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An Ethos of Literary Struggle: Literary Novices' Challenges with Literature

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Abstract

This study explores challenges with literary texts from the perspectives of the novices who read them and the experts who produce and teach them. Six English professors and five advanced undergraduate English majors at a private university in the United States participated in this study. Qualitative analyses of semi-structured interviews indicated that literary struggle was manifest as readers interacted with texts in disciplinary contexts. An ethos of literary struggle was represented by (a) the complex nature of literary texts, (b) the difficulties readers had interpreting literary language, and (c) the lack of skills required to manage literary struggles. Findings suggest that literary struggle may represent a disciplinary phenomenon undergirding aspects of novices' experiences with literature. Findings contribute to a more robust understanding of the role of struggle in navigating literary texts and can provide insights into how the field conceptualizes, enacts, and manages readers' literary challenges.

Keywords: Content area literacy, disciplinary literacy, literary struggle, literature-based instruction, qualitative research

An Ethos of Literary Struggle: Literary Novices' Challenges with Literature

Navigating the "territory of literature" (Hillocks, 2016) can be difficult for inexperienced readers. Literature is often multidimensional and complex, and it includes a wide variety of genres that can convey intricate characters and character relationships through complicated textual structures and patterns of character behavior. Literary experiences also contain high levels of indeterminacy in which language and narrative constructs, as well as readers' assumptions, motivations, and experiences, evoke endlessly shifting horizons and the sense "that in literature there is no end" (Langer, 1995, p. 27). As an ill-structured domain (Zietz, 1994) that uses ill-structured problem-solving processes (Lee et al., 2016) to navigate thematically dense texts in an effort to, as Rosenblatt (1978) explained it, "evoke . . . a literary work" (p. ix), English has complexity woven into its disciplinary fabric in ways that can confuse and frustrate novices. As Greg, a literary scholar in this study, described it, sometimes inexperienced readers of literature can feel like they are "drowning in the text." As educators, understanding novices' literary and other text challenges should be central to our work.

The purpose of this study is to explore the reading struggles of literary novices. The following question operationalizes this purpose: From the perspectives of literary experts and literary novices, what is the nature of novices' struggles with literature? Expert-novice research often draws distinctions between experts' and novices' approaches to literature (Rainey, 2015; Reynolds & Rush, 2017); this study, however, attends to experts' and novices' *shared* understandings of the challenges novices experience working with literary texts. Literary experts in this study are university English professors, and literary novices are advanced undergraduate English majors. This dual-perspective approach provides an opportunity to develop a disciplinary theory of literary struggle and understand key similarities in literary novices' text-based

experiences from two important and related points of view that are often explored in opposition rather than in concert with each other.

Conceptualizing Literary Struggle

Literary struggle, as a construct, is not *in* literature any more than meaning is *in* literature (Rosenblatt, 1938/1968). Because literary struggle deals fundamentally with readers' experiences with and the construction of meaning of texts in a specific disciplinary environment, the conceptualization of literary struggle in this article is informed by models of reading comprehension (RRSG, 2002; Ruddell & Unrau, 2013) and disciplinary literacy theory (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2018). To account for novices' struggles with literature, literary struggle is conceptualized in this article as a key feature of readers' experiences with literature that is informed by the reader, the text, the activity, the teacher, and the context, all of which are interconnected and disciplinary grounded (Figure 1).

Drawing on three decades of comprehension research, a group of reading experts known as the RAND Reading Study Group (2002) created the reader, text, activity, context (RTAC) model of reading comprehension. In its conception, *readers* bring a variety of knowledges, skills, and experiences as they engage with words and ideas in different types and genres of *texts* through reading tasks or *activities*, which occur in specific sociocultural *contexts* such as classrooms, but also homes and neighborhoods which reflect larger social and economic realities. In terms of struggle, the RTAC model has also been used to identify problems readers can have processing texts (Lee & Goldman, 2015), such as possessing and activating the right knowledges, strategies, and skills for specific reading experiences, understanding and working with the language and conceptual complexities of various types of texts, and identifying suitable

purposes for reading, all of which mediate and are mediated by the organization, structure, and values of social and cultural contexts in and outside of the classroom.

