Literacy Learner Analysis Case Study Project: Billy Bob

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### Section 1: Brief Background and Reason for Project Focus

Differentiated instruction is a useful way to support literacy learning in the classroom. The texts Best Practices in Literacy Instruction (Gambrell & Morrow, 2015) and What research has to say about reading instruction (Samuels & Farstrup, 2011) provide much evidence to support its effectiveness, and the latter details some essential elements for teaching reading comprehension. Chapter 3 begins "If learning to read effectively is a journey toward everincreasing ability to comprehend texts, then teachers are the tour guides" (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman 2011, p.51). The goal of working one-on-one with a student this semester is to become a better tour guide, and to utilize more of the instructional practices provided by Duke et al. According to the research "teachers matter, especially for complex cognitive tasks like reading for understanding" (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman 2011, p.55). This means that the goal is to be able to take an unmotivated and unsuccessful reader and "incrementally [turn] over responsibility for meaning-making practices from teacher to student [...] while simultaneously employing instructional approaches that include several essential elements of effective comprehension instruction" (p.52). Essentially, I want to become a better teacher of reading comprehension so my student(s) can be a better reader.

I have been teaching for four years, and out of those eight semesters, I am teaching English for only the third time this year, and it is a different English class from the ones I have previously taught. Originally, I was disappointed to teach only Spanish in the beginning of my career, but I have come to enjoy teaching a foreign language more than I had thought was possible. Now English—reading, grammar, all of it—seems like a foreign land to me. I am unaccustomed to the population of students I currently have, and they seem to be the most unmotivated readers (and academics in general) that I have encountered thus far. In the Spanish

classes I teach, however I do not have many problems with students not completing assignments. Students grow accustomed to my routines and procedures, and quickly fall either in or out of line. My English classes are another story, though. There is chaos that I like to think of as controlled, but some days it is definitely out of control. I have so many ideas, and I care so deeply about reading that I desperately want to better my own practices so I can reach more students. Some days, though, I feel like I have no clue what I am doing. There is a lot of academic freedom where I teach, because the students came to us because they could not seem to make it happen at their home school, so to speak. Therefore, the atmosphere cannot be like their home school; something has to be different.

### **Section 2: Home & Family**

The student I have chosen to work with is Billy Bob (he insisted that I use this as his name). He is sixteen and a junior (although at my school, the grade just designates their age group). He has 2 younger siblings, a sister and a brother. He lives at home with his parents, and his grandparents. He is Albanian, but English is his primary language. He mentioned that sometimes his parents and/or grandparents will speak Albanian, but he does not speak it fluently. He came to the alternative high school because he did not have enough credits to graduate at his home school, and he does have an IEP. His IEP is primarily for math; he is allowed to take his tests with a resource room teacher, and he receives extended time on his assignments. He's also diagnosed with ADHD, and receives other various supports in all of his classes, like extra time, or use of his own handwritten notes on tests and quizzes.

When we began our conversation, the first thing Billy Bob said was "Well, you know I don't like to read, so how much more can you have to ask me?" I asked him if he knew that the word literacy could reference a lot of things, and he was surprised. I know he likes to cook (his

dad used to own a restaurant), and I asked him if he can read a recipe correctly to make something. Turns out, he sure can! I explained to him that this can count as a form of literacy, and although he does not sit down and read books every day, he does still read. He had never thought about it that way, but it was a good start to our conversation. From there, he told me about his mom and grandma, who love to read. He estimated that between the two of them, there are probably a couple hundred books in his house. When asked about what type of books, Billy Bob was unsure. His younger brother likes to read as well, but he was not sure about his sister. Billy Bob does remember being read to as a child; he said usually his mom or grandma would read him parts of the Bible, or random children's books. At this moment in time, he does not read for pleasure at home. He only reads at school, when he has to, or in situations where it has a practical use for him (i.e. like reading a recipe).

