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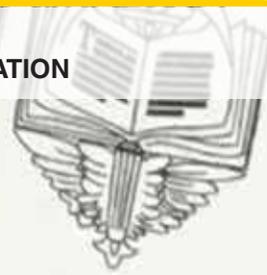
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ABOUT THE COVER -

Our SIG has a long, strong tradition of providing a place for ILA and PLTE members to submit scholarly articles. We are an international group, and our Journal is juried; every submission receives three reviews by members of our Editorial Board. All work on *The Reading Professor* is voluntary.

We went back several years to see what some topics of interest were in 1999, 2004, and 2010. Articles included:

- Fall, 1999: **Photo Story Writing: Integrating All Language Modes in Teaching Literacy to Elementary ESL Students**
Authors: Ping Lui and Richard Parker
- Spring, 2004: **Honing Writing Skills of Preservice Teachers (A Two Year Study)**
Author: Karen Foster
- Winter, 2010: **Collaborating with Classroom Teachers to Improve Performance Assessments in Literacy Methods Courses**
Authors: Francesca Pomerantz and Michelle Pierce.

As we look forward, all of us at *The Reading Professor* wish you a joyous 2018 as we continue our history of literacy inquiry.

Photo courtesy of Bonnie Johnson

Editors' Corner:

The Reading Professor frequently receives queries about the Journal's guidelines. They are printed below for the convenience of prospective authors.

The Reading Professor

Guidelines for Authors

The Reading Professor is a peer-reviewed electronic publication forum for Professors of Literacy and Teacher Education (PLTE). The Editorial Board members welcome the submission of research papers that address aspects of literacy instruction at all levels. Authors are encouraged to submit articles directed toward the improvement of reading instruction. *The Reading Professor* publishes instructional practices, innovative strategies, historical research, course development information, and book reviews.

Requirements and Evaluation

- Authors must be members of the Special Interest Group Professors of Literacy and Teacher Education and the International Literacy Association.
- The first author should submit a cover letter that includes contact information of author(s), and a statement verifying that the manuscript currently is not under consideration for publication by another journal.
- The first author should submit the manuscript via an e-mail attachment to

johnsob3@stjohns.edu
- Manuscripts should be double-spaced (including references) and must follow the format of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Manuscripts that do not follow APA Style will not be sent out for review.
- Manuscripts should be limited to approximately 20 pages in length (including references).
- Authors' names should appear only on the cover letters.
- Avoid inclusion of the authors' identities in any portion of the manuscript to ensure an impartial review.
- Manuscripts are evaluated by at least three reviewers; authors' names are not revealed to the reviewers.

- Manuscripts are evaluated in terms of significance of topic, clarity of communication, overall organization, methodology (if appropriate), interpretation of information, and aptness for the Journal.
- Decisions about publication usually are reached within two months, but this is not always possible due to workloads. Reviewers' decisions are final.
- Accepted manuscripts may be edited due to space requirements.

Literacy Teachers' Learning through a Recursive Coaching Cycle

Yang Hu and Jennifer Tuten

Abstract

This study investigates teachers' self-identification of their literacy professional development needs, the relationship of those needs to their specific classroom contexts, and their insights into their learning at the end of a recursive coaching cycle. The work is grounded in studies of effective professional development and coaching practices that increase teacher knowledge and self-efficacy. Participants were 44 teachers in a graduate literacy practicum course as part of their Masters in Literacy Education Program. Most of these teachers worked in the public schools of a large urban school system. An inductive analysis of data revealed three themes in teachers' self-identified professional development needs. Further micro and macro analysis, and double coding led to the discovery of varying degrees to which teachers describe their changed practice and learning during the coaching cycle. The study demonstrates that contextualized thinking is at the heart of instructional change and professional growth.

From a sociocultural perspective, effective teacher learning must be contextualized. Improved instruction hinges upon not only attention to curriculum content and practices, but more importantly, an understanding of the learners and contexts involved in the knowledge construction. A review of studies focused on the learning experiences of teachers and how these experiences led to better understanding and more frequent implementation of effective practices (Hall, 2005) suggests that it is through guided practices that teachers gain new ways of thinking. Based on sociocultural learning theory, our Literacy Practicum course is designed for teachers to take action, including taking ownership of their learning, receiving feedback after observations of teaching and video analysis, and reflecting. We hypothesize that using a recursive model of mentoring: setting intention—observation—feedback—video practice—feedback—reflection, can lead to strengthened teacher self-efficacy and growth in literacy education. In this study we investigated the following *a priori* questions.

1. How do teachers initially describe their professional development (PD) needs in literacy education?
2. What factors contribute to the way in which teachers describe their PD needs in literacy education?
3. In what ways do teachers describe their learning and growth at the end of a coaching cycle?

Review of Related Research

The course that is the context for this study is grounded in research in effective practices in PD that increases teacher knowledge and skills as well as studies of coaching and its relationship to teacher growth and self-efficacy.

Effective Models of Literacy Professional Development

Over the last 20 years there has been a growing shift

from PD models that are imposed upon teachers to ones that are inclusive and collaborative (Webster-Wright, 2009). Putman and Borko (2000) argue that teacher learning takes place in authentic contexts, meaningful to themselves and their current practice. This learning is distributed across the multiple contexts of their work that includes their classroom, community of peers, and school contexts. Other researchers look at the importance of embedded PD within teachers' practice (Borko, 2004; Heller, Daehler, Wong, Shinohara, & Miratrix, 2012; Henry, Tryjankowski, DiCamillo, & Bailey 2010; Kuijpers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010; Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009) to support the shift to school and classroom based PD. For effective and sustained teacher change, PD needs to focus on specific outcomes for students, embed the learning experience in teachers' own daily practice, be sustained over time, provide time for teachers to work together on issues important for them and their students, and provide specific content knowledge that is coherent with other activities (Dillon, O'Brien, Sato, & Kelly 2010).

Emergent research demonstrates the impact PD has on student achievement. School-wide PD cycles have been shown to influence students' literacy performance (Fisher, Frey & Nelson, 2012; Kennedy & Shiel, 2010; Porche, Pallante, & Snow, 2012). Research also suggests that PD impacts student achievement when it is focused on increasing content knowledge and on supporting students thinking (Boyle, While, & Boyle, 2004; McCutchen et al., 2003; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Timperley and Alton-Lee (2008) argue for an inquiry model of PD that identifies student learning needs aligned with teacher learning needs to support identifying effective actions or practices to support learning outcomes. Kraft and Papay (2014) investigated the role of a school's professional environment on teachers' growth and found that professional context of a school supported or hindered teachers' growth.

One element of PD is coaching. Vanderburg and Stephens (2010) found that teachers valued how coaches supported the creation of space for discussion and collaboration, sustained support, and concrete, research-based instructional strategies. As a result of the coaching cycles, teachers were willing to try new practices, explored a wider range of assessments, changed practices as a result of deepening their content knowledge, and shifted to more student-centered practices and curriculum. Other work (Hoffman et al., 2014; McAndrews and Msengi, 2013) addressed the role of coaching in supporting teachers to develop different kinds of reflection.

Coaching to Support Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, ones' sense of confidence and belief that one can exert control over situations (Bandura, 2001) plays an important role in teacher professional

development. Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek (2013) describe the interconnections among teachers' beliefs, skills, and self-efficacy about literacy instruction. Cantrell and Hughes (2008) found that teachers with a high level of self-efficacy at the beginning of a yearlong coaching experience were more successful in implementing effective changes in their instruction. Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) examined the possible contributing factors for teachers' self-efficacy in literacy instruction and concluded that strong pre-service experiences, PD, and resources were correlated to strong self-efficacy. Guo, Piasta, Justic, & Kaderavek (2010) examined preschool teachers' assessments of their self-efficacy in literacy instruction. They asserted,

Taken together, the findings presented in this study established the importance of preschool teachers' self-efficacy and classroom quality in understanding children's language and literacy gains in the context of preschool, which are consistent with findings obtained from the studies in elementary and secondary schools. (p.1101)

Tschannen-Moran & McMaster (2009) examined the impact of different types of PD and the relative impact on teachers' self-efficacy and implementation of new teaching and found that PD that focused on understanding content and followed up with coaching had the strongest effect on teachers' ability to enact new practices with confidence. In a different vein, Timperley and Phillips (2003) investigated the need for teachers to be pushed out of their comfort zone to develop greater knowledge and self-efficacy. In PD sessions, teachers were shown a video of students similar to their own making progress with a different instructional model. This provided a catalyst to new thinking and willingness to adapt a different approach to teaching.

Methods

Literacy Practicum Context

This study was conducted over a three-semester period from 2014 to 2015 in the context of the Literacy Practicum course in a graduate program in Literacy Education in a large urban public university. The practicum is designed to integrate course work with opportunities for teachers to make connections with their own practice. The course meets once a week for 50 minutes in a seminar format. A minimum of 50 hours of fieldwork is completed in each teachers' own classrooms.

Central to this course is an invitation to teachers to take ownership of their professional learning through a teacher-focused inquiry process that involves two phases of the teaching/observation cycle, as seen in Table 1. Teachers begin the first phase by identifying an area of literacy practice that they find challenging or intriguing through a survey (Jensen, Tuten, Hu & Eldridge, 2010). These teacher-generated practices guide and shape the weekly agenda of the seminar. After selecting her or his own area of focus, each teacher composes a letter inviting

the instructor to observe her at her school. The instructor observes the teacher and debriefs. Taking time to reflect and integrate the conference points, the teacher writes back to the instructor with her reflections and next steps. The second phase consists of the teacher video-taping a follow-up lesson, which incorporates suggestions from the first phase, as well as new resources. This time the teacher writes a letter to a peer in the practicum, and they exchange videos and letters. The teacher is also asked, in a letter to the peer, to provide feedback on her partner's video. At the end of the cycle, we ask teachers to reflect upon the experiences of the two phases as well as implications on their professional practice, and on their students' learning.

Phases	Activities	Goal
Phase 1: Site Visit	Survey of literacy practices	Determine (dis)comfort zone
	Letter of invitation to instructor	Describe context and area of practice for learning
	Site visit and discussion	Explore the teaching; integrating feedback on practice
	Post-visit letter to instructor	Articulate reflections on visit; identify areas for further work
	Instructor feedback on letters and visit	Provide targeted questions, suggestions as catalyst for change in understanding & practice
Phase 2: Video Exchange	Videotaping a lesson	Capture a lesson/conference for detailed review; consider if action meets expectation
	Open letter to peer	Analyze own video
	Response letter to peer's open letter and video	Sharpen ability to observe another's practice and provide appropriate feedback
Online Reflection	Final reflection	Examine own growth as well as impact of own learning on practice and children's learning

Table 1: Phases of the Mentoring Cycle

Participants

Participants were 44 in-service teachers, studying towards a master's degree and a state professional certification in Literacy Education. Their teaching experiences range from 0 to 13 years. Besides one participant who hadn't begun teaching, and two who had been teaching for 13 years at pre-K levels, the majority were in their mid 20's and had been teaching for 1-3 years. Most were employed by the city's public schools. Two were unemployed at the time, but

they were able to find classrooms to complete the fieldwork requirements. All but one were female. Table 1 illustrates the participants' teaching experiences and grade levels they taught at the time of data collection.