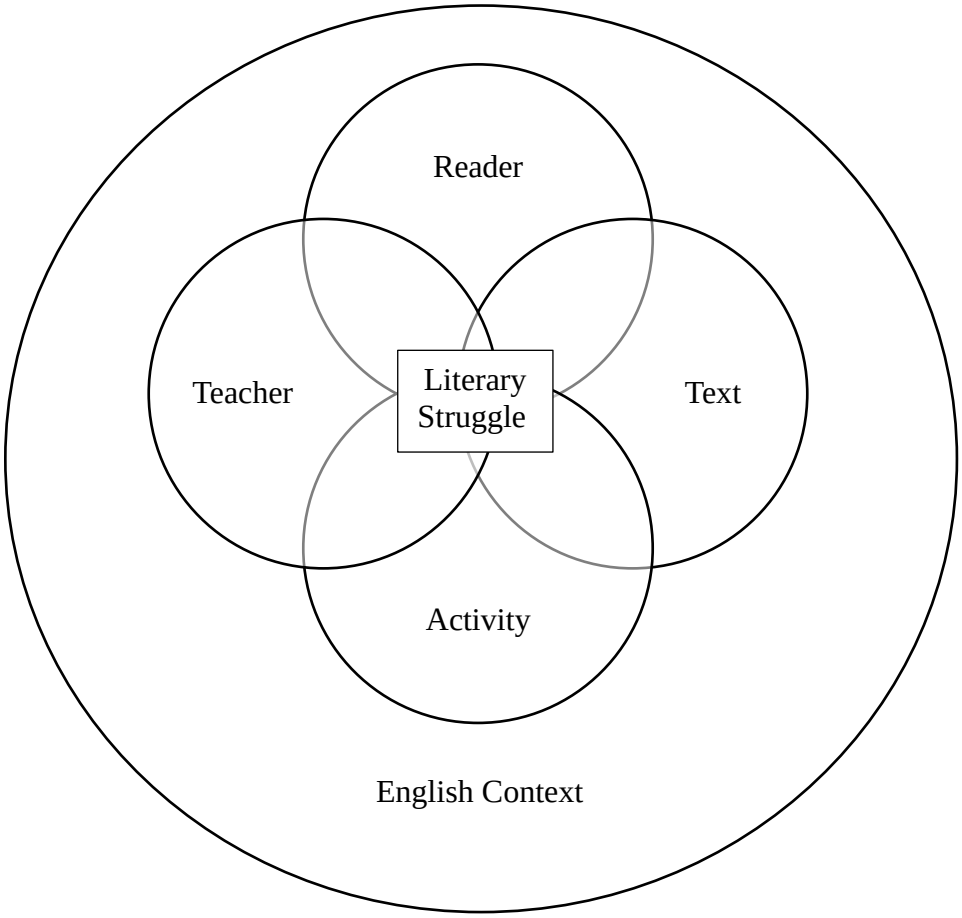

Figure 1. Disciplinary Grounded Representation of Literary Struggle

Although helpful for identifying key elements of reading comprehension and struggle, the RTAC model does not account for the role of the teacher (Alvermann & Moje, 2013). In their reader-text-teacher (RTT) model of reading, Ruddell and Unrau (2013) argue that teachers are central to theories of meaning-making because the teacher "frequently assumes major responsibility for facilitating meaning negotiation within the social environment of the

classroom" (p.1015). According to the RTT model, teachers establish instructional purposes, engage readers in inquiry and problem-solving, formulate and enact instructional strategies, and incite reader curiosity. Moreover, how readers engage with texts, what they get out of them, and how they use them "depend heavily on the instructional stance and strategies used by the teacher" (Ruddell & Unrau, 2013, p.1046). When teachers take an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1978) toward reading instruction, for example, readers "become absorbed in a text world of imagination" (Ruddell, 2004, p. 981) and are often more motivated to take on the challenges of challenging texts. In the absence of informed instruction, readers' struggles with literature and other types of texts can be ignored or exacerbated, which can confound their learning. Although the RTT model is more explicit about the place of instruction in meaning-making than the RTAC model, neither addresses the disciplinary nature of working (and struggling) with texts, which is central to this study. Disciplinary literary theory attends to this gap.

Disciplinary literacy provides a disciplinary grounded understanding of literary experience and struggle not addressed elsewhere. Disciplinary literacy maintains that domains of study such as mathematics, history, and English have distinctive (sub)cultures (Ball & Lacey, 1984) with unique histories, norms, and languages (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995) that inform the construction and distribution of knowledge (Moje, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2018). This leads to the cultivation of specialized "disciplinary habits of mind" (Fang & Coatoam, 2013, p. 628) that guide the development of disciplinary learning. As they move into more focused areas of study, readers face mounting domain-specific challenges learning to manage more complex texts generally and more sophisticated texts central to academic disciplines specifically (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Disciplinary literacy scholarship (Fang, 2012; Fang et al., 2014) has identified some of the distinct languages and structures of disciplinary texts that "students

often find unfamiliar and difficult, if not alienating" (Fang, 2017, p. 323). Instructionally, disciplinary literacy argues that content area educators should be the ones to teach students to manage meaning-making and other disciplinary challenges "because they know exactly the type of literacy processes that are needed to succeed within their discipline" (Wolsey & Lapp, 2017, p. 3).

