A Phenomenological Study in Supporting New Teachers Working with Adolescent Readers

Colleen Walsh
Long Island University
New York, U.S.A.

Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the factors that impact the teaching of reading among first-year teachers participating in an alternative certification teacher education program, and focused on what factors could lead to their success teaching reading to their adolescent students. The central research question that guided this study was: How can teacher educator's best support new teachers in teaching adolescent readers? Questions that supported the central question that emerged from preliminary research were: (a) What do new teachers believe they need to successfully teach reading to adolescent students? and (b) How do new teachers feel about teaching reading? Data collection methods included a survey, individual interviews and a focus group. Data analysis methods included triangulation, bracketing, establishing categorical patterns and themes, and describing the essence of participants' experiences. Findings yielded the emergence of three themes: (a)Fears of new teachers in terms of their past perceptions of who they were as readers and their current perceptions of what knowledge is needed about adolescents to successfully teach them to read; (b)New teachers desire a knowledge of what an adolescent is physiologically, what is happening during this time period, and how it manifests cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally; and(c)Providing teachers with specific knowledge about adolescents and successful reading strategies leads to an intrinsic motivation for teachers to teach reading.This study offers insight into the current trends in teacher education, and provides a voice to statistics showing a nationwide reading crisis among adolescents and how teachers may play a pivotal role in changing this.

Keywords: adolescent, cognitive strategy, reading, new teacher preparation

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

Background

The National Council of Teachers of English (2005) defines reading as a complex, purposeful, social and cognitive process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning. Reading is not a technical skill acquired once and for all in the primary grades, but rather a developmental process over a lifetime. With the shrinking world economy and increased reliance on digital connectedness, the abilities to read and communicate are foundational to basic individual opportunity and the social good.

In America today, the consequences for the individual and to the nation are staggering in terms of lost wages and earnings. For those students who earn a diploma, an increasing number must take remedial coursework upon entering college, with those least likely to earn a degree or certificate requiring remedial reading (Carbo, 2010).
Research has substantiated that literacy is foundational to education, work and civic life, and that effective implementation strategies must acknowledge the complexities of reading as a lifelong developmental process. In middle and high school, adolescents are already reading or being asked to read in multiple ways, using literacy as a social and political endeavor in which they engage to make meaning and act upon their worlds. This is unique to adolescent readers and must be acknowledged (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Evidence suggests the need for a paradigm shift in curriculum integration of skills and content area instruction around literacy, and the alignment of staff development to this (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko and Hurwitz, 1999). The focus on the shifting national and global literacy requirements, and the multicultural and social nuances of adolescent literacy, increase demands on teachers in establishing sound adolescent literacy scope and sequence trajectories.

At this time in United States' history, it is easy to utilize what Jacobs (2008) calls, *thelanguage of crisis* in discussing adolescent literacy. A pivotal report released in the 1980s first contextualized the urgency of the issue: *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* reported statistics about adolescents' reading abilities, noting, that "about 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States could be considered functionally illiterate" and that "functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent" (p. 11). The report also stressed that adolescents lacked "higher-order" intellectual skills: "Nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material and only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay" (p. 11). These data raised concern about the ability of the nation's youth to be participants in an increasingly complex global workforce. The challenges associated with adolescent literacy extend beyond secondary school to both college and elementary school. According to a policy brief produced by the National Council of Teachers of English (2005), analyses of reading instruction in the elementary school suggest that an emphasis on processes of how to read can take the focus off reading for ideas, information, and concepts; considered the very skills adolescents need to succeed in secondary school. On the college side, instructors noted that students arrived in their classes ill-prepared to read and write at a level appropriate for higher education, and employers experienced the inadequate skills of young workers.

In comparison globally, the U.S. college-educated workforce has fallen from 30 percent to 14 percent as young workers in developing nations demonstrated higher levels of proficient literacy (National Council of Teachers of English, 2005).

Between 1973 and 2008, the share of jobs in the U.S. economy requiring postsecondary education increased from 28 percent to 59 percent (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). More than ever, students need advanced literacy skills to succeed in a fast-paced global economy. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in member and non-member nations of 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading. In one measure of reading American fifteen-year-olds placed seventeenth among developed nations in reading, lagging behind countries such as Estonia, Liechtenstein, and Poland. As shown in Table1, the United States is far removed from top international standings in reading (Program for International Student Assessment, 2012).

Table 1The PISA Global Education League Table.*

GLOBAL EDUCATION LEAGUE TABLE

Overall Rank*	Country/Economy	Mathematics Score	Reading Score	Science Score
1st	Shanghai (China)	613	570	580
2nd	Singapore	573	542	551
3rd	Hong Kong	561	545	555
4th	Taiwan	560	523	523
5th	South Korea	554	536	538
12th	Finland	519	524	545
26th	United Kingdom	494	499	514
36th	United States	481	498	497
61st	Jordan	386	399	409
62nd	Colombia	376	403	399
63rd	Qatar	376	388	384
64th	Indonesia	375	396	382
65th	Peru	368	384	373

Based on 2012 PISA math score   Source: 2012 Program for International Student Assessment, OECD [1]

In the face of this literacy crisis, the majority of states have agreed to take dramatic measures to improve reading and writing instruction. Adopting the English language Common Core State Standards was part of this initiative. The idea behind them was for students to show a steady increase in their ability to read complex texts and write reasoned arguments based on evidence.

---

[11] *Results for 2012, from the Program for International Student Assessment, OECD. The United States ranks 36th in overall standings for Reading, Math, and Science. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf

The development of strong literacy skills requires explicit instruction and extensive practice in reading, writing, and thinking across the curriculum. Ensuring that all young people graduate from high school with advanced literacy skills is essential in postsecondary education and a career. Unfortunately, several years later, there exists much controversy regarding the use of these as measures of student and teacher success. An example of this comes from New York State where decision-makers are moving to a four-year transition period to focus on revamping the Common Core standards and are considering alternative ways to evaluate teachers. Further evidence of the need for a more synergistic approach to policy development and implementation is consistently discussed by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT); a vocal stakeholder in the literacy dialogue. In June 2015, it published a commentary of The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2015results, emphasizing the 4th grade drop in reading test scores and questioning the Common Core Learning Standards. The article further highlighted how teachers were asked to teach to new tests they had not seen, mostly without curriculum aligned to the new standards, "The implementation of the Common Core standards in New York State and New York City beginning in 2012 were marked by haste, missteps and confusion. The standards for the early grades were developmentally inappropriate, according to many educators" (Mcadool,p. 4).

These statements help make a case for comprehensive federal, state, and local decision-making to improve reading and writing skills for adolescents across the nation. In the past, even though a sense of urgency resulted from state and national reports, an organized, collaborative response to the adolescent reading crisis was not facilitated due to the focus on early reading programs and the commitment of funding to developing primary-grade reading instruction and materials. Jacob's (2008) study articulates this:

National reports such as the National Reading Council's *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998) and the National Reading Panel's *Teaching Children to Read* (2000) recommended action plans for addressing childhood reading, and federal funding for programs such as Reading First (2001) provided support for implementing those recommendations; the time had finally come to turn full attention to older, adolescent readers. (p. 8)

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the shared experience of ten first-year,special education teachers who, as part of their regular teaching responsibilities, work with adolescents who cannot read or who read below grade level. Each participant in this study was a new teacher, recruited and hired by the Department of Education of a major urban city to be part of a cohort in an alternative teacher certification program. This city program is aligned with its state Department of Education and has been in existence for thirteen years.

This pilot study endeavors to discuss challenges in teaching reading to the adolescent population of student, to review the research on best practices for teaching adolescents to read, and to describe what is needed by new teachers to feel successful in teaching reading. It also explores reading as foundational to education, work and civic life, and highlights some effective implementation strategies that acknowledge the complexities of reading as a developmental process and addresses the need for an equitable and comprehensive approach to adolescent literacy reform. It identifies adolescence as a crucial developmental stage and draws heavily on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to establish recommendations in supporting new teachers in working with adolescents in teaching them to read.

Pros and Cons of This Topic

There are challenges in researching this topic. Adolescence is a relatively short transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It is a period of heightened physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, psychological and moral development. Within this time, the individual is supposed to successfully complete all developmental tasks that characterize the passage from child to adult (Lazarus 2013). Teaching students at this time in their human development is fraught with challenges. As students are going through multiple stages of change and adjustment, teachers, especially those new to their field, are required to develop their own foundation of teaching skills while interacting successfully with adolescent students. The structure of secondary education forces teachers to be content-area experts, skills-based experts, and challenges teachers to take on responsibilities of counseling and assessing students on social and emotional as well as academic abilities. It is *messy* work as it deals with a tumultuous time in the lives of students and in the lives of professionals beginning their careers (Spear, 2000).

