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Good Readers, Good Teachers? Subject Matter Expertise as a Challenge in Learning to Teach

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Abstract

In this article, Diane Holt-Reynolds critically examines the importance placed on subject matter expertise in the training of secondary school teachers. Recognizing that knowledge of subject matter has been a major concern in national calls for education reform, Holt-Reynolds explores the role that such knowledge plays in a prospective teacher's conceptualization of skillful and successful teaching. Through a case study of Mary, one subject matter expert enrolled in a college-level teacher training program, Holt-Reynolds demonstrates how, for this teacher, subject matter expertise does not translate into an understanding of how to model that expertise or share it with students. Providing extensive data to support her identification of Mary as an expert reader, she then shows how Mary fails to see her expertise as learned and suggests that this failure causes Mary's expertise to be "unavailable" for teaching literature as a subject. Drawing on her conclusions from this case study, Holt-Reynolds expands the definition of subject matter expertise to include an awareness of that expertise as learned. She ends with a clear challenge for teacher educators to help prospective teachers recognize their subject matter expertise and learn ways to share and model it with students. (pp.29-50)

The past decade has been marked by a renewed interest in and focus on questions of how best to educate teachers. Landmark publications such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983), a series of reports on the nation's high schools (Boyer, 1983; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984), and the seminal *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Forum, 1986) positioned teacher educators to examine once more the

ways we structure and support prospective teachers' learning. These documents led to an agenda for the 1990s: find ways to improve what schoolchildren have the opportunity to explore, master, and learn by improving the quality of the teaching they encounter.

The calls for reform in the late 1980s were by no means novel. Klausmeier (1990) has pointed out the "almost cyclical" (p. 23) nature of the nation's interest in questions of how to prepare teachers. His review of reform movements, beginning in 1950, demonstrated that, while a variety of issues emerged in each decade, calls for improved scholarly, academic, or subject matter preparation of teachers repeatedly headed the list (see Bestor, 1955; Conant, 1963; Howsam, Corrigan, Denemark, & Nash, 1976; Koerner, 1963; Smith, 1980). The Holmes Group added its voice in 1986 and so helped to place the reform of teachers' subject matter preparation at the forefront of the reform discourse in the 1990s.

Of the various domains of teacher knowledge (Shulman, 1986), subject matter expertise might appear to be the most easily addressed. Approaches to this domain have included adjusting teacher education programs to require disciplinary majors for all K-12 teachers, developing admissions standards to favor prospective teachers with high grade point averages in their disciplinary majors, and/or moving course work in pedagogy to a fifth year in order to leave undergraduates ample time to pursue course work in their majors as suggested by The Holmes Group (1986). All of these represent programmatic attempts to respond to almost five decades of calls for stronger, more substantive disciplinary preparation of new teachers.

Agreeing that prospective teachers need to be knowledgeable about the subjects they teach is easy. Finding ways to shape the quantity of time prospective teachers spend in academic departments is practical and tenable. However, defining or articulating what we, as teacher educators, mean by "knowledgeable about subject matter" is a far more complex maneuver. Berliner (1986) has made a helpful distinction between *knowing that* and *knowing how*. *Knowing that*, he maintains, is the more general of the two knowledge types. It is represented by an ability to perform a skill or demonstrate comprehension of a discipline's facts, principles, or theories. A prospective teacher might know, for example, that Shakespeare wrote many plays, lived at a particular time, and influenced literature profoundly. She might demonstrate a thorough recall of the plots of Shakespeare's plays, describe the form of his sonnets, and recite dominant critical views on his work. However, Berliner also argues for a second kind of knowledge that transcends knowing that Shakespeare is an important figure in literature and that there are standard rationales for defending his prominence in literary circles and high school curricula. *Knowing how,* Berliner explains, includes an ability to articulate the personal strategies that a teacher would use to approach Shakespeare, to tell another how she reads his work, and what she does in her mind to understand and respond to it. Shulman (1986) argues similarly. His premise, those who *understand* teach, parallels Berliner's argument. Thinking about expertise as "understanding," like thinking of it as "knowing how," points teacher educators interested in improving the subject matter knowledge of prospective teachers toward a kind of teacher knowledge or expertise that extends beyond the level of general mastery required for degree status. This knowledge includes an ability to transform disciplinary knowledge so that novice learners can participate in discipline-specific ways of understanding the world around them.

What sorts of criteria might help teacher educators distinguish teacher candidates who have rich subject matter preparation and a genuine knowledge of how their own expertise functions from others who do not? What guidelines might help to identify those who have completed required courses in their majors, accumulated above-average grades there, and yet are unable to understand their own expertise well enough to do more than merely tell others the factual contents of their disciplines? Assessing what teachers know (National Board, 1991; Shulman & Sykes, 1986) and improving their knowledge base through pre-service teacher preparation is a concern not only of the teacher education community, but of the public as well (Barnes & DeRoche, 1994). And yet, as Grossman and

Stodolsky (1994) noted, the research data available to focus teacher education reform on this critical issue — especially in terms of secondary teachers — are sparse.

