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Portrayal of Learners with Reading Difficulties in the USA
: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Textbooks for Pre-Service English Language Arts Teachers

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I. Introduction

Teachers matter more to student achievement in school than other factors, such as facilities, services, or leadership (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; RAND Education, 2012). While teacher practice defines teacher quality, it is teacher knowledge and beliefs (e.g., belief about students, teaching, educational purpose, etc.) that affects teacher performance in the classroom. It is fair to say that what teachers know and believe influence students' achievements (Darling-Hammond, 2000). It is not surprising that "knowledge of students" is the first standard of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards' *Early Adolescence/English Language Arts (ELA) Standards*. According to these standards:

> Accomplished Early Adolescence/English Language Arts teachers systematically acquire specific knowledge of their students as individuals and use that knowledge to help develop students' literacy (p.2).

That is, teachers need to know their students, which includes knowledge of adolescent readers who experience difficulties in reading.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has pub-

lished and revised a set of guidelines for the preparation of preservice English teachers at ten-year intervals, and the latest was issued in 2006. This set of guidelines states that preservice English teachers should have knowledge of diverse adolescent readers and how to meet their individual needs (NCTE, 2006). NCTE/NCATE Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts (2012) also suggests that preservice ELA teachers need to promote learning for all students, "including English language learners, students with special needs, students from diverse language and learning backgrounds, those designated as high achieving, and those at risk of failure" (p.1).

Where then do teachers get the knowledge to help students with difficulties in school reading? Research suggests that teachers gain much of their professional knowledge from preservice teacher education programs (Risko et al., 2008). By reviewing 82 empirical studies conducted in the U.S. on teacher preparation for reading instruction, Risko et al.'s review (2008) suggested that reading teacher preparation programs have shown relative success in changing preservice teachers' knowledge and beliefs.

Given its effect on teacher knowledge and belief, what preservice ELA teachers learn from teacher preparation program matters. Yet little has been known about what preservice ELA teachers are taught in methods courses given its importance. Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) analyzed ELA methods course syllabi from 81 universities in the United States in their book, How English Teachers Get Taught. In their introduction, they claim, "we have surprisingly little knowledge about the matter in which students in methods classes are taught" (p.1), and still limited number of research has been done on what ELA teacher prep programs teach.

The particular research question for this study includes: how are learners with reading difficulties portrayed in secondary ELA course textbooks? This paper explores how learners with reading difficulties are portrayed in secondary ELA methods courses by analyzing the

textbooks commonly used in those courses and if the terms are used as similarly as they are in the field of reading the research. By "secondary ELA methods course," I refer to courses that teach preservice secondary ELA teachers how to teach English. I use the term learners with reading difficulties as a concept that includes students perceived as having reading difficulties of any kind, addressable by ELA teachers in their classes. When the authors of textbooks describe certain readers as *hard to teach, needing special care*, or *challenging* for ELA teachers, I identify the readers described in the textbooks as learners with reading difficulties.

I wish to emphasize that I acknowledge the bounds of my paper. I am not examining actual methods courses in real contexts with data obtained by class observations or participant interviews. I only analyzed textbooks used in undergraduate ELA methods courses with a narrow lens of how learners with reading difficulties are represented within them. The analysis cannot represent what pre-service secondary ELA teachers learn from methods courses.

My analysis, however, intends to present initial knowledge about the concept of learners with reading difficulties in methods course textbooks. My goal is helping people understand how ELA methods course textbooks describe learners with reading difficulties. Based on my findings, future research can be further discussed on the topic. I also intend my study to enable those who teach secondary ELA methods courses to consider the ways learners with reading difficulties are framed when choosing texts for pre-service teachers in the future.

II. Trajectory of Definition of Readers in America

The historical trajectory of the concept of "reader" in the U.S. has followed theoretical perspectives in the field of reading. The perspectives include the medical model of reading, behaviorism, psycholinguistics, cognitivism, constructivism, and sociocultural theory. In addi-

tion to reviewing the history of a reader, studying what was regarded as reading difficulties also provides inklings for what aspects of reading research have emphasized.