There are also promising implications of researching this topic when looking at aligning new teacher training with expanded knowledge of who their adolescents are and what the physiological implications could be in manifesting opportunities for growth in reading.   Havighurst (1972) includes learning to read as one of the critical developmental tasks in our lives, "the successful achievement of which leads to happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later tasks" (p. 23).   There is evidence-based research that makes strong connections between reading and social mobility (Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison, 2006).   With so much at stake, how best to support teachers in working with adolescent readers is an issue of paramount importance, albeit one that requires a careful sifting of previous research and attention to one's own biases.

Limitations of Previous Research

The importance of high-quality professional development and teacher education courses in advancing both pre-service and in-service teachers 'expertise in teaching reading and understanding literacy cannot be underestimated (Tovani, 2000).   Research focused on adolescent reading as part of their overall academic achievement has historically provided information on helping students achieve in content-areas, with achievement of content-specific goals.

Research has provided teachers with a variety of skill-based strategies for integrating reading into their instruction but it has generally not provided teachers with the means to examine why and how reading strategies can facilitate content-area learning (Conley, 2008).   Research has lacked to illustrate for teachers the relationship between reading and learning as a *meaning-making process*, and how the learning strategies used to teach their content also serve as a means to hone students' comprehension, vocabulary, and study skills without interrupting content-area learning (Conley, 2008).

Research has fallen short in allowing secondary teachers to understand that while they are not teachers of reading, they can, by capitalizing on reading skills and processes, help their students become independent learners who are able to comprehend the "world" as well as the "word" of their disciplines (Freire, 1998).   There is also a lack of research associated with how adolescent cognition is impacted by environmental nuances of the teacher-student relationship. Research that contemplates brain function of adolescents and connects that to the role of the teacher-student relationship in moving forward academically, socially and emotionally, is imperative in making reading stick. Research has also been limited on the impact of these relationships on the teachers themselves and their motivation and desire to hone their craft and continue teaching.

Questions from new and aspiring teachers about how to teach adolescents to read must be addressed with sound empirically-based interventions.   Historically, concerns of teachers center on the low levels of reading or the complete inability of their secondary students to read. What best practices are working to support teachers in their efforts to teach reading to adolescents? How can the teacher-student relationship encourage reading as a lifelong skill? Questions like these are important to consider in all facets of work with education professionals; focusing research, developing curricula and designing effective reading strategies and research that addresse these questions is needed.

Centralizing the Study and Research Questions

Teacher education currently lacks a focus on the meaningful integration of cognitive strategy instruction, especially with regard to connecting cognitive strategy instruction to student thinking and learning across secondary content areas. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needshas implications for the work of teachers with adolescents in classrooms, especially around reading. Currently, some of the most successful research-based interventions that help adolescent readers require that teachers create supportive learning environments and develop strong interpersonal relationships with students so they enjoy reading and believe in themselves and their ability to learn (Carbo, 2010). In conjunction with ideas of identity and role adolescents are grasping to acquire their identity as learners in any given classroom.

According to Panksepp (Silton, Flannelly, Flannelly, &Galek, 2011), there is growing evidence that the basal ganglia, the limbic system, and the prefrontal cortex are involved in attachment and threat assessment; "To the degree this is so, they would appear to be primarily responsible for safety, love and self-esteem needs proposed by Maslow" (p. 263). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is based on the idea that higher needs arise as lower needs are gratified but it does not offer an explanation of what stimulates the needs in a person – or makes a person seek to fulfill these needs (Silton et al., 2011).

There is research that proposes that within the limbic system area of the brain internal wants and desires are actualized and humans and animals may act and find pleasure in meeting these internal wants and desires based on motivation (Spear, 2010; Steinberg, 2005).

The theoretical framework involved in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs when related to how the brain functions, could possibly advance teaching reading by showing the correlation between meeting psychosocial needs while concurrently impacting learning capacity or biological nature as it is represented in the human brain. Marrying relational, skills-based and cognitive-based teaching strategies might greatly impact an adolescent's ability to read. Providing training and ongoing, expanded opportunities to increase new teacher knowledge in how to do this; how to build better trusting relationships with students, what cognition is and how to develop and implement strategies aligned to adolescent brain cognition, and what skills are needed to retain and grow in reading as a lifelong skill, would be a step forward in the teaching of adolescent reading.

From these studies, it is suggested that these ideas improve teacher education and professional development. So, while application of Maslow has been seen to pay particular attention to the role of non-cognitive, psychosocial variables in learning, specifically students' basic physical needs, emotions, values, and self-perceptions; cognitive needs, as proposed by some researchers, are met concurrently as there is an inherent support of cognitive functions when psychosocial needs are met (Silton, et al., 2011).

Expected Contributions of This Study

Research that focuses on the teaching and learning processes of adolescent reading with a focus on how to support teachers in this work is lacking. A phenomenological study among first-year teachers participating in an alternative certification teacher education program focused on the factors leading to their success teaching reading to their adolescent students can offer further insight into the current trends in teacher education, as well as provide a voice to statistics showing a nationwide reading crisis among adolescents. It may also provide pertinent information to schools of education in how to sequence course trajectories and what skills and ideologies to embed in courses throughout programs of study that will have the most impact on the success of teachers and their students. Coming to a clearer understanding of what new teachers need to be better prepared in meeting their students' needs in reading is an expected contribution of this study.

Adolescent literacy rates are falling at alarming rates. Teacher sustainability is an increasing problem. Educators must be at the forefront of understanding the multifaceted layers of this phenomenon in order to reach the needs of all adolescent readers. How to help teachers be successful and stay in teaching and how to help students stay in classrooms and be successful at school, is ultimately what this study hopes to address.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was not without some limitations. It was limited due to my dual role as the Assistant Director of the teacher education program in which study participants are cohort members and my role as an instructor in this same program. Both roles could be seen to have possible limiting effects during the focus group and interviews. Data collection and analyses were delimited due to the choice of research design: transcendental phenomenological. Also, this study was delimited to ten new teachers of a cohort of over 100, due to the time constraint under which the study was conducted; it was delimited to a mid-sized, private university located in a large urban city due to location of my job and delimited due to my own experience teaching reading to adolescents and in teacher education over the past fifteen years.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Studies

Adolescence is a relatively short transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It is a period of heightened physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, psychological and moral development. Within this time, the individual is supposed to successfully complete all developmental tasks that characterize the passage from child to adult (Lazarus, 2013). Currently, teacher education professionals are faced with questions from new and aspiring teachers about how to teach adolescents to learn to read. Most of their concerns center on the low levels of reading or the complete inability of their secondary students to read. Research by Havig hurst (1972) studied learning to read as one of the critical developmental tasks. His theory suggested that the successful attainment of reading will lead to happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later tasks (Havighurst, 1972).There is evidence-based research that makes strong connections between reading and social mobility.

With so much at stake, socially and personally for each struggling reader, their families and society, how best to support teachers in working with adolescent readers is an issue that has far reaching implications. What are best practices in supporting teachers in their efforts to teach reading to adolescents? How can the teacher-student relationship encourage reading as a life-long skill? These are among questions that continue to arise in teacher education and are noteworthy of further research.

Adolescent Readers and Emotional Needs

Erikson. Adolescence has often been depicted as a stressful period in which behavioral, emotional and relationship conflicts, especially with parents and other prominent adults, including teachers, reach their peak. In the chapter, *Eight Ages of Man*, referencing stage five, Identity versus Role Confusion, of his theory of psychosocial development, Erikson (1963) states:

With the establishment of a good initial relationship to the world of skills and tools, and with the advent of puberty, childhood proper comes to an end…In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, adolescents have to refight many of the battles of earlier years, even though to do so they must artificially appoint perfectly well-meaning people to play the roles of adversaries, and they are ever ready to install lasting idols and ideals as of a final identity.(p.261)

Erikson's stage five is marked by the crisis of needing to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Unfortunately, many adolescents are not given the opportunity to establish the necessary skills and tools toward reading proficiency prior to this stage which occurs between the ages of approximately 12 to 18.