A Disciplinary Example

Subject matter preparation for teaching literature in secondary schools is one potentially useful and informative area for a case study. The language arts have historically been tolerant of and enriched by multiple definitions, perspectives, and traditions (Applebee, 1974; Elbow, 1990; Graff, 1987) for articulating what counts as expertise within the discipline. At the most sophisticated disciplinary levels, those of us who think about the teaching of high school English live with, and perhaps even cherish, multiple and various responses to seminal questions such as, "What do truly expert readers do when they read literature?" The scholarly, defensible, and well-regarded discourse within the discipline frames its answers in various ways. In fact, enduring questions about what readers should/could/ought to do when performing a quality act of reading a text constitute the intellectual center of the discipline, yet critical theories have yet to exhibit consensus. In fact, it is not clear that consensus is even a desired disciplinary objective. Informed participation in this ongoing debate about what expert readers do and why they do it is actually one important way to signal mastery of the discipline.

Study Design

At the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, a team of researchers consisting of this author, three graduate students in the College of Education, and another education professor invited twelve undergraduate literature majors enrolled in a teacher education program to talk with us about what literature is, why and how they read it, what literature they hope to share with future adolescent readers, and, especially, to explain to us the reading actions they intend to teach to those future students. By reading actions, we mean those particular mental processes prospective teachers believe good readers use when they read. We wanted to learn how successful literature majors transfer their own disciplinary expertise — that is, their abilities as readers — into an understanding of the school subject "literature" and project a subject-specific pedagogical role for themselves as teachers. Several lines of inquiry informed our design and guided our direction.

Purpose of the Study

Drawing on the work of Grossman (1990), we were curious about how these prospective literature teachers would see and understand the role of a reader and the purposes for reading as they neared completion of a bachelor's degree, but before they participated in a teacher education program or real classrooms as student teachers or interns. We wanted to understand how they talked about and drew on their own actions as readers when attempting to transform that personal knowledge into a knowledge for teaching others. Our question paralleled that of Zancanella (1991), in that we wanted to trace the connections prospective literature teachers might make between their personal practices as readers and the actions they most valued as they envisioned their work as teachers. Like Zancanella, we made no attempt to critique their knowledge on the basis of its viability. We were not looking to see whether their knowledge "worked" or would stand up in the act of teaching real students in real high schools. Nor did we have any interest in making a critique of the quality of the education they received as English majors. We were, rather, curious about the character and content of their subject matter knowledge at the point when they would begin course work designed to help them transform that knowledge for teaching. We hoped to use these data as a springboard for a theoretical exploration of the potential interactions between knowledge of subject matter and the yet-to-be-developed knowledge of subject-specific pedagogical practices (Shulman, 1986).

Design Features

We selected participants from a pool of volunteers at a large midwestern university according to three criteria: participants had to anticipate becoming secondary school literature teachers; they needed to be sophomores or juniors so we could be relatively certain of the stability of their selection of English as a major; they could not be seniors, because prospective literature teachers spend significant numbers of hours in schools early in their senior year, and we wanted to have ample opportunity to talk with participants before they modified their positions to accommodate field experiences. We spoke with each participant at the end of each semester between the time they volunteered for the study and the time they enrolled in the teacher certification course sequence. This meant that, in addition to the entrance and exit interviews, we interviewed the participants at the end of each of three semesters, for a total of five interviews each. We video- and audiotaped each interview. Interviewers had no previous connections with any study participants and saw them exclusively in the context of the formal interview sessions.

Entrance and Exit Interviews

The most extensive of these interviews was the entrance interview, a 119-question protocol in four parts (See Appendix A). Part one solicited participants' histories as readers by asking them to recall early reading experiences at home and at school, favorite books, and memories of family events where stories — oral or textual — figured prominently. Part two invited participants to define "literature" and to talk about their values for genre and text types.

This portion of the protocol included asking participants to examine twenty-five different texts and to decide whether to classify each as literature. Samples ranged from *The Complete Shakespeare* to a romance novel complete with steamy front cover to rap lyrics to instructions for operating a coffee maker to a child's wordless picture book. Part three elicited participants' current theories about critical perspectives widely recognized within the discipline of literary studies. We provided participants with a one-page position paper written from each of four critical perspectives — New Criticism, deconstructionism, reader response theory, and postmodern structuralism (See Appendix B). Each untitled position paper focused on the role of readers, critics, authors, and the printed text in the development of meaning, given each particular perspective. Participants were asked to evaluate each position paper and to talk about elements within the paper with which they either agreed or disagreed.

Part four moved into participants' projections about the role of a literature teacher. They were asked to select books for an imaginary class and to talk about the rationales guiding their selections; they were asked to read Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven," a highly controversial narrative poem easily read during the time of the interview, and to talk about what they did as a reader to understand the poem. We also asked participants to look at a short paper on Poe's life, and then to talk about how/whether the biography informed their reading and whether they might use it to inform future students. We then asked participants to construct a test on *Romeo and Juliet* for tenth-graders by choosing test items from among a set of twenty-five questions we had written. Finally, we asked them to talk about what they might learn from students' answers to those questions, especially from "wrong" answers. (A more extensive discussion of the entrance interview protocol is available; see McDiarmid, 1993.)

We returned to this protocol eighteen months later when we conducted exit interviews with each participant. This exit interview repeated many items from parts two, three, and four of the entrance interview protocol. Our purpose was to record and acknowledge any shift in position that may have resulted from maturation or the effects of three semesters of university course work. While some participants evidenced slight variations from entrance to exit interviews, no one reported radical or extensive revisions in their beliefs. Variations were limited to selecting

different texts for imaginary classrooms due to increased familiarity with the texts from which we asked them to choose, or offering more liberal definitions of literature. Some of these students recalled the task from the entrance interview and explicitly claimed, “I’ve been thinking about this!”