1. Medical Model

To early researchers before 1900, being a reader was a given. If you learn languages, you will be able to read. Because researchers at that time believed reading to be a natural process; they thought there was something wrong with children who were not able to read. Researchers from the medical model tried to find something wrong inside the reader and fix it. This is known as the medical model of reading diagnosis. Among the major variables studied were visual acuity, auditory acuity, general physical status, neurological factors, emotional/psychiatric factors, and intelligence (Klenk & Kibby, 2000; Wixson & Lipson, 1991).

2. Behaviorism

Behaviorism was the most dominant theory during the 1950s and 60s, and Alexandra and Fox (2004) described this phase as the era of conditioned learning. At that time, behaviorism was the most dominant theory in reading research as well as in other education research fields. Reading during this period was conceptualized as conditioned behavior, a process susceptible to programming. Learning was seen to be the acquisition of behaviors as a result of certain environmental contingencies, rather than development or growth.

3. Psycholinguistics

After behaviorism, psycholinguists dominate literacy research. For psycholinguists, language was to be developed through meaningful use, not practiced until it became automatic and engrained in the

mind, as behaviorists had proposed. Psycholinguists also argued that the capacity for language must be built in innately because all human languages follow similar production rules. This assumption applied to the reading processes as well (Alexander & Fox, 2004). As a consequence, learning to read was viewed as an inherent ability rather than a reflective act that involved the acquisition of a set of basic skills with repetitive practice like behaviorists thought (Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1984). Readers were understood as coming to understand their written language, given enough exposure in meaningful situations (Goodman & Goodman, 1979). Learning to read was "arriving at a facility as a result of a predisposition to seek understanding," (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.10) rather than being taught.

4. Cognitive Theory

Cognitive theory, more specifically, information-processing theory, dominated reading research in the 1970s and 80s (Anderson, 1977). Readers were considered to be able to could understand texts and hold them through the process of critical evaluation. Using their prior knowledge and skills, they could make meaning out of the text. Working from this perspective, researchers typically compared the skills or products of expert readers with those of novice readers, the methods were known as good-poor reader research (Wixson & Lipson, 1991). When differences in some component were observed, that component was presumed to represent a key processing element.

Different from social cognitivists, cognitive constructivists regard the individual as the primary agent for construction of knowledge. As the constructive agent, a reader is expected to bring his or her own background knowledge, and experience to the act of reading and draws on them in organizing, selecting, and connecting mental material cued by the text (Davis, 2002). Literacy educators took these new understandings social about reading and developed strategies for enhancing and monitoring comprehension through active reading

processes that stimulated students' prior knowledge. Schema theory (Anderson, 1977) and transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) incorporated this perspective.

5. Social Constructivism

Social constructivism has been widely embraced in reading education since the last quarter of the twentieth century. This perspective regards learning as social and constructed. Social constructivism in literacy education spans a broad landscape featuring theories that emphasize the psychosocial processes of the individual and theories that emphasize the importance of social relations and institutions (Hruby, 2002). Most social constructivists in literacy acknowledge and incorporate the importance of both the individual and the social aspects of knowledge foundation. Social constructivists in literacy agree upon the central importance of language in understanding (Phillips, 2000). Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) emphasized on the role of teachers and scaffolding in reading education. Constructivists expected readers to construct meaning from the text in accordance with what the learner already knows. At the same time, society or culture surrounding the reader facilitates this process and provides necessary guidance as to how the reader should construct meaning so it can be coherent with other readers' in the society. Such work recommended socially oriented learning practices such as group work and peer-led instruction (Hruby, 2002).

6. Critical Theory: Socioculturalism

Sociocultural perspectives on literacy are related to sociolinguistic conceptualizations of the ways in which language instantiates culture (e.g., Gee, 1996; Halliday, 1974), the ways in which language use varies according to contexts (Bakhtin, 1986), the relationship between language use and power (Bourdieu, 1991), and the ethnography of

communication (Hymes, 1994). The sociocultural perspective of literacy shares its understanding of literacy as a social practice with social constructivism, but with an influence from critical theory, it strongly emphasizes power relations (Perry, 2012). According to Gee (1996), a language "always comes fully attached to 'other stuff': to social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world" (p. vii). Sociocultural views assert that all social practices, including literacy, are involved with the power structure. From sociocultural perspectives, all readers have their own agency and identity with their own literacy, and they should be empowered by education. Socioculturalists raise the question: Who decides the criteria? How were the criteria formed? Sociocultural reading researchers suggested that perceived *good readers* so far were people whose reading were valued by the society.