Disciplinary literacy provides a domain-specific grounding of key elements of meaning-making that help articulate a working theory of literary struggle. In this study, the readers, texts, teachers, and activities that inform experiences and challenges with texts are situated in an English context, a positioning that orients these elements within a disciplinary theory of literary struggle. Informed by models of meaning-making and disciplinary literacy, literary struggle in this study is understood as a phenomenon of *readers'* experiences with *texts*, *teachers*, and *activities* that are grounded in the *contextual* histories, norms, expectations, and practices of the English domain (Figure 1). This suggests that literary struggle has disciplinary contours that make it unique and qualitatively different than say, mathematical struggle, scientific struggle, or historical struggle.

Expert-Novice Experiences with Literature

Expert-novice research has played an important role in understanding the ways disciplinarians engage with the challenges of domain-specific texts (Bazerman, 1985; Fulda, 2009; Wineburg, 1991). In English-related fields, this body of research has identified the approaches experts and novices use to construct meaning of literature, suggesting experts' facility—and novices' difficulty—managing literary struggles, particularly as they relate to constructing meaning of narrative texts. An early literary expert-novice study (Graves and Frederickson, 1991) found that experts contextualized literature more often than novices and

focused on the influences of the author's use of language. Novices tended to focus on surface features of texts, made fewer interpretations of the passages, and when struggling with texts took it "as a reflection of their inadequacy [as readers of literature]" (p.21). In a related study (Zietz, 1994), experts identified multiple levels of meaning in literature, were more sensitive to symbolism, demonstrated more robust analytic reasoning, and made stronger literary arguments than novices. More so than novices, experts also had better literary memories. In contrast, novices "seemed to have developed a nearly one-dimensional view of each of the texts … and largely ignored [their] more abstract components" (p. 300). Similarly, Peskin (1998) found that literary experts had a much richer reservoir of literary knowledge than novices that helped them anticipate literary elements, correctly identify and use genre conventions, and make interpretations of texts. For their part, novices stopped examining a text when they believed they understood it, struggled making allusions to other literary texts, were less likely to recognize and engage with a text's wordplay, and overall, were much less satisfied with their literary reading experiences than experts.

More recently, Rainey (2015, 2017) found that literary experts' reading practices rested on two shared orientations: The social nature of constructing meaning and the development of "new knowledge through text-based inquiry" (2017, p. 59). As they read, experts tended to seek text-based patterns, identify strange or unusual textual elements, consider a variety of possibilities in a text, and make original claims. Half of the literary novices in the study were aligned with the experts' literary practices and broader orientations. The other half of the novices focused their literary instruction on helping students do well on exams. This group believed that making connections or summarizing was the point of reading literature and "tended not to focus

on constructing, pursuing, or communicating about literary puzzles" as the literary experts did (2015, p. 125).

Reynolds and Rush (2017) also identified key distinctions between the reading practices of literary experts and novices. Experts made more extensive hypotheses that dealt with the tone of the texts, the authors' use of language, and character relationships. Novices read for basic comprehension. When experts encountered unfamiliar words, they engaged with the words, trying to define them and reason through them. When novices encountered unfamiliar words, they shut down. Experts asked questions as launching pads for more focused literary interpretation and as openings for "new pathways of analysis" (p. 210). Novices asked questions, but seldom sought to address them. Overall, experts seemed to welcome the challenge of challenging literary texts. Novices did not. The authors described the novices' responses to the challenge of literary texts as "entirely pessimistic and self-defeating" (p. 208).

Together, the disciplinary oriented model of literary struggle and the relevant expert-novice research guiding this study suggest the importance of readers' literary experiences and the need for additional research exploring novice's literary struggle. Although expert-novice literary literacy research has identified differences between the approaches experts and novices use to navigate literature, the almost exclusive focus in the research on the discrepancies between the two groups provide opportunities to identify points of agreement between them. From the perspectives of literary experts and literary novices, what, for example, is the nature of novices' literary struggle? Through the examination of a shared ethos of literary struggle, the present study extends the boundaries of current research by exploring novices' challenges with literary texts from the perspectives of the novices who read them and the experts who produce and teach them.