Other Interviews

We were able to conduct interviews with participants at the end of each of three semesters. These were brief interviews in which participants told us about course work they had taken that semester and texts they had read, and shared any ideas they had formed that semester about themselves as readers. None of these interviews became powerful data sources in the study, but they did serve to maintain rapport and contact across time with participants.

Data Analysis

Each participant’s data were read as a whole text at the end of the study by all five researchers. During this reading, each researcher also focused on one piece of the larger research question, read the participant’s data with that one sub-question in mind, and prepared an issue paper reflecting the participant’s position on the question/issue. We chose issues to parallel the four parts of the entrance/exit interview protocols: personal history and biography, definition of literature, theory of reading, and perspective on teaching. The research team then met to build the case around each participant’s data. Consensus of analysis was reached by repeated hypothesis creation and tested by rereading the data. Beach and Marshall (1991) provided a framework for thinking about participants’ personal ways of understanding the purposes of reading and describing the ways readers think about or mentally act on and around texts.

The orientations these prospective literature teachers took toward their own actions as readers tended to reflect disciplinary positions and perspectives quite poorly. Most participants cobbled together bits and pieces of standard critical perspectives when describing their own actions as readers. When shifting to discuss what they imagined high school readers might do with texts, those participants who were themselves talented readers were most likely to set strict boundaries on the range of teacher actions they projected. These talented readers believed that teachers should set no goals for students’ reading. They believed that teachers might legitimately ask, “What do you think?” but treated any guided questioning or direct modeling of possible ways a reader might interpret or respond to a text as suspect, a potential misuse of authority.

Their projections about what literature teachers should do suggested that they held thinly understood versions of reader response theories of reading and the teaching strategies that reflect this theory of reading. A richer understanding of reader response theories of reading and pedagogy would have included a sense of how teachers use classroom conversations about texts as opportunities to help adolescent readers see additional possible meanings, engage with textual elements, envision characters and events, enter the world of the text, or make judgments about it. Those participants most enamored of reader response theories for use in classrooms were also least likely to recognize the potential utility of textual forms of reader response (see Beach, 1993) or teaching strategies that might be based in New Criticism. For example, they passionately rejected the idea that an author has an intended meaning or that reading includes an effort to discover that intended meaning. Therefore, they rejected teaching strategies that would focus readers on the author, her life, or the context in which she wrote.

Mary: A Knowledgeable Subject Matter Major

Mary gave us an especially clean, clear, and counter-intuitive case. The connections that reform-minded teacher

educators might assume between genuine expertise in a subject area like literature and a conscious appreciation of the underpinnings of that expertise did not help Mary see an instructional role for herself. Despite her status as a skilled reader — a subject matter expert — she demonstrated little accompanying ability to recognize the processes she used in a way that might lead her to imagine how she could share reading process information or model it with high school readers. In the first conversation we had with her, Mary described herself as "average," but, as the research sequence progressed, we learned that she had been valedictorian of a large, urban high school; had a 4.0 in every literature course she took; and was an avid, lifelong reader with a fondness for poetry. We came to see Mary was anything but an "average" reader.

Evidence of Expertise

Our interview questions were not designed explicitly to "test" prospective literature teachers' knowledge of criticisms, theories, or individual texts in any way. However, we did invite study participants to talk to us about their ways of classifying some texts as either literature or not literature. This open-ended, general probe proved to be a rich source of information about how study participants thought about literature. It was the point within the interview sequence where we began to see how Mary understood the activities of reading.

The interviewer showed Mary twenty-five different sorts of texts, including "standards" such as *The Complete Shakespeare*, less typical story-based texts such as a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon, non-story texts such as Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and texts that might challenge her definition of reading, such as a child's wordless picture book. In response, Mary talked with the interviewer about her criteria for classifying something as "literature." She consistently made her decision about whether something was or was not literature by analyzing the sample text's potential for inviting a reader to develop multiple meanings or interpretations, its ability to provoke abstract thinking, and its power to elicit a reader's passion. She was quick to dismiss such items as newspapers, a history textbook, and a memo as "not literature":

> I consider literature anything not just written for the purpose of information. Literature, I think, takes on a lot of different aspects. A newspaper is just purpose writing; it gives information. It doesn't evoke any other feelings. Literature is something [that gives you] different ways that you can read and interpret it. It's not just written for one purpose.

In each of her decisions about a sample text, Mary estimated whether that text might invite or allow a reader to use sophisticated mental processes for understanding or interacting with it. She determined whether a text was literature by telling the interviewer what she believed a reader would need to do in order to understand it. If she estimated that a reader would need to engage in the act of interpreting in order to understand the text, Mary classified that text as literature.

Given a magazine advertisement for an automobile, Mary classified it as literature because, she said, "It's creating an image for your own interpretation." She followed this same logic to decide that a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon strip is literature: "I never thought of a cartoon as literature, but I guess by the images that it creates, it's an opinion."