The changes in the concept of a reader, overall, is rather integrated and inclusive than exclusive change. Each succeeding generation of researchers has investigated a wider range of phenomena, and often at a greater level of complexity.

III. Methods

I used qualitative content analysis to explore the representation of learners with reading difficulties in secondary ELA methods course textbooks. Qualitative content analysis has been used to analyze various text data including verbal, print, and/or electronic form (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Qualitative content analysis has been widely used in health research such as nursing and public health (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and number of educational researchers used qualitative content analysis to examine how certain concept is represented in textbooks (e.g., Low & Sherrard, 1999; Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008; Staver & Lumpe, 1993; Yanowitz & Weathers, 2004). This study is aligning with

the previous research exploring a representation of a certain concept in textbooks such as chemistry concept (e.g., Staver & Lumpe, 1993), gender stereotypes (e.g., Low & Sherrard, 1999; Yanowitz & Weathers, 2004), and gender minorities (e.g., Macgillivray & Jennings, 2008). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) explained three different approaches of qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative.

In this study, I define qualitative content analysis as a "method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns," following Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p.1278). I use the term qualitative content analysis, not content analysis because my analysis was beyond counting numbers of words. Since I aim to describe the portrayal of learners with reading difficulties derived directly from the text data, it is closest to a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Details of textbook selection and analysis procedure are discussed in the next section.

1. Textbook Selection

Once research questions are formulated, a qualitative content analysis needs to select samples to be analyzed (Kaid, 1989, as cited in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For this study, online search and recommendations from experts helped sample selection. First, online searches were done for finding ELA methods courses and syllabi. Along with syllabi searching, I sent emails to course instructors in the United States via Literacy Research Association's listserv, asking which textbooks instructors used in secondary ELA methods courses. Also, faculty who have been teaching ELA methods courses more than 10 years in a research one university recommended a list of books they used in the secondary ELA method courses. Twenty-one books were recommended (Appendix A). In the first round of reading, books for final analysis were selected. Only textbooks about reading education were included. Books about (a) writing (e.g., Gallagher, 2006; Hicks,

Table 1. ELA Methods Course Textbooks Included in the Final Analysis

Full Citations
Appleman, D. (2009). *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Atwell, N. (2015). *In the middle: a lifetime of learning about writing, reading, and adolescents* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Beach, R., Appleman, D., Hynds, S., & Wilhelm, J. (2011). *Teaching literature to adolescents* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
Beers, K., & Probst, R. E. (2013). *Notice and Note: Strategies for close reading*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read, what teachers can do: a guide for teachers 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Burke, J. (2000). *Reading reminders: tools, tips, and techniques*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton.
Burke, J. (2008). *The English teacher's companion* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Christenbury, L. (2000). *Making the journey: being and becoming a teacher of English language arts* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton.
Langer, J. A. (2011). *Literature: literary understanding and literature instruction* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College.
Milner, J. O., Milner, L. M., & Mitchell, J. F. (2012). *Bridging English* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
Olson, C. B. (2007). *The reading/writing connection: strategies for teaching and learning in the secondary classroom* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
Smagorinsky, P. (2002). *Teaching English through principled practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Smagorinsky, S. (2008). *Teaching English by design: how to create and carry out instructional units*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Smith, M. W., & Wilhelm, J. D. (2002). "Reading Don't Fix No Chevys": Literacy in the Lives of Young Men. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Tchudi, S., & Tshudi, S. (1999). *The English language arts handbook* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton.
Tovani, C. (2000). *I Read it, but I Don't Get it: Comprehension strategies for adolescent readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

2013; Smagorinsky & Johannessen, 2010), (b) general classroom management (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2013), and (c) professional development (e.g., Wiggins & McTighe, 2006) were excluded. Sixteen books were finalized for the analysis (see Table 1). I would like to note that I tried to analyze books as current as possible, other than those specifically commented by the person who recommended them. That is, if there

was a newer edition available, the newest one was included in the analysis.