Teaching Experiences Total: N=44	Grade Level Assignments Total: N=44
0 Year N=1	
1 Year N=10	PreK N=12
2 Years N=14	Kindergarten N=8
3 Years N=8	1 st Grade N=5
4 Years N=4	2 nd Grade N=8
5 Years N=3	3 rd Grade N=4
6 Years N=2	4 th Grade N=4
13 Years N=2	5 th Grade N=3

Table 2: Participants' Teaching Experiences and Grade Level Assignments

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data sources consisted of the following. The secondary data sources were our field notes and our written feedback to participants.

- The letter of invitation: written by participants to the practicum instructor, providing the contextual information, as well as identifying their learning focus in literacy education
- The post-visit letter: written by participants to the practicum instructor, reflecting on the site visit and the conference with the practicum instructor
- Video of a teaching practice: captured by participants incorporating suggestions from the practicum instructor and new resources
- The open letter to a peer: written by participants to a self-selected peer in the practicum to describe their teaching video and ask for advice
- The response letter to a peer: written by participants to their self-selected peer to provide feedback to the peer's video
- Final reflection: written by participants at the end of the course to reflect on their own growth and impact of their work on their students' learning

Both authors have taught the Literacy Practicum course multiple times. The first author was the instructor of the course during the three semesters of data collection. Her role in this study was both mentor and researcher. She collected and analyzed the data inductively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) noting patterns and themes. Using the same inductive method, the second author coded the data independently, so that our double-coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984) could establish reliability. When comparing our results, we agreed over 90% of the time. Disagreements were discussed and resolved. We began analyzing the letters of invitation at a micro-level, by highlighting how teachers described their PD needs, and the factors that influenced their needs. Then

we examined the highlighted data and came up with broad themes to categorize teachers' self-perceived PD needs.

Once the categories were identified, we examined the data in each category to see if there was any correlation between teachers' self-perceived PD needs and the length of their teaching experience or the contexts in which they teach.

We then analyzed the rest of the primary data to investigate how the teachers had worked to meet their PD needs. We used the same inductive methods and double coding. Specifically, we looked to see if the teachers' reflections suggest new/changed practice and new/changed thinking about their practice. We crosschecked coding by examining their video-captured practice to look for evidence of changed or new practice.

Findings

A. Teachers' Initial Description of their Professional Development Needs

Writing a letter to invite the practicum instructor for a visit of their classroom allowed our teachers to examine their PD needs. In our guidelines for the letter of invitation, we asked them to consider their school and classroom contexts, as well as their students' needs. We encouraged them to move to the edge of their comfort zone as they identified an area of literacy practice to focus on. We also gave them a survey, asking them to rate their confidence level of various areas of literacy practice. Data analysis of the 44 letters of invitation yielded three categories in which teachers described their own PD needs—Context-Specific, Practice-Specific, Non-Specific.

1. Context-Specific

17 of the 44 participants (39%) fell into this category. The primary theme in these letters was a focus on providing detailed description of their classroom contexts. These contexts include: the background of their school or classroom literacy culture or curriculum, their students' needs, and the expectation that the chosen area of practice could address these needs. For example, Ariel, in describing her challenges in teaching close reading in her current guided reading groups, discussed the need in her school to align curriculum to the Common Core Standards, her students' lack of experience in non-fiction reading, and how close reading strategies could help her struggling readers. Most of these teachers' descriptions show varying degrees of recognition of their chosen areas of focus as a way to respond to their students' learning needs.

2. Practice-Specific

16 of the participants (36%) described their PD areas by focusing almost exclusively on an instructional practice, with very little mention of their school and classroom literacy contexts or the needs of their students. There was an overwhelming expression of wanting to become better at the practice. Half of the teachers in this group focused on guided reading as their chosen area. The rationale for this focus included: (1) lack of confidence or PD; (2) lack of experience; and (3) never tried it before. Gina wrote,

I would like to have a better understanding on how to lead

an effective guided reading lesson. I have never received PD on this practice. I would like to know how I am doing, and how I can improve my practice.

It is not clear, at least from these letters of invitation, how their chosen areas of practice relate to the literacy practice of their school or classroom, or to the needs of their students.

3. Non-Specific

Among 44 participants, 11 (25%) described their PD needs by focusing neither on the context of their classroom or students, nor specific literacy practice. Instead, their description is broad and general. For example, Sandy didn't include any description of the literacy practices that she currently used or description of her students' needs. She wrote,

What I need most help with is how to scaffold for students individually and help them to work by themselves. I already have tried to implement systems in the room to help them to achieve this success. However, I know there are more effective ways to help them.

Description of PD Needs n=44	Teaching Experiences	Grade Levels
<p><i>Context Specific (n=17, 39%)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider school or classroom literacy curriculum & teaching context Consider students' needs Recognize the importance of chosen PD needs as a solution to problems or responsive to students' learning needs 	<p>1-2 Years n=7 >3 Years n=10 (59%)</p>	<p>n=14: Elementary (82%) n= 2: Pre-K n= 1: Not Teaching</p>
<p><i>Practice Specific (n=16, 36%)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on a specific literacy practice Not clear how the practice relates to the teaching context 	<p>1-2 Years n=12 (75%) >3 Years n=4</p>	<p>n=12: Elementary (75%) n= 2: Pre-K n= 2: Assistant Teachers</p>
<p><i>Non-Specific (n=11, 25%)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of PD needs is not context or practice specific 	<p>0-2 Years n=7 (63%) >3 Years n=4</p>	<p>n=8: Pre-K (73%) n=1: Assistant Teachers n=1: Substitute Teacher n=1: ESL Teacher</p>

Table 3: Correlations of Descriptions of Professional Development Needs to Teaching Experiences and Grade Levels

B. What Led to such Differing Levels of Descriptions of PD Needs?

In determining the factors that led to these different articulations of PD needs, we first ruled out instruction and

course content in the three semesters of data collection because the same instructor taught all three semesters, using the same syllabus and assignments. We then were able to ascertain that the length of teaching experiences is a factor (Table 3).

A close examination of the three groups shows that 59% of the teachers in the Context-Specific group, in fact, have more than 3-year teaching experiences. 75% in the Practice-Specific group have 1 or 2 years of teaching experiences. In the Non-Specific group, 63% have zero to 2 years of teaching experiences. It appears that the tendency to consider contexts and learners' needs decreases with fewer teaching experiences. Those who are still in their first two years of teaching tend to focus largely on their own teaching practice.

We also analyzed the relationship between the contexts and grade levels that our teachers were teaching at the time of data collection. Their teaching contexts, including the roles they held (i.e. assistant or head teacher) had the greatest impact on how teachers described their PD needs, as is illustrated in Table 3. For example, for those whose letters are context specific, the majority of them (82%) were teaching at the elementary levels. 75% of those who focused exclusively on a practice also taught at this level. However, an interesting finding is that in the non-specific group, 73% of the teachers were teaching at pre-kindergarten levels; and the remaining did not have responsibilities as head-teacher—they were working as assistant teacher, substitute teacher or pull-out teachers. This finding led to a speculation that, perhaps, the pre-K settings do not usually lend themselves to clear literacy specific curriculum guides or requirements. But it is clear that the level of specificity in how teachers describe their PD needs is greatly influenced by the grade levels they teach and their teaching responsibilities.

C. Teachers' Descriptions of Their Learning and Growth at the End of the Coaching Cycle

Our area of investigation was to look at what kinds of learning took place as a result of the coaching cycle in the Literacy Practicum course. What was the relationship between different ways of describing the PD needs and descriptions of learning at the end of the cycle?

According to McAndrews and Msengi (2013), transformative learning happens when adult learners not only act in new ways but also think in new ways. All of our teachers acted in new ways after the initial site visit and debriefing. They revised their practice by incorporating suggestions from the practicum instructor and new resources. This was clearly demonstrated in their video-recorded lessons. The revisions varied from refocusing the lesson to trying new practices. In order to ascertain to what degree revising teaching practice would lead to new ways of thinking, we examined our teachers' reflections in their post-visit letters to the instructor, their letter exchanges with their partner around their videos, and their final reflections. Our content analysis of the data and double coding reveal three trends in the learning outcomes: Practice-Focused Learning, Learner-Focused Learning and Context-Focused Learning. See Figure 1.

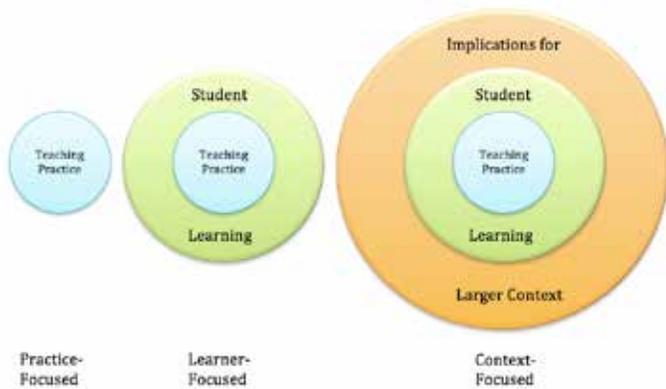


Figure 1: Three Learning Outcomes

1. Practice-Focused Learning

Teachers with this learning outcome focused on reflecting on their own practices. They compared and contrasted their old practice with revised practice, and described what they learned in revising their practice as a result of incorporating their instructor's suggestions. Many shared that their revised practice allowed them to experience classroom success leading to increased confidence and self-efficacy. For example, Adia implemented guided reading for the first time in her 3rd grade classroom during the semester she was in the Literacy Practicum. In fact, she had planned to launch guided reading while taking the practicum course in order to gain support from her peers and the instructor. She had never attended any PD in guided reading nor had she ever been observed teaching guided reading. During the site visit, her instructor reaffirmed her execution in setting up guided reading groups, as well as the routines and procedures she had put in place to lead the guided reading groups. The debriefing focused more on how to make the teaching in the guided reading groups more responsive to the needs of her students. In reflection, Adia wrote,

I am proud that I was able to put what I have learned into practice. It took so much preparation but in the end, it was completely worth it. I went from having so much uncertainties (sic) to knowing that I have set up all the groups correctly. More importantly, I realized that having all the groups in place is just the first step. I have to be thoughtful and teach each group by focusing on what they need as readers, rather than teaching the text the same way with each group.

However, teachers in this group stopped short of discussing student learning in their reflections. Even though two teachers in this group did mention that their students responded well to their revised practice, there was no evidence of any further description of how their students responded or why they responded well.

2. Learner-Focused Learning

Teachers in this group went beyond reflecting on their own practice. As they described their revised practice, their line of vision broadened to include descriptions of how their students reacted or responded to their new practice. They incorporated description and analysis of their students' responses to gauge the effectiveness of their revised practice.

Hence, to illustrate their learning, we use two concentric circles (see Figure 1) that includes student learning. Having a video-recorded lesson allowed the teachers to pay close attention to their students' learning. Some of our teachers were pleasantly surprised at seeing what students were capable of during guided practice, and the evidence that their students were applying what they learned from their revised teaching practice. Close examination of the videos also led many teachers to the realization that students' reactions and responses to their lessons are the best barometers for measuring the effectiveness of their teaching.