Methods

Participants

The selection of participants was informed by current expert-novice research (McCarthy & Goldman, 2019; Reynolds & Rush, 2017; Shanahan et al., 2011). The literary experts in this study were selected for their disciplinary expertise. Experts were university English professors (and one lecturer), all of whom had terminal degrees in English, published in their respective areas of specialization, and taught a wide variety of courses, such as Technical Writing, Freshman English, Rhetorical Theory, and American Civil War Literature. Experts averaged 19.5 years of university experience in English. Instructionally, the experts claimed limited formal training in literary pedagogy. They described the development of their literary instruction primarily as on-the-job training that consisted of personal study, working with mentors as graduate students and/or early-career professionals, "seeing what worked" in their classrooms, and replicating the instruction of previous professors. The experts believed their instruction aligned with accepted practice in their field and expressed a general interest in continuing to develop their teaching. Two of the experts were female. Four were male.

Literary novices were advanced undergraduate students majoring in English. As part of their major, they had taken the same core English courses and many of the same upper-division courses such as literary analysis, literary theory, and specific genre, author, and period studies. None of the novices stated that they were skilled at navigating literary texts. They were more circumscribed, stating that they experienced "a little bit of struggle" reading, learned a lot through their meaning-making work, and were getting good grades in their major courses. Novice participants were selected for their disciplinary major in English. Three of the novices were female. Two were male (Table 1).

Table 1

Expert and Novice Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Position	Gender	Expertise or Major
Cynthia	Professor	Female	African-American literature
Deborah	Assistant Professor	Female	Renaissance studies
Greg	Assistant Professor	Male	Creative writing
Howard	Professor	Male	Rhetorical theory
Jeffrey	Lecturer	Male	Fiction
Richard	Professor	Male	19th–century American literature
Annabelle	Student (Junior)	Female	English
Lucy	Student (Senior)	Female	English
Marcus	Student (Junior)	Male	English
Scott	Student (Senior)	Male	English
Tanya	Student (Senior)	Female	English

All participants were either professors or students at the same private university in the United States. It was not uncommon for students to have taken one or more courses from the participating professors. Representative of his colleagues' beliefs about their instruction, Richard said, "Our objective is to teach [students] to carefully read literature." There was no indication from the experts or novices that literature courses were used to sort students or initiate them into the field by intentionally failing a certain number of them. Responses from experts and novices suggest that literature courses had a clear instructional focus. Participants received no incentives for participating in this study. All names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Data consisted of semi-structured interviews with all participants. As the beginning phase of a larger project aimed at understanding experts' and novices' interactions with literary texts, this article draws on data from the first round of interviews. Conceptualized as meaning-making processes (Seidman, 2013), participants were given the opportunity to (re)construct accounts of their literary-related experiences during the interviews. Interviews explored participants' experiences with English literature, motivations for reading literature, and conceptions of literacy, literary texts, and literary knowledge development. The experts' interviews also included questions about literary instruction. The novices' interviews included questions about literary learning. Briefer, more targeted formal and informal interviews were conducted in-person and electronically to clarify participants' responses and follow up on ideas that surfaced during the analysis process. All interviews were audio recorded. Formal analysis began after the first round of expert and novice interviews were transcribed.

Analytic Procedures

A colleague and I began analyzing the first round of interviews by reading the novice interviews and conducting extensive microanalyses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) aimed at identifying the novices' practices and experiences with literature. Through careful observation, multiple readings, and attention to details such as participants' language use, microanalysis helped us "break open the data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 59). We read the interviews individually and then met to discuss our observations and experiences. Early in the coding process we noticed novices talking extensively about their literary challenges in response to many of the interview questions. Literary struggle, it appeared, was an important part of novices'

literary experiences. “Literary struggle” became a focus of the first round of analysis. We assigned tentative labels to the novices’ “struggle” codes/themes and continued analyzing the interviews to identify the emerging codes’ properties, tensions, and dimensions. We also wrote relational statements and created analytic memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to examine how the developing codes fit together to explain the novices’ literary struggles. Memos included written and pictorial comparisons among the novices’ experiences with literature, questions about what we were seeing, and our developing thinking about the nature of the novices’ struggles.