2. Analysis Procedure

After selecting textbooks for this study, I started from reading the text data thoroughly. During closely reading textbooks repeatedly, I generated a table for each book and noted relevant information (Appendix B) as part of developing an initial coding scheme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The table contains a full citation of the book, theoretical orientation, chapter or section included in the analysis, direct and indirect quotes from the book. To see if the theoretical orientation and concepts were reader-related, I put each book under the best fitting theories of reading. Then, chapters with the concept of learners with reading difficulties were selected for analysis. When books were without a specific chapter on learners with reading difficulties, chapters that included ideas of the reader or reading were included in the final analysis. If there was an explicit definition or description of learners with reading difficulties, direct quotes were included in the table as well.

Once the table was generated, I coded the learners with reading difficulties described in the textbooks inductively by using the textbooks words to capture the concepts used in the books. Then the codes were categorized into meaningful clusters (Patton, 2002), and I merged similar categories into one.

IV. Findings

Five common thematic categories emerged from my analysis in the descriptions of learners with reading difficulties: (a) readers who cannot comprehend texts, (b) readers who are not engaged, motivated, and do not like reading, (c) readers who are low-achievers, (d)

readers who have limited English proficiency, and (e) readers who do not have basic reading skills. Three additional categories emerged from some textbooks: (f) readers with disabilities, (g) readers with gender, race, and cultural differences, and (h) readers with power inequity. I will explain each portrayal of learners with reading difficulties described in ELA methods course textbooks below.

1. Portrayal One: Learners with Reading Difficulties Cannot Comprehend

Ten ELA methods course textbooks regarded lacks comprehension as the most prominent quality of the learners with reading difficulties. That is, they read the text, but do not understand the meaning. Burke (2008) said, "Most kids in this category [learners with reading difficulties] don't have a basic understanding of what is happening in the story" (p.97). Tovani (2000) identified two types of learners with reading difficulties in secondary ELA classrooms: resistive readers and word callers. Word callers were described as a learner who "can decode the words but don't understand or remember what they've read" (Tovani, 2000, p.14). Those students were said to depend on teachers to help them understand the meaning of texts (Milner, Milner, & Mitchell, 2011; Tovani, 2000). Sometimes, these learners were described as not to even make the effort to complete the readings (Burke, 2000).

ELA methods textbooks suggested three causes of non-comprehension. Those type of learners with reading difficulties may not be able to comprehend the material because of: (a) the lack of strategies (Atwell, 2015; Beach et al., 2006; Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000, 2008; Langer, 2011; Milner et al., 2011; Olson, 2007; Smagorinsky, 2002, 2008; Tchudi & Tchudi, 1999; Tovani, 2000), (b) lack of background knowledge or reading experience (Atwell, 2015; Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000, 2008), or (c) lack of cognitive ability (Atwell, 2015; Beers, 2003).

1) Readers Who Lack Strategies

Five textbooks suggested that learners with reading difficulties did not understand a practice of reading as a strategic method of comprehending meaning, and that caused difficulties in their readings. The textbooks said proficient readers used strategies for reading, monitoring their comprehension, asking questions to themselves and connecting previous knowledge to their reading. In contrast, the textbooks suggested, learners with reading difficulties in this category did not read strategically or did not even know about reading strategies at all (Atwell, 2015; Beach et al., 2006; Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000, 2008; Tovani, 2000).

2) Readers Who Lack Knowledge and Experience

Four textbook suggested learners with reading difficulties could not comprehend text due to lack of background knowledge (Beach et al., 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Tovani, 2000) or experience in reading (Burke, 2000). Learners with reading difficulties described as not having knowledge such as organizational patterns of text (Tovani, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) or genre conventions (Beach et al., 2006). Burke (2000) added some adolescent readers can struggle simply because they did not read enough, and with more reading practices, the learners could read better.

3) Readers Who Lack Cognitive Ability

Two textbooks suggested learners with reading difficulties could not comprehend because they were deficient in cognitive ability to read independently (Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000), which includes reading and learning disabilities. Burke (2000) and Beers (2003) suggested that cognitive deficiencies hinder adolescent readers from making meaning from text as well as utilizing basic reading skills such as word recognition, fluency, and vocabulary.