Both novice and more experienced teachers fell into this group. As novice teacher Hathai watched how her students responded to her teaching, she realized that children actually had better sense of ownership and were more likely to write with their own voices if given the opportunity. She wrote, "It was more effective to let kids wrestle with telling their stories and then provide feedback than leading children in a step-by-step fashion." The opportunity to watch the students through video, as well as watching it through the critical eye of a peer as the teachers exchanged their videos, allowed many of our teachers to see how children reacted to their revised practice thereby deepening their understanding of why their revised practice was effective. In addition, there were shifts in their perspectives about their students. For example, our pre-school teacher, Candace, in her initial letter of invitation, referred to her preschoolers as struggling readers. After engaging her students in a shared reading of Eric Carle's *I Can Do It*, she invited children to act out both as a group and then individually how animals in the book act. She was very pleased to see that all of her students were engaged, despite their learning differences. More importantly, she began to call her students emergent readers, instead of struggling readers, in her subsequent letters to the instructor and peer as well as in her reflection.

3. Context-Focused Learning

The context-focused learning can be described as having the largest diameter in their learning focus, as is illustrated in Figure 1. The teachers' learning is represented by three concentric circles. Not only did these teachers describe their old and new practice, they also discussed their students' learning and lessons they had learned as they observed their students. More importantly, they critically reflected on the implications of their revised practice, and their students' learning on the larger context—their literacy curriculum, the classroom context, and demonstrating a better understanding of what makes teaching and learning more effective. Table 4 illustrates characteristics of this learning outcome.

Better Understanding of Responsive Teaching and How Children Learn	Broadened Vision of Implications for Improved Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating time and space for discovery learning • Making learning more accessible and appropriate to meet the needs of students • Teaching according to what students need to learn rather than the rubric criteria • Designing one-size-fits-one approaches to better respond to students' needs • Asking more open-ended questions to gauge students' comprehension of the text before skills instruction • Negotiating the prescribed curriculum to teach more responsively to the needs of the children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming advocates for students • Adopting literacy intervention program, rather than stick to one-size-fits all programs • Raising expectations for students' literacy learning outcomes • Making changes in the classroom to facilitate more effective practice, such as setting up centers to encourage student-centered practices • Recognizing the importance of peer-led small group discussions • Better understanding of culturally and developmentally appropriate practices and materials

Table 4: Characteristics of Context-Focused Learning

Ruth, a special Education teacher, wrote in her initial letter of invitation,

I am interested in exploring if the differentiation I am providing adequately supports my students in meeting the learning target—using text details to answer questions. I would like to try other options without losing sight of the third grade reading standards.

Indeed, during the semester she was in Literacy Practicum, she tried simplifying the text, color-coding the text to match the comprehension questions, all in the hopes to help her students who were reading at a first grade level. Her practicum instructor suggested that she augment her practice by using a leveled literacy intervention program, and asked her to join a small group during the seminar in which three other teachers were working with struggling readers. Through the small group work and video analysis with peers, Ruth decided that just focusing on differentiation was not enough. She needed to adopt an intervention program to document and foster students' growth. Moreover, she went to her principal to negotiate using one of the three periods dedicated to literacy for leveled literacy intervention, and it was approved. Ruth's stance, at the end of the practicum, changed from that of a teacher focused on improving practice to that of an advocate for her students. She wrote in her final reflection, "I need to focus on teaching the students, not teaching the curriculum."

An emphasis in the practicum is for teachers to examine children's learning so that we can learn from them what we need to teach them. There were many cases in which our teachers moved their gaze from their own practice to the learning of children, and learned profound lessons that led to not only changed practice but also new insights into the nature of teaching and learning.

After discovering and delineating these three trends in learning outcomes, we ascertained how these trends correlated to the ways teachers initially describe their PD needs. As illustrated in Figure 5, the Context-Specific group experienced most of the Context-Focused Learning, as 70% of the teachers in this group demonstrated growth and critical stances in practice as well as in their ways of thinking. 25% of the teachers in the Practice-Specific group described their growth in practice by including students' learning, while the majority of them, 62%, focused on their own practice as they discussed their learning. Similarly, in the case of the Non-Specific group, 27% included evidence of watching their students' learning. The majority of the group,

54%, described their growth only in terms of their own practice.



Figure 5: Correlations of Descriptions of Professional Development Needs to Learning Outcomes

Discussion and Implication

The teachers in our study drew upon their immediate school and classroom challenges as they identified their specific need for PD. Teachers identified Practice-Specific, Context-Specific or Non-Specific areas for feedback and development. As research in effective PD (Webster- Wright, 2009; Putman and Borko, 2000) suggest, teachers learn best when they are able to shape and put into direct action newly gained information. Our study also suggests that while novice teachers typically ask for support to clarify and confirm particular instructional practices, more experienced teachers expand their focus to include student learning. From our findings we argue that significant teacher growth is stronger when teachers are able to participate in identifying their own needs and provided opportunities to develop contextualized thinking rather than a focus on improving particular practices.

Our study also demonstrates the importance of the coaching cycle that includes time for revised practice. Too often PD initiatives, including coaching, cast a wide net and don't allow for in-depth grappling with a particular issue. Our findings show that continued focus in a particular dimension of literacy instruction leads to change. Video analysis is a critical component of this cycle. It provides teachers an opportunity to widen their focus on students as well as focus on areas of instruction such as language (Hu & Tuten, 2015).

As a result of participating in this coaching cycle, teachers learned in varying ways. Our analysis supports a

view of learning outcomes with increased understanding of the interrelationships between teaching, student learning, and school context. Newer teachers, who focused on practice-specific learning, primarily learned a new practice. Teachers who embedded their professional development questions within a school context were able to achieve new insights about the relationships between their own practices, student learning, and their particular school curriculum. In some cases this learning became a catalyst for continued focus and advocacy.

In the final analysis, it is contextualized thinking that has the strongest potential for transformation. The result of our study demonstrates how teacher education programs can intentionally bridge graduate studies with teaching and learning in the schools. It shows significant promise in contextualized coaching in teacher education, in that teachers themselves have ownership of their learning, their learning is embedded in their own daily practice, and their focus includes student learning and implications for the larger classroom and school contexts. In addition, effective coaching cycles usually begin with teachers problematizing their own teaching and learning, followed by observation/feedback, guided practice, video analysis, and peer critique. We believe that the coaching cycle described in this study has significant implications for both pre-service teacher education and in-service staff development.

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Textbooks & Trade Books: A Statewide Investigation of Texts Used in Undergraduate-Level Children's Literature Courses

Betty Coneway, Laurie A. Sharp, and Elsa Diego-Medrano

Abstract

Learning about children's literature should be both highly valued and respected as a critically important instructional component in preparing future teachers. Limited literature is available that explores preparation efforts with children's literature among preservice teachers, and no known studies specifically explore the types of textbooks and trade books used in children's literature courses. The current study used a qualitative research design to identify both the required textbooks and supplementary resources that are used in children's literature courses offered among educator preparation programs in the state of Texas. Data were collected from publicly available course syllabi from 52 undergraduate-level children's literature courses taught in educator preparation programs across Texas. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques, which identified the titles of the most commonly used textbooks, along with patterns of recurrent topics addressed in these textbooks. Data analyses also generated a list of commonly used children's literature trade books that were used as supplemental course texts. Findings from this study have suggested that exposure and exploration of a wide variety of textbooks and trade books in children's literature courses has the potential to enhance preservice teachers' appreciation of children's literature, as well as enhance their pedagogical, theoretical, and literature understandings.

Keywords: children's literature, preservice teachers, preparation, textbooks, trade books

High-quality children's literature texts are motivational and evocative resources that can support the literacy development of students. Teachers who effectively use children's literature in their classrooms help students develop important literacy skills while fostering a love for reading (Tunks, Giles, & Rogers, 2015). Therefore, learning about children's literature should be highly valued and respected as a critically important instructional component in preparing future teachers (Hoewisch, 2010). In order to maximize the potential benefits associated with using children's literature in the classroom, preservice teachers must build their knowledge of how to effectively select and use children's literature in the classroom. This often occurs as a result of their experiences and exposure to acclaimed books during children's literature courses taken as part of their educator preparation programs (Tunks, et al., 2015).

Each state typically has an agency that oversees licensure requirements and professional standards for teacher certification. In Texas, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) has developed standards for beginning teachers that align with the required state curriculum standards,

the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The following English Language Arts and Reading standards address what Early Childhood - 6th Grade (EC-6) teachers should comprehend regarding children's literature:

The beginning teacher knows and understands:

- that reading comprehension begins with listening comprehension, and knows strategies to help students improve listening comprehension;
- how to model and teach literal comprehension skills (e.g., identifying stated main idea, details, sequence, and cause-and-effect relationships);
- factors affecting students' reading comprehension, such as oral language development, word analysis skills, prior knowledge, previous reading experiences, fluency, ability to monitor understanding, and the characteristics of specific texts (e.g., structure and vocabulary); and
- various literary genres (e.g., historical fiction, poetry, myths, and fables) and their characteristics. (p. 10)

These standards have also been identified as common learner outcomes associated with undergraduate-level children's literature courses offered as requirements and/or electives among university-based educator preparation programs in Texas (Sharp, Coneway, & Diego-Medrano, 2017).

Although many preservice teachers complete one or more children's literature courses during their educator preparation training, there is limited research examining the characteristics of children's literature courses and teacher preparation simultaneously (Sharp et al., 2017). In preparing for the current study, we were able to locate a plethora of research studies that explored texts used in children's literature courses involving specific learning activities and tasks (e.g., Barnes, 2006; Rule, Montgomery, & Vander Zanden, 2014; Ward, 2005; Wilson, 2013). However, we were unable to discover any research studies that specifically explored the types of texts used in children's literature courses. The paucity of prior research in this area became the impetus for the current study.

We used a qualitative research design to identify the types of texts that were required or used as supplementary resources in undergraduate-level children's literature courses offered among educator preparation programs in Texas. This research endeavor provided insights regarding the most commonly used textbooks and trade books, which also suggested patterns of concepts emphasized within children's literature courses. Findings will be useful to faculty members who teach children's literature courses, as well as

other educator preparation program stakeholders who are interested in enhancing learning among preservice teachers.

Literature Review

Studying children's literature may entice individuals to explore their own personal tastes with literature, examine different cultural perspectives, and learn about literary forms and elements (Joseph, 2015). Preservice teachers who critically explore and evaluate children's literature experience many benefits, such as the ability to formulate deeper responses and stronger intertextual connections (Fahrenbruck, Schall, Short, Smiles, & Storie, 2006). Exposure to culturally diverse children's literature also develops a more culturally responsive pedagogy among preservice teachers, particularly among those who have limited experiences with diversity (Barnes, 2006). Recent research revealed that preservice teachers who received more training with children's literature in their educator preparation programs used more nonfiction and informational literature, selected literature that broadened student's views of others, and shared classical children's literature texts more frequently in their future classrooms (Tunks et al., 2015). Furthermore, preservice teachers who receive a positive and enthusiastic induction into the world of children's literature are likely to pass on a love for reading among their future students (Anderson, 2013; Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007).

