognition and decoding skills, to be sure, represent important dimensions that researchers have long identified as critical for reading success. Several

studies, for example, have argued for the close relationship between word recognition and comprehension, suggesting that students "cannot understand oral and written language without knowing what most words mean" (Flood & Lapp, 1992). However, current research in reading comprehension places discrete skills, such as vocabulary awareness, within larger and more complicated frameworks of strategic reading (Schoenbach et al, 1999). Reading research emphasizing verbal think alouds (see Kucan & Beck, 1997) suggests that successful readers engage in multiple, intersecting, but identifiable processes: establishing purposes for reading, setting and revising goals with particular texts, bringing forth prior knowledge, generating images, analogies and cognitive associations while reading, predicting, asking questions, articulating confusion, and using metacognition to monitor understanding (Flood & Lapp, 1992; Pearson 1999). From this perspective, reading miscues are seen less as indicators of reading deficit and more as necessary moments in the process of learning to read—moments that require guidance from expert readers who are aware of, and can exert cognitive control over, their own multiple strategies. Experts readers (teachers) might model how they deal with confusion while reading, for example, making such processes explicit and available for younger readers. Teachers like Andrew and Caroline, this study suggests, have had little exposure to these cognitive perspectives on reading. Although they recognize the importance of reading skills for their students' engagement with literature, they may have few ways of talking about reading processes beyond targeting discrete, word-level breakdowns. Observing reading phenomena that are unfamiliar, teachers may bring the issue to rest using broad-based psychological theories (e.g. brain hemispheres), as Caroline did.

The issue for these teachers, however, goes beyond developing a more extensive vocabulary for student reading strategies. Andrew, Caroline, and Ellen, as we have seen, each assumed a robust subject boundary between reading as a kind of generic knowledge and literature as a disciplinary event. Each lived with the belief that reading is central to literary understanding but not really part of the discipline of literature itself and therefore not their responsibility. Redressing the reading concerns of these teachers' with more emphasis on "reading instruction" or "reading strategies," in other words, may only serve to beg the issue. Teachers' preoccupation with subject matter boundaries, for instance, has been well-documented (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994; Hargreaves & McMillan, 1995; Siskin, 1995), suggesting that attention to student reading processes with literature may depend upon teachers' ability to conceptualize those processes as disciplinary. A growing body of research in English education, in fact, makes the case that teaching literature must involve attention to textual strategies that go well-beyond generic "reading." Such studies emphasize strategies for helping students experience or engage with, rather than comprehend, literature (Thomson, 1987; Wilhelm, 1997); they have also emphasized tools for interpreting the unique rhetorical and structural signals literary authors devise for readers (Rabinowitz, 1987; Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998; Smith, 1989; Hamel & Smith, 1998). The teachers in this study were unfamiliar with approaches to teaching which are mindful about such disciplinary assumptions about reading. No teacher, for example, distinguished explicitly between what it means for students to read and what it means for students to read literature. This dissertation study suggests, then, the importance of diversifying teachers' epistemology of reading to include both general processing strategies and

disciplinary or "domain-specific" (Hofer & Pintrich 1997) dimensions. Observing and discussing audiotapes and videotapes of students thinking aloud with literature may help teachers begin (as occurred in Caroline's 4th interview) to construct more diverse images of student reading within the discipline. Teachers' conceptions of reading as non-disciplinary otherwise may conspire to keep teachers at chronic distance from the textual strategies of their students.

Ellen's case, in this respect, remains instructive by itself. Despite Ellen's conception of student reading as a metacognitive process, she responded similarly to her colleagues when it came to classroom curriculum and instruction. Like Andrew and Caroline, she did not expect to focus, in literature class, on students' reading strategies—an assumption that, regardless of reading orientation, left her with limited instructional options when students exhibited actual weaknesses. The activities she did use, she felt, represented remedial work of sorts, work she didn't expect to have to do with teenage readers. In short, like Caroline and Andrew, Ellen had difficulty conceptualizing the challenges of student reading for teaching—although she clearly made some efforts. Ellen's case suggests that younger teachers may be developing more detailed and varied conceptions of students as readers, but that such conceptions remain on the margins of what "counts" in the literature curriculum. Even with her concern for student engagement, Ellen's conception of curriculum centered on communicating the basic content of classic texts—teaching the "what happened," the content of the text itself as curriculum, or perhaps historical information surrounding the text. Such assumptions were shared by Caroline and Andrew as well, but their persistence in Ellen's thinking,

given her "process" and "metacognitive" orientation toward reading, suggest the difficulty of any curricular transition toward student understanding. Indeed, pre-service courses in areas like "reading in the content areas" are still usually separated from methods courses in teaching literature—emphasizing the divisions between learning to read and learning literature. Teacher educators may have few school-based models or examples to offer that exemplify reading support integrated into "content-area" instruction. Although current research on reading suggests a surprising consensus on "best practices" (Pearson 1999), examples of such practices in content area classes are only just beginning to emerge (Schoenbach, et al, 1999). Re-orienting new English teachers toward issues of student understanding will require more focused attention to the relationship between subject matter learning and the varied ways students read texts. Teachers entering the profession, in particular, may need practical models of integrated reading support, access to student thinking, as well as opportunities to critically assess diverse conceptions of student understanding with colleagues.

Finally, the non-disciplinary conception of reading assumed by these teachers should be brought to light for the significant influence it may have on the teaching of literature. The purpose of reading, in this "pre-disciplinary" view, is typically seen as gathering neutral information from the text—a perspective, in fact, that reflects efferent (Rosenblatt, 1938/1976) or paradigmatic (Bruner, 1986) assumption for reading. In other words, teachers with this conception may implicitly bring "non-literary" assumptions to student reading—assumptions that reflect what Scholes (1989) calls "textual fundamentalism" —the belief that texts contain some neutral or self-evident

dimension, a literal level upon which all reasonable persons can arrive and agree (qtd. in Cherryholmes, 1993) While Scholes term is dramatic, the assumption itself may be widespread. Nystrand (1997) found, in his study of numerous literature classrooms, that a majority of teachers felt that "getting the facts down" was a necessary first step in student thinking about literature. Nystrand argued that this orientation lead teachers to frame the initial step of literary understanding as "literal reading," as a matter of transmission and recitation—a pattern Ellen found herself uncomfortably pursuing during her first year. This study suggests such conceptions of student reading may play a significant role in instructional planning with literature—leading teachers (despite response-oriented English methods courses, in Ellen's case) to emphasize efferent modes of response in students' early encounters with literature.

Chapter 5: Conceptualizing Initial Responses

". . . and all I would have to say is remember when you were a kid, and you went out and . . . you did ABC, and they start talking about it right away. Their memories. And then it's always fun to just let them go free and then to take what they have said and pull it back into the poem."   Caroline

Introduction

While they would all acknowledge an important relationship between the two, the teachers in this study differentiated the act of "reading" from "literary understanding." They left to themselves, in other words, the task of helping students learn something uniquely "literary." Generally speaking, the teachers in this study referred to four dimensions of student understanding with literature. Students employ general reading skills, generate personal engagement with literature, apply content knowledge, and make abstract interpretations. Broadly construed, the teachers were especially concerned that students enter texts successfully, and especially concerned that they arrive at final conclusions. They had less to say about what happens as students move "through" a text—how students might proceed from initial engagement to analytic interpretations. In addition, a fine-grained familiarity with students' ways of reading literature did not emerge for any teacher—a fact that suggests both the lack of emphasis of this kind of knowledge in the profession and the difficulty of generating knowledge of this kind on one's own. On the other hand, these teachers each had extensive knowledge of their own classrooms and curricula, and each a great deal to say about why students respond to literature as they do.

I focus in this chapter on teachers' conceptions of their students' initial responses to, and ways of accessing, literature—a dimension of student response to which teachers gave significant emphasis. Reports of secondary literature teaching suggest that teachers

emphasize literal level learning as students initially encounter texts, and that they may use personally-oriented connections with literature to get students engaged before moving on to more text-centered concerns (Applebee 1993). My interest in this chapter, however, is in how teachers conceptualize students' experience of entering a literary text. Beyond the generic act of reading, which teachers characterized as non-literary, to what aspects of students' initial responses to literature did teachers attend? How did they construe students' early encounters, and which aspects of these encounters did teachers believe require instructional support? In what follows, I organize the teachers' responses around the issues of student motivation, strategic ways of entering texts, and the extent to which teachers draw on their knowledge for teaching.

Perceptions of Student Motivation

As we have seen, each teacher had explicitly noted the prevalence of student indifference or resistance toward literature. Ellen, Andrew and Caroline each recognized that even students read effectively might not take interest in literature or literary knowing. Overcoming such dispositions toward literature was clearly a considerable task in itself. Ellen, for example, had found that establishing student motivation and engagement with literature was more difficult than she had expected. As students struggled, she helped them by going "chapter by chapter," emphasizing "what happened" as they went along. Often despite her best efforts, students remained baffled by the point of classical literature. Ellen recalled an ongoing skirmish with students:

> *I got into this discussion with kids a lot last year. Why do I need to learn this? Why am I doing this? Who cares? And my response was always, . . . it may not*

> *matter twenty years from now if you remember what happened in Chapter 8 of* The Iliad, *but your ability to be able to read that and figure out what is going on and understand and find connections is something that will carry you through to other aspects of life. And they don't understand that...*

Ellen remained distressed by students' perception of literature as an institutional chore and by her own inability to alter the perception. Her own rationale for literature included the importance of lifelong, critical thinking skills ("your ability to . . . figure out what is going on and understand and find connections"). But such justifications didn't sink in, she observed, and students resorted to mechanical responses and passive resistance. In Ellen's words, they "just focus on the question, find the answer." Students viewed literary texts, at least as presented in school, as academic and disconnected from their lives.

> *[They believe] that the pieces that we pick . . . are of this other world, they're not the kind of pieces that they would read on their own if they had a choice and, therefore, they're more difficult. They are—they don't relate to them. It's just drudgery. . . . I think a lot of kids see it as drudgery. I did when I was in high school.*

This difficulty, Ellen suggested, was less a matter of reading skill, and more a matter of perceived relevance and negative school conditioning. For Ellen, many students won't "trust themselves" with school literature and may not even begin the process of reading for understanding. As we saw in Chapter 3, Ellen had experienced plenty of this conditioning herself as a student. She explained, though, that as a first year teacher, she

was ill-prepared for the pervasiveness of this dynamic among students. Her frustrations were still evident:

> *I think that there are kids in those classes who were taught to hate English and they associate English with --I can really go off here. I think that the whole worksheet way of teaching and picking apart every little thing kills literature for a lot of students, and when they get to the point where they're a senior and they've done this for all these years, they just don't want any more. It's very difficult. And I was a first-year teacher, I don't know if I really got to any of the kids who were already conditioned not to like it.*

Helping students transform their negative perceptions of literature was, in her words, "very difficult"—so much so that Ellen was not sure she wanted to teach literature again in the immediate future. Indeed, this experience played a part in her decision to teach all writing courses in the year I interviewed her.

Andrew, too, suspected that many of his students could read literature but just didn't care. He tried to empathize with this disaffection to an extent. He explained that teenagers probably don't have literature as the first thing on their minds. He speculated about how they might think:

> *And the desire, the desire to read doesn't seem to be there in a lot of cases. Well, they've got other things to do. They've got jobs, they have girlfriends or boyfriends, they have, you know, there's a phone. Why not talk to somebody, why sit here with this, you know, I know it's going to take hours to read this book. When do I have those hours that I want to bore myself with?*

Too often, Andrew explained, students approach literature "as an assignment." As we saw in chapter 3, he perceived "an amazing lack of interest in the curriculum" among students. "If I get a third of them really engaged in what's going on, that that's a high response," he said. Andrew had learned from experience that many students will not read literature assignments for homework independently, and that he could not rely on their outside reading to construct his lessons. Thus, in the quarter I observed him, Andrew had set target dates for students to finish sections of their texts, then provided several class periods for silent reading so that students would be able to finish. In two periods that I observed, Andrew gave introductory remarks and/or invited questions the first 10 minutes of class, then gave students reading time for the remainder of the period. This teaching decision was built upon a perception of student motivation—the perception that otherwise students won't read the text. Andrew expressed this sentiment as he discussed students' potential readings of "Personal Helicon:"

> *And those for whom, you know, English is a requirement and they have to get a certain grade, I don't think we can make them enjoy literature, or understand literature that they are reluctant to get into. So if I were to hand this [poem] to them and say, okay, you know, bring me a half page analysis of what's going on . . . first of all, half of them wouldn't read it.*

Andrew sensed that he could not make students enjoy literature—that he had to deal with students' dispositions as they are. In fact, he found that students sometimes don't read literature when he gives them class time to read—an aspect he found particularly dispiriting:

And then they're given time to read. About every other day I like to talk about a chapter or two and see what they're getting out of it, and if they're not reading I find it very difficult. That's probably the most frustrating part about teaching is the students who aren't doing the work and don't really care.

Such perceptions emerged again as we looked at student writing during interview 3. Examining the paragraphs his students had written about short stories by Richard Wright, Andrew repeatedly explained that the key issue was simple lack of interest. After reading one student paragraph, he commented, "My suspicion on this response is that this is an effort simply to get it done. . . . She's not, you know, devoted to literature. . . I don't think literature is something that draws her in the way you and I were drawn into it at some point." Moreover, Andrew explicitly tried to differentiate such motivational issues from "reading" problems. He noted, for example, that students sometimes "won't read my assignments," but they then "come in with fat books that they are reading." He found the distinction difficult to make, but Andrew suspected strongly that "problems" with reading often boil down to poor motivation. He wanted, in other words, to separate students who were really struggling with reading from those who were just not trying:

Well, my problem is always separating those who are honestly trying to read and struggling and those who aren't reading, and I have some that honestly try to read and don't always get it, but I don't know which ones they are, or whether sometimes that isn't just an excuse for not reading.

Caroline referred to the theme of motivation far less than either Andrew or Ellen, although when she did, she noted similar themes. She understood, with Andrew, that

teenagers may not prioritize school literature in their lives. Caroline, however, in the few comments she made, included gender in the equation. She spoke, for example, about her efforts teaching sonnets to the general ed population (i.e. not upper-division or AP):

> *In the English Literature class, I have a majority of people, boys particularly, who were there only because they have to take English, and many of them can't read very well. Many of them are just more interested in, "Oh my God, I just got up and here I'm in class and I have to stay awake and listen to this stuff," so it's hard to motivate them.*

She joked occasionally about such students— for instance "those boys who are interested in 'did I turn my lights out on my car or not?'" Students whose minds are so preoccupied, she noted, are only there "because they have to take English." Discussing the student she observed in the think aloud, Caroline said that, as a sophomore, he was "really adamant against reading poetry." She noted that he "hated English," and acted "hostile. . . combative, confrontational." Such reactions, she explained, were grounded in the fact that he was a poor writer and usually received D's in English. Yet, Caroline differed from her colleagues when she brought up such student disaffection with literature. In almost every case, as we shall see, she also suggested that students had transformed, or could potentially transform, their initial resistance to literature. Students usually "come around," Caroline said.

Perceptions of Students' Entry into Literature

The teachers in this study successfully generated interest and enjoyment with the texts they read during Interview 2. Part of what they noticed about their own readings

with unfamiliar texts was that they used specific reading strategies for generating engagement. Each teacher activated strategies for envisionment—generating visual or sensory images as they read, often associating images and events in the text to something they knew or could relate to. In other words, teachers worked especially hard to "experience" what they were reading. An example from Andrew is representative: Reading the opening line about "wells" in "Personal Helicon," he related: "We had a well at my house. I grew up with a hand-dug well. I remember watching people down at the bottom of it digging it deeper at one time because we were running out of water every summer." Andrew went on to make distinctions between the wells he knew and those described in the poem—envisioning the speaker's scene for himself. After he finished the think aloud, he explained: "When I read, I make associations to my personal history. Very importantly. And to my experiences . . . You know, out of our experiences." Andrew, Caroline and Ellen each gave emphasis to these dual strategies of envisionment and connecting literature to one's own experiences.

In thinking about how their students initially respond to literary texts, each teacher referred to these strategies, although to differing degrees and often incidentally. In fact, anticipating how students would read "Personal Helicon," the teachers said little about such reading strategies. Their awareness of these dimensions of reading emerged primarily in response to the think-aloud protocols—suggesting that conceptions of strategic envisionment may typically remain tacit or latent as a form of pedagogical knowledge. Caroline, for example, while she did not believe reading literature was "about" making and reflecting upon personal connections, occasionally indicated that

experiential connections are relevant for students' entry into literature. She noted how students would connect with an obscure line from "Personal Helicon:"

> *[re-reading] To pry into roots, to finger slime, and to stare into some spring is beneath adult dignity. They would understand that. I think everybody would. Because they've all been children and all I would have to say is remember when you were a kid, and you went out and . . . you did ABC, and they start talking about it right away. Their memories. And then it's always fun to just let them go free and then to take what they have said and pull it back into the poem.*

As she watched one of her students on videotape draw on his own knowledge to make sense of an obscure line from Cyrano de Bergerac, Caroline approved: "This is in his experience. He's staying in his experience in this text, and that's perfectly fine as far as I'm concerned with literature." She acknowledge the role of personal experience in her own reading, as she wondered why students had problems with a particular poem she had taught several times. "Being a parent, maybe that's why I understand this more," she reflected.