2. Portrayal Two: Learners with Reading Difficulties Do Not Like Reading

Nine ELA methods course textbook stated readers who are not engaged, motivated, and/or do not like reading as learners with reading difficulties in ELA classrooms (Appleman, 2009; Beers, 2003; Beers & Probst, 2013; Burke, 2000, 2008; Milner, Milner, & Mitchell, 2011; Olson, 2003; Tchudi & Tchudi, 1999; Tovani, 2000). Terms such as "reluctant" (e.g., Appleman, 2009) or "alliterate" (e.g., Beers, 2003) were often used to describe those learners. Beers (2003) stated that those alliterate learners became a serious problem because they would not choose to read as long as they do not see the benefit of reading.

These learners were described as having negative emotions about and attitudes towards reading (Beers, 2003) or the English subject (Appleman, 2009); they were also considered to rarely choose to read for pleasure (Burke, 2000); and sometimes those adolescents were portraited with very low self-efficacy as readers (Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000; Tovani, 2000). They are not necessarily low-achieving or acting out in class, which makes teachers more difficult to recognize that they need support to be engaged in reading. Students who read at grade level (Appleman, 2009), or students who do all assigned readings (Beers, 2003), can be alliterate as well as a student who hates reading, having previously failed in the subject (Tovani, 2000). Learners with those reading difficulties were described as dependent readers, meaning that these students wait until teachers providing answers. This dependence results in their reading skills never improve (Beers, 2003; Milner, Milner, & Mitchell, 2011).

3. Portrayal Three: Learners with Reading Difficulties Are Low-Achievers

Even though the textbooks did not state it explicitly, most learners with reading difficulties were described as lower achievers than

their peers in class. Langer (2011) described learners with reading difficulties as students in remedial classes and below-average. Other textbooks also described them as lower-achieving (Burke, 2000), at risk, and extreme underachievers (Christenbury, 2000). ELA methods textbooks suggested teachers could indicate these reading difficulties if learners score lower than a certain percentile in any kind of standardized test at school. Those learners were perceived as readers who needed more intensive instructional support. However, three textbooks suggested teachers should be cautious with student achievements because the assessment itself did not necessarily determine students good or poor readers (e.g., Langer, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2002, 2008).

4. Portrayal Four: Learners with Reading Difficulties Have Limited English Proficiency

Five textbooks suggested readers whose first language is not English need additional support. Most ELA methods course textbooks mention English as Second Language (ESL) students, English Language Development (ELD) students, and English Language Learners (ELL) as learners with special needs (e.g., Appleman, 2009; Burke, 2000, 2008; Olson, 2003; Tchudi & Tchudi, 1999).[1]

ELLs with reading difficulties were described as newcomers (Burke, 2000; Langer, 2011) who might need to learn about American language and culture (Burke, 2000), and to attend remedial reading classes (Olson, 2003). ELA methods textbooks suggested that while some ELLs might be literate in their first language, some might not (Tchudi & Tchudi, 1999), and ELLs might easily lose self-efficacy as readers (Langer, 2011). Tchudi and Tchudi (1999) suggested teachers not to overcorrect ELLs English because the overcorrection could

1 The textbooks did not necessarily describe those ELL as learners with reading difficulties but most authors considered the students' status as a deficit than an asset.

hinder ELLs language learning. Only Appleman (2009) added that once they overcome the language barrier, emergent bilingual students showed more flexibility in switching perspectives and understood the text better than their native-English-speaking peers.

5. Portrayal Five: Learners with Reading Difficulties Do Not Have Basic Reading Skills

More than four ELA methods course textbooks described learners with reading difficulties due to limited reading skills (e.g., Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000; Langer, 2011; Olson, 2007). According to the textbooks, learners with reading difficulties were described as unable to recognize words easily or quickly (Beers, 2003) and not fluent in reading (Beers, 2003; Burke, 2000; Olson, 2007). Lack of reading skills was explained as problematic because it resulted in them unable to comprehend (Olson, 2007). The books suggested that learners with reading difficulties should master basic reading skills (e.g., phonics, vocabulary, and any other skills needed in decoding) until they can use them unconsciously (Olson, 2007), or they could lose the skills (Beers, 2003). Langer (2011) stated that ELA teachers should not teach these readers by only focusing on the reading skills per se separate from whole reading practices.