Exposing preservice teachers to a wide variety of high-quality literature supports their discovery and familiarity with both classical and new children's literature titles that may help their future students learn about the different genres of literature and a variety of text structures (Donovan & Smolkin, 2006; Duke, 2000). Purposefully selecting and using children's literature with students during reading instruction enhances their literacy development and scaffolds their understandings with comprehension techniques, vocabulary, and important book features (Lennox, 2013; Neumann, 1999; Palinscar & Duke, 2004). Children's literature selections may also be used across the curriculum to develop knowledge and skills in a variety of content areas, build student interest, and introduce specialized vocabulary and content (Werderich, 2014).

As part of an educator preparation program, children's literature courses generally provide preservice teachers with broad knowledge about literature; focus on authors, illustrators, and poets; and provide preservice teachers with pedagogical understandings regarding effective uses of children's literature (Sharp et al., 2017). Teacher educators who address these learning outcomes in their children's literature courses will likely use textbooks and trade books to disseminate knowledge, build understandings, and model authentic uses of children's literature. In an effort to improve the quality of current preparation efforts, Hoewisch (2010) encouraged teacher educators to "systematically and carefully review our children's literature course syllabi" and "critically scrutinize" the textbooks and trade books used to prepare preservice teachers (para. 41).

Methodology

Research Design

To achieve the purpose for our study, we used a qualitative research design that encompassed purposeful sampling methods. To compile the sample, we first accessed the Texas Education Agency's (n.d.) online list of state-approved educator preparation programs (EPPs) to identify state-approved programs that offered teacher certification at the elementary grade levels [i.e., Core Subjects (Grade Level EC-6)]. This search yielded 128 EPPs, which included both traditional and alternative certification programs. Due to programming differences, we determined that limiting our sample to university-based, traditional EPPs was the most appropriate choice to achieve the purpose of our study. After applying this data filter, we identified 69 eligible EPPs. Next, we carefully examined degree program requirements for each EPP and discovered that 17 EPPs did not require their preservice teachers to complete a course that specifically focused on children's literature. Therefore, we removed these EPPs from our sample, which narrowed our sample to include 52 EPPs.

Next, we reviewed each course syllabus objectively and systematically using content analysis techniques (Berg, 2004; Marks & Yardley, 2004; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). First, we read through each course syllabus in its entirety to gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, we read through each syllabus a second time, citing all textbooks and trade books that were referenced as course

Data Collection and Analysis

The specific focus of our study was to discover the resource materials that were either required or used as supplementary texts in children's literature courses in the state of Texas. We sought to identify the most commonly used textbooks and trade books utilized within children's literature courses and to determine patterns of concepts emphasized within these educator preparation course materials. The guiding research questions for this research study were:

- What children's literature textbooks and trade books are the most commonly used in children's literature courses in the state of Texas?
- What patterns of concepts are frequently emphasized in the required and/or supplementary course materials used in children's literature courses?

Since syllabi are easily accessible documents that outline course content and usually include information about materials and texts used within a course, they are an excellent supplier of information (Priester et al., 2008). Data collection efforts entailed retrieving publicly accessible course syllabi that were published on the Internet for each children's literature course offered by the EPPs in our sample. We selected course syllabi as our data source because syllabi are informative documents that outline the content covered in a course, required materials and resources, learning tasks, and how student performance would be evaluated (Davis, 1993). Moreover, Texas state legislation enacted House Bill 2504 (2009), which mandated that all public universities make course syllabi for all credit bearing, undergraduate-level courses available to the public on their university websites. According to this legislation, course syllabi must include several required components, including "lists of any required or recommended reading" (para. 3).

As a research team, we reviewed each course syllabus objectively and systematically using content analysis techniques (Berg, 2004; Marks & Yardley, 2004; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). First, we read through each course syllabus in its entirety to gain a comprehensive understanding. Next, we read through each syllabus a second time, citing all textbooks and trade books that were referenced as course

materials. To guide our data analyses, we created literature-based differentiations for “textbook” and “trade book” (Short, Lynch-Brown, & Tomlinson, 2014). We determined that textbooks were comprehensive texts used as the primary driver of instruction in the course. Trade books, on the other hand, were children’s literature texts used for specific course learning activities or tasks. Finally, we examined the textbook and trade book data to identify common patterns and themes. We created summary sheets of our findings and organized the data into the following tables. Table 1 below provides information for each required course textbook: the text title, author information, year of publication, and a summary from the publisher regarding the content within the text. Table 2 provides the title, author and year of publication for the most commonly used trade books identified through this syllabi investigation.

Table 1
Children’s Literature Textbooks

Required Course Textbook	n	Publisher Summary
<i>Children’s Literature Briefly</i> (6 th ed.) by Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, & Bryan (2016)	8	A concise, engaging, practical overview of children’s literature that keeps the focus on the books that children read.
<i>Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children’s Literature</i> (7 th ed.) by Norton (2007)	7	A visually stunning, theoretically sound, comprehensive overview of children’s literature.
<i>Charlotte Huck’s Children’s Literature in the Elementary School</i> (9 th ed.) by Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman (2007)	6	This classic text shows readers how children’s literature can capture the attention of K-8 students and foster a lifelong love of reading.
<i>Elementary Children’s Literature</i> (4 th ed.) by Anderson (2013)	3	This book gives pre-service teachers of elementary, early childhood, special education, media specialists and parents of children aged infancy through age 13 a comprehensive look at children’s literature.
<i>Reading Children’s Literature: A Critical Introduction</i> by Hintz & Tribunella (2013)	2	Informed by recent scholarship and interest in cultural studies and critical theory, this text introduces students to the historical contexts, genres, and issues of children’s literature.

<i>Essentials of Children’s Literature</i> (7 th Edition) by Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson & Short (2011)	2	Brief, yet packed with rich resources, this popular book is a true compendium of information about children’s literature.
<i>Literature and the Child</i> (8 th ed.) by Galda, Sipe, Liang, & Cullinan (2013)	2	Covers the two major topical areas of children’s literature: the genres of children’s literature and the use of children’s literature in the classroom.
<i>Children’s Books in Children’s Hands: A Brief Introduction to Their Literature</i> (5 th ed.) by Temple, Martinez, & Yokota (2015)	2	Designed to give pre- and in-service teachers a wealth of richly illustrated, practical ideas for sharing literature with children.
<i>Literature for Children: A Short Introduction</i> (8 th ed.) by Russels (2015)	1	A concise, accessible, text that provides a solid understanding of the foundations of children’s literature across its various genres from picture books to folk literature.
<i>Multicultural Children’s Literature: A Critical Issues Approach</i> by Gopalakrishnan (2010)	1	Designed to prepare K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers to address the social, cultural, and critical issues of our times through the use of multicultural children’s books.
<i>A Celebration of Literature and Response: Children, Books, and Teachers in K-8 Classrooms</i> (3 rd ed.) by Hancock (2007)	1	Applies reader response theory to children’s literature methods to help new and experienced teachers best involve kindergarteners through eighth graders in literature and literacy.
<i>Fifty Literacy Strategies: Step by Step</i> by Tompkins (2012)	1	This conveniently organized resource book reflects the latest, most exciting ideas in literature focus units, reading/writing workshop, and thematic instruction.
<i>Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever</i> (2 nd ed.) by Fox (2008)	1	Author Mem Fox reveals the incredible emotional and intellectual impact reading aloud to children has on their ability to learn to read.

Table 2

Commonly Used Children's Literature Trade Books

- *My Name is Maria Isabela* by Alma Flor Ada (1995)
- *The True Blue Scouts of Sugar Man Swamp* by Kathi Appelt (2013)
- *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate (2012)
- *The Tequila Worm* by Viola Canales (2005)
- *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis (1999)
- *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis (2009)
- *Now One Foot, Now the Other* by Tomie DePaola (2006)
- *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper (2012)
- *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman (1997)
- *Corduroy* by Don Freeman (1976)
- *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman (2008)
- *Maximilian and the Mystery of the Guardian Angel: A Bilingual Lucha Libre Thriller* by Xavier Garza (2011)
- *Rumpelstiltskin* by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (1905)
- *The Year of Billy Miller* by Kevin Henkes (2013)
- *Turtle in Paradise* by Jennifer L. Holm (2011)
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960)
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle (1962)
- *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (1993)
- *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan (1985)
- *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz-Ryan (2000)
- *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio (2012)
- *Heart of a Samurai* by Margi Preus (2010)
- *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero (2014)
- *Eleven* by Patricia Reilly Giff (2009)
- *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Saenz (2014)
- *Juventud! Growing Up on the Border* by Rene Saldaña, Jr. and Erika Garza-Johnson (Eds.) (2013)
- *The Night Fairy* by Laura Amy Schlitz (2011)
- *Wonderstruck* by Brian Selznick (2011)
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor (1976)
- *Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women* by Catherine Thimmesh (2002)
- *Gone Fishing: A Novel in Verse* by Tamara Will Wissinger (2013)
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson (2014)
- *Breaking Stalin's Nose* by Eugene Yelchin (2013)

Results

Required Course Texts

Findings from our review and analyses revealed 13 unique texts that were cited most frequently as required course texts used in stand-alone children's literature courses in the state of Texas. Closer examination revealed that the majority ($n = 11$) were traditional textbooks, one was a teacher resource book of literacy strategies, and the other was a commentary on the importance of reading aloud to children.

Table 1 notes that two of the required course texts reviewed were not traditional textbooks. One text was a practitioner's resource book that specifically described research-based, classroom-tested instructional practices with children's literature (Tompkins, 2012). The other text was written as a commentary calling for consistent use of an effective instructional strategy: reading aloud (Fox, 2008).

We further examined each of the remaining required course textbooks, which were 11 traditional textbooks with similar content. We found that the following major topics were presented in each of these textbooks: (a) value of quality children's literature; (b) evaluation and selection criteria; (c) historical milestones and literature trends; (d) art, illustration, and picture books; (e) instructional strategies for developing comprehension, vocabulary, and inferential language skills; (f) children's book awards, and (g) literary genres. We will provide a brief discussion of each of these main themes.

Value of quality children's literature. Each of the 11 traditional children's literature textbooks included an introductory section that defined children's literature and provided a rationale for its value. For example, Short, Lynch-Brown, and Tomlinson (2014) highlighted the value of literature in children's lives and emphasized the importance of its aesthetic qualities, including enjoyment, identity, imagination, empathy, and literary and artistic preferences. Norton (2007) added that quality literature helps children develop emotional intelligence, while Kiefer et al. (2007) discussed the importance of storytelling, expressing that "narrative is the most common and effective way of ordering our world today" (p. 6).