Erikson's theory has implications for the work of teachers with adolescents in classrooms, especially around reading. As they make the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents may begin to feel confused or insecure about themselves and where they fit in society. As they seek to establish a sense of self, they may experiment with different roles, activities, and behaviors. According to Erikson, this is important to the process of forming a strong identity and developing a sense of direction in life. Those adolescents who receive proper encouragement and reinforcement through personal exploration will emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self and a feeling of independence and control. Those who remain unsure of their beliefs and desires will be insecure and confused about themselves and the future (Erikson, 1963). In a classroom setting, it is the teacher who is best positioned to encourage and promote growth in students. A teacher that is skilled in teaching reading can utilize it as a developmental skill and thus a vehicle for exploration and growth for adolescent learners.

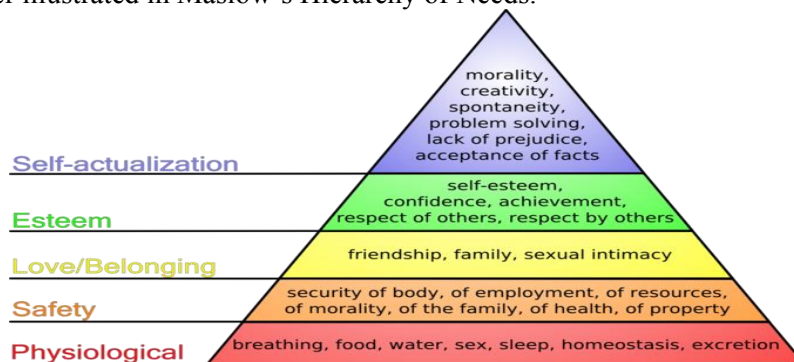**Maslow.** This is further illustrated in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

 Maslow wanted to understand what motivates people. He believed that people possess a set of motivation systems unrelated to rewards or unconscious desires. Maslow theorized that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled a person seeks to fulfill the next one, and so on. Adapted from McLeod, S. (2007). *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved from http://www.sim plypsychology.org/maslow.html

The most fundamental and basic four layers of the pyramid of the hierarchy contain what Maslow called "deficiency needs" or "d-needs": esteem, friendship and love, security, and physical needs. If these "deficiency needs" are not met – with the exception of the most fundamental (physiological) need – there may not be a physical indication, but the individual will feel anxious and tense. Maslow's theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire (or focus motivation upon) the secondary or higher level needs (Maslow, 1954). This has implications for teachers in utilizing their classrooms as safe and supportive places where developmental tasks, like reading, can be attained, sustained and increased.

The human mind and brain are complex and have parallel processes running at the same time, thus many different motivations from various levels of Maslow's hierarchy could be concluded to occur at the same time. Maslow spoke clearly about these levels in terms such as "relative," "general," and "primarily" (Maslow, 1954). Instead of stating that the individual focuses on a certain need at any given time, Maslow stated that a certain need dominates the human organism and emphasized as significant identifying the basic types of motivation and the order in which they should be met. The impacts of motivation on teaching adolescents to read and utilizing knowledge of these in assessing barriers to their reading success is worth considering.

Adolescent Readers and Physical Needs

Brain. Adolescence is the period of physical, cognitive, and social maturation between childhood and adulthood (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). The beginning of adolescence occurs around the onset of puberty and is therefore marked by dramatic changes in hormone levels and in physical appearance (including rapid physical growth, changes in facial structure, and the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics). Over the same time period, adolescents experience many changes in social, academic, and other environmental influences, and typically enter a stage of profound psychological transition.

The end of adolescence is said to occur when an individual has attained a stable adult role by which time the majority of pubertal transitions will have reached completion(Blakemore, Burnett, & Dahl, 2010). Most importantly, throughout adolescence, there are changes in the structure and function of the brain.

According to Blakemore, relatively little is known about the relationship between puberty and neural development in humans, although based on findings from nonhuman animal studies, it is suggested that the hormonal events of puberty trigger a second period of structural reorganization and plasticity in the brain (Sisk & Foster, 2004). But, with the growing number of human behavioral and neuroimaging studies, tentative evidence that hormones might influence the structure and function of the developing human brain has emerged. Developmental changes that have been delineated using MRI include alterations in the amount of gray and white matter microstructure. Empirical studies also suggest puberty has a role in cognitive development and function, and preliminary evidence from developmental MRI studies has suggested that the stage of puberty might play an important role in adolescent brain development perhaps more so than chronological age (Sisk & Foster, 2004).

The knowledge that exists currently, that the plasticity of the brain may increase during the adolescent stage, is encouraging. How teachers can best plan and implement cognitively appropriate reading lessons for their adolescent students must be addressed in any comprehensive reading intervention strategy (Spear, 2010; Steinberg, 2005). Further research and collaboration among scientists and practitioners toward this end is needed in considering how to structure lessons that include specific skills aligned to content when teaching reading.

Disorders. Disabilities in reading can vary greatly in adolescents. As stated by Lazarus's (2013) study: Reading requires decoding, accurate and fluent word recognition, and comprehension of word, phrase, sentence and text levels. Each student requires fundamental proficiency in the skill of reading if he is going to access the content presented in basic curriculum. Failure to read efficiently results in severe academic achievement deficits especially in the basic academic skills of reading, writing and mathematics; not allowing a student to process content knowledge. An adolescent with a reading disability has difficulties in reading skills that are unexpected in relation to age, cognitive ability, quantity and quality of instruction, and intervention. However, the reading difficulties are not the result of generalized delay or sensory impairment. For students with a reading disability, the reading difficulties are persistent and attributable to neurological disorders that may remain for the life of the individual. (p. 223)

Reading disabilities can manifest in many ways: difficulties in single word reading; initial difficulties decoding or sounding out words; difficulties reading sight words; insufficient phonological processing. Many struggling readers have difficulty understanding that sentences consist of words, words are made up of syllables and syllables are made up of individual sounds and phonemes. They also exhibit comorbid expressive or receptive language difficulties, and difficulties with comprehension (Lazarus, 2013).

Adolescent Readers and Relationship Needs

Teacher-Student. According to Tovani (2000),the teacher-student relationship is at the core of a foundation from which reading can be assimilated cognitively as well as emotionally, fostering a reader identity in the adolescent to be in the best possible position to address learning deficits.

A review of local and national testing results from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014), shows the combined effect and enormity of the link between childhood reading readiness, student-teacher relationships, and high school dropout rates; providing context for the urgent addressing of adolescents as struggling readers. In the United States, approximately one-third of public high school students fail to graduate, many of whom have borderline reading skills that make learning stressful and difficult (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

Environment. Currently, some of the most successful research-based interventions that help adolescent readers require that teachers create supportive learning environments and develop strong interpersonal relationships with students so they enjoy reading and believe in themselves and their ability to learn (Carbo, 2010). In conjunction with ideas of identity and role adolescents are grasping to acquire their identity as learners in any given classroom. Teachers who take the time to engage in relationship with their students and who practice observation and assessment to identify adolescents' reading abilities can better ascertain the reading style of each student and present reading programs that correlate to these.

 To simply say that teachers should differentiate reading instruction misses the overarching need for students to be treated as individual learners with specific social and emotional needs; those brought on by the adolescent stage, and nuanced by familial and other environmental forces.

 Summary of Extant Literature

National attention is now focused on older students who continue to demonstrate problems reading to be able to comprehend the content areas within secondary education. Even if they remain in school, the struggle takes an emotional toll on these readers and their teachers. Many teachers report that their adolescent readers are angry, frustrated, lazy, or withdrawn. These teachers note that they spend 50 to 90 percent of class time dealing with these students' negative behaviors, causing them to feel frustrated, sad, and burned out (Carbo, 2010). To propel adolescent readers forward and alleviate stress for both student and teacher, empirically-based cognitive intervention strategies are required. In developing these, it is important to expand the research on adolescent brain function to better understand how it relates to reading, and what teachers can do to further their knowledge and ability in this area to assess and address reading deficits.

It is also beneficial to examine how Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical framework can contribute to teacher educators' understanding of how best to support new teachers in the area of teaching reading to adolescents; furthering their understanding of how to identify what adolescents need to be successful readers, and developing capacity to know how best to support them in attaining reading success.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how best to support new teachers, sharing a common experience of an intensive in-service teacher preparation program, in teaching reading to adolescents. During this pilot study, a mixed method approach was utilized. The researcher's own experiences and feelings of teaching reading to adolescents were bracketed, and data collected through a survey, a focus group, and interviews were analyzed by open coding, bucketing themes into categories, and utilizing quotes from respondents to gather the *essence* of the shared phenomenon studied.