Ellen, as we saw in Chapter 4, recognized the importance of visualizing as a way to gain access and generate interest with literature. In fact, of all the teachers in this study, Ellen most directly recognized reading itself as an active, strategy-based process—one that overlaps substantially with the process of literary envisionment. She directly identified her student's efforts to visualize and make personal connections. Listening to her student read during the think aloud, Ellen admired the student's way of "visualizing" and "creating a picture . . . and making a movie in her head" as she read. Ellen also

became animated when the student made a personal connection. "Wow . . . She's relating. She's visualizing . . . She's identifying the behavior with something she'd seen before." Ellen remarked that this students' ability to make such associations reflected "high level reasoning" in relation to literature. This comment suggests that Ellen may conceptualize the processes of envisioning and engaging as relatively complex or difficult—that she does not assume that all readers will perform these operations automatically.

Andrew, by comparison, treated personal connections as a given dimension of student reading at times. Predicting his students' potential responses with "Personal Helicon," for example, Andrew explained: "Well, I think they would draw on their experience. I think we all do as readers." Later, observing one of his students think aloud with a text, he suggested that the student's strong engagement in the story was related to the personal connections she made, even if she hadn't verbalized them:

> *Well, I remember my session with this, and I think I made a lot more personal associations than she is making. . . . You know, has she been around a woman who is breast feeding? Does she understand, you know, that relationship between mother and child in that way? Has she, you know, been in a household with young children? Things like that that I might have wondered if she—if that's part of what was keeping her interest there. She is aware of this relationship but hasn't talked about it yet.*

Listening to this student read a second text, however, Andrew noted that she was not making the same kinds of personal connections he had made during a passage when a character leaves his vehicle in the middle of the road:

> *I know that there are times when I've wanted to abandon a vehicle in traffic (laughter) and just I'm so tired of sitting there and wanted to walk away, do something else more interesting. . . . Yea. I have great sympathy for a guy who can do that and not look back (laughter)—which she seems to miss.*

These teacher observations, while sporadic, reflected the fact that each teacher had a framework for the role of experiential connections as students encounter literature. Each teacher noted the importance of envisionment and personal associations in their own readings and as they observed their own students read literature. On the other hand, the fact that a vocabulary for envisionment emerged primarily during think aloud interviews suggests that teachers may not draw upon this language in their everyday instructional thinking. Such procedural knowledge or knowledge of disciplinary strategies, may remain what Schoenbach, et al (1999) refer to as "teachers' untapped resources" (p.12-13). In addition, teachers differed in the importance they ascribed to such connections. Andrew and Ellen, in particular, differed in terms of the difficulty they felt students face in making experiential connections. These differences did not depend upon theoretical orientation toward literature. Caroline gave more attention to envisionment strategies than Andrew did, although both exhibited New Critical assumptions in their reading and comments. The theoretical assumptions, however, did shape teachers' conceptions of student thinking. For both Andrew and Caroline, the role of personal connections was to help

students get interested in texts—rather than initiating for students a process of reflecting upon their own relationship to a text (cf. Applebee, 1993). Another point here is that teachers spoke more often about "personal connections" than they did about the processes of visualizing or envisionment, although it was clear they valued both dimensions. This phenomenon may reflect, again, that teachers' have had little reason for making such distinctions with the nuances of student response.

Are Teachers' Conceptions Available for Teaching?

I have already suggested that these teachers' conceptions of processes of envisionment remain latent sources for pedagogical thinking. To what extent, in fact, did teachers draw upon their conceptions of students' initial responses to literature for teaching? How did teachers, practically, support students' early encounters with literature? I look at each teacher separately:

Andrew

Although he valued image building and personal connections as a reader himself, Andrew emphasized such connections only incidentally in teaching. He made occasional efforts to support strategic engagement. As we saw before, he suggested an introductory anecdote for starting students with "Personal Helicon," relating his own memories with wells to help students gain access to the speaker's setting. In one class, early in his unit on Cat's Cradle, Andrew tried to engage students by taking out a long piece of string and asking students: "Do you ever play with string?" He made a design with the string in his fingers and invited one student to come forward and play the game, "cat's cradle," with him. "It's an ancient game," he said, as he demonstrated with the student. He asked:

"Where's the cat? Where's the cradle? What kind of game is this?" Students' attention was high, and a brief discussion ensued, as students tried to make connections between the game and the opening chapters they had read.

More typically, Andrew left issues of engagement to the students themselves—assuming they would react however they react. Andrew suggested to me that affective responses were something he could encourage and "hope for" but not necessarily count on, teach or evaluate. His goal with literature, he said at one point, was to slow students down as they read, to bring literature, in his words, "if not to life, at least to understanding." Separating the "life" of literature from "understanding" in this way, Andrew seemed to prioritize comprehension over envisionment, suggesting that "resonance" with literature was difficult to control and predict with students. In fact, echoing the teachers in Nystrand's (1997) study, Andrew directed his students, in their initial encounters with literature, primarily toward paraphrasing. He recognized this as diluted version of how he himself might approach literary texts—a second-best option of sorts, grounded in the fact that students' dispositions toward literature were difficult to affect. As he discussed his approach to Cat's Cradle, for example, Andrew explained that his primary goal at the beginning of the novel was to help kids with "the linear plot sequence first. . . . mostly what I want them to know initially is what is going on in the story just so they have a, some kind of linear sequence to the novel itself." He likewise described his general approach to Uncle Tom's Children, a text he had just finished teaching, and the essay evaluation he had used:

I have ways in which I proceed. . . . really my main thing is to get plot summaries

just so they know what's going on, and when I do discussion very often that's the focus that I emphasize—just knowing what goes on in the stories. And then, as a result of that, beginning to develop some of the ideas that arise out of these particular writings, so that's why this final essay is meant to kind of draw some of this together at the second level. By then they should have done the plot summaries. They should be ready to discuss this relationship between the races and Wright's particular view.

For Andrew, plot summaries, if done successfully will "ready" students for the next stage of literary thinking—interpretation. He explained that paragraph summaries are a common tool he uses. In his words, "a summary at least gives us a beginning point for talking about [the author's] agenda." Andrew's language ("at least") suggested he knew of other activities or dimensions of response he could attend to, and that summaries did not exhaust students' possible responses. In fact, he explained that the summaries played a mostly pragmatic role:

Well, I want them to read the story (laughs). And if you don't have some assignment or something, a follow up to a reading assignment, they usually won't do it, or a lot of them won't do it, just because you asked them to do it. So I think, you know, fundamentally that's what's going on is I want to know that they've read it.

Andrew realized, however, that his students often have difficulty summarizing literary texts. He did not conceptualize these difficulties in terms of engagement strategies, however, or in terms of his own process of envisionment. He interpreted such

problems in terms of comprehension and motivation. He discussed with me, for example, the paragraph summary of one student who had received a low grade for her work. The summarized short story, "Long Black Song" by Richard Wright, tells of the rape of a black woman by a white man and the black husband's reaction. In the transcript passage below, Andrew discussed what went wrong with the student response (student writing is underlined):

> *. . . because one white man pissed him off so bad that he was going to kill him as in the story "Long Black Song." . . . because he slept with his wife. See, and he didn't sleep with her, he raped her. And Silas, who was in "Long Black Song" was already mad at whites. This just gave him an excuse to start shooting. He didn't like them to begin with. They never let him get ahead and so on and so on. He mentions that. . . .*

Andrew's response reflected his knowledge of nuances in the storyline and his concern for exact reproduction. He corrected the student's use of the words "slept" and "because," for example, because they were not specific enough, leaving room for misconceptions—first, that the sexual encounter might have been an affair rather than violence, and second, that the husband's anger was singularly motivated by rape, as opposed to this being the last straw. The student's imprecise summary, however, otherwise perplexed Andrew:

> *When he found out, he not only wanted to kill the white man, but also his wife and she was able to escape, is either a misunderstanding or gross misreading of this story because he wants to whip her. He wants to teach her a lesson. There is never any indication that he wants to kill her, but he is mad at her. . . I mean he's*

lived in the black community long enough to know that that wasn't her choice. But he also makes sure she gets away. When he knows he's going to be killed after he shoots the first guy and the other one escapes and he knows they're going to come back and kill him, he throws her clothes out the door and tells her to leave and makes sure she gets away. So I'm not—see, I'm not sure whether she read that at all or whether she just kind of heard what happened. Or if she did read it, quite how she understood it.

In Andrew's reading of the passage, the husband was trapped by circumstances over which he had little control, and Andrew was disconcerted by the student's failure to recognize this nuance. When I asked him what he would suggest to this student in a conference, he said, "I'd say, well, you ought to read these stories (laughs). Because my real suspicion is that this may not have been read." Andrew's assessment of these student paragraphs, in fact, reinforced for him the importance of comprehension-oriented instruction. When I asked him what might help such students respond more successfully in the future, Andrew said, "Well, I would probably emphasize what it means to summarize a story."

Andrew, in other words, did not draw much on his own ways of reading as a resource for conceptualizing student difficulty or for supporting students into literature. Part of the disjuncture between what he knows, at some level, and what he teaches, is grounded in what Andrew perceived himself to be teaching his students—namely the content of the short story, rather than strategic student operations. Role-playing a student conference in interview 3, he evaluated a student paragraph in this way: "This shows

some knowledge of the story, but it doesn't show me . . . that you caught the important elements of the story." However, the disjuncture may also be grounded in his sense that personal connections are naturally-occurring for all readers—a reading process that needs little support.

Caroline

Caroline emphasized envisionment the most consistently in her teaching, whenever she perceived students at risk of not engaging with literature successfully. In other words, Caroline drew systematically from her beliefs about experiential connections to inform teaching and to provide support. She knew, for example, that students have particular difficulty building recognizable images with classic literature. She explained her decision to use a film for the first act of Cyrano de Bergerac before students began reading.

> *The beginning of Cyrano is so confusing, there are so many characters and it jumps from this group of people talking to this group of people, to this group of people, so I show it to them, just the first scene that's at the theater when Cyrano comes in . . . But they really need this to understand what is going on. It also helps me show them what theater was like in the classical time because we're dealing with two times when you read Cyrano. You're dealing with the time of Moliere, and you're dealing with the Nineteenth Century theater. So in order to help them see that this is a piece that is set on historical time.*

For Caroline, the film served multiple purposes, helping students to visualize something about the historical era as well. Most importantly, she felt that without the film, students

would have no experiential reference point for their in-class reading and would have little connection or interest in the scene.

Caroline likewise discussed the support she would provide for students who may have difficulty becoming engaged with poetry. She said that she might ask students to draw pictures so they could visualize the images.

> *Today we did Shakespeare's sonnets. . . . Easiest goals for me to find is, look at this beauty, and I'll just say something, "Picture that in your mind." And even those boys who are interested in, "Did I turn my lights out on my car or not," for that moment they will see the beauty.*

Caroline's answer illustrated she addressed issues of motivation through strategic activities to promote ways of thinking with literary texts, in this case visualizing. She described other classroom activities, such as group role-playing, that she employed primarily with her Sophomore classes—with students she saw as less motivated with literature:

> *With my Sophomores . . . they will be in groups, and they can present their interpretation of the reading. . . That's been fun....you can act out what you have read in the scenes. . . For instance, all the different adventures that Odysseus has while he is on the sea. They pick which one they would like to illustrate somehow and present it to the class. I've had skits, I've had drawings, I've had musical presentations.*

In such activities, Caroline emphasized the need for students to draw or act out specific scenes, giving them a chance to experience a textual world for themselves. Caroline

explained that such emphasis on student engagement depends on the "type of kids" she's dealing with, however. "Creative dramatics," she explained, are less necessary with better readers, since such students are able to access literature independently. Her European Literature students (11th & 12th grades), she said, expect more content and fewer engagement activities such as role playing. She explained, in this respect, that she had decided not to use cooperative grouping in European Literature during the semester I interviewed her.

Caroline's support for student motivation was thus sporadic but purposeful, as she selectively targeted strategies for student engagement, using activities that help students envision particular storyworlds. Caroline thus drew upon her framework for how students come to engage texts—a framework that was more detailed than Andrew's. Her use of such activities may partially account for Caroline's optimism toward students and literature. Her interviews, again, were marked by comments like the following:

> *It's—where the difficulty lies is when you have some wild sophomores, you know that they want to do something else like look out the window or talk to each other, or whatever. But they come around. They always surprise me. I always expect, oh, man, this is going to be pulling teeth today. That's why teaching is fun, as I said, (laughter) kids never cease to amaze you. It can go the other way, too, but not as often as the positive way.*

Such comments say little about Caroline's conception of student understanding per se. The strategic support she provides students as they encounter literature, however, suggests that Caroline's conceptions of student envisionment support her in addressing the

complex topic of student motivation. Caroline perceives such motivation as partly within her control—as partly a matter of getting students to do the kinds of things experienced readers do when they initially encounter literary texts. Indeed, she explicitly identified this pedagogical perspective-taking both as part of her role. As she discussed addressing students' difficulties relating to Act I of Cyrano, she added: "But that's my job to see that, and experience tells me that."

Ellen

If Caroline conceived her role as scaffolding students into texts whenever needed, Ellen was constructing such a role for herself. Ellen, like Caroline, drew upon her conceptions of student response—in particular in terms of visualizing —to plan experiences for students that might help then envision a literary world. However, making the transition to teaching was not easy. In the first place, Ellen felt she had to get students through the text—so that focusing on students' internal processes was not an immediate concern. Secondly, she had little experience with these texts, and as we have seen, hadn't expected students would respond as they did. Ellen' first reaction to her students' resistance was to focus students on the text chapter by chapter, using study questions. Only later, as students came to the end of the text, did she consider using visually oriented activities.

In our third interview Ellen shared a literature assignment she had devised with such visualizing goals in mind. In the assignment, she asked students to take a passage from The Odyssey and "interpret it visually."[18] Since the students had already written an

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18 Ellen's assignment had other options as well. Her description follows:

essay on the literature, she felt the project would give students who don't write well, or who have lesser ability, a chance to "show their understanding in different ways" and "a good chance to excel as well." When I pressed her on what she meant by "interpret visually," Ellen replied only that it meant: "As you study that piece of text, this is what you think it looks like."

The assignment, as I came to understand it, served a few purposes. First, it supported students in the process of taking a passage and creating detailed visual images. Second, it allowed students to learn to "trust themselves" with literature – to focus on what they saw, rather than an interpretation that they think the teachers wants them to see. We discussed at length one student drawing of Odysseus' men stabbing the eye of the Cyclops. Ellen observed that there were noticeable discrepancies between the text the student had used (provided on the poster) and the actual picture he had drawn. In evaluating the poster, she described what the student had done:

> *There's no—the Cyclops ate Odysseus's men, so there's no mouth, it's just a big eye with eyelashes and lots of red lines and a big stick through it. So obviously they weren't thinking about all that, the fact that it had to be a creature that could*

. . . so I chose a project and what they had to do was choose a passage in the book and somehow interpret it visually so they could have done—let me try to think of all the options they had. They could have done a drawing like these. They could have done a collage where they took photographs from magazines that, for instance, they could have interpreted all the characteristics of Odysseus and then had modern photos that were depicting the same characteristics and put that together somehow in a collage. They could have done a presentation where they enacted a scene.

Okay, like a role play?

Yea, right. I had one pair of students do a little puppet thing that was really a disaster but I think they enjoyed it anyway. . . . And I think that—or some kind of 3-D they could have with something 3-D, but I think that was pretty much the gist of it. Most kids chose to either draw something, and the kids who couldn't draw, most of them did the collage.

eat. I mean this does not look like a creature that could eat to me. And yet the idea in the passage was that they had to blind the Cyclops in order to save themselves. So that's what's happening here.

For Ellen, this student ignored details to focus on "the idea in the passage." What was important to the student in his reading of the text was the gory point of impact of the spear and the eyeball, not the details about the mouth. "They weren't thinking about all that," Ellen speculated. When I asked whether she found the poster successful, she paused, then said, "Yes, because they got involved with the text." She explained her pause:

I thought through, um, what I had said earlier that I wanted to see a representation of what was in the text, but if it's not, this particular piece isn't, I mean I wouldn't call it accurate, but yet I still think it's successful because, um-- I'm having a hard time verbalizing. I think it's successful because it shows intensity—and it shows—it may not be—it may not show the actual size and shape and logic of everything, but it does show some of the emotional things that might be going on, some of the intensity, some of the gore, some of the violence. And so in that way I think it's successful.

The student's success hinged on his ability to connect to "emotional things" in the passage, its "intensity," the students' awareness of stark drama, rather than including every detail. Ellen conjectured further about this student's way of reading: "Maybe he just wasn't really using the text as a map . . . I mean as a point by point map." Ellen

appreciated maplike accuracy in students' reading, yet she acknowledged that reading may have other emphases besides exact replication. Emphasizing one's "involvement" with literature, she suggested, is especially important when school too often fails to validate the student's standpoint. She thus concluded by affirming the engagement her student demonstrated with the poster. "I think emotional reactions are important," she said, "...so that [drawing], even though it's not what I would say realistic or proportionally accurate, it shows extreme intensity, and that's definitely there. He's seeing that. He's feeling that intensity and that's coming through in the way he's drawing that picture." Ellen valued primarily how her student created his own unique response, connecting emotionally to the "intensity" of the story. In this respect, she felt that the student's work was a valuable piece of learning.