#### **Section 3: Emotional Climate**

My current classroom climate is a bit chaotic, as previously stated. I try to foster independence by holding my students accountable for their own learning, like using literature circles or Socratic circles to encourage discussion. Students have to cooperate on many of those assignments, because without the information from other members in their group there will be missing pieces to the final product. Students in my English classes are given jobs when asked to work cooperatively together, and each job has different requirements to fulfill. I have tried to instill the idea of teamwork, and working together to complete something. There are quite a few groups that have caught on, but just as many that remain unmotivated. Billy Bob is one of the students who remains unmotivated. He would rather be the class clown than do the work in my class. I have seen him become engaged with a text, particularly when we were reading 13 Reasons Why by Jay Asher. But it seems that as soon as he becomes engaged, he can be quickly

disengaged by any random happening in the classroom. There are many, many boys in my classes, and the majority of them like to be class clowns. It can be challenging to reign them all in at the same time and keep them there, and if one disengages, he can easily disengage others. As far as I can tell, Billy Bob does not show frustration with reading, at least not outwardly. Overall, Billy Bob is apathetic toward school. He does not know why he should be engaged or motivated to graduate, because he wants to be a chef when he gets older.

## **Section 4: Literacy History**

I began my conversation with Billy Bob about his literacy history much like I have begun every other conversation; I told him I had to speak with him about this project. He was very excited about being a part of my graduate education, and I saw how he lit up when it was time, and how important he felt. Initially, Billy Bob was adamant that most of his English teachers have just given him (and his class) a book, had them read it, and answer questions about the chapters. He could not recall much explicit instruction on how to read, or being taught any specific reading strategies. He felt that he did not remember much about anything else, but after taking a few days to think a little more, he was able to give me other examples of things his previous English teachers had done with him. One of the things he does remember is being asked to do a lot of projects. Billy Bob explained that this was very difficult for him, as he never felt like he had enough time, and usually did not complete them, often giving up before he started. But, Billy Bob was especially descriptive when it came to another English teacher at our current school. He mentioned that her class is the first interactive English class he remembers encountering. During our conversation, Billy Bob told me that this other teacher teaches a lot like I do; meaning there is a lot of collaboration, outside the box thinking, and hands-on activities.

### **Section 5: Assessments Given & Summary of Assessment Results**

There is a unique situation happening at my school this year. A teacher was given the opportunity to partake in training last summer that allows her to teach a reading comprehension class that the students perceive as a text analysis course. In order to find her students, the aforementioned teacher conducts Q.R.I tests on various students to find a grouping of students who are at the same reading level. The Q.R.I., or Qualitative Reading Inventory is an informal reading inventory that is "designed to assess a student's oral reading accuracy, rate of reading, and comprehension of passages read orally and silently" (Leslie & Schudt Caldwell, 2017, p. ix). This particular version of the Q.R.I. is unique for several reasons. There are narrative and expository passages available at each level, from low elementary to high school. "All are selfcontained selections highly representative of the structure and topics of materials found in basal readers and content-area textbooks" (Leslie & Schudt Caldwell, 2017, p. ix). Billy Bob was one of the students tested in the most recent semester, and I approached the teacher about his results and her findings. Billy Bob scored higher than most, and the teacher explained that he was at too high of a level to be a good fit for the class. I plan to use this Q.R.I. as a pre-test for Billy Bob. I will be giving him different levels (higher than where the other teacher stopped; once he passed the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level test, she deemed he was too high for her class) until I find where he is. The main usage of the O.R.I. will be to assess the variety and quality of Billy Bob's think-alouds, and to determine his frustration levels for word identification in context (independently and otherwise).

#### **Section 6: Lesson Plan Matrix**

The more I work with Billy Bob, the more I realize that his challenges with reading and literacy may not necessarily be about comprehension issues. Rather, Billy Bob does not think

reading is worth his time, therefore he does not try to understand texts that he has no interest in or that he finds irrelevant. I want to use the Q.R.I. as a starting point, and then explicitly teach Billy Bob a few reading strategies using *My Life in France* by Julia Child (2007) and *Medium Raw* by Anthony Bourdain (2010). Billy Bob's interest in these texts should provide a base for my teaching and his learning. According to Duke et al. (2011), one of the ten essential elements of effective reading comprehension is providing motivating texts and contexts for reading. Duke et al. (2011) say "Students' motivation to read is also enhanced by providing contexts, materials, or tasks that catch students' spontaneous attention or situational interest" (p.60). I hope to spark Billy Bob's attention by using memoirs by famous chefs, one he has heard of (Child, 2007) and one he is more familiar with (Bourdain, 2010). After teaching and modeling using the gradual release of responsibility model recommended by Duke et al. (2011), I will use a higher level Q.R.I. test to see if Billy Bob can take reading strategies that we used on a topic he does like, and apply them to understand a text that he is not necessarily interested in.