Research Questions

The central research question that guided this study was how can teacher educators best support new teachers in teaching adolescent readers? Questions that supported the central question were: (a)What do new teachers believe they need to successfully teach reading to adolescent students? (b) How do new teachers feel about teaching reading? Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs emerged as a theoretical framework of this study in establishing research questions.

Setting, Sample, and Participants

Setting. The setting for this study was a large, northeastern, urban city. All participants attended the same mid-sized, private university and were enrolled in a Master's Degree teacher education program. Participants were surveyed in a classroom of the university. The focus group and individual interviews took place on the university campus but in a neutral space not used for classroom activities.

Sample. Because of the short deadline for completing the study, convenience sampling was used and therefore the study may not be sufficiently representative of the entire population of new teachers in the program under study. This sampling technique was preferred because the population was most appropriate for the study, albeit small, there was no cost in conducting it, and the subjects were readily available on a weekly basis.

Participants. The ten new teachers who participated in my study were enrolled in my graduate seminar for first-year teachers. This was a year-long course and was part of an alternative certification program for special educators teaching secondary content-areas in grades 7–12. While this was an alternative certification track program, this cohort of students followed the same course sequence of traditional students and each will earn a master's in education after completing 42 credits. The teacher preparation program was considered highly intensive as teachers must find their own jobs, and begin teaching and taking coursework concurrently by the beginning of the academic, public school year. They were licensed as teachers of record as soon as they completed a six-week pre-service training program of coursework and summer school teaching. Table 2 represents participant demographics.

Table 2 Participant Demographics

Age	Gender	/Name	Race/Ethnicity	Content Area	Years Teaching
24	F	Esther	Caucasian	SpEd Math	In first year
29	M	Colin	Caucasian	SpEd Soc Stud	In first year
35	F	Ellen	African American	SpEd ELA	In first year
40	M	Randy	Hispanic	SpEd ELA	In first year
23	F	Penny	Hispanic	SpEd Math	In first year
32	M	Ken	Caucasian	SpEd Science	In first year
22	F	Caitlyn	Caucasian	SpEd Soc Stud	In first year
28	M	Brian	African American	SpEd ELA	In first year
29	F	Bre	African American	SpEd Math	In first year
26	M	Ray	Arabic	SpEd Science	In first year

Data Collection

First, I developed a survey with three quantifiably-framed questions, and four open-ended questions, which constituted a mixed method approach. I triangulated data collection methods by using three types of instruments: survey, focus group and interviews. Data was analyzed using open coding and themes emerged from the coding. I horizonalized statements collected during the focus group, along with those from individual interviews of all participants. Meanings that emerged from all the data collection instruments were clustered into common themes and used to develop descriptions of the shared experience, ultimately to "convey an overall essence of the experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Since a phenomenological study focuses on the shared experiences of a group of people, all participants were full-time, first-year special education teachers in secondary schools in a large urban city. The guiding research questions asked participants to describe their own reading experiences, the preparation received in teaching reading, their fears of teaching reading, and factors they believe would most contribute to their success in teaching adolescents to read (Creswell, 2013). The triangulation of the data collection allowed for the story of theshared experience of this study's participants to emerge over time andwas founded in their participation in a highly intensive alternative teacher education program, as first-year special educators, being required to teach reading within their specified content areas.

Instruments

To better understand how best to support new teachers in teaching reading to adolescents, participants answered an in-person survey, and participated in a focus group discussion and one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The seven survey questions asked about knowledge participants believed was needed to successfully teach reading, what they believed would be most useful to other new teachers in teaching reading, what they feared most about teaching reading and what they most would want to earn to document success in teaching reading. The choices for ranking this former question aligned to the stages of development in Maslow's hierarchy and was further explored in the focus group discussion where they were asked, "What impact does Maslow's Hierarchy have in thinking about teaching your students to read?"

Interviews were then conducted of all participants. There were three interview questions which were developed by scaffolding the results of the focus group discussion and the surveys. I designed all questions for the survey, focus group and interviews.

It is important to mention that the survey administered to the participants also sought to examine extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors in the teaching of reading and the acquisition of knowledge of learning to read. Some behaviors are motivated by external factors. Ryan and Deci (2000) define *extrinsic motivation* as "the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome" and define *intrinsic motivation* as "doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself" (p. 71).

The survey also sought to understand whether or not external factors had a positive impact on intrinsic motivation of teaching of reading, and if so, what type of external factors have had a positive effect. Ultimately, the questions sought to understand they type of impact internal and external factors have had and might continue to have on participants' perceived abilities to teach reading.

Data Analysis

Responses to questions of the three research instruments were coded into several categories; beliefs about knowledge of self (the teacher), knowledge of students (adolescents), and beliefs about knowledge of theoretically-based practical strategies needed to teach reading successfully. Themes that emerged were contextualized as follows: fears of new teachers in terms of their past perceptions of who they were as readers and their current perceptions of what knowledge is needed about adolescents to successfully teach them to read; new teachers desire a knowledge of what an adolescent is physiologically, what is happening during this time period, and how it manifests cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally; feeling unprepared to teach reading adds to new teachers' fear of teaching reading; new teachers have specific ideas of what they would like to know about teaching adolescents to read; and finally, providing teachers with specific knowledge about adolescents and successful reading strategies leads to an intrinsic motivation for teachers to teach reading.

Reliability

While there was not time to test for internal consistency, I tested ideas that emerged as themes, twice and in some cases, three times, as part of the triangulated approach of the data collection. Similarities of the results of the tests existed when compared over time. Answers to questions about what teachers thought would be most helpful to know in teaching reading to adolescents consistently centered on acquiring knowledge on how best to support the adolescent learner specifically, in terms of knowledge of their brain function, differences in skills-based versus cognitive-based interventions, developing relationships with adolescents and providing a safe space to read in their classrooms. Ultimately, these were coded and the theme of connecting neuroscience to education theory in teacher preparation emerged. What also became evident from the retest was that the new teachers had an intrinsic motivation to help their students become successful readers and that there was a connection between the success of their students' learning and their feelings of success in teaching.

Validity

Ultimately, qualitative researchers hope to attain an understanding during and at the end of their study that the research conducted, data collected, choice of participants, and culminating results worked. That a study works or has validity can be seen through various lenses and perspectives. The outcomes of this study were robust and the reliability was strong.

Validity is categorized into four types, the conclusion, internal validity, construct validity, and external validity. The conclusion validity focuses on the relationship between the outcome and the program. This study revealed that the teacher preparation program could be made more relevant to new teachers by focusing on adolescent development and aligning that with cognitive reading strategies and interventions that could be used in classrooms immediately. Internal validity asks what kind of relationship exists between the outcome and the program. It was found that a relationship existed between the outcome of the study and the program. The awareness of the new teachers about what they did not know and their perceived ideas about what they needed to know impacted their feelings about the worth and value of their teacher preparation program. The outcome of the study aligns with research and has a general sensibility in that it recognizes what has already been found to be lacking in the research of teacher education and adolescent reading.

The external validity or general concept of this study's outcome can be considered strong; new teachers need to know more about the developmental aspects of their adolescent students and the supporting theoretical frameworks in order to make sound decisions about interventions.

Care of Human Subjects

Participation in this study was voluntary and while it was not an anonymous study, participants were given the option of responding through written response in-person, or online, or verbal response, in a small group, or one-on-one. Participants' names were changed to protect their confidentiality.

Bias

Prior qualitative research philosophers have highlighted the importance of the researcher as the main "instrument" of qualitative data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2003). I realized that any data collected would be interpreted though my own lens as I was both the course instructor and Assistant Director of the teacher preparation program in which the subjects participated. I was emotionally invested in my work and the outcome of the research and knew I had to take measures to check my own biases so that my study had credibility.

To do this I met regularly with other doctoral student colleagues to share preliminary findings and to format my instruments. I received feedback from my professor who guided me in developing focused research questions that allowed me to keep the focus on the research topic. I debriefed with participants in order to cross-check data and ensure continuity among generative themes.