We then analyzed the experts’ responses, looking for points of (dis)agreement between the two groups with regard to novices’ literary struggles. Across many of their responses, the experts also indicated that novices’ literary experiences were characterized by various types of struggle. We coded and labeled the novices’ struggles identified by the literary experts, finding a high degree of alignment between the two groups (Table 2). Creating diagrams and tables helped us map out each “struggle” code and visualize the nature of novices’ literary struggles from the novices’ and experts’ perspectives. Making theoretical comparisons between the novices’ struggles with literature and the extant scholarship on literary literacies (Peskin, 1998; Rainey, 2016; Reynolds & Rush, 2017) helped clarify and refine our thinking. Disagreements throughout the analysis process were settled through discussion, continued analysis of the data, and revisiting the relevant research.

Table 2

Coding Scheme and Data Exemplars Representing an Ethos of Literary Struggle

Code	Definition	Data Exemplar
Literary complexity	The participant articulates the complex nature of literature or general difficulties of working with literature.	Expert: "[Literary texts] have a way of saying things in the most obscure way possible" (Deborah). Novice: "It's hard because you have to make your brain think differently all the time" (Lucy).
Struggles with language	The participant articulates language-based and interpretive struggles with literature.	Expert: "[It's] difficult to get at the metaphorical and figurative meaning of language" (Jeffrey). Novice: "The language can be a struggle" (Marcus).
Managing reading challenges	The participant articulates (inadequate) approaches for managing literary challenges.	Expert: "Sometimes I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do or don't have the time or energy necessary to help each and every student get it" (Greg). Novice: "When I don't understand what's going on, I just look for that stuff to get a deeper understanding of the text" (Tanya).

An Ethos of Literary Struggle

For the participants, struggle appeared to be central to novices' experiences with literature. Literary struggle was not simply a feature of the text; rather, it arose through readers' interactions with literature through reading activities and literary instruction within English disciplinary contexts, which were informed by ideologies, histories, and practices central to the field. These elements account for the shape of literary novices' struggles with literature, which were represented in this study by (a) the complex nature of literary texts, (b) the difficulties readers had interpreting literary language, and (c) the lack of skills required to manage literary struggles. Although presented separately for clarity, these three disciplinary dimensions of an ethos of literary struggle overlapped, suggesting that they worked together to inform novices' literary experiences. To help identify the contours of an ethos of literary struggle, representative responses from expert and novice participants, respectively, are used to illustrate each of the three dimensions.

"Hopelessly Difficult to Get Through": Literary Complexity

All the experts and novices indicated that reading literature was difficult. The literary experts addressed the complexity of literature and general struggles making sense of it. Experts referred to literary texts as "complex things," "a foreign language," "intimidating," and "confusing." Greg described literature as "deceptive" because it could lull novices into thinking they understood it and then reveal additional layers or withstand interpretations that novices had not considered. The literary scholars indicated that these experiences often frustrated novices who were still developing the ability to identify and accept more complicated and nuanced interpretations of literature. In her explanation of the complexity of literary texts, Cynthia said they were loaded with "submerged meaning" that was not readily apparent to novices. Reading

literature, she said, was not the same as understanding literature. Saying the words on the page was not enough if one hoped to understand complex literary texts. It took time and effort for novices to find the salient ideas in part because, as Deborah stated, literature "has a way of saying things in the most obscure way possible." The "obscurity" of literary texts challenged novices' meaning-making processes, requiring them to adjust their existing processes and learn new ones.

Greg described struggling novice readers of literature as "drowning in the text." He called literary meaning-making "an exercise in obfuscation" that was often "a painful process" through which novices could "feel very lost and overwhelmed." As a result of these experiences, Richard argued that novices often "become intimidated" by the difficulty of making sense of texts and see literature as "hopelessly difficult to get through." Adding another layer to the literary complexity puzzle, Deborah said she wanted to "challenge students . . . to think critically and analytically about a challenging work of literature." Howard echoed his colleague, stating that the purpose of his literature courses was "to push [students] to where they are struggling." Because he believed struggle was part of understanding literature, Howard tried to engage students in the struggle, to get them to the point of struggle. Cynthia said struggle was necessary to do the "work of understanding" literature. For the literary experts, complexity appeared to be a central feature of novices' experiences with literature, and struggling with that complexity was part of the process required to make sense of it.

For their part, the literary novices also recognized the complexity of reading literature, but it was coupled with a degree of appreciation. Marcus, for example, confessed that he had "always enjoyed reading in general," but that reading literature was "a little bit of a struggle because of the subject matter." But overall, he said, "I love it." "It's not easy," Annabelle said

about reading literature, "but it's important." Lucy explained her reading experiences through the lens of literary theory:

> It's hard because you have to make your brain think differently all the time, like you would just wrap your head around one critical theory and then you're thrown another one. Just applying that is really hard. You have to make your brain work a different way and it was challenging, and I enjoyed that.