Ellen was thus building a repertoire of supports for students who may not otherwise trust themselves with literature, who may not activate visualizing strategies, or who may have difficulty connecting emotionally with a literary text. It is interesting, in this regard, that Ellen had used the poster activity after her students had already read much of The Odyssey and written an essay on the subject—after she realized that some students had found little success with the text. For Ellen, the activity was an effort to rehabilitate students' interest and sense of "success." The teaching decision suggests that Ellen, while she attributed student disaffection to factors outside her own classroom, was rehabilitating her own role in shaping students' dispositions with literature—a role Ellen explicitly envisioned for herself in becoming an English teacher. Ellen found this role more complicated than she had imagined, even as she experimented with ways to apprentice

students to the kinds of envisionment strategies she herself uses extensively in her reading.

Conclusion

Part of this discussion hangs on the question: To what extent do teachers see students' early encounters with literature as related to their own early encounters, and to what extent do they draw on this relationship as they made instructional plans? In terms of motivation, each teacher recognized that students do not approach literature with the same level of interest that they themselves bring. They placed high priority on students' initial responses, recognizing that without adequate entry, students are unlikely to arrive at any significant conclusions or interpretations. Each teacher, in this respect, described specific instructional activities they had designed to generate interest. Yet, in terms of the thinking strategies students use to gain access to literature, the teachers differed more noticeably. Andrew did not see as much difference between his own process of making personal connections and student processes. Caroline saw quite a difference between her own envisionment skills and students' common failure to visualize effectively. She made explicit instructional plans to scaffold this dimension for students who are struggling with or resisting texts. Ellen had been surprised that her students remained as disconnected from literary worlds as they had, and she made adaptations to her instructional sequence to give students opportunities to envision for themselves. The contrast suggests that teachers' developing pedagogical content knowledge depends upon not only identifying one's own strategies for reading but carefully comparing student readings in relation to these expert strategies. Caroline's case, and Ellen's as well, suggest that their efforts to scaffold envisionment are grounded in their perceptions of the significant difference

between students' use of envisionment strategies and their own and the belief that they can make a difference in bringing students from their immature strategies to more mature version of envisionment.

On the other hand, it is interesting that the teachers focused on envisionment strategies and initial access to texts as much as they did. Recent assessments of literature education suggest that the process of envisionment has been largely underestimated and under-theorized (Grossman, handbook chpt; Wilhelm, 1997; Langer 1995). Wilhem points out:

> Most teaching and research have focused on the spectator stance and how a reader interprets, evaluates, and reflects on the evoked world of the text. Little emphasis has been placed on what readers actually do to go beyond simple comprehension of story action to evoke the text and elaborate upon it as a 'story participant.' Students are thus asked to interpret a story by gazing and reflecting upon what they have never learned to experience (89).

The comment echoes Thomson's (1987) observation that, too often, "we ask kids to arrive without having traveled," when it comes to thinking about literature, or Rabinowitz' (1998) comment that with literature, too often, "the race has been replaced by the act of crossing the finish line" (p.101). Both Wilhelm and Thomson emphasize the importance of "elaborating" the storyworld—the process expert readers use to fill in what hasn't been written but what readers imagine must be true within the world of the text. Wilhelm cites Encisco (1992) and Bruner (1986) in suggesting that such extra-textual elaboration is "a key indicator, and in fact a prerequisite, of the link between participating in a story world

and moving along a continuum toward a more reflective exploration of those experiences as a spectator" (69-70). The responses of teachers in the present study do not contradict Wilhelm's argument, although, as we shall see, their conceptions of student response was in many ways the <u>most</u> elaborate at this envisionment stage. While an emphasis on Wilhelm's "elaboration" was not a significant emphasis for these teachers, Caroline and Ellen's attempts to support student envisionment suggest that English teachers may have, at least, some frameworks in hand to support students' initial responses to literature. Whether teachers exhibited similar conceptions and language, incipient or otherwise, with respect to students' interpretive responses to literature, is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Understanding Student Interpretation

"I think the major thing we do as instructors is help them toward interpretation. . . If I can assume that they have read the book, then we can move towards some of the other levels of understanding . . . say, philosophical issues or some of the literary play that goes on, some of the points of satire..." *Andrew*

Introduction

Literary understanding essentially occurs on two levels, Caroline, Andrew and Ellen agreed. Students read at the literal level of character and plot or at the interpretive level of analysis and metaphor.[19] Andrew stated this two-stage conception most clearly, when he pointed out that "a summary at least give us a starting point for talking about [an author's] agenda." His formal assessments of student understanding reflected the two dimensions as well. He used factual identification and multiple choice, followed by analytical paragraphs or longer interpretive essays. Caroline's examinations were similar in format. Discussing a test she had recently given, which included a factual content section and an essay section, Caroline pointed to the latter and said: "Yea, this is the analysis, the synthesis part. Yea, that is the knowledge right there." She recognized, though, at least momentarily as we paused over her exam, that the exam may neglect other dimensions of student response: "I guess I kind of leave the stuff out that's in the middle. The Bloom--" she said, cutting herself off, as if trying to recall other aspects of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy.

Caroline's unfinished comment suggests something about her underlying theory of student learning—namely, that it leans on Bloomian thinking, on a series of generalized, or

19 Rabinowitz (1987) suggests that all characterizations of literary understanding assume some version of these two levels.

non-disciplinary, thinking processes that begin with literal level understanding and proceed to higher levels of abstraction. Andrew, in fact, also referred to Bloom's taxonomy when he said he wanted students to respond at a "thinking level" with their reading of Richard Wright. When I asked what he meant by "thinking level," Andrew replied:

> *Well, I'm not sure how high it is on Bloom's list, but it's something beyond merely a factual recall. I haven't, yea, I haven't pegged what it might actually do (laughter).... But I wanted them to think about, you know, Wright as, you know, intellect not just as somebody who copies down what he sees but is thinking and projecting a theme.*

In these comments, Andrew and Caroline both indicate that Bloom's taxonomy has provided a useful way of thinking about various levels of student thinking – has helped them, in particular, conceptualize the kind of student understanding they want with literature. The offhand nature of the comments suggested, however, that Bloomian conceptions of learning exist as an implicit framework for thinking about students and learning. Bloom's taxonomy was not in the forefront of their pedagogical thinking or planning.

Analytic interpretation represented a real prize for these teachers, a pinnacle each had achieved herself or himself with literature—a height, each assumed further, that students should at least try to reach. Andrew described this kind of interpretive thinking as understanding what the author is after; Caroline referred to it as identifying "universal themes;" Ellen called it "discerning a purpose" behind a text. In Langer's (1995) terms, each teacher wanted students to step back from texts and "objectify" the experience—to

interpret broad meanings within texts and to relate them to their own lives. This way of reading, they agreed, held potential power for students and represents, as Langer says, one of the primary reasons we read literature at all. Yet, how did teachers understand students' efforts to make sense of literature in this way? If teachers should support students to see "how to situate a text in relation to culture, society and the world," as Scholes (1998) suggests, how did Andrew, Caroline and Ellen conceive of their students interpretive efforts?

Setting Students within Range

First, Andrew, Caroline and Ellen each placed their own interpretive goals for students rhetorically "within range"—that is, as something most students could potentially reach and, consequently, as worthy of curricular attention. Andrew told me, for example, that students know literature goes beyond the literal. In fact, they expect something beyond literal comprehension when they read literature in school, he said. Andrew put it this way during our first interview: "I think . . . they're aware, you know, that literature itself is not a simple thing. It has these other levels." He observed that students typically have had practice before high school applying literary devices, particularly symbolism, to yield abstract meanings from literature: "They are tuned . . .I believe, . . . by the time they're in high school to the idea that symbols exist," he said, "and that they can, by thinking about them, pick them out." Andrew knew that not all his students will recognize abstract meanings in this way. Still, he had seen enough evidence from his own students to indicate that they could generate such meanings. Despite the cursory nature of one

student's written response to a Richard Wright story, for instance, Andrew admired how the student had focused on authorial themes:

> *Well, I think she was responding to the stories at the level of this, you know, what Wright is after, more than simply a summary of the plot. I think she was trying to go a little bit into what was going on in the story. . . you know, the racism. I mean some of this, again, I don't know whether this comes from discussion or what. . . . She showed some thinking about conditions in the south and race relations in the south.*

Caroline likewise felt that students could potentially arrive at important life questions and social issues through literature. In fact, she found such issues eminently accessible, even, or perhaps especially, as her students studied classic texts. In particular, higher level student thinking occurs through a common teaching practice—class discussion. She referred to a recent conversation from her European Literature class:

> *In the Inferno we've just finished reading about the sodomites who are homosexuals, alcoholics, and drug addicts, so the discussion of how the church looked at that in the Middle Ages, how the church looks at it now, and what we as secular people, how we view these people and what they need. They had a really nice discussion on this this morning.*

Caroline enjoyed helping students draw relevant connections between medieval literature and contemporary issues. Her exams included interpretive essay questions, so that students could draw analytic points about the literature they had read.

Ellen, too, found that, even with the difficulties she faced in the previous year, her

students eventually arrived at discussion of worthwhile "issues" as the semester wore on. With the earlier texts, like the Odyssey, she had proceeded chapter by chapter, touching only briefly on intellectual possibilities like "the journey, that kind of thing," she said. By the end of the semester, she found students at a richer place:

> *. . . with the Oresteia we really got into issues of justice and revenge and all that stuff, so thatCwith that unit we did a lot more relating. . . . Because they already had enough of a background in the story. The story of Agamemnon's return is in the Odyssey, and so they already knew the story and this was just more detail. So they didn't have to struggle with who's who and what's going on. That was the biggest problem with the earlier pieces. So that was wonderful. It was a really nice way to end that course.*

Referring to another class, she said she occasionally found students' interpretation to be more thoughtful than she had initially realized. Some answers would appear to be confused until Ellen was able to interrogate student thinking more:

> *I didn't teach a lot of poetry last year, but I did some, and when kids came up with off the wall interpretations, or what appeared to be off the wall to me, I would make them dig into it and say, okay, where are you getting that from? And sometimes what they--what seemed off the wall at first because of the way they phrased it, was really very close to my interpretation and they just said it in the way that made sense to them but didn't necessarily make sense to me because of our different experience.*

All three teachers in this study, in other words, assumed that student thinking

could and should be directed toward such broader issues, ideas and interpretive conclusions. Each could point to direct classroom evidence of student success at this level. In addition, each teacher drew a great deal of satisfaction from students' participation in this kind of intellectual thought. Caroline and Ellen explicitly noted how "wonderful" or "nice" the classroom experience had been as students engaged literature in this way. For his part, Andrew, referring to symbolism in The Great Gatsby, described how a successful interaction might occur:

> *And somebody will say, "A green light." And then you say, "Oh, well, what does that mean?" And then suddenly they begin to kick in themselves. Well, green means go. Green light means go. And here he is reaching toward this light. Um, I think they find it for themselves. Now I don't know how many of them sat there and thought this up before it was mentioned . . .*

As his last sentence indicates, Andrew expressed ambivalence about the degree to which students were actually independent with this kind of thinking. In general, though, all three teachers indicated that deeper interpretive meanings were available to students—in particular through teacher-student interaction in all-class discussion. Given their contrasting concern that many students "can't read," however, the question remained whether some students weren't automatically excluded from these larger goals—or, alternatively, what kind of scaffolding teachers would provide for student thinking – for those "connections" that each teacher had predicted their students would fail to make with a poem like "Personal Helicon."

The Role of Background Knowledge

Caroline, Andrew and Ellen each mentioned the role of "domain knowledge" or background knowledge in supporting student understandings with literature. Each felt that disciplinary content knowledge would assist students as they form interpretations, although no teacher felt that students should be inundated with such knowledge. The teachers knew, in other words, that students simply didn't have this kind of knowledge and would have to be given it directly—through direct lecture, notes, or background reading. The teachers also recognized together that there was too much to learn in this regard, and the best they could do was to expose broadly and selectively. Caroline suggested that historical background to literature is important but is not absolutely required for understanding. She used the construct of literary history, for example, to help students frame their readings. She thus provided notes on her blackboard as students began Cyrano de Bergerac—explaining that a "romantic" play stimulates an audience's desire for "escape" and reflects a "backlash against realism." As students finished this play, Caroline constructed the following prompt for an essay evaluation: "Cyrano is an idealized romantic hero. De Guiche, Christian, and Rageneau serve as foils to his character. Analyze this relationship." In class, Caroline helped students understand what an "idealized romantic hero" was, what a foil meant, and after in-class discussion, students applied these concepts to the play. As Caroline put it, "In literary criticism you have to take [these concepts] as a basic set of ideas, and then we appropriate it to this play." Caroline thus attempted to share the critical concepts and schemata that she brought to reading literature—schemata that reflected the assumptions of her orientation toward literature.[20]

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20 In discussing a poetry unit she had recently taught, Caroline likewise emphasized structural concepts

Ellen's emphasis on strategies like visualizing were balanced against her belief that students often need "background," as she called it, to engage successfully with texts. Especially with classical literature, Ellen found that, beyond having a "purpose" for reading, historical knowledge and subject matter knowledge was crucial for success. For instance, with The Odyssey, her students "couldn't keep the characters straight" and "had trouble with chronological order." With the last text (The Oresteia) for the semester, however, she found that her class began to "get into issues of justice and revenge and – with that unit we did a lot more relating..." Ellen attributed this success to the fact that the students by then

> *--already had enough of a background in the story. The story of Agamemnon's return is in* The Odyssey, *and so they already knew the story, and this was just more detail. So they didn't have to struggle with who's who and what's going on. That was the biggest problem with the earlier pieces.*

Ellen pointed to a similar issue in her American literature class. Without relevant historical background, she sensed that her students would miss important aspects of a text like Of Mice and Men. She explained:

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and elements central to poetry—helping students apply disciplinary language to texts.

> *We look at what perspectives do poets take and who's the speaker in the poem, what's the purpose of the poem . . . you know what you have to do, the speaker, the occasion, the purpose of the poem, and how does the poet use the stylistic devices . . . . We look at the figurative language, and we read poems that are particularly strong in these different elements: connotation, denotation, that sort of thing, diction . . . metaphors and similes and we look at how does the speaker in the poem use metaphor and simile to tell us war is futile, for instance.*

Caroline wanted students to know that "these are the elements that they look for" when reading poetry. Their goal is "to see these things and apply what they know to the whole poems." The heart of Caroline's instruction revolves, to some extent, around helping students make such applications of disciplinary concepts.

. . . I would ask them what they knew about the depression or—so then I would figure out how much background I had to give in order for them to understand the situation, because I think most kids if they just read Of Mice and Men, *they don't understand what's really going on there. I know a lot of the period pieces that we do involved different attitudes towards especially what we would see now as racist and* Of Mice and Men *they didn't really have an attitude then, it was just that's the way it is. So, you know, the whole idea of these guys traveling on the trains, it just doesn't happen anymore. It doesn't make sense to a lot of kids.*

Without historical context, Ellen felt students might become confused or stumble into anachronistic judgments—failing to differentiate between their own historical perspective and that of the literary situations or characters. Ellen did not especially emphasize this aspect of student understanding during our interviews, but she found such background relevant depending on the text. Andrew had a similar sense of the role of background knowledge. He said that, as students begin The Great Gatsby, he provides information they would not otherwise know. "I talk about Fitzgerald the first day. I talk about his background, biographical things. Point out in general some of the ways they are going to see this in the book." In general, Andrew said he reminds students of basic disciplinary terms through the year, and he emphasizes "era" to give students better historical perspective on a work:

I would like them to understand the elements of literature. . . so I remind them with a series of overheads, for instance, about what plot is, what character is. I want them to know the terms that we use when discussing literature. And I'll use

> *those a couple times per quarter. I'll put these things up on overhead and remind them and then at some point stick a question on a quiz about it—or a test. I want them to understand era. I think that's important, to integrate this into their historical perspective.*

Each teacher thus hoped to fill in for students the content frameworks that shape their own perceptions of literature. Without these frameworks, students would be without the tools to make informed interpretations—would be susceptible to myopic or anachronistic judgments.

Difficulties with Interpretation

Caroline, Andrew and Ellen, of course, were aware of the complications students face when it came to generating analytical conclusions. As if the mountain peak were often covered by a low layer of clouds, the teachers recognized that students simply don't perceive anything like the heights of interpretation, and others may not believe that heading to the top is worth the effort. For such students, scaling the entire mountain may be something the teacher wants to do, the students themselves content to take shorter hikes around the base. Ellen, Andrew and Caroline thus indicated that students, even if they are interested, often do not construct meanings effectively from literary texts. Students fail to make "connections" when they read. In Ellen's words, students know a poem "is supposed to mean something," but they "don't know how to look at a poem." Many students would remain on the surface level with a poem like "Personal Helicon," according to both Caroline and Andrew. No teacher predicted, at least with any confidence, that students would arrive at the kinds of metaphoric understandings each of

them had with "Personal Helicon."

Caroline explained that getting students to perceive literature in universal terms, or in terms of universal truths, was among the most difficult of teaching tasks. Andrew and Ellen both concurred. Abstract meaning-making eludes many students, each said, despite teacher support and modeling in class. When we spoke about typical problems students have with literature, Caroline explained: "The really difficult one I found with the majority of the students is for them to understand the tie of all humanity through all of time, which I've always found interesting that they don't see that immediately." Caroline knew that such imaginative connections were part of her own repertoire and expectation for reading literature. Her students, however, often remain stuck within the boundaries of a story:

> *They look at the speaker on the bow of his boat with his feet frozen to the deck in The Seafarer, and they see this as some Viking guy who's out there in the storms, he's a sailor. . . . Bear Wolf is a king and a warrior, that's what they would like to believe. They don't see that they have elements of honor and dignity, and all of the positive things that humanity has. So that's difficult.*

Students, by her account, often "don't see" how a text, especially a classical one, could relate to them. They just see "some Viking guy," rather than relevant themes, values or characteristics that extend beyond the single character. Moving students to a new awareness, Caroline suggested, is neither easy nor automatic.