My own assumptions were brought to the study; underlying assumptions were that due to the nature of the teacher preparation program, the intensity and rapidity of pre-service training and becoming teacher of record with no prior education experience, participants had not secured the knowledge base to address the reading needs of their students nor did they feel prepared to address the reading needs of their students. Another assumption was there was a general lack of information available in the participants' teacher education program about adolescents and their learning needs, specifically around reading. The bracketing of my own assumptions, opinions and feelings, as part of the phenomenological methodology was vital in allowing me to see my own biases as they emerged throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Summary

In deciding upon a methodology for the study, I wanted to better understand each individual's perspective of the experience while maintaining the integrity of the shared phenomenon. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of what my students knew about teaching reading to adolescents and what they felt they needed to successfully teach reading to their students. I considered my own comfort level in research methodology and I considered Creswell's (2003) ideas on how contemporary research studies show a tendency towards one paradigm or another. Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. Considering these rationale, a phenomenological approach was best suited to the research needs of the study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Overview

Ten secondary special education teachers, who are presently experiencing their first year of teaching in an urban public school district, were surveyed. Data were collected to determine how to support new teachers in working with adolescents who teach reading. Answers were coded to ensure confidentiality. The following survey excerpts will guide this section.

Teachers Recalling Their Early Experiences

Q1: The first time you remember reading a book in school. Three of the ten respondents stated that they remembered their high school reading experiences which included exercises on Greek dramas, Outsiders, and MidSummer's Night Dream. Two respondents reported experiences from their third grade class; one respondent talked about a reading club experience, one spoke to a summer school experience; one talked about having the reading relate to her life. One respondent, Penny, shared her experience, recounting using reading to keep her out of trouble, by remembering "reading books to avoid getting in trouble, especially when the books were not related to the subject. I loved reading so much and I didn't like math."

Reading Preparation for Teachers

Q2: Previous preparation you had to help you teach reading.

Three of the respondents stated they have had no preparation in teaching reading. Two respondents reported having professional developments at their school where they teach which were led by special education staff members; one respondent stated she had learned to teach reading as a tutor for a private education company.

One respondent, Randy, shared about a college course he had during pre-service training, by stating "it was an amazing class that gave us practical applications of how to assess adolescent reading abilities. I wish we had more of that at the college."

Q3: The preparation you feel would be most useful to new teachers.

Figure 2 shows what respondents believe new teachers should know in teaching reading to adolescents.
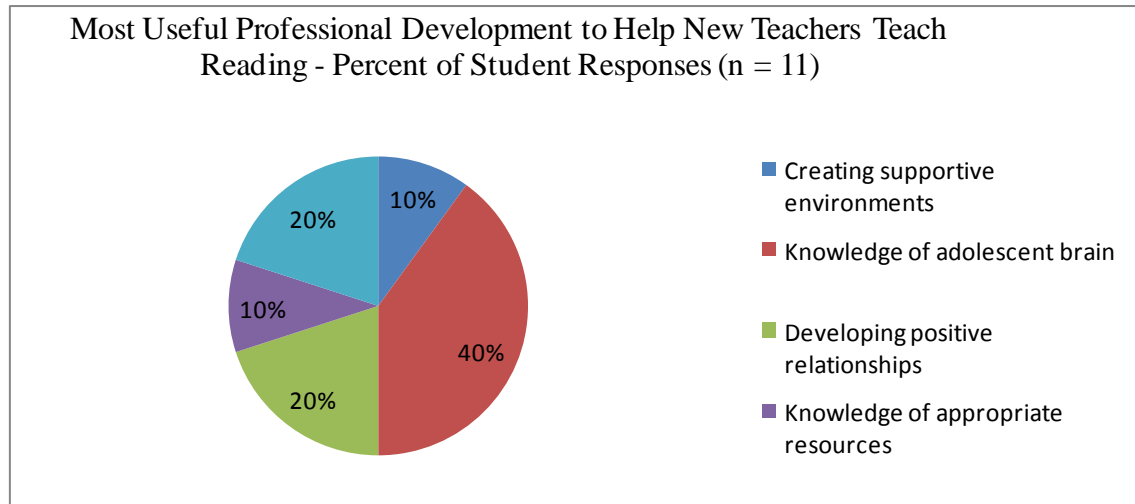

Figure 2. Most Useful Professional Development for New Teachers in Teaching Adolescents to Read. The percentage of top-rated answers of respondents are shown in Figure 2.

Four respondents chose how to better understand how the adolescent brain functions in regard to reading as their number one answer; two respondents chose how to develop positive relationships with your students as most useful for new teachers to know, while two more respondents made understanding skills-based versus cognitive-based strategies their top choice. One respondent chose create a supportive reading environment and another chose what are appropriate books/materials for adolescent readers, as the most useful preparation new teachers should have in teaching adolescents to read.

Teachers Sharing Their Fears and Ideas of Success Related to Teaching Reading

Q4: Rate what you fear most about teaching reading. The greatest fear in teaching reading to adolescents for respondents overall, was lack of knowledge and skills in teaching reading to this age group; six of the ten respondents noted this was their greatest fear. Lack of resources from the school and other teachers was the second, most feared choice. Your own lack of supportive leadership,as well as challenges in teaching reading in a large classroom, were rated third and fourth respectively. All respondents but one reported having no fears related to teaching reading.

Q5: The one thing you would most like to earn to demonstrate your success in teaching reading. Figure 3 illustrates what teachers believe demonstrates that they have been successful at teaching reading.

Correlation Between What Teachers Want to Demonstrate Success and Maslow's Hierarchy
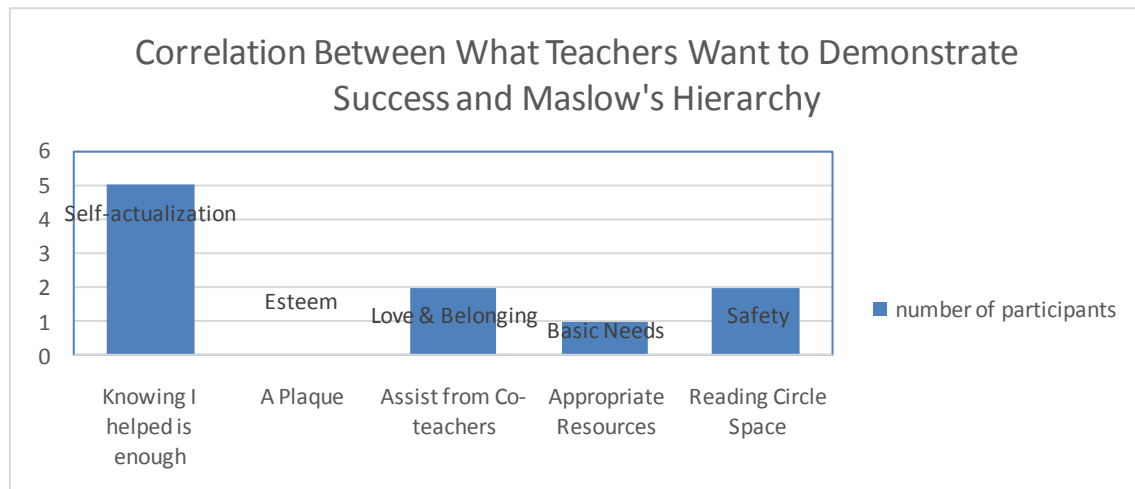
*Figure 3.*The One Thing You Would Most Like to Earn to Demonstrate Your Success in Teaching Reading. Choices for this question were developed to align to the stages of development of Maslow's hierarchy: Basic physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization. Figure 3 illustrates what respondents chose and their correlates to Maslow's different stages.

Two respondents whose choices aligned with self-actualization explained their choices: Esther stated, "It is such a pleasure just knowing that my students understood a math word problem because that *RARELY* happens." Another respondent, Caitlyn, said, "At the end of the day I am at work for the kids. They are the most important." Correlating to the basic, physiological needs of humans, one respondent, Ellen, reported "being successful would be difficult to achieve for me and my students without the basic, appropriate resources. Kids are expected to learn when they come to school hungry and sleep-deprived and then are expected to learn to read without books?"

Other respondents defined success; "collaboration shows how dedicated teachers are to students. That, to me is success," and "A safe space for my teenagers to read would alleviate their high tendency of picking out each other's mistakes. These interactions create disrespect and environments where they feel safe and supported can combat this."None of the participants chose receiving a plaque, to demonstrate their success.

Focus Group

The focus group was conducted as part of a class session. All respondents participated voluntarily as they had a choice not to attend class that evening. The question, "What can we learn about how to approach teaching reading to our adolescent students by examining Maslow's hierarchy?" was written on the board and respondents had ten minutes to free-write in response to it. Answers were collected at the end of the session. The focus group was held to gather further information about themes derived from the survey, specifically, open-ended answers respondents gave to questions seven, one, and four.

