

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULA:  
A REPERTOIRE FOR TEACHER AS COACH, CRITIC, AND CURATOR

By

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation presents a framework for using children's literature as part of an elementary preservice teacher preparation program in a more inclusive and cross-curricular manner. This humanities-oriented study draws on Matthews's (1982) Philosophy of Childhood as an additional conceptualization of childhood that transcends more typical psychological and sociological foundations in teacher education. Using repeated and recursive readings of key texts from the fields of education, library science, and English, I provide insight into delineations and connections that apply to children's literature in teacher education. Analysis of scholarship, children's literature texts and teaching stories provides important understandings in the development of this multidisciplinary framework. This framework can also be read as a teaching repertoire and as such represents multiple roles enacted in the pursuit of teaching children's literature. These roles are teacher as *reading coach*, *literary critic*, and *reading curator*. The author argues that preservice teachers need to experience each of these three roles as students and readers in children's literature coursework. It is through these new and expanded experiences, as well as explicit metacognitive modeling, that preservice teachers are guided towards the possibility of enacting a more complex pedagogy with children's literature.

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For Emma and Annie who inspire me  
And for Sam who never said, “I told you so”

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| LIST OF TABLES .....   | ix  |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....  | x   |
| Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review .....  | 1   |
| Children’s Literature in Elementary Teacher Preparation.....   | 4   |
| Children’s Literature in English Studies .....   | 12  |
| Children’s Literature in Library Science .....   | 16  |
| Significance of the Study.....   | 19  |
| Key Texts and the Selection Process.....   | 26  |
| Literacy/education key texts.....  | 30  |
| Literature key texts.....  | 31  |
| Library science key texts.....   | 33  |
| Outline of the Dissertation Chapters .....   | 35  |
| Chapter 2: Framing this Study.....   | 37  |
| Psychological Conceptualizations of Childhood that Inform TE Curricula.....                              | 40  |
| Gareth Matthews's <i>Philosophy of Childhood</i> .....   | 43  |
| Teacher Education Curricula for Children’s Literature.....   | 45  |
| My Experiences Teaching Children's Literature .....  | 48  |
| Bringing Matthews's <i>Philosophy of Childhood</i> into Children’s Literature in Teacher Education ..... | 59  |
| Gubar on Not Defining Children’s Literature and Not Essentializing Childhood .....                       | 60  |
| Philosophy of Childhood and Not Defining.....  | 62  |
| Chapter 3: Teacher as Reading Coach.....   | 64  |
| Teaching Story: <i>Grandpa Green</i> .....   | 67  |
| Reading Skills and Processes .....   | 68  |
| Comprehension.....   | 70  |
| Genre .....  | 75  |
| Teaching Story: <i>When You Reach Me</i> .....   | 76  |
| Reading Levels.....  | 77  |
| Reader and text levels.....  | 78  |
| Lexile levels.....   | 79  |
| Guided reading levels .....  | 80  |
| From Children’s Literature: <i>My Life as a Book</i> .....   | 81  |
| Chapter 4: Teacher As Literary Critic .....  | 85  |
| Not Thinking Like Children .....   | 87  |
| Literary Interpretation .....  | 91  |
| Teaching Story: Co-teaching .....  | 94  |
| Literary Interpretations of Children’s Literature .....  | 96  |
| Vigilant reading .....   | 102 |
| Reading with theory .....  | 105 |
| Teaching Story: <i>One Crazy Summer</i> .....  | 107 |
| The Curriculum of Children’s Literature from a Literary Perspective.....                                 | 109 |
| From Children's Literature: <i>Love That Dog</i> .....   | 113 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Teacher As Literary Critic.....  | 116 |
| Chapter 5: Teacher as Curator of Books and Readers.....                    | 118 |
| Readers' Advisory.....   | 121 |
| Teaching Story: Interest Inventory.....                                    | 123 |
| Collection Acquisition and Management.....                                 | 125 |
| Library Science Contributions to the Children's Literature Curriculum..... | 127 |
| From Children's Literature: <i>Matilda</i> .....                           | 128 |
| Chapter 6: A Teaching Repertoire.....                                      | 133 |
| Teaching Repertoire for Children's Literature.....                         | 134 |
| Developmental reading coach.....   | 136 |
| Literary critic.....   | 139 |
| Curator.....   | 143 |
| Conclusion or What I Learned.....  | 146 |
| REFERENCES.....  | 150 |



## LIST OF TABLES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Overview of Theories of Literacy Development .....                      | 10 |
| Table 2: Overview of Theories of Literacy from a Sociocultural Perspective ..... | 11 |
| Table 3: Key Texts By Category and Disciplinary Focus .....                      | 28 |
| Table 4: Chapter Titles from Children’s Literature Textbooks .....               | 88 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development .....                        | 42 |
| Figure 2: Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory of Reading .....                   | 46 |
| Figure 3: Overlapping Roles, Contexts, and Powers of Preservice Teachers ..... | 52 |
| Figure 4: Components of Skilled Reading (Scarborough, 2001) .....              | 69 |
| Figure 5: RAND Reading Heuristic (2002) .....                                  | 71 |
| Figure 6: Expanded Reading Heuristic based on RAND .....                       | 72 |

## Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

In 2010 the first *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Wolf, Coats, Enciso, and Jenkins, 2010) was published. This text is notable because of the multiple disciplines and perspectives represented by editors and authors; including English, education, and library science. The introduction to the handbook explicitly brings attention to the complexities of reading across disciplines because of the different approaches recommended and required by each discipline. Each discipline differs across writing style and prose, what counts as evidence, use of different theories and criticisms. Layered on top of this are the varying positioning and viewpoints of 'book' and 'reader' in each of discipline. While reading and writing across disciplines is indeed complication, each approach "offers a crucial piece in a comprehensive understanding of the research possibilities that we can pursue in order to understand children's and young adult literature in an expansive way" (Wolf, Coats, Enciso, and Jenkins, 2010, p. 526).

This dissertation examines the role and purposes of children's literature in the preservice teacher education curriculum as it is constructed across the fields of literacy, literature, and library science. I will identify similarities and intersections across these fields as a way to expand the ways that preservice teachers can be prepared to think about and use children's literature in their classrooms. This dissertation uses an interdisciplinary approach to children's literature specifically in relation to teacher education and the ways we prepare teachers to think about children's literature and its role in classrooms. Over the past seven years as a preservice teacher educator, I have found the interrelationships among those three disciplinary perspectives

to be intriguing. I am personally interested in investigating possibilities for integrating aspects of those three disciplines into the teacher education curriculum.

This study draws on humanities-based research as a way to “illuminate educational processes or phenomena by providing insightful and sometimes provocative portrayals of them and their origins” (AERA, 2009, p. 482). My goal is not one of truth-seeking, nor is my desire to create a generalizable study, but instead I intend to explore pedagogical decisions I have made and continue to make as a children’s literature instructor of preservice teachers. Humanities research also offers a way to generate deeper understandings through repeated and recursive reading and writing of what I’ve identified as seminal or *key texts*. Children’s author Richard Peck has said, “We don’t write what we know. We write what we wonder about.” After teaching children’s literature for six years, I wondered about many things and wanted to closely and intentionally examine the ways that I have come to draw on different ways of thinking about children’s literature.

I will consider this multidisciplinary approach using the work of Matthews (1982) development of philosophy of childhood. His philosophy provides an additional and alternative way of conceptualizing childhood and theories of development that transcends the usual psychological and sociological foundations for teacher education curricula. The predominant way of thinking about children in Western cultures has been to envision children as incomplete beings who need guidance to develop into functional adult humans. Matthews believes that this predominant way of thinking underestimates children (Matthews and Mullin, 2015)

[The theory of children as incomplete beings] ignores or undervalues the fact that children are, for example, better able to learn a second language, or paint an aesthetically worthwhile picture, or conceive a philosophically interesting question, than those same

children will likely be able to do as adults. Moreover, it restricts the range and value of relationships adults think they can have with their children. (n.p.)

When adults consider children only as incomplete beings that need the assistance of complete adults in order to develop, the adults are also limiting their views of childhood and artifacts of child culture, including children's literature. Matthews's philosophy of childhood engages philosophically interesting questions about childhood and attitudes towards children, which ultimately provide a way for us to reconsider assumptions about children and childhood. With Matthews's perspective on children's abilities, we are able to extend our thinking about the teacher education curriculum, especially where it intersects children's literature.

The disciplines of literacy, literature, and libraries have a long history of connection to children's literature. For example, *The Handbook of Research on Children's and Adolescent Literature* (2011) edited by four scholars representing the three different disciplines: Shelby Wolf and Patricia Enciso both represent the field of education (literacy); Karen Coats is a professor of English (literature); and Christine Jenkins is a faculty member of a school of library science. In the preface of the handbook, Wolf, Enciso, Coats and Jenkins (2011) describe the differences between these disciplines as follows:

Scholars in English and literature tend toward a text-oriented approach that historically excluded the reader from view. Scholars in Education focus on the reader, but may well ignore the insights to be gained from the text being read. And scholars in Library and Information Science are often between intellectual worldviews of either end of the text-reader continuum, because their professional work is located precisely in the intersection between texts and young readers (p. xi).

While this quotation essentializes the ways that these fields of study consider children's literature, it also provides an entrance to examine more specific similarities and differences across the three disciplines. I'll begin by summarizing the characteristics of each disciplinary area, and then I will outline the ways that this study can contribute to the curriculum of teacher education.

### **Children's Literature in Elementary Teacher Preparation**

Broadly speaking, there is tension between scholarship and practice in teacher education, particularly from the standpoint of practitioners and also preservice teachers whose notions of teaching are based largely on their own schooling experiences (Lortie, 1975). Lortie's apprenticeship of observation can be extended outward from the generalized classroom experience and can be used more specifically, to frame the ways preservice teachers conceptualize children's literature: preservice teachers tend to think about children's literature in the ways they were taught and experienced children's literature when they themselves were children.

In the *Handbook of Research in Children's and Adolescent Literature*, education scholar Short (2011) points out there is also tension about the role of children's literature in elementary classrooms because of political policies around curriculum and the purposes of schooling:

Unlike secondary schools in which literature is a field of study, children's literature in elementary schools has primarily been viewed as a reading material that is used to teach something else, typically either skills or facts, or as a "free time" activity. (p. 50)

She reminds readers that children's literature is more than just a vehicle to learn skills and have fun but is also "integral to (students') understanding themselves and the world" (p. 49). In this way, she calls attention to both the complexity of children's literature in elementary classrooms.

When children's literature is used to teach something else (such as decoding skills, the life cycle of a butterfly, or how to share), we can think of it from the tool mentality, in which the text is used as a tool to teach something else. One example of this would be a teacher who elects to read the book *Cat the Cat, Who is That?* (Willems, 2010) with kindergarten students<sup>1</sup> as a way to help emergent readers understand rhyme schemes. A fourth grade teacher might use the book *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000) as a mentor text for writing instruction to help students understand plot and point of view in their own writing. A science teacher might want to use an informational book like *A Rock is Lively* (Aston and Long, 2007) to review for an upcoming assessment about rocks and fossils.

In each of these examples, the text is used to achieve a pedagogical goal outside of the text, so what matters most about the text is its alignment with a curricular objective other than the text itself; children's literature is used as a tool to help students (who are the readers) achieve proficiency in a topic (e.g., science) or linguistic form (e.g., rhyme or emplotment). Particularly at the elementary level, this may mean that the insights to be gained from the text being read are not completely forgotten, but have a curricular-oriented purpose as a tool, as opposed to the experience of literature as its own disciplinary area and as something valuable in its own right. I want to be clear that I'm not arguing that literature should not be used as a tool. I am arguing that using literature only as a tool is limiting, not only to the literature itself, but also to the teachers and students.

Another role that children's literature plays in education and literacy is as the material for free reading, also referred to as SSR (silent sustained reading), DEAR (drop everything and read), or FVR (free voluntary reading) in schools and classrooms. While there may be a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, 'students' will refer to children and adolescents in K-12 classrooms. I

perception that this type of activity is merely for fun, the practice is actually based in research that has found that the more students read, the better readers they become (Krashen, 2008; Miller, 2009). While there is research to support choice reading as contributing to literacy growth in readers of all ages, more and more often I have heard teachers claim that they don't have time for it. One teacher told me, "I can't give up instruction time for DEAR time. I'm now required to do test preparation with my [third grade] students. I just can't fit all of the curriculum into the day and give them time for free, fun reading". I've heard this comment in various forms at national conferences and in my own daughter's school. This sentiment is evidence of Short's observation about the tensions teachers feel in classrooms as a result of national policies, curriculum, and the current testing frenzy in American public education. While this dissertation does not seek to delve into the details of national policies and debates about Common Core Standards, it is important to acknowledge the elements that contribute to the ways that curriculum exists within a larger social context.

The teacher's decision to offer choice reading also indicates something about trusting students to select materials that they will enjoy (consistent with a library perspective), but what about reading levels (consistent with a literacy perspective)? Elementary teachers, particularly those at the lower grades, often have a primary goal of helping students develop into independent readers. Their instruction tends to be focused on explicit components of *how* to read. Research also tells us that explicit instruction of specific literacy components/content (e.g., concepts of print, phonological awareness, sound-letter relationships, morphology, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, composition, and genre knowledge) is best practice for teachers in terms of literacy pedagogy (Pressley, Rankin & Yokoi, 1996).



Many elementary literacy instructors often focus on literary values as well. However, if teachers are solely concerned with the ways a piece of literature can inform literacy instruction, then they often only think of the book in terms of the particular aspect of the book that they need for instruction (e.g., close reading, word identification, or genre study). I'm not saying that teachers shouldn't be using literature in this way; they should when the curricular or pedagogical goal is for a particular outcome (such as comprehension strategy instruction). What I am cautious of is if a teacher *only* thinks of literature in this way. While those literary components are crucial for learning how to read in terms of mechanics (e.g., decoding), this one-element approach does not necessarily provide explicit instruction for literature as a way for students to better understand themselves and the world or the framework necessary to become active, engaged readers.

An example of a narrower mentality is the question that I hear repeatedly from teachers, parents, and preservice teachers in my children's literature course: "What reading level is this book?" While asking this question can provide us with some information about a book, it does not provide information about the individual reader. Reading levels of books can come from many sources, including readability and leveling systems such as Lexile Measures, Guided Reading Levels, and Developmental Reading Assessment level or DRA (Mesmer, 2008). These measures (and others like them) analyze books based on some or all of the following: language (sentence complexity, organization text, style, predictability), content (familiarity, genre, and vocabulary), and text format (length, print, layout, and illustrations). It is important to note that not all readability or leveling formulas account for all of these elements.

While these measures can be used as one potential resource for teachers to match books to children, it is important to remember also that "no one system can work for all children all of

the time, and qualitative leveling systems are no different” (Mesmer, 2008, p. 79). For example, a second grade student may have weak decoding skills but exceptionally strong comprehension strategy use. I worked with a second-grade student whose score on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) put her at a level 6, a full grade equivalent level below what is expected. This was due to the fact that her comprehension appears to be low because of her decoding struggles. While it is important for her to work on strengthening her decoding skills, it is also imperative that she read not only texts reflective of the level 6 DRA score because she will not have the opportunity to continue to grow in the area of comprehension if she only reads books that reflect her capacity to decode. (Not to mention the fact that she could potentially become a disengaged reader if limited to DRA level 6 because lower level books tend to be less complex, which does not generally encourage deeper comprehension and engagement).

While the level of book can, and often does, inform teachers’ pedagogical choices, reading level alone is a narrow conception of literacy for children’s literature. If a book level is the only question that is asked about a book or the only information that is used in regards to evaluating children’s literature, it reveals a presumption that the answer to matching a book to a reader lies solely in matching the reading level of book to student and tends to undervalue factors such as interest level and artistic value.

Another version of the question about reading level is often phrased, “What age group is this book for?” Often, when I am asked this question, the adult wants to know if a particular book is appropriate for a certain child or grade level. The question is connected to the question about book level but reveals more awareness of the reader or readers. However, it presumes a sameness exists for grade or age level readers. This is an outgrowth of the literacy perspective, and demonstrates how, when a teacher only uses a literacy way of thinking to consider children’s

literature, it often leads to viewing it as a tool. In the case of reading levels, particularly for younger ages, grades, and/or comprehension levels, the books are being considered in terms of either the mechanics of reading or appropriateness in terms of content and curriculum rather than as a comprehensive whole.

These educational approaches to literacy and learning can also be linked to current theories of development. Considering the ways that children develop broadly (e.g., Piaget, 1969) and as readers (e.g., Chall, 1983; Ehri, 1991; Morrow 2012) can inform instructional decisions and practices made by teachers; however, it can also limit the ways that they think about literature. The following table provides a brief overview of three different theories of literacy development, drawing on a cognitive or skills-based lens (see Table 1). It also includes examples of how each theory might inform pedagogical decisions by a teacher.

Table 1: *Overview of Theories of Literacy Development*

| <u>Theory</u>                                    | <u>Description</u>  | <u>Pedagogical Implications</u>   |
|--|---|---|
| Theory of Cognitive Development (Piaget, 1969)   | Details ways that children's thinking progresses across time and how they are "likely to develop." Progression originally perceived as linear but contemporary studies "emphasize the flexibility of these periods" (p. 93) indicating that there are likely periods of progression and regression. | Helps teachers to broadly understand how children are likely to think, which can inform developmentally appropriate lesson plans and experiences.<br>Example: 7-year-olds benefit from hands-on manipulation of letters because they are in concrete operational stages (ages 7-11)   |
| Stage Development Theory (Chall 1983, Ehri 1991) | Provides insight into "stages through which readers pass as they move toward reading proficiency" (p.97), focused on decoding and word-level reading.   | Teachers can use theory to inform instruction based on understanding of what stage(s) individual students are currently in.<br>Example: a meaningful way for students at the pre-alphabetic phase to begin to identify letters is to study the letters in their own name  |
| Emergent Literacy (Morrow 2010)                  | Three central tenets: 1) listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interrelated; 2) literacy development is continuous and ongoing; and 3) parents have a powerful influence on children's literacy development (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 108).  | Teachers can design instruction based on three tenets of emergent literacy.<br>Example: teachers develop a classroom library that contains variety of genres (e.g. fantasy, informational, realistic fiction, traditional literature), types of texts (e.g. electronic, audio, paper), and writing materials (e.g. pencils, pens, markers, computers, iPads). |

Tracey and Morrow (2012)

When drawing on a cognitive perspective, key aspects of concern are information processing for word decoding and recognition, along with higher-level cognition for comprehension (Purcell-Gates, Jacobsen, Degener, 2006, p. 69).

Another way to consider literacy and reading development is from a sociocultural perspective, which includes "a collection of related theories that include significant emphasis on

social and cultural contexts in which literacy is practiced” (Perry, 2012, p. 51). Whereas the aforementioned developmental perspectives of literacy focus more on the process of becoming literate, sociocultural ways of thinking about literacy focus primarily on the ways that culture, activity, identity, power, and contexts inform the ways that people interact with and use literacy practices. Table 2 briefly outlines some of the key ways of approaching literacy from a sociocultural perspective (table based on Tracey and Morrow, 2012):

Table 2: *Overview of Theories of Literacy Development from a Sociocultural Perspective*

| Perspective  | Description   | Pedagogical Implication   |
|--|---|---|
| Sociolinguistics<br>(Heath, 1982; Gee, 2007)                           | Individual’s language, along with social and language interactions with others, impacts reading acquisition and ability (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 204) | Creation of a class book or story—students and teacher co-create on chart paper a story about a shared experience                                       |
| Sociocultural Theory<br>(Au, 1997; Moll, 1992, 1994)                   | Focused on the broader concept of social, historical and cultural factors (including language) and how they impact literacy?                            | Funds of knowledge / literature circles—students learn from each other, reading and responding to the same book and fulfilling different response roles |
| Social Constructivism<br>(Vygotsky, 1978)                              | Mastery of sign systems; learning is result of interactions with others   | Scaffolding / Gradual Release of Responsibility (more specific)   |
| Critical Literacy Theory<br>(Freire, 1970; Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003) | Education is not politically neutral but exists to recreate and reproduce power, hierarchies, etc.  | Critical reading experiences—whose voice is being heard, whose is not? What are the potential consequences?   |

The goal of this study is not to argue for or against either of these theories, but to draw on them explicitly to broaden the ways children's literature is presented in curricula for elementary preservice teachers. Approaching the teaching of children's literature from multiple theoretical perspectives, along with different disciplinary ways of thinking, has the potential to inform and provide a wider range of experiences in children's literature coursework. By explicitly identifying different lenses and ways of thinking in the process of teaching children's literature to preservice teachers, the hope is that it will allow them to be able to more conscientiously consider the complexities of reading and teaching literature when they are in the classroom themselves.

### **Children's Literature in English Studies**

Scholars who study children's literature from the disciplinary perspective of English are primarily interested in the ways that theoretical perspectives inform a book in larger social and cultural contexts. Scholars of children's literature in English often publish in journals such as *Children's Literature* and *Children's Literature in Education*. They belong to variety of professional organizations, such as the Children's Literature Association, the Modern Languages Association, the Association for Research in Cultures of Young People, Popular Culture Association, and the American Literature Association.

In the introduction to the *Handbook of Research in Children's and Adolescent Literature*, the editors give an overview of the perspective of each field. In regards to English, they write, "Scholars in English and literature tend toward a text-oriented approach that historically excluded the reader from view" (Wolf, et al., 2011, p. xi). Articles that feature close analysis of a specific text or sets of texts are most commonly found in journals like *Children's Literature in Education*, *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, and *Children's Literature*, supporting

this view. In addition, children's literature scholars positioned in English departments frequently publish books focusing on specific texts, authors, or critical perspectives.

My understanding of the English-discipline perspectives early on in my scholarly studies was that those investigating a text from an English discipline did not include or even care about the reader or readers. I believed that the text served as the only source of information, with scholars reading closely and deeply for understanding of how a text worked. The analysis of literary elements, such as plot and character, provided for a deeper understanding of the ways that the author constructed the narrative of a story. An example of this understanding of the English-discipline approach to a text can be found in Coats's (in Enciso et. al., 2008) examination of the main character Kenny from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* (Curtis, 1995). Coats poses questions about how Kenny develops throughout the story, asking, "What do we know about him and how do we know it? What are his contexts, and is it believable that his character would develop in those contexts?" (p. 222). Exploring these questions involves closely examining the text as well as considering other cultural references that help provide insight. Another example of focus on a text from an English perspective can be found in Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). This text, which is often used in children's literature classes situated in English Departments, is a close examination of the canonical book *Peter Pan*, using theorists Freud and Rousseau.

The fact that so many articles and books from the English perspective are published focused on the text of children's literature supports the claim made by editors of the handbook in their introduction. It is interesting to note that in the introduction to *Teaching Children's Fiction*, editor Charles Butler (2006) notes one of the issues raised by during the study of children's literature is the lack of a specific canon within the genre itself, that this minimizes the field as a

whole because there is not an established historical perspective to be able to draw on, making it difficult to situate the current field. I've not found a similar concern within either library science or education. In library science, awards like The Newbery and Caldecott often fill this role. In some ways, this illuminates the history of the discipline of English, particularly in terms of how the canon came to be.

In *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*, Clark (2003) considers various factors that have shaped the way that children's literature is considered, broadly as well as in scholarship. In her chapter, *Kiddie Lit and the Academy*, Clark alluded to children's literature as a field that "has such low status among literary critics that it is often not even considered a discipline" (p. 50). She goes on to argue that accepting children's literature as serious works or as part of the English academy would have meant minimizing the field in general by its association with childhood and librarians and as something that was both popular and profitable.

While this notion of English studies focusing only on a text seemed to be true to me at the time, I have come to realize (of course) that it is much more complex. Culler (2000) provides some clarification in ways to approach texts in a section titled, *Modes of Analysis*, where he writes about the process of literary or textual analysis and cultural analysis lenses. If I use a literary or textual analytical perspective when approaching children's literature, "the main point of interest [would be] the distinctive complexity of individual works" (p. 50), whereas if I choose to use a cultural studies lens, I would "consider works as symptoms of something else rather than of interest in themselves" (p. 51). Culler's descriptions helped me to realize that my initial perceptions of the English perspective on children's literature being focused only on the text were exclusively from the textual perspective. This is obviously a simplified version of a textual



lens, for as Hunt (1994) reminds us, “the study of children’s literature involves audience—the child, the reader and the circumstances of reading” (p. 9).

One of the reasons that I believe I focused so strongly and exclusively on analysis of the text early on in my studies was the fact that I was teaching children’s literature to preservice teachers who were neither children themselves, nor had children available to read with as an audience. As an instructor, I was looking for a way to help me draw their attention closely to the languages of the text of children’s literature (including visual and design elements), and I was looking for a way to help the preservice teachers focus on their own responses to the children’s literature texts that we read in order to help them move away from the collective consideration of all children.

One way to help preservice teachers (and myself) focus on self as reader was to use a Reader Response lens. As stated by Tyson (2006), “Reader response theorists share two beliefs: (1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and (2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature” (p. 170). There is not one reader response theory, but a range that varies based on the amount that the text and reader inform understandings. In some cases, this leads students to conclude something along the lines of, “If my experience informs my response, than there can’t be a wrong response.” However, the key is that the individual reader must clearly explain and support her response using evidence from the text (and sometimes additional sources).

Tyson also clarifies various ways to refer to readers when talking or writing about a text using a reader response lens. The use of words like *readers*, *students*, or similar terms denotes actual real people, actual readers. Another way to analyze the reading experience is to focus on

the reading experience of a hypothetical ideal reader encountering a specific text. This is usually denoted by the term the reader. It is key to note that “references to the reader are really references to the critic analyzing his or her own carefully documented reading experience of a specific text according to specific reader-response principles” (Tyson, 2006, p. 187). This is a crucial point to make with preservice teachers who are reading analyses of children’s literature, in order to clarify that a reference to the reader does not necessarily mean an assumption that all readers will share that response.

Some children’s literature scholars are critical of the fact that reader response criticism is often the only lens presented in children’s literature coursework based in colleges of education (Thomas, personal communication, 2015) because of its limitations. I have come to find that beginning with reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1995) is an excellent choice because it allows preservice teachers to acknowledge their own reading experiences and apprenticeship of observation. It also helps to remind us, “just as children’s books do not exist in a vacuum—they have real, argumentative readers and visible, practical, consequential *uses*—so the theory of children’s literature constantly blends into the practice of bringing books and readers together” (Hunt, 1994, p. 2). Bringing books and readers together can be studied using reader response theory, and this is important work, as children’s literature is often at the heart of elementary classrooms and is a foundational aspect of library science work.