6. Portrayal Six: Learners with Reading Difficulties Experience Difficulties Connected to Sociocultural Factors

Three additional themes have emerged during analysis. Only limited number of textbooks touched reading disabilities, and/or sociocultural issues such as race and gender. I grouped those learner profile under one theme because either (a) small number of books addressed those theme, or (b) textbooks did not expand the argument as deep as they did with other issues above. Detailed profiles of learners with reading difficulties fell into these categories are pro-

vided below.[2]

1) Readers with Disabilities

Four textbooks suggested that certain types of disabilities fitted the profile of learners with reading difficulties (Burke, 2000, 2008; Christenbury, 2000; Langer, 2011). They explained that learners in this group had reading difficulties because they had genuine reading disorders that affected their information process (Burke, 2000), learning disabilities (Burke, 2000; Christenbury, 2000), or other physical disabilities that resulted reading difficulties (Langer, 2011). Burke (2000) provided a list of disabilities that could make reading difficult, which included "(a) reading disabilities (e.g., dyslexia), (b) learning disabilities (e.g., auditory/language processing disorders or attention deficit disorder), speaking disabilities (e.g., stuttering), and/or writing disabilities (e.g., visual-motor skills, fine-motor skills, and dysgraphia)" (Burke, 2000, p.380). He also added that emotional or psychological problem can also affect students' reading ability.

2) Readers with Gender, Racial, and Cultural Differences

Only two authors covered reading difficulties associated with gender, racial, and cultural differences. They suggested learners with reading difficulties might come from other than white-middle-class American family, such as African American communities (Langer, 2011), and often boys had more reading difficulties than girls because they considered reading as feminine work (Burke, 2000). The textbooks did not necessarily describe it as negative (e.g., Burke, 2000, 2008), but suggested students could experience reading difficulties resulted from the differences, and ELA teachers should consider and respect these differences in order to boost reading success.

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2 I gave ELL as a separate category because many textbooks specifically pointed out ELLs as a separate group, not necessarily a part of other cultural differences.

3) Readers Falsely Accused of Having Difficulties

While most ELA methods textbooks perceived learners with reading difficulties as who needed to be fixed, some authors questioned which was more problematic, adolescent readers or the American, Euro-centric school system. There is prominent overlap between this and the previous section, but this perspective questioning school system (e.g., Appleman, 2009; Burke, 2000; Langer, 2011; Olson, 2007) specifically pointed out that cultural difference was related to a power hierarchy in the U.S. school system.

Olson (2003) pointed out current curricula reflected the perspectives, experiences, and valued the priorities of middle-class hetero European-Americans. This emphasis inevitably resulted in readers coming from places other than this culture having more difficulties with school readings (Banks & Banks, 2003; Olson, 2003). For example, Olson (2003) stated that American schools promoted individual achievement and competition, so that students from different cultures valuing cooperative work over individual work were are disadvantaged by the instructional design.

The textbooks also argued that learners fallen into this group have been historically marginalized because of social inequities (Appleman, 2009). Burke (2000) argued that learners who resisted the inequity in traditional American schools tended to resist school literacy when they found schools devalue their personal knowledge and experience. The ELA textbooks suggested those learners might challenge hegemonic beliefs as well as the status quo (Appleman, 2009), and their resistance was regarded as a failure in school (Burke, 2000) until they learned school literacy (Langer, 2011).

IV. Discussions

This section is a discussion what might be problematic in analyzing the above definitions and/or descriptions of learners with reading

difficulties. They are: (a) dominance of constructivism, (b) lacunae in studies of learners with reading difficulties, and (c) no mention of overlapping with special education.

1. Dominance of Constructivism

Constructivist's view of reading dominated the secondary ELA methods textbooks. All sixteen books analyzed in this paper were, at least partially, based on the Constructivist's views of reading pedagogy. Some authors explicitly wrote that their theoretical orientation was Constructivist (e.g., Atwell, 2015; Smagorinsky, 2000, 2008), while the others vigorously incorporated reading instructions and activities reflecting Constructivist views of reading (e.g., reader-response, student-led discussion, inquiry projects, etc.).