Andrew observed, as well, that students often remain on the level of literal comprehension and relating to characters. As one of his students read Cat's Cradle during interview 4, we noticed how she worked hard to figure out, successfully, a word she did

not recognize ("Marmon"). The student also displayed interest in a hinted-at romantic tryst between two characters. At the end of her reading, Andrew remarked that she had "a good sense of what's going on" but that she hadn't reached to more sophisticated levels of understanding: "She seems to be missing some of that kind of satirical level, I think. At this point she's really interested in . . . the interactions of the people." The comment echoed what Andrew had said during our first interview. Asked how his students would characterize what it means to "understand" literature, Andrew responded: "They would be more concerned at a more basic level. To understand literature is to know plot, to understand, you know . . . characters, literary terms types of things. Um yea. I don't know that they're looking at a grander picture."

Andrew and Ellen both explained that students' literalism is partly a function of school training (Rogers, 1991). Student responses are shaped by school expectations which focus on recitation-based activities, like memorizing literary conventions. Andrew continued: "If you ask a student how do they know when they understand literature, see we've trained them to think that you understand literature by being able to regurgitate plot, to be able to know the characters and their main attributes." Andrew's own teaching reflected some of the school training he lamented, but he saw few alternatives. Like Ellen, he felt that student accountability demanded quizzes about basic declarative knowledge. Thus, students, he said, become more willing to write summaries of "what happened" in Richard Wright's short stories than interpretive paragraphs discussing the author's views. Students who have learned the recitation approach of schooling, he implied further, also learn to dislike interpretive questions. He explained that teenagers often resist if his

questions are too open-ended: "I try to ask at least occasionally some questions that I haven't told them the answers to," he said sardonically, "which is—they always think is unfair."

Ellen noted that kids often "don't understand the concept of purpose"—often comprehending the storyline, but not seeing any reason why it might have been written or what message it might have for them. Students, she said,

> *. . . notice things and they don't make the connections. If it requires more work than just what's on the surface, seeing what's on the surface. Now this isn't everybody. But I know that there will—usually the louder ones in the class will come up with things like that. Like we were reading a Walt Whitman poem, I forget which one, but one kid said, "Uhh, was he drunk or what?" And I say, "I don't know" (laughter). How can I answer that? . . . they know there's something. They know, I mean they're trained enough to know that I'm giving them a poem because I think that there is something in it they can get out of it, but a lot of them are also trained to sit and wait for the teacher to tell them what it means.*

Ellen, for her part, explained that she found kids to be "not analytical." "I had some kids who couldn't answer an analytical question," she said. "They just didn't know how. They never had—either they never had been asked to do it or, when they couldn't do it. They somehow got by [in school]." She explained that with the Homeric epics she did raise questions about symbol and mood, but did not push such literary issues, since "not everyone was able to make those connections."

General Psych Explanations

The teachers in this study drew less upon conceptions of their own strategies for interpreting literature to think about student understanding than they had with strategies for entry and envisionment. They offered more general, sweeping comments about student learning—suggesting at once that students could interpret literature and that they would have significant difficulty. How, then, did teachers understand these difficulties in light of their own teaching goals—their shared desire to bring students to richer analytic interpretations with literature? How did they conceptualize student learning in relation to an interpretive stance, given the significant confusion students experience? With some prompting from me, a few patterns emerged.

In one pattern of response, the teachers recognized a range of intellectual and psychological profiles among students, suggesting, sensibly enough, that students will differ—some more and others less inclined toward analytical thinking and literary generalizations. Caroline, Ellen, and Andrew used this frame to describe rather than judge—to accept and at times validate student responses that might be dramatically different from their own. Caroline, for example, acknowledged that developmental factors may be at work in students' responses. Discussing students' often facile reactions to poetry, Caroline questioned whether she herself would have made deeper connections before her senior year in high school: "I wonder if I would have seen that as a junior," she said, referring to a specific insight in a poem her students typically missed. "Was it that I was just ready for it? And this was the second semester of my senior year, so I don't know. And I felt that, too, age makes a big difference, and maturity." Ellen made a

similar point, as we discussed how she might respond to a student's superficial understanding of a poem. She acknowledged that students' responses to texts will necessarily differ from her own:

First of all I think that as we mature we relate to certain pieces, or we're able to see things in pieces and in different ways. So you read the—read a book at 18, read the same book at 25, read the same book at 35. You get so many different things from it. So, um, if the student is able to defend their interpretation and do that well, then I would say that they—they'll—I think their understanding is superficial. I would invite them to continue to look deeper. But I would still accept the fact that they have, um, they are attempting or working on skills that are my—part of my goal, if that makes sense.

Ellen and Caroline both acknowledged that students will respond to texts at their own level—and should be supported as such. As we spoke about the difficulties of interpretation, each was careful not to impose their own abilities on students. Caroline, in this respect, referred to her student's personality-type as she observed him express intolerance for a writer's narrative detail, rather than draw associations from such detail, in interview 4. She said: "I get the feeling that the kid is an action kid. He wants more action and less exposition. He wants to jump right in, and I would have guessed that from his personality." Later, as the student came to the end of his reading of Cyrano, Caroline attributed his interpretive success to a combination of gender and youthfulness:

It's his youth, his masculinity, his faith in the future and that things are attainable. Yea. . . . Don't you see that kids love Romeo and Juliet, too, because

they can see themselves and this is a time of romance in your life, actually, feeling that sense of all things are possible. Don't you feel that with what he's saying here? . . . It's his youth, his masculinity, his faith in the future and that things are attainable.

Such general psychological explanations of student understanding sometimes focused on intellectual ability. In an earlier interview, for example, Caroline she described the responses of two very different student types:

Now if I have a student who is not an intellectual, then I would just be satisfied if this kid felt a satisfaction with the story. "Oh, I liked that. That was entertaining, it was fun to see that this guy did that," or "Oh, look at all the blood that was all over the place," and just really understood why the blood was there rather than the fact that there was blood there. . . . If a kid is cerebral, then he will say, "I saw that the character did this, this and this which led to that," and see an association that the kid sees either in the story itself or between the story and reality.

Andrew raised the issue of intellectual difference in terms of the tracking he perceived in his department. As we began a discussion of some student writing samples during our third interview, Andrew commented: "Of course, I'm dealing with a regular level class. This class tends to draw I would say middle and lower middle students, not the very bottom ones, although we get a few in here who are really bottom, and not very many of the top ones." Referring to a student paragraph he found average, Andrew placed the

student intellectually: "She is a—she's not a great thinker as a person to begin with. This is probably as intellectual a paper as I've seen from her."

The flipside of these general psychological explanations was that they offered little insight on how to support students, and they exerted little pressure to alter or even provide instruction. With such theories, all three teachers positioned themselves as observers of student differences (cf Clark & Peterson, 1986). In other words, whether a teacher focused on cognitive ability or personality type, these frameworks functioned deterministically, leaving teachers with few options beyond watching non-analytical students operate at their own level. The value of such lenses for teachers, presumably, comes as they help us refine what we can and cannot control in students' learning. Yet, these lenses gave little direction for supporting students who do not learn literature easily. Andrew, in fact, seemed to perceive this point quite well. He pointed out, with characteristic honesty, that not all students were represented in the intended audience of his department's literature curriculum:

> *I think, for instance, that some of the literature we do is—not that we don't have that literature, you know, as a good thing for them to learn, but that when we're dealing with a general run of students, we're really aiming like at the upper middle rather than at the broadest spectrum of students in how we expect them to come through it.*

Disciplinary Experience

A second frame for interpreting student thinking involved students' disciplinary experience. The usefulness of this frame, however, differed for each teacher. A teacher's

ability to transform observations of students' "experience" into supportive teaching turned on the ability to answer the question: Experience with what? In addition, it turned on teachers' conceptions of the relationship between their own expertise and student experience. On the one hand, each teacher in this study perceived a significant gap between teacher and student thinking—a perception that is supported in noice/expert research reading literature (Earthman, 1992, Peskin, 1998). Andrew remarked, for example, "I mean you and I, we've spent our lifetimes reading, and we're fairly skilled at it. But a lot of them, that's not high on their agenda, reading." As we talked about the kinds of narrative he has students read, Andrew noted how easy it is to neglect the difference between his reading and students' reading. He said, "Most of what we read is pretty approachable. It's not real difficult stuff, I don't think. But then I've had, you know, a lot of years of reading literature that sometimes I overlook." Caroline marked the same gap. She lamented her students' failure to distinguish popular writers such as Danielle Steele from masters like William Faulkner, and their inclination to prefer superficial poems over quality poems:

> *...they haven't had a great deal of exposure to the more difficult literature. I found out my AP students do that, too. . . I found that they really prefer bad poetry. They like it. They don't understand about where's the imagery in this poem. There's none.*

Such lack of exposure, Caroline indicated, leaves students with low sensitivity to textual nuance and with limited vocabulary for interpreting texts. As she observed one student

reading on videotape, she noted that he lacked the subject matter vocabulary to articulate what was happening:

> *He understood, yea, the general gist of it, but you know, and then he says there's no detail in here, and I'm thinking, "What! This is full of detail. It's all detail.. It's all images. . . ." So maybe he doesn't have literary vocabulary either to articulate what's happening here. . . There is a certain tone to this. It's slangy with a hip-type tone, and he doesn't have that vocabulary to say that either. See, I can say that because, well . . . it's my love. And I've done this for a long, long time. I have experience.*

Ellen, for her part, had also been surprised to find students without the disciplinary vocabulary she had expected—vocabulary that would assist them in making sophisticated judgments. She described her realization that students were oblivious to the terms she was using:

> *So, my other assumptions were that they knew basic distinctions between the literary terms, there are literary terms like plot, they knew what plot structure was, what the theme was. . . . They didn't know the terms. . . . So—but I went in there throwing these terms around—and didn't know for, I don't know how long it took me, but I do remember at some point figuring it out.*

Ellen, though, perhaps reflecting her newness to the profession, referred less to her own experience in relation to students. In fact, she more often relayed instances where she had downplayed that experience so students would come to trust their own responses:

> *I try as best as I can to validate their honest responses and to—to show them that, you know, I don't know everything and that my answer doesn't have to be the answer. Um, and sometimes that shocks some kids when I say I don't know everything. I say, "I know more than you, but I don't know everything."*

Such comments suggested implicitly, however, Ellen's awareness of her own position as expert in the classroom.

Caroline, Andrew and Ellen recognized, then, that their own experience with literature far outstripped students. Yet, how did they map out this space between their own skilled reading, their own ability to scale the mountain, so to speak, and student inexperience? To what extent did the perceived distinction in experience become either a resource or an obstacle for teachers' instructional planning? As noted above, the answer to these questions turned on teachers' ability to unpack the construct of experience in detail. No teacher found this an easy task. Ellen and Caroline, for example, referred to the importance of disciplinary vocabulary and language – students' unfamiliarity with concepts like "theme," "plot," and "tone." Andrew, too, had pointed out that differences in "author's style," between Faulkner and Richard Wright for instance, were difficult to communicate to students. In other words, the teachers were able to pick out discrete elements of their own content knowledge that students lacked. More difficult for these teachers was identifying their own thinking strategies or ways of knowing in generating critical, analytic, or metaphorical conclusions—how an individual may come to develop ideas about theme, or how one learns to interpret tone. Ellen, for example, spoke about interpretive thinking in general terms. She observed that students need to be able to

"defend" their interpretations, and that skillful readings of literature involve the ability to "reflect" on what one has read. Such conceptions suggested that Ellen had thought about ways of thinking with literature as much as specific content knowledge. How students develop such skills, however, or how Ellen might distinguish "defending" one's view and "reflecting" with literature, from the thinking of a historian or scientist, however, was not clear (cf Applebee 1996, p.103). Ellen, as a newcomer to the profession, was still working out these conceptions of "experience" in relation to student learning.

Andrew maintained the most distance between his own experience and student understanding. He indirectly criticized the literature curricula in his department as being directed at levels that are too high for secondary students. "I think sometimes we tend to over-teach at this level, um, and go to areas that more rightfully belong somewhere later in their learning," he said. He concluded further that many students would never need to read literature in the way he reads it. For Andrew, the division between student experience and his own experience with literature represented disparate worlds of understanding—worlds that are sometimes not worth bridging:

> *I've spent a lot more years looking at literature than they have, and I don't mind that there's a disparity between what I see when I look at literature and what they see when they look at it. For most students, most students will never take another English class after high school unless it's 101 at college. A few will take lit classes in college and maybe one out of five hundred will actually take many classes and perhaps even become an English teacher someday, but for most of them it's not going to be an area of study for them. . . . They know they have to*

take an English class, so to know the subject matter is to respond to what the teacher expects you to do.

Andrew's sense of this gap of experience, in fact, echoes Scholes (1998) recent observation that English teachers and professors for too long have aimed their teaching at prototypes of themselves. Andrew had difficulty resolving this dilemma, however, other than to accept students' mechanical responses as a chronic reality—and to continue teaching literature to the "upper middle." After describing his own strategies for making sense of a poem, for instance, Andrew explained how students might approach it:

When students come to it, if they're assigned to read it, I think it works in a different way, for those who like it, who know they like poetry, and those for whom, you know, English is a requirement and they have to get a certain grade. I don't think we can make them enjoy literature, or understand literature that they are reluctant to get into. So if I were to hand this to them and say, okay, you know, bring me a half page analysis of what's going on in this poem, they would read through it, struggle with the idea, try and come up with some things in sentences, and do it as an assignment. If I handed it to them and said, "Read this, we'll talk about it tomorrow," first of all, half of them wouldn't read it. But the ones who did would probably be the ones who like poetry.

Andrew did not, in other words, draw any specific curricular or pedagogical insights, from the differences he observed between his reading and student readings—other than to suggest some inherent frustrations in the project of teaching literature and to continue giving students opportunities to interpret literature.

Caroline, again, was more optimistic, providing, on occasion, detailed conceptions of student "inexperience" as well as potential activities to scaffold more experienced ways of thinking. She explained, for example, that students often have false expectations for poetry—looking only for a single message or moral. Students thus typically become frustrated with obscure poems, she said, because they believe the poet is "hiding meaning:"

> *Another misconception is, "There's got to be a meaning in here and it's a puzzle and I've got to figure it out, and the poet is hiding the meaning in here." [But] not every poem has to mean something. It can just be. So if you're, like a haiku, for instance, it may have a meaning, but here's the lovely image . . . Why does this have to be something that is really deep and hidden and out to get you? Which many of them think that that's what the poem is, too. This is hard. I can't figure this thing out. Why even try?*

Ellen and Andrew would have certainly agreed with this assessment. Only Caroline, however, had developed routes for student learning. She described an activity that might bring sophomores to help students read more aesthetically.

> *I put on the board glasses, cat, table, stove, and we have a whole list of things. And so then I say, "What picture do you see?" Well, most of them see a farm. Oh, alcohol is another word. Others say, "Well, I see the kitchen where my uncles and dad are drinking." Another one, "I see a veterinarian clinic." So that's fun to do and I can hear the various kids, what they have to suggest. Then they start arguing about, "Well, alcohol, what are you talking about? That's a*

lab!" And then they talk among each other and that's what I really like.

This was the only specific scaffolding Caroline described in relation to literary interpretation—broadening student perceptions beyond the notion of a single meaning. It suggested though, that Caroline tries to do more for students than provide ongoing exposure—although exposure was clearly one of her strategies.

Conclusion

The diversity in teachers' conceptions of experience, then, emerged less as they identified student inexperience with literature (which they all did) and more as they attempted to describe and map out student possibilities in the space between inexperience and expertise. Andrew saw few possibilities in this space; inexperienced or low performing students were unlikely to make much progress up the mountain or even come to appreciate its possibilities. Ellen held out hope for such progress, but was puzzled by students' aimlessness with literature. She was trying to work out why students responded as they did, although her vocabulary for experienced "climbing" remained general. Caroline could describe more specific routes for students, offering occasional practice with the kinds of skills and strategies experienced climbers might use. Caroline seemed most able to take her own conceptions of an experienced reading and construct activities that bridge students gradually toward new ways of thinking with literature. This ability depended not only on her optimism about students, but on her metacognitive awareness of specific thinking processes relevant for understanding specific texts, and her understanding of the kinds of representations that would bridge students toward these ways of thinking.

Opportunities for teachers to develop this kind of pedagogical content knowledge, it must be said, have been rare for secondary teachers. Discipline-specific, or text-specific modes of thinking, especially in relation to student learning, as researchers like Lee (1993), Smith (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998; Smith 1991) and Wineburg (1991) have claimed, typically go undiscussed as teachers consider instructional and curricular issues. Peskin (1998) confirms that reading research, as well, has had little to say about the specifics of such higher level, discipline-specific thinking processes. In her words:

> Although reading comprehension research has focused on general strategies of comprehension such as rereading from the beginning of confusing segments, paraphrasing, summarizing, backtracking, and pressing on in hopes of later resolution, it has failed to examine higher level interpretive processes particular to specific texts.