The interviewer then asked Mary to clarify the concept she was trying to articulate. In the following interview excerpt, Mary explains how a text that intentionally opens itself to reader interpretation is more literary than a text written by an author who has one idea or point she wants a reader to find:

> I think the reader can choose what you want to do with [something that is] literature. When Emily Brontë wrote *Wuthering Heights*, I don't think she meant it to be read the different ways that people read it. She might have, but there are different ways that people can interpret that story. . . . Like Mary Shelley when she wrote *Frankenstein*. There was a lot of social disorder going on, and revolution and change. But you can look at the different angles of the story. She may have intended them, but she was young, nineteen. So I don't think that she had everything [in mind] that other people read into it. Literature is something you can read into, look for something on your own, create your own interpretation.

Wuthering Heights and *Frankenstein* were not texts the interviewer brought into the interview as samples to be classified. Instead, Mary brought these texts into the discussion. Her citing them suggests that she was able to recall and use intertextual references to support her theory-making. Her argument above is a scholarly one, based on rules of evidence that represent one way of thinking about the relationship between authors' meanings and interpretations. Mary argued that literature is text that is by design open to reader interpretations. As Mary explained, "purpose writing"(her term) differs from literature in that the author intends to transmit particular information, and the text is meant to be read as the author intended, rather than to be open to a reader's personal interpretation. Mary's was a sophisticated argument about what readers do, what authors do, and how literary texts differ from other types of text. We heard many less powerful or discipline-based ways of discriminating among the samples in this portion of the interview with other subjects. Other study participants classified everything with words as literature, everything with a plot as literature, everything fictional as literature, or anything that was published as literature. Mary's rationales were consistently far more sophisticated than those offered by other study participants, and were rooted in the literary theories that define the discipline.

For example, Mary was quite capable of referencing these theories by name. In this same portion of her entrance interview, she introduced critical theory into the conversation, though the protocol would not explicitly take her to these theories until later in that interview session. Her spontaneous use of theory was another marker of Mary's skill as a literature major:

> It depends on how you read [*Frankenstein*] — if you read it at the scientific level, if you read it from the woman's point of view or from Marxism, or if you just want to read it on the Gothic level. I don't know if [by] just looking at it or reading it you can guess what you thought Mary Shelley had in mind when she wrote it, because I think you bring your own interpretations in.

When asked to look again at the same texts eighteen months later, Mary advanced the same argument. "What makes it [the history textbook] not literature is because I don't think that when you read something just for facts, when you search for information, I don't think that counts as literature."

In the exit interview, we were able to see that Mary's expertise included an awareness of the multiple and varied purposes for which readers read:

> *Native Son* is literature because it stimulates thought. I mean, I read Shakespeare just to think. A lot of his themes are powerful and it is something that I can think about and move on from there. [Literature] can make you think about other things; it stimulates thought. The history text is facts and you memorize it. That is where the difference is. . . .The romance novel [*Sunder, Eclipse and Seed*] is literature because it is something you read to escape. It takes you to a different level of thinking. Anything you can get lost in and see yourself and move on from there I would classify as literature.

Mary also knew a lot about the theoretical underpinnings of the discipline. As a standard part of the entrance and exit interviews, we gave each participant one-page position papers, as described above in the protocol. As part of her discussion of these papers, Mary indicated her familiarity with these four theoretical positions. She volunteered the name of the position summarized in three of the four pieces, though we did not ask her to do this. She had not prepared in advance of our interview; the interviewer showed her the position pieces for the first time when he sat down with her in the entrance interview context. She simply added the formal names to her critique of these ideas. We found this interesting and treated it as evidence of Mary's expertise in her discipline. Only one other study participant out of the twelve volunteered his recognition and knowledge of the names of these theoretical schools of thought.

Finally, Mary gave us some indication of her own ability to read with sophistication. When the interviewer asked in the exit interview why she would want to teach literature in college or high school, Mary responded:

> I want to teach literature because I like it. I want to read it. If I take a class, I want to learn more about reading. . . . As a reader, you could be a superficial reader without getting down to the depth of it. You could read a book and totally miss all of the symbolism. . . . I want to be able to pick up a book and get more out of it than I would have. I [first] read *Romeo and Juliet* and thought it was a nice love story. I read it this week and thought it was an example of bad parenting. I don't believe they were ever in love. It was infatuation.

Mary had been reading *Romeo and Juliet* as an assignment in an English class she was taking. As she told the interviewer what she was noticing about the possible directions a teacher might take the play, she revealed her own ability to read and locate potential interpretations:

> When you pick *Romeo and Juliet* apart, you find that it is just packed. . . . There are a lot of different things you can support. The Friar. Some people say he was just scheming; others say he was just doing it for the kids or because he wanted to end a family feud. I say he wasn't doing it to end the feud because he was going to send Juliet secretly away [to Romeo] and they weren't ever going to come back. That was in his mind. Nobody can get into the Friar's mind or Shakespeare's mind and say what he was thinking exactly. It [the play] is vague enough that there are different interpretations you can have. [The question] is which one fits the play? They all fit; it just changes how you look at *Romeo and Juliet*. It's not that these interpretations are wrong, it's just that they are not standard, not what you're used to hearing. . . . If you can support it, then it's a valid point.