The textbooks meet the guidelines set by the NCTE (2006), which explicitly suggests using a Constructivist view of teaching reading. In the reading part of the content knowledge section, the Guidelines suggest five basic knowledge items that future English teachers need to know and imply in their practice in classrooms. Three out of those five knowledge items reflect Constructivist views of reading, that understanding reading is a transaction between reader and text. Constructivism is shown in the section of pedagogical knowledge section in that Guideline repeatedly.

I do not attempt here to undermine or deny the influence of Constructivist's view of teaching reading. However, as the Guidelines suggested in their introduction, pre-service ELA teachers need to be informed of "the various theories of the nature of reading (NCTE, 2006, p.29)" so that they can choose what works in their classrooms. Lack of exposure to diverse reading theories, especially the sociocultural theory could be problematic when it comes to classroom teaching with learners from a diverse cultural background. Reading theories before sociocultural theory, including constructivism, attribute reading difficulties to learners, and it could result in teacher blaming learner's

background as the cause of English deficiency.

Even though the textbooks and authors had admirable, good-faith intention to support learners with reading difficulties, their approaches, in many cases, were rooted in the notion that There is something wrong with these kids and teachers can fix it, following constructivists' view of reading. Especially when they are talking about ELLs, the textbooks persist the perspective that students with diverse cultural background have a deficit in Anglo-American culture, and the textbooks rather ignore the positive effects of cultural asset ELLs bring into classrooms. Some textbooks suggest future ELA teachers need to understand diverse cultural backgrounds of readers, but they skirt any suggestion of the need for culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-billing, 1992).

2. Fragmentation in Studies of Learners with Reading Difficulties

The secondary ELA textbooks did not provide various characteristics and reasons why learners with reading difficulties got the difficulties or considered as having difficulties. Some of them did not have any separate sections for reading difficulties at all, and many others with separate sections mainly focus on comprehension and ELL students rather than covering diverse reading difficulties. Because they only allow one or two sections for reading difficulties; most portrayals of learners of reading difficulties were simple. In a way, they perpetuated the deficit perception of learners with reading difficulties, who someone "slumped down, heads down, or bodies turned around" (Beers, 2003, p.24). Beers (2003) argued that many teachers' perception of learners with reading difficulties were not necessarily true, suggesting even the most engaged, high achieving learners could have reading difficulties. However, she did not give pre-service teachers a chance to reflect on possible diverse reading difficulties or school system marginalizing certain groups of learners.

Anyone can struggle at any point with certain texts in different contexts (Alvermann, 2006), and characteristics, causes, and instructions for reading difficulties inevitably diverse. Pre-service secondary ELA teachers should be exposed to the knowledge of diverse learners and/or reading difficulties as much as possible to support learners with reading difficulties. Failing to address this diversity of reading difficulties, ELA teacher prep perpetuates existing deficit view of learners of reading difficulties, which results in marginalizing more learners from reading.

3. Not Mentioning Relation to Special Education at All

Last but not least, the textbooks analyzed in this study failed to address reading difficulties in the relation of special education. Only three (e.g., Burke, 2008; Christenbury, 2000; Langer, 2011) of the sixteen textbooks analyzed mentioned reading/learning disabilities that can affect students' reading. Secondary ELA teachers need to be exposed to and to know about the needs of students in special education as well as other students. Research suggests that inclusive classes help students with and without learning disabilities (Bond, & Castagnera, 2006; Bryant et al., 2001). As Burke (2008) points out, most learning disabilities were associated with reading disabilities in one way or another.

There is also an overlap among reading difficulties in general education classrooms and reading disabilities in special education classrooms, and in most school systems there is no clear distinction between the two. Readers with reading/learning disabilities belong to general education classrooms as well as special education classrooms and secondary ELA teachers encounter learners with reading/learning disabilities in their classroom eventually. The intertwined relationship between reading difficulties and learning disabilities needs to be addressed in their methods as well.

VI. Conclusion

Reading can be a struggle for anyone, especially for young, inexperienced, adolescent students who do not have sufficient support from ELA teachers who do not understand their diverse difficulties (Alvermann, 2006). Teaching reading to these students also become increasingly more difficult considering their omnipresent dynamics in the classroom. To address all dynamics in the ELA classroom, education researchers and practitioners are working to find better instruction for each learner with different needs. Before they are thrown into the world full of diversity, pre-service secondary ELA teachers deserve to know about the reality about diverse reading difficulties and to have their own lenses calibrated to face it. ELA teachers with knowledge and the preparation may better understand the students' diversity and improve their teaching.