Esther: "I agree that social pressures can affect how a young reader approaches texts and there is so much work to do there. It's self-evident that Maslow's hierarchy affects how students read. I feel similarly about this reading hierarchy as I do about Maslow's. It's daunting to think about how I can improve attitudes, opportunity, support, motivation and culture around reading to help young readers. I know there are steps I can take that will do this but I would love to read a study that addresses exactly how we can take steps in this effort. I remember reading another article (last semester? Last summer?) in your class about being a literacy teacher. You basically just have to try. I remember it being a matter of trial and error because there are going to be strategies that work for some students and not others. There will be peer-reviewed studies that proffer strategies that should work because they address student needs but still might not be effective for a certain student. I will just have to continue trying different things, researching, asking other teachers and going back to the drawing board."

Bre: "Initial thoughts before becoming a teacher are usually, "All I have to do is teach skills and content." It is an unwritten contract between teachers and students that there is a level of "needs" support required before delivering/receiving an "education". In the population in which I find myself teaching, Maslow's Hierarchy has played a huge role. Students have demonstrated their struggle to concentrate on the skills and content necessary for their grade level. For many of my students, their "safety needs" and "belongingness and love needs" have been the bump on their education road.

It has been difficult for them to understand the importance, since the majority of them come from families were education was not always a luxury. Parents are forced to support their children financially but do not have the time to address the relationship with their child."

Ken: "Often student's feel as if their actions have no consequences due in part to the lack of parent presence. Comments such as "my father, doesn't even check my backpack for homework, so why should I care?" have been verbalized by my students recently. Showing them that as their teacher, their best interest is at heart. I understand that with their mind preoccupied with household instability, it hinders their ability to concentrate in their achievement."

Ray: "There are certain aspects in education that simply cannot be achieved with Maslow's Hierarchy "There are a number of 'levels' that you need to work through and needs to be in place for a young person to be a 'self-actualized' reader as Maslow would describe it."

Ellen: "Examining Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is good insight to foresee our student's success in reading, and thus in life; the question is how can we ensure they continue to climb the tiers instead of being pulled back down? It takes a village to raise a child but I don't see enough resources being provided to address social needs beyond the grasp of a single person (aka teacher). However, I personally will continue to put myself forward (with or without a village) in hopes that a student can climb those tiers to proficient reading, being a literate citizen and thus achieve, in my opinion, self-actualization.

Penny: "In terms of relating Maslow to my students and my teaching, I think I have to admit to myself that even though I don't feel like I have it figured out now, that's OK. Because I never will. If I thought I did, I wouldn't be growing and getting better. Society will continue to change, students will and I will. I think my attitude towards reading is a big deal and if I can exhibit a positive attitude it will at least set an example that students can like reading, It's not against the rules. This would also help the culture around reading if they see someone they respect (or just realize is an authority figure) then maybe that could affect how they view the act of reading. I would love to read a study around this (as long as the writer finds someone else to write the abstract and revise everything else."

Brian: "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs brings up very important points that we, as a society, often ignore: Your basic human needs must be fulfilled before you can even start thinking about growing educationally. This is a complicated truth, since it is often education that may help you get out of a situation in which your needs are not met. So what do we do? How do we address this chicken-and-egg dilemma? The thing is, no single one of us can. There needs to be whole structural change for things to improve and for our kids to succeed… but we can try, of course, and perhaps, with a bit of luck, actually make a dent."

Caitlyn: "As teachers, we are in an unmatchable place from which we can, if we put enough effort, discover what our students are going through. It is not enough to have them take a test and assess their "academic level" but we must look at them as a whole. When I have a student who is struggling academically, socially, or emotionally, I try to identify what else may be happening in her life. I review her IEP (if one is available), I check her grade progress from the past few months (and years, if available), I check notes regarding her personal situation and her relationship with peers and teachers, I consult with other educators who have worked with her to get their input, and I try to set up a meeting with their parent or guardian to try to understand what may be going at home."

Colin: "Often after doing all of this you may realize that the issues start at home and that students are not receiving the nurturing and nourishment they need. Even though you are usually not able to change what happens at home, you can try to help the student create strategies to cope with these situations. You can make sure you always praise the kid when they do something good, or even when they try and fail, you can also talk to the students about how parents have different ways to show they care. You can encourage them to create a support circle made of peers and teachers at school, and friends and family outside of school. If the issues relate to nourishment, you can make sure to always have some fruit handy (I often have tangerines in my school closet so I can pass them on to students if they are hungry), you can encourage them to take advantage of the free breakfast and lunch that is served at the school –Students often reject this idea because they don't want to get "free stuff," but perhaps you can ask your school if it is okay for you to sometimes join the kids in the cafeteria, this way they can see that this "free stuff" cannot be so bad, tainted, and stigmatized if an actual teacher is partaking." Randy: "Dress is another issue that is hard to grasp, since students would not talk about it. However, often you can see which students may be struggling with hygiene and wearing the same, unwashed clothes through the week.

Many times your school will have a social worker that may be able to more comfortably speak to the student or the parents about it and try to give them some of the hundreds of resources that NYC has for clothing."

Interviews

Interviews were conducted one-on-one with each respondent at scheduled times. They were held at neutral locations.

Q1: How would you describe your first-year teaching experience so far?

Interview question one sought to gain the essence of participants' first year teaching experiences. It was derived from themes of purpose and fears that arose from the survey and focus group and built upon the knowledge that each participant's story was part of a larger, shared experience.

Randy: "For me, rather than falling in love with a specific field of study I fell in love with the art of teaching. Initially, I wanted to be an elementary school teacher where I would have taught all content areas; I was never drawn to only one particular subject area or content specific. This also made the transition into teaching special education ideal as I am immersed in various content areas in an Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) setting. This is the hardest thing I have ever done but the most rewarding."

Caitlyn: "I am tired of keeping my head down and making myself inconspicuous so no one will notice my mistakes on the public stage. Although the prospect scares the hell out of me, I am ready to embrace my inner fierceness."

Bre: "Now I found myself in a similar, albeit less intense version of this situation in my actual school and teaching job. I don't have a full curriculum and I'm mostly making it up as I go along, which is causing my rather acute anxiety."

Colin: "The other problem I have had so far is to find time to help work one on one with the students on my roster. So, much of the class has been direct instruction and discussion based that I haven't found time to work with my students one-on-one very much. I spoke with a colleague in the building who has co-taught the same class and she recommended I pull students out of the class for small blocks of time to discuss what we can do differently to get them to work. I will have to find a way to build trust with my roster without embarrassing them."

Q2: Describe a recent interaction you have had with one or more students around reading.

Interview question two spoke directly to the respondents' work with students around reading and sought to connect to the themes of relationship and choices of interventions which arose from questions three, four and seven of the survey and the focus group.

Ellen: "Trying to teach reading has taught me more that I thought possible but what it taught me most about was myself. As a student and as a teacher, I want to continue to open up my identity and discover what to embrace and what to abandon because it is not a part of what gives me life."

Brian: "I have been struggling with lesson planning regarding reading. I am expected to teach Math, ELA, Science, and Social Studies to a class of 6th and 7th special education students. I have been advised by the other special education teachers that I should focus on Math and ELA. I have not been given a specific curriculum yet but am expected to use the Common Core Standards as my guide. I have a student who actually cannot read, yet he is supposed to take the Regents. We are constantly at each other's throat."

Penny: "My thoughts on how to teach reading were on how I could be creative and make it fun and engaging regardless of the subjects, but most importantly making it educational and to spark curiosity within students. I am dedicated to inspiring independent thinking and reasoning. My students seem to respond to that and they try hard but most have reading difficulties that I don't know how to diagnose or help"

Q3: What would you like to share about the kind of environment you teach in and the quality of relationships you have with your students?

Interview question three was developed specifically to gain further insight into how respondents' experiences align to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; a theme addressed in survey question six as well as the focus group.

Esther: "I feel like this school environment devalues students' experiences and the lives they are currently living. I know it seems like an insignificant quip teachers use when a student turns an assignment in late or neglects to read the syllabus in full but it is indicative of a larger issue.

It is the teacher's way of holding the power and telling the student that they could inflict consequences if they wanted but will be *nice* in hopes the student will like them more. I want more for myself and for my students."

Penny: "This is something I want to engender in students so that they realize that "part of the mystery of selfhood is the fact that one size does not fit all: What is integral to one person lacks integrity for another. I am not sure what actionable steps I will take to do this yet but I know if I let my true teaching identity shine through then hopefully students will sense this solely based on my demeanor and how I carry myself in relation to them."