Connecting Personal Expertise and Teaching Others

Mary had substantial expertise in her discipline, as evidenced by her knowledge of how to read for interpretation. What's more, she knew how to use that disciplinary knowledge as a framework for deciding which of multiple interpretations were most valid. Hers would be a "poster" case study for the advantages of recruiting skilled subject matter majors into the profession, were it not for one critical plot twist: Mary did not see that her skills as a reader were learned. She did not treat the mental processes and actions she knew how to use when reading as anything special. There is no evidence in the data to suggest that she regarded herself as an unusually skilled reader. Rather, Mary told her interviewer that she was "average." We could read her interviews and see in them evidence of her expertise; Mary held no similar view of herself. Her expertise was invisible to her, a tacit set of skills she could use but did not directly identify as belonging in the category Shulman (1986) has called subject-specific pedagogical

knowledge. She had not identified her use of a rich array of reading processes and actions as a knowledge important enough to share with the adolescent readers she imagined she would one day teach. In Berliner's words, Mary knew that she read in particular ways, but she did not give evidence of *knowing how* those reading actions contributed to her expertise or how they might be useful to less experienced or less skilled readers.

Mary was, however, conscious of some ways in which her personal history as a reader had served her well. First, she was often clear about what she *learned* by reading. The quotations above include her references to her own learning, and she also reported that she felt she had never been *taught* anything as a reader. We discovered how strong this feeling was when her interviewer asked her to draw a representation — an open-ended prompt that she interpreted as a request for a picture or model — showing the relationship between a text, an author, a reader, and a meaning or interpretation. She explained:

> I think the author writes the text and the text helps the reader create the meaning. The author becomes a part of what you are reading. That is why it is all connected to meaning. This is how I read. I cannot draw it for anybody else except myself.

When the interviewer asked her to insert a teacher into her representation, Mary responded:

> The teacher doesn't fit into the picture for me when I read. I get the book and I consider the author and I consider the period and the text. So that is a private experience for me. For somebody else, I can't say what the teacher would do. I can't say what I'm going to do. A teacher is not an influence when I read. I can't include her or him in this circle.

The interviewer then asked her whether she meant that there is nothing she could gain from a teacher's perspective. Mary replied, "I am not saying that. I'm saying when I read, I don't read for a teacher. I read for myself. The teacher is not in my circle because it is a private experience." Mary's logic reflects her own experiences as a talented learner and skilled reader. She had experienced high school teachers in particular as interfering with her reading by seeming to ask that she hold the same interpretations they held and that she agree with their readings of a text:

> We as readers have the choice to see [our teachers'] perspective but it should not be forced on us. We don't want it. We shouldn't be guided to reach their interpretation. It should be an option. . . . I don't think that a reader necessarily needs help to understand. I think readers are quite capable of getting out of it what they want. . . . The teacher or a critic is just a different opinion, it's a separate opinion. You may not agree with the teacher. Does that mean that you are wrong? I don't think so.

Mary powerfully rejected a conception of the teacher as a directive force. In its place she put value on a teacher who would honor any and all valid interpretations. She remarked, "You can talk to [students] and ask, 'What do you think?' . . . The reader is going to find [his] own meaning. I think the reader's role is to discover whatever he wants." Pressed by her interviewer for an imaginary example to clarify her idea, Mary explained:

> [A teacher should] ask for general reactions and then ask [students] why they felt that. And if they can't answer, [I'd] ask other people where they might draw their conclusions from and just talk about the poem and about theories behind that poem. You can draw a bunch of different things into it. . . . Ask them to form their opinions why they think anything is significant. Then tie that back into the literature to make them feel they answered the question. Students need to think for themselves

> rather than be told an answer.

Mary's scenario reveals the importance she placed on student thinking; it is silent about what she believed a teacher might do to foster that thinking beyond inviting students to demonstrate what they already know how to do. How readers might be taught more than they already know about making personal interpretations was simply not apparent to Mary. She seemed unable to envision it as a problem that might require an instructional response.

Mary's interviewer regularly invited Mary to talk about what kinds of instructional input she thought might inform a reader's ability to develop an interpretation. As a research group, we were curious about whether Mary might then work backward to talk about how she as a teacher would help a reader learn to arrive independently at meaning. Nothing emerged. Instead, Mary talked about "understanding the language" as the only prerequisite a reader might need in order to develop an interpretation. Her earliest statement of this type came in the entrance interview as she talked about her own study of Shakespeare: "With Shakespeare, part of it is interpretation. [Our professor] taught us how to get over the confusion point about the language. . . . If you don't understand it, you are going to interpret it to mean what you think and that may not always be right." Mary never enriched or expanded on this fairly simplistic stand; in her mind, if a reader understands the language, a valid interpretation is unproblematic. Yet she herself was able to bring critical theory, personal experiences, knowledge of authors' devices like symbolism and alternative viewpoints to her own work as a reader and interpreter of literature.

The Teacher's Role

Over the eighteen months and more than sixteen hours of interview time, we were able to invite all study participants to tell us what they thought their role as a teacher might include. The most revealing responses were to our questions about teaching particular texts to imaginary students. Invited to talk about what might cause a group of tenth-graders to have difficulty with Poe's poem, "The Raven," Mary cited lack of maturity as the most likely culprit: "I think experience colors how you read things. If you don't have any experience because of your age, then you're not going to be quite as knowledgeable as the mature reader is. So I think the older you are, the better."

While I would not argue with Mary's underlying premise — that readers bring life experiences to texts and that it is an advantage to have lots of experiences on which to draw — a student's chronological maturity is not something a teacher can affect. However, a teacher might help readers compensate for lack of experience by attempting to provide background and help readers build a base of experience. But these are my ideas about roles for a teacher, not Mary's. Mary-as-Teacher imagined simply reserving a text until students become old enough to read it. She went on to recall how she "didn't like it" when she read Shelley's poetry in high school, but then she " read it in college and liked it a lot. So, I think once you get older, you just learn more." She said her own development occurred outside any instructional experiences and that her expertise was a function of getting older. It is altogether reasonable that she would assume her students would also become better readers as they matured. As stated above, Mary believed that "The teacher doesn't fit into the picture."