### **Children’s Literature in Library Science**

While historically children’s literature has been securely nestled under the umbrella of library science, other academics have not always considered the field of library science itself to be a viable discipline (Clark, 2003). Librarian Anne Carroll Moore in particular has played a significant role making librarians’ work visible because of her considerable influence not just

with librarians, but also with publishers, editors, authors, and illustrators. While not everyone liked or appreciated her, her influence has been significant. I wonder (and it seems Clark may have wondered as well) what direction the field of children's literature would have taken had Moore been considered a member of academia. Obviously we can't know such a thing, but for someone as seemingly influential as Moore, even she was not able to break through academic barriers because of the general perception of librarians and their field. Clark (2003) shares a quote from editor Susan Hirschman:

As much as we complained about the library market when we had it, those librarians were people who had standards and criteria and who had been educated and trained in book selection. What's happening now is that there are not many standards except "big is better" and "shiny and glitzy is good." ( p. 72)

In the chapter of the *Handbook of Research in Children's and Adolescent Literature* focused on school libraries, Eliza Dresang noted research findings that indicated teachers had difficulty conceptualizing children's literature in the ways that librarians do. She observed in discussion as well as in written work "their desire to use literature as vehicle to teach a concept" (Dresang & Kotrla, 2011, p. 124). This is in contrast to school librarians, who "might use youth literature to teach a concept, but their primary concern is to motivate the child to read the book presented and to link that reading to a wide array of related literature available in the library" (p. 124). This can be seen in the reader advisory work that is a large part of librarianship. Reader advisory posits that librarians need to have a broad, significant knowledge of children's literature to meet the interests and needs of individual readers.

The knowledge and approach necessary to meet the needs those who are using a library will obviously differ based on the individual contexts of each particular library, but the necessary

approach is also dependent upon whether the library is a public library or school library. For example, in a public library setting, the particular needs of a community and those who live in that community provide the most crucial foundation to make decisions based on book purchases, technology made available, programming, and other services. The children's room of a public library is both child-centered and family-centered in book selection, programming, and services. This differs from school libraries, which are not only serving the needs of the children at that school but also the needs of the teachers and the curriculum. Regardless of the participant's desire to focus on school or public library settings, programs of study for library science "include knowledge of child development, collaboration, curricular knowledge, [and] knowledge about books and reading" (Lesesne, personal communication, Sept. 13, 2013). The field's broad approach to the appropriate preparation of school librarians can be further clarified by examining the mission of one of the professional organizations tasked with their creation. According to the American Association of School Librarians:

Today's school librarian works with both students and teachers to facilitate access to information in a wide variety of formats, instruct[s] students and teachers how to acquire, evaluate and use information and the technology needed in this process, and introduces children and young adults to literature and other resources to broaden their horizons. As a collaborator, change agent, and leader, the school librarian develops, promotes and implements a program that will help prepare students to be effective users of ideas and information, a lifelong skill.

(<http://www.ala.org/aasl/education/recruitment/learning>, accessed 8.26.13).

These sources indicate the breadth of the field – the school librarian is not only concerned with the selection of appropriate material, but also the development of critical thinkers and information users in the broadest sense, both now and in the future.

It is important to note that library science focuses on a wide variety of media, including electronic books or e-books in addition to traditional paper books, graphic novels, and audio presentations of literature. Librarians often have a much broader view than elementary teachers of what may count as reading materials, not only in terms of personal choice reading, but also in terms of classroom instruction (Dresang & Kotrla, 2009). Ultimately the characteristics and role that children’s literature plays in library science is focused on the individual child or reader—or, in the case of school libraries, individual readers as well as teachers and classrooms. This is different from literacy characteristics about children’s literature because of the service mentality that guides decisions and services from the library perspective, whether the person needing service is a student or teacher. In literacy and education, the focus tends to be primarily on the literature as a tool for instruction instead.

### **Significance of the Study**

An examination of the fields of literacy, literature, and libraries in relationship to each other while looking for both commonalities and differences and connecting those relationships to the field of elementary preservice teacher education will contribute to the field by expanding the ways that children’s literature can be conceptualized in teacher education curricula. The ideas that preservice teachers bring with them to coursework in regards to children’s literature and what teaching is are based on their own previous experiences. Lortie (1975) labeled this “apprenticeship of observation” and noted, “What students learn about teaching then, is intuitive or imitative rather than explicit and analytical; it is based on individual personalities rather than

pedagogical principles” (p. 62). While preservice teachers’ experiences can be a strong drive in their desire to be a teacher (both positive and negative), it can be problematic if they are not willing to consider that there is more to teaching than what they viewed from behind their student desks. In considering children’s literature across literacy, libraries, and literature, I seek to explicate for preservice teacher educators and preservice teachers the roles that children’s literature can play in classrooms in ways that expand understandings beyond the essentialized, one-dimensional, or deterministic perspective of children’s literature and its possibilities and potential in the classroom.

But if preservice teachers are already taking coursework in children’s literature, is that not providing those very opportunities I claim to seek in this dissertation? In some cases, yes. However, my six years of experience as a teacher educator and scholar have suggested that the children’s literature curriculum in practice tends to emphasize one of the three domains at the expense of the other two. I also see the ways that preservice teachers’ own preconceived notions of children’s literature (based on the apprenticeship of observation) are affirmed when they are presented with only a literacy view of teaching children’s literature. They are still likely to focus on only the reading level of a particular book or child, or on the ways a book can help them to meet curricular goals; therefore, the explicit presentation of all three domains is a way of becoming more inclusive in the teacher education curriculum. Again, I want to be clear that literacy is always one way that preservice teachers think about literature, but this should not be the *only* way that they think about children’s literature when they go into their own classrooms.

As I have taught children’s literature courses over the past six years at Michigan State University, I have come to see preservice teacher’s apprenticeship of observation in terms of kiddie lit as limiting and problematic. I explored this observation more deeply in a poster

presentation titled: “Entertaining OR Didactic: Preservice Teachers Confronting Assumptions About Children’s Literature in the Classroom” (McIlhagga, 2011). In that study, I learned that the preservice teachers began the semester in my children’s literature courses with descriptions of children’s literature as either “cute, fun, [and] entertaining” or “teaches a lesson, has morals.” These notions align with the characteristics from library science (entertaining) and education (teaching a lesson), but are unexamined as well as limiting. While these are actually two roles that children’s literature can fulfill, I find it disconcerting and problematic that these were almost exclusively the *only* ways children’s literature was described (DeGroot, 2007).

If we consider children’s literature in terms of Shulman’s knowledge of teaching (1987), literature is unique in that it can be considered both disciplinary knowledge as well as a material of teaching. When preservice teachers (and practicing teachers) consider children’s literature as only entertaining or didactic, they are essentializing the literature into a binary. This not only limits the role of the literature, but also limits the experiences of the students in the classroom with literature as a subject to be explored and studied. This is why it’s important to consider a literary way of thinking about children’s literature; preservice teachers need to be able to study children’s literature as part of the discipline of literature in a children’s literature course (in addition to the role that it plays as curricular materials usually examined in disciplinary methods coursework). Considering the ways of those who study literature as a primary discipline will provide language and concepts to bring this multidimensional understanding into the preservice teacher education curriculum.

In my own teaching, one way I push against these assumptions is by asking preservice teachers to respond to the texts of children’s literature as readers rather than only as teachers. *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998) is a picture book that I’ve used across five years of teaching.

A multivocal picturebook illustrated with Anthony Browne's recognizable surrealist paintings, the plot shows four different perspectives of a walk in the park. Themes of privilege, unemployment, and parent-child relationships are woven throughout in the voices of Charles, his mother, Smudge, and her father. The response of many preservice teachers in my class is often, "Kids won't understand this. If it's confusing for me, then how could a child understand it?!" Using the individualized reading maps created at the beginning of the semester as a jumping off point into discussions, they begin to realize that when they say a child, they are often thinking of a romanticized notion of their childhood selves. For example, I have heard preservice teachers say such things as, "I think that *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) is too scary for young children because it would have scared me when I was young. I didn't like books with monsters or bad dreams." Someone else might then chime in with, "I actually have that book listed on my reading map because it was one of my favorites when I was five. I remember asking my dad to read it to me over and over again. Eventually I had the entire thing memorized." This activity helps teachers to see children's literature from perspectives other than their own personal experiences.

Conversations like these allow the preservice teachers to begin to see each other as unique readers with unique childhood reading experiences. I encourage them to ask friends and roommates about childhood reading memories of specific books. These conversations begin to open up understanding about how unique each person's reading experience can be with the same book. Because I am asking them to focus on who they are as readers now, I strongly encourage them to write and speak using I instead of readers or children. I also repeatedly draw their attention back to the text and illustrations (along with experiences) as a way to support and explain their interpretations. While it is by no means an instant shift in perspective for everyone,



preservice teachers begin to see that a work of children's literature has more potential than entertainment, a moral, or a lesson. However, they then often push back by saying that the only reason they think something, interpret, or understand complexity is because they are adults and not children. At this point, Matthews's (1994) philosophy for childhood provides some perspective on children's capacity to think in surprisingly complex ways about literature.

As a preservice teacher educator, I am also very careful about the texts that I select for preservice teachers to read; I work hard to find children's and adolescent literature that is complex and pushes against notions of simplicity and entertainment. Much of the work I have done around text selection for my own courses has come from my understanding and study of library science. While text selection and response type are two ways to combat narrow views of children's literature, I am constantly looking for other ways to expand the thinking of preservice teachers (and any adult reading children's literature). I also am always on the lookout for ways to articulate the complexity of children's literature. By exploring the disciplinary ways that literature, libraries, and literacy conceptualize children's literature, I believe that the topic can be presented to preservice teachers in ways that will help them to see the role of children's literature in the curriculum that goes beyond entertainment or didactic instruction.

One way I ask preservice teachers to read beyond these two ways of thinking is by paying attention to the aesthetics of reading. I ask them to consider how words sound and feel. What images are created in their mind as they read? This aesthetic way of thinking about literature is reflected differently in literary and library ways of thinking and is important for preservice teachers not only to learn about from an academic perspective but also to experience.

In helping students become literate, teachers need to guide them to develop the ability to read as well as create a disposition for leisure reading (Applegate and Applegate, 2004). If

preservice teachers are going to enter classrooms prepared to help students develop in both of these ways, I believe it is imperative to have the same goals of developing ability and leisure reading in teacher education children's literature courses. This is especially important because:

If the corpus of research on reading habits and attitudes is even remotely accurate, large numbers of teachers and prospective teachers have never experienced the aesthetic stance in their reading. That is, they read but they tend not to see links between what they read and their private selves, or even the human condition. (Applegate & Applegate, 2014, p. 199)

As such, I find it to be crucial, when asking preservice teachers to develop these traits in their students, to first facilitate this aesthetic experience for them.

At our first meeting each semester, I ask students to complete a reading-interest inventory. This helps me get to know who they are as readers (or non-readers), what their interests are, and how they see themselves as literate people. One way I bring in a library perspective to my class is to use some of the information from student interest inventories to try and match a book to each reader (or student). One semester there was a young man in my class who was a voracious fan of all things history, but he had little experience with historical fiction and children's informational texts about history. This led me to bring in Kadir Nelson's (2008) *We Are the Ship*, an illustrated informational text about the Negro Baseball League, *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985), a picture book about a young German girl's perception of the Holocaust, and *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (Gansworth, 2013) set in post Vietnam War, within which we meet Lewis Blake, a seventh grader living on the Tuscarora Indian Reservation in upstate New York. During a presentation at our final class meeting for the semester he commented, "I did not expect to discover that children's literature was either interesting or

complex, particularly when it came to history. These texts (listed above) and others showed me otherwise, and I think have maybe even helped to make me a more critical consumer of the history that I do read.” This is a clear indication that this aesthetic experience, even within a single class, can impact the way that preservice teachers engage with and comprehend the text.

As I argued earlier, the inclusion of multiple perspectives enriches our experience of children’s literature, and I practice this with my preservice teachers as well. Having an explicit discussion while using literary terminology is one way that I bring a literature perspective to the classroom. Across multiple sections, one of the common texts (read and written about by everyone in the class) in my children’s literature course is *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia (2010). The novel tells the story of Delphine and her sisters Vonetta and Fern as they travel to Oakland, California to spend a month with their mother, who left them seven years prior. Set in 1969 in the midst of the birth of the Black Panthers, the book is told from the first person point of view of eleven-year-old Delphine. Many in class are often incredulous that Cecile, the mother, seems to not care about their children. In the first two days of the girls’ arrival in Oakland, she sends them to a Chinese restaurant and the local community center unaccompanied. After the students finish demonizing Cecile for “not acting like a mother should” (a very personal response), I ask them to return to the actual text on the page and consider the role of point of view. The preservice teachers have often identified or labeled literary elements like point of view, but have rarely had a discussion about how those elements impact their reading and understanding of children’s literature texts. They realize that part of the reason we are so angry with Cecile’s behavior is that we are seeing it only through the eyes of her daughter, who is hurt by her mother. This understanding helps them broaden their perception of the literature and begin to read critically, by using their knowledge of different literary

elements to inform their reaction to the text and deepen their understanding of their own aesthetic experience.

To examine and articulate more closely the affordances of each of these three disciplinary perspectives, I have selected seminal or key texts along with a work of children's literature as the focus of analysis for each of the three chapters: Literacy, Literature, and Libraries. Because this study uses a humanities research perspective, I do not have a literature review section in the style of a social science methodology. This choice was made for an array of reasons, but partially out of the goal of closely examining the *connections* across the disciplines that inform my thinking about teaching children's literature to elementary teacher candidates. These key texts, which include children's literature texts along with teaching stories, comprise the three analysis chapters. Teaching stories are drawn from my experiences discussing, reading, responding, and writing with preservice teachers for the past six years. I have created these stories using my own teaching journals and notes to represent key themes and ideas that arose in my own pedagogical thinking. They are not intended to be exact replicas of any specific class, conversation, paper, or preservice teacher. The anecdotes from my teaching are not data sources in this study; rather they are illustrations of curricular concepts. The next section of this chapter will describe the process used to select each of the key texts followed by a brief description of each.

### **Key Texts and the Selection Process**

I have made selections that are robust and inspiring from the past seven years of scholarly studies about children's literature. I've come to think of these selections as my own professional canon because of the ways that these texts have helped me to develop my thinking and understanding of children's literature across the three disciplinary ways of thinking. All of the texts selected are also considered relevant and rigorous by those situated in these disciplines.

In the process of narrowing down the titles to include in this study and my professional canon, I asked myself the following questions:

- Do I have selections representing ways of thinking about children’s literature English, Library Science, and literacy education?
- What research literature across three disciplines (literacy, literature, libraries) inspires me to think more deeply about children’s literature?
- What literature prompted me to make connections across disciplinary ways of thinking?
- What combinations of research literature help convey the complexity of children’s literature in ways that I want to engage with as I write?
- Does the selection offer insight or ways of thinking about children’s literature that could be beneficial to preservice teachers learning about children’s literature?
- Is the research text thoughtful, insightful, interesting, engaging and/or beautifully written?

I began my search by using keyword searches on ProQuest and Google Scholar. I used combinations of phrases including the following: (a) “children’s literature and teacher education,” (b) “children’s literature and children’s library services,” and (c) “children’s literature and literary studies.” I also consulted children’s literature scholars, asking for their opinions of robust, key texts from their respective fields. One of the most useful exercises was to look at the reference lists of handbook chapters and articles to notice which authors, articles, and books were referenced most often. Using interlibrary loan systems to augment both the university and public libraries, I reviewed more than 75 books and 100 articles or chapters. To narrow my selections, I read with a holistic look across several features, including citations, publication position, and reputation of author. I also selected texts that spoke directly to

affirming accepted roles and characteristics in each particular field, as well as texts that explicitly pushed boundaries.

The books that I selected represent texts that have and continue to be used in children’s literature coursework in each of the three disciplines. I also selected texts that helped to push my thinking about scholarly study in children’s literature. Some of the selected texts helped me to navigate pushing the preconceived notions about children’s held by preservice teachers in my own classrooms. The focus texts are divided into four categories: a) handbook or anthology chapter, b) textbook, c) scholarly article or book, and d) children’s literature text (see Table 3).

Table 3: *Key Texts by Category and Disciplinary Focus*

| Text Type                             | Literacy  | Literature  | Library Science  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Chapter<br>(handbook or<br>anthology) | <i>Reading Literature in<br/>Elementary Classrooms</i><br>(Short, 2011)   | <i>Looking in the Mirror:<br/>Pedagogy, Theory, and<br/>Children’s Literature</i><br>(McGillis, 2006) | <i>School Libraries and<br/>the Transformation of<br/>Readers and Reading</i><br>(Dresang & Kotrla,<br>2011)<br><br><i>Public Libraries in the<br/>Lives of Young<br/>Readers</i> (Rothbauer,<br>Walter & Weibel,<br>2011) |
| Textbook                              | <i>The Joy of Children’s<br/>Literature</i> (Johnson,<br>2012)  | <i>The Pleasures of<br/>Children’s Literature</i><br>(Nodelman & Reimer,<br>2003)                     | <i>Children’s Literature<br/>in Action</i> (Vardell,<br>2008)  |
| Scholarly<br>article/book             | <i>Children’s Literature<br/>and Reading<br/>Instruction: Past,<br/>Present, and Future</i><br>(Martinez & McGee,<br>2000). | <i>How to Read Literature</i><br>(Eagleton, 2013)   | <i>Solid Foundations: A<br/>Primer on the Crucial,<br/>Critical, and Key<br/>Roles of School and<br/>Public Libraries in<br/>Children’s<br/>Development</i> (DeGroot<br>& Branch, 2009)                                    |

Table 3 (cont'd)

| Text Type                  | Literacy                                  | Literature                          | Library Science             |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Children's literature book | <i>My Life as a Book</i> (Tashjian, 2011) | <i>Love That Dog</i> (Creech, 2001) | <i>Matilda</i> (Dahl, 1988) |

Handbook and anthology chapters are taken from either *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* (Wolf, Coats, Enciso, and Jenkins, Eds., 2011) or *Teaching Children's Fiction* (ed. Butler, 2006). To use each of these texts in their entirety would be beyond the scope of this study; they total 568 and 192 pages respectively. I selected specific chapters that would help me focus on both differences and connections across the disciplinary ways of thinking. I elected to include a textbook from each disciplinary area because they are written specifically as teaching tools, thus providing some insight into what that field considers important information. The inclusion of scholarly texts (articles and a book) reflects what is acknowledged by academics in each area through the peer review process. In both literacy and library science, peer reviewed journals are considered to reflect rigor and current research in the fields. I selected a solo-authored scholarly monograph to represent an English disciplinary perspective as this is a commonly accepted format of publication in that field. Lastly I selected three different children's literature texts to explore representations of literature and reading. While I considered selecting one text and reading it from three different lenses (as in Enciso et. al 2008), I felt that examining three different texts would provide a richer and broader perspective of actual children's literature texts. In the next section, I briefly summarize each of the key text selections.

**Literacy/education key texts.** *Reading Literature in Elementary Classrooms* (Short, 2011) is one of three chapters in the *Handbook of Research in Children's and Adolescent Literature* that explicitly considers literature for children and adolescents in the context of K-12 classrooms. In this chapter, Short explores the roles that children's literature can fill in elementary classrooms beyond merely a tool to teach literacy. I have selected this chapter not only because it is a representative chapter for education and literacy from the *Handbook*, but also because it explicitly addresses the ways that literature is often conceptualized as only a tool and offers other roles that literature can serve in elementary classrooms.

*The Joy of Children's Literature*, second edition (Johnson, 2012), is a textbook that I have used with undergraduates enrolled in the children's literature course offered in the College of Education. Written expressly for use in teacher education programs, this text provides an extensive overview of children's literature along with reading methods and pedagogical knowledge. The layout is similar to other children's literature texts written with an education or school library audience in mind, such as *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* (Kiefer, 2010), *Literature and the Child* (Galda, Cullinan, and Sipe 2010), and *Essentials of Children's Literature* (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, Short, 2013). An opening section includes information about the history of children's literature, children as learners, and literacy development. The second section includes chapters based on genre, and the last section considers children responding to literature in a classroom context. I am compelled to include this text for the same reasons I choose it for a focal text for teaching children's literature. The author is cognizant of the need to make connections between pedagogy, methods, and children's literature and is also asking teachers to consider how to help kids have a pleasurable reading experience. She is explicit about both of those goals throughout.



*Children's Literature and Reading Instruction: Past, Present, and Future* (Martinez & McGee, 2000) provides insight into the ways that children's literature has been (and has not been) considered as part of reading instruction in U.S. schools. Martinez & McGee's piece, published in *Reading Research Quarterly*, brings historical perspectives in terms of reading materials for instruction as well as political and research trends that have impacted the role and perception of children's literature in education. Because children's literature is often grouped with reading instruction at the elementary level, the historical, political, and research overview provided by this article are reasons for including it as a key text in this dissertation.

Twelve-year-old Derek was labeled a reluctant reader by his teacher in *My Life as a Book* by Janet Tashjian (2010). His reading teacher (who he refers to as Satan) created a reading system for him that involves keeping a list of all of the vocabulary words he does not know. Although he wants to spend his summer relaxing and having fun, he feels his teacher has ruined it with a summer reading project and his parents sign him up for learning camp. Motivation to read becomes a clear theme in the book as Derek discovers old newspapers and a mystery to solve.

**Literature key texts.** Roderick McGillis is a professor of English at the University of Calgary who has interests in children's literature but also in literary and cultural theory and film history and theory. In the chapter "Looking in the Mirror: Pedagogy, Theory, and Children's Literature," (2006) McGillis begins an acknowledgement of the cross-fertilization of the study of children's literature across various perspectives, which clearly aligns with this study. He provides multiple reasons to support teaching theory as part of learning about children's literature. Of particular interest to this study are the ways McGillis writes about theory as a way

to think more self-consciously as readers (regardless of age) and as a way to both consider ourselves and the act of reading itself.

Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer pose a number of questions in the preface to *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003) including, "Why does anybody or should anybody read literature? Why should children? *How* should people in general read it? How should children?" (p. x). They also address topics of literary strategies, child culture in the marketplace, reading critically, and theory. I selected this textbook to include in my study because it was instrumental in helping me begin to understand the ways that the study of children's literature could look from the perspective of English. I also used it as the required textbook one semester in the children's literature course that I taught as a way to consider how the course could change when not based in a distinctly literacy-centric frame that drew on stage development theories.

Terry Eagleton is a well-known British academic who is currently Distinguished Professor of English Literature at Lancaster University. He is best known for his 1983 book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, but I've chosen the more recent *How to Read Literature* (2013) as a key text for this study. This text offers a close examination of how to do literary interpretation and analysis, including a close examination of character and narrative. The fact that the title directly answers one of my key questions (How do we read?) is a happy coincidence.

*Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech (2001) is a children's literature novel written entirely in poetic, or verse, form. The story is told from the first person point of view of Jack as his class learns about poems and poets throughout an entire school. The beginning of the book has Jack pondering if poets only need to use few words and put spaces between lines in order to make something a poem. He also wrestles with why poets don't just say what they mean, particularly

Mr. Frost and Mr. Williams. As the story continues, Jack learns about Mr. Walter Dean Myers and is not only inspired by his poetry, but finds his own poetic voice.

**Library science key texts.** I have chosen to include two chapters from the *Handbook of Research in Children's and Adolescent Literature* to present perspectives of libraries: "School Libraries and the Transformation of Readers and Reading" (Dresang & Kotrla, 2011) and "Public Libraries in the Lives of Young Readers" (Rothbauer, Walter & Weibel, 2011). I have chosen to include both of these chapters from the *Handbook of Research in Children's and Adolescent Literature* together as one text. While they both address the role and knowledge of the children's librarian, the contexts of public or school library are addressed separately, and while there is crossover between the two contexts in terms of foundational knowledge of the literature and children, I include them both as a way to analyze more closely similarities and differences. Rothbauer, Walter, and Weibel's chapter on public libraries not only discusses past, present, and future, as the title notes, but also gives important insight into the core functions of a children's or youth services librarian, and online trends that are impacting the field. The Dresang & Kotrla chapter on school libraries explicitly addresses 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies, changing perceptions of readers and reading, and the role of the library and librarian in supporting teachers, students, and curriculum. As more and more schools are cutting certified library staff members (ALA, 2014), teachers may turn to public libraries for some of the missing support. Understanding more thoroughly the similarities and differences across the two different contexts will provide important insight into the ways we prepare teachers. In particular, I believe it will illuminate explicit language and create a broader understanding of literature and library services and the ways they support, enhance, and broaden children's literature in the classroom.

Sylvia Vardell's textbook *Children's Literature in Action* (2008) begins with the chapter *An Introduction to Children and Their Literature*. As the first chapter in the book, it presents foundational concepts about literacy development in children and the role that librarians play in helping them become literate. The remainder of the book is organized by genre and includes definitions, specific types of books related to that genre, evaluation criteria, authors, awards, book titles, sharing suggestions, and resources. Genres included are: picture books, traditional tales, poetry for children, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, and informational books. In the introduction, Vardell notes that her goal was to write a textbook specifically focused on those seeking certification or a degree in children's library services. She wanted to write a textbook that focused only on librarians and library media specialists as opposed to one that focuses on children's literature in a classroom. This exclusive focus on librarians and children's literature, along with the fact that it is one of the most commonly used texts in children's literature courses housed in schools of library science (Lesesne, personal communication), made it a clear choice for this study. Vardell's text will provide important insight into the ways that librarians think about the roles and characteristics of children's literature.

The opening chapters of Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) offer insight into the experiences of a very young child going to a library. The third-person omniscient point-of-view provides perspective not only on young Matilda's experiences, but also on the thoughts and decisions of the librarian; who is not quite sure what to make of such a young patron.

Clearly the selection of such a small number of texts cannot represent the only disciplinary ways of considering children's literature. However the books, articles, and chapters

that I have selected offer me the opportunity to closely consider my own thinking about the role of children's literature study and to explicate similarities and differences across texts.

### **Outline of the Dissertation Chapters**

In this first chapter, I have laid the groundwork and foundational information to frame the rest of the dissertation. In particular I have explained the characteristics and roles of children's literature in each of the three disciplines and have provided a rationale for the ways these three ways of thinking can inform the curriculum for children's literature in teacher education. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical lenses that I am using to consider the foci texts. Gareth Matthews's philosophy of childhood provides a counter narrative to developmental theories that traditionally dominate teacher education. Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory and a piece by Marah Gubar (2001) about *not* defining children's literature also informed my reading and pedagogical thinking. The second chapter will introduce each of these theoretical perspectives and contextualize them in terms of this study, children's literature, and teacher education.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively focus on three different roles of the instructor of preservice teachers in a children's literature class. Chapter 3, *Teacher as Reading Coach*, draws on literacy ways of thinking, especially the ways that understanding reading development can inform the ways texts are read and analyzed. Chapter 4 titled *Teacher as Literary Critic* considers the ways that English ways of thinking provide a more critical approach to examining and using children's literature. Library science perspectives inform Chapter 5, *Teacher as Curator of Books and Readers* more closely examine broad knowledge of literature and close knowledge of specific readers. The first half of each chapter provides a theoretical perspective of one of the disciplines as presented in the focal texts. The second half of each chapter draws on a

work from children's literature as a way to reflect on and illustrate those affordances within children's literature texts.