The objectives listed next to each lesson describe the overall goal that I would like to achieve with Billy Bob through the teaching of different reading strategies. Ideally, I would like to bring Billy Bob to some higher-level thinking, including the identification of thematic elements, and usage of symbols within literature. The ongoing assessments will be in the form of journals that will serve as Billy Bob's personal narrative. I will be asking Billy Bob to consider the different themes and essential questions presented by Julia Child, and to look at food as a symbol. I will also ask Billy Bob to think about the themes and essential questions in terms of his own life, and to connect food as a symbol to his own life as well.

Lesson Focus &	Objectives	Instructional	Ongoing Assessment
Date		Materials	

3/20 Q.R.I Pre-Test Level: Upper Middle School Expository: Social Studies	To assess variety and quality of think alouds  To determine frustration levels with word identification  Billy Bob will be able	Q.R.I. Passage Level: Upper Middle School Expository: Social Studies  Pre-Reading Guide	Personal Narrative—
Provide Motivating Texts and Contexts for Reading  Teach Strategies for Comprehending -Set Purposes for Reading	to identify thematic elements of <i>My Life in France</i> by writing/telling about a similar experience.  CCSS.RL.2 CCSS. RL.3	My Life in France by Julia Child (excerpt)	Journals that will encourage Billy Bob to think about the bigger ideas in the memoir: self-doubt, self-actualization (to fully realize one's potential), and the search for happiness.
3/23 Teach Strategies for Comprehending -Monitor, Clarify, and Fix -Self-Question and Think Aloud	Billy Bob will be able to understand a complex text like My Life in France by identifying food as a symbol, and connecting it back to his own life and experiences.  CCSS.RL.4	My Life in France by Julia Child (excerpt)	Personal Narrative— Journals that encourage Billy Bob to connect food as a symbol to his own life.
3/27 Gradual Release of Responsibility— -encourage Billy Bob to apply new strategies to <i>Medium</i> Raw by Anthony Bourdain	Billy Bob will be able to set his own purpose for reading, monitor, clarify, and fix his reading errors, and self-question and think aloud on his own (or with little to no guidance/prompting from me)  CCSS.RL.2  CCSS.RL.3  CCSS.RL.4	Medium Raw by Anthony Bourdain (excerpt)	Personal Narrative— Journals that encourage Billy Bob to connect to the text on a personal level.
3/29 Q.R.I Post-Test	To assess variety and quality of think alouds	Q.R.I. Passage Level: High School Expository: Social Studies	

To determine frustration levels with word identification	
To determine if Billy Bob is able to apply strategies learned with texts that he is interested in to texts that he is not interested in.	

# **Section 7: Reflections on Your Literacy Lesson Plans**

This case study and the timing of this class in general could not have been better. This year, I have been presented with the opportunity to work with students outside of the standard classroom. They are alternative education students, and even though my gut tells me not to use this cliché, I feel lucky to know them. I have known Billy Bob since September, and I have learned a plethora of things about who he is, in and out of the classroom. I also assumed things about him when we first met, based on his grades and general attitude in the classroom, coupled with his I.E.P. I always enjoyed having him in class, but it was not until I started working with him one on one that I realized that he was not struggling to comprehend reading the way I thought he was.

When I started this project, a fellow teacher was testing students to be a part of her "text-analysis class" and she needed all the students to be at the same reading level, but it did not matter what reading level it was. She was using the Qualitative Reading Inventory, and when she explained the concept of the Q.R.I. to me, and it seemed like the type of assessment that would be beneficial when determining a reading level. This assessment is "designed to provide information about (1) conditions under which students can identify words and comprehend text successfully and (2) conditions that appear to result in unsuccessful word identification or

comprehension" (Leslie & Schudt Caldwell 2017, p.1). The conditions provided here correlate to the views of Afflerback, Cho, Crassas, and Kim (2015) in "Best Practices in Reading Assessment" which is Chapter 14 of *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction*. Afflerback et al. (2015) say "Reading assessment must reflect a series of balances that produces information that is useful to different audiences, designed for their different purposes" (p. 319). The Q.R.I. looks at comprehension, fluency, and word identification, and can be useful to a variety of teachers for their individual purposes.