Beyond content knowledge, in other words, teachers may have tremendous difficulty identifying what "experience" means, and what learning means, in concrete terms for students. Teachers had richer conceptualizations of students' early encounters with literature, and provided more constructive support for students' envisionment, than with students' final conclusions.

As noted before, though, the teachers in this study were not used to talking about teaching in terms of students' strategic needs when reading literature. Andrew mentioned this fact directly a few times: As mentioned above, when he considered his students' ability to generate interpretive responses to literature, Andrew remained puzzled: "I don't know how it happens," he said. Later, before Andrew listened to a students think aloud, I asked if he

could predict what the student would do. Andrew responded simply: "No, because I've never tried to." If Caroline's case suggests that attention to student thinking in relation to disciplinary expertise may result in useful pedagogical scaffolding, all three cases suggest that such learning has not been emphasized in the professional lives of these teachers. Researchers like Applebee (1996) and Nystrand (1997), however, suggest that this phenomenon reflects prevailing conceptions of curriculum, pointing out that literature teaching remains embedded in a recitation tradition, focused on the transmission of content and/or teacher knowledge. The point is that teachers' limited consideration of student thinking reflects, rather than faulty professional thinking, a sensible and nonsurprising outcome within the "curriculum as content" tradition—a curriculum tradition that Andrew, Ellen and Caroline each understand and care about.[21] Within this tradition, literature teachers are less likely to focus explicitly on student processes for learning or the gap between experienced and inexperienced readings. Indeed the power of this content orientation makes all the more remarkable the knowledge teachers like Caroline have developed in relation to student understanding. Ellen's case suggests, however, the difficulty of constructing such knowledge on one's own. Indeed, the classroom itself, as Andrew's case suggests, may not always be helpful or predictable source of learning (cf Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1985). This study, then, confirms earlier research which suggests that pedagogical content knowledge is not an automatic product of "experience" in the classroom. This appears to be especially true for teachers'

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21 Andrew captured this tradition succinctly with the comment: "What they need to know I expect to go over with them."

understanding of student understanding.

A final point involves the conceptions of learning that teachers used, once their attention was directed toward details of student literary understanding. When such language did arise, it reflected general psychological, or non-disciplinary conceptions of student learning. Andrew and Caroline, for example, each briefly made reference to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy in the course of their responses. Caroline, as we saw above, wondered momentarily about some dimensions of learning that might be neglected on her exam—an exam that included factual content and synthesis/analysis. Andrew wanted students to approach literature at a "thinking level," or as "something beyond factual recall." The references to Bloom, though fleeting, shed some light on teacher thinking in this chapter, suggesting that Andrew and Caroline may implicitly conceptualize student literary thinking in terms of a general hierarchy from "literal" to "abstract." One question this raises is the extent to which Bloom's non-disciplinary framework justifies for teachers an emphasis on factual content as a starting point for students' response to literature. This would also help explain what Zancanella (1991) found as teachers' "school approach" to teaching literature—an approach which emphasizes recall and summarizing, even though teachers themselves use personal connections extensively in their own reading. Andrew's conceptions of teaching reflect this school approach, in contrast to his own sensitive readings. In the end, teachers' conceptions of student understanding, this study suggests, may be influenced more heavily by implicit nondisciplinary learning theory than by attention to their own reading processes.

Chapter 7: Experience in Action

Introduction

As we have seen, the teachers in this study did not easily identify students' strategic thinking or their own disciplinary thinking while interpreting literature. Without viable frameworks for understanding student thinking, Andrew, Ellen and Caroline relied on general constructs such as "experience" to explain success or difficulty with texts. My approach in this chapter, however, is to address the problem from another perspective—not in terms of deficit but in relation to the complications that arise from expertise. Teachers' lack of attention to student thinking, I argue here, arises also from subject matter knowledge, or, more precisely, from the way subject matter knowledge is constructed in relation to the teaching of literature.

Peskin's (1998) expert-novice study assumes that as subject matter knowledge develops, attention to strategic processing diminishes. Peskin points out that experts rely upon a rich web of rapidly activated associations during their readings. They rely less upon the kinds of operational strategies that are needed during times of textual uncertainty or confusion. A teacher's growing domain knowledge, in other words, leads to the automation of reading processes, which necessarily distances the teacher precisely from the kinds of cognitive operations that less experienced readers will need with texts they find challenging. This characteristic of subject matter expertise reflects how English majors are educated to think about literature—namely, in terms of thoughtful conclusions rather than the processes that lead to thoughtfulness with literary texts. Whether the growth of content knowledge necessarily involves the loss of attention to reader processes

is an important question for English education and for teacher education in general; my point here is that, for teachers like Andrew, Caroline and Ellen, subject matter knowledge may distance their own pedagogical thinking from their students' understandings. Teachers must develop proficiency with content knowledge, as each teacher in this study recognized, but without reconstructing such knowledge to take students into account, such domain knowledge may have little power in the secondary classroom (Clift, 1991; Grossman, 1990; Holt-Reynolds, 1999; Shulman, 1987).

This is not to suggest, ironically enough, that teachers would be better off with less subject matter knowledge, an implication that could be drawn from the work of Holt-Reynolds (1999).[22] Supporting students toward strategic disciplinary thinking, as others have repeatedly pointed out (Clift, 1992; Conant, 1963; Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1987) requires high level content knowledge. Understanding student understanding, in this respect, involves not erasing one's own proficiency, but, as Gadamer would argue, being able to identify the limits and boundaries of the "expert" horizon—to be able to suspend and place this horizon in relation to the horizon of the less-experienced other.

Reading Against Memory

In this chapter, I explore teachers' understandings of students in terms of the phenomenon Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz & Smith 1998) calls "reading against memory." As we saw in Chapter 2, Rabinowitz argues that with literature, reading against memory favors "coherent" over "configurational" readings. Readings of coherence assume the

22 Holt-Reynolds (1999) suggests, specifically, that teacher educators may be unprepared for the challenges of helping especially skilled subject matter experts reconstruct their ways of knowing for students. However, this appears to say more about the expectations teacher educators have for their work

whole design or "total pattern" of a story, appreciating how its various parts may interconnect. Configurational readings, on the other hand, reflect an often haphazard piecing together as one tries to make sense of unfamiliar territory. For Rabinowitz, teachers' bias toward coherent readings can easily devalue students' necessary groping with texts the first time through. In his words, students' necessary sense of dislocation becomes exactly what is "erased with the [teacher's] map of re-reading" (100). Teachers' own knowledge and experience with texts may limit their perceptions of students' first readings, so that teachers perceive only students' lack of coherence rather than students' strategic configurations. Rabinowitz suggests reading books for the first time with students—so we can "blunder along with them through a text" rather than stand from a position of experience/privilege and wave them on (102).[23]

To illustrate teachers' tendencies toward coherent reading, I draw first from the think aloud responses with familiar texts in interview 2. My purpose in asking teachers to think aloud with both unfamiliar and familiar texts was to investigate the differences in such readings and the potential influence of these differences on teachers' understanding of student understanding. How did the teachers in this study read texts with which they were familiar or that they had taught many times?

Ellen, reading Lord of the Flies, a novel she had taught the previous year, drew on both strategies of configuration and coherence as she spoke about the opening paragraphs.

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than about the merits of subject matter expertise. Note that Caroline, who has the most subject matter expertise in this study, gives more attention to student understanding than her colleagues.

23 Booth (1998) proposes the same thing in a recent essay on the "ethics" of teaching literature.

For example, she worked hard to situate herself in the opening scene, visualizing as she read:

> *"Smashed into the jungle, that gives me an image I'm going to remember."*
>
> *"Words like clambering, I can see him kind of working very hard to get somewhere."*

She formed expectations about what might happen next:

> *"What other people they're going to find. What more about their past is going to be revealed? What about the pilot?"*

This attention to configuration reflects the re-reader's need to re-situate herself into the storyworld—in other words, that Ellen must re-assemble the world of the text as she reads. It may also reflect the fact that readers will notice things, given the scrutiny of the think aloud technique, that they had not noticed in earlier readings. Indeed, in noting that Ellen used configurational strategies, I recognize that the think aloud technique itself may have promoted such strategies. The technique, for example, may prompt teachers to display envisionment strategies, if they feel they must "perform" in the interview and because the think-aloud artificially draws attention to second to second processing.

Ellen's predictions (*"What other people [are they] going to find? . . . What about the pilot?"*) were especially interesting, in this regard, in that she knew what was going to happen in the story. Her predictions, in other words, suggest that Ellen was role-playing part of the think-aloud, trying to imagine how she would read "if" this were a first reading. Her questions reflected the kinds of questions her students would have, even though I had not asked her to read in this way. The fact that she engaged in a pretended configuration,

again, may reflect the effects of the think aloud method. It also makes clear that teachers, in re-enacting first readings of familiar texts, still read "against" memory—must exert artifice into their reading. This suggests that teachers' attempts to "configure" familiar texts do not give them transparent windows onto student readings. Even as teachers re-imagine a reading of configuration, a gap exists between their approach and the novice's approach. To what extent, we must ask, will Ellen's imagined configuration of this text reflect a student's reading? What makes for an authentic role-play of a first reading?

These questions aside, Ellen's reading soon began to invoke a position of coherence. Specifically, she focused attention on a binary opposition she saw at work in the opening pages:

> *He bent down, removed the thorns carefully, and turned around. He was shorter than the fair boy and very fat. He came forward, searching out safe lodgments for his feet, and then looked up through thick spectacles.* ***See these two as opposites. One is thin, one is fat. One is taller, one is shorter. They're referring to—one is referred to as "the fair boy," so obviously the other one is not fair. And he's wearing glasses and the other one is not.***

Ellen emphasized this distinction between the two male characters as she read, noting how the fat boy adopted a follower position almost immediately. Ellen explained that, reading the chapter this time, she had seen something she hadn't seen before—"evidence of the set up" of this opposition for the entire book. "Oh, just the body language between the two," she said. "Well, just the—how automatically Piggy was following Ralph. He's never even walking with him, He's always behind him. Wanting to be accepted. Wanting

to be noticed." Ellen also found a playful headstand by Ralph worth noting, since "that's important for the rest of the story, how that [playfulness] changes." Such attention to the author's "set up" suggest that Ellen's skillful associations (of binary oppositions, for example) reflect not only strategic disciplinary thinking but thinking that is embedded within earlier readings.

Andrew, in his "familiar" think aloud as well, adopted both configurational and coherent stances with "Long Black Song." Reading the opening paragraphs of this short story, Andrew stopped at almost every line:

> *Go t sleep, baby, Yo candys in the sack, Go t sleep, baby, Papas comin back. I wonder what "yo candys in the sack" means. Over and over she crooned, and at each lull of her voice she rocked the wooden cradle with a bare black foot. She is poor; she's got a child. But the baby squalled louder, its wail drowning out the song. She doesn't seem to be able to still it. That's odd, maybe there is something wrong with the baby. She stopped and stood over the cradle, wondering what was bothering it, if its stomach hurt. So it could be something and she knows it. She felt the diaper; it was dry. She lifted it up and patted its back. Still it cried, longer and louder. So she's very solicitous. She put it back into the cradle and dangled a string of red beads before its eyes. Red. Red might become important in this story. The little black fingers clawed them away. She bent over, frowning, murmuring: "What's the mattah, child? You wan some watah?" Why would she think of water? Going back, of course, I've had kids. I've dangled things in front of them when they seemed upset and (chuckle) beads*

might work, or whatever else you have nearby often will distract them, their inner thoughts. She held a dripping gourd to the black lips. So the baby's old enough to drink out of a cup, or a cup-like device. But the baby turned its head and kicked its legs. She stood a moment, perplexed. Whuts wrong wid that child? She ain never carried on like this this tima day. Um, so maybe we're getting some kind of foreshadowing here of things out of wack.

Andrew's comments show again the multiple cognitive strategies he uses for entering and engaging a literary text. He worked actively to construct a storyworld he could relate to—noting what puzzled him, asking questions, speculating, summarizing the action, and relating to personal experience.

Andrew's effort to "configure" the storyline, however, also suggests reading against memory. Andrew's conclusion that the speaker is "poor," for example, after reading the first 2-3 lines of this story, is not warranted by anything in the text so far. Like Ellen, Andrew appeared to role-play certain aspects of a first reading, pretending to guess about the importance of certain figures of speech. After the narrator refers to "a string of red beads," Andrew stabs at an idea: "Red. Red might become important in this story." Andrew maintained a speculative stance here, even though he knew this text well. He did not indicate whether "red" did or did not become important in the story. It was thus unclear whether he was hinting at something he already knew or role-playing a first reading—pretending to stab at something he knew went nowhere in the text. Similarly, with the last line Andrew guesses "She ain never carried on like this this tima day" might reflect "some kind of foreshadowing." In each case, Andrew draws on specific lines to

suggest points of significance, to identify where the text is heading. Yet, in each case, Andrew acted as if he wasn't sure.

Such role-playing is significant, since it suggests again the speculating teachers must do to reconstruct students' experiences with texts. However, the think-aloud procedure itself, which focuses on moment-to-moment processing, may have prompted teachers to think more actively in terms of student processes. It may not be that teachers will read familiar texts this way on their own. Andrew's acting was particularly interesting, in fact, since even as he pretended a first reading, he drew on strategies of coherence. Andrew concluded his reading of this passage (in which the child's colic continues) in this vein:

> *It seems to be set up so that the child is a problem and in a larger way. It's a problem with her now, but it's at some point a problem in a bigger way that is going to come into play in the story. . . . It's causing her, it's between her and her sense of happiness at this point. Or her sense of contentment, whatever peace that she wants to feel. That seems to me in fiction that it ought to be setting up for, you know, further intervention.*

Andrew did not indicate explicitly, as Ellen had, that he was reading against memory. That he was attempting to read from the "end" of the book, so to speak—from the perspective of overall design, seemed evident.

The most emphasis on coherence came from Caroline. This may reflect Caroline's level of experience and high subject matter knowledge with the text she was teaching. It may also reflect the fact that Caroline read the <u>final</u> scene of a play she was currently

teaching, rather than early paragraphs as Andrew and Ellen had. Creating coherence, in other words, may be a stance we can expect experienced readers to take as they comes to the end of a text, although as Langer (1995) points out, this kind of stance does not necessarily wait upon other stances to emerge. For her familiar text, Caroline read from Act V of Cyrano de Bergerac. The passage focused on Cyrano's final words, as he stands mortally wounded before his friends. For Caroline's response, which I provide at length,24 I use two columns, with Caroline's think-aloud on the left and my commentary of her reading on the right.

CD ***Reading Cyrano, Act V***	***Commentary***
[Caroline reads bracket sections silently] *[Roxane:] Your life has been unhappy because of me! Me!* *[Cyrano:] No, Roxane, quite the contrary. Feminine sweetness was unknown to me. My mother made it clear that she didn't find me pleasant to look at. I had no sister. Later, I dreaded the thought of seeing mockery in the eyes of a mistress. Thanks to you, I've at least had a woman's friendship, a gracious presence to soften the harsh loneliness of my*	

24 I provide this section at length, since it was the clearest example of a remembered reading. Caroline, in this section, activates few strategies to figure out "what's happening" or to otherwise configure the scene, even though the text is rather complicated.

life.	
In all the while that I'm reading Cyrano, I always have this feeling of the poignancy of this sweet inner soul that is so ugly on the outside, and this is so touching because his mother didn't find him pleasant to look at, and just about every mother thinks her baby is beautiful. But Roxane has been able to fill that void for him and upraise his....	Caroline refers to her reading of the entire text, or possibly to earlier readings ("In all the while I'm reading Cyrano, I always...") in declaring her sense of "poignancy." She relates the text (what Cyrano reveals about his mother) to her own sense of mothering ("just about every mother...."). Caroline is confident in her conclusions.
[LeBret, pointing to moonlight:] Your other friend has come to visit you.	
[Cyrano, smiling at the moon:] Yes, I see her.	
And in this, the moon is a symbol in this book, or this play, as something that is chased and unattainable but yet is beautiful. So he jumps down out of the moon, you know, he comes from the moon, from a far-off place, and then he talks to de Guiche about how he is going to go to pierce the virginity of the moon which, we know, that's	Caroline identifies a symbolic meaning for the reference to the moon, referring to several other passages in her mind to support the interpretation. Generalizes abstract ideas from the several passages together.