The study concludes with Chapter 6, in which I explore the analyses of Chapters 3, 4, and 5. This closing chapter is a discussion of how insight gained by closely considering evaluation, interpretation, and reader can inform children's literature in a teacher education curriculum. In particular, the process of articulating the specific language and concepts of evaluation, interpretation, and reader across three disciplines will offer a way to engage preservice teachers in their own assumptions and apprenticeship of observation regarding the roles of children's literature in elementary classrooms.

## Chapter 2: Framing this Study

This chapter introduces, explains, and connects Gareth Matthews's (1994) *Philosophy of Childhood* as a theoretical lens alongside Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978) to consider curricula and reimagine the act of preparing preservice teachers to think about children's literature in elementary classrooms. I begin by providing some insight into conventional preservice teacher education pedagogy. This will provide a reference point as I introduce Matthews's work, particularly in terms of how his work will help me to address gaps in the conventional curricula.

At Michigan State University, the children's literature course is one of only three courses that preservice teachers can take prior to applying to the teacher education program. One of the other courses is titled Reflections on Learning and is a prerequisite for even applying to the program. Offered through the Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education Department, the course description is, "Students' experiences as learners in comparison to psychological, sociological, and anthropological theories and assumptions about learning and teaching in and out of school." The other course is titled Human Diversity, Power, and Opportunity in Social Institutions. Taking a sociocultural approach to education, this course is described as, "[a] comparative study of schools and other social institutions." The course listing notes that the topics of the course are, "Social construction and maintenance of diversity and inequality. Political, social and economic consequences for individuals and groups" (<http://www.reg.msu.edu>, accessed 8/5/2015). Examination of concepts such as cultural capital and the hidden curriculum are often a part of this course. Following acceptance into the College of Education, elementary preservice teachers then take coursework in subject-specific and methods knowledge in literacy, mathematics, social studies, and science, as well as topics related

to special education and English language learners. The program culminates with a one-year teaching internship.

The preservice teachers<sup>2</sup> that I work with in my children's lit courses typically have only taken the course on reflections in learning and perhaps the course on human diversity and power as part of the curriculum specific to their education major. Occasionally preservice teachers are in their first year in the program and are concurrently taking the beginning subject matter courses. Their knowledge about teaching is predominantly limited to the courses that they have taken as well as their own apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). Likewise, their knowledge of children and student learning is based on this theoretical work and any prior experiences that these preservice teachers may have had outside of formal schooling. While I cannot claim causation about how their ideas about children are formed, it is my experience that most of preservice teachers in the children's literature courses I teach use language that reflects their belief that children are innocent beings who need protection and/or children who are lacking in knowledge that ought to be overcome with the help of adults/teachers. This often sounds very much like a deficit perspective, which positions children as lesser and in need of adults to progress.

Another common trend that I have experienced with preservice teachers is a desire to apply a singular theory to various scenarios. For example, the act of using a child's age to determine his developmental stage based on Piaget (1969) and then matching a pedagogical tool or text content to the stage. This can indeed be a starting point as well as an affordance of understanding stage development theory. However, if it is the only theoretical grounding, the

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the paper I will refer to the undergraduate students in the children's literature and methods courses I have taught as "preservice teachers" to distinguish them from those who are not education majors and from students from K-12 schools.



child's social and cultural experiences have been completely ignored, along with any specifics about that individual. The same could happen if only a sociocultural lens were used. The teacher may select a text that draws on a child's social understandings, but this can also limit her experiences to those that only match her cultural view. What is limiting about any perspective of child development is when it is used in isolation, without consideration for other theories or individuality. However, I'm not proposing that this is what preservice teachers are taught to do. As they learn about the complexity of children and acquire learning that pushes against their own apprenticeship of observation, there is cognitive dissonance, which can be uncomfortable. Seeking a direct answer to questions about children or learning can provide a sense of knowing and comfort. Holding on to a deficit perspective of children also affirms the necessity of teacher. It affirms the choice of the preservice teacher's field of study because she is on a path of study that will result in being the more knowledgeable other relied upon by children who will need her.

This perspective is not one that is only exhibited at the beginning of preservice teachers' formal education. I have also experienced a deficit perspective of children at the senior level methods language arts methods course that I have taught. At this point, preservice teachers in the class have completed several more content courses to build and expand their teacher knowledge. In addition to the three-hour weekly class meeting required by this course, each preservice teacher spends three hours a week in a classroom placement, providing them with a specific context and specific students to begin making connections between theory and practice. A big focus of the course asks the preservice teachers to consider what the students in their classrooms *can* do and build on those strengths, as a way to push against a deficit perspective. Again, the language used by preservice teachers in classroom discussions and informal online discussions reflects assumptions of deficit. For example:

The kindergarten students in my classroom couldn't sit through a lesson like that. I've never seen them pay attention for more than five minutes, so how could I possibly expect them to engage in a literature-based discussion for 20 minutes?

Again, I'm not claiming to identify the cause of the deficit child perspective, or even that every preservice teacher thinks this way. However, because I have heard this perspective repeated across teacher education courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, at conferences, and at professional development workshops, as well as in elementary buildings by practicing teachers themselves over the past six years, I want to consider other ways to address the notion of child other than innocent or lacking.

I will now briefly examine Piaget's Stage Development Theory (1969) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1978), followed by Matthews's Philosophy of Childhood (1994). Ultimately, the intention is to suggest that having an understanding of all three theories along with Rosenblatt's Reading Response Theory can inform the ways that preservice teachers are taught about children's literature.

### **Psychological Conceptualizations of Childhood that Inform TE Curricula**

Because I ultimately want to consider how multidisciplinary ways of thinking about children's literature can inform teacher-preparation curricula, it is important to consider what it means to be a child within any given teacher education curriculum. Teacher preparation coursework in the United States typically includes an entire course dedicated to learning about learning and child development theories. For example, the large university where I teach requires preservice teachers who want to enter the College of Education program to enroll in a course called Reflections on Learning and is described as exploring "students' experiences as learners in comparison to psychological, sociological, and anthropological theories and assumptions about

learning and teaching in and out of school” (MSU Registrar website). This course provides preservice teachers with theoretical ways to consider what it means to learn, as well as a way to consider the children and young people that will eventually be students in their future (K-12) classrooms. While there are a number of different theorists that have contributed different ways of thinking about children’s literature, I am going to first briefly review Piaget and Vygotsky. These two theorists are frequently included in teacher education coursework and used to frame studies, curricula, and teaching styles.

Piaget (1969) is known for his theory of cognitive development. He identified four stages that humans move through as they develop: sensorimotor (infants), preoperational (toddler & early childhood), concrete operational (elementary and early adolescence), and formal operational (adolescence & adulthood). Piaget believed that these stages were universal and occurred in order, aligned with the age of the subject. His way of thinking about development posits that learning follows the development. The teacher’s understanding of the stages and each child informs their instructional decisions. For example the child would be given tasks, books, etc. that match his current developmental stage.

I often hear Piaget’s influence on my students thinking when they ask questions regarding book levels or appropriateness. For example, "Would you read *One Crazy Summer* (Williams-Garcia, 2011) with third graders? Because it seems like it would be too complicated for them. I mean it deals with race and a mom who does not actually care about her kids. Those are complicated topics for adults!" or the common question, "What age is this book for?" These questions frame the stage of the child as determining what books a child can or should read. As noted before, this can sometimes be an affordance; with so many books available for children it

can be difficult to narrow down choices, and understanding a child's developmental stage can help with that process.

An influential sociocultural theorist that is a significant part of our teacher education program here at MSU is Vygotsky. His way of thinking about learning is that both social interactions and cultural context play the most significant role in child learning. Children need many social interactions with a variety of others to grow intellectually. One of Vygotsky's (1978) most well-known contributions to teaching is the concept of the zone of proximal development (see figure 2). One way that this informs teaching is the notion that the child (or learner) requires a teacher (or more knowledgeable other) to help scaffold them from not knowing something to being able to know it independently. In this case the role of the teacher is to provide the support necessary for a child to gain knowledge and understanding.

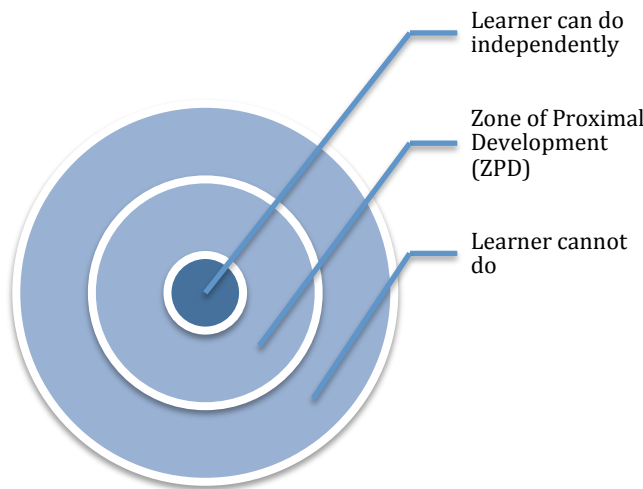


Figure 1: *Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development*

Piaget (1969) (cognitive development) and Vygotsky (1978) (sociocultural theory) offer important and unique insight into the ways that children are conceptualized. This in turn can help to better understand the ways that teacher and teaching are understood and enacted.

For the most part, psychological conceptions of literacy rely on the theories of Piaget (and/or Vygotsky) as the basis for thinking about what children can and cannot do. In this way, theories of development inform the preservice TE curriculum and make it possible to ask questions about developmental appropriateness. This perspective is valuable for preservice teachers because it provides one entry point for considering children as learners in classrooms.

### **Gareth Matthews's *Philosophy of Childhood***

After Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978), another, less common, perspective that can offer insight is Gareth Matthews. What is unique about Matthews's work in this area is that he does not attempt to create a new definition of children or childhood; rather he provides insight gained from numerous discussions with children that offer evidence for expanding views of childhood beyond developmental and deficit perspectives. This work presents a way to view children and childhood with fresh eyes, to consider that "children know and are capable of far more than we might ordinarily think" (1994, p. 229). Eight-year old Tim asks his father at bedtime one night, "Papa, how can we be sure that everything is not a dream?" followed by, "If it were a dream, we wouldn't go around asking if it was a dream." Matthews notes that young Tim's answer to his own question can be compared with philosophical thinking of Plato and Descartes (1994, p. 5).

In contrast, when considering children from a developmental perspective, the notion that a child could think philosophically in ways similar to two giants of philosophy does not fit with the notion of children as developmentally incompetent. Matthews wants us to be open to the possibility that children are actually thinking in philosophically sophisticated ways, rather than assuming that all children's thinking is elementary or developmentally immature just because they are young. The developmental theory of childhood embeds a deficit perspective by

focusing on what children cannot do. In contrast, Matthews's theory of childhood begins with the assumption of equality, which is open to the possibility that children's thinking could be remarkably sophisticated.

Matthews's concept of not categorizing, defining, or describing children in psychological terms provides an additional lens for this study, which will allow me to examine closely the ways that the three disciplines consider the children of children's literature, as well as ways that both children and adults are positioned as readers. Matthews notes that while theoretical models (e.g., innatist, experientialist, or recapitulationist) can be useful in terms of guiding research and interpreting data, there is no one model that is superior over another. Even Piaget's model, which combines these three models, has limitations. When we limit ourselves to only one theoretical model, it's possible to miss key information or possibly misunderstand the data that we do have. This potential limitation is true not only in terms of child development, but also in terms of learning and more specifically reading. Matthews puts forth the idea that we must always look beyond a single model of childhood:

Each model is useful in its own way but none clearly and obviously superior to the rest, we should be on the lookout for what a given model may encourage us to overlook, or misunderstand, as well as for what that model may help us understand better. (Matthews, 1994, p. 26)

In addition to Piaget, Vygotsky, and Matthews, summarized here, I will also briefly review Rosenblatt's Reader Response Theory. Rosenblatt's theory is relevant because of the specific focus on reading and responding to literature, specifically preservice teachers reading and responding to children's literature.

## **Teacher Education Curricula for Children's Literature**

Conventional curricula for preservice teacher learning about children's literature and the role it plays in classrooms typically includes three content goals: selection of quality literature, organization of literature study, and support and guidance of children's transactions with literature (Martinez & Roser, p. 7, 2011). These three goals also match my own personal experiences teaching children's literature for teacher education. Selection of literature is presented as the job of the teacher; she needs to know quality literature in order to make informed decisions for the students in her classroom. The teacher needs to organize the literature study as well as support and guide the ways that students interact with books. In most interpretations, each of these goals places the teacher as master of knowledge, and the child/student at a deficit in terms of both knowledge of the literature and their ability to respond; this can reinforce a deficit perspective of children and the necessity of the teacher.

Another commonality in the curricula of many children's literature courses in education is Reader Response Theory (Martinez & Roser, 2011). Grounded in the work of theorists like Louise Rosenblatt (1969), this theory can be seen as one way to counter the notion that the teacher determines the correct response or answer to the interpretation of any text. The first semester that I taught children's literature, I was provided with teaching materials that included power point slides for the first class, including the following image:

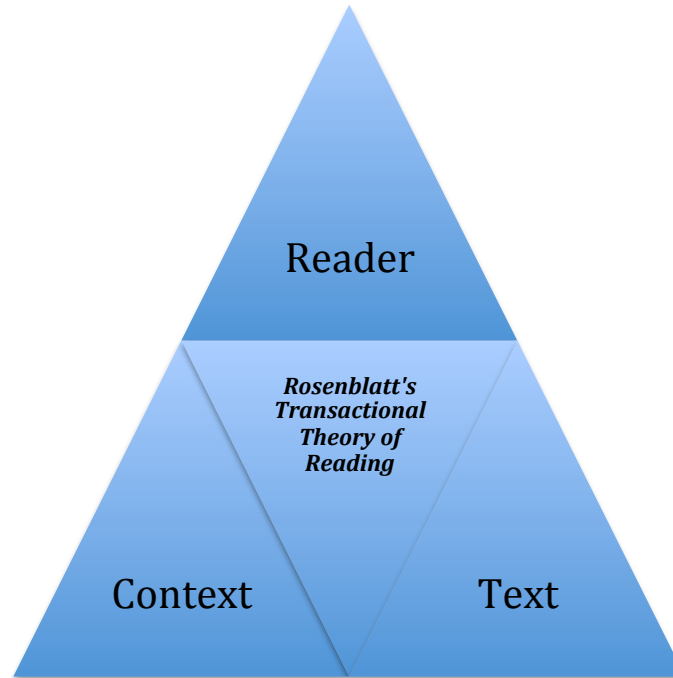


Figure 2: *Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading*

With a transactional or reader-response lens, theorists like Rosenblatt posit that meaning is made through a combination of the reader (and their prior knowledge & experiences), the text, and the context in which they are reading. As Rosenblatt explains:

From the transactional point of view, reading always implies both a reader and a text in a reciprocal relationship. A text by itself is simply a set of marks or squiggles on a page. These become a sequence of signs as they meet the eyes of the reader. He [or] she engages in a dynamic, fluid, reciprocal to-and-from, back-and-forth process of the text. A reader implies someone whose past experience enables him or her to make meaning in collaboration with a text... Meaning—whether scientific or aesthetic, whether a poem or a scientific report—happens during the interplay between particular signs and a particular reader at a particular time and place... Hence each reader's memory will have a unique accumulation of various encounters with [for example, the word fair] carrying different mixtures of ideas and feelings, denotations and connotations. (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. x).



Framing interactions in the children's literature class using Rosenblatt's theory provided two affordances. The first was to explicitly draw attention to the preservice teachers' own responses to the children's literature texts, as opposed to responding as an imagined child or generalizing responses to all children. While not directly opposing a deficit model of children, asking preservice teachers to read as the person you are today helped to push against assumed less-than-knowledgeable children. The other goal of asking preservice teachers to read only as themselves was to provide a counter-narrative to the meaning of a text residing only in the text or only with the teacher. In other words, there was no longer one right meaning to be determined by the preservice teacher (as the reader).

How teachers view the purposes and role of both curriculum and children's literature is going to inform what they believe the child reader can do—because they (teachers) are creating the knowledge gap that the student is always trying to achieve. One way teachers create gaps using children's literature is by considering themselves as gatekeepers who ultimately know better than the child herself what she should be reading and how it should be interpreted.

In their review of contemporary children's literature coursework for teachers, Martinez and Roser (2011) stated:

If preservice teachers themselves have been taught that texts have an obtuse central theme and that their job as readers (or teachers) is to ferret that theme, they have learned to privilege the text over the reader. Courses in children's literature, then, must reteach teachers to trust children (and themselves) to make supportable meanings that will astound. (2011, p. 6)

I propose that explicitly drawing on Rosenblatt as well as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Matthews is one way to expand the number of perspectives that preservice teachers can draw on to think about

their children's literature curricula. In the following sections, I describe Matthews's concept of the Philosophy of Childhood as one way to inform the ways preservice teachers can conceptualize teachers and teachers as readers, address implied and explicit power relationships, and ultimately uncover the role of children's literature in elementary curricula.

### **My Experiences Teaching Children's Literature**

Across the multiple sections of children's literature courses that I have taught, there is evidence of preservice teachers' considerations of children as less-than-capable or completely incapable of authentic literary response to complex picture books. One picture book that preservice teachers are asked to read and respond to in the children's literature course that I teach is *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne (1998). A visit to a local park is told from the perspective of four different voices: a mother, her son, a father, and his daughter. Browne illustrated the book in a surrealist style, incorporating visual elements that create a mismatch with what is depicted in the illustrations and ways that readers view the real world. For example, there are hats on every page, but drawn in different ways: on one page there are hat-shaped clouds, on another page there is a fountain wearing the same hat. The hat is not meant to be just a hat because it is first shown being worn by the mother. One way the hat can be interpreted is as a metaphor for the overbearing, judgmental, and controlling personality of the mother. There are numerous other metaphors present in the illustrations that readers can interpret as commentary on social class, royalty in the United Kingdom, and unemployment.

Across five years (and twenty sections) of teaching this book in a children's literature course, preservice teachers engage in thoughtful, in-depth discussions lasting close to an hour each time. They consistently express amazement at the complexities in the book as well as at the length of time they are engaged in the discussion. Discussions are frequently followed by

statements like, “Well, but kids couldn’t do this.” On one hand, this reflects an understanding of Piaget’s concrete operational stage, which says that children are becoming more logical, but only about concrete events or objects. Understanding this and considering the surrealistic style of the artwork alone in *Voices in the Park* could lead someone to think that this is not a book for younger children, despite being a picture book. There are also multiple implied elements of relationships included in the book, which again conflict with the notion that children in the concrete operational stage would not understand everything going on in the story. These could be seen as good reasons not to share this book with children at this stage.

Preservice teachers sometimes also reflected a deficit perspective. Their belief that children are less than adults is reflected in comments like, “If a class of twenty-five undergraduate preservice teachers can’t figure out what the burning tree means, how could a group of kids?!” This comment aligns with Matthew’s note about adults having a need to “define for the capacity for thought and reflection in our young children” (1994, p, 40) using a deficit lens. It also matters that the preservice teachers assume that reading means the act of determining the meaning of the burning tree.

After preservice teachers have read and discussed *Voices in the Park* (1998), I play a short video of a class of second grade students responding to the book after hearing it for the first time. In the video, many of the second graders anxiously share what they notice about the illustrations without much explanation. A boy sitting patiently with his hand up and is finally called on and shares:

Well I don’t believe that the tree is on fire. It can’t be on fire because if it was, all of the other trees around it would be on fire. I think it is fall and the leaves look like fire because they have changed color and the sun is on them.

I then share with preservice teachers that this particular child was considered a below-average reader. The week after the video was made, a team of teachers, support staff, and his parents met to discuss whether he needed reading remediation, and they were thrilled with his response because the teacher had seen him engage deeply with texts and believed that he needed support services, not only because he was having difficulty reading independently, but because he needed to be *challenged* more at the same time. This example provided the preservice teachers with an opportunity to consider how understanding more specifics about this particular student's development as well as his school experiences impacted the way he responded to a text and their understanding of his response. While this is only one example of one child, it provides an opportunity for the preservice teachers in my classroom to begin to articulate their beliefs—and surprise—about children and their capacity to engage.

This combination of understandings of childhood, learning, and responding to literature from Piaget, Vygotsky, Matthews, and Rosenblatt provides a very broad view of child and childhood, albeit far more messy and ill-defined than any individual study. Because my study is ultimately about considering the ways preservice teachers are prepared to think about children's literature in elementary classrooms, is important not just to focus on children and childhood but also to challenge assumptions about childhood by engaging with a range of theoretical perspectives. This allows for a reconsideration of the ways that children's literature functions in traditional classroom curricula. In addition, providing the teacher candidates with the opportunity to more deeply explore the ways that theory impacts teaching, choice, and children's literature is also my way of honoring their capacity to think about their own teaching in complex, multidimensional ways. I do not want to present a teacher preparation curriculum that underestimates or assumes a deficit perspective about teacher candidates.

On the surface, the concept of teacher and teaching might seem to be basic or obvious, something that anyone can understand based on their experience in K-12 schools. After all, in the U.S., most people have had weeks, months, and years of experience sitting in classrooms, watching teachers teach. Lortie (1975) asserts that those experiences as (K-12) students largely inform the ways that preservice teachers conceptualize the work of teachers. I want to consider more closely the ways preservice teachers conceptualize what it looks like to be a teacher. Another way to think about Lortie's apprenticeship of observation is to consider three specific student roles that preservice teachers have had in the past and present: 1) as students in K-12 schools; 2) as university students in teacher education coursework; and 3) as preservice teachers, developing dispositions and professional identities in teacher education placements. These roles do not exist independently of each other, but overlap and inform preservice teachers' concepts of roles and power relations. A visual representation of these overlapping roles, contexts, and typical power structures might look like this:

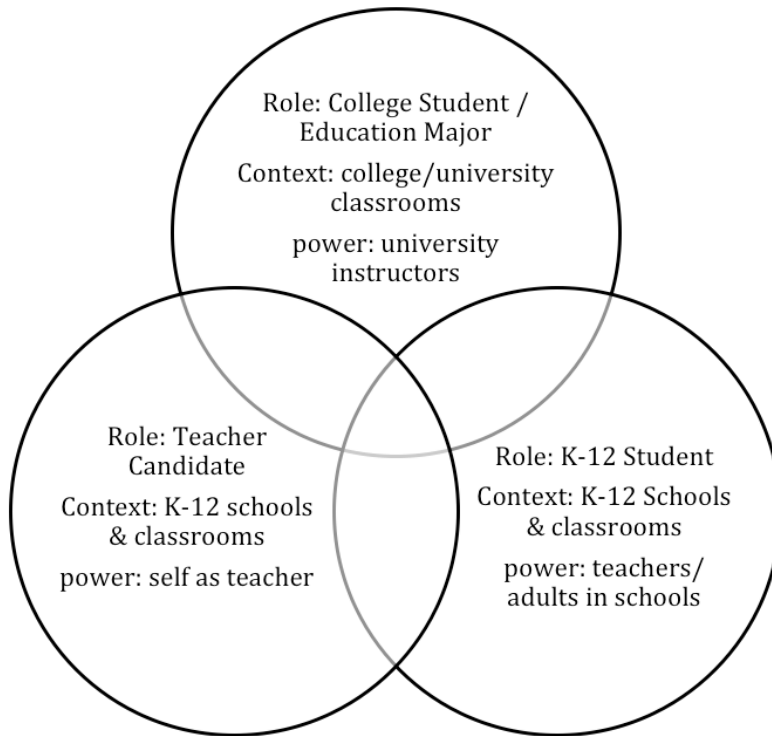


Figure 3: *Overlapping Roles, Contexts, and Powers of Preservice Teachers*

In each of these three roles and contexts, there are different perceived power relations at play, sometimes implied and sometimes explicit. For example, the preservice teachers in my children’s literature courses often enact the assumption that I (as the teacher) have the answers (knowledge) about the meaning of a children’s literature book that we read. Even after discussing at length a book like *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), and determining together that there are multiple possible answers to a question, one preservice teacher in class asked me, point blank, “We decided that there are a couple of ways to look at it, but can you tell us the answer?” This comment reflects a belief that I as the instructor have the power in the interaction and that the preservice teachers (in the role of undergraduate student) lack the ability to discern the right answer in the discussion.

In senior-level language arts methods courses, I see the preservice teachers begin to switch roles where they exhibit more of a teacher stance when they are asked to write and teach a discussion-based language arts lesson plan in an actual elementary classroom. The assignment

states that one of the goals is for the preservice teachers to facilitate interactive discussion based on a piece of children's literature. The concept of interactive discussion is explained in counterpoint to *IRE* (initiate-respond-evaluate) interactions (often mislabeled by preservice teachers as interactive discussions) because when the teacher determines questions and acceptable responses, she also affirms correct and incorrect responses. Throughout this type of discussion, the teacher responses are almost entirely evaluative in terms of what she has determined to be correct. The predetermined answers and evaluative nature of the discussion contribute to perceived power of the teacher in this relationship. In both of these examples, the preservice teacher's assumption of power informs the interactions between teacher and student.

I will consider the ways the different disciplinary perspectives of children's literature offer ways to reconceptualize ideas of power relations in classrooms related to teachers, students, and reading/responding to children's literature.

Revisiting the example from the beginning of this chapter:

*A preservice teacher designs a lesson plan for her second grade students. She identifies it as a literature-based discussion lesson plan as part of an author study of Kevin Henkes. For this particular lesson, the preservice teacher has selected the book Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse (1996). Her reasons for selecting this book are: the book includes Henkes's recognizable mouse characters, which her students like; the book has a good message; the book has a character that changes; and there is one clear author message. There were two lesson objectives: 1) students will identify if the main character has changed and provide evidence from the text and 2) students will identify the author's message.*

*Further in the lesson plan, following a review of the plot with students, the preservice teacher wrote out the following dialogue (PST= preservice teacher, S = students)*

*PST: Now let's decide if Lilly's character changed, and if so WHY she changed. Talk about it for a minute with your partner.*

*PST: Let's come back together! Did she change from the beginning to the end of the story? How?*

*S: Yes, she did change! <Students give examples of how she changed.>*

*PST: Good! But how do you know she changed? Remember we need evidence from the text for all of our thinking!*

*S: <Students give evidence.>*

*PST: Do we all agree this is why she changed?*

*PST & S continue until teacher and students form an accurate sentence explaining how character changed.*

As I continued to read and discuss the lesson plan with the preservice teacher, it became clear that while she was asking what she believed to be open-ended questions, ultimately she wanted the students all to come to the same conclusion about Lilly's character, namely that the character had in fact changed. She believed it was part of her role as the teacher to predetermine the right answer. She asked me, "If I don't know the answer, then how will I know if they understand the character properly?"