Other evidence points to Mary's sense that Mary-as-Teacher would have, both on principle and by definition, a limited role. She believed that readers are best left alone: "I think the reader's role is to discover whatever he wants. . . . I don't think that everybody can have the same interpretation, but I believe that somebody can find a constant theme that runs through a book for themselves." Given a set of questions from an anthology that included "The Raven" and asked whether they might help readers understand the poem, Mary responded:

> I can look at these and say, "What a joke." . . . These questions require regurgitation of facts. They

> don't focus on discussion. When you answer these questions, you are basically going to critique the question's statement and try to prove [that the question's premise] is right. That is what the anthology wants to hear. If you are open to your own interpretation, these questions don't give you room to explore. . . . I don't want to present students with an anthology question and I don't want to present them with my own question because with my own question they are going to answer what they think I want to hear. If I present them with their own questions, then they feel free to argue what they raise.

Mary apparently imagined that all readers are replications of herself — naturally capable of reading texts for personal meaning and frustrated by teaching that either silences them or forces them to adopt interpretations other than their own. Granted, we talked with Mary before she had any authentic field experiences; she had not been in a high school classroom since she left as class valedictorian. Perhaps, we thought, a few weeks in an eighth-grade classroom would radically alter Mary's sense of the relationships possible between teachers, students, and texts, but the point here remains. As a successful, well-prepared literature major just ready to enter professional study, Mary was unprepared to see a teacher's use of personal reading expertise as anything other than misuse of authority. She believed that all readers are able to develop valid personal interpretations of text with no tutoring, schooling, or teaching: "I think that most teachers go in with expectations that the kids don't know very much. And students, knowing that's what the teacher thinks about them, fall into that trap and let them believe that and then they don't try as hard."

Mary did have a projected game plan. She had a list of attributes good teachers need in order to be effective literature teachers. She told her interviewer that her best teachers had been those who demonstrated that they cared about students, who were personable, yet could retain class control — all attributes to which we feel prospective teachers should aspire. Yet, in spite of being asked "What does it take for someone to teach *literature* in schools?" she gave no response that was in any way literature-specific:

> Knowledge, patience, flexibility. They have to bridge the generation gap. They have to be good storytellers. They have to be good listeners. There are so many characteristics. They have to share; they have to give the student a chance to speak and use their own voice and create a good class community so that students feel they can share without being ridiculed. I mean, anything you would think a good teacher would have to do would be applied to a teacher of literature, except the most important thing with literature is that students make sure they're safe because nobody wants to be made a fool of. Teachers must be open-minded, flexible, and able to keep [students] on task because students can go off on a tangent and teachers have to be able to incorporate that tangent back into the original plan, but at the same time make students feel worthwhile.

Pushed by her interviewer to say how a good literature teacher would be different from, for example, a good math teacher, Mary added, "Well-read would be the only difference I can think of. In order to teach literature, you have to have a solid background in literature."

There is absolutely nothing "wrong" with Mary's list. Teachers indeed need to be generous individuals with strong interpersonal and communications skills. We certainly hope to attract flexible, open-minded, smart individuals into the profession, and everything Mary has named would be beneficial in a teacher of literature. What is striking here, however, is that Mary knew so much about how to read, how to interpret, how to think about text, that she could use the skills she valued to her own reading advantage, and yet she offered none of that expertise as a valuable trait for a literature teacher.

Mary and Teacher Education

Mary completed her undergraduate major saddled with an ironic challenge. The potential problems she brought to her study of teaching were not the outgrowth of deficiency; they had their roots in the very expertise she had so easily cultivated. Mary "knew" a lot about reading, and knew a lot about her discipline, but she did not know that her expertise was learned. Treating her learned skills as merely a function of maturation, Mary could not talk to us about a "teacher self" who *taught* those skills to others. Instead, she imagined only extending opportunities to her students to display full-blown personal expertise at an earlier age than she had been allowed that freedom. Her apparently egalitarian belief in the innate and untutored skill of others positioned her to reject most teacher actions designed to make the mental processes of reading for personal meaning explicit for inexperienced readers. She saw these actions as oppressive, silencing, and patronizing.

Conscious Expertise

Mary's case suggests that at least some prospective teachers may come to teacher education unaware of their own expertise. They may be unable to recall or be unaware of how they have learned the processes they use and that render them expert. Unaided by their disciplines in locating the underpinnings (see Graff, 1992) of their expertise, these skilled, talented, and desirable recruits to teaching may easily become, ironically, those who can *do* but who cannot *teach* (Shulman, 1986). Our work as teacher educators would then include helping them recognize and claim as *learned* expertise the skills and abilities that they take for granted as unlearned. A definition of subject matter expertise needs to include awareness of that expertise as learned, earned, or developed.