It was when I actually administered the Q.R.I to Billy Bob when I realized that he did not struggle with reading as much as I had originally thought. I gave him the Upper Middle School Expository: Science piece about the Life Cycle of Stars. Billy Bob showed that he is very close to being at the Independent Level, but hovers in the Instructional Level. There were two parts to the passage I administered to Billy Bob, and the first one he was 88% accurate in his oral reading and 95% accurate in his comprehension. The Q.R.I. text by Caldwell and Leslie (2017) says that students at the instructional level are 90-97% orally accurate and 70%-88% accurate. Billy Bob is flip flopped here, but I am still reluctant to say he's at the Independent Level (98%+ and 90%+ respectively). The second part of the piece, Billy Bob was 85% accurate in his oral reading and 90% accurate in his comprehension. I chose not to test him further, although I was confident that he would probably not fall into the Frustration Level in higher level assessments. I also chose not to administer another test because I was starting to see that his problem may not lie in the territory of reading comprehension.

As I reflected over my lessons and work with Billy Bob, I did come to the conclusion that the Q.R.I may not have been the best choice for a pre-and post-test under these circumstances. I chose not to post-test Billy Bob using the Q.R.I. because I do not believe his progress (or lack of

progress) would be reflected in the results. It has been more effective for me to watch Billy Bob in class, and observe his daily diligence to work. It would mean more to me see a change in Billy Bob's work ethic than it would to see a higher Q.R.I. score. In fact, I have no doubt that Billy Bob could pass a higher Q.R.I. selection.

While the assessment told me that Billy Bob was not necessarily struggling with his reading capabilities, his grades in all three of his English classes said differently. This was the second or third time for him in some of those, and it is the subject area where Billy Bob needs to do the most credit recovery. Billy Bob and I always had a good relationship, and I have spoken with his mom on several occasions. Her and I have good rapport as well; she often told me how much Billy Bob enjoyed my class. I knew him well and knew that he did not excel at school, and was failing many of classes. During my discussions with Billy Bob I began to definitively think his problems were with motivation, not reading comprehension.

In the introduction of *What research has to say about reading instruction*, Samuels and Farstrup (2011) stress the importance of teacher quality. They state that their position is "that improving and maintaining teacher quality is an essential component if we are to achieve the goal of universal proficiency in reading" (p.3). They go on to say that "reading instruction is ever changing [and] preservice and in-service education needs to keep up with new discoveries to train teachers to effectively use the new ideas" (p.3). These insights made me want to try with Billy Bob even more, because now I knew he could do better, and the views of Samuels and Farstrup (2011) only reinforced my thinking.

I decided to base most of my lesson plan ideas off "Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension" which is Chapter 3 from *What research has to say about reading instruction*. My first lesson with Billy Bob was centered around the idea that I needed to

provide him with a motivating context for reading. According to Duke et al. (2011) "motivated reading behavior is characterized by students valuing and engaging in the act of reading with expectations of success a with greater persistence and stamina when encountering difficulty" (p.60). I chose excerpts from Julia Child's (2007) *My Life in France* and Anthony Bourdain's (2010) *Medium Raw* because I know just how much interest Billy Bob has in the kitchen. When I told Billy Bob about my ideas, he immediately showed interest and excitement. I already knew how important he felt to be a part of my graduate class, but this was the first time I saw him truly become excited to get started to work.

Then, using the gradual release of responsibility model recommended by Duke et al. (2011), I helped Billy Bob set a purpose for reading. I explained my purpose for reading (in that context), and gave him many examples from my personal life. Then I asked him to set his own for the Julia Child (2007) memoir. After reading, Billy Bob and I discussed what she said, and while the entirety of our conversations is not apparent in his journals, Billy Bob was successfully able to answer questions and discuss some of the bigger ideas. Then, I challenged Billy Bob to set goals for reading in his other classes as well. Unfortunately, our district had a week-long spring break recently, and I know Billy Bob did not have much of a chance immediately following to put our skills in to place, and he has only been able to remember to set a purpose for reading a few times since then.