. . . . . . *I believe I see . . . yes, I see him with his noseless face, daring to look at my nose! What's that you say? It's useless? Of course, but I've never needed hope of victory to make me fight! The noblest battles are always fought in vain! You there, all of you, who are you? Your numbers seem endless. . . . Ah, I recognize you now: my old enemies! Lies! My greetings to you!*	
The bravado he has always had in his life he has to the end, and part of this is show for Roxane, too, as well as for his own being.... I'm going to stand for myself, I never needed the hope of victory to make me fight. Battles are fought in vain, like the hundred to one.	Caroline explains how Cyrano's personality and life history relate to his current posture in death—connecting different parts of the story together, seeing consistency in Cyrano's actions throughout play..
And that's also a balance that Rostand has done here, that the first act is very much like the fifth act. They echo each other, the entrances of Cyrano.	Identifies an authorial strategy or convention. Sees "balances" and "echoes" from Act 1 to Act 5.
Here's Compromise! And Prejudice! And	

Cowardice! What's that? Come to terms with you? Never! Never! Ah, there you are, Stupidity! I know I can't defeat you all, I know that in the end you'll overwhelm me, but I'll still fight you as long as there's a breath in my body! Yes, you've robbed me of everything: the laurels of glory, the roses of love! But there's one thing you can't take away from me. When I go to meet God this evening, and doff my hat before the holy gates, my salute will sweep the blue threshold of heaven, because I'll still have one thing intact, without a stain, something that I will take with me in spite of you! You ask what it is? I'll tell you! It's . . . *[Roxane] What is it?* *[Cyrano] My white plume.* And the last symbol of his very being is, well, he's a soldier, he's a lover, he's an honest man. His integrity. His romantic dashing self.	**Caroline reads the ending symbolically, connecting the final image to Cyrano's character throughout the play. Makes a complex inference, using her associations with the image to her view of the character.**

Caroline's approach reflects a high degree of domain knowledge and familiarity with themes and structures for this play. Less tentative or exploratory in her responses than either Ellen or Andrew, Caroline's efforts to make sense of the ending exhibited little uncertainty—as if Caroline could draw immediately upon a set of well-formed ideas. Caroline did not stop and puzzle over potentially confusing passages. She did not stop, for instance, to wonder about Cyrano's long and strange conversation with the abstract vices "Cowardice," "Prejudice," and "Stupidity." Caroline's reading of the last image, too, shows little uncertainty, no second-guessing, with respect to either the literal or symbolic meanings of "my white plume." Caroline's reading was distinct in that it was completely and explicitly a remembered reading. She did not attempt to role-play or pretend a first encounter with this part of the play.

These readings of coherence by Andrew, Ellen and Caroline represent, first, skilled efforts. Readings of coherence surely reflect a key dimension of English teachers' subject matter knowledge—a significant way within the discipline to understand the signifying power of texts. But the relationship between such subject matter knowledge and teachers' pedagogical content knowledge remains less clear. What role does this kind of expert knowledge play in teachers' efforts to understand student thinking? To what extent are English majors taught to reflect on the nature of their own readings of coherence? With familiar texts, the teachers in this study typically invoked an objectifying stance with a text early on—sometimes almost immediately in their reading. Caroline, as she read the ending of Cyrano, identified symbolic and structural connections without overtly processing the difficulties of the text. Even in role-playing a first reading, Andrew drew on strategies of

coherence.

Yet, as Rabinowitz argues, students have no access to remembered readings and are far less likely to adopt a coherence position—unless, as Ellen has found especially frustrating, students seek coherence by asking the teacher what the text means. Indeed, this student behavior comes more clearly to light, given the teacher readings above. Teachers may play a more active role than we realize in encouraging students to seek closure with texts. English teachers may activate coherence strategies, as both Ellen and Andrew seemed to do, even in their efforts to imagine novices' initial experiences with texts. Coherence strategies, in other words, are a deeply embedded dimension of teachers' subject matter knowledge. From this perspective, students simply reach for or imitate the readings they notice in their teachers. As I have argued above, English teachers rarely point out the stepping stones that lead to their own skilled readings. More importantly for the expert, the contours of these stepping stones may have largely disappeared from sight—only to be recovered through an act of imagination.

Remembered Readings and Student Understanding

How do teachers' remembered readings shape their conceptions of student understanding? How does a reading of coherence influence what teachers see in their students' readings? I provide below a few excerpts from interview 4, in which teachers each had the opportunity to comment directly on a student's interpretive efforts with a literary text. In other words, each teacher had a unique chance to look closely at a students' configurational thinking—at students' first attempts to make sense of complex passages.

Caroline observed her student reading from the final scene of Cyrano de Bergerac—the same passage that she herself had read during interview 2, in which Cyrano is dying before his friends. In the preceding weeks, the student had read the play in class and watched parts, including the ending, on video. The student told me before we began the think aloud, however, that he hadn't actually read the final section. The student's reading occurs on the left and Caroline's commentary appears to the right.

Student's reading –misreading or deletion errors noted *[in brackets]*	Caroline's commentary
. . . but I've needed hope of victory to make me fight. (re-reads) But I never needed hope from [text= of] victory to make me fight. Okay. *The noblest battles are always fought in vain!*	
INT: "Okay," meaning what?	
I understood it.	
INT: What have you understood?	
He—I missed a word. I missed "never." I never hoped—I never hoped of needing victory—(goes to text)	
I never need—I never needed hope, a hope of victory to make me fight.	And he does that often, skips over words.. . He saw that "never" is a very important word.
Which means he doesn't need—he doesn't need to know that he's going to win in	

order to fight. He'll fight for any cause. I lost my place now. *The noblest of battles are always fought in vain. You there, after all [text= "all of you"], who are you? Your numbers seem endless. Ah, I recognize you now: my old enemies! Lies! My greetings to you! And here—here's Compromise! And Prejudice! And Cowardice! What's that? Come to terms with you? Never, never! Ah, there you are, Stupidity!*	
He's actually talking about himself in all this. He sees himself as a coward and stupidity. I don't know whether the prejudice comes in too. Maybe he's prejudice to people that are—	Yea, I think he's missing this [laugh]. He's missing that these are the battles that Cyrano has always fought against, and that's—in here he's saying this is him looking at himself, but I think it's more what Cyrano sees in others. . . . He would never compromise, he would never be prejudiced, he would never show fear, and those are things that he has always fought against everywhere, and he sees these in—which, yea, on second thought, I suppose you could see that in Cyrano, but I don't think Cyrano ever had those. . .

The excerpt is worth commenting on for a few reasons. The student, first, monitors his understanding, stopping twice to state his own sense of the passage in his own words. He recognizes, in other words, that the speech is not self-evident, that gaps need to be filled, that a "virtual text' must be created (Earthman, 1992; Iser, 1978). In the last comment, he attempts a complex inference – piecing together his knowledge of the story with Cyrano's references to a series of personified vices. The student notes, moreover, something about

his own interpretation that doesn't fit well ("I don't know whether the prejudice comes in…"). He goes forward from here, satisfied, at least for the time, with his interpretation.

Caroline, in her reaction, explains how the student hasn't sensed the direction of Cyrano's remarks (outward rather than inward) and has failed to connect these words with Cyrano's mostly noble character throughout the play. Although she momentarily re-thinks the student's interpretation, Caroline indicates, in the end, that the student "missed" this particular passage. Her dismissal of the student's interpretation is interesting, not because she isn't optimistic about her student as a learner,25 but because she approaches his reading in terms of her own finished reading. The coherence perspective, in general, lead Caroline to measure student interpretation in terms of adherence to her own views of the text—in terms of whether students "got" an established meaning or not. In fact, when this student came to the end of his think aloud in interview 4, when he demonstrated a fairly well-developed understanding of the story and its ending, Caroline's focus was again not on how he came to understand but <u>that</u> he understood the text. "That is great," she said, listening to his final comments. "He's got this lit down. He's got the story down. He knows it, you bet." Given the difficulty she had observed in his reading, Caroline explained that the student's understanding was a result of watching the film and discussion in class.

Andrew likewise, during interview 4, emphasized the difficulties students have "getting" higher level meanings and connections from the texts they read. Observing one

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25 See Hillocks (1999), who suggests that "optimism/pessimism" is a primary axis for teaching thinking about students. Caroline, indeed, had remained an empathetic supporter of this student for two years, despite the learning dificulties he brought to language learning.

student think aloud about Cat's Cradle, Andrew appeared to measure the student's interpretation against his own interpretation. The chapter the student read involved the narrator's interview with the administrative director (Dr. Breed) of a scientific research facility. The narrator, who intends to write a book about a-moral status of scientific research, inadvertently offends the director—who proceeds to defend the "purity" of the research his people do. I provide an extended excerpt of the student's reading and thinking below (reading from the text is underlined), followed by Andrew's response:

Student's Reading	Andrew's Commentary
(Dr. Breed) "I'm sick of people mis-understanding what a scientist is, what a scientist does." *(narrator) "I'll do my best to clear up the misunderstanding."* *"In this country most people don't even understand what pure research is."* *"I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me what it is."* *"It isn't looking for a better cigarette filter or a softer face tissue or a longer-lasting house pain, God help us. Everybody talks about research and practically nobody in this country's doing it. We're one of the few companies that actually hires men to do pure research. When most other companies brag about their research,*	

they're talking about industrial hack technicians who wear white coats, work out of cookbooks, and dream up an improved windshield wiper for the next year's Oldsmobile." *"But here . . .?"* *"Here, and shockingly few other places in this country, men are paid to increase knowledge, to work toward no end but that."* *"That's very generous of General Forge and Foundry Company."* *"Nothing generous about it. New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become."* *Had I been a Bokononist or Communist then, that statement would have made me howl.* *[student re-reading] "Nothing generous about it. New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become."* *Had I been a Bokononist then, that statement would have made me howl.* That makes me think about this quote I heard someone say. It was—humans are	

always trying to move faster and like, say with computers, always trying to get the faster computer, the more higher memory and all that stuff, but we're not really sure for what, why we actually need a faster computer. We just need it because it's like the best thing that came out. And I could understand why he said it would almost make him howl, because he said, *"New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth."* And I don't know if we can handle that, like thousands of human beings can handle more new knowledge because we can barely handle all the knowledge we have now. ***And the more truth we have to work with, the richer we become***. And I think that kind of refers back to the way how he said in the beginning, the Bokononist, or Communist, this whole book is based on lies. [looks through book to find earlier passage—reading from p.14] Oh,	

"*All the true things I'm about to tell you are shameless lies.*" Int: Okay. Would you . . . talk aloud about your, your sense that? "*Because all the true things I'm about to tell you are shameless lies.*" And then back on page 36, "*The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become.*" and yet he said "*all the true things are shameless lies.*" So, so what he's basically saying is a combination of lies, even for those who care-*(unintelligible)*. Remember the discussion in class today? We were talking about religion and it said, the Bok—Bokononist religion is based all on lies, but-- I don't know—that could be true for all religions. . . . There's no real proof of things people believe in. . . . It feels like I'm digging myself in a hole. . . because I know exactly what I'm thinking but it is hard to explain.	I don't know. It's just—it just shows that human frailty that we all certainly have that you know

	sometimes we don't exactly say what we mean. We know that we're groping toward an understanding but not quite articulating it. Certainly I come to the awareness, probably every time that I teach this book I find some new slants and approaches. . . . As far as his reading here goes, he's confusing the characters, Breed and John, the narrator, and that what I think is this somewhat pompous statement, "The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become," by Breed, who is in the business of making money for his company and trying to justify pure research on that ground. And then he went back to page 14 where the statement is that "everything I'm telling you is based on lies," as if these two ideas nestle together in some kind of a snug relationship as opposed to being really opposite of each other. "As a Bokononist, this statement would make him howl." The idea that you need more knowledge or more truth to work with.

Andrew's responses to this think aloud segment focus initially on the student's own sense of feeling misunderstood. Andrew empathized with the students' struggle to organize his thoughts. Yet, Andrew takes issue with the specifics of the student's interpretation. Similar to his comments about the student's paragraph summary of "Long Black Song,"

Andrew critiqued his student's reading from the perspective of his own experienced reading of the text. Referring to the spontaneous association the student had made with a previous text on page 14, Andrew said: "I don't think he understood it clearly. . . . I don't think he saw the distinction between what Dr. Breed was saying and what the narrator was saying." Andrew, although he admired his student's philosophical thinking about the text, felt the student's "groping" reflected confusion and misunderstanding. Like Caroline, Andrew's dominant focus in observing this student was assessing how the student's reading measured against his own coherent picture of the story.

Conclusion

These segments support the contention that teachers' own ways of reading, in themselves, provide a particular kind of resource for understanding student thinking with literature—a finished, coherent reading against which to measure student readings. Thus, if teachers' own intellectual processes with texts represent "untapped resources" for pedagogical reasoning (Schoenbach, et al, 1999), this study suggests that such reading processes are not transparent or unproblematic guides. English teachers, even given direct access to students' first efforts at configuring meaning with literary texts, may interpret such efforts from a position of coherence—a position that may encourage deficit versions of student thinking. Caroline's and Andrew's thinking, on the one hand, reflects something we should value in English teachers—namely, their subject matter expertise with the texts they teach. On the other hand, the reality that literature teachers "read against memory" suggests that they must consciously re-construct their own ways of knowing literature to identify, value, and support students' strategic efforts with texts.

The gap of "memory" thus results in readings that are different in kind rather than degree. As Rabinowitz points out, students and teachers engage in vastly different intellectual projects with texts—a difference too often ignored in planning for teaching. With familiar and unfamiliar texts, the teachers in this study invoked strategies of coherence sooner and more readily than their students. If we recall Andrew's and Ellen's readings of "Personal Helicon" in chapter 3, for example, each indicated that they were seeking larger organizational patterns in this new poem. Each was also able to construct a powerfully coherent reading their first time through. Ellen's and Andrew's cases suggest further that even teacher efforts to imagine students' first readings will still rely on the coherence strategies of an expert. This dimension of teachers' expert knowledge (readings of coherence), in other words, provides a way for teachers to measure student readings against established interpretations, but may offer few ways to support students in their own attempts at configuration.

We have done too little, this study suggests, to support teachers' reflection on their own reading processes in relation to students. Rabinowitz suggests that teachers may need to read unfamiliar texts with students—as a way to experience texts anew and to re-learn the student's perspective. While the suggestion is a useful one, drawing on a first reading may give teachers only partial insight into the readings of their students. This study suggests that no simple distinction exists for English teachers between their own first readings and remembered readings. The "experienced first reading" of the teacher must still be differentiated from the first reading of the student. Teachers also need more consistent opportunities to read with each other—to make explicit the distinction between

remembered readings and readings of configuration. In this respect, it may be especially useful for teachers to read difficult texts that stretch and challenge their reading processes—so that teachers must access and draw upon those strategic operations that otherwise remain hidden in reading familiar or less-challenging unfamiliar texts.

Gadamer suggests for us that teacher understanding, like all understanding, is not a matter of importing technical information but always understanding of oneself, a revision or enlarging of one's horizon in its encounters with other horizons. Understanding student thinking involves not reducing or eliminating the teacher's horizon, but making one's own frame of reference, one's own expert way of reading, explicit. This event of understanding occurs, Gadamer argues, specifically through reflection and dialogue with others who are different from us. Rabinowitz initiates such a dialogue by giving English teachers an initial language for naming the differences between expert readings and students' ways of reading. This study confirms his insights and suggests further that even teachers' first readings of texts must be consciously reconstructed to keep the learner's world in mind. Without supporting teachers in these directions—toward a language for understanding teacher understanding of students and toward professional dialogue about empirical instances of both teacher and student readings—knowledge of student understanding will remain an under-addressed dimension of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge.

Chapter 8: Final Conclusions

This study proposed to examine an area of teacher thinking that has been largely unexplored in the research on teaching literature—namely, teachers' understandings of student understanding. A detailed investigation of this dimension of pedagogical content knowledge can illuminate an important nexus for professional learning. Recent studies in mathematics education have suggested that conceptual change in teaching is tied to teachers' developing knowledge of their students' abilities and strategies within a subject area. Teachers who have succeeded with Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI), for example, learn to use student thinking as a generative source for instructional planning (Carpenter, et al, 1998; Fennema, et al, 1993; Franke, et al, 1998). The present study, which examined the ways in which teachers conceptualize student thinking with literary texts, clarifies the knowledge English teachers bring, or may need to develop, in relation to such pedagogical thinking.

Limitations

The conclusions I draw are tempered by the methodological limits of this study. First, the primary data-gathering took place out of context from teachers' day-to-day instructional planning and assessment of students. The interviews did not reflect teacher thinking in relation to actual lesson-planning or about specific classroom episodes. Even though we looked at concrete artifacts of student learning, such artifacts were presented as discrete instances of student thinking and were disconnected from the situated life of the classroom. We should be aware that the teachers' responses might look different if the study had drawn more directly on their teaching contexts—using interview questions

directly following planning for class, for example, or using think-aloud prompts as teachers planned for instruction. More classroom observation, as mentioned in chapter 2, might also have provided a fuller picture of teacher understandings.

This study also represents an intervention into teacher thinking, rather than a description of teachers' understandings. The think aloud protocols and the videotapes of student thinking were used, precisely, to prompt teacher response. But the think aloud exercises, as mentioned in chapter 7, seemed to stimulate particular kinds of responses—like pretended configurational thinking with familiar texts. While this phenomenon was of interest in itself, it may not reflect how teachers think, in fact, with the texts they read for class. With the videotapes, also, teachers likely attended to issues of student thinking in much more detail than they otherwise do for teaching. While eliciting detailed thinking was one of my goals, it is not clear that their responses above reflect how they think about student understanding as they prepare for teaching. There may be more to learn about the influences of situated classroom life on teachers' thinking about their students' understandings.

The findings in this study also reflect the thinking of three teachers in a single context. Using qualitative case-study methods, this study traded breadth for a closer look at the details of teacher understanding. Thus, these particular findings may not generalize to other teachers. The cases of Andrew, Ellen, and Caroline may tell us relatively little about teacher understandings in other teaching contexts, for example. Since Andrew, Ellen and Caroline work in the same department, their responses may reflect the norms for instructional practice or the theoretical assumptions that hold in that department. Other

school-related norms or district reform measures may also influence how these teachers think about students' understanding.