Ray: "Although it has been rapidly evolving over the past few months, my view of a teacher's purpose is to give students opportunities. Not just standard opportunities for career and college readiness but to find their own identity through learning about the world and their place in it. I know this is something that no person ever fully understands to the point where they need never consider it again. However, I want to start students on the journey to realizing that there are different ways to live in and see our world. I dislike the phrase that teachers use when describing how things will be once students make it out into the "real word" because they are already there."

Ken: "These assumptions and biases people hold in their minds, influence the judgments they make based on those assumptions and biases. It affects how people interact with others and can hinder many things like: communication, attitudes towards others, how well they can hinder work together (if at all), among various other aspects. One must always have an open mind and not allow what you hear or read, affect how judgment is passed onto others. We must consciously practice this as we encounter many different types of students with their variety of cultures, religions, learning styles, communication styles, etc."

Summary

The new teachers who participated in this study responded to the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in thinking about ways to approach the teaching of reading on several levels. In informal discussions they expressed the thought that the hierarchy can also be a motivational tool. Some saw a correlation between their quest for self-actualization in their profession being highly impacted by their students' movement toward self-actualization. New teachers are interested in learning how cognitive functions are supported when psychosocial needs are met. They want to learn more about how the adolescent brain functions. They want to be providers of cognitively sound strategies to teach their adolescent students to read. Teacher preparation programs can support new teachers working with adolescents in teaching reading by integrating these topics into courses.

Teachers of this study are consistent in their desire to provide safe classroom spaces, and focus on relationship building with their students. Many express their belief that classrooms and schools should be safe places for students to realize their psychosocial needs, and expand and improve their cognitive abilities. Research supports this notion and empirically-based interventions that meet both cognitive and psychosocial needs are in existence and can be developed further. Why new teachers are not being exposed to this knowledge so that their adolescent students are given more opportunities to succeed in reading and thus, in society, is in question.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Overall Summary

As this pilot study describes through survey responses and direct quotes from the focus group and interviews, participants 'perceptions of their success as new teachers in teaching reading is correlated to them being able to provide their students' opportunities for success in learning to read. This propels me to wonder what teacher education programs can learn from this?

I ascribe to the humanistic approach to teaching and agree with the ideas of Maslow (1954) in that it helps students better understand themselves to be in the position to create supportive classroom environments that activate the inherent desire all humans have to learn and fulfill their potential. The new teachers who participated in this phenomenological study are all facing the challenge of how to teach adolescent students to read. They are all taking coursework that does not specifically address this issue pedagogically. They are all teaching in schools that do not provide consistent professional development on how to do this.

In considering conducting this study, I was influenced by the knowledge that very little prior research focusing on the nature of teacher preparation programs and teachers' perceptions of what they need to be successful in teaching reading, and what the research shows as best practices in teaching adolescents to read. My work in preparing alternatively certified teachers as well as traditionally trained teachers to work in 7–12 education, allowed me to unpack some of my own frustrations.

During the past several years, I have seen a trend in my own college students' challenges with reading proficiency at the undergraduate and graduate levels; most of whom are products of the public schools in which they are now being hired to teach.

To date, awareness of the need to teach reading as a lifelong skill is growing in acceptance, but there is not a wealth of research discerning best practices and approaches in teaching adolescents to read. There is also a gap in understanding the adolescent student and the ever-changing physiology of the adolescent. Researchers such as Hruby (2011) have done much to shed light on the neural correlates of the adolescent brain but more is needed. Finally, what new teachers need and believe they need to be successful at teaching reading has not been given wide attention. Not only does my pilot focus on new teachers, but it actively seeks to make connections between their knowledge and perceptions of best practices teaching reading, to their students' knowledge and attainment of the successful learning of reading. The ideas emerging from this pilot study exemplify the idea of reciprocity in teaching and learning. As Nakkula and Toshalis (2006) state in *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators*:

The idea of reciprocal co-authorship, the notion that just as teachers play an important role in students' understanding and construction of their "life texts," so it is that the students also help coauthor those texts for the educators they encounter, is an elegant and intellectually stimulating concept. Identity in context and the notion that adults in educational contexts grow along with the adolescents on whom they impact draws from Erikson's psychosocial theory of development to understand the identity exploration of adolescent students in classrooms and the opportunities offered to teachers and other educational professionals who interact with them daily. (276)

Implications of Findings

Policy makers. Policies designed to embrace the shifting literacy demands from elementary to secondary school entails many changes including fundamental ones in the nature of literacy requirements. In deciding how to evaluate education legislation impacting schools, families and communities, conversations about how, why, and what adolescents read need to happen. In contrast, the focus on high stakes testing such as high school exit exams like the New York State Regents, is limiting the content of the literacy curriculum and restricting teachers' instructional approaches to reading and writing (Amrein & Bereliner, 2002). Policy makers need to approve funding for effective literacy programs that move students to deeper understandings of texts and increase an adolescent's ability to generate ideas and knowledge for their own uses. This counters the practice of utilizing a model of reading instruction focused on basic skills, which has also has led to the mislabeling of some secondary students as "struggling readers" and "non-readers" because they lack extensive reading experience.

Schools and Universities. School leaders and university personnel need to collaborate to reinforce the teaching of reading. Cognitive strategy instruction must be modeled to new teachers in schools and in the college classroom including: using significant quality and quantity literacy activities that utilize hands-on, scaffolding, mini-lessons, discussions, group work, student choice, ample feedback, and multiple forms of expression; participating in ongoing professional development committed to furthering adolescent literacy support; developing quality relationships with students; and teaching with approaches that foster critical thinking, questioning, student decision-making, and independent learning. Courses should be developed on adolescent brain function, human development, and cognitive strategy instruction, across content-area disciplines. Teacher support groups must be organized and safe places provided for teachers to learn and grow professionally.

Teachers. Advocating for self is important. It is crucial that teachers reflect on their attitudes and possible biases towards what they teach, how they teach, who they teach, and their potential for learning. Students' interactions with teachers and classmates impact their social and emotional adjustment as well as their academic motivation and learning. Positive and supportive relationships with teachers and classmates promote a sense of school belonging and a positive student identity, which encourages participation in classroom activities and the desire to try hard and persist in the face of challenges (Brendtro, 2006). Research shows that minority and low income students as well as students with low readiness may be especially responsive to differences in the quality of classroom social relationships; important to know for teachers working in urban schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is clear that the research needed to adequately understand and maximize the potential of cognitive strategy instruction in secondary content-area classrooms is not readily available.

After situating cognitive strategy instruction in the larger context of research on adolescent literacy and school-to-work transitions, Conley (2008) provides classroom examples of cognitive strategy instruction, demonstrates the need for meaningful integration of *brain friendly* strategies in teacher education, and recommends specific directions for future research needed to understand and maximize the benefits of cognitive strategy instruction for adolescents. The next challenge for research in this area is to understand how an adolescent's experiences, many of which may reflect his or her socioeconomic, racial, or ethnic background, may affect the developing brain.

Understanding that experience influences behavioral and brain development will influence the possibilities to design educational curriculums that target the specific brain regions that underlie cognitive skills important for academic success. Although researchers have traditionally measured gaps in school readiness using standardized achievement tests, the fact that they can now assess readiness in terms of more specific brain-based cognitive functions is hopeful for both student and teacher (Hruby, 2011).

Summary and Discussion

The national agenda for adolescent reading is becoming largely focused on the idea of cognitive strategy instruction to meet the physiological (psychological, hormonal, emotional) needs of this group of students. It is critical for educators to understand and implement cognitively sound strategies in working with adolescent readers. Cognitive strategies include activities such as asking questions to interrogate texts, summarizing, activating prior knowledge, and organizing and engaging prior knowledge with newly learned information. Paramount to the success of this kind of teaching is the relational aspect between teacher and student; a stance supported by the psychology of Erikson and Maslow in identifying adolescents' developmental need for bonding with a more learned adult to feel supported and have a reason to excel.

Tovani's (2000) work represents these ideas in that her recommendations center on teacher-student interaction. She provides specific recommendations and examples of how teachers can model the reasoning they want students to learn to do. Her emphasis comes from cognitive strategy research, as she emphasizes developing a purpose for reading, connecting new information to prior knowledge, thinking aloud, asking oneself a question and trying to answer it, monitoring comprehension, making a connection between text and real life, making a prediction, noticing patterns in text structure, and visualizing a text's meaning (pp. 13-19).