The preservice teacher shared her belief that by allowing the students to determine the evidence to support that Lilly's character had indeed changed (because she didn't have specific evidence written in her plan) this was an open-ended lesson plan. The goal of the lesson plan



was for students share their answers and evidence from the book for support; however, the expectation was that all of the students would say that the character has changed. In other words, before even teaching the lesson, the preservice teacher's perception of the goal of reading a book and having a discussion was for her to teach the students what they did not know. While an important component of teacher preparation is for preservice teachers to learn about assessment (e.g. different types, when to use, how to assess, etc.); their apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) in regards to their own experiences with assessment seems to push them towards more summative cut and dry" assessments. In the children's literature and literacy methods courses that I teach, assessments are almost entirely formative and include open-ended discussions, response papers, lesson plans, observation notes, and reflections.

It was always notable to me that regardless whether the preservice teachers were filling the role of undergraduate student in a college course discussing *The Arrival* or filling the role of teacher leading a discussion of *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* with second graders, the preservice teachers' questions, answers, and responses reflected a belief that the role of the teacher included having knowledge about the book and a capacity to respond to the book that students did not have.

Some examples of statements from preservice teachers that are evidence of this belief are:

- "If I ask them what they think and why they think it, they won't know what to do, they are only 2<sup>nd</sup> graders!"
- "It's my job as the teacher to model thinking aloud for them. Aren't you always telling us to be more explicit? That's what I'm trying to do—explain everything to them so that they will know how to do it."

- “You are the teacher, and I’ve never read a book with no words in it before, how will I know if I’m doing it right if you don’t tell me or give me an example?”

These statements and the lesson plan scenario from earlier in the chapter reflect the preservice teachers’ belief that she needs to predetermine the singular meaning of the story as part of lesson planning prior to having a discussion with students. The preservice teacher’s focus on ensuring that she provide everything needed for the children to understand the book reflects Matthews’s concerns that adults miss out on what children can do without adult support.

This presumption that students/children are not able to respond to literature (particularly if it is perceived by preservice teachers as complex) without being taught how is one that has been repeated in every education course I have taught over the past five years. Whether the course is a children’s literature course or language arts methods course, preservice teachers reflect a perception that the teacher needs to know *the* meaning if she is going to teach it to students. They enact this not only in the role of preservice teachers (developing in the role of teacher) but also in the role of preservice teacher (also as an undergraduate student) in a children’s literature course wanting me (as I fill the role of teacher) to tell them the answer to questions about a book. In this scenario, the likelihood of students (whether child-aged, undergrad, or otherwise) revealing more than the teacher felt they were capable of, once the correct answer was revealed, is small. There would be little reason to continue a discussion. This self-perpetuating view of the student being dependent on the teacher to determine the right answer by having it supplied by a more knowledgeable other is in conflict with Matthews’s notions that children are capable of more than adults think.

Thus, it is crucial to employ this philosophical stance as a way to consider aspects of children’s literature in literacy, libraries, and literature in order to explicate opportunities for

preservice teachers (in the role of student) to experience learning about literature from a perspective where teacher and student are both capable of a variety of responses. This perspective also provides an explicit way to consider implied power relationships between teachers and students, particularly as based in the preservice teachers' own prior experiences.

When teacher and child readers of a text enter a conversation with a presumption of equality in the interaction, then the age and reading level of the reader can become insignificant to that particular discussion. This is not to say that it becomes irrelevant in every situation, either in or out of school. What is important is the notion that the age of the reader does not impact that reader's capacity to make meaning or understanding when reading *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* or *The Arrival*.

These theories inform my current pedagogical decisions about how to teach preservice teachers how to read, respond, and consider children's literature in their own imagined classrooms. I was introduced to Rosenblatt's transactional theory, which provides these preservice teachers with a way to express and explore their personal response to the literature. Nodelman and Reimer (2003) provided insight into asking preservice teachers to consider their assumptions about children as readers and then reflect on how those assumptions inform their response. Their textbook *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* is a focal text for this study and will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, while Rosenblatt, and Nodelman and Reimer helped me to shape pedagogy specific to the children's literature class, it was the experience of teaching a senior level language arts methods course that solidified the need for preservice teachers to be offered a different and more nuanced way to envision children. As mentioned earlier, the sequence of courses in this particular program is such that preservice teachers can enroll in the required children's literature

course prior to being accepted into the college of education program. This means that most preservice teachers complete their children's literature coursework prior to or at the very beginning of the methods courses. The focus of this senior level course is teaching and learning in the English language arts. One of the main assignments is to design and enact a lesson plan in their elementary classroom placement that is an interactive discussion centered on a text; this is a first experience for many preservice teachers. The assignment description states:

This should be a lesson where you work *on facilitating interactive dialogue for the purpose of helping children understand, interpret and appreciate a selection of children's literature or poetry*. This can be an opportunity to engage in and practice open-ended talk about literature, or one where you explicitly try to teach the students about the process of responding to and interpreting literature. In either case, the emphasis in the lesson will be on engaging the children in an *interpretive discussion*, where they will share insights, work to convince one another of the value of their insights, and consider others' ideas. The point of the discussion will be to go beyond comprehension of the piece to interpretation and critical thinking. (TE402, Lesson Plan Assignment Description, original bold and italics)

Preservice teachers are instructed to be strategic and intentional in their text selection, looking for a text that “generates deep thinking, has multiple layers of meaning, has gaps for readers to fill, and has appeal for [their] specific classroom” and “meets criteria for high quality literature that [they] learned about in TE348” (quoted text from powerpoint slides created to present the project to preservice teachers).

I was surprised that many of the preservice teachers' text selections and lesson plan designs reflected very narrow ways of thinking about the literature and the capacity of children to respond independently and authentically. While I knew that these preservice teachers had experienced rich, complex texts that met these guidelines in the children's literature course, many of them were reticent to select such texts for their own lesson plans. One of the most common concerns preservice teachers made in their lesson reflections was in regards to student's ability to respond to complex texts and/or engage in a discussion where literary understandings were co-constructed. Instead of implementing the theory and experiences as readers in children's literature course, they fell back on preconceived assumptions about children and the purpose of literature in classrooms. If the teacher preparation curriculum would offer a more complex, transdisciplinary, and multidimensional approach to teaching children's literature, the intellectual capacities of the preservice teachers could be honored and engaged.

Preservice teachers can engage deeply by thinking about a book like *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007). In a children's literature class we can openly discuss a response like "Kids won't understand the complexity of this book." But engaging as readers and reflecting on assumptions has not been enough to impact these same preservice teachers' pedagogical mindsets and decision-making when it comes to the role of children's literature in their elementary classrooms.

### **Bringing Matthews's *Philosophy of Childhood* into Children's Literature in Teacher Education**

Matthews provides a complementary philosophical stance to reconceptualize the often-repeated types of literature response models that many pedagogies employ, in particular to examine and consider the role of teacher and child interacting with children's literature in an elementary classroom setting. As a teacher and researcher of children's literature, I have been

struck by the consistency and repetition of the questions and comments made by preservice teachers, practicing teachers, and adults in regards to child readers and children's literature. I have heard the following questions and phrases repeatedly at the beginning of the semester:

- What grade level would you use this book with?
- I don't think kids would understand this; it's too complicated.
- Is this book appropriate for a nine-year-old?
- If I didn't notice that in the illustrations, then I don't think that kids will.
- The pictures are not really that important, not compared to the words.

These questions and comments present a teaching challenge because the ideas they express and assumptions they perpetuate broadcast the speaker's assumptions about the limits of readers, text selection, and responses. In the six years since I began teaching children's literature and learning about teacher preparation, I've been pondering ways to help engage preservice teachers in thinking about and responding to children's literature both as readers but also as preservice teachers. As discussed previously, a reader response or transactional view of reading provides an opportunity for preservice teachers to focus on themselves as readers, but without explicitly considering the role and context of teaching and schooling, ultimately, responses to both the literature and potential children's responses are both going to be limited.

### **Gubar on Not Defining Children's Literature and Not Essentializing Childhood**

One question that comes up, not only in the courses that I teach, but more broadly in children's literature studies is, "What is children's literature?" This can and has been answered in a variety of ways that include: anything read by children, anything written with young people in mind, or anything designated so by a publisher (Gubar, 2011). If we are to believe that anything read by children is children's literature, then what about Charles Dickens and fanfiction? Using

author intention is problematic if we consider authors like Maurice Sendak and countless others who explicitly claim that they do not write for a particular audience. There are also those books, like *Enders Game* (Card, 1985), *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005), and *The Curious Incident of the Dog In the Nighttime* (Haddon, 2003), which were originally written with an adult audience in mind but came to either be embraced by or marketed towards a younger audience. Using publisher designation brings in a host of concerns that stem from the fact that publishers need to consider a host of factors including purchasing power (adults), marketability, and profit margins.

Gubar identifies those who attempt to answer this question as *definers* and also identifies that there is a significant contingency of scholars who are *non-definers*: those who carry on with their work of analyzing without the confines of a definition. She contends that the process of trying to determine a definition is actually more limiting than it is liberating, particularly considering that “the idea that all children’s texts share even a single trait that remains the same over time and across cultures is untenable” (Gubar, 2011, p. 210). This is not to say that there should not be conversations about similarities and differences across specific titles, but that there should be caution in attempting to create and rely on a definitive description, as noted by Gubar here: “In their drive to generalize, definers rely too heavily on authorial intention and often end up essentializing children or adults” (p. 211).

This notion of essentializing both children and adults is one that is evident in my experiences working with preservice teachers. In a desire to become clear and knowledgeable about the teaching profession and the children they will teach, the preservice teachers I work with often exhibit a tendency to essentialize not only the children’s and adolescent literature that we study together, but also children, adults, and more specifically elementary teachers. For example, as one preservice teacher said:

True, there is no eternal essence that all children share—not even youth. But it does not follow that the designation child has no meaning, that we cannot know anything about the lives, practices, and discourses of individual children from different times and places. . . . We can continually strive to characterize our subject in ways that acknowledge its messiness and diversity.

It is exactly this messiness and diversity that is lost if we seek to define childhood in a singular way. In this example, the preservice teacher shows the capacity to engage in complex thinking about the meaning of child. Gubar argues for an acknowledgement of the complexity by engaging with Wittgenstein's family resemblance. Using children's theater to illustrate the benefits of exploring and comparing while acknowledging that the messy nature of a topic like children's literature or children's theater is in fact one of the identifiable characteristics.

Because this study focuses on reconceptualizing the ways disciplinary understanding can broaden the ways preservice teachers consider how, why, and what we read, Gubar's conceptualizations frame the ways I approach, read, and analyze the key texts presented here as well.

### **Philosophy of Childhood and Not Defining**

Gubar's (2011) desire to acknowledge the complexity of children's literature by not defining it has helped shaped my pedagogical thinking and motives. In particular, I see connections between her acknowledgement of the messiness of it along with the ways that Matthews's *Philosophy of Childhood* encourages as a way to "give up adult pretensions to know" (1994, p. 13) about childhood, children, and their thinking. It is these two concepts that helped me to extend my own thinking and eventually the thinking of the preservice teachers about children's literature, our own responses, and the roles it can play in elementary classrooms.



These two authors' willingness to acknowledge messiness and the inherent lack of definition also aligns with the act of teaching itself. Although difficult to acknowledge for teachers across a range of experience, as much as we plan and prepare: enacting lesson plans with our actual students often does not resemble either what was in our head or on paper.

I am not advocating for chaos or a lack of planning on the part of the teacher. Having knowledge and understanding of the cognitive components of reading and ways that readers develop is important information. But before I explore how this is defined, I want to acknowledge that cognitive knowledge can be combined with more open ways of thinking about literacy. In the next chapter, I review key aspects of the ways those in literacy and education think about children's literature and reading.

### Chapter 3: Teacher as Reading Coach

The focus of this chapter is to examine some affordances of a developmental reading perspective in a children's literature course with preservice teachers. To reiterate, a developmental reading perspective refers to the overview of cognitive development, stage development, and emergent literacy development (Tracey and Morrow, 2012) presented in chapter one. In order to respond, analyze, understand, or process a children's literature text, the reader needs to be able to make sense of what they are reading. This particular teacher role---the teacher as developmental reading coach, provides an opportunity to be explicit with readers about the ways they are making sense of a text. More specifically, for the purposes of this study, I'll examine the approaches a teacher can employ in order to scaffold the ways readers make sense of text from a cognitive perspective as well as from a sociocultural perspective.

Martinez and McGee's (2000) retrospective of the role of children's literature and reading instruction in U.S. education revealed that literature shifted away from the sidelines and assumed a much more central role in classroom instruction. For example, until the 1980s, reading was typically taught using text designed specifically *for* reading instruction, like *Dick and Jane* (cite) and other basal reading series. There is a wide range of ways that children's literature is used in elementary classrooms today, including as reading instruction, as support material for other content areas (e.g. social studies or science), as a fact-learning tool, or "as a free time activity" (Short, 2011, p. 50).

Children's literature scholars who situate themselves in education are often connected to literacy studies as a branch of teacher education.<sup>3</sup> Literacy as a concept is extremely broad and

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<sup>3</sup> Other branches include content areas that are taught in K-12 schools such as social studies, science, math, music, languages, and art.

can have different theoretical groundings. For example, the 2006 UNESCO report on education divides literacy into “four discrete understandings” (p. 148): literacy as a set of skills, literacy as applied practiced and situated, literacy as a learning process, and literacy as a text. This description is helpful when considering literacy and children’s literature as components of preservice teacher preparation, for it informs how the field might conceptualize the teacher as a developmental reading coach. Because teachers at all levels are responsible for helping students learn how to do literacy as both skill and process, instructing teachers in how to support this skill and process development is an essential component of teacher preparation. Scholarship that considers the ways that children’s literature contributes to literacy is therefore situated within the broader context of education.<sup>4</sup>

Some children’s literature scholars who are situated in literacy or education are also interested in the intersection between children and books (not unlike some of their colleagues in library science). Scholars in education can also be interested in both the individual child and the classroom connections between children, teacher and curricula. Additionally, the mediation of adults and peers within the reading experience are key aspects of interest. An example of this particular area of focus can be seen in the questions posed by literacy scholars (Enciso, Coats, Jenkins, & Wolf, 2008) about *The Watsons Go To Birmingham – 1963*, which include, “What is challenging about the book, for this particular group of children, from the standpoint of its literary qualities, themes, and cultural reference? And, what does the teacher or adult in the setting need to know to mediate these challenges?” (p. 226). Connections disciplinary ways of ways of thinking about children’s literature from English are evident in these questions, with the

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<sup>4</sup> While scholarship from other branches of teacher education may include children’s literature, it is typically approached as a tool to deliver content rather than approached as literature itself.

focus on literary qualities and themes, though the connection here is to the cultural references of the reader and/or classroom of readers.

Teacher as reading coach includes both developmental and sociocultural perspectives. A focus on the developmental perspective of reading can be seen in the opening sections of textbooks often used in undergraduate education courses in children's literature such as *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* (Keifer & Huck, 2010), Cullinan, Galda and Sipe's *Literature and the Child* (2009) and *The Joy of Children's Literature* (Johnson, 2010). Each of these textbooks begins with chapters outlining connections between child development and literacy. For example, since the first edition of *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature*, the first chapter has included a table titled *Ages and Stages*. The table, "describes some characteristic growth patterns, suggests implications for selection and use of books, and provides examples of suitable books for that particular stage of development" (Huck and Young, 1961, p. 8) and a version of it has been included in every version of the textbook including the tenth edition published in 2010. It is important for preservice teachers to understand the role of teacher as development reading coach, especially as they are learning about children's literature as a way to consider reading skills and learning how young readers might apply and practice those skills when engaging with children's literature texts.

Elementary teacher preparation typically includes aspects of both developmental and sociocultural perspectives of reading as part of foundations and/or methods coursework. Specifically considering these perspectives in a children's literature course offers the opportunity to experience the application and practice of theoretical concepts as readers. While it is indeed imperative for preservice teachers to interact with young readers and children's literature (Wolf, Carey, and Mieras, 1996), it is also crucial for them to consider their own reading experiences as

they develop understandings of the role of teacher as coach. This perspective also provides preservice teachers with the opportunity to understand the distinct literary elements, such as plot, character, theme, use of language and an overall sense of narrative, related reading skills, such as comprehension, sequence, main ideas, and vocabulary (Short, 2011). Understanding both literary elements and literacy skills supports Kathy Short's notion that reading and experiencing literature as literature does not need to happen *instead of* explicit strategy or subject instruction but rather *in addition to* those frameworks (2011).

Now that I have described some of the foundations of teacher as reading coach, I will describe in more detail the concepts of reading skills and processes, comprehension, genre, and reading levels. To begin, I will draw on my own experience as a children's literature teacher educator to illustrate how a Teacher as Development Coach might work with readers.

### **Teaching Story: *Grandpa Green***

During a whole class read aloud of the book *Grandpa Green* by Lane Smith (2011), I stopped partway through the book and asked preservice teachers, "Who is the narrator?" A student raised her hand and said, "I think the narrator was the grandfather and that the young boy pictured throughout the story represented the grandfather in his younger days." Many students in the classroom nodded their heads in agreement. I then asked the class to consider what reading strategy they used to come to that conclusion. Some were puzzled, and I further explained, "In the first half of the book, the text and images do not make explicit who the boy is or who is narrating the story. I'm asking you to be metacognitive, asking you to think about your thinking, in order to articulate how you came to this conclusion."

One student said, "Well, I think I was doing that filling the gap thing that we read about, oh WAIT, we just talked about this in my reading course. I was making inferences based on the

words and the illustrations! Inferencing is a reading strategy!” I asked the student to clarify what she meant by, “that filling in the gap thing,” and she read the following quote: “Readers make sense of the minimal information on the page by understanding that it is minimal, that it leaves gaps, but that their knowledge of a context – reading strategies and a repertoire of information – can tell them how to fill in those gaps” (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, p. 54). The student also connected her thinking to the concept of inference as a comprehension as discussed in literacy methods course she was thinking. This story illustrates ways some students were working to be metacognitive readers and also make connections to understandings across coursework literacy and literary understandings.

I continued reading the book and when I got to the page with the text, “He had lots of grandchildren and one great-grandchild, me.” Hands shot up around the room. The class continued the discussion about how the text and illustrations helped them to adjust the previous inference about the narrator of the story. At the end of the discussion, I asked the class to consider how their understanding of narrator and point of view (based on the strategy of inferencing) impacted the way that they thought about the story (engaging in literary understanding). This story reflects an example of guiding preservice teachers to have a theoretical understanding of literacy skills (in this case, inference and comprehension) as well as applying and practicing a skill to inform literary understanding.

### **Reading Skills and Processes**

In *Knowledge to Support the Teaching of Reading* (2005), Snow, Griffin, and Burns draw attention to the idea that “literacy is a secondary system, dependent on language as the primary system” (p. 17). They draw on the work of Scarborough, a psychologist, to articulate the distinctions between word identification and comprehension. In order to effectively prepare

teachers to think about reading instruction, they need to understand the different components that make up the act of reading (see Figure 2). Understanding this developmental perspective of reading provides preservice teachers with the background knowledge and information for explicit strategy instruction both in isolation as well as in concert with literary knowledge and experiences with literature.

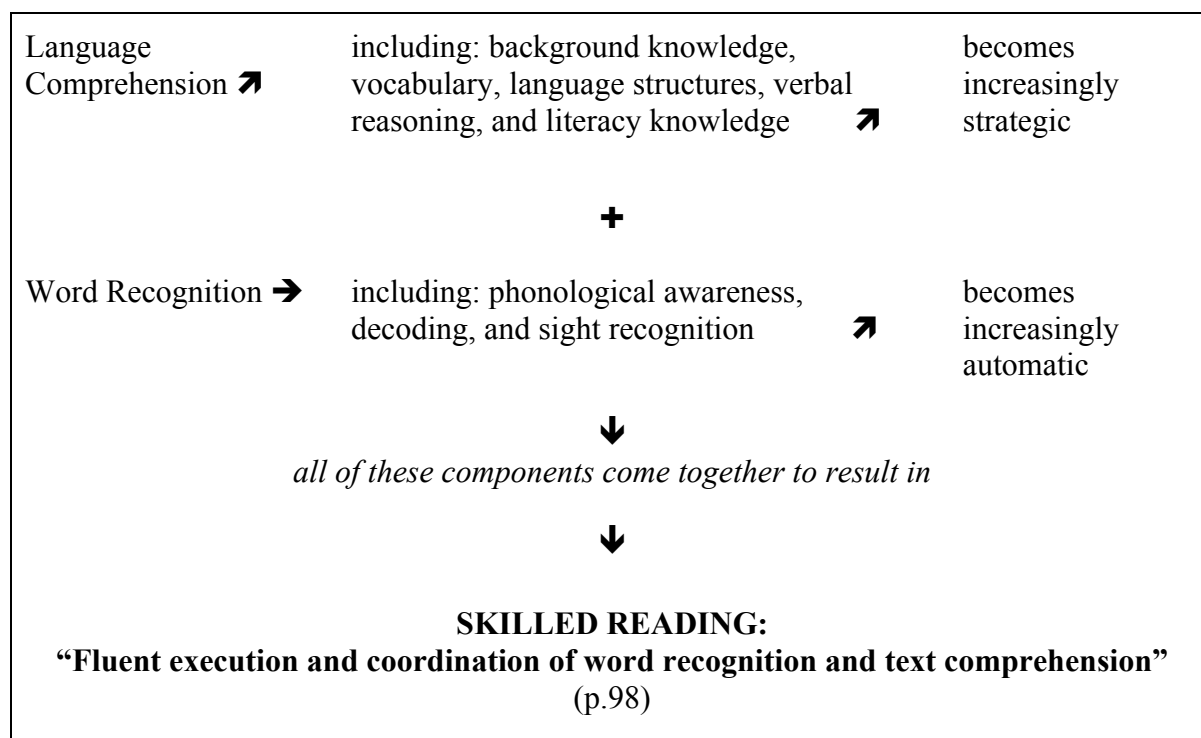


Figure 4: *Components of Skilled Reading, (Scarborough, 2001)*

A significant affordance of a developmental perspective of reading is that it delineates discrete skills and concepts that can be used to inform instruction of readers at all phases of development. Research about effective reading instruction has shown that teacher understanding of these skills that is used to determine and provide explicit instruction to students in elementary classroom is highly effective (Pressley, Rankin and Yokoi, 1996; Snow, Griffin and Burns, 2007).

The understanding of theory, language, and concepts about reading development also affords insight that can inform instructional decisions in classrooms. For instance, if a child in a classroom has high comprehension when read to, but not when independently reading, his teacher might want to more closely examine his decoding skills. She might use a diagnostic tool and discover that the child is having difficulty with digraphs (two letters that together make one sound), and then she can plan differentiated instruction to focus on that skill.

While explicit instruction is important, as noted in the teaching example from Chapter Two, it is important not to confuse explicit instruction with knowing all the answers. It is possible to provide explicit instruction and support while still allowing children to pose interesting philosophical questions and create meaningful responses to literature. Understanding developmental ways of thinking about reading alongside Matthews's philosophy of childhood (1994) and reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1969, 1995) helps provide a theoretical foundation to support a wider range of pedagogies. Understanding and incorporating both ways of thinking about children and childhood stretches us to think differently not only about the children who are students in classrooms, but also about the literature itself.

**Comprehension.** An affordance of teacher as reading coach is insight and understanding of the inherent complexity of and the many contributing factors that are involved in comprehension. RAND Reading Study Group (2002) describes comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Reading comprehension consists of three elements: “the reader, the text, and the activity of reading. ” (RAND, 2002, p.11) all of which happens within a context that includes both physical space (classroom, home, etc.) as well as sociocultural context(s). These contexts



help to set a purpose for reading. In the RAND report, the heuristic is visually represented by the following figure:

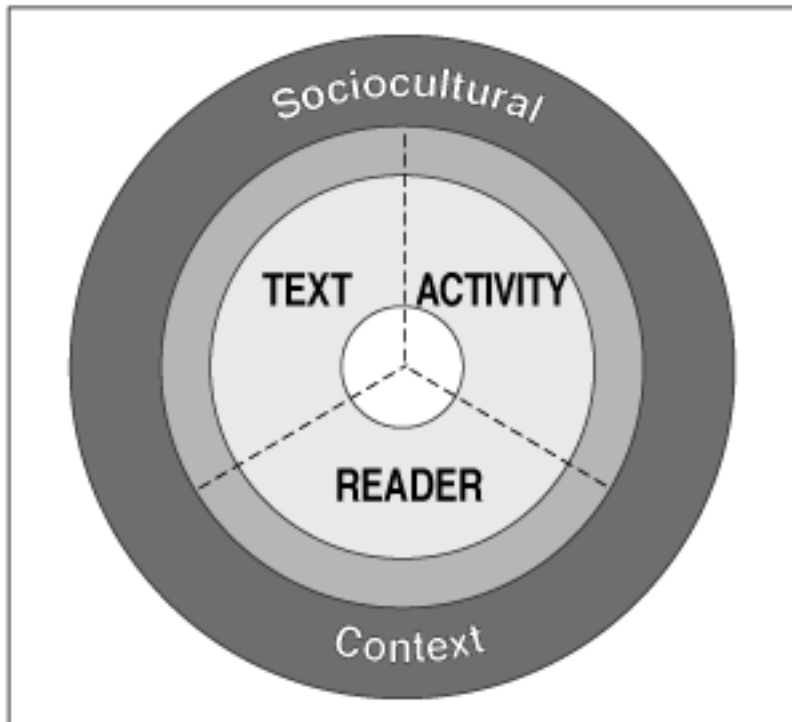


Figure 5: *RAND Reading Heuristic (2002)*

In order to understand the interrelationship of the different elements presented on the chart, it is first important to understand each element individually. The RAND study breaks down each element into unique components, which reflect the intricacies of each element of comprehension. Breaking down the element of the reader reveals the components of cognitive abilities, motivation, knowledge, and experiences. Components of the text element include exact wording of the text, idea units representing meaning, and mental models embedded in the text. While reader and text have components that are unique to them individually, there also aspects of both that are parts of activity. For example, reader engagement with text is an aspect of activity that also includes the interaction between the two elements, element one and element two, whatever they are, which resides in the interaction *between* them (as opposed to within one or the

other). In order to better understand the complexities of each individual component, I created a visual representation of the RAND heuristic that includes components of the individual elements.