Inadequate Preparation

With these caveats in mind, my findings suggest that literature teachers are unfamiliar with the details of their students' ways of understanding texts. Despite proximity to students themselves, everyday observation, and the availability of tests and papers for assessment, the details of student understanding remain a shadowy domain for English teachers. On the one hand, focusing on students' ways of thinking is not typically how Andrew, Caroline and Ellen go about their work. Yet, even given up-close observation of their students' responding to literature, the teachers in this study groped for a language to articulate what they saw. All three teachers placed student difficulties with literature in the broad category of "reading," and each saw reading as outside his or her teaching domain. They likewise used the general construct of "lack of experience" to explain why students often failed to interpret literature in sophisticated ways. Despite their own extensive expertise with literature, the teachers drew inconsistently on their own strategies for understanding/reading literature. Caroline drew systematically on her own knowledge of envisionment processes to scaffold students into literary texts, although this knowledge was an implicit dimension of her teaching. Andrew, alternatively, saw few connections between his own strategies for reading and students' efforts. He was unsure why he would need to look at students' understandings in his teaching. As he told me, "What they need to know, I expect to go over with them." Ellen was beginning to create links between her own ways of reading and student readings, but these had not emerged

easily for her in her first year teaching literature. The teachers' experiences suggest that familiarity with student understanding requires two things: first, a framework for understanding students' readings and second, tools for linking one's observations and knowledge of student readings to classroom instruction. This study suggests that English teachers are not well-versed in either area.

This summary description should not obscure the fact that Andrew, Caroline and Ellen were each highly concerned about their students' ways of understanding. Caroline described several purposeful efforts to support students through literary difficulties, suggesting she had thought carefully about students' experiences with texts. In general, the teachers in this study wanted to know more, and when pointed in the direction of student understanding, they sensed, though sometimes only vaguely, the relevance of this kind of knowledge for teaching. Andrew's comment after hearing the directions for his think-aloud interview is most salient: "Obviously," he said, "you're aware of reading-thinking connections that I'm not, or that I have paid no attention to, and I suppose that you're doing is teaching me this... so that I will become more aware of it." Andrew told me later he found himself "learning and thinking about things" because of what we had talked about, and he felt the interviews were a way of teaching him. Ellen likewise suggested that she wanted to learn more about how her students think about literature. She had been especially intrigued with the opportunity in interview 4 to observe student readings. The interview sounded "scary, fun, enlightening, all that stuff," she said beforehand. After the interview, Ellen discussed the value of the process:

I think it was really good for me to see an individual work through a piece...

It was enlightening to watch how she reads because it's a lot like how I read and a lot like how I would expect somebody to read, but I don't necessarily assume that my students read that way. I don't assume all my students are going to stop and question like she had that questioning technique. . . . I don't think most of my students do that.

The interview became an opportunity, as the comment implies, for Ellen to reflect on how she reads in relation to her students and to re-consider what she assumes about student understanding. She was also able to begin to formulate a incipient language for student reading processes—identifying specific strategies like "that questioning technique." Caroline likewise remarked at the end of interview 4, "I find it really interesting because you don't always know what kids are thinking."

Caroline's, Ellen's, and Andrew's intrigue with student understanding suggests that secondary teachers may be especially ripe for frameworks and activities that make student thinking in the disciplines more accessible. Jackson (1968), in his classic ethnography of classroom life, suggested that teachers ultimately may be uninterested in "learning theory." The complexity of classroom life—the thousands of decisions, the numbers of students, the compressed time—these classroom factors focus teacher energy more centrally on issues of "managing" the environment and keeping activities going rather than scaffolding learning. Jackson's point is a stark rejoinder to those "human engineers," as he calls them, who would hope to alter the conditions for learning in classrooms quickly on the basis of clinical trials. Yet, this study offers a different perspective—namely, that teachers' unfamiliarity with student understanding reflects not

disinterest but inadequate preparation. Teacher uncertainty about students' ways of knowing may relate more directly to the lack of attention this dimension of pedagogical content knowledge has received in teacher education, which has focused more on teacher behaviors than on student learning. If understanding student understanding is at the heart of effective teaching (CGI studies; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978), we have done a poor job of preparing teachers to use students' thinking as a resource for teaching at the secondary level. Rather than being surprised that teachers have few ways to conceptualize student understanding, the surprise of this study arises instead from Andrew's, Caroline's and Ellen's deep curiosity about this kind of knowledge given an opportunity to reflect upon instances of student thinking with literature.

Curriculum as Content

A more complicated issue to address involves the implicit conception of curriculum assumed by the English teachers in this study. As we have seen, Andrew, Caroline and Ellen each have content to teach—a set of books, various genre (drama, fiction, poetry, research), specific literary elements within the genres (metaphor in poetry, or characterization with short stories). Teachers feel they must, at least, get students through the plot of a literary text. Alternatively, teachers may perceive important universal themes, as Caroline mentioned, that students should think about or respond to in discussion and in writing. Strong transmission-oriented assumptions thus pervade the thinking of the three English teachers in this study—a point that echoes the recent conclusions of Nystrand (1997) and those made earlier by Barnes (1987) and Applebee

(1974).26 This underlying conception of curriculum as content (of books, themes, historical periods) ultimately grounds the readings of "coherence" discussed in chapter 7 and implicitly privileges remembered readings—the intimate knowledge of content teachers enjoy with a small set of literary texts. For Caroline, for instance, deeply informed remembered readings are precisely what she relies on in her teaching, precisely what define her expertise, and, for her, what the Western literary tradition is all about.

Such beliefs about the literature curriculum cannot be seen as idiosyncratic. Rose (1995) suggests that the phenomenon relates to the rise of academic specialization in university departments—a formative locale for secondary teachers and their thinking about curriculum. He writes that the modern history of those departments can be read as "a gradual move away from concerns about pedagogy, teacher training, or the novice's acquisition of disciplinary knowledge" (185). Secondary teachers have been strongly influenced and apprenticed to the assumptions about specialized content in the academy—where expertise means a teacher's own deep knowledge of a particular "area" within the wide expanse of the discipline as well as the ability to explicate texts in a scholarly way. Literature teachers at the secondary level may also perceive themselves to be "generalists" whose job it is to convey a passion for the wide expanse of knowledge available in the field, usually through exposure to an array of canonical texts.27

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26 In Applebee's words: "Teachers of literature have never successfully resisted the pressure to formulate their subject as a body of knowledge to be imparted."

27 Graff (1987) traces the differences between "generalists" and "specialists" in university English education starting in the late 19th century.

Either way, re-orienting the curriculum to focus on the development of students' thinking conflicts substantially with the curriculum-as-content model that underwrites most literature instruction. Scholes (1998) claims that literary texts have come to represent "quasi-sacred textual objects" in the academy—an assumption that leads to "priestly exegesis and passive coverage," rather than "attention to reading as a process" (164). Coverage, Scholes argues, has become "the organizational basis of the field" of English at the university level (148), an approach that widens, if anything, the "gap between our pedagogical practices and the needs of our students." Scholes' constructive solution is "to replace the canon of texts with a canon of methods," to place the "process of reading" and students' engagement with "textuality" at the center of the English curriculum (145-146). The centrality of literature itself, for Scholes, must be replaced by attention to the general processes of "consumption" of a wide range of texts, including literary texts. The metaphor of consumption, he argues, helps to de-mystify literature as a semi-sacred object and turn our attention to the processes by which textual objects are "assimilated and ingested" (162-163).

Yet, even Scholes acknowledges that such fundamental revision of the English curriculum is unlikely—although he argues strongly for change. Scholes suggests that it is precisely the notion of literature "as something to be professed" which teachers find difficult to relinquish. The semi-sacred literary text, he says, "carries its own transcendental justification, is deeply embedded in the thinking of English teachers, to the point where it seriously inhibits reconstructing the discipline" (163). Scholes thus offers a somewhat uncomfortable reminder that no easy transition from content to process in the

culture of secondary schools will occur—as if we could, by persuasive argument or with the right set of workshops, bring teachers to place students' understandings at the center of the curriculum.

What implications, then, does the present study have for secondary literature teachers and for secondary literature curricula? What would it mean to worry more directly over the gap I have identified between teachers' "coherent" conceptions of literature and students' own processes with texts? To what extent would such efforts be feasible and worthwhile for teachers whose time is exceedingly compressed and whose learning needs are multiple?

Professional Development

The research on professional development in mathematics education offers the most guidance on these questions (Brinker, 1998; Carpenter, et al, 1988; Carpenter, Franke, & Levin, 1998; Franke, et al, 1998; Peterson, Fennema & Carpenter, 1991). However, we cannot assume that this work provides ready-made models of professional learning for English teachers. The math studies reflect subject-specific assumptions about the nature of knowledge and about what counts as evidence. CGI workshops typically ground participants in detailed research-based knowledge on children's mathematical thinking and direct teachers intentionally toward specific knowledge about how children solve word problems in math. Yet, studies of secondary content areas suggest that math and English teachers hold divergent beliefs about the nature of knowledge and about the best ways to structure the curriculum (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994). Math teachers, for example, are more likely to support ability-grouping and to conceive of the curriculum as

sequential. And while "conversation" has been described as an important activity in both math and English classes, conversation that involves defending concrete answers to discrete problems may differ substantially from conversation that is guided by the subjunctive (Bruner, 1986) or exploratory (Langer, 1995) imperatives of narrative knowing.

What we <u>can</u> learn from the math research is that changing teachers' conceptions of curriculum and instruction involves fostering a stance toward teaching and toward students that is currently missing for English teachers. In particular, as Ball and Cohen (1999) argue, teachers must learn how to inquire into student thinking "in classrooms and in the context of classroom work" (11)—to make inquiry into teaching integral to the act of teaching. The insight is more radical than it might sound. The culture of professional development is unsettlingly disconnected from the details of practice—from documented instances of student understanding and from shared conversation about classroom episodes that relate to student thinking. A "stance of inquiry" runs substantially against common conceptions of teaching which define expertise in terms of content knowledge, the ability to communicate well with kids, and competence in managing the logistics of classroom environments. Likewise, teacher discourse about student learning, if it occurs, typically involves pseudo-discourse—akin to physicians discussing the treatment of a "general" tetanus patient without reference to the complications of certain medications for specific individuals, the results of specific blood tests, a patient's actual response to treatment, and possible alternative approaches based on such assessments (Ball & Cohen, pp.18-19). Too often teachers discuss curriculum and instruction in the absence of

concrete instances of practice, and when concrete practice is shared, typically only one teacher has had access to the event, so colleagues are left to listen politely. Little (1996) has observed further that teachers rarely have reason to share such concrete episodes with one another—that teacher isolation leaves teachers with few incentives to explore alternative conceptions of student understanding.

Ironically, examination of concrete artifacts from classrooms may offer one of the most productive ways to address larger questions about "what" we teach and why. Investigations of student understanding, examinations of documents and records of practice (papers, videotapes, teacher records), in themselves, have the potential to shift teacher attention from the content of the discipline alone to implicit conceptions of curriculum and the place of students in these conceptions. Ball and Cohen remind us, though, that we must not conceive of investigations of practice too narrowly—as if teacher learning must be restricted only to observations of students in classrooms in real time. Classrooms are often poor places to learn reflectively, given the multiple demands on the teacher.[28] Instead, teachers need to learn both "in" classrooms and "from" classroom practice—from tailored examples of students puzzling through texts, for example, that are considered with colleagues away from the immediacy of the classroom. Investigating practice must also mean more than random examples of classroom work brought to meetings for "discussion." While teachers must be encouraged to select instances of teaching to investigate on their own, English teachers, this study suggests,

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28 A "stance of inquiry" is thus different from teacher research or action research, which typically involve projects in addition to one's teaching load (cf Ball & Cohen, 1999; Franke, et al, 1998).

have a prior need to develop a vocabulary for talking about student learning and for constructing purposes for such investigations. In this respect, as the math studies suggest, teachers will need research-based examples of student thinking as well as frameworks and principles to guide their own analysis. This kind of support may be necessary to help teachers construct for themselves reason to reconsider everyday artifacts of student thinking in their own classes. The role of research knowledge in pedagogical thinking may be more important than we think, if we acknowledge with Schon (1983) that teachers never simply import research information into their daily practice. Indeed, it may be teachers' exposure to new conceptions and models of student thinking that encourages teachers to conduct the "frame experiments" (the attempts to organize new knowledge selectively in the context of particular cases and to reflect "in action" upon this knowledge through informal trials) that are the hallmark of the reflective practitioner.

On the one hand, we must challenge the professional culture of teaching by insisting that documents of practice and artifacts of student thinking be the source and touchstone for all teacher learning. But this study suggests that even more is needed. For Andrew, Caroline and Ellen, observing videotapes of their students reading literature did not revolutionize their thinking about classroom teaching and learning. While each teacher felt he or she had learned something about students, this learning primarily meant confirming what they already knew or believed. Andrew and Caroline, for example, each drew on readings of coherence to measure student readings against their own readings. Teachers need access to richer frameworks for thinking about students' thinking with texts as well as tools for translating their observations into classroom teaching. Here, teachers

need models of successful practice and opportunities to design, experiment with, and reflect collaboratively upon lessons that draw on student thinking.

Understanding teachers' ways of positioning new knowledge in relation to practice is also important, as Franke, et al (1998) have observed. In the math studies, some teachers who had developed new ideas about students from workshops used classroom practice to confirm what they had learned rather than "as a basis for acquiring new knowledge." We must be aware of the difference between teachers' sense that an activity "worked" with students (that they responded to it appropriately) and teachers' attempts to understand why it worked, how students came to understand and how that understanding was related to instructional decisions. Only the latter reflects "generative change" because it involves formulating principles for how students learn in relation to teaching practices and ongoing reflection upon those principles. We need to think carefully about how considerations of student understanding can reflect a "narrative of inquiry" for teachers rather than re-formulating what Schwab has called a "rhetoric of conclusions."

Starting Points for English Teachers

An explicit purpose of this study was to profile the current conceptions English teachers have about their students' literary thinking. If English teachers typically do not attend to student understanding in detail, what implicit theories and beliefs guide their approach to student understanding, and what can we learn from these patterns in teacher thinking? How do such profiles provide starting points for professional learning?

First, we should note that Ellen, Andrew and Caroline each grasped fleetingly at theory to organize and support their perceptions of student learning. On the one hand, it

may be clear that English teachers have few meaningful theoretical frameworks to draw on for student learning. A more constructive assessment, however, might emphasize that the teachers in this study were incipient theorizers about students. Andrew and Caroline, for example, reached for names like "Bloom" and other general psychological theories to help support their views of student response—as if they tacitly understood that classroom experience and direct observation were insufficient windows onto student understanding. Secondary teachers, in other words, cast about for theoretical tethers—hoping to ground what they see in a larger organizing framework. This study suggests clearly that teachers have few theoretical options to choose from, and that the available theories themselves may obscure the details of disciplinary understanding. But we should emphasize how actively teachers rely on theories of student learning rather than criticizing teachers for what they don't know. Eliciting teachers' ever-present impulse to understand their students' learning, and uncovering the contours of their implicit theories, is an important first step if we hope to initiate possibilities for instructional change.

An important characteristic of the theoretical frames that did emerge in these cases is their non-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary nature. Beyond the generalized references to "reading," mention of Bloom's taxonomy, for example, suggests that literature teachers have no other schema for student thinking than a "literal" to "abstract" trajectory. Such general assumptions were reflected in the unit tests given by both Caroline and Andrew. Yet, as we have seen, Bloom's taxonomy inadequately reflects what the teachers themselves did with literary texts when they read. Andrew's own reading, for example, went far beyond literal comprehension in his own initial encounters with texts. His own

emphasis on conveying to students the literal level, in fact, controverted his belief that literature should be a matter of individual "resonance" rather than "regurgitation." As discussed in chapter four, the presence of teachers' general conceptions of learning helps to explain the persistence of monologic teaching strategies in literature classrooms. Opportunities for teachers to reflect on the fit between such theories of learning and the disciplinary character of their own readings of literature may be an especially important starting point in helping English teachers re-construct their conceptions of students as learners.

Wilhelm (1997) has argued that English teachers typically under-estimate the demands students' face "entering" the secondary storyworlds of literature. This conclusion, however, must be tempered with the findings of the present study, which suggests that teachers have more of a vocabulary for envisionment than for other dimensions of literary response. The conclusions are not as contradictory as they seem. This study suggests, that while teachers may have a limited language and schema for envisionment, their ultimate goal with texts is to bring students to "interpretation," as Andrew explained. Unfortunately, teachers have few constructive frameworks for identifying the strategic processes of interpretation beyond their own readings of coherence. In other words, English teachers have difficulty addressing either dimension of literary response from the perspective of the student. Moreover, the teachers in this study rarely referred to those dimensions of response that occur between "entry" and "interpretation." It is this language for students' experience of "moving through" a text—for the processes of elaboration on the storyworld, drawing analogies, paraphrasing,

relating to characters, changing one's beliefs about events, trying out alternative explanations of characters' behaviors, etc.—that must also be identified and recovered if we are to support students' learning with texts rather than the reproduction of teacher readings.

English teachers need more opportunities to read together and to reflect metacognitively upon the ways in which they "move through" and draw interpretive conclusions from literary texts. As Rabinowitz argues, we expect students to arrive at higher interpretive conclusions or generalizations, but students receive few supports to help them in the process. They are expected, in other words, to learn on their own—a strategy that works well, as Andrew pointed out, for an "upper middle" slice of secondary students. In practice, as Rabinowitz writes,

> We encourage our students to *mimic* [our] stance from the start without really teaching them how to get there. ... we're not examining the student's reading abilities—the perplexing walk—at all, but rather his or her ability to *end up* in the right place, his or her ability to replicate the stance of the re-reader. The race has been replaced by the act of crossing the finish line (Rabinowitz & Smith, p.101).