Evaluation and selection criteria. Adults engaged in children's lives have a responsibility for captivating children's interest and sparking their delight in books. The texts in the analyses relayed multiple emotional and intellectual benefits that children experience when adults read aloud to them (Fox, 2008). These textbooks also underscored the sheer joy of adults and children sharing the pleasures of reading together and the influential role that teachers have in helping children develop as readers (Trelease, 2013). Teachers require practical guidelines for evaluating and selecting quality literature for classroom use (Lennox, 2013), and the textbooks in our analyses revealed this criteria through addressing specific genres. For example, Norton (2007) provided the following five objectives for selecting literature for use with children: (1) help children realize that literature is for enjoyment, (2) acquaint children with their literary heritage, (3) teach children the formal elements of literature, (4) guide children to understand themselves and the rest of humanity better, and (5) develop the ability to evaluate what children read.

Historical milestones and literature trends. Kiefer et al. (2007) stated, "As we study the changing history of children's literature, we find that social, cultural, and political norms have had an impact on [those] stories" (p. 71). The traditional textbooks in our analyses commonly traced the development of children's literature from the oral storytelling tradition through recent publications. Through these textbooks, preservice teachers are exposed to a variety of historical milestones and literature trends, including the theory of didacticism, the history of classic literature, the creation of postmodern literature, and the development of e-books and literature response blogs. In addition to looking at the history of children's literature globally, one of the textbooks defined the evolution of specific genres using an historical perspective (Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2015). Short et al. (2014) also included easy-to-read charts highlighting significant historical milestones by literature genre.

Art, illustration, and picture books. Today's visual society demands well-developed visual literacy skills among students (Short et al., 2014; Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, & Bryan, 2016). Visual images are an integral part of children's literature because children's picture books can easily be used to demonstrate how visual images communicate ideas and convey information quickly and powerfully. Each traditional textbook in our analyses addressed art or illustrations in some manner. Many of these textbooks contained either a chapter or a section that addressed art and illustration in picture books, including artistic style, media, and visual elements.

Instructional strategies. Many of the traditional textbooks we reviewed included a chapter that addressed specific instructional strategies regarding how to use children's literature in all content areas: English language arts, reading, math, science, and social studies. Information shared in these textbooks addressed specific ways in which works of children's literature become vehicles to develop comprehension, vocabulary, and language skills among students. Additionally, Lennox (2013) asserted that the use of literature-based instructional strategies across the curriculum has the potential to foster development of literacy skills, as well as a love for reading.

Children's literature book awards. Another common topic among the traditional textbooks we reviewed was children's literature book awards that recognize specific trade books, authors, and illustrators. Among these textbooks, two specific book awards were consistently presented: (a) the John Newbery Medal, which recognizes the author of the most distinguished American children's book; and (b) the Randolph Caldecott Medal, which recognizes the illustrator of the most distinguished picture book. Some of the textbooks highlighted children's literature book awards that recognized authors and illustrators for their body of works, such as the Hans Christian Andersen Award and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal. Other children's literature book awards addressed in the textbooks included:

- The Mildred L. Batchelder Award - Recognizes the most outstanding children's book originally published in a language other than English and in a country other than the United States, which was translated into English for publication in the United States.
- The Pura Belpré Award - Recognizes a Latino/Latina author and illustrator.
- The Coretta Scott King Award - Recognizes outstanding books for young adults and children by African American authors and illustrators that reflect the African American experience.
- National Council of Teachers of English Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children – Recognizes a living American poet for their body of children's poetry.

Literary genres. Another common topic addressed in the traditional textbooks we reviewed was literary genres. In all of these textbooks, we found chapters that included descriptions for each literary genre, as well as salient information for each. Lennox (2013) stressed that "exposure to different genres helps children understand how various texts are organized and offers many different learning opportunities" (p. 383). The

following literary genres were recognized in each textbook: early childhood, picture books, traditional literature, modern fantasy, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, biography and autobiography, and informational texts.

Although most of the traditional textbooks introduced multicultural children's literature in some manner and provided insight regarding how to include diversity through literature in the classroom, one of the textbooks specifically focused on presenting multicultural children's literature through a critical literacies stance (Gopalakrishnan, 2010). This textbook described how to address significant social issues and theoretical perspectives of multiculturalism in the classroom during instruction through the use of children's literature.

Trade Books

Data analyses also revealed the presence of several trade books among course syllabi that were recorded as either required or supplementary course materials. In order to identify patterns within these trade book titles, we established the following criterion for analyses: trade book titles that were referenced only on one course syllabus were omitted. After applying this exclusion criterion, we identified 33 unique trade book titles that were commonly used in children's literature courses (see Table 2).

Analyses of these commonly used trade books revealed several patterns regarding book themes. Many trade books addressed concepts related to cultural diversity, while others focused on relevant contemporary social issues, such as racism, gender equality, immigration, and physical disabilities. The majority of trade books we reviewed were notable works of children's literature written by well-known authors and illustrated by well-respected illustrators who had been recognized with prestigious children's literature book awards. A large number of course syllabi also referenced specific trade book titles within the context of literary genres, such as:

- Greek myths - *Favorite Greek Myths* written by Robert Blaisdell (2012),
- fables - *Aesop's Fables* written by Aesop (2014),
- folktales - *Favorite Folktales from Around the World* edited by Jane Yolen (1988),
- fairy tales - *The Blue Fairy Book* edited by Andrew Lang (2012), and
- poetry - *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children* edited by Jack Prelutsky (1983).

We also found numerous references on course syllabi to supplementary materials, which were mainly novels, included as specific books sets, reading lists, or themed book titles. In many instances, course syllabi indicated that preservice teachers had choices with the selection of supplementary materials. For example, some of the course syllabi provided an instructor-created list of trade book titles from which preservice teachers could choose to complete a required learning activity or task. Other course syllabi referenced existing lists of trade book titles, such as a university-created reading list that accompanied their reading campaign or the Texas Library Association's Texas Bluebonnet Awards Master List. Choice with trade books was also extended to preservice teachers through lists of preselected themed book titles. In

these instances, course syllabi referenced groups of trade book titles that addressed specific themes, such as (a) racism/prejudice/immigration, (b) the Holocaust, (c) special needs/bullying, (d) lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgender (LGBTQ), and (d) homelessness/poverty. Course syllabi that included themed book titles as supplementary materials instructed preservice teachers to self-select one book from the group with which to complete a specific learning activity or task. Several course syllabi also stated that the instructor would provide additional supplementary materials that were not listed on the syllabus

We observed that *Rumpelstiltskin* by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (1905), a beloved traditional fairy tale associated with Germany, was included in the list of commonly used trade books. While the Grimm version of this story is traditionally the most cited, it is important to mention that several authors have retold, adapted, and illustrated this classic traditional tale in many different languages and cultures.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (1960) was listed on two Children's Literature course syllabi, so this title was included in our findings. While most people would not categorize *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a children's book, the theme of basic human dignity is important for all children, adolescents, and adults. According to one book reviewer, "If you are a human being with emotions, this book will impact you, regardless of age, gender or background (OrliTheBookworm, 2015).

Discussion and Implications

Children's literature courses have the potential to empower preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively share high-quality literature with their future students (Serafini, 2003). Children's literature course learning outcomes generally focus on the development of personal and professional knowledge about literature among preservice teachers, as well as ways in which they may employ literature-based instructional strategies to benefit the literacy development of their future students (Sharp et al., 2017). With this in mind, the required and supplemental textbooks and trade books selected for use within children's literature courses play a significant role in shaping theoretical, pedagogical and literature understandings among preservice teachers (Serafini, 2003).

Through our investigation of texts used in children's literature courses offered across EPPs in the state of Texas, we assert that preservice teacher candidates are being exposed to quality materials and key knowledge that support their growth as effective literacy educators. Our biggest concern rests with the preservice teachers who are not required to complete a children's literature course as part of their teacher training. This phenomenon begs the following questions: How will these future teachers develop theoretical understandings that underpin the value of literature? How will these future teachers develop professional, pedagogical understandings related to effective uses of literature-based instruction? How will these future teachers further their own personal understandings of literature?

If teacher candidates are not required or encouraged to take a children's literature course, then many future teachers will not develop an appreciation for children's literature nor possess the knowledge and skills necessary to introduce

young children to the world of books and the joy of reading. This is a crucial understanding that can change a child's world. Mary McLeod Bethune, a noted education advocate, shared, "The whole world opened to me when I learned to read" (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2013, p. 8). Young children deserve well-prepared teachers who will open the world of books to them.

As new pathways emerge to prepare qualified teachers and state licensure requirements change, some EPPs have altered pre-existing requirements, such as successful completion of one or more courses in children's literature (Hoewisch, 2010; Tunks et al., 2015). Based upon our findings, we strongly recommend that educator preparation programs continue to require successful completion of at least one children's literature course. Participation in a course specific to children's literature exposes preservice teachers to rich and varied literature and cultivates their understandings regarding how to engage students with high-quality literature. We concur with Hoewisch (2010) that preservice teachers must respect and value children's literature as an important literary form that can be incorporated across the curriculum to promote the development of literacy skills among their future students. Children's literature courses are vital components within educator preparation programs.

Limitations & Future Research

As with any research study, there were a few limitations present with our investigation. First, our analyses of data relied solely on information that was provided in publicly accessible course syllabi that were published on the Internet. Thus, we approached our analyses of data with the assumption that each course syllabus accurately portrayed that information required by state legislation. In order to enhance validity with our findings, we recommend that follow-up research studies are conducted that utilize additional data sources, such as subjective feedback from teacher educators who teach children's literature courses. Another limitation with our study was related to our sampling methods. We limited our sample to include only university-based traditional educator preparation programs in one state and within one teaching certification area. Although these limitations narrowed our sample, they were necessary in order to achieve a representative sample. We acknowledge that differences exist among state teacher licensure agencies, alternative and traditional educator preparation programs, and even among teaching certification areas. Therefore, we recommend that future studies replicate the design of our study with these considerations in mind to investigate the types of textbooks and trade books used in children's literature courses in other states, alternative types of educator preparation programs, and additional areas of teaching certification.

Conclusion

Within educator preparation programs, children's literature courses provide a positive and motivating means to help preservice teachers learn about classical and contemporary literature. Through exposure to high-quality children's literature selections, preservice teachers are better equipped to impact the literacy development of their future students.

The textbooks and trade books used within children's literature courses have the potential to provide a comprehensive and valuable way for preservice teachers to acquire a rich literary knowledge base and learn pedagogically-sound approaches to using children's literature as a way to enhance the learning and love of reading among generations of future students.

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Independent Reading: Trends in the Beliefs and Practices of Three Classroom Teachers

Lauren R. Brannan and Rebecca M. Giles

Abstract

Reading is arguably the most important skill taught in today's schools. Contradictory perceptions of how best to teach reading continue to alter perceptions regarding the importance of students' engagement in independent reading during school. This study sought to determine the current perceptions regarding independent reading through an exploratory analysis of the teaching practices of second-grade teachers. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to collect semi-structured interview and observation data from three participants. Two overarching themes (quantity of reading and quality of reading) emerged from data. Results revealed that teachers not only value the amount of reading that students engage in, but the quality of that time spent reading.