Connecting teachers' reading instruction to students' cognitive development, while making purposeful efforts to develop relationships with them, offers a plan for improvement over traditional literacy reforms. Understanding adolescents' social and emotional natures allows for a unique basis of trust to develop which may open the brain to advanced learning. A reciprocal relationship is key to success of both teacher and student in defining positive outcomes in reading (Abiola, 2012).

The studies reviewed for this research bring to light some essential questions for teacher education programs to consider: How do we best prepare teachers to acknowledge their own attitudes and possible biases in teaching reading in and out of the content areas? When is it appropriate in the trajectory of teacher education course sequencing to introduce and build upon the relationships between cognitive strategy teaching and learning and what we know about adolescence? How can teachers learn to integrate cognitive strategy instruction effectively within the complex domains and perspectives found in the content areas?

More research is required that looks at the multiple literacy's already acquired by adolescents by virtue of their lives at home, in their communities and at school. Acknowledging these environments as having impact on an adolescent's ability to feel supported and safe and thus more prone to be open to learning to read, must be taken into account in preparing and supporting new teachers (Brendtro, 2006). During his interview, Brian, a participant of this study, eloquently articulated the immensity of the job of the new teacher and his beliefs in the power of reading, embodying the intent of this phenomenological study: I know how humiliating and difficult it can be to admit weakness. Even today I get frustrated by my limitations, whether they be physical or imagined mental ones. I want to be honest with my students and tell them what I have struggled with to show them that we all have obstacles to overcome if we want to be successful or even just survive life. I do not want to engage in a therapy session where I force my students to be little Freuds as I admit the multitude of ways I find myself lacking. However, I agree with the sentiment that "only through communication cans human life holds meaning" (Friere, 1968). I want to give them choice in their lives and being able to read is one sure way to do this and empower them.

Appendix

Survey Introduction: Thank you for responding to the following survey. I am collecting data to determine how to support new teachers in working with adolescents to teach reading. Your answers are confidential and will help to inform my research and understanding of this topic.

1. Tell me about the first time you remember reading a book in school. Do you remember what it was about?
2. What preparation have you had to help you teach reading? Where have you received this preparation?
3. What further preparation do you wish you had to be better at teaching reading?
4. What professional development might be most useful to help new reading teachers? (rate most useful to least useful on a scale of 1 to 5)

1) how to create a supportive reading environment
2) how to better understand how the adolescent brain functions in regards to reading
3) how to develop positive relationships with your students
4) what are appropriate books/materials for adolescent readers
5) what is the difference between skills-based and cognitive-based reading strategies

5. Rate the following 4 items in order of what you feared most about teaching reading:

_____ Lack of knowledge and skills in teaching reading to this age group
_____ Your own lack of supportive leadership
_____ Your own challenges in teaching reading in a large classroom
_____ Lack of resources from the school and other teachers

6. At the end of this year, which would you most like to earn to demonstrate your success in teaching reading?

1) I don't need anything – it is enough of a reward knowing I was successful
2) A plaque stating I was successful
3) Other teachers co-teaching with me
4) Having the basic resources to utilize with my students
5) A classroom that has safe space for a reading circle

Why did you choose the item as demonstrating success? Explain your answer.

7. In thinking about your experience as a new teacher to date, tell me 3 ideals to share with new teachers who are teaching adolescents to read.

References

Abiola, O. (2012). Improving classroom practices using our knowledge of how the brain works. *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, *7*(1), 71-81.

Amrein, A. & Bereliner, D. (2002). High-stakes testing, uncertainty, and student learning. Educational Policy Analysis Archives. 10(18). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu/ojs/article/view/270

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2014). *Low reading scores show majority of U.S. children not prepared for future success.* Retrieved from http://www.aecf.org/low-reading-scores-show-majority-of-us-children-not-prepared-for-future-s

Blakemore, S., Burnett, S., & Dahl, R. (2010). The role of puberty in the developing adolescent brain. *Human Brain Mapping, 31,* 926-933. doi:10.1002/hbm.21052

Blakemore, S., & Choudhury, S. (2006). Development of the adolescent brain: Implications for executive function and social cognition. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, *47*(3-4), 296-312. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01611x

Brendtro, L.K. (2006). The vision of Urie Bronfenbrenner: Adults who are crazy about kids. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 15*(3), 162-166.

Brendtro, L.K., & Longhurst, J.E. (2005). The resilient brain. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 14*(1), 52-60.

Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Morison, K.B. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*(Evaluative Report). Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, LLC.

Busso, D. S. (2014). Neurobiological processes of risk and resilience in adolescence: Implications for policy and prevention science. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, *8*(1), 34-43. doi:10.1111/mbe.12042

Carbo, M. (2010). What helps at-risk adolescent readers? *Educational Leadership, 67*(6).

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). Research methods in education (7th ed.). New York: Routledge.

Conley, M.W. (2008). Cognitive strategy instruction for adolescents: What we know about the promise, what we don't know about the potential, *Harvard Educational Review, Adolescent Literacy,78,* 84-105.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. C. (2014). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2010). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Davis, A. (2013). Neuroscience and education: At best a civil partnership: A response to Schrag. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *47*(1), 31-36. doi:10.1111/1467-9752.12012

Erikson, E. (1963). Eight ages of man. In E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (pp. 247-274). New York, NY: Norton & Co.

Freire, P. (1998). Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *23(1).* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Havighurst, R. (1972). *Developmental Tasks and Education*. New York: McKay.

Hruby, G. G. (2011). Minding the brain. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54*(5), 316-321. doi:10.1598/jaal.54.5.1

Jacobs, V. (2008). Adolescent literacy: Putting the crisis in context, *Harvard Educational Review*, *78*(1), 7-39.

Keene, E. & Zimmerman, S. (1997). Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Lazarus, K. (2013). The storm and stress of adolescents with reading disabilities: Implications for teachers and parents. *African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 16,* 222-229. Retrieved from http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajpssi/article/view/100814

Lincoln, YS. & Guba, EG. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Lyon, R., Shaywitz, S. E., Shaywitz, B. A., & Chhabra, V. (2005). Evidence-based reading policy in the United States: How scientific research informs instructional practices. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, *2005*(1), 209-250. doi:10.1353/pep.2005.0009

Maslow, A.H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality.* New York: Harper & Brothers.

Mcadool, M. (2015, June). Regents, educators balk at state changes to evaluations. *NY Teacher Newspaper,* (4). Retrieved from http://www.uft.org/news-stories/regents-educators-balk-state-changes-evaluations

McLeod, S. (2014). *Simply Psychology.* Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.Retrievedfrom http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html

Moje, E.B. & Sutherland, L.M. (2003). The future of middle school literacy education,*English*

Education, 35(2), 149-164. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ660667

Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, (1999). Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement for the

Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association.

Nakkula, N.J. & Toshalis, E. (2006). *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development forEducators*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

National Council of Teachers of English (2005). *Adolescent Literacy:A Policy Research Brief.*Retrieved from http://www.NCTEfiles/Resources/Magazine/Chron7AdLitBrief.pdf OECD. (2012). *2012 Program for international student assessment.* Global Education League Table. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf

Ryan, R., Deci, E. (2000) Self-Determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychology. 55[1]:* 68-78.

Sisk, C.,& Foster, D. (2004). The neural basis of puberty and adolescence. *Nature Neuroscience, 2,* 859-861.

Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C., Cziko, C., & Hurwitz, L. (1999). *Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Silton, N., Flannelly, L., Flannelly, K., & Galek, K. (2011). Toward a theory of holistic needs and the brain. *Holistic Nursing Practice, 2011(September-October),* 258-265. doi:10,1097/hnp.0b013e31822a0301

Spear, L. (2000). The adolescent brain and age-related behavioral manifestations. *Neuroscience Biobehavior Review, 24*, 417-463.

Steinberg, L. (2005).Cognitive and affective development in adolescence. *Trends in Cognitive Science,9*, 69-74. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15668099

Tovani, C. (2000). The realities of reading. In C. Tovani, *I Read it, But I Don't Get It Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers* (pp. 13 – 21). Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform.* Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html

Zhou, J., & Fischer, K. W. (2013). Culturally appropriate education: Insights from educational neuroscience. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, *7*(4), 225-231. doi:10.1111/mbe.1203

Colleen, what a brilliant job you did on this final version of your min—dissertation! You truly showed that you were able to master the dissertation process. Yes, you have much more to learn as you educate yourself over the next few years; however, you truly have what it takes to obtain and maximize the power of the doctoral degree. Brava!

Grade:

    Content: A+

     APA: A

Congratulations! Jh 4/21/16

May I have permission to use this in future classes as an exemplar?