I understand that secondary methods courses incorporate not one designated textbook but also other books and articles representing various views of reading. I also acknowledge that teachers will gain much knowledge during their practice, beyond what they have learned in pre-service programs. I hope, however, that my analysis can give ELA practitioners and teacher educators a chance to think about learners with reading difficulties when they read books related to ELA methods course.

Current research does not synergistically examine what and how pre-service ELA teachers are taught about learners with reading difficulties in teacher education. Absent also are practitioners' and students' knowledge and perceptions of learners with reading difficulties, and how such knowledge and perceptions impact learners' reading. Thus, I conclude this paper with a call for more research examining these topics. To that end, I suggest using data collected from real ELA classrooms and reading classes designed for learners with reading difficulties. Research should incorporate the flexing dynamics

between learners with reading difficulties and teachers working with those students. Texts advanced in teacher education should examine heterogeneity of learners, attribution of diverse reading difficulties and means of evaluating the validity of these categorical rubrics.

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APPENDIX A. Books Initially Recommended

Full Citation
Appleman, D. (2009). *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Atwell, N. (2015). *In the middle: A lifetime of learning about writing, reading, and adolescents* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
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APPENDIX B. Sample Analysis Table

Feature	Description
Full Citation	Smagorinsky, S. (2008). *Teaching English by design: how to create and carry out instructional units*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Theoretical Orientation	Constructivism
Table of Contents (Analyzed chapters underlined)	**Part I: Teaching with Students in Mind** Chapter 1: Students' Ways of Knowing Chapter 2: Providing Scaffolds for Student Learning Chapter 3: Alternatives to Teacher-Led Discussions Chapter 4: Planning the Whole Course **Part II: Teaching Writing Within a Unit Design** Chapter 5: Goals for Conventional Writing Assignments Chapter 6: Goals for Unconventional Writing Assignments Chapter 7: Responding to Student Writing **Part III: Designing the Conceptual Unit** Chapter 8: Why Conceptual Units? Chapter 9: The Basics of Unit Design Chapter 10: Your Unit Rationale Chapter 11: Outlining a Unit Chapter 12: Setting Up the Construction Zone Chapter 13: Introductory Activities Chapter 14: Down and Dirty: Daily Planning
Concept of learners with reading difficulties (Quotes, if possible)	• No separate section for learners with reading difficulties • Based on Constructivists' view of reading • Readers have their own strength, and teachers should teach the way to make the curriculum to be relevant those strengths. p.18 For the most part, students work at the lowest end of the Cognitive ladder, foregoing synthesis and synergy in favor of rote memorization and mimicry in following such an approach, teachers underestimate what young people are capable of and limit students' school learning to its most reductive, least interesting parts. In place of this method, I urge you to consider the possibilities of teaching students in ways that challenge them to draw on a wide range of their intellectual resources to construct new knowledge and meaning in relation to the English curriculum.

ABSTRACT

Portrayal of Learners with Reading Difficulties in the USA

: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Textbooks for Pre-Service English Language Arts Teachers

Lee, Soojin

Given that teacher perception influences teaching practice and eventually student learning, the knowledge pre-service teachers are taught in teacher-prep programs is meaningful. This paper explored how learners with reading difficulties are represented in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) methods course textbooks in the U.S. with qualitative content analysis. With experts' recommendations and searching, total of sixteen textbooks were included in the analysis. Results indicated that, with few exceptions, most textbooks described learners with reading difficulties with deficit view, attributing reading difficulties to learners. Result also showed the criteria for grouping learners with reading difficulties were not clearly provided in the textbooks. Teaching reading has become increasingly more difficult considering their omnipresent dynamics in the classroom, and current pre-service ELA teacher education textbooks were not sufficient enough to address the diversity to pre-service teachers who would face the dynamics in their classrooms soon. Other findings and implications from the analysis are discussed in terms of possible influence on secondary ELA education and ELA teacher education as well as a call for future research on secondary ELA teacher education.

KEYWORDS Learners with reading difficulties, Alliteracy, Struggling readers, Secondary literacy teacher education, ELA teacher education, Literacy teacher education