Anticipating a Teacher's Role

However sharply it violates our intuitive senses, it is also possible that highly expert subject matter majors may, like Mary, aggressively avoid imagining an active, instructional role for themselves as they face the transition from university student to schoolteacher. Mary's sense that interpretations are constructed, rather than given, marks her as a sophisticated reader and interpreter of literature. It was this same sophisticated commitment to the generation of personal interpretations that also led her to see any and all instructional actions as nothing more than a veiled preferencing of a teacher's interpretation. Truly expert subject matter majors like Mary may arrive in teacher education passionately committed to a model of Self-as-Teacher in which the teacher has little instructional responsibility in the classroom. Therefore, a definition of subject matter expertise must also include an awareness of concepts, ideas, and dispositions that must be actually taught to others.

Discussion

The reform rhetoric calls for better subject matter preparation of prospective teachers; however, that call is not grounded in a research-based model that predicts the relationship between exemplary subject matter expertise and the disposition to adopt an active role as a teacher. Those of us actively engaged in teacher education hear little or nothing about what challenges we might face if we successfully recruit into the profession genuinely expert disciplinary majors. While I would certainly *not* argue the counter point, I suggest that we use the case of Mary as a point of departure. Admittedly, Mary is only one case. Without over-extending these data, it is fair to worry about whether prospective teachers like Mary will be able to sustain themselves in the profession. Mary's case projects at least the possibility of a teacher who will find herself unable to have a noticeable or personally satisfying impact on her learners. What would prompt a teacher who never sees student improvement to remain in the profession? Her case suggests a teacher who is prepared to frame student non-engagement exclusively as a function of her choices

of texts and their current level of maturation. What happens to adolescent readers when they encounter teachers who read well and know a lot about texts, but who have no sense of how they learned to read well or how to show others how to behave in a like manner?

An Afterword

The research in which Mary was a formal participant ended one year before she entered her internship year in her university's Teacher Certification Program. Because the research team members remained interested in Mary and because our team knew she was progressing to an internship, we arranged to informally observe her work there. As one of the principle investigators on the research team, I elected to be the team member who would visit Mary's classroom. There, Mary's extensive expertise as a reader was invisible. Instead, I saw her working hard to explain to eighth-graders how to make a collage, how to fill out question sheets, how to staple pages of a personal poetry collection book in order, how to create its cover page. Fostering students' completion of assignments appeared to have become Mary's entire role as a teacher.

Following one such lesson, I asked Mary whether she had meant to teach the poem students read that day or to teach the worksheet she coaxed them to fill out. Her blue eyes met mine and grew large as she affirmed her desire to teach the poem, not the worksheet, and recognized that she had in fact done just the opposite. She was surprised when I asked her whether these younger readers might benefit more from hearing her talk about what she does with her mind when she reads poetry — what she notices, what makes her smile or satisfies her, what other ideas and texts she brings to the poem as she reads. It was an idea she had not considered.

Few experiences in my life as a teacher educator and researcher have moved me more. Mary's case shows me vividly that unidentified, unclaimed, and untapped subject matter expertise has little power. It lies dormant and useless in a classroom. Helping talented, sophisticated prospective teachers identify their expertise, value it, and imagine ways to share and model it with their students may be a challenge teacher educators had not anticipated when we set out to recruit more subject matter experts into teaching. Shulman was right: those who can must also understand. The surprise for teacher education is that we may need to work hard to help prospective teachers identify their expertise and transform it into effective instruction.

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Appendix A

Description of Understanding Literature Interview Protocol

Part One: Personal History

Example Questions:

- Tell me about how your interest in reading and literature developed.
- Tell me what you remember about reading and literature in elementary school.
- What about English or American literature classes in high school? Which did you take? When you think back to that class, what stands out for you?
- Tell me about why you decided to major in English. . . . When did you make this decision?
- What's the best English or literature course you've taken?
- What made it so good?
- What about the flip side — what's the worst English or literature course you've taken?
- What made it bad?
- In college, have you found that literature is treated differently than it was in high school?

Part Two: Defining Literature; Knowing Literature

Example Questions:

- Could you tell me what texts or books or works you think of when you hear the word "literature"?
- Now I want to present you with a bunch of different texts and I want you to tell me whether or not you consider each of them literature. As we are most interested in HOW you think about this issue, please think

aloud and say whatever comes to your mind as you look at each text.
- Can you tell me how you decided? What influenced your decisions and ideas about this classification? Why is a particular text literature and another text isn't?
- Is there anything that you want to comment about? Is there anything else that you want me to know? Anything else you want to say?
- I'd like for you to take a moment and think of something you've read or a writer that has meant a lot to you. Then, I'd like for you to tell me about when you think about what it means to know or understand literature, what sort of ideas come to mind? How did you come to think that way?
- As you probably know, we are trying to find out more about how people think about literature and what it means to say someone knows literature. Can you think of someone who you would say knows literature?
- How did you come to believe that this person knows literature?

Part Three: Critical Theories

Examples:

- Here is what someone has said about literature. Take some time to read it. When you feel ready, I want you to tell me what you think of it.
- How would you compare these different views?
- Which is closest to your idea of literature? Why?
- What do you find in the others that you don't agree with?
- Is there a theory of literature that you prefer that we haven't included? [If yes:] How does it differ from these four?
- Are there things about literature that you believe but that these authors left out?
- How do you think it happens that people disagree about literature?
- What experiences have you had reading about or studying literary theory?