Billy Bob and I, a few days later, talked about the difficulty of the text itself. Child's (2007) memoir is sprinkled with French words and phrases, and her speech is quite eloquent. I, again, used the gradual release of responsibility model to walk Billy Bob through such a difficult text. I explained to him that skilled readers constantly self-check their understanding, and equally important: skilled readers know when they do not understand something. During the first lesson,

Billy Bob and I did not actually begin reading the memoir; I simply wanted to get him thinking about his purpose for reading, and begin thinking about the bigger ideas within the texts. During this lesson, I began by reading and essentially performing a think aloud to explicitly teach strategies for comprehension. I focused on monitoring my reading, clarifying my miscues and errors, and fixing any comprehension problems I had. I also self-questioned and thought out loud. According to the gradual release of responsibility model, after the description of the strategy and teaching modeling, there is a collaborative use of the strategy in action. Billy Bob and I finished reading the chapter together, but toward the end Billy Bob was the main reader and I was helping to clarify. I also prompted many questions, as it seemed a bit awkward for Billy Bob. He did become more comfortable toward the end, though. Afterward, we had a discussion about how this meal changed things for Julia Child (2007). It is an important moment in her life, and Billy Bob's was able to discuss this moment in detail with me.

I decided that I wanted to give Billy Bob something that was maybe more interesting to him, and although Anthony Bourdain (2010) can be vulgar at times, the opening sequence of *Medium Raw* is quite interesting. He is at dinner with some of the most famous chefs—although he refuses to name them—and they eat a forbidden, even illegal meal. His description mirrors the title of his book; it is raw and meaty. I encouraged Billy Bob to set his own purpose for reading without hearing mine first, and to monitor, clarify, and fix while self-questioning and thinking aloud. Billy Bob was able to question this text much easier than he was with Child's (2007) memoir. It seemed like he was immediately more motivated to read Bourdain (2010), and was definitely interested in the idea of an illegal meal with famous chefs.

During this lesson, I also realized that perhaps I chose the wrong things to work on with Billy Bob. His comprehension of the Bourdain (2010) passage exceeded what I had predicted.

He was able to picture what was happening, and rarely had to stop or ask for clarification. He was excited to read Bourdain (2010), and I believe that made all the difference. After reading the passage, Billy Bob and I discussed at length what cooking means for different people. Billy Bob came up with the idea that food is a symbol of comfort, and we discussed this for longer than anything else. We share an interest in food and the kitchen, so Billy Bob and I were able to discuss our differences in relation to Child and Bourdain. They are two chefs who could not be more different, as Billy Bob and I are different in many ways. Yet, we all have food in common. I was able to share some of my experiences in a restaurant, and Billy Bob was able to do the same.

Billy Bob was extremely positive while we worked together, and I can see that he was interested in the moment. Overall, his attitude in class seems a little better than before. I have noticed a slight change in the amount of work he is willing to do in class in regards to the novel we are reading. I have noticed that when independent reading is assigned, he has sometimes stayed awake long enough to actually read the chapter on his own. He is more encouraged to follow along when I read aloud, and seems to be paying more attention in those moments. Yet, Billy Bob's general apathy toward school persists. His grades show that he consistently fails to turn in assignments, and there is reason to believe that if Billy Bob does not make changes soon, he could be dropped from the program. My work with Billy Bob continues, and I hope to see changes in the future.

If I could re-teach any of these lessons to Billy Bob, I would do many things differently. First of all, I have Billy Bob 4<sup>th</sup> hour and we have B lunch; this is the lunch that comes in the middle of the class period and oftentimes disrupts the class more than I would like. We did most of our work during lunch, and I wish I could have found a better time. It always took some time

to get him to focus on what we had to do, but once we got there he was able to focus. I could probably have slowed down a lot. I tend to talk rapidly when I am passionate about something or when I am trying to explain something that I am excited about. It was also a bit uncomfortable for me to work with him one on one doing something that I have never explicitly done before. I would like to teach the lessons again mostly due to the fact that I know they would improve. I would be more comfortable and able to sort my thoughts better. I believe that is how it goes when a teacher decides to teach something new or try a new strategy in the classroom; awkward at first, but worthwhile in the long run.