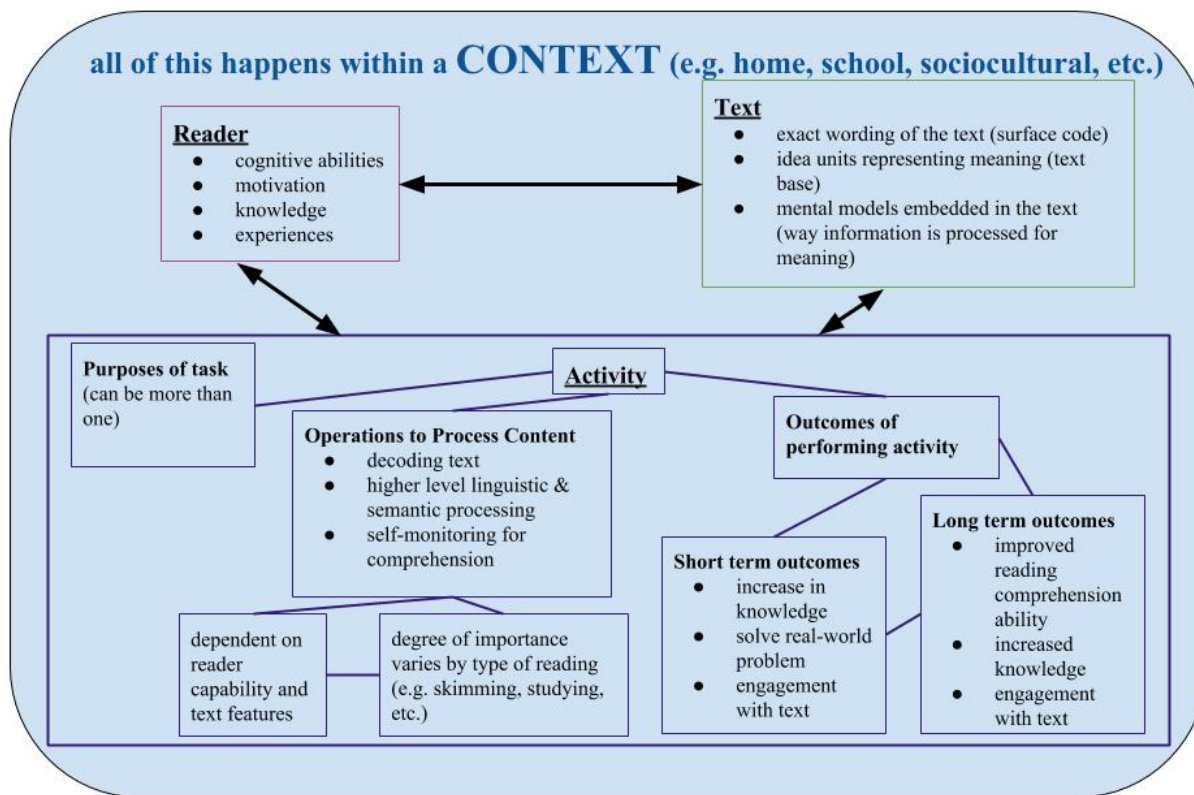


Figure 6: *Expanded Reading Heuristic based on RAND*

Creating this visual helped me consider the similarities and affordances of considering a developmental perspective of reading (using the RAND model) alongside Rosenblatt’s reader response theory. While Rosenblatt uses the language of *reader*, *text*, and *context* to consider response to literature, the RAND presentation of reader, text, and activity within context provides important language to consider cognitive abilities, textual components, and individual components of comprehension that impact readers. This includes the ways that readers make sense of literature and overlaps with interpretation in Chapter 4: Teacher as Critic. For preservice teachers in a children’s literature class, it also offers the language to articulate factors that

influence their own comprehension and the opportunity to more deeply understand that these factors are also a factor for elementary readers. Many preservice teachers have reached a level of automaticity in their own reading and comprehending that it can be challenging to think metacognitively about comprehension and their own response to literature. Explicitly studying the comprehension using a lens of teacher as coach alongside interpretation from the lens of teacher as critic (from chapter 4) offers one way to help preservice teachers expand their thinking about children's literature.

I want to explicitly acknowledge that a developmental perspective of reading and comprehension is a complex topic, and a complete review of all aspects of this perspective is beyond the scope of this work. For example, Duke & Carlisle (2011) describe comprehension as “the act of constructing meaning with oral or written text” (p. 200). It is a constructive process in which meaning resides in neither the oral or written text alone. The reader/listener creates and adjusts their mental representation of the text (Duke & Carlisle, 2011). A key understanding for preservice teachers to take away is that comprehension develops over time but that there is no one single way in which it develops, due to the various factors involved in the process.

Harvey and Goudvis distill reading as “a combination of cracking the alphabetic code to determine word and thinking about those words to construct meaning (2007, p. 13). Before the work of Durkin (1978), comprehension was primarily assessed through student answers to direct recall-type questions; there was very little explicit strategy instruction or assessment occurring in classrooms. In the current climate of assessment-heavy mandates, literal-level questions and assessments are still common. But it is crucial for preservice teachers to understand the complexities and nuances of comprehension. Yes, students need to have a literal understanding

of the text, but they also need to be able to “merge their thinking with the text and extend their thinking beyond a superficial understanding” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 14).

Understanding a developmental perspective of reading is also important because it informs understandings of strategies used by proficient readers. These strategies are crucial for preservice teachers to be able to identify as readers themselves so that they can model the strategy metacognitively and authentically for students in their future classrooms. Specific strategies that preservice teachers need to understand and identify include:

- activating background knowledge and making connections
- questioning
- making inferences
- visualizing
- determining importance, or distilling the text
- summarizing and synthesizing information, or the evolution of thought

It is through summarizing and synthesizing that interpretation happens. Harvey and Goudvis describe this process as follows: “Summarizing is about retelling the information and paraphrasing it. ... Synthesizing happens when we merge the information with our thinking and shape it into our own thoughts. ... when readers synthesize, they reach a more complete understanding” (2007, p. 19). As such, an important component of a children’s literature class for preservice teachers should be articulating developmental understandings and also considering how such understandings impact a reader’s interpretation (or synthesis) of a piece of children’s literature. Another important children’s literature concept that should be included in coursework for preservice teachers is that of genre. While genre is not unique to a developmental reading lens, considering it uniquely from this perspective provides another affordance.

**Genre.** The contemplation of genre can help readers determine what types of strategies to use as they read. Understanding the genre of a text activates prior knowledge about that genre as well as provides the reader with clues about how to read. For example, an informational text will often include text features such as headings, labels, and a glossary to provide important information along with the prose. Understanding the role of text features in non-fiction can help the reader to pay close attention to those features to learn more about the topic of the book. Like comprehension, the concept of genre is not unique to the role of teacher as coach, I will discuss it again both chapter 4 and 5 as part of teacher as critic and teacher as curator roles.

The Johnson textbook (2012), like many other children's literature textbooks written for an education-oriented audience, is organized into three main sections with the largest section divided by genre. The section is titled *The Good Books Themselves* and has chapters devoted to the following genres:

- picturebooks
- traditional literature
- modern fantasy
- realistic fiction
- historical fiction
- poetry
- nonfiction: biographies and informational books.

In this case, the genres are grouped either by content (e.g. fantasy, historical) or by format (e.g. picturebook, poetry). Johnson provides a definition of each genre as well as quality indicators, provided as a way to consider the texts more deeply. In the broadest sense, books can be divided into the genres of fiction and nonfiction. These kinds of delineations are useful because the

breakup by genre can provide useful information to the reader and allow an informed approach to the text. However, strategies and capacity for comprehension is not necessarily directly applicable from genre to genre, as demonstrated here by Johnson: “Each genre is unique and requires certain strategies for reading, so it is not safe to assume that students who are competent in one genre will have no problem mastering others” (2012, p. 10). While having an understanding of genres can inform instruction of specific reading strategies, it can also help teachers be mindful of including a range of texts in their classroom libraries and instruction. Again, can you bring this section back to the concept of Teacher as Developmental Reading Coach or Teacher as Skill and Strategy Coach?

**Teaching Story: *When You Reach Me***

One semester, an entire children’s literature class read the book *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009). The book includes time travel as a key element, putting it in the genre of fantasy/science fiction. It begins as a story that very much reads like realistic fiction. However, at the end of the story, a mystery is cleared up and it is revealed that one of the characters had traveled through time to warn his friends. A number of readers in the class conveyed a sense of confusion and discomfort when this was revealed, making comments like, “That can’t happen in real life so it doesn’t make sense in the story. It felt like there was no resolution or conclusion.” Comments like this lead to a discussion about genre and how it can set up expectations for a reader. One student firmly believed the book to be realistic fiction based on characters live in New York City (a real place) in the 1970’s, go to school, have friends, get in arguments, and do homework; all things that can and do happen in the real world. Thus, when the element of time travel was introduced as a key element of the plot, it was out of alignment with realistic fiction.

Another student in class shared that she had similar thoughts, but noticed that Miranda, the main character Miranda, frequently refers to her favorite book, *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1963). "That really stood out to me, I wasn't sure what it mean, but I read that book and knew that it was science fiction". She was able to share with her peers the way that her background knowledge about time travel from reading *A Wrinkle In Time* (L'Engle, 1963) helped her begin to question early on if there was something outside of real life that would solve the mystery. Then as a class, we went back through the book to identify hints that there were unknown forces involved in what was happening to the characters. Reframing the book as science fiction helped those students who were struggling with the way the mystery was resolved to better understand it as a cohesive part of the story and not just random.

While the information I had shared prior to reading *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009) included the fact that the book had earned a Newbery Medal, was published in the past ten years, had complex characters and storyline, I had not shared the genre. After this discussion, I realized the importance of sharing that the book crosses genres of historical fiction and science fiction. This information would have supported them, as readers, in suspending disbelief as needed. Sharing the reasons for selecting texts and the reasons we share particular information with the readers before engaging directly with the text with preservice teachers is another important way that I model pedagogical thinking about children's literature for preservice teachers. Bring this section back to the concept of Teacher as Developmental Reading Coach or Teacher as Skill and Strategy Coach.

### **Reading Levels**

While understanding the level of a book can provide useful information, particularly when considering developmental reading components, not all levels are determined in the same

way or even mean the same thing. When preservice teachers ask questions about the level of a book or what grade a book is for, they are reflecting the idea of matching book to child from a literacy perspective. *Reading level* can refer either to a reader or a text. When teachers or others talk about matching book to reader from a literacy perspective, they are often referring to matching a book level to a reader level. For example, in some classrooms, teachers have books arranged on shelves by reading level, and students are taught to select books that are at their independent level for free voluntary reading. However during a reading strategy lesson, the teacher would select a text at the reader's instructional level to help the child grow and improve as a reader. Because the idea of reading level can be applied to both reader and text, I'll examine each approach more closely, starting with the reader.

**Reader and text levels.** In terms of readers, one way to describe their level is to use the descriptors independent, instructional, and frustration. These levels are determined by assessing a student on word identification and comprehension levels of a previously unread text.

Independent reading level reflects 99 percent word identification and 90 percent comprehension, instructional level is a minimum 95 percent word identification and 75 percent comprehension, and frustration level reflects 90 percent word identification and 50 percent comprehension.

Student reading levels can also be reflected as a Lexile Level and grade level equivalents. Using the concept of reading levels in these ways can offer teachers a starting point in terms of understanding their students from a developmental reading coach perspective. As a coach, the levels can provide a starting point to learn more about what particular strategy might most help readers. For example, one student at a given level may struggle with asking questions that are supported by a genre, while another at the same level might need support with summarizing.



Text level (sometimes referred to as readability level) refers to a way to measure the difficulty of a text in terms of decoding and comprehension. There are a variety of methods to determine readability of a text. Some of the most well-known are Lexile Levels (2012), Guided Reading Level (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), Developmental Reading Level (DRA), and Accelerated Reader. Other research-based readability formulas that are less frequently found in classrooms include formulas developed by Chall and Dale (1995) and Fry (1977). Understanding how readability formulas are determined is important so that the levels are not misused or misappropriated. For the purposes of this study, I will now provide a brief explanation of Lexile (2012) and Guided Reading Levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), as they are two of the most common found in elementary classrooms at the time of this study.

**Lexile levels.** The idea behind the Lexile Framework for Reading (2012) seems simple: if we know how well a student can read and how hard a specific book is to comprehend, we can predict how well that student will likely understand the book. For example, if a reader has a Lexile measure of 600L (600 Lexile), the reader will be forecasted to comprehend approximately 75 percent of a book with the same Lexile measure (600L). When the Lexile measures and the Lexile scale were developed, the 75 percent comprehension rate was set as the point where the difference between the Lexile reader measure and the Lexile text measure is 0L. The 75 percent comprehension rate is called targeted reading. This rate is based on independent reading; if the reader receives help, the comprehension rate will increase. The target-reading rate is the point at which a reader will comprehend enough to understand the text, but also will face some reading challenges. At this point, a reader is not bored by text that is too easy, but also does not experience too much difficulty in understanding (Lexile, 2012).

Lexile levels are determined using the following factors:

- length of word and number of syllables
- length of sentence and punctuation
- length of paragraphs

The Lexile website (2012) provides reminders that while the Lexile levels do indicate likelihood of comprehension, “Lexile measures do NOT measure age-appropriateness, the book quality, the book's theme or other such characteristics of the book” (n.p.) This includes the relationship between text and images in picture books and other books with visual components.

**Guided reading levels.** Guided Reading Levels, as developed by Fountas and Pinnell (2011), are also referred to as the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) Text Level Gradient. This level is determined using a combination of the following ten factors: genre/form, text structure, content, themes and ideas, language and literacy features, sentence complexity, vocabulary, words, illustrations, and book and print features. I believe that this system of text leveling is more thorough than the Lexile (2012) approach and better represents the fact that many factors impact understanding, including illustrations and book and print features. Text levels are represented by a letter, with A as the beginning of the gradient and Z+ at the end. These levels are also grouped by grade equivalents; for example, levels E-J are listed as first grade. The Fountas and Pinnell Level Books website (<http://www.fandpleveledbooks.com/>) offers subscribers access to a database with more than 48,000 leveled titles of fiction and nonfiction titles. Teachers can match books to readers by determining a student’s instructional reading level and then teaching students to select books within their range. Teachers also use the text levels as a way to select books for small group instruction.

It is important to remember that even though readability levels can provide some information about a text, the level does not reveal specifically what was considered or why a text

is complex. Choosing to identify texts by using readability formulas also calls for an understanding that the concept of complex text is determined “by measuring two factors: challenging vocabulary and long, complex sentences” (Shanahan, Fischer, & Frey, 2012, p. ). As I’ve mentioned, I am frequently asked the question, “What level is this book?” by preservice teachers. By educating them about the various ways that reading levels can be determined in the context of a children’s literature class, preservice teachers can better understand the affordances offered by reading levels, as well as develop a cautiousness about when and how to use these levels to inform pedagogical decisions.

### **From Children’s Literature: *My Life as a Book***

In this section, I extend the illustration of developmental reading perspective by focusing on and analyzing a book of children’s literature, in this case, Janet Tashjian’s (2010) *My Life As A Book*. This was a more challenging category to select a text for due to the fact that the perspective of a teacher as a developmental reading coach is not often directly represented in texts. There were a variety of texts that feature children learning to read and others that have characters reading as secondary elements. Ultimately, I chose this text because the main character’s first-person narration provides insight into the ways that he thinks about himself as a reader. This text also illustrates the affordances of explicit comprehension strategies and metacognitive awareness of self as reader from a developmental perspective of reading and reader.

In the opening chapter of Janet Tashjian’s *My Life As A Book* (2010), readers meet protagonist Derek Fallon. Derek’s feelings about reading are emphatically pronounced in the opening sentence of the book as he declares, “I DON’T WANT TO READ THIS BOOK!” (p.1) and goes on to explain, “Ever since my teacher said I was a ‘reluctant reader,’ I spent every

waking minute avoiding my mother and her latest ideas of how I should use my time. WASTE my time is more like it” (p. 1). Because the book is narrated from Derek’s first-person point-of-view, we can’t know exactly how or why Derek’s teacher has identified him as a reluctant reader.

Some insight about what this means for Derek comes from the following passage, “My teacher, my mother, and the reading tutor—a nice woman named SATAN! —came up with a new reading system for me this year. They had me keep a list of all the vocabulary words I didn’t know” (p. 4). Considering this text from a developmental reading perspective, I infer that Derek’s teacher and reading tutor have asked him to use this new reading system as a way to focus specifically on the act of understanding vocabulary as a specific reading strategy. This approach may have been based on a reading assessment showing that vocabulary was a specific reading skill where Derek had earned a low score. By providing direct strategy instruction in this area, his teacher and reading coach are likely hoping that his vocabulary understanding will improve.

We can see the affordance that explicit vocabulary instruction offers throughout the book. Derek takes the system created for him and makes it his own by drawing each of the vocabulary words that he does not know. Using simplistic stick figures and only the word, the book itself has Derek’s drawings/definitions throughout. There are typically one, two, or three illustrated terms per double-page spread. This provides readers of Tashjian’s book with an extended way to think about vocabulary as a component of literacy, and it allows them to reframe it as one that does not necessarily have to look like a dictionary entry or only use words to describe other words. The notion of the visual component of images also allows an opportunity to consider the ways that words and images can work together; in this case Derek’s visual definitions add to the text

because the vocabulary words are integrated in context of the story, but not with traditional dictionary definitions. Because Derek's vocabulary drawings are shown throughout the book, readers can quite literally see his vocabulary understanding increase throughout the book.

On the one hand, Derek has been labeled reluctant reader and says things like, "My parents insist I use this [vocabulary] system all the time, so I usually pretend I'm a spy being tortured by Super Evildoers who force me to practice 'active reading' or be killed by a foreign assassin" (p. 5). But only three pages after his declaration "I DON'T WANT TO READ THIS BOOK!", Derek also shares with readers, "The thing is, I like to read. If everyone just left me alone with Calvin, Hobbes, Garfield, Bucky, and Satchel, I could read all day. But forcing a kid to do something as private as reading?" (p. 4). And suddenly, with that disclosure, Derek's reader identity becomes much more complex than our initial perception from that first page. "Calvin, Hobbes, Garfield, Bucky, and Satchel" are references to particular comics that Derek reads throughout the book.

Derek also discovers old newspapers in his parent's attic, taking time to read them. The newspapers tell the story of a young woman who tragically drowned in the ocean of a New England beach more than eight years prior. Derek wonders why his parents have saved the articles, and then remembers that they used to vacation in the area where the drowning occurred. One component of the plot is Derek's attempt to solve the mystery of why his parents have saved the articles. As Derek articulates his realizations, questions, and thinking, he is showing the comprehension strategies of questioning and activating prior knowledge. Through the first-person narrative, it is also clear that Derek is able to be metacognitive about himself as a reader, another strategy used by successful readers. While readers can't necessarily pinpoint Derek's reading level or specific reading test scores, we can infer that working with a reading coach and

explicit strategy instruction—as much as Derek may loathe them—has impacted him as a reader. I would also argue that Derek’s desire to read his comics and the articles in the attic are a reflection of the fact that practicing reading of any kind has helped Derek become a better reader in general.

This close look at Derek’s character provides ways to consider a development perspective of reading, specifically explicit comprehension strategies and metacognitive awareness of self as reader. These are only two of the affordances of preservice teachers understanding a developmental reading perspective as part of a children’s literature course. Additional key takeaways are a broad understanding of reading skills and process, a consideration of genre as it relates to comprehension, ways of thinking about text selection, and a deeper understanding of the ways reading levels are determined and can be used to inform instruction.

## Chapter 4: Teacher As Literary Critic

This chapter addresses the second of three disciplinary perspectives brought to bear on the teacher education curriculum of children's literature. The organization of this chapter is parallel to the previous chapter on literacy. In this chapter, I elaborate on the literature perspective by making reference to the following texts:

- *Looking in the Mirror: Pedagogy, Theory, and Children's Literature* (McGillis, 2006)
- *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003)
- *How to Read Literature* (Eagleton, 2013)
- *Love That Dog* (Creech, 2001)

As a doctoral student I enrolled in a seminar on English education and engaged in many conversations with colleagues who had been English teachers. I was trying to increase my own understanding of English as a disciplinary perspective. While I was enrolled in the seminar, I would nod my head in agreement when one fellow instructor commented, "Teachers think of literature only as a tool; we need to help them think about literature *as literature*." At the time, I was not confident that I understood what she meant by "literature *as literature*." The following description from Judith Langer (2011) helped me to expand my own thinking from literature as just a tool. Langer (2011) writes:

Literature as a way of thinking, rather than as a type of text—as one aspect of intelligent and literate thought that brings with it particular reasoning and problem-solving strategies. From this perspective, literary thinking has the potential to be useful in all of life's contexts, across the life span. Through literature, students learn to explore possibilities and consider options; they gain connectedness and seek vision. (p. 2).

In the children's literature course that I taught, I sought to help preservice teachers experience literature in the ways that Langer articulates so succinctly as the ability to explore possibilities and consider options as a way to better understand both the literature we read and themselves as readers. Preservice teachers enrolled in the course were asked to respond to five key texts in writing and in discussion. Grounded in reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1969), they were asked to focus on their own individual responses to texts that we read along with providing evidence to support that response. Rosenblatt's theory was chosen as a way to be explicit with preservice teachers that although the literature we read was labeled as children's literature or young adult literature, what mattered was their own experiences as a reader in making meaning from and understanding a text.

Although explicitly asked to focus on their personal response, I was puzzled that almost all responses referred to either "the/a reader" or "children." As a way to focus on their own response, I explicitly asked the preservice teachers to use first person pronouns in their both written and spoken responses. It was not uncommon to hear comments such as, "The reader may be confused by the man Jack and what he is doing" (referring to *The Graveyard Book*, (Gaiman, 2008). When I inquired about the use of "the/a reader," the most common response was "that is how I was taught to write about literature in high school." I was particularly concerned with the use of "children," as in, "This book would scare children. It is about murder!" My concerns about these responses were twofold. One concern was that typically when the focus of was turned towards child readers, the preservice teachers were not focusing on their own response to the literature that we were reading and discussing. The second concern was the language about child readers that positioned all children as immature and therefore incapable of complex thought when responding to texts. Matthews's (1994) philosophy of childhood, as an alternative to deficit



and grouping perspective, helped me to shape discussions that invited preservice teachers to be mindful not only of their personal response to the texts we read, but also about the language they used about themselves and young readers.

### **Not Thinking Like Children**

Avi, an acclaimed author of more than 60 books for children and young adults, wrote, “It is impossible to be a child once one becomes an adult” (1993, p. 45), an observation that I have found particularly instructive in my own conception of children and child readers. English professors Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer (2003) also informed the ways that I’ve addressed the ways preservice teachers were referring to young readers. In their textbook, *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature* (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003), the first chapter, *How to Read this Book*, invites readers to enter into dialogue with the ideas and opinions presented in the book. They write about the importance of intentional acknowledgement that we cannot make assumptions about how readers of any age will respond, as they instruct,

Don’t tell yourself to be childlike as you read, for you aren’t and can’t be. And don’t concern yourself with whether children would understand the text or be frightened by it, for you can’t really know. Instead, let the text happen to you. (2003, p. 20)

In this way, I instruct preservice teachers to respond to the text as they currently are, rather than trying to extrapolate how a general child might respond, or how they might have responded themselves, as children.

One way Nodelman and Reimer convey the notion of dialogue is by including a brief biography for both authors and by sharing within that biography what brought them to writing the text. These biographies are an important way that the authors model the ways that their own experiences and background inform the ways that they think and write about children’s literature

and reading. Throughout the chapters, there are small textboxes labeled “explorations” that serve to continually remind readers to both read dialogically as well as to think about who they are as readers and how that positions them to agree, disagree, or question the content of the book.

Initially this move conflicted with the idea that English scholars don’t spend time on the interaction between book and reader, as I noted at the beginning of this dissertation. However, as I reflected on the fact that this is a textbook and instructional tool, the move of asking readers to think about themselves explicitly is ultimately is about the development of more critical readers, both of Nodelman and Reimer’s (2003) textbook as well as everything else that we might read.

The rhetorical instructions to read dialogically and with awareness of self in this textbook are unique in comparison with many other children’s literature textbooks, which are often written from the education or library science perspective for use in certification programs. Those textbooks are typically arranged by genre and include brief information about developmental instruction (see Table 4).

Table 4: *Chapter Titles from Children’s Literature Textbooks*

|   | Literature approach  | Literacy approach  | Libraries approach  |
|---|--|--|---|
|   | <i>The Pleasures of Children’s Literature</i><br>(Nodelman & Reimer, 2003) | <i>The Joy of Children’s Literature</i><br>(Johnson, 2012) | <i>Children’s Literature in Action</i><br>(Vardell, 2008) |
| 1 | <i>How to Read this Book</i>   | <i>The Books: Children’s Literature</i>                    | <i>An Introduction to Children and Their Literature</i>   |
| 2 | <i>How to Read Children’s Literature</i>                                   | <i>How Children Respond to Literature</i>                  | <i>Picture Books</i>                                      |
| 3 | <i>Teaching Children’s Literature</i>                                      | <i>Literacy: How Children Become Good Readers</i>          | <i>Traditional Tales</i>                                  |

Table 4 (cont'd).

|    | Literature approach   | Literacy approach  | Libraries approach                                     |
|----|---|--|--|
|    | <i>The Pleasures of Children's Literature</i> (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003) | <i>The Joy of Children's Literature</i> (Johnson, 2012)                                    | <i>Children's Literature in Action</i> (Vardell, 2008) |
| 6  | <i>Children's Literature in the Marketplace</i>                         | <i>Modern Fantasy</i>  | <i>Historical Fiction</i>                              |
| 7  | <i>The World of Children's Culture</i>                                  | <i>Realistic Fiction</i>   | <i>Fantasy</i>   |
| 8  | <i>Literature and Ideology</i>  | <i>Historical Fiction</i>  | <i>Informational Books</i>                             |
| 9  | <i>Children's Literature as Repertoire</i>                              | <i>Poetry</i>  |  |
| 10 | <i>The Repertoire of Theory</i>   | <i>Nonfiction: Biographies and Informational Books</i>                                     |  |
| 11 | <i>Poetry</i>   | <i>Diverse Perspectives in Children's Literature</i>                                       |  |
| 12 | <i>Picture Books</i>  | <i>The New Literacies: The World of Online Children's Literature</i>                       |  |
| 13 | <i>Fairy Tales and Myths</i>  | <i>Reading to and with Children: Reading Aloud, Shared and Guided Reading, and Writing</i> |  |
| 14 |   | <i>Reading by Children: Independent Reading and Writing and Literature Circles</i>         |  |

As the chart shows, the textbooks I chose to represent literacy and library ways of thinking have the bulk of the pages dedicated to reviewing genres. These chapters (and others in similar books) typically present genre definitions, descriptors, and subgenres followed by multiple examples. In contrast, while the literature textbook does include three chapters about genres, they are at the end of the book, after the majority of the chapters address topics of

literary, reading, the culture of childhood and childhood, and theory. As stated in the title, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003), the authors are explicit about the fact that children's literature is primarily *literature*:

[W]hile we concentrate on the ways in which children's literature is distinct from other kinds, we do so in the belief that differences are less significant than the similarities, that the pleasures of children's literature are essentially the pleasures of all literature.

(Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, p.22)

When working with preservice teachers, what I came to focus on when reading children's literature was the importance of focusing on the preservice teacher's own response to the texts that we read, regardless of the label. That is, I asked them not to pretend they were children, but rather to read the book from the perspective of the adults they were. This was an objective that I was diligent about at the beginning of the semester, in order to help the preservice teachers think of the literature as something more than a tool or as entertainment. If the preservice teachers could read the books from the perspective of adult readers, then they would be in a position to experience the children's literature books as literature. In addition, when preservice teachers read the children's literature books from their own adult perspectives, then their reading experiences would not be filtered by their preconceptions about what they assume about who children are and how children read.

In addition to making generalizations about children, comprehension was another common topic that preservice teachers continually brought into question when they were thinking from the perspective of literacy. Particularly for those who were simultaneously enrolled in a literacy methods course, there was a desire to match what they were learning about reading and comprehension from a literacy perspective with what we were reading in the

children's literature class. As I continued to read, question, and better understand ways of thinking about children's literature, I noticed that the preservice teachers were often using the phrases comprehension and interpretation interchangeably, as though the terms were synonyms. I realized that I needed to provide explicit instruction and scaffolding regarding reading for interpretation.

As noted in Chapter 1, there are different ways to think about literacy development (including comprehension). Both cognitive development theories like Piaget's and stage development theory (Tracey and Morrow, 2012) are important ways to frame the ways that children become proficient readers and frame how to think about the complexity of reading in general. In the previous chapter I focused specifically on the concept of comprehension in relation to literacy. In this chapter, I do the same with interpretation in relation to literature. This is important not only to understand each concept in isolation but also to understand similarities, differences, and overlaps between comprehension and interpretation.

### **Literary Interpretation**

"Interpretation draws on a bundle of moral, social, and emotional concepts. An interpretation is not merely a reaction to the text, but it is also the intersection of aspects of the text with mediating ideas, or lenses, available in the 'common sense' of the culture. The interpreting habit of mind continually taps this well of abstract, reflective lessons from life and literature" (Bomer & Bomer, 2001, p. 27 as cited in Cherry-Paul & Johansen, p. 18).

The preservice teachers in my classes needed to begin by understanding that interpretation is about a consciousness and mindfulness on the part of the reader. Some believe that interpretation happens almost magically or almost automatically; either that or it is an innate ability that readers either do or do not have. This can look Nodelman (1987) notes that the

undergraduates in his children's literature classes begin the semester thinking that responding to literature in the ways that he does as an English professor is a capacity that a person either does or does not have. However, this is untrue; this way of thinking is reflective of a skill-based understanding of interpretation and response to children's (or any type) of literature. Nodelman shares that one of the main objectives of his children's literature course is to convey that reading for pleasure is a skill that can be learned, that "an appreciation of literature is to a great extent a learned ability—that we cannot expect children to be able to understand and enjoy aspects of literature that we have not taught them *how* to understand and enjoy" (1987, p.114). He asserts that "their own ability [the students] to arrive at my kinds of perceptions persuades them that their own kind of reading is what people automatically and naturally do until they come to college and have some smartass intellectual tell them that it's wrong" (p. 114).

Thinking of literary interpretation as a habit of mind that can be learned (and also taught) is important to consider regardless of the label of "children" as a limitation factor. In terms of a preservice teacher learning about children's literature, being explicit about interpretation as a learned way of reading provides a lens for them to consider the way that they each respond to literature. It also provides an opportunity to make an explicit connection to the role of teacher as coach and comprehension. By making distinctions about the two concepts as well as identifying similarities, it helped both the preservice teachers and myself provide more specific language about metacognitive processes and responses to children's literature texts. When taken into consideration alongside Matthews (1994), this understanding of interpretation as a skill that can be taught and learned helps to stretch thinking about the ways that children could respond to literature as well as the ways that literature can be used in classrooms.

The idea of interpretation, in general, is a focus on making meaning from the examination of how the language of a text works. In the children's literature classes that I have taught, preservice teachers often confused interpretation and comprehension, or conflated them as if they were the same thing. The ways that they would talk about and use the term comprehension reflected a more simplistic perspective than the RAND or NAEP study I referenced in Chapter 3. While those definitions include interpretation as a component of comprehension (along with motivation, prior knowledge, and cognitive abilities), it was more common in class for preservice teachers to refer to comprehension as basic construction of meaning. Book reports that summarize events and outline important characters are an example of a school assignment that is more focused on comprehension than interpretation. Confusion about interpretation often became most evident when it came time to write and submit the first paper in response to a commonly read text. Inevitably there were conversations that went something like this:

*Preservice Teacher: I don't understand what I'm supposed to write in this paper if you don't want me to summarize the book.*

*Me (Instructor): I want you to tell me what you think and why you think it using evidence from the text for support.*

*Preservice Teacher: But how will you know if I've read the book, if I don't do that?*

*That's how I've always written papers about books, by retelling it and explaining the author's intent or whatever else the teacher told me to do.*

The more that I had these conversations with preservice teachers, the more the context of their schooling emerged as a common experience that preservice teachers referenced. Eagleton notes, "In most practical settings, we do not have much of a choice over meaning. It tends to be determined by the setting itself" (2013, p. 118). I want to be clear that I am not claiming that

school is the only reason that led these preservice teachers to struggle with writing (and thinking) about interpretation instead of comprehension. However it was a repeated pattern that preservice teachers believed that their role as an undergraduate student was to somehow show me (as their teacher) that they had read and understood the book. This was complicated by their perception of children's literature texts as simple and entertaining.

Works of literature are “inherently open ended, which is one reason why they can be subject to a whole range of interpretations” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 118). It is this very range of interpretations that can seem at odds with the notion of comprehension, which is intended to show one correct answer. As an instructor, I chose to model my own interpretations using a think-aloud strategy with a picture book. I found it important not to model using the text that the preservice teachers would be writing about for class, otherwise they had a tendency to compare their own interpretation with mine, sometimes stating, “I did it wrong” if they hadn't come to the same interpretations that I had.

### **Teaching Story: Co-teaching**

An example of modeling my thinking about interpretation came during a class that I was co-teaching with a children's literature colleague. This particular section of students was having great difficulty shifting their responses from comprehension or *show what you know* to interpretation as a way to examine how the text works and what from my experience informed my understanding. During a read aloud of Willems's *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (2003), we stopped and asked each other questions. Part of the discussion would have sounded something like this:

*(After reading the first few pages)*

*Laura: Kristin, who is the main character in this book?*



*Kristin: The main character of this book is obviously Pigeon. There is also the bus driver, but he isn't really a main character.*

*Laura: Yes, the Pigeon is the main character, good job.*

*(After reading a few more pages)*

*Kristin: Laura, what are you thinking so far? What do you notice?*

*Laura: I think it's interesting that the Pigeon is actually talking to the reader. It really draws me into the story and makes me feel a part of it. The double page spread with eight panels is really funny. It reminds me of when my son wants something so bad that he just keeps arguing in any way possible. The panels give it the rhythm that we have when he keeps asking and I keep saying no.*

Laura (co-teacher) and I were very explicitly asking questions to reflect comprehension or interpretation. We continued reading the book aloud, and we asked the class to respond to questions followed by a class discussion. During discussion, we asked the preservice teachers to consider the questions that we asked as well as the responses those questions elicited. As the discussion progressed, we used the language of comprehension and interpretation explicitly.

This discussion was key in helping the students to become aware of the ways that comprehension and interpretation inform each other but are also unique. Explicitly modeling the different ways to talk about our responses to the book, using language of literary and design elements, helped the preservice teachers become more metacognitive about the different ways to respond to a book. It also helped them begin to see the ways that they could each have an individual interpretation and support it with the text and their experiences.

Discussing our responses as a class for many books throughout the semester provided an opportunity to allow the preservice teachers to articulate what evidence supported initial thinking

as written in their papers. It allowed them to hear the ways that others responded to the book, to see that there wasn't one singular way of interpreting Meg's character in *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle, 1963) or the actions of Cecile in *One Crazy Summer* (Williams-Garcia, 2010). These discussions were crucial in helping to understand and experience interpretation that was grounded in the language on the page—whether literal or figurative. Reader response theory also proved to be useful as a way for everyone in the class to consider how their prior experiences may have informed their interpretation. In these ways, the preservice teachers began to learn about how interpretation was one way to appreciate literature, a way for them to experience and enhance the appreciation of the text that Nodelman's students believed to be innate.

### **Literary Interpretations of Children's Literature**

Many scholars who study children's literature from the disciplinary perspective of English are interested in the ways that theoretical perspectives inform a book in larger social and cultural contexts. This is in opposition to the interaction between the text and the individual, as demonstrated by Enciso, Coats, Jenkins, and Wolf, when they write, "English professors spend almost no research time or ink investigating the interaction between books and real children" (2008, p. 222). In the discipline of English, the text serves as the primary source with scholars reading closely and deeply for understanding of how a text works. Analysis of literary elements such as plot and character provide for a deeper understanding of the ways that the author constructs the narrative of a story. Coats (in Enciso, et. al., 2008) illustrates this as she poses questions about the main character Kenny from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* (Curtis, 1995) and how he develops throughout the story asking, "What do we know about him and how do we know it? What are his contexts and is it believable that his character would develop in

those contexts?” (2008, p. 222). Exploring these questions involves closely examining the text as well as considering other cultural references that help provide insight.

Rosenblatt’s (1994) conceptualizations of efferent and aesthetic reading provide important insight and theoretical understandings for preservice teachers to consider different ways of reading. An important note about Rosenblatt’s terminology is that efferent and aesthetic reading are not either/or ways to read, but a spectrum. The goal in efferent reading is to take away or gain information. In efferent reading, “[t]he reader’s attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 23).

Residual/informational reading tends to be the type of reading associated with schooling.

Aesthetic reading on the contrary is the idea that readers are engaged in the experience of reading for itself: “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 25). It is critical for preservice teachers to experience aesthetic reading as part of their children’s literature coursework to help them further distinguish different ways to read and engage with text.

Applegate, et al. (2014) note:

If the corpus of research on reading habits and attitudes is even remotely accurate, large numbers of teachers and prospective teachers have never experienced the aesthetic stance in their reading. That is, they read but they tend not to see links between what they read and their private selves, or even the human condition (Applegate et. al, 2014, p. 199).

How do we prepare preservice teachers to bring the aesthetic elements of reading to their students if they themselves don’t have positive views/past experiences of that aspect of reading themselves? Responses to this question would constitute a warrant for explicitly bringing literary

aesthetics into the TE curriculum alongside other conceptions of reading and children's literature.

The goal in asking preservice teachers to experience themselves as readers is to begin to help them become self-aware about the ways that they think about reading and literature in school settings. Ultimately, this process is intended to help them add an aesthetic perspective of reading to understandings of comprehension and skills-based reading that is more aligned with Rosenblatt's efferent reading. Becoming self-aware of themselves as readers is important in order for them to begin to think more deeply about what they are reading, to move beyond a literal interpretation, and to begin considering *how* language, our experiences, and the world inform the ways that we interpret, analyze, and evaluate literature. The reading-maps activity that I ask the preservice teachers to complete at the beginning of the semester is one way for the preservice teachers to begin to consider memories or emotional connections with reading and habits of mind or mental work of reading, all the while reminding them that learning and practicing these habits of mind are important regardless whether something is defined or labeled children's literature.

While these memories are a helpful starting point, it is crucial to guide preservice teachers towards developing more nuanced ways to think about reading. It is important to clarify and scaffold aesthetic reading as a type of reading that can be intentional and learned by readers. I noticed a tendency for the use of preservice teachers to use language that presents reading as either for a specific purpose related to schooling, or as an escape, in this case reading as escape, presuming a lack of effort or mindful reading. This is similar to what McGillis (2006) labels the "enthusiastic consumer" (p. 87) or what Eagleton (2013) refers to as a "culture of instant consumption" (p. 24). I myself sometimes read as an enthusiastic consumer as a way to escape

into another world. Describing different ways of reading and considering drawbacks and affordances is important element of studying children's literature with preservice teachers in order to create awareness and understanding about when, where, and how mindful reading for interpretation differs from reading for consumption. Articulating the idea of reading for instant consumption or as enthusiastic consumer is also a way to help push against the notion that children are less than capable of complex response (Matthews, 1994). Aesthetic reading and reading for interpretation means that the reader (regardless of age) must read carefully and thoughtfully; it often means rereading passages, chapters, or entire books multiple times. Mindful reading for interpretation also pushes against assumptions about children's literature being simple, fun, and/or innocent.

One way to approach thoughtful interpretation is by introducing different theories as lenses. McGillis (2006) argues that theory can be fun, an exploration, and play, with ideas to explore possible answers to our questions. Reading with theory as a lens also helps to clarify the concept of reading for interpretation to examine and explore different possibilities, versus finding a single, correct answer, as she states here: "Theory is about the journey of seeking understanding but not answers" (McGillis, 2006, p. 90). Reading from this stance can allow readers of all ages to ask questions about themselves and the world around them. It can allow us to explore worlds that are nothing like our own and to reflect on what it means do so via reading text. This way of thinking about response to literature needs to be presented and scaffolded for preservice teachers to experience as readers of children's literature themselves.

Furthermore, from the English discipline perspective, teaching literature is far more than the exposure of students to literary terms and concepts. As McGillis states, "What we teach when we teach literature to children is not, then, themes and structures but rather the desire to examine,

analyze, recreate, perform, and understand the forces that shape our own lives” (2006, p. 206). If we want to prepare teachers who are able to teach literature to children in the way McGillis writes, it will help if those preservice teachers have rich, meaningful, and aesthetic experiences as readers of children’s literature themselves. When we add literary experiences to the teacher preparation curriculum, we also express our confidence in preservice teachers’ capacities to engage with literature on multiple levels at the same time. It is possible for teacher educators to scaffold these experiences for them in teacher education courses, both to provide the experiences, but also to help them begin to think about the ways that they can integrate these literary ways of thinking into their own teaching.

In the English discipline, a keen focus on the text is absolutely crucial. The age of the implied reader is important for psychologically informed approaches to literacy; however, for an English-theory informed approach, the age of the reader is less important than what and how a text is communicating to that reader. It is not unusual for adults to read children’s literature from a nostalgic perspective, drawing on romanticized visions of childhood. For example, when reading a book like *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), an adult reader may recall her own experiences reading it as a child and then try to imagine herself as a child reading it now. While this perspective is not inherently wrong or bad, it can be problematic if the adult reader never moves beyond nostalgia, particularly if that adult reader is also a preservice teacher. The preservice teachers’ tendency to essentialize the idea of childhood based on their own memories offers a very limited perspective on the concept of children and childhood. When they become teachers, there is a tendency to make text selections based on those same memories, making a decision like, “I wouldn’t read *insert title here* to my students.” The other tendency is for the preservice teachers rely on psychologically informed stage-development theories that suggest

generalizations about all children (Matthews, 1994). I reiterate that I'm not opposed to psychologically informed strategies when they are used with other ways of thinking about children and literature. I become concerned when I hear nostalgia or stage theories as the only reason for a response, text selection, or lesson plan.

A literary way of thinking about and reading children's literature affords the opportunity for preservice teachers to be conscious about separating out childhood memories and focusing instead on what the text is doing in the present. While there are those who ask questions and study the ways that children respond to books, that work is often housed in the newer discipline of Childhood Studies, and not in English departments.

Professor of Children's Literature in a school of English literature and language, Kimberly Reynolds, writes, "Most of those who work in this area [of children's literature], with the exception of some educationalists, are more concerned with what texts for children reveal about when, where, or by whom they were produced" (2011, p. 33). Reynolds also writes that because of the assumptions about audience, "ideological positions and agendas are often more overt than in texts for adults" (2011, p. 33). While there are many children's literature titles that are extremely overt in the messages and agendas they portray (e.g. *The Golden Rule* Cooper, 2007), the argument can be made that these texts also have more under the surface. When I share texts that are more complex and less overt with preservice teachers that are more complex and less overt (e.g. *Voices in the Park*, Browne 1998), I often hear phrases like, "This is too difficult or sophisticated for children." Again Matthews's (1994) philosophy for children aligns with the idea of teacher as literary critic, and allows us to consider that if we share more complex books with children and allow them to space to share their thoughts with us, we may gain insight about children and about the text. Similarly, if we add more complex layers to the teacher education

curriculum, we gain insight about preservice teachers. In the following sections, I examine vigilant reading and reading with theory more closely as a way to consider how the concepts might be presented and incorporated in a children's literature course for preservice teachers.

**Vigilant reading.** I begin this section by examining more closely what Eagleton calls "vigilant readers" (2013, p.2). I start with this attention towards language because, in that order to move towards seeing a text as a whole and understanding the ways it communicates the text's agenda, in McGillis's (2006) words, both explicitly and implicitly, "we need to be able to see *how* it communicates this agenda and to see the *how* of textuality is to give attention to matters of form in order to reach matters of content" (p. 95). It is by examining elements of text and form then, that we are able to more closely interpret using theory.

When I teach children's literature courses, one course objective is for preservice teachers to understand that nothing in a book is an accident. This is true of language as well as of color, paper type, layout, illustration, endpapers, and more.<sup>5</sup> Taking time to specifically focus on the language is crucial for a number of reasons. Hunt (1994) believes that

to suggest that *any* text is not capable of generating complex meanings (and I mean *any text*) is to misunderstand totally how language works. It is only because we are dominated by certain value systems (the canonical, the "literary," the adult, the male, the middle class . . .) that we decide not to read certain books in certain ways (p. 233).

For example, at first glance, Chris Raschka's *Yo! Yes!* (1993), with its minimal text, could appear to be simplistic, with only 34 words in the entire book, but ultimately it offers a close examination of the ways that different people understand language differently.

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<sup>5</sup> While design and illustrative elements are crucial to consider particularly with picturebooks, wordless books, and illustrated books, for the scope of this dissertation I am focusing only on textual elements. I plan to address these elements in future work related to interdisciplinary ways of thinking about children's literature.



The notion that children's literature is meant to be either entertaining or didactic (McIlhagga, 2011, LRA presentation) is one that must be explicitly acknowledged and addressed with preservice teachers. If a preservice teacher (or any reader for that matter) approaches a children's literature text with the belief that the text does not have the capacity to be complex, then that reader will never see complexity in the text. For example, if a reader approaches *Love That Dog* (Creech, 2001), believing it to be simplistic based on the fact that it is written for children, she limits her ability to see multiple complexities available to readers regardless of age.

In order to cultivate vigilant readers of the language in children's literature, teacher education coursework needs to include not only the concept of vigilant reading but also instruction and opportunity to read children's literature texts this way. The recent focus on "close reading" in the Common Core State Standards provides an opportunity for another connection to the role of teacher as coach. To say that paying attention to language is a key aspect of why we read may seem to be self-evident. How can we know what a text says without paying attention to language? An important clarification that I want to make is that attention to language is more than just a focus on what words say and mean; it is also a question of *how* the language says it. McGillis refers to the necessity of understanding "the constructedness of the textual universe" (2006, p. 91) if we hope to understand children's literature. The textual universe includes all aspects of form, content, and design of a book. Or as Eagleton (2013) describes, "tone, rhythm, narrative structure, punctuation, ambiguity—in fact everything that comes under the heading of 'form'" (p. 2). We read to be vigilant of each of the factors because the words alone on a page do not make meaning. From here forward, I'll use Eagleton's notion of vigilant reading to refer to a close attention to language and factors of form.

Eagleton's (2013) notion of vigilant reading from his (aptly named) book *How to Read Literature* provides more specific language and thinking to articulate the ways that an English-discipline perspective guides readers to focus on language and form in a mindful way. I chose this book because of the way that Eagleton articulates different aspects of literary reading, specifically: openings, character, narrative, interpretation, and value. While the focus of this study is specifically children's literature, Eagleton's book is important because it provides language that informs how children's literature instructors of preservice teachers can explicitly model teacher as literary critic.

Vigilant reading could be likened close reading, which has become a current education buzz phrase thanks to the Common Core Standards. The exact language is that students of all ages (K-12) should be learning to "undertake close, attentive reading" (National Governors Association, 2010, p. 3). The mere fact that this type of reading is part of these standards is one key reason that preservice teachers themselves need to learn how to read with careful attention to language. Vigilant reading is also important for preservice teacher educators to learn and practice to help guide them towards more critical reading, rather than reading only from a place of innocence and that of "enthusiastic consumer" (McGillis, 2006, p. 87).

By the time students arrive at college, most of them (including preservice teachers) are reading at a level of automaticity and with a goal-oriented, finish-the-assignment mentality. Children's literature instructors need not only to model vigilant reading but to provide opportunities to read that require that slowing down in order to carefully consider how the language in a text works. Assignments that target vigilant reading require readers to articulate what they think about a particular text using evidence to support that interpretation, thereby deepening the more frequent approach, as described here: "The most common mistake students

of literature make is to go straight for what the poem or novel says, setting aside the way that it says it” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 2). Creating opportunities that require paying attention to language is necessary to help scaffold preservice teachers from more simplistic retellings to more complex and nuanced interpretations.

We also read to explore and investigate the ways that language can work. Anyone who has participated in a book club or read a review that differed from their own opinion of a book knows that people respond to texts in different ways, again regardless of age. One way to examine different responses is to pay close attention to the ways that language, structures, and form impact understanding. This is crucial because unlike bus tickets or assembly directions, where language is primarily practical, when we read literarily, we are paying attention to the ways that language constitutes the experience of a text and the value it has itself (Eagleton, 2013). When reading *Love That Dog* (Creech, 2001), for example, I ask students to consider the poetic format of the novel, rather than simply considering the words.

**Reading with theory.** One key to a literary way of thinking is to focus on the language of a text. We do this in order to move towards seeing a text as a whole and to understand the ways it communicates, both explicitly and implicitly, what McGillis refers to as the text’s agenda: “We need to be able to see *how* it communicates this agenda and to see the *how* of textuality is to give attention to matters of form in order to reach matters of content” (2006, p. 95). It is by examining elements of text and form that we are able to interpret using theory, as presented here:

Self-consciousness about what we are doing; this is theory. Sounds simple. But of course such self-consciousness is neither simple nor easy. The resistance to theory we

sometimes meet in the classroom stems from an ingrained notion that literary activity ought to be natural, fun, and self-evident. (McGillis, 2006, p. 89)

One thing that I think is helpful about the way that McGillis writes about theory is that he writes about it from a panoramic view (versus close up) as a way to help understand what the idea of theory provides to readers. There are of course a number of specific theoretical lenses that a reader can apply to a work, such as reader-response, feminist, Marxist, or historical; however, “the application of theory does not have to be consciously the application of one ‘ism’ or another to that which we read” (2006, p. 101).

*The Giving Tree* (Silverstein, 1964) is one text that I share with preservice teachers to model reading with a theoretical lens or point of view. Some love the book, interpreting it as a story about the selflessness of parenting and motherhood. Other students associate it with a reading memory, connected to a person like a favorite teacher. Yet others have never heard of the book. After reading the story aloud, I ask students to consider some underlying ideologies that aren’t overt or obvious. Environmentalism is often the first concept noted, with a comment like, “Maybe it’s about the ways that humans don’t take good care of nature and the Earth, that would be represented by the tree. You know like how we keep using resources and not thinking about long term consequences like the boy does with the tree.” Another student may bring up the idea that the tree is she and the boy is he, beginning a conversation about the ways that the use of these perspectives can invite readers to consider gender norms.

It is crucial to be aware of the forces that shape readers’ thinking because “reading does not take place in some isolated utopian space where innocence can rest unalloyed” (McGillis, 2006, p. 93). Regardless of the age of the reader, there are always underlying forces at play for the reader and in the text. Preservice teachers (or any reader) may experience some fear and

trepidation of pulling back the curtain from the notions of neutrality and innocence while reading. I remember being fearful that I would never be able to pick up a book again and read it merely for pleasure, that I would never again be able to escape into that void of a fictional world that swallows me and allows me to block out everything else. I came to realize that learning to read with different theoretical lenses allowed me to have a wider range of reading experiences.

To be a self-conscious reader takes a level of metacognition that many preservice teachers have not experienced for many years. It is effortful. Vigilant, conscientious reading typically cannot be done by skimming a book or through one quick read. This type of reading can also look different for different readers; some people may need to reread sections of a book, while others may need to reread the same book in its entirety. This is another point in the class when I model for student my own process of vigilant and metacognitive reading, and then make connections to comprehension (Chapter 3: Teacher as Coach) and text selection (Chapter 5: Teacher as Curator). When I teach *Love That Dog* (2001) or any other book, I read aloud and use the document projector, stopping to articulate my thinking and make notes directly in the text.

**Teaching story: *One Crazy Summer***

“Literary works quite often ‘know’ things that the reader does not know, or does not know yet, or perhaps will never know” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 14). This idea came up repeatedly in class conversations around the book *One Crazy Summer* (Williams-Garcia, 2010). In this historical fiction, coming-of-age novel, eleven-year-old Delphine, along with her younger sisters Vonetta and Faun, fly on their own from New York City to Los Angeles to spend time with their mother, Cecile. The girls have not seen Cecile since she left them, shortly after Fern was born. The story is told through Delphine’s first-person perspective, providing a limited view of her mother’s character that includes sending the girls to the community center alone, not cooking

meals for them, keeping secrets, and getting arrested. Many of the preservice teachers in my classes were disturbed by the behavior and actions of Cecile, making comments like, “That isn’t how a mother is supposed to act,” and, “What a bitch, why did she ever have kids?!”

Eagleton also writes, “One of the most common ways of overlooking the literariness of a play or novel is to treat its characters as though they were actual people” (2013, p. 45). The preservice teachers were often stuck in the process of comparing Cecile as a mother with their own (usually beloved) mothers. The tendency was for the preservice teachers to imagine what might have happened in Cecile’s life that could have caused her to act that way that she did. Readers actually learn very little of Cecile’s past—only a brief glimpse that she shares with her daughter Delphine towards the very end of the book. Closely examining the ways that Williams-Garcia created the characters was key to helping the preservice teachers move beyond comparing Cecile with their own mothers.

A specific way that we examined the impact of the text was to consider the fact that the story is told from a first-person limited point of view, and that voice is Cecile’s own eleven-year-old daughter Delphine. During the class discussion, I asked students to consider the impact of Delphine as the narrator and how that shapes our view of Cecile as a mother. Focusing on the literariness of the character and the story helped preservice teachers to distance their own personal emotions about the concept of mother. Eagleton writes about the difference between considering the experience behind the words in a text and the experience of the text, arguing, “The latter is what we are concerned about when we read from an English perspective” (2013, p. 137). Closely examining the ways that Williams-Garcia created the characters was the key to helping the preservice teachers move beyond comparing Cecile with their own mothers and to help them become more vigilant and critical readers. Discussions about the point of view in *One*

*Crazy Summer* (2010), the pronouns in *The Giving Tree* (1964), and the poetic form of *Love that Dog* (2001) are about helping the preservice teachers in my class consider how those factors affect the experience of the text. The goal was not to invalidate their personal connections, but to guide them towards an additional way of making meaning and understanding the book.