Introduction

Reading is a skill that transcends many areas of our daily lives, making it perhaps the most important skill to be learned. Yet, there has been little consensus about the best approach to reading instruction (Chall, 1967; Halford, 1997; Pearson, 2004; Pressley & Allington, 2015; Strauss, 2013). As the pendulum swings from supporting one approach to reading instruction to another, the United States continues to fall below other nations in regards to growth in reading achievement (Education Commission of the States, 2011; Pressley & Allington, 2015). Studies have found that as the pressure to perform on standardized tests and other accountability measures mounted, teachers began to rely on commercial reading programs, which allocated little time for students to read independently at school (Allington, 2006; Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). Research, however, has consistently shown a connection between the volume of reading that students engage in and reading achievement (Allington, 2009; Allington, et al., 2010; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991, 1997, 2001, 2003; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 2004; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990; Topping, Samuels, & Paul, 2007), regardless of their initial level of achievement (Allington, 2006, 2013).

The amount of reading children engage in contributes to growth in their vocabulary and thinking skills, as well as general knowledge (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001, 2003). Cunningham and Stanovich (1991) found that exposure to print, a construct very similar to reading volume, can predict students' ability to spell and their vocabulary knowledge. In fact, Cunningham and Stanovich (2003) cited reading volume as the primary source of children's vocabulary differences. Students who read more not only have higher reading achievement, but they demonstrate more knowledge of content (Krashen, 2006). The implementation of independent

reading in the classroom is one approach elementary teachers use to increase students reading volume (Miller, 2002; Sanden, 2012, 2014; Taberski, 2011; Towle, 2000).

Independent Reading

Independent reading, in which choice, authenticity, challenge, and collaboration are made possible through authentic reading experiences, requires that a block of time be set aside for students to read self-selected texts independently, or with a partner, to practice reading skills and strategies while the teacher provides scaffolding through individual student conferences (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2011; Towle, 2001). Independent reading is often a component of reading workshops, which include a focus lesson, small group instruction, independent reading, and share time (Miller, 2002; Taberski, 2011; Towle, 2000). This format follows Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, which illustrates the process of cognitive apprenticeship, where experts make their thinking visible and provide scaffolding as novices learn new skills (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1987). During independent reading, teachers support students' reading independence, focus on student growth, and show a commitment to student-centered practices (Sanden, 2012, 2014).

The commonly agreed upon components of independent reading are as follows: 1) a sustained amount of time for reading, 2) reading appropriately leveled text, 3) participating in reading as a social activity, 4) eliminating the requirement of silent reading, 5) reading with a purpose, 6) teacher-student conferences, and 7) access to a large variety of quality text (Miller, 2002; Sanden, 2012; 2014; Taberski, 2011). Although some of these components overlap with programs such as Sustained Silent Reading (Pilgreen, 2000) and Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2012), the collective use of all components during independent reading offers powerful differences. A detailed description of each component follows.

Time to Read

Independent reading consists of a sustained amount of time each day that is set aside for students to read (Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2000, 2011). The time allotted for reading can occur in a single span or be divided into two separate blocks of time (Taberski, 2000). While Routman (2003) recommended setting aside thirty minutes or more each day, Taberski (2011) noted that the amount of time allocated to read should be each individual teacher's decision. Time spent reading, however, should follow a focus lesson, in which the teacher demonstrates a reading skill or strategy (Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2011; Taberski,

2000). This creates an opportunity for students' authentic independent practice of the skills learned during the focus lessons and establishes relevance for the period of time set aside for reading.

Appropriately Leveled Text

As part of a reading workshop, students read texts each day that are appropriately leveled (Towle, 2000). With teacher guidance, students choose the books they would like to read (Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2000; 2011). This ensures that students are reading texts that they can read successfully, but with adequate challenge (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, Routman, 2003). Many teachers use a commercial leveling system to level texts in their libraries. Book levels, however, should not be the sole method for choosing appropriate books for children (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Dzalov and Peterson (2005) encourage teachers to consider students' interests and backgrounds as well.

Reading as a Social Activity

During independent reading, students may read alone or with partners for an extended period of time (Sanden, 2014; Taberski, 2000; 2011). Sanden (2014) observed some students purposely placed with a partner during independent reading. This is consistent with the collaborative piece of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Fisher & Frey, 2008) that recommends students have the opportunity to work collaboratively before they are ready to practice a skill or strategy independently. Sharing reading experiences with one another is also an expectation within independent reading; thus, Sanden (2014) also observed students sharing information with one another about their nonfiction texts and text-to-text connections they were making.

Productive Noise

Although silent reading is a goal of independent reading, it is not required, as young readers may need to subvocalize as they read (Taberski, 2011; Wright, Sherman, & Jones, 2004). Whisper phones, telephone-shaped devices that allow students to whisper into one end and hear their voice through the other end, or other devices are useful in keeping the noise level down in the classroom during reading time. As a result, independent reading time may not be silent, but may consist of a low hum of students reading quietly and working collaboratively with other students.

Connection to Direct Instruction

Independent reading is designed for readers to enter with a purpose—to practice the skills and strategies demonstrated by the teacher (Miller, 2002; Taberski, 2000; 2011). Students often practice these skills and strategies through written response, where the students keep a written log of readings and may use some sort of graphic organizer or sticky notes to track their thinking (Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2011; Taberski, 2000; Towle, 2000).

Student-Teacher Conferences

While students in the class are reading independently, the teacher conducts reading conferences with individual students (Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2011; Taberski, 2000; Towle, 2000). This component aligns with the guided practice stage of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model that describes how the teacher provides scaffolding so that students may work toward independence (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Conferences provide the teacher with the opportunity to conduct reading assessments, provide scaffolding or provide individualized instruction (Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2011; Taberski, 2000; Towle, 2000). Conferences may include activities such as having a conversation about what the student is currently reading, the student reading quietly while the teacher takes a running record assessment, the teacher modeling specific reading behaviors, or the teacher providing guidance to a student who is reading quietly.

Access to Text

Independent reading also requires teachers to have an excellent, organized classroom library (Routman, 2003; Taberski, 2000; Towle, 2000). Routman (2003) recommends including a variety of text types and genres in a classroom library. She also recommends emphasizing students' interests and deemphasizing leveled books.

Significance and Purpose

Following their review of fourteen empirical studies where students were involved in self-directed reading through Sustained Silent Reading or Renaissance Learning's Accelerated Reader (NICHD, 2000a; 2000b), the National Reading Panel (NRP) released a report claiming that there was not enough experimental evidence to support the practice of encouraging students to read independently for a specified period of time during the school day. The panel stated, "at this time, it would be unreasonable to conclude that research shows that encouraging reading has a beneficial effect on reading achievement" (NICHD, 2000b, p. 23-24). In the publication *Put Reading First*, based on the findings of the NRP, Armbruster and colleagues (2001) suggested that teachers instead encourage students to read outside of class. As a result, many classrooms discontinued their programs that designated classroom time to read (Allington, 2013; Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). Although independent reading, which connects students' autonomous reading practice to direct instruction and incorporates teacher scaffolding, is significantly different from programs such as Sustained Silent Reading and Accelerated Reader, its national prominence waned drastically in light of the NRP's negative implications. This study sought to determine the current perceptions of independent reading through an exploratory analysis of the independent reading practices of second-grade teachers with varying experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research study:

Research Question 1: What are teachers' beliefs about providing students with an allocated time for reading self-selected texts each day in their classrooms?

Research Question 2: What are teachers' practices when implementing the independent reading?

Methods

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to collect semi-structured interview and observation data from three participants. Purposive sampling was employed in order to select teachers who implemented independent reading in their classrooms. Three white female second grade teachers were selected from three different schools in a large school district in the Southeastern United States. Participants were selected on the recommendation of their administrator or reading coach, based on their implementation of independent reading and their agreement to be interviewed. Table 1 provides a description of the participants' education levels and teaching experience.

Table 1
Research Participants

Teacher	School Type	Highest Degree	Teaching Experience
Jacky	Small rural	Master's	16 years
Gwen	Large urban	Master's	2 years
Andrea	Large rural	Bachelor's	3 years

Note: Teachers' names are pseudonyms.

Interviews were scheduled during each teacher's planning time and lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed. Observations of each teacher's independent reading time were conducted the same day teachers were interviewed and lasted approximately 30 minutes. An observation guide was used for focusing the observations and consisted of a list of each of the components of independent reading. Coding the data progressed in several stages using MAXQDA 12 software. In the first stage, initial coding emerged directly from the data, rather than forcing data into preexisting categories. Each line in the transcripts was coded line-by-line in order to begin to uncover meanings directly from the data. The second stage, focused coding, identified the most significant and frequent line-by-line codes (Charmaz, 2006). This procedure involved categorizing the codes that were collected during the first stage into more meaningful or significant groups. The third stage, axial coding, involved the development of major categories and subcategories using the categories generated during focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, theoretical coding was used to develop a coherent theory from the various pieces of data as the researcher theorized how each category and subcategory of codes was related to one another.

Findings

Interview and observation data revealed common beliefs and practices among the participants. The beliefs described by each teacher led to the identification of two overarching themes -- quantity of reading and quality of reading were both highly valued by each of the teachers. The observed practices of each teacher provided additional support for these two themes. Observational data also confirmed that each participant implemented each of the components described in the review of literature. To protect the identity of the participants, the pseudonyms Jacky, Gwen, and Andrea were used.

Quantity of Reading

The theme of quantity of reading emerged as participants described their beliefs about the importance of a daily, designated time (20-30 minutes) for students to read from organized classroom libraries, book rooms, and school libraries. Observations confirmed these descriptions, as Jacky, Andrea, and Gwen were observed providing time during the school day for students to read self-selected texts from "just-right" book bags, the school library, the classroom library, or a school book room. Andrea described her beliefs about students' quantity of reading as follows: "I believe that the more they read both at school and at home, that it just helps them better with their skills of reading and with their comprehension." Providing time for students to read at school was a priority for each participant. Jacky stated the following:

A lot of students won't read at home. Don't have the support at home to be encouraged to read. Any class time that you can give. I know it's hard sometimes to try to find the time for that independent reading, but I believe that it's extremely important for them.

Jacky also emphasized the impact of higher quantities of reading:

I believe that students should read at any opportunity they have. The more they read, the more they'll succeed. The better they are in writing, the better they are with using their strategies of decoding and context clues. I believe that any time they have, they should be reading.

In addition to a designated period of time for students to read, the teachers admitted providing other opportunities for students to read throughout the day.

Gwen stated:

We normally read right after they eat breakfast. They get their morning work and then they're reading. I don't have any objection to them reading when we're not doing anything. I say, 'If you're done, you need to take out a book.'

Andrea emphasized the importance of students also reading at home. She explained that she sent home a reading log each week for students to record their daily reading and return at the end of the week.

Quality of Reading

The quality of reading theme emerged as participants described their beliefs about meaningful independent practice and a transition to independence through reading conferences. Participants valued the level of engagement and success with text as opposed to only the amount of time spent reading. Various strategies, including providing appropriately leveled texts, requiring reading response activities, and holding reading conferences, were described as supporting students' quality of reading. Observations of these strategies provided more detail about how the teachers put these beliefs into practice.