Encouraging teachers to reflect upon the full range of their own thinking with texts, however, may be insufficient if teachers are to unpack the demands of interpretation from students' perspectives and comprehend the distance we often ask students to travel with texts. The phenomenon of reading against memory reminds us that teacher readings and student readings may be fundamentally different experiences, and that teachers cannot blithely draw inferences from how they read to how students will interact with texts.

Teacher education programs must support new teachers in the process of theorizing about students' needs in light of their own reading strategies. More attention to research-generated frameworks for understanding student readings, to artifacts of student thinking processes (videotape segments, interviews of students while reading, audiotapes of think-alouds, journal writings), as well as support in inventing activities that bridge conceptions of student thinking to instruction, may together productively challenge teachers' conception of the relationship between teacher readings and student thinking. Extending the activity I did in interview 4 into a collegial or departmental setting may be especially helpful in generating dialogue about teachers' theories of student learning.

English teachers who make student thinking a central source for curricular and instructional planning will experience a significant shift in their classroom practice. If the studies in math education are a guide, literature instruction might begin with tasks which allow students to display what they know, how they "move through" a text, and how they think about "interpretation"—rather than teaching concepts, themes or strategies or pre-structuring questions first. Such teaching requires thoughtful consideration of the kinds of textual problems and questions students are asked to address, as well as careful listening to the nuances of student thinking—asking students to explain how they came to their conclusions. Teachers must learn to build on these displays of knowledge to generate further instruction. English teachers, again, need a more elaborate vocabulary to perceive the constructive and strategic moves students use to make sense of literature,[29] but again,

29 Wilhelm's (1997) description of the multiple processes and strengths he saw in the adolescent readers in his classroom provides one of the few available models for identifying, reflecting on, an supporting the various ways students respond to literature.

a vocabulary itself will not be enough. Teachers need support inventing instructional strategies that connect a new vocabulary to classroom practice. Teachers will need models of successful instructional practice, as well as time to construct, try out, and reflect on new lessons and their designs. Without such support, teachers will have difficulty using their perceptions of student thinking to generate changes in practice (Carpenter, et al, 1988). More consistent reflection upon records of student thinking, as I have argued, along with constructive frameworks for understanding students' strategic thinking, may be the best way to assist English teachers in developing a language for student understanding—and in making use of classroom displays of learning. But literature teachers also need practical examples of successful teaching practice, and opportunities to try out, and reflect upon, lessons based on students' understandings.

Such changes in pedagogical thinking reflect a very different notion of curriculum. Text-selection within English departments, for example, would look different than it does now. Teachers would need to focus less on texts that represent era, theme, or genre and more on those texts that challenge and stretch the particular processing strategies of students. In this respect, teachers would need to be more flexible in selecting texts, even be willing to construct a syllabus of readings as a semester unfolds, as students' strengths and weaknesses with particular kinds of textual "operations" emerge into view. Teaching literature, in this view, would involve a carefully constructed balance between unifying questions that guide classroom deliberation and attention to, and use of, students' reading processes to guide instruction. Applebee (1996) thus writes that "allowing students room

to develop their own understandings in their reading; ensuring that activities support natural processes of thought and language; and in turn helping students internalize a repertoire of effective strategies of language and thought" represent necessary "preconditions for dialogue." An emphasis on student disciplinary thinking with texts is thus not antithetical to current proposals which argue for the importance of deliberation in the curriculum. Without a carefully constructed balance, however, attention to student thinking could reduce the literature curriculum to "teaching student strategies for reading," rather than engaging in conversations of significance. The curriculum I envision, instead, seeks to provide students with tools to enter and contribute to such classroom deliberation. The teacher learning I encourage in this study is ultimately geared toward creating more democratic classrooms – toward giving a greater range of students access to the public deliberation and "grand conversations" (Eeds & Wells, 1989) that must be central to English classrooms.

Teacher Education

Pre-service teachers in teacher education programs often take general courses in literacy or adolescent learning. Such coursework would seem warranted from recent reports about teachers' knowledge about teaching reading. Greenleaf and Schoenbach (1999), reporting on their professional development work with high school teachers, conclude that "by and large, secondary teachers are unprepared to teach reading in their disciplines" (8). The statement is reinforced here; even English teachers hold weak conceptions of student reading. Yet, "reading across the curriculum" initiatives may be problematic. Such courses, from the perspective of this study, vastly under-theorize the

intricate relationship between disciplinary knowing and general literacy. Even "reading in the content areas" courses—a current approach for addressing secondary teachers' conceptions of reading—may leave teacher under-prepared. A currently recommended text on secondary literacy (Dornan, Rosen, & Wilson, 1997),30 for example, provides multiple supports for teachers of science, math, and social studies as well as in language arts. The book sensitively conveys a rationale for why all secondary teachers must be considered literacy teachers and why a content-area approach is important. In a section entitled "Assessing Students' Strengths and Weaknesses as Readers in Your Content Area," the authors suggest learning about students as readers through carefully constructed inventories, classroom observation, authentic assessment practices and reading/writing portfolios. In pointing to frameworks for strategic thinking with texts, however, the authors rely on the work of Herber (1976) who suggests three "levels of questions" teachers should incorporate: the "literal level," the "interpretive level," and the "applied level." Dornen, Rosen and Wilson also offer Bloom's taxonomy as a framework for scaffolding critical thinking with texts, although they admit to criticisms of Bloom's work. They acknowledge the importance of "affective" or "aesthetic response" which may apply to works of art or other kinds of texts like literature.

My study suggests that something is missing even from such well-considered approaches to secondary literacy and student understanding. The work of Dornan, Rosen and Wilson, and others who focus on reading in the content areas, I argue, do not provide teachers with nuanced enough frameworks to identify the disciplinary processes of

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30 I call this text "currently recommended" from the fact that it has been promoted and circulated on an

students' reading/thinking. Such courses may fail to address how both students and teachers think/read within a disciplinary content area. Unfortunately, such texts or teacher preparation courses in general literacy may be the only places that treat, explicitly, students' actual engagement with texts—the reading processes students access to generate meaning—as well as direct support for reading. While my argument would seem to lead to subject-specific contexts for discussing literacy, I would invite instead a lively debate between those who perceive value in general literacy courses for secondary teacher preparation and those who would focus on subject-specific preparation. On the one hand, well-intended courses in general literacy may inadequately support teachers in interpreting students' transactions with texts from the perspective of disciplinary thinking. Furthermore, learning about "reading in the content areas," which privileges domain-general conceptions of reading, may provide fuel to the boundary secondary teachers draw between their own subject area expertise and the general processes of reading. On the other hand, general courses in literacy have the potential to give novice teachers broader exposure to a variety of disciplinary literacies across the curriculum. This approach may offer greater socialization for teachers toward interdisciplinary dialogue and a stronger sense of the nature of disciplinary thinking in subject areas beyond one's own.[31] Although I have argued for subject-specific notions of student understanding, we must ask what is lost if teacher preparation involves primarily and/or exclusively disciplinary-oriented

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AERA listserve for teacher-educators.

31 See Hamel (in press) for a description of the disciplinary conceptions a history teacher and a language arts teacher held of each others' subject areas.

perspectives on student learning. How do teachers best learn to negotiate the overlap, or the differences, between domain-general and domain-specific conceptions of learning?

Toward Change: Teacher Learning and Student Learning

This study affirms Jackson's (1986) observation that student understanding remains "one major class of uncertainty connected with teaching." Within English education, in particular, we have paid too little attention to this feature of teachers' daily experience. Ongoing teacher isolation, weak models of professional learning, as well as conceptions of curriculum that leave student thinking on the margins—such factors combine to exacerbate endemic uncertainty teachers have about student learning and leave teachers with few productive tools for grappling with the space between teacher knowledge and student understanding. Our goal must not be to eliminate the space between the teacher and student, as Gadamer reminds us, but to recognize that we can do more to support productive interaction between teacher learning and student learning. Teachers need practical tools and contexts for reflecting on their own assumptions about students and for developing alternative conceptions and practices. This cannot occur, I have argued, without dramatically new approaches to teacher learning, approaches which have at their center access to and inquiry into situated examples of student learning. Teachers must understand "teaching expertise" to include centrally, teachers' ability to raise questions about one's own teaching and about student understanding—to find gray areas, to recognize the limited nature of one's own frameworks in relation to student thinking and to be open to alternatives. We are only just beginning to appreciate what it

might mean for teachers to learn, not so much "about" teaching and learning, but "from" the experience of teaching and from students' efforts.

Secondary teaching in the near future is likely to remain inherently busy, often under-resourced, highly complex work—where the orchestration of the daily classroom environment requires high level skills. Teachers will remain at the cross-roads of district directives and state mandated tests. Students will continue to reflect the pluralistic richness as well as the divisions of American society. Nothing about this makes the work of teachers easy. This study argues, though, that teachers have been vastly under-prepared in a complex area of pedagogical knowledge that lies at the heart of teaching—namely, how to understand more completely the thinking of the student, how to draw on and use student understanding to identify and support student learning. This study finds, also, that teachers want to do this better—although they are not clear how they would go about it. If we are committed to democratic classrooms, to resisting the default model of curriculum in which learning falls primarily, as Andrew so aptly observed, to the "upper middle" student, then we must commit ourselves to enriching the opportunities teachers have to understand the students with whom they work. The teachers in this study, Andrew, Caroline and Ellen, each recognized in an incipient way the centrality of this kind of teacher knowledge to their own classroom aims. We need to draw on this pedagogical impulse, on teachers' proximity to students, teachers' disciplinary knowledge, and on teachers' implicit theories and default conceptions of student learning, to build new understandings of students as learners in English, to give teachers new ground on which to formulate relevant, student-centered standards for their students. In the end, without

engaging and building upon teachers' conceptions of student understanding, efforts to reform classrooms may fail to enlist and educate those who have the most power and desire to make a difference for students.

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Appendix: Interview Protocols

Interview 1 *General Perceptions of Student Understanding*

1. Tell me a little about how you came to be an English teacher.

   --prompt for motivating experiences, personal decision-making, teacher training

2. Tell me about the literature courses you teach now (or taught last year).

   --Give an overview. How do (did) you structure the courses? texts?
   --What are (were) your general literature goals and objectives for students?

3. Describe a current lit. unit you are doing now, or will soon do, with your students (or a specific unit you recall).

   --What are (were) your specific goals for students?
   --How do you go about accomplishing these goals?
   --Which goals are easiest or most difficult to accomplish?

4. High schools students sometimes say things like: "I'm not good at literature." or "I hate to read." "I hate poetry." "This stuff is boring." What makes reading literature difficult for students?

5. What do you think it means to "understand literature?" What does it mean to say that someone understands literature? How might students answer this question?

6. How do you determine what students know about literature, and what they need to learn?

7. How do you, as a reader of literature, approach reading literary texts?

   --What processes, stances, strategies and skills do you rely on while reading literature?
   --What theoretical perspectives do you bring?

Interview 2 *Think-aloud and Simulated Planning*

1. Procedures & Practice

The purpose of this think-aloud interview is to help illuminate the specific processes you use as you make sense of literature. For this interview, I will ask you to verbalize whatever comes into your head as you read a piece of literature. A few guidelines are important for the think-aloud:

> **I have a few points marked for you to stop and report your thinking. These represent the minimum times I'd like you to think aloud. You may stop at other places or words as well.
> **Be as "on-line" as possible. Avoid hiding your thoughts until you have a finished product.
> **Do not censor your thoughts
> **Focus on the content of your thoughts themselves, not an explanation of your process

Brief practice.

2. Think-aloud with familiar teacher text.

3. Think aloud with poem (unfamiliar)

4. I'd like you to reflect on your reading just now. What do you notice about your own processes/ways of making sense of literature? Can you identify some of the strategies you use to build an interpretation?

5. I want you to think about your students and their possible readings of this text. How would your students respond to this text? How would they understand it? What difficulties would students have? What strategies would they likely employ?

6. (hypothetical) If you were going to teach this poem to a class (You may "place" the story within an instructional unit, or you could teach it separately), how would you go about planning for instruction? Describe a lesson or series of lessons. What objectives, activities, or focus would you have for students? Why? How would you evaluate students' understanding? Why?

AFTER – for interview 4.

a) Select a particular student in your classes that you would be interested in learning more about, are puzzled by, in terms of their understanding of literature. (Why would you choose this student? (student interview to form the basis for 4th teacher interview)

b) Bring artifacts of student learning next time--some physical item that gives insight into how a student in your class interprets literature. (examples?)

Interview 3 *Interpretation of Student Artifacts*

Teacher bring two to three artifacts from their own students representing a range of students' response to literature. Such artifacts can be journal writing, papers, drawings, student comments in class (which teacher has recalled or noted), or other. Teachers bring in artifacts that they feel represent both student understanding and misunderstanding

1. Let's discuss the pieces of student response you brought. First, describe the lesson and text that these items relate to. What was the unit? What were your goals? What were students asked to do? What criteria did you have for student performance?

2. How and why did you choose these particular artifacts? What do they show about student understanding in relation to your unit?

3. For an artifact that shows misconceptions--what seems to have gone wrong, or where precisely does the misconception lie? What processes were missed or misunderstood?

4. For an artifacts that show a range of difference--describe the thinking of the students to get to this point.

5. For artifacts that shows misconception/difference--try to describe what was going through the mind of the student as he/she said/wrote/created this.

6. How would you plan the next step in an instructional sequence, based on these artifacts? (treat each separately)

<u>Interview 4 *Responding to Videotape of Students Reading*</u>

Teachers view a videotape of a student (the student they selected in Interview 2) reading a literature passage (the piece the teacher read in Interview 2, or a text the class is currently reading) and thinking-aloud. Teachers will then interpret what the student is doing and make judgments about this student's literary understandings. Teachers have a TV remote and can stop tape when they have comments. Questions are context-specific—depending on the particular tape, teacher concerns or what teacher notices. (What did the student mean by...? Why did the student say?)

After discussing the videotape, each teacher is asked to make summary comments about the student's reading and to plan next steps in instruction, based on the students responses.

Curriculum Vitae

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Current Position	**Position for 2000-2001**
English Faculty (.6)	Visiting Assistant Professor, School of Education
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Education

Ph.D. University of Washington, Curriculum and Instruction (English Education & Teacher Education)

M.A.T. University of Chicago, 1990, English Education

M.A. University of Chicago, 1986, Divinity

B.A. University of Santa Clara, 1985, Religious Studies, magna cum laude; minor, German Language & Literature

Professional Teaching Experience

1992-2000	English Teacher, Bremerton High School Bremerton, WA
1997-1999	Co-chair, English Department, Bremerton High School Bremerton, WA
1990-1992	English Teacher, Lyons Township High School La Grange, IL
1986-1989	Teacher/Department Head, Religion Department, Hales Franciscan High School Chicago, IL

Publications

Hamel, F.L. (in press). Disciplinary landscapes, interdisciplinary collaboration: A case study. In S. S. Wineburg & P. L. Grossman (Eds.), Interdisciplinary Curriculum. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Professional Presentations

Hamel, F.L. (1999, November). Mapping student literary understanding: Two teachers thinking about their students reading literature. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Denver, CO.

Hamel, F.L. (1999, June). Mindful abstraction: Supporting lower-tracked students in the interpretation of literature. Presentation at "The English Teacher as Curriculum-Maker in the Face of Reform," a summer conference sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL.

Hamel, F.L. (1997, April). Disciplinary landscapes and interdisciplinary collaboration: A case study of two secondary teachers. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Hamel, F.L. (1995, May). Teacher control in discussions of literature. Paper presented at the Northwest regional meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Spokane, WA.

Hamel, F.L. (1994, March). A pivotal member: Teacher control in discussions of literature. Paper presented at the annual spring meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Portland, OR.

Zalewski, J.J., Hamel, F.L., & Fischer, T.L. (1994, March). Carpe diem: Practical approaches that may encourage writing teachers to attempt new ways of teaching writing in both the classroom and the writing lab. Presentation at the annual spring meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Portland, OR.

Hamel, F.L., Fischer, T.L., & Zalewski, J.J. (1993, March). First experiences in a computerized writing lab. Presentation at the annual spring meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Richmond, VA.

Related Experience

Research assistant, McDonnell Foundation project, "Establishing a community of learners among high school teachers." Pamela Grossman & Sam Wineburg, principal investigators, University of Washington, 1995-1996.

Mentor, Portfolio Seminar for pre-service English teachers, University of Washington. I assisted five teacher education students who had completed student teaching evaluate specific teaching experiences in constructing their professional portfolios. 1996.

Research assistant, Spencer Foundation project, "Subject matter as context of secondary teaching." Pamela Grossman & Susan Stodolsky, principal investigators, University of Washington, 1992.

Research assistant, "A study of composition teaching methods." George Hillocks, Jr., principal investigator, University of Chicago, 1990.

Research participant, Spencer Foundation project, "The moral life of schools." Philip Jackson, principal investigator, University of Chicago, 1988-1990.

Honors/Awards

Paul and Kate Farmer English Journal Writing Award, 1992, for journal article: "Teaching argument as a criterion-driven process."

Memberships:

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Professional References

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