The first objectives I came up with were very ambitious, as well. As my lesson plans will reflect, my objectives changed as I was teaching the lesson. I still want Billy Bob to see more from the text than the surface ideas, but I realized that my true objectives were to work on the specific aforementioned strategies and techniques. My original objectives would be better suited during later lessons, after Billy Bob has mastered some of the techniques completely, and found the motivation to want to be a more successful reader.

Again, at the risk of sounding repetitive, I believe my efforts could have been directed toward something that would have been more meaningful for Billy Bob. I had assumed (incorrectly) that Billy Bob's low grades and credit deficiencies were due to (in part) to his struggles with reading comprehension, and this is simply not the case. Looking back, the Q.R.I was not the most effective assessment I could have chosen, and some of the skills I chose were not the right choice. It would be interesting to start this assignment over with all of the knowledge I have now. In fact, I think a second round of work with Billy Bob that centers around his actual problem area (motivation) would prove to be more effective than the work I did with Billy Bob.

#### **Section 8: Recommendations to Teachers & Families**

To Whom It May Concern:

Over the last few months, I have been working very closely with Billy Bob, and my initial goal was to improve his reading comprehension. I sought to motivate and encourage him, as well as teach different reading strategies that would support his becoming a more skilled reader.

I learned that Billy Bob can and does comprehend a lot of what he reads; this is a strength. He is able to make inferences about what he reads, and question the text in a complex way. This all applies to when Billy Bob feels motivated to read, though. I found that he was highly motivated to work with me for various reasons. He enjoyed the one on one attention, and I was able to spark his interests in other ways, like using famous chefs' memoirs.

Billy Bob could be more successful in all of his readings if he can find a way to motivate himself intrinsically. He expressed motivation to take the readings I provided seriously because he knew it was for a class of mine, and being involved made him feel special. He was also motivated because I spoke with him at length about what we would be reading together. I chose two selections; one by Julia Child (2007) and one by Anthony Bourdain (2010). Billy Bob loves to cook and be in the kitchen, and he was actively eager to read something by these two well-known chefs.

In order to continue his motivation, I suggest providing Billy Bob with readings that directly relate to his interests. There are many memoirs by famous chefs and other people involved in the culinary world, as well as countless cookbooks and other books related to food. Any and all of them would fall under my recommendations for Billy Bob, but truly, I would speak to him

directly about what he wants to read. If presented correctly, Billy Bob could and would be motivated to continue reading.

**Section 9: Appendices** 

Swanteck	Lesson Plans LLASCP	Billy Bob
Common Core Standards	Objectives	Instructional Materials
CCSS.RL.2 CCSS. RL.3	Billy Bob will be able to set a purpose for reading.  Billy Bob will be able to identify some thematic elements of <i>My Life in France</i> by writing/telling about a similar experience.	Excerpt from My Life in France  -Ongoing Assessment: Personal Narratives by way of journals that encourage Billy Bob to think about fully realizing one's potential and the search for happiness.
CCSS.RL.4	Billy Bob will be able to monitor, clarify, and fix his own errors while reading a text.  Billy Bob will be able to think out loud and self-question while reading a text to better comprehension.	Excerpt from My Life in France by Julia Child Ongoing assessment: Personal Narrative Journals
CCSS.RL.2	Billy Bob will be able to use the learned strategies on his own as part of the gradual release of responsibility.  Billy Bob will be able to set his own purpose for reading, monitor, clarify, and fix his reading errors, and selfquestion and think aloud on his	Excerpt from Medium Raw by Anthony Bourdain

	own (with little to no guidance from me).	
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
1. Explicit explanation of setting a purpose for reading 2. Teacher Modeling of strategy 3. Collaborative Use 4. Guided Practice  Begin Personal Narrative Journals: What is your purpose for reading My Life in France?	1. Explicit explanation of monitoring, clarifying and fixing.  Using My Life in France  2. Teacher Modeling  3. Collaborative Use of Strategy (Billy Bob and I take turns reading out loud)  4. Guided Practice  5. Independent Use of Strategy  Continue Personal Narrative Journals:  Can you compare your life to Child's? What does it feel like to finally find something that makes you feel so complete?	Using Medium Raw  5. Independent Use of Strategies  Continue Personal Narrative Journals:  How is food used as a symbol in both books? What does it mean to each author? What does food mean to you?

# **Section 10: Reference List**

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