Lucy, like her colleagues, struggled reading literature but respected the struggle and found it enjoyable. When asked about having enough time to complete her course readings, Lucy said, "Sometimes I guess time is an issue, but I love reading and I love reading literature and I love the challenge of literary texts. But sometimes you just have to pick and choose what you value more." Interestingly, Lucy's response reframed the time question as a restriction on her opportunity to read and be challenged by literature, not necessarily a restriction on having the time to complete her reading. For the novices, reading literature was a complex, difficult task; yet, it was not pointless, nor was it a "dreary surrender to convention" experienced by young readers in other English classrooms (McGraw & Mason, 2019, p.5). The novices' perspective on literary challenge suggests that although they struggled working with literature, they prized the struggle and may have seen it as a point of pride that they could endure the challenge and find purpose in it.

"The Language Can be a Struggle": Readers' Language-Based Challenges

Experts identified novices' language-based and related interpretive struggles as a serious issue. Cynthia said it was "easy [for novices] to just read the words," but that it was "harder to interpret it." She explained: "I mean, they can read something and they'll come to class saying they really liked it or they didn't understand it." Once they have made these observations the real

work begins as novices learn "to figure out the language in the texts; what works in a text and what doesn't." Cynthia continued, stating that students struggle learning how to "question a text" and learning to "go beyond the surface and go deeper." Her colleagues agreed. Jeffrey said novices find it "difficult to get at the metaphorical and figurative meaning of language." Howard said novices "struggle with being able to read beyond the text and get to interpretations, subtle meanings in language, and then to support effective interpretations." The other literary experts expressed similar interpretative and language-based challenges facing novice readers of literature.

Relatedly, experts also indicated that novices' lack of familiarity with genres, texts, text structures, and certain types of language was a challenge. They spoke of novices being unfamiliar with narratives or "non-quantifiable texts," not knowing how to work with "long blocks of texts," and lack of facility with "any language or style that precedes our own era," such as the Elizabethan English of Shakespeare. Some experts suggested lack of familiarity with language, genre conventions, and other issues could translate into students' reading resistance. Cynthia, for example, said some students without previous experiences with literary language "refuse to read texts the way we want them to." Others indicated that students' lack of familiarity working with language could induce fear. Richard talked about students being "intimidated by the complexity of [literary] texts' language." Greg suggested that novices "psyche themselves out [when] they think they don't get it because it's new and [the texts] are using words they're not familiar with."

Literary novices also identified working with language as their primary literary challenge, but as with experts, it was not simply about wrestling with unfamiliar words. Beneath the novices' identification of literary language as a key struggle was the anticipation and challenge

of comprehension. The novices struggled working through the language of literature to understand – to use their words – what literature was "trying to say." Annabelle said her primary challenge with literature was "to find out what they're trying to say." In an echo of her peers' experiences, Lucy said, "I struggle with what exactly they are trying to say about language and rhetoric." As suggested, one of the central issues the novices faced was not necessarily defining unfamiliar words – they indicated that that was easy to deal with – but rather the key issues being conveyed about literature and language, through language. Lucy's words capture this idea succinctly. She suggested that literature often makes statements about language through the use of language, or that language could be the medium of examination as well as the topic of examination. Understanding this literary dynamic, she said, was often difficult. When asked about her struggles with literary language, Lucy laughed, stating with a hint of sarcasm and fatigue, "I'm like an English major, of course I don't struggle with anything." And then she laughed again.

With regard to an ethos of literary struggle, Lucy's response is instructive. It draws attention to the realities of her language-based challenges. The sarcasm in her voice belied her words, indicating that she – and perhaps by extension, other English majors – struggled navigating literary structures, genres, and language. Also, as indicated by her laughter, Lucy may have felt uncomfortable being so open about her literary struggles, which may have been grounded in the tacit belief that English majors should know what they are doing with literature. In some ways, admitting the struggle may have been a breach of disciplinary etiquette because it pulled back the proverbial curtain to lay bare the difficulties novices had handling the language-based work in the texts at the center of their discipline.