Part Four: Teacher Roles

Examples:

- Here is a copy of "The Raven." Read it, and when you're finished we'll talk a little about what you think is going on in this poem.
- I'm eager to understand "The Raven" the way you do without biasing you too much. So, I'd really like to know what you think of this poem. Tell me about it.
- If you think of this poem from your perspective as an English major, is there anything you'd add? Anything about your original analysis you'd especially want to highlight or explain differently? Is there anything you feel would be less important or not important at all?
- What do you know about Poe's life? The reason I'm asking this is because sometimes what we know about an author's life influences how we read and think about his or her work. Is that important for you when you're reading "The Raven"?
- "The Raven" is a poem you could find yourself teaching one day. Would you choose to teach it if you found it in the anthology your students had been assigned? Could you explain what factors might affect your decision? Anything else?
- Let's assume for a moment that this poem is important to teach in a high school curriculum. Think about grades 9 through 12. Where do you think this poem could best be included? Would this be a difficult poem

for students? What helps you decide? How do you predict students will react to this poem?
- Imagine that you were going to "teach this poem": what would you focus on?
- If I were a visitor in your classroom when you were teaching this poem, what would I likely see you doing? How about the students — what would they likely be doing? From the first moment that students see the poem through to the last time they talk, think, or write about it, what might be going on in your classroom?
- Why do you think we teach literature in college? How about in high schools? And in elementary schools?

Appendix B

Summary of Theoretical Positions

Theory #1: Postmodern Structuralism

A **work of literature** is a self-contained world. The meaning is found within the text itself. The various parts of the text may conflict or be in tension. The form or structure of the work pulls these parts together into a coherent whole. The form *is* the meaning.

Since a literary work contains its own reality and its form is its meaning, knowledge of the intentions or the life and times of the **author** is *not* important for understanding what the work means.

Similarly, since the work exists in and is its own world, **society** has little influence on the meaning of a text.

The **reader** must experience the meaning of the work. However, experiencing the meaning is not simply a matter of responding subjectively and/or affectively to the work. Experiencing the meaning requires hard-nosed, rigorous, objective analyses of the text.

This is where the **critic** comes in. The critic cannot merely paraphrase the meaning for the reader. Indeed, since the meaning of a work is its form, it cannot be paraphrased. "Close" reading — attention to the use and meaning of words, symbols, metaphors, and structure — is required. The critic helps the reader learn to do this close reading.

Theory #2: Reader Response

The reader largely determines the meaning of a **work of literature**. Nevertheless, the text sets constraints on the meaning that the reader can find because its language and structure elicit certain common responses rather than others.

One group of critics who adhere to this idea claim that all **authors** necessarily have an intended audience in mind when writing. Other critics argue that meaning is created by reading; thus the reader is really the **author**.

The **reader** plays the central role in both of these views. If the author writes for an intended reader (audience), the reader effectively controls the meaning of the text. If the reader is the author, then the reader creates whatever meaning the text has through the act of reading.

Forces within **society** affect the backgrounds that authors and readers bring to a text. Similar backgrounds and perspectives lead author and reader to create meanings for a text that are compatible.

The **critics** define and write about the respective roles of the text, author, reader, society, and critics. Some critics primarily describe how and why these roles developed and are the way they are; other critics attempt to demonstrate how the reader functions as author of what is read.

Theory #3: New Criticism

A **work of literature** exposes the reader to other points of view, other imaginations, other emotions and actions, and enables the reader to see more and further and, hence, to become a better person. The traditions and cultural values found in the greatest literature represent some of the finest sentiments and achievements of the species: particular notions of the True and Beautiful and of enduring moral and aesthetic values; an affinity for the "eternal" human truths; a sense of a shared humanity and a deep and abiding awareness of the importance of democratic ideals.

The **author**, particularly the author of a great work, creates a world so powerful and alive that a reader actually experiences themes that are ageless and comes to understand universal truths.

The **reader**'s role is to discover the meaning of the text, a meaning that transcends the time and circumstances in which it was written. In discovering this meaning, the reader also learns about her or his own existence and shared humanity as well as his or her individuality and distinctive heritage. A reader reads to become a more complete and better person.

The ideals and truths depicted in literature can only imperfectly be realized in **society**. But by reading and becoming a better person, the individual contributes to the improvement of society as a whole.

The **critic** helps the reader to learn to read critically, to find the meaning more readily. The reader thus becomes capable of experiencing the meaning more deeply and intensely and, hence, gains increased pleasure and understanding from reading.

Theory #4: Deconstructionism

A **work of literature** has no fixed or constant meaning. A single word can be defined in multiple ways, and each definition of a given word is a definition of that word by default; that is, because it is *not* the definition of a different word. Each of the myriad words, separately and strung together, imparts to the text an uncertainty and indeterminableness. Other texts, past and future, entwine with a work. Also present in any work are faint suggestions of alternative texts that are absent only because the author chose to write the one written.

The words used and the meaning the **author** wants cannot coincide; notions about the author's intention and original meaning are merely empty phrases.

The **reader** will find at most an ebb and flow of shadowy meanings that fade, re-form, fade again.

What is true of a single work is true of Literature as a whole; and if Literature cannot capture and hold meaning, can there be any ultimate meaning in **society**?

The role of the **critic** is to “defamiliarize” the text: to enable the reader to see that the appearance of meaning is but illusion; to expose as rhetoric claims that the traditional moral and cultural values transmitted by “Great Literature” are immutable and eternal truths. It is through this rhetoric that traditional authority and privilege perpetuates itself.