Another key aspect of these discussions is to help preservice teachers see different ways of reading because of their tendency to think that their response is wrong if I ask them to read differently. Not liking Cecile's character is not wrong, but it is also not the only way to consider her character, and limiting our reading and interpretation of a book to our own emotional reactions does not at all demand vigilant reading of the way that written language functions in this particular book. Using textual evidence to support interpretation "can usually be construed in a variety of ways, and conflicts can arise between these versions" (Eagleton, 2013, p. 147). It is those very conflicts, different opinions, and ultimately different interpretations that make for the most interesting conversations about the texts that we read. These concepts of interpretation and vigilant reading of the text along with personal experience that helps preservice teachers begin to understand that there can be multiple ways to understand children's literature. When I ran into a preservice teacher that had taken my children's literature class she said, "Your class was so difficult for me at the beginning because I had never thought about interpretation as something that could be unique to me as a reader. Now in other classes I take, I am so much more aware of how I read and why I think what I do."

### **The Curriculum of Children's Literature from a Literary Perspective**

Another affordance of the children's literature instructor modeling the teacher acting as literary critic for preservice teachers is to consider text selection that invites vigilant reading and multiple interpretations. In addition, this perspective engages preservice teachers as literary,

sensitive, and multidimensional thinkers and readers. In contrast, there are many texts labeled children's literature that are not rich in language or image, are didactic, and don't generally encourage rich discussion or meaning making. This is not to say that texts that these types of text don't have any value, just they have limitations in terms of interpretation. Approaching the question of what we read from a literary perspective is important in terms of selecting texts that represent complexity in terms of both meaning making as well as reader assumption. While a book like *If You Give A Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985) may be an excellent text to help readers to rhyme words and seek patterns, it offers little in terms of rich language and multiple interpretations.

If readers, including preservice teachers, presume children and childhood to be a time of innocence and simplicity, there is often an assumption that those texts bearing the label children's literature are synonymous with texts that reflect innocence and simplicity. In other words, any literature written, labeled, or read by and for children cannot be complex enough to warrant anything beyond a literal or superficial interpretation. This extends to those who believe that the role of adults is to be gatekeepers for children, to help maintain and preserve their innocence for as long as possible. These ways of thinking about children's literature and childhood contrast with Matthews's (1994) philosophy that both texts and children have the capacity to be complex and sophisticated. Matthews's views can also be extended to our views of preservice teachers as teacher educators.

An affordance of approaching text selection from a literary way of thinking is that it frames reading as focused primarily on the text and how the text works on the reader. This frame can help readers (including preservice teachers) to focus their awareness on the language of a text, including the ways that literary elements inform their understanding. It can also help them



to become more metacognitive in terms of how their own personal experiences and worldview may be shaping their response.

Hunt (1994) writes,

The value we accord a book is proportional to the way in which we read it, and the way in which we read it is not a function of the book, but a function of the way in which our culture *allows us to read it*' (p. 239, emphasis in original).

It is crucial then, as the instructor of a children's literature class, to ensure that I set up a classroom culture that values every aspect of the texts that we read. It is also necessary for me use these understandings to inform the texts I select for the preservice teachers to read in the children's literature class, and to be explicit with students about why I made the selections that I did.

An example of text selection from a literary way of thinking is offered by Roderick McGillis in *Looking in the Mirror: Pedagogy, Theory, and Children's Literature* (2006). He includes a section in which he explains why he selected a particular picture book for analysis in the chapter. First, he chose it because it is a picture book and, "I want to acknowledge that any reading of what we term children's literature necessitates an understanding of visual representation as well as verbal representation" (p. 101). The second reason he gives for his choice is that it is a way to "indicate that any canon we might acknowledge in the field of children's literature needs always to expand and change" (p. 101). The last reason he gives for this text selection is "because I do not fully understand it. Mind you, I don't think I understand any book fully" (p. 101). McGillis's work offers examples of how children's literature can be seen as full-fledged and conceptually rich literature, as well as providing an explicit connection to the role of Teacher as Curator (chapter 5).

This articulation of the process of text selection is important in that it illuminates one way to select a text from a disciplinary perspective of English. This does not mean that it is representative of the entirety of text selection, in this way of thinking, but it does provide important insight. The idea of selecting a text that he doesn't understand fully is one that I articulate with preservice teachers during class discussions. I share with them that one the most interesting parts of teaching the course multiple times is that no matter how many times I have taught *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998), *One Crazy Summer* (Williams-Garcia, 2010), or *When You Reach Me* (Stead, 2009), I always hear new interpretations and understandings. Selecting a text that I don't fully understand also provides me with an opportunity to model my own wonderings as I read by sharing notes that I take during reading. Selecting a text that I don't fully understand as the instructor also helps to reinforce the idea of texts as capable of generating a range of meanings versus a fixed understanding (Eagleton, 2013).

The importance of acknowledging both visual and verbal is imperative when considering any text that includes both regardless of format and/or genre: picture books and graphic novels, for example, or realistic fiction and memoir. Visual representation can also include the entire design of a book, including cover, end pages, paper type, and font selection.<sup>6</sup>

His reason for selection of challenging any canon connected to children's literature is a sticky topic and could be an entire dissertation itself. McGillis (2006) is clearly about pushing the notion of a canon as he later states, "Any choice that shatters a sense of a strict canon is a good choice as far as I am concerned (p. 101). The concept of the canon is large, complex, and beyond the scope of this dissertation. In the study of literature, McGillis (2006) describes the

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<sup>6</sup> As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, I believe illustrative and design elements to be a crucial aspect of text selection, but due to space constraints, I will not address here.

literary canon as “unified and therefore we could examine its unity and admire the manner in which the artist achieved this unity. We could, in other words, attend to the formal features of the work and admire its “aura” of greatness” (McGillis, 2011, p. 349). While on the one hand, the concept of having a set of texts that serve as exemplars to set standards can be appealing, and it offers one way to examine and study literature; on the other hand, it can also be limiting when books identified as canonical are the only texts studied. This is another area that I want to help preservice teachers explore: the complexity of the topic and the consideration of texts beyond a label of canon.

In the late 1980s the Children’s Literature Association published a three-volume set titled *Touchstones* that was an attempt at creating a children’s literature canon. McGillis points out the irony of creating such a canon when a) there were already works of children’s literature that were a part of the larger literary canon, and b) there were heated debates occurring regarding the existence of the canon that were part of larger conversations placing books on the same level as other texts, like film and paintings. Ultimately the question of the canon is one that I continue to read about and wrestle with. As I write this dissertation, I believe that the concept of a canon is not something to be considered as having a right answer, but as a topic to be explored and examined, much like the way I approach interpretation and children’s literature with my students.

### **From Children’s Literature: *Love That Dog***

Just as *My Life as a Book* (Tashjian, 2010) served to illustrate the affordances of a literacy perspective, *Love that Dog* (Creech, 2001) serves in this chapter as an illustration of the perspective of teacher as literary critic. I chose *Love that Dog* because, in both form and content,

it embodies the affordances of a literature perspective for the curriculum of preservice teacher education.

Sharon Creech's *Love that Dog* (2001) is one children's literature text with representations of literary ways of thinking about reading and texts. Creech's choice to use poetry to tell the story encourages readers to slow down, to savor the language. The format, which is sometimes called a verse novel or a poetic novel, is typically seen as a novel-length narrative that uses poetry instead of narrative prose to tell the story. In this particular book, Jack, the sole narrator, uses dates for headings as the book progresses. The first entry also states, "Room 105 – Miss Stretchberry", (Creech, 2001, p.1) which leads the reader to assume that the story is taking place in a school classroom. This is confirmed later in the story, when Jack refers to Miss Stretchberry as his teacher and references his school and class (p. 52). The dates show entries occur about once a week.

**Some of Jack's poems are in response to poetry that his teacher shares with the class (Creech includes the complete text at the end of the book for eight of the poems that Jack references throughout the story). For example, the entry dated September 27 is:**

I don't understand  
the poem about  
the red wheelbarrow  
and the white chickens  
and why so much  
depends upon  
them.

if that is a poem,  
then any poem  
can be a poem.  
You've just got to  
make  
short  
lines.

(Creech, 2001, p. 3)

Examining the first stanza, Jack *comprehends* some of the text of *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams; he knows that it is about a red wheelbarrow and white chickens. Jack's lines, "I don't understand" and "why so much depends on them" (p. 3) show that he is wrestling with *interpretation* of the poem. This same text shows the reader that while he may be wrestling with interpretation, he also shows an understanding that there is more to reading than just literal meaning-making. Two pages later, Jack is frustrated by Miss Stretchberry's feedback about a poem he wrote about a blue car, modeled after the line "so much depends" (p.5). She tells Jack that she wants him to explain why so much depends on the blue car, and his response is, "The wheelbarrow guy didn't tell why" (p. 6).

Eagleton (2013) writes, "Literature is about the felt experience of language, not just the practical use of it. It can draw our attention to the opulence of a medium that we usually take for granted" (p. 192). In the above example and throughout the book, Creech's writing conveys this concept of the felt experience of language. The format of using poetry to tell Jack's story as he himself experiences and wrestles with understanding both poetry and life contributes to the felt

sense of his development and the reader's intimacy with the character as he undergoes this process.

This gets at the idea that close examination of language helps us to consider interpretation and the idea that works of literature “are inherently open ended, which is one reason why they can be subject to a whole range of interpretations” (Eagleton, 2013, p. 118). Ultimately, a literary way of thinking about literature offers preservice teachers similar reading experiences that Jack has as he sits in his class reading, writing, and responding to poetry. *Love That Dog* both models the process of vigilant reading and attention to language and offers readers the opportunity to practice vigilant reading and attention to language, as well as interpretation based on personal experience and textual evidence, examination of format and literary devices, and ultimately a better understanding of Jack, the reader themselves, and the world.

### **Teacher as Literary Critic**

Children's literature instructor enacting the role of teacher as literary critic provides multiple affordances for preservice teachers. Becoming aware of self as reader is important to help the preservice teachers separate their own responses, interpretations, and understandings from their assumptions or memories of children while reading children's literature texts. The goal is not to ignore children or child readers, but to understand (and experience) that individual responses cannot necessarily be generalized to all readers of any age. This role is important to clarify differences in comprehension and interpretation as two different outcomes of reading. In addition, demonstrating the practice of reading with theory (McGillis) helps us to consider how forces that shape readers' lives impact the way readers make meaning and interpret a text. Lastly, modeling teacher as literary critic serves as a way to guide preservice teachers to experience,

articulate, and understand vigilant reading. Vigilant reading not only informs reader responses, but also provides important insight for text selection.

## Chapter 5: Curator of Books and Readers

In addition to literacy and literature, another way of thinking that can contribute valuable insight to shaping the curriculum of children's literature in teacher education is library science. This chapter briefly describes the relation of library science to children's literature in teacher education, and particularly the affordances of a library science perspective for contributing to the teacher education curriculum in children's literature. Initially, I was drawn to library science because of my own experiences with libraries and librarians as places and people who helped me develop my identity as a reader. Both as a child and as an adult, librarians have helped me to find books and authors I wouldn't have otherwise known about.

As a scholar new to children's literature, I was also anxious to engage in conversations with anyone else knowledgeable about texts, authors, illustrators, awards, and reviewing. In order to better understand the professional roles and standards of library science in relation to teacher education for children's literature, I engaged in numerous conversations with library science colleagues across public and school library positions, as well as those who teach in schools of library science. I also read handbook chapters, books, and journal articles that focused on the role of library science in children's literature. I joined the American Library Association Conference, and attended library conferences.

What surprised me the most about library science was to learn that some of the pedagogical decisions that I was making were supported by work in library science. Another aspect of work from library science that I was drawn to was a more balanced use of child development understandings with meeting the needs of patrons as individuals (as opposed to all one or the other). For example, in Sutton and Parravano's collection of essays *Family of Readers* (2010), multiple authors refer to child development stages along with reading development but



they are very explicit about the fact that it shouldn't be used without considering each individual reader. This text is an excellent example of the ways that librarians draw on stage development understandings (e.g. Piaget) as one piece of information when working with young readers.

Library Science as a way of thinking encompasses a wide range of roles and perspectives. Librarians fill a range of roles, including collaborations with teachers, program development and delivery, and administration. While these roles are important to libraries, they did not necessarily inform my thinking about the problems of practice that I identified as a children's literature instructor in teacher education. In the context of this study, I've chosen specifically to focus on the librarian work that is known as "youth services," which includes work with children aged birth through 12 years in both public and school libraries. This role has changed over the decades, morphing into the current 21<sup>st</sup> century school librarian, who has become "a transformational leader in helping young readers achieve a synergy of cognitive and aesthetics skills" (Dresang and Kotrla, 2011, p. 123). This use of the term "synergy" in this quote is again reflective of a nuanced sensibility about how young readers develop in multiple ways and as individuals.

As I began to think about the key questions of practice I pose in this study, one thing that became evident was that in library science, the "we" in the question "What do we read?" can signify multiple persons. The "we" in this case can refer to both the librarian herself and to the patron that she is serving. I use the term "patron" because of the nature of library science as a service field. Particularly in children's library service, the patron can be a child, but the patron could also be a teacher, a parent, grandparent, or other caregiver. This can vary, depending on whether the library is a community or public library or a school library—although the functions

are often similar across sites. The patron's needs are one basis for determining what the librarian should read, as well as what materials should be acquired for the library.

In addition to serving young readers, professional standards charge that school librarians also be experts in helping students learn to read across a range of text formats (e.g., picture, video, print, audio, digital), and also support teachers in development of classroom libraries, curriculum support, and through the provision of literacy and literature leadership for the entire school (Dresang and Kotrla, 2011). They end the chapter stating,

Motivation is not enough nor is simply providing services. Providing the synergy of aesthetic and cognitive skills, focusing on pleasure and skill and bringing the two together is essential if the 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian is to continue to transform readers and reading (2011, p. 131).

In referring to readers and reading, Dresang and Kotrla are not limiting those served by school librarians to children, but to all who are part of the library community. This includes teachers, support staff, and even administrators. This way of thinking from the library science perspective is an important part of my own teaching and the ways that I believe preservice teachers can think about readers and reading. Specifically, that the designation of "children" when referring to literature, reading, and readers is only one descriptor and does not need to limit the experience of the reader or a text. This connects with Matthews's perspective about children as not less than adults or incomplete versions of adults. Librarians model on a daily basis that their work is to serve readers and reading regardless of age, level, or any other descriptor.

Dresang and Kotrla's use of the phrase "transform readers and reading" is reflective of the idea that readers and reading should not be stagnant, but instead grow and change. This growth and change can be the result of becoming older, changing interests, or life experiences.

The transformation of readers and reading starts with the reader (regardless of age) and is then scaffolded by the more knowledgeable librarian, a prime example of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development.

In drawing on library science to inform this dissertation, I do not attempt to represent the many components that comprise children's librarianship, as expressed by Rothbauer, Walter, and Weibel: "There are six core functions common to youth services librarianship: collection development, readers' advisory service, reference service, summer reading program, year-round programming, and space" (2011, p. 136). I instead begin this chapter by sharing some of the ways my experiences as a children's literature instructor lead me to seek out disciplinary knowledge from library science, specifically the areas of readers' advisory and acquisitions/collections management. Readers' advisory is the aspect of librarianship that has librarians helping patrons locate and recommend texts based on need and or interest. Acquisition and collection management refers to the decisions and processes of both acquiring and managing the collection of a library, including texts, periodicals, electronic books, visual and audio media, etc. In the remainder of this chapter, I'll examine both concepts in more detail as I explore the ways that library science helped me to consider the three key questions described in Chapter 1: Why, how, and what do we read?

### **Readers' Advisory**

"Readers' advisory" is defined by Dresang and Kotrla (2011) as "traditionally about recommending what librarians considered the best books, or quality literature, to a focus on matching individual reader interests with books" (p. 127). It is also sometimes referred to as the notion of matching the right book to the right reader at the right time. According to the American Library Service for Children Education committee, a competency of librarians serving children

in public libraries is to “conduct reference/readers’ advisory interviews to assist children and their parents/caregivers with the identification and selection of materials and services, according to their interests and abilities” (2009). DeGroot and Branch refer to readers’ advisory as “services that introduce children to new resources and authors” and identify it as one aspect of libraries that “promote reading-for-enjoyment and literacy” (2009, p. 55). One reason for reading as librarians, teacher educators, or preservice teachers ourselves is so that we can perform these roles of helping readers locate books.

Readers’ advisory is sometimes described as “matching the right book to the right reader at the right time.” Jenkins (in Enciso et. al, 2008) poses the following big questions often posed by librarians: “What can we say about this book when we place it alongside the other books on our shelves? In what context(s) could this book be the right book for the right child at the right time?” (p. 224). So how we read is not only about reading a text with readers in mind, but also in terms of other books. This framing of the text in relation to other texts is a strong similarity shared by English and library science. There is also some overlap with reading levels from the role of Teacher As Coach, although from the perspective of curator text levels would only be one small component of matching book to reader. Librarians, however, don’t stop with the text but extend the focus to include the reader as an equally important part of the equation. This focus on both book and reader is a commonality that library science and education share. A librarian may facilitate a book discussion of *The Watsons Go To Birmingham – 1963* (Curtis, 1995) by asking students to share their response of a similar passage in light of their own experiences and then ask them to compare it intertextually with other texts that focus on the Civil Rights Era in the United States. Jenkins notes that scholars in the field of library science may use some of the same theories as both English and education, but that library science scholars expand even more

to include such fields as sociology, anthropology, and history as well as ethnic, gender, and queer studies.

Interestingly, as I came to learn more about readers' advisory, I realized in hindsight that I sometimes thought of the preservice teachers in my classroom as a librarian would think of patrons. I worked to introduce the preservice teachers in my course to both new resources and new authors as well as to help them learn to identify materials with and without my assistance. Using a reading interest inventory at the beginning of the semester aided me in working to meet the individual reading needs and preferences of the preservice teachers in my classrooms.

### **Teaching Story: Interest Inventory**

On the first day of every class that I teach, I ask those enrolled to complete a reading interest inventory. The goal of the survey is twofold: first, to help each candidate consider their reading preferences and interests, and second, to help me understand them better as individual readers. The questions include questions about what and where they read for pleasure, where they get book recommendations, if they have a library card, favorite titles, and topics of interest. The questionnaire finishes with the open-ended prompt, "Something I would like you to know about me as a reader is..." At the beginning of the semester, I particularly look for those who identify in various ways as non-readers. Some had negative experiences in school, while others perhaps were readers during the elementary years but then stopped.

All of this information provides me the opportunity to draw on the idea of readers' advisory from library studies to help me pair up each reader with a unique title chosen with that individual's experiences and preferences in mind. An example is a young man who identified himself during the first class as someone who "only reads books when I have to" but was an avid baseball fan and reader of *Sports Illustrated*. The week before our study of informational texts, I

lent him my copy of *We Are The Ship* (Nelson, 2008) about the African American Baseball League. It's a well-researched, engaging, award-winning, oversized book with breathtaking illustrations. He came back, not only having read the entire book, but also chose to book talk it to the entire class and then asked me how to find similar books.

One semester, a young woman in class called me over while working on a reading survey, looked me straight in the face, and said, "I don't read. I haven't read an entire book since the tenth grade." The all-class picture books were not difficult for her; she was fascinated by the illustration elements and the ways that they were related to text. I suggested that she try audiobooks for the longer texts that we would be reading, taking time during a class break to show her how to use the local library or the website Audible. She confessed that she didn't think it would make a difference but would give it a try. The following week, she returned to class early to talk to me about the book she had begun listening to, *One Crazy Summer*, (Williams-Garcia, 2010). She was amazed at how interesting it was "even though it is history, which I hate."

Both of these examples from my own teaching illustrate the ways that I used knowledge of individual readers along with knowledge of books and formats to (hopefully) help them engage in a pleasurable reading experience. I was able to make recommendations based on what I knew of them as readers from the reading interest inventory and our conversations. Those recommendations were also possible because I read widely across children's and young adult literature. Without my personal experience of these texts, I would not have had the suggestions available to make. Next, I examine how broad knowledge, acquisition, and management of texts informs a subset of library science called collections and acquisition management.

## **Collection Acquisition and Management**

Collections acquisition and management refers to the selection, gathering, and management of materials held by a library. This not only includes “hard” texts such as books, magazines, journals, and newspapers, but also includes electronic materials. The scope of the consideration of the collection is demonstrated by the following explanation: “At the basis of everything that youth services librarians do is the evaluation of books and other materials to provide collections chosen to reflect the community and a particular philosophy about children’s and teens’ reading” (Rothbauer et al., 2011, p. 136). Selection and evaluation is most often based on a collection management policy that has been written and adopted by the library staff and/or board. Each policy will vary somewhat based on the particulars of their context and community, however, each policy should reflect each of the following:

- mission of the library
- types of materials available (print, electronic, etc.)
- general selection criteria (typically based on reviews, reader requests and community needs)
- guidance for dealing with challenges
- guidelines for dealing with outdated or worn materials (also known as weeding)

Through this material, it is clear that there is a deep and broad process of selection the material that is available through a library, and that librarians and scholarly thought about library collections encourages selection based on a broad variety of criteria. Text selection has overlap and connections to both Teacher as Coach and Teacher as Critic. In the role of teacher as coach, it is important to have knowledge and access to a variety of genres and levels to share with students and use in instruction. Reading with theory, from the role of teacher as critic, provides

important insight into building a collection that has a wide range of representations and acknowledges both explicit and implied story elements.

A debate that has been ongoing since the beginnings of children's librarianship is the question of popularity versus quality. The American Librarian Association originally created the Newbery Award for writing in 1922 and Caldecott Award for illustration in 1938 in an effort to promote quality children's literature (ALSC awards, <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/>). There was a time when librarians would not purchase comic books or popular literature like *Nancy Drew* and the *Hardy Boys* because it wasn't believed to be of the "quality" needed to promote children's reading development. Now libraries have entire sections devoted to series books such as *Junie B. Jones* (Park), *The Percy Jackson Series* (Riordan), and *Baby Mouse* (Holm).

Collection development is connected to this study because of the goal of not only making informed, community-centered decisions regarding library materials, but also the goal of making those policies explicit. Rothbauer et al. (2011) remind readers that ultimately the goal is a balanced collection with a range of subjects and points of view. Many librarians are mindful of creating collections that reflect both their patrons and the world outside of the community. The American Library Association affirms this stance in the 1999 document *Libraries: An American Value*, stating, "We celebrate and preservice our democratic society by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas, so that all individuals have the opportunity to become lifelong learners—informed, literate, educated, and culturally enriched" (as cited in Rothbauer et al., 2011).

Dresang & Kotrla (2011) devote a section of their handbook chapter to literature for digital age readers, again an example of being mindful and explicit about what is selected for a



library and why, as 21<sup>st</sup> century learners and schools become more digital and visual. This theory, which has gained widespread recognition, parses out digital age principals of texts and reading with “three sets of indicators that relate to Changing Forms and Formats, Changing Perspectives, and Changing Boundaries” (Dresang & Kotrla, 2011, p. 126). This articulation is useful and important to consider when teaching preservice teachers about children’s literature as a way to help them expand their thinking beyond just a traditional-looking book.

Ultimately Vardell (2008) reminds us, “It’s our professional responsibility to seek out the very best literature for children, as well as balance the unique needs of our particular library and community” (p. 21). I would argue this is true of teachers and the books that they select both for classroom libraries and instruction.

### **Library Science Contributions to the Children’s Literature Curriculum**

The librarian has the broad knowledge of the books—the literature. The child can’t know all of the books available to him or her. What children do know is their own interests and purposes for reading. A librarian can help to stretch this: “The more you (the adult or librarian) immerse yourself in reading children’s literature, the more names you will come to know—and love” (Vardell, 2008, p. 26).

Predominant texts in children’s literature courses in schools of library science consist of multiple titles of the literature itself (as opposed to articles or books *about* children’s literature). Courses often list between 25 and 50 titles for those enrolled to read and review over the course of a semester. These are typically organized either chronologically or by genre, though this can vary if the course is focused on a specific genre. Using these ways of organizing (publication year or genre) along with the literature itself supports the belief that librarians need to have both

a broad and deep knowledge of available literature in an effort to help match books and readers, as well as to encourage readers to build intertextual understandings across books.

### **From Children's Literature: *Matilda***

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* is the third children's literature example. This text illustrates aspects of library science that can contribute to a teaching repertoire for preservice teachers. *Matilda* (1988), by beloved author Roald Dahl, offers one illustration of a library science way of thinking about both readers and books. I chose this text in particular because it illustrates aspects of the affordances of teacher as librarian, specifically reader's advisory unique to the individual, and developing reading for personal satisfaction. In a selection I have chosen to highlight from the first chapter, readers meet precocious Matilda and the kindly librarian, Mrs. Phelps. Matilda, who taught herself to read at a young age, has grown tired of rereading the one book in her home, which happens to be a cookbook. The librarian, Mrs. Phelps, guides Matilda to find reading material (readers' advisory), and she is also an example of an adult who views a young child as neither inferior nor incapable. The selection:

Before finding her way to the library, Matilda asks her father to buy her a book.

"A *book*?" he said. "What d'you want a flaming book for?"

"To read, Daddy."

"What's wrong with the telly, for heaven's sake? We've got a lovely telly with a twelve-inch screen and now you come asking for a book! You're getting spoiled, my girl!" (Dahl, p. 12).

Later that day, Matilda makes her way to the village library by herself and meets the librarian, Mrs. Phelps. Mrs. Phelps guides her to the children's book location and asks if she would like help finding something to read. She is not only physically guiding her to the space where the books are located, but she is in addition offering her support in finding reading

material. Matilda declines, sits down, and begins reading. Mrs. Phelps reflects concern inwardly about such a young child being in the library alone but “watches her with fascination” (p. 12). Matilda continues to return to the library unaccompanied, sit down in the children’s section, and read to herself. A few weeks later, Mrs. Phelps offers assistance again when she notices Matilda wandering through the library.

"I'm wondering what to read next," Matilda said. "I've finished all the children's books."

"You mean you've looked at the pictures?"