"There is Not an Adequate Safety Net": Managing Reading Struggles

Literary experts articulated two general approaches for managing novices' reading struggles, both of which were characterized by degrees of agency. The more agentive approach involved practices in which experts took responsibility for developing students' capacity to navigate literary texts. These consisted primarily of rereading and reviewing challenging sections with students and demonstrating how students might, as Jeffrey said, "arrive at understanding through various critical thinking and analytic methods." When students struggled with literature, Cynthia said, "I'm going to help you work through some of those issues and we're going to take passages and break it down and explain them so that you have a stronger sense of what you're doing." Versions of "sifting through" literature and "reviewing it" represent some of the tools experts used to address novices' literary struggles, which demonstrate the value experts placed on guiding novices through literary texts. However valuable these practices might have been, they ran up against the experts' more common but less agentive practices.

When he noticed students struggling to understand literature, Richard, for example, hoped students would ask the right questions. "I hope students voice questions," he said, "and ask me why this is important during discussions." When students struggled, Greg said, "Sometimes they come and see me and sometimes I hope that will happen. I hope that the student that doesn't get it but wants to get it will come and see me." In addition to hoping students will ask questions and reach out for additional help, experts also avoided talking with students and ignored them. Howard preferred not to talk with students about their reading challenges because it could limit their learning:

> I mean, I'm willing to talk with [students] about it, but the worst thing I can do is talk to them about what they're reading because most students when that happens will end their attempt to understand it, which means it will end their attempts to learn.

Greg explained that he did not have the time or the tools to address students' literary struggles, so sometimes he ignored them:

> Well, the bad answer and the honest answer is that sometimes I don't do anything [when students struggle with literature]. Sometimes I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do or don't have the time or energy necessary to help each and every student get it. . . . When a specific student is struggling, you know, sometimes I just ignore it.

Similar to Greg, Deborah also struggled to address students' reading challenges, in part because of the large number of students she taught. She said, "the reading is hard to address on a personal level because I have so many people in my bigger classes." Together, hoping students will ask questions, refusing to talk with them, ignoring their challenges, and not addressing their reading needs because of large class sizes indicate limits on experts' pedagogical volition in addressing novices' literary struggles. This may have informed Greg's observation that "there's not an adequate safety net; probably, I haven't provided an adequate safety net for each student who's not getting it."

Novices also struggled managing their literary reading challenges. Their most common practice for working through literature was to "look up stuff on the internet." Scott and Marcus looked up "certain words or phrases." Tanya used digital technologies to help her dig into literature: "I just look for that stuff to get a deeper understanding of the text." Annabelle looked for summaries. "If I find a summary," she said, "I'll go back and reread the text. If not . . . [laughs]." Lucy found technology useful when she was reading "a really dense text. Derrida, for

example. Where an author takes it and breaks it down." When pressed, the novices articulated very little logic or technique for finding information online to help them address their literary challenges. Their use of technology consisted primarily of "googling it" and sifting through the results until they identified something they found useful. They also stated that they received minimal direction from their professors for navigating (to) relevant online resources. The novices' use of technology in their language-based work with literature amounted to a relatively blind search through the internet.

When they were not using digital technologies, the novices also appeared to have few robust tools for navigating literature. Marcus tried to "make connections and see similarities" to try to help him "understand an author's point of view." When they were available in the text, Scott used footnotes. Annabelle and Lucy addressed literary challenges by rereading. For Annabelle, rereading appeared to be a broad-level strategy for reading entire texts several times. She said rereading helped, but that it took a lot of time, so she did not do it often. Lucy used to believe that she should understand literature her first time through it. Over time, her perspective changed: "I found – and I had to get over this, but – I found that there is no shame in having to reread a sentence or reread a paragraph. So, I do that." Rereading was one of Lucy's most common tools for addressing her literary reading confusion, and perhaps because it helped her, she learned to manage the shame of not comprehending literature on her first read-through. Novices also tried to manage their literary struggles by reading the assigned material right before class so it was "fresh in my mind." Much like their technological practices for managing struggle, many of the novices' non-technological strategies appeared clumsy and thin. None of the novices identified more than a few general techniques, nor when invited could they explain how and when they used them beyond the most basic level.

Limitations

Findings from this study should be understood in light of some of its limitations. First, although the number of participants is appropriate for investigating emerging areas of interest (Patton, 2015) and is consistent with current expert-novice literacy research (McCarthy & Goldman, 2019; Reynolds & Rush, 2017; Shanahan et al., 2011), the study's findings are not generalizable. Second, although analyses indicated clear themes in the data, the data were generated from the first round of interviews with literary experts and novices. More work is needed to bolster, refine, problematize, and contest the dimensions of an ethos of literary struggle presented here. Third, although the experts received their advanced degrees and academic training from a range of institutions, the expectations of the target institution of which all participants were associated may have served to flatten the scope of literary experiences identified in the study. The findings might, therefore, partially reflect an institutional representation of expert and novice literary experiences and interactions. Despite these limitations, this study's attention to articulating an ethos of literary struggle can help pave the way for future work by English and literacy researchers and educators that explores the influence of literary struggle on novices and how well literary novices and experts manage these struggles as readers and educators, respectively.