“Just-Right” Texts. The teachers valued meaningful practice with texts that students could read with little to no support, which was scaffolded by using leveled text to guide their selection. All three teachers described use of the Accelerated Reader leveling system as the primary method for leveling their texts. Jacky and Andrea used additional leveling systems, including Fountas and Pinnell (1996) and Reading A to Z (Learning A-Z Text Leveling System, n.d.). The use of leveled text emerged as a common trend among participants, as they expressed the importance of students reading text that is “just-right” for them. Jacky described how attending to text levels that students chose impacted her struggling readers:

Even though they want to get those higher books or those bigger chapter books because their friends have it, if they do that, they're going to struggle, extremely bad. Then, when they've got a book on their independent reading level, they are successful. They're being able to read that on their own.

The use of leveled text was observed in each of the participating teachers' classrooms. Andrea's students were observed reading from “just-right” book bags, which were plastic zipper bags that contained several books that students were able to read with little to no support. Each book in the bag was labeled with a Guided Reading level. Her students also read from books checked out from the classroom library. These books were labeled with stickers that indicated the Accelerated Reader level range. Both Jacky and Gwen's students read books from the classroom library and the school library, both were labeled with Accelerated Reader levels.

Response to Reading. Reading response activities were another common trend among the participants that connected direct instruction to independent reading. Types of reading response activities described by the participants included graphic organizers, summaries, book reviews, and journals. Gwen described her reading response activities as follows:

If we're going over story structure, like beginning, middle, and end, I'll usually assign a graphic organizer for their seat work. I'll actually get a piece of paper and fold it for a template because if they did it on their own, it would be disastrous.

Jacky shared how her students recorded their responses in a journal:

If we're working on character traits, then I might tell them, ‘Find the character traits in your book that you're reading. Write them in your journal and we'll discuss how they found those throughout the book.

Observations verified the teachers' statements about their

reading response activities. Students in Jacky's classroom recorded their responses in notebooks that contained a variety of response types, including graphic organizers, summaries, book reviews, illustrations, and lists. The response notebooks also included examples of connections to the focus lesson; for example, a Venn diagram created from a read aloud lesson was contained in each of the students' notebooks. Gwen's students' notebooks contained many of the same types of responses, including lists of text features and recordings of the problem and solution from a story. These observations were consistent with Andrea's students' reading responses. Anchor charts on the walls of each classroom showed evidence of modeling types of reading responses.

Reading Conferences. All three participants described how the implementation of reading conferences helped transition students to independence in their reading. Each of the teachers emphasized the importance of informal assessment, conversations with students about their reading, and focusing on each student's individual and immediate needs during conferences. Andrea described a typical reading conference in her classroom:

Basically, I sit with each student for a few minutes and they pick up right where they were reading. I would tell them what we worked on the last time that we met and what skills they're working on, and then I ask them to show me that they're practicing. I look for different things that they're struggling with, and then also I make sure I write down the name of their book that they're reading and the level, and I make sure that it is just right book for them, that it's a good fit. If not, we talk about it, and then how to pick that just right book for them so that they're not struggling, or that it's not too easy so that they can work on getting to a higher level.

Andrea's students sat all around the room in areas of their choice during independent reading. She circulated the room and met students where they were seated for reading conferences, and she kept records of each reading conference with students by using a form she had created. Each student's conference record contained anecdotal notes, assessment scores, and goals.

Conferences were reported as consisting of a very casual conversation with each student about their reading progress. Conversations included identification of strengths and weaknesses by the student and the proposal of strategies and solutions by the teacher. Gwen provided a description of the typical format of her reading conferences with students:

We work on strengths, weaknesses, areas to improve on, how to improve comprehension strategies. With them, though, I don't really word it that way. I feel like that they would feel, A: They wouldn't understand, and B: They would think that they were weak. I would say pretty much motivational speak, ‘You're doing really well. Here are some things that I see that you're doing really well with. You're motivated, you love to read this chapter book, and so and so.’ Then I'll kind of point out what they need to improve on, and what I've noticed. I think they're receptive to it. We'll see in the long run.

Conferences were held at a small group table in Gwen's

classroom where she employed the use of formative assessments and on-the-spot instruction when needed. A few of her students were completing a response sheet called "Questions to Ask While Reading." She held casual conversations with students, encouraged them to spend more time reading, and deemphasized taking multiple Accelerated Reader quizzes during independent reading.

Participants described getting to know their students as readers, including their interests and goals for themselves, and equipping them with tools for becoming more strategic independent readers. Evidence of this can be found in the description of a conference from Jacky:

During the conference, I'll ask them why they chose those books; how are the books going; if they think it's too hard, too easy; [and] if they're enjoying the book. We discuss some of the reading strategies. I listen to them read. If they're having [an] issue with sounding out words or even context [or] if they're not understanding that, we work through those. I also look at their levels to make sure they're reading on appropriate levels for them. Then I'll check their journals, if they have put an entry on their book on their own.

In the same fashion as Andrea, Jacky circulated the room to meet with students in their chosen seating location for reading conferences. She carried with her a spiral notebook that contained anecdotal notes. She began her conferences with a question about what they were reading. She discussed the text with each student and asked more specific questions to assess their progress on practicing specific skills, such as identifying the plot and summarizing a chapter. She assisted one student with selecting a book that was a better fit for them when she seemingly realized the student didn't have enough background knowledge about Egypt to adequately comprehend the text they were currently reading. She encouraged the student to select books that she knew something about and was interested in, rather than selecting a book solely based on reading level. She modeled for the student how to preview a book before making a selection.

Each of the participants emphasized a quality of reading that was highly student-centered using "just-right" books, individual reading conferences, and meaningful response activities that tied their reading to what they learned in class. In addition, they each had classroom libraries filled with a variety of genres and difficulty levels that were arranged by topic and author so that students could easily select books of interest to them. In these classrooms, quality of reading and quantity of reading seemed inseparable. Figure 1 illustrates the two themes, quantity of reading and quality of reading, that emerged from teachers' beliefs about independent reading.

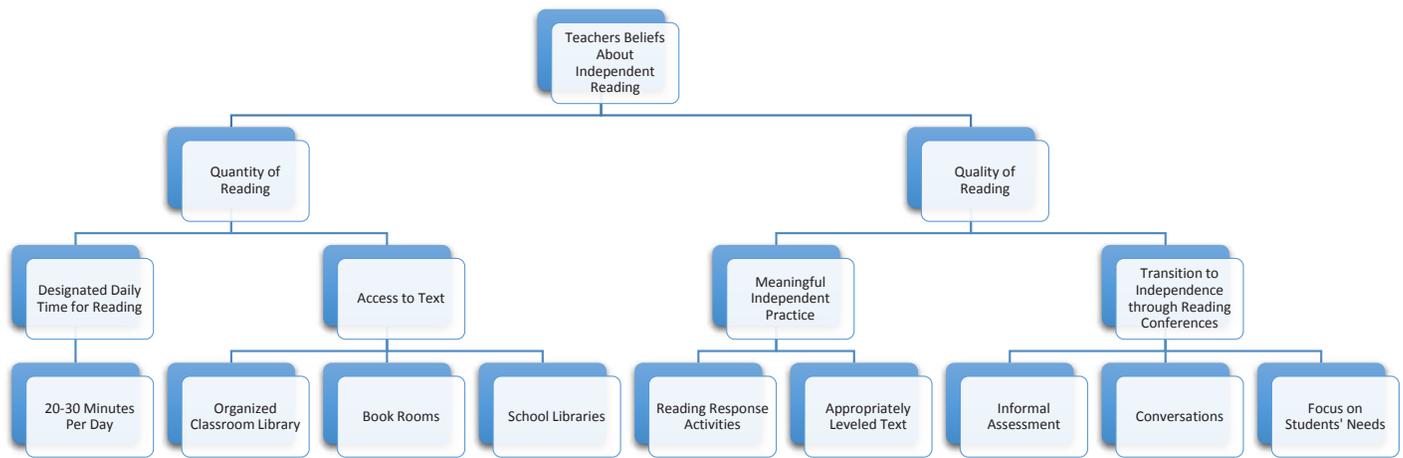


Figure 1: Diagram of Teachers' Beliefs About Independent Reading

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the beliefs of teachers who implement independent reading. Two overarching themes -- quantity of reading and quality of reading -- appeared following the analysis of interview and observation data. Topping, Samuels, and Paul (2007) found that quality and quantity of reading were both important for influencing reading achievement. Quantity of reading was revealed in the trends of daily class time for independent reading, access to books, and the encouragement of students to read at home. Quality of reading was demonstrated through the implementation of instruction and scaffolding that guided students to select texts in which they could find success, assigning reading response activities, and regularly conferring with individual students to foster increased independence.

It has been said that the best way to become a good reader is to read (Anderson, Kaufman, & Kaufman, 1976). The teachers in this study highly valued the opportunity for their students to read self-selected books in class. This belief was manifested in a daily time for independent reading and access to texts. Each teacher housed a classroom library, organized by topic and book level. The teachers also allowed their students to visit the school library and a separate book room to check out books. A study by McQuillan and Au (2001) found that providing students with easy access to books is associated with a greater amount of voluntary reading.

Not just quantity – time to read and access to books, but also quality – assessing and scaffolding while students read and ensuring a wide variety of interesting and challenging books is important for blossoming readers. The teachers valued their students' reading quality, which was evident in their descriptions of their student-centered reading programs. They described reading conferences that focused on promoting growth in each reader through specific feedback. This is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, which describes how learning takes place through interaction with someone more experienced. In addition, they emphasized the importance of students reading books that provided a challenge, yet allowed the students to enjoy them without significant struggle.

The teachers' attention to the quality of students' reading

experiences was further disclosed in their description of various response activities that were often assigned during the daily independent reading time. According to Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1982), comprehension occurs as a transaction takes place between the text and the reader. Readers bring their own background knowledge with them to a reading experience, which varies the reading experience for each reader. The response activities described by the three teachers in this study provide students with an outlet for expressing their unique experience with the books read. Teachers reported the use of summaries, graphic organizers, and other written forms being used as response activities. Completed responses were then shared with the teacher during reading conferences and provided a basis for discussion and formative assessment.

All three participants believed in promoting students' responsibility for their own literacy learning by providing daily time for them to read autonomously from self-selected text. These teachers' student-centered approach was further evidenced in their use of conferences as an opportunity to work with students on identifying their areas of weakness, and setting goals. These findings are consistent with the support of students' reading independence and focus on reading growth through student-centered practices identified in Sanden's (2014) study of teachers using independent reading and described in the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). This model illustrates the flow of responsibility from the teacher to the student and emphasized that before students are to be independent with a task, they must first be provided an explicit model and guided practice.

Pajares (1992) emphasized the importance of bringing attention to teachers' beliefs, as these beliefs influence teachers' perceptions and judgments, which influence their classroom practices. The participants in this study firmly believed that sufficient time (quantity) spent engaged in meaningful (quality) reading experiences would improve their students' reading ability. This belief was translated into their use of independent reading components consistent with Gambrell's (2011) strategies for engaging readers; which facilitate motivation to read. Gambrell's (2011) strategies included making sure tasks are relevant, providing students with a wide range of texts, providing time for students to read, giving students a choice about their reading activities, providing opportunities for students to discourse with other students about what they are reading, ensuring students

experience success with challenging texts, and providing incentives that reflect the value of reading. This suggests that classrooms using independent reading facilitate opportunities for gains in students' reading motivation. Students with higher reading motivation read more and have been found to score higher on measures of reading achievement (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Gottfried, 1990; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 2004; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). If motivation to read is increased as a result of independent reading, it can potentially impact students' volume of reading and ultimately their reading achievement. Thus, more research is needed to determine if independent reading contributes to an increase in reading motivation, reading volume and/or reading achievement.