"Yes, but I've read the books as well." (Dahl, 1988, p. 13)

Mrs. Phelps’ assumption that Matilda had only looked at the pictures can be attributed to her small stature and apparent young age. Mrs. Phelps is somewhat stunned when Matilda shares that she is four years and three months old, and even more stunned when this disclosure is followed by astute opinions regarding the books she read from the children’s section:

"I thought some were very poor," Matilda said, "but others were lovely. I liked *The Secret Garden* best of all. It was full of mystery. The mystery of the room behind the closed door and the mystery of the garden behind the big wall." (Dahl, 1988, p. 13)

This exchange shows Mrs. Phelps (and readers of the story) that Matilda not only *read* the books as she said she did, but that she also comprehended and formed thoughtful opinions about what she read. Matilda’s comment demonstrates that she understands what a mystery is, but it also clarifies how she is speaking and thinking of mystery in a thematic way, in a way that typically considered a skill only of older and more sophisticated readers.

Matilda asks Mrs. Phelps to help her find a new book to read that is “a really good one that grown-ups read. A famous one” (Dahl, p. 13). The third person omniscient narration reveals that Mrs. Phelps is struggling a bit between her presumptions about Matilda as a child and what

Matilda as a reader is asking for and has showed thus far: “How, she asked herself, does one choose a famous grown-up book for a four-year-old girl? Her first thought was to pick a young teenager’s romance of the kind that is written for fifteen-year-old schoolgirls, but for some reason she found herself instinctively walking past that particular shelf” (Dahl, p. 15). Mrs. Phelps decides to give Matilda Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, with the caveat that, “If it’s too long for you, just let me know and I’ll find something shorter and a bit easier” (Dahl, p. 14) and thinks to herself that she must be slightly mad. Dahl’s work illustrates that in readers’ advisory work, what guides the librarian is the specific reader—not assumption about age or reading ability.

Matilda finishes the 411-page classic within a week and asks Mrs. Phelps for another. Over the next months Matilda reads books by Dickens, as well as Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, George Orwell and more. She reflects:

"Mr. Hemingway says a lot of things I don't understand," Matilda said to [Mrs. Phelps]. "Especially about men and women. But I loved it all the same. The way he tells it I feel I am right there on the spot watching it all happen."

"A fine writer will always make you feel that," Mrs. Phelps said. "And don't worry about the bits you can't understand. Sit back and allow the worlds to wash around you, like music."

"I will, I will." (Dahl, p. 19)

As Dahl tells the story, Mrs. Phelps is clearly listening to Matilda as an individual reader, regardless of her age, size, or lack of parental supervision. She gives Matilda space to decide for herself if the book is a good fit without judging, and she also engages in genuine discussion

about the books with Matilda. Mrs. Phelps's behavior and discussions with Matilda reflect that she trusts Matilda as a reader to know her own likes and dislikes, as well as what may be difficult or confusing. This is also an enacted (albeit in a book) reflection of Matthews's belief that children are capable of sophisticated thinking. Mrs. Phelps not only nurtures Matilda as a reader by helping her find books and talking to her about them, but she also shares the great secret of libraries:

“Did you know,” Mrs. Phelps said, “that public libraries like this allow you to borrow books and take them home?”

“I didn't know that,” Matilda said. “Could *I* do it?”

“Of course,” Mrs. Phelps said. “When you have chosen the book you want, bring it to me so I can make a note of it and it's yours for two weeks. You can take more than one if you wish.” (Dahl, p. 19).

The exchanges between Mrs. Phelps and Matilda as librarian and reader illustrate strategies that could become part of the teaching repertoire of preservice teacher educators teaching children's literature and related courses. In particular, PST educators should have conversations with preservice teachers like those that Mrs. Phelps had with Matilda to better understand each preservice teacher as an individual reader, with unique preferences and responses. Having a broad knowledge of available literature is another important part of the teacher repertoire; in the case of Mrs. Phelps, her wide knowledge of books allowed her to make multiple recommendations to Matilda (and presumably other library patrons as well).

In addition to serving as curator for individual readers and the entire class, it is also important for preservice teachers to have access to a range of books. I have enabled this in my own class in a variety of ways, including lending my own books to teacher candidates as well as

holding class in the children's room at the local public library. (At the time I was facilitating these courses, the university didn't have a children's literature collection.) Regardless of how or where the texts come from, the ability for preservice teachers to borrow books provides them the opportunity to read more widely as well as to read in a setting other than the classroom. By providing these opportunities to students, preservice teacher educators are creating the opportunity for candidates to experience "the synergy of aesthetic and cognitive skills, focusing on pleasure and skill and bringing the two together" (Dresang & Kotrla, 2011, p. 131).

## Chapter 6: A Teaching Repertoire

As I have developed my thinking and teaching about presenting children's literature to elementary preservice teachers, I have been reminded of the role of repertoire in my development as a musician when I was an undergraduate music major. Developing a wide repertoire for musicians is about being a complete and versatile musician. As a violist, I needed to know and to be able to draw on foundational etudes to help me refine particular techniques. I needed to be able to play from a variety of musical periods, composers, and styles. Learning repertoire involved listening, analyzing, and playing my instrument. I learned etudes, symphonic excerpts, and solo works by practicing independently and listening to experienced players perform. I listened to and played music for duets, quartets, small ensembles, and full orchestras. I listened to recordings and attended live performances. I studied the ways that different conductors or soloists interpreted the same piece of music. Sometimes a teacher determined the subject of my study, other times it was my own interest in a particular musician or piece of music. Listening, analyzing, practicing, and performing a wide range of music contributed to my overall development as a musician. Those experiences helped me to be more versatile and responsive in a wide variety of situations: to be a better listener, observer, and performer. It is those experiences developing my repertoire as a musician that led me to think of creating a teaching repertoire specific to children's literature in the teacher education curriculum.

In this case, the repertoire specific to children's literature that preservice teachers can learn in a children's literature course include: (a) teacher as developmental reading coach, (b) teacher as literary critic, and (c) teacher as curator. As with my own musical development, which included a variety of opportunities both experience-based (through listening, analyzing) and action-based (through practicing and performing), preservice teachers need to both experience

and enact the teacher roles I have outlined in this dissertation. As with my musical education, sometimes these roles will exist in isolation (in the practice room or theoretical study) but there is also crossover across the roles and experiences.

The role of preservice teachers taking courses is unique because they are simultaneously “students” in the class and beginning to develop their teacher identities. Acknowledging both of these roles explicitly is an aspect of framing learning about the repertoire approaches to teaching about and teaching with children’s literature. By examining and experiencing the affordances of different perspectives, my hope is that preservice teachers will be prepared to make thoughtful and informed decisions about selection, evaluation, reading, and use of children’s literature in their future classrooms.

The idea of a teaching repertoire isn’t necessarily unique, and in some ways it reminds me of Shulman’s work with types of teacher knowledge (1987). What is unique about the teaching repertoire that I am proposing here is that it is an interdisciplinary perspective specific to children’s literature for preservice teachers. A crucial component of this framework is that preservice teacher educators should create opportunities for preservice teachers to both *experience* and *enact* a variety of reading lenses and purposes, interacting with a different readers and engaging with a variety of books. In other words, the preservice teachers need experience teacher as coach, critic, and curator as students in a teacher education, and also learn how to enact coach, critic and curator as teachers. I will now share ways that this teaching repertoire framework has (and could) inform my own work as an educator.

### **Teaching Repertoire for Children’s Literature**

The following section will outline the ways that preservice teachers experience and enact the roles of teacher as developmental reading coach, literary critic, and curator. By selecting one



common book for all of us to read, preservice teachers were able to experience teacher as coach, critic, and curator with me initially enacting the roles as the teacher. Through course discussions, the preservice teachers began to enact coach, critic and curator with each other, thus beginning to take on (or enact) the roles as they will when they are teachers. This is not the only way to present the teacher roles I have outlined, rather it is meant to illustrate one way that modeling and supporting the roles for preservice teachers to consider children's literature. I am presenting the examples using the book *Flora and Ulysses* (DiCamillo, 2013). In using a whole-text book, the entire class was able to draw on that text as a common thread for making connections from experience to enacting, and they were able to experience and investigate across the three teaching roles. The examples provided are based on experiences reading the book with students in both children's literature and methods courses across semesters, and I have presented them in a model similar to the teaching stories in previous chapters. The student quotations are amalgamations based on notes from my teaching journals and they make connections to the concepts I am presenting in this study.

*Flora and Ulysses* incorporates significant visual elements, beginning with a multiple-page spread in the style of a comic book or graphic novel. While discussions of these elements were part of class discussions, as noted in earlier chapters, I have elected not to include visual and illustrative elements in this study due to scope and space limitations. The story begins with Flora, our heroine and protagonist rescuing a squirrel she names Ulysses from a rogue vacuum cleaner. I initially selected this text because I had never taught it before and because it was a rich, complex text that I thoroughly enjoyed although didn't fully understand (McGillis, 2006). Also it has a plotline that invites multiple interpretations, has complex and interesting vocabulary, and is a Newbery Award winner. Another reason I selected it was that it is animal fantasy (animals act

like humans), a common genre in children's literature. In the children's literature class, we read the book over a period of three weeks in order to have time for in-depth discussions and make connections to course concepts.

**Developmental reading coach.** I designed lessons using *Flora and Ulysses* to help preservice teachers experience the following aspects of teacher as developmental reading coach: metacognitive awareness, explicit vocabulary instruction, and discussion of reading levels. The goal was to develop the experiences as a way to closely examine and consider self-as-reader as well as the text itself.

I asked the preservice teachers to read for a very specific purpose: to metacognitively reflect on the comprehension strategies they used while reading. They used sticky notes to make notes of places and specific strategies they used as they read. I asked that they have at least one note for every five to ten pages in order to ensure that they remembered to stop and think about their reading. I specifically assigned fewer pages to read per assignment, explaining to them that they likely would need to slow down as they read to capture their thinking. Many of the preservice teachers commented on how difficult the assignment felt, noting that they struggled to slow down and sometimes had to reread sections in order to articulate their thinking. One noted, "It wasn't just that I had to slow down, but also that I had to make connections to comprehension strategies. After the first few pages, I went back and reviewed the strategies so they would be fresh in my mind when I stopped. Looking at my notes helped me to be more aware of the strategies as I used them, but it was still hard and slow-going." As they shared notes with peers in the class, there were realizations of the automatic-ness of their reading. As the discussion moved to the entire class, the preservice teachers were sharing notes about the ways that they had questioned, visualized, summarized, and monitored their own reading.

A powerful aspect was the ways that they were being very specific with their metacognitive language and examples from the book itself. For example, “When I got to chapter twenty-three, ‘Enter the Villain,’ I initially was shocked that Flora’s mother would tell her father that he should kill the squirrel. Then I realized that it was very in character based on the way she [the mother] had acted so far. That was monitoring because I was sort of checking in with myself to see if my thinking about the mother made sense. Then questioned what Flora’s father would do, like would he actually try to kill Ulysses? I didn’t think so, but really at that point, we don’t know that much about his character.” The more the students discussed the notes about their metacognitive thinking, the more they were able to identify their use of comprehension strategies like monitoring, inferring, predicting, summarizing, and rereading.

Up to this point, the preservice teachers had been experiencing the developmental reading role based on the instruction that I gave them as the teacher. In order to help them shift their thinking from experiencing to enacting, we turned our attention to reading level and vocabulary. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons I selected the book was because of the rich vocabulary. For example the first two chapters include the following words: cynic, high jinks, defiance, malfeasance, cogitation, and profound. This vocabulary alone prompted many of the preservice teachers to ask at the first discussion, “What level is this book?” or “What grade is this book for?” These questions provided the opportunity for them to investigate different level designations based on different systems. First we looked up the book on Scholastic’s Book Wizard website (<http://www.scholastic.com/bookwizard/>). This website provides information about books, including a summary, author and illustration information, genre, theme, subject, interest level, and reading level. According to the Book Wizard website, Flora and Ulysses has an interest level of grades 3-7, Grade Level equivalent of 4, Lexile measure of 520L, DRA level

of 50, and Guided Reading Level of U. I then asked the students, “Now what? What does this information mean and how could you use it to inform your pedagogical thinking as a teacher?”

I asked the preservice teachers to work in small groups to discover specific ways that levels are determined according to the Lexile Measure, Developmental Reading Assessment (or DRA), and Guided Reading Level (all being used by teachers in schools where the preservice teachers were completing a field component of the course). It was important for them to examine the ways that different levels were determined alongside each other. One group called me over and said, “We found a chart that compares different ways of leveling texts and there is kind of a big difference. According to this a Guided Reading Level of a U is like grade five and so is the DRA score of 50, but the Lexile level says grades two to three. That is a big difference.” Another group noted that the Lexile level did not take into account any visual elements, which are a key vehicle for the telling of some of this story. They commented, “It only uses word frequency and sentence length. And the website says it is important to take other factors into account like the interest of the reader.” The group decided that they might use the book with a student that has strong vocabulary and loves reading graphic novels or comic books. Another group discussed using the book as a whole class read aloud to model vocabulary study. I asked them to support their pedagogical thinking with knowledge about development reading strategies, and they came up with the following:

- Reading it aloud to the whole class gives everyone the opportunity to experience the story regardless of their independent reading level.
- Read alouds are an important part of reading development because they give students the opportunity to hear fluent reading with prosody and inflection. We think this book would make a great read aloud because of the dialogue, interesting characters, and humor.

- The teacher can model what to do when a reader comes to a word they don't know. She can model explicit use of questioning, using context clues, and looking up a word.

While the discussion in class about enacting this way of thinking was theoretical because it was a class of preservice teachers and not children; it did provide the opportunity for the preservice teachers to consciously shift their thinking from being aware of their own comprehension strategies to considering the text in a classroom from a development reading perspective. The following week, I started class by asking students to share their personal thoughts about the book; there had been some negative grumbling the first week that was important to get out in the open. Asking students to share their personal thoughts also opened the door to making connections to Reader Response Theory as an entry into considering a literary lens as part of the teaching repertoire.

**Literary critic.** As a way to experience a literary perspective of *Flora and Ulysses*, I asked the preservice teachers to closely examine the use of poetry and poetic devices as vigilant readers (Eagleton, 2013). As a class, we considered the final page of the book—a poem written by Ulysses (the squirrel) for Flora (the heroine and Ulysses' best friend):

*Words for Flora*

*Nothing*

*would be*

*easier without*

*you,*

*because you*

*are*

*everything,*

*all of it—  
sprinkles, quarks, giant  
donuts, eggs sunny-side up—  
you  
are the ever-expanding  
universe  
to me.*

(DiCamillo, 2013, p. 233)

We discussed the use of spacing and line breaks particularly in terms of slowing us down as readers, with one preservice teacher saying, “It means more, what Ulysess is saying to Flora, because he says it as a poem. Something about how deliberately each word was chosen and phrases are grouped makes me really understand how much he loves her, it’s like it has more depth or emotion or something.” During this class discussion, we were mindful of considering the craft of the words just as they were on the page. Some preservice teachers commented on the difficulty of switching different ways of reading the book, wishing that we had started with a focus on the writing because “that was the easiest way for me to read,” while others were very vocal about the difficulty they had in considering a poem written by a squirrel, saying “there was just no way for me to relate to that.”

Drawing on Rosenblatt’s (1969) Reader Response Theory, each reader makes his/her own meaning from a text at the intersection of reader, text, and context. This is *one* way to read and respond to children’s (or any other type) of literature. While individual readers make their own meanings, enacting a literary critic perspective requires readers (including preservice teachers) to move beyond reading only from a reader response perspective, moving beyond

relating. The conversation brought us back to consider underlying ideologies that could be considered (McGillis, 2006). I wanted them to approach the text from a literary way of thinking, to ask questions like, “What else can this tell book tell us about the world?” To teach as literary critic means to attend not only to the world the preservice teacher as reader knows and sees, but also the worlds that aren’t immediately evident in the text. To interpret means to go beyond and outside the text.

Thinking and responding from a literary critic perspective was the focus of an earlier response assignment, so it was not a new way of thinking at the time of this conversation. What was new was the follow-up question: “How might this inform your thinking about this book in a classroom context?” For me, guiding preservice teachers to consider how the literary critic perspective might be enacted by a teacher in an elementary classroom was one of the more challenging aspects of the teaching repertoire. Our earlier examination of both Matthews’ *Philosophy of Childhood* (1982) and Nodelman and Reimer’s (2003) assumptions about children and childhood provided the foundation to stretch from experiencing the role to enacting it.

As the instructor, I needed to pull back and provide the space for the preservice teachers to push each other to respond not only from a reader response perspective (or relating) but also to consider underlying ideologies as a way to consider the text in more critical ways. In a small group discussion, one table was discussing the presumptions made based on the label of the book as children’s literature. One member of the group shared with the entire class,

As soon as I know it’s children’s literature, the first thing I want to know is the level. It’s like thinking about teaching is so much a part of my brain right now, I immediately try to stick it (the literature) in a category to help me figure out what to do with it. But I’m starting to see that if I *only* do that I might miss some things.

Someone from another group hesitantly raised her hand, and speaking slowly, she said, Okay, but then aren't you making assumptions about children readers and the book? Hang on, let me figure this out, let me think, <pause> It reminds me of <pause> well, isn't it kind of like the way that Flora's mother made assumptions about Flora reading comics?

This was followed by a conversation in the classroom about thinking beyond the literal words on the page to consider how Flora's character pushed against some stereotypes like girls don't read comics, and children are capable of complex thinking, and mothers unconditionally love their daughters. This conversation was fascinating because the preservice teachers had to acknowledge their own experiences but then pull back to think from a critical perspective.

As the conversation continued, connections to earlier readings and discussions about assumptions about what children are capable of noticing and understandings started to surface. The preservice teachers in the class began to consider ways that the book could be part of a larger discussion about the construct of the family and by doing so provide a way for elementary children to share their own understandings of family based on experience as members of families and communities, as well as their understandings from the book. Going beyond the text involves interpretation, which requires a set of skills that are different from, but related to, comprehension. As a teacher educator, I serve as literary critic in order to model and facilitate increasingly more critical and nuanced interpretations of texts. Interpretation is necessary to help readers make connections between literature and larger social, cultural, aesthetic, political and spiritual values.



We then began to share and discuss other children's literature titles that could be shared with elementary students to broaden the discussion of family. As titles like *The Family Book* (Parr, 2003), *Pictures of Hollis Woods* (Giff, 2002), *One Crazy Summer* (Williams-Garcia, 2010), *Esperanza Rising* (Munoz Ryan, 2000), and *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman, 2015) were suggested as other children's literature texts with representations of various representations of family. While the discussion had began as a way to consider literary critic, the preservice teachers were now seeing how the role of curator could overlap and inform text selection as well as inform possible conversations.

**Curator.** Experiencing and enacting teacher as curator draws from the services of library sciences. As such, curation includes components of both readers' advisory as well as collections management. Selecting *Flora and Ulysses* as a common text for the class was a starting point to create an experience with readers' advisory for the preservice teachers in my classroom. For example, there were a number of students who did not like *Flora and Ulysses*. One preservice teacher walked into the classroom and declared, "This book is just WEIRD. I don't get it. I don't like the characters. I don't understand why there is a squirrel writing poetry." Another said, "Oh my gosh, I know! The characters are so strange. Not to mention, how could a squirrel get super powers from a vacuum?!" Then a quiet voice said, "I actually love books with animal characters, and even if I didn't, I'm curious about what is going to happen when a squirrel gets superpowers." Others added that prior reading experiences with other animal fantasy informed their preference or dislike for this book. There were comments about preferences for reading books that were more straightforward or not so confusing. Articulating these opinions about the book as well as the experiences, thinking, or ideas that were underlying helped them to be more aware of their individual reading preferences and also helped me to model the role of curator.

By modeling teacher as curator, the preservice teachers experienced this role as readers, but also provided the opportunity for me to articulate children's literature knowledge and pedagogical thinking. One way to model this was by sharing book talks at the beginning of each class. Book talks are brief commercials for books that I had read the previous week. Another way that I served as reading curator was to build on their responses to *Flora and Ulysses*. For example, when some of them shared their difficulty suspending disbelief (an important reader skill when reading fantasy), I made suggestions of realistic fiction and narrative nonfiction that aligned with preferences they had noted on their reading interest inventories that could be read and connected to future coursework. For those who enjoyed the writing style, I shared information about author Kate DiCamillo and some of her other books. I modeled using her website to find out more information about other books she had written, as well as how to search for books with similar characteristics using the public library website and Goodreads.

In addition to the entire class reading *Flora and Ulysses*, the preservice teachers in the class also completed the Independent Reading Project, which required them to locate, select, and read across a wide range of children's literature. The ability to independently locate, evaluate, and select children's literature is all part of developing the role of teacher as curator. Discovering titles are the first step in the assignment, selecting what books to read and analyze is the next step because it isn't possible for most of us to read all of the titles available. Some of the ways that I ask them to narrow down selections is by awards, subject, genre, cultural representations, format, and style based on their own preferences as well as the goal of selecting a wide range of children's literature. Another way to make selections is by reading book reviews from review journals, teaching journals, and professional blogs. Knowing and understanding not only how to review, but that there are different ways to review can also help preservice teachers be more

astute and critical readers of the reviews themselves, as well as the books. In addition to using reviews, libraries, librarians, and websites to locate literature, the preservice teachers also began to make suggestions and recommendations to each other. As the preservice teachers sought out titles across genres, formats, and levels, they were simultaneously learning more about each other's reading preferences and needs. The increases in their own knowledge of available texts led them to serve as curator for each other.

As the semester progressed, the preservice teachers took over the responsibility of doing book talks for each other at the beginning of each class. In addition to sharing plot points, genre, possible curriculum connections, and character details, they also began to make suggestions based on genre understandings and other books. For example, "If you like mysteries that are a little bit weird, you should definitely read *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library* (Grabenstein, 2013). It has some unexpected twists that kept me interested, and I loved how the plot incorporated technology and video games in a library setting." By sharing their discoveries, the preservice teachers were enacting the role of teacher-as-curator with each other.

The Independent Reading Project served multiple functions in the class in addition to helping the preservice teachers develop as curators through identifying, locating, reviewing, selecting, and recommending children's literature. The same assignment also asked them to make curricular connections and determine the levels of the books they read in multiple ways, helping them to develop and consider the ways that reading children's literature supports developmental reading goals. The role of literary critic was incorporated as they read reviews of books and also articulated their own interpretations of literary elements and multiple representations.

While the roles can be and are articulated and enacted separately, as the semester neared its end, the preservice teachers began to make connections across the roles. For example, they recognized how being a vigilant reader (Eagleton, 2013) of literary elements and devices (critic) could help them consider aspects of a text not included with a standardized leveling measure (coach) and design lesson focused on close reading (coach). There were realizations about how having a broad understanding of how to locate children's literature texts (curator) provided a much larger pool of books to select focus texts for a content lesson (coach or critic), and also helped them to include a wide variety of representations across texts in a classroom library (critic and curator). In these ways, the preservice teachers began to reflect a synthesis of these roles and their evolution teachers capable of approaching children's literature from a range of different perspectives and to serve a variety of needs and circumstances.

### **Conclusion or What I Learned**

Throughout the journey of researching, teaching, and writing this dissertation, I have learned about myself as a researcher, preservice teacher educator, and as a children's literature scholar. When I first began studying and teaching children's literature as a doctoral student, I was aware that children's literature could be studied in the different disciplinary homes of education, library science, or English literature. While this was not new information for me, or anyone else that studies children's literature, I became fascinated with understanding more about delineations as well as connections across the disciplines. While I had chosen to study children's literature in a college of education and felt dedicated to working with preservice teachers, I became frustrated. I was most frustrated by language and writing by the preservice teachers I taught that represented narrow and limiting ways of thinking about children and children's

literature. The language and phrases were often explicitly supported using understandings from developmental ways of thinking about reading.

This frustration came through in early drafts of this dissertation that revealed clear preferences for the roles of teacher as critic and curator, with heavy criticism for the role of teacher as developmental reading coach. As I continued to develop stronger research-based understandings of children's literature, I came to realize that I also had my own biases that I needed to unpack if I was going to be a responsible researcher and teacher. I also needed to be open to feedback and criticism in order to grow and extend my thinking. Although I had taken both qualitative and humanities-based research methods courses, I came to understand that this work was incredibly recursive in nature and it was that recursiveness that allowed me to begin to articulate delineations and connections. It is also what helped me to let go of some things, and more closely examine others, ultimately coming to the realization that it is necessary to consider affordances and drawbacks of the different perspectives. The recursiveness of moving between teaching, research articles, preservice teacher conversations, coursework, and my own teaching journals also helped me to articulate and communicate my understandings in both my teaching and in my writing.

As I taught and worked to explicitly share my pedagogical thinking and decision making with the preservice teachers in my classes, I continued to read current children's literature. This allowed me to not only stay current with children's literature titles and authors to share with the preservice teachers in my classes, but also to develop my own skills as a literary critic and to create assignments that would support the preservice teachers to also grow as critics. By sharing titles and authors with preservice teachers, the importance of the role of teacher as

curator was reaffirmed when they returned the following week claiming, “I haven’t felt this way about reading a book since I was in elementary school. Do you have more books like this?”

This examination of a teaching repertoire for children’s literature in elementary teacher education provides a curricular framework from the three disciplinary perspectives of literacy, literature, and library science. The teaching repertoire is consistent with research within the discipline, useful in practice, and illustrated by actual books in the field. The framework meets three criteria: (a) it aligns with disciplinary research focused on children’s literature from the three dimensions of education, English, and library science; (b) it includes and is supported by experiential evidence that this framework is useful in practice in teaching TE courses; and (c) it provides examples from children's literature (the books themselves) that illustrate the three dimensions.

Ultimately, I came to believe that a multidisciplinary perspective of children’s literature strengthens developing understandings, scholarly identity, and pedagogical stance about children’s literature. Providing a classroom experience where preservice teachers examine disciplinary research and understandings that support the repertoire is just the start. I believe it is crucial for preservice teachers to not just examine children’s literature as a subject, but to also *experience* the different teaching repertoires as a way to move towards enacting those repertoires. I believe that close examination of developmental perspectives of reading, comprehension, and text levels provide important insight for preservice teachers to understand as they learn about becoming teachers of reading. I believe that understanding how to be a vigilant reader of literary elements, and understanding how to read critically with theory, are imperative to help preservice teachers consider children’s literature as more than just a tool to teach other subjects. It is also imperative to help them read beyond the literal presentations to consider

representations, misrepresentations, and missing representations. I believe that preservice teachers need to experience someone handing them a book and saying, “I chose this book for you, because I know you as a reader and a person,” and if that book is not a good fit for them, to be handed another book and another and another, until they are able to experience pleasure, connection, realization, or new understandings through their reading. I believe that preservice teachers need to experience making recommendations to other readers based on understandings of what is available and for them to hear in return, “Thank you, this was the exact right book at the exact right time.”

Through their experience of this approach and the teaching repertoire framework I have presented here, preservice teachers will not only understand the disciplinary understandings that inform pedagogy, they will also have greater insight and awareness in order to create similar experiences for the elementary students they will teach in their own classrooms.

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