Discussion and Implications

This study suggests that struggle was a central feature of novices' experiences with literature. An ethos of literary struggle was manifest by the complex nature of literature, the language-based and interpretive challenges novices faced, and the narrow range of practices for addressing these challenges. Experts and novices appeared to share the same general contours of an ethos of literary struggle, indicating that those who teach literature and those who read it may

see literary struggle as one of the defining characteristics of literature-based domains. This work supports and builds upon existing literary literacy scholarship and raises issues that seem critical for current work in literacy research and instruction.

Much of the extant expert-novice literary literacy research focuses on measuring literary domain knowledge and identifying important differences/variations between experts' and novices' construction of meaning (Peskin, 1998; Rainey, 2015; Reynolds & Rush, 2017). The present study builds on this research by articulating a shared expert-novice ethos of literary struggle that may represent a disciplinary phenomenon undergirding aspects of one's experiences with literature; that is, struggle may be central to the literary learning process, or to some extent, working with literature means struggling with literature. Understanding the nature of this struggle is important. As English educators know, novices' literary struggles can vary within a text, across texts, over the course of a lesson, during a unit, and throughout their lives. Literary struggle is seldom a singular feature of a text or explained by a single characteristic of a reader; rather, literary struggle may be more of a feature of readers' experiences with texts, instruction, and activities within the context of the English discipline. This disciplinary conception of literary struggle informs how and why novices might struggle with literature.

For example, a disciplinary-grounded view of literary struggle can help English educators understand struggle in terms of (a) the interests, knowledges, and skills readers bring to a literary experience, (b) the structure, genre, and language conventions of a literary text, (c) the clarity, focus, and purpose of a specific literary activity, and (d) the manner in which instructional practices and stances inform the literary experience, as they are situated and informed by (e) the histories, norms, and values of English disciplinary contexts. If, for example, readers can access knowledge related to a literary text, but the knowledge does not align with the instructional

purposes articulated for the reading activity, then readers may struggle constructing meaning of the text. Moreover, if instruction is clear and appropriate and students have a rich reservoir of skills to construct meaning of texts generally, they may still struggle if those skills are not appropriate for the demands of a specific literary activity within a specific English context. As part of a dynamic interplay of factors, literary struggle can appear when we least expect it. The approach to literary struggle presented here is likely to complexify the construct; yet, it also provides English educators with a helpful analytic tool for identifying, monitoring, and addressing the literary struggles readers are likely to experience with the complex text and processing tasks necessary for academic achievement in today's English classrooms and beyond (Goldman et al., 2016).

Disciplinary literacy highlights the unique ways of knowing and doing in academic areas of study (Moje, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2018). Recently, it has emerged as a solution to help today's "endangered readers" (Alexander & Fox, 2011) who struggle learning increasingly complex and abstract concepts from increasingly specialized texts across a range of academic domains (Moje et al., 2011). Situated within the discipline of English, an ethos of literary struggle extends current disciplinary literacy scholarship by providing another perspective on the nature of literary literacy. Given that a key feature of disciplinary literacy is understanding the specialized nature of and approaches to texts, literary struggle may be one of the disciplinary constraints that informs experts' and novices' engagement with literature. Although participants believed struggling with literature was part of one's literary experiences, struggle could also be counter-productive if it was not managed well. For their part, literary novices learned to anticipate various literary challenges as part of their literature-based experiences. Literary struggle was both frustrating and exciting. It made reading laborious and rewarding. In as much

as understanding the specialized nature of and approaches to texts is a key feature of disciplinary literacy (Fang, 2017; Moje, 2015), a deeper understanding of literary struggle could provide important insights for conceptualizing and helping readers navigate their disciplinary meaning-making experiences with literature.

Moving forward, we might consider what other disciplinary expectations, text features, and reader experiences can contribute to literary struggle, how literary struggle can manifest itself across stages of literary development or levels of expertise, and the nature of the relationship among elements of literary struggle and how they work together to inform novices' experiences with literature in the English classroom and in other spaces. Consideration of the representation of literary struggle presented in this study and literary struggle more broadly could develop a finer-grained understanding of what literary struggle looks like and how it informs novices' experiences with literature.

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