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Teacher Candidates Dig Deep: Professional Development from Project-Based Exploration and Classroom Application of Reading Strategies

LeAnn A. Johnson, Rebecca Mercado, and Karin Spencer

Abstract

In order to achieve deep processing and application of research-based literacy teaching with undergraduate teacher candidates, restructuring of literacy methods courses included a project-based focus that utilizes Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles for representation, engagement, and demonstration of learning. Using on-line learning communities and other supports for accessing research, teacher candidates engaged in a project that required them to translate a researched instructional practice into lesson plans appropriate for students in their assigned field placement classroom. Analysis of the implemented practice was presented in the form of a mock conference poster session with top projects receiving faculty endorsement for presenting at a regional conference. This article outlines the underlying thinking for the changes implemented, challenges faced, and results of this new way of engaging teacher candidates in deep understanding and application of literacy practices.

As literacy teacher educators, our ultimate goal is to provide instruction that enables teacher candidates to translate theory into practice in order to deliver effective instruction for their future students. We also seek to cultivate teacher candidates' responsibility for their own ongoing professional development as part of a commitment to lifelong learning and engagement in their profession. However, the challenge of bridging the gap between university coursework and professional practice can be constrained by student expectations, limitations within our established courses, and by the nature of field practicum experiences.

Specifically, literacy methods course instructors must guard against the practice of covering vast amounts of critical course content, which may result in teaching characterized as "a mile wide and an inch deep" (Herrmann & Sarracino, 1991). Sometimes undergraduate teacher candidates anticipate instructors who will ask them to memorize facts and information about every topic they might face on teacher qualifying exams, while at the same time extolling the errors of "teaching to the test." Unaware of the truly complex nature of teaching, they expect "recipes" for teaching that require little engagement of their own thinking. Smith and Colby (2007) provide some clarification of this type of superficial learning, in which students seem most interested in retaining the information they might be tested on later.

In our own literacy methods courses, the authors recognized the limitations of talking about a variety of reading strategies in class without engaging students in their own construction of knowledge and application of the concepts. We recalled an example of multiple candidates not retaining knowledge of a specific strategy across semesters because none of the students had actually seen it implemented or practiced it in a field placement classroom. We believed that active exploration and application of concepts were

needed. Additionally, we recognized that the opportunities to apply practices in field placements do not always match the sequence of concepts and strategies learned in the methods course, creating possible time gaps between when the learning first takes place and when the teacher candidates are able to experience it with students. Lack of opportunities for timely, authentic application can often result in the limited transfer of learning needed for deep and lasting understanding. Smith and Colby (2007) illuminate this more effective type of learning:

A deep approach to learning involves an intention to understand and impose meaning. Here, the student focuses on relationships between various aspects of the content, formulates hypotheses or beliefs about the structures of the problem or concept, and relates more to obtaining an intrinsic interest in learning and understanding (p. 206).

Part of the intrinsic interest in learning, we believe, comes from engagement in project-based exploration and immediate, meaningful, authentic application of that learning in a classroom with real students.

Several studies have addressed this need to augment teacher candidates' deep learning and connection to professional development within methods courses. Cross and Bayazit (2014) developed revisions to methods course curriculum to increase the transfer of theory into practice using course reading, journal writing, and observational protocols in field placements. Another study described curriculum changes made to provide authentic professional development and collegial learning that resulted in pre-service teachers' increased identity as teachers (Knipe, Walker, Beavis, McCabe, & Mitchell, 2008). Bauml (2016) recently reported an impact on the classroom practices of pre-service teachers long after their methods course through the teaching of conceptual tools. Our project embraced these goals by fully engaging our undergraduate teacher candidates in project-based inquiry and authentic application of their learning, both in field classrooms and then in professional presentations.

We began by restructuring major assignments to provide candidates with opportunities to research and apply knowledge of self-selected literacy strategies in field classrooms. Candidates then presented the results of their individualized application of this research as poster presentations in a session at a regional literacy conference for teachers held at the university.

This article explains the steps taken to change course curriculum as well as those taken in developing the professional development conference for in-service and pre-service teachers. Changes in the teacher candidates' perceived value of the authentic assignments and presentations are described, and challenges and implications are discussed.

Context for Curriculum Changes in Literacy Methods

In addition to the value of incorporating a more authentic and constructivist stance in our literacy courses, a second motivating factor for the curriculum changes was the adoption of a teacher performance assessment (TPA) as a requirement for certification. In TPAs, teacher candidate's knowledge of pedagogy is linked to planning, implementing, and assessing a sequence of instruction. The candidates must provide written commentary to support instructional decisions made 1) during lesson planning, 2) in analyzing their video-recorded instruction, and 3) to analyze and evaluate assessment data. TPA commentaries are designed to reveal ability to connect selection of instructional and assessment strategies for diverse learners to theory and research.

In some cases, candidates are required to identify the language demands inherent in their instruction and to describe the language supports they build into their lessons to meet student needs. Consequently, the need for a deep understanding of literacy in each content area became even more apparent than before work with the TPAs began. Research-based projects provided an effective way to scaffold students in preparing for this new way of measuring their competency (Lysaker & Thompson, 2013).

Three field-based literacy courses were the focus of this project: *Language & Literacy in Pre-K/Kindergarten Education*, *Integrated Reading & Language Arts Pedagogy in Elementary Education*, and *Reading in the Content Areas for Secondary Education*. The three course instructors conferred regarding the purpose, scope, and desired outcomes for the restructured assignments. While there were some differences in project expectations among the courses due to variations in typical classroom practice at each age/grade level, the final assignment for teacher candidates in all three courses included the following core elements:

- Identification of a research-based literacy practice appropriate to students and curriculum in the field placement classroom
- A review of current research regarding that practice
- Incorporation of the research-based practice in a content-based lesson designed for PK-12 students
- Collection of evidence documenting the impact of the practice on student learning
- Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the practice along with necessary modifications made for the context of implementation
- Sharing of the project in an authentic professional context.

Of the three courses involved in this project, *Reading in the Content Areas*, taught by the first author, represents the most significant development of the restructured assignments during the pilot semesters and, in this article, contributes to many of the detailed examples of implementation.

Scaffolding Candidates' Learning

Teacher candidates in the *Reading in the Content Areas* course represent a variety of all-level and secondary

certification areas including music, art, physical education, health, family & consumer sciences, mathematics, chemistry, biology, general science, social studies, and English. Candidates were introduced to the project-based assignment at the beginning of the semester, and time was routinely provided for class discussion and activities to support their selection of topics, literature search methods, understanding what was meant by "peer-reviewed source," and comprehending published research. In the beginning, some candidates' understanding of what *pedagogy* means was very shallow. For example, many candidates were initially attracted to online sites that contain 'cute' classroom ideas that were appealing to the age of students or appropriate to the content, though superficial and without evidence of effectiveness. For the project-based exploration to yield valuable results, the candidates needed to gain a deeper understanding of underlying principles connected to effective instruction.

The course instructor worked to redirect cognition from shallow to deep understanding by providing in-class, collaborative opportunities for candidates to discover decision-making based on application of research and sound theory rather than on surface-level appeal. Small groups analyzed practices for their instructional *power*. For example, one candidate shared a picture of a storytelling glove. She thought it would be perfect for her young learners because it was colorful and appealing; however, she was frustrated at not being able to find any research on storytelling gloves. After analysis with her peers, she identified *visual support for clarifying character actions*, *translating meaning from text to action*, and *retelling to measure comprehension* as areas of instructional power associated with how she might use the glove. These concepts became potential areas of research for her review and decision-making and deepened her level of understanding of how to determine appropriate strategies.

In addition to class activities, the online course management system used on campus was set up to help candidates as they moved through check-points contributing to project completion. More scaffolding was provided to assist candidates with successful literature searches using the university library's electronic resources to locate appropriate scholarly research articles. A discussion forum was also opened to provide an electronic anchor chart of possible areas to research. This collaborative resource was particularly effective because as candidates began their research, they often ran across articles potentially valuable to a peer and were able to post helpful links to the associated conversation in the forum.

Throughout the research phase of the project, the course instructor emphasized the need to think flexibly in the application of what candidates were learning about regarding particular methods of instruction. For example, an elementary candidate and a secondary music candidate were each researching *annotating text during close reading*. Although they began with the same literacy strategy, their implementation of the instructional practice was very different. Elementary students taught by the first candidate used the system to identify key points in a science passage, while high school music students taught by the second candidate applied a modified version to annotate a score of music prior

to their initial sight reading of the piece.

Secondary and all-level teacher candidates were placed in small, heterogeneous groups to broaden exposure to how instructional methods could be applied. Candidates in a group regularly shared what they were learning in electronic forums or engaged in collaborative problem-solving face-to-face. To encourage divergent thinking, for example, a physical education major who was reviewing research on the *impact of restatements* was grouped with an art major who was reviewing the *development of key vocabulary to guide oral critiques*, a math major who was exploring *comprehension strategies* for analyzing algebraic word problems, and a science major who was researching the *use of graphic organizers*.

Prompts were provided to engage candidates not only in sharing what they learned from the research but also in collaborating on how that research could translate into effective lesson plans, help determine appropriate authentic assessment for the lesson, contribute to analysis of artifacts representing learning, and clarify the problem-solving needed to make the application of the research effective for diverse learners. Over the course of the semester, strong learning communities emerged within each of these small groups, and candidates found themselves learning meaningfully in multiple areas of literacy.

Teacher Candidates' Motivation

While some of the most important factors that influence pre-service teachers' use of conceptual and practical reading tools are access to knowledge and opportunities to put that knowledge into practice, a critical factor is motivation to assimilate knowledge (Leko & Brownell, 2011). Motivation to assimilate knowledge was addressed by employing principles of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Meyer & Rose, 2015).

UDL seeks to make curriculum accessible to all learners by designing learning opportunities that present new content in multiple ways, provide multiple means for learners to engage with the content, and allow for individual learners to demonstrate learning in different ways. While commonly used in PK-12 special education, the application of UDL to university coursework is a significant departure from typical instruction in which a professor introduces a new method, provides examples of that method, and then tests learning on an end of course exam.

Choice is foundational to UDL. Teacher candidates were encouraged to choose topics of personal interest and relevance to practicum classrooms, to access knowledge of selected topics from a variety of sources, and to apply the selected topic with real students. This differentiated instruction and the opportunity to critically think about research and practice in a strong supportive learning community created a learning environment that contributed to maximum motivation for learning about other group members' topics as well as their own chosen strategy.

The final element contributing to motivation came through the creation of authentic venues for students to present what they had learned in a collegial environment with peers and practicing teachers. By incorporating the

concept of professional development into the requirements of the restructured assignment and assessment, candidates became excited about how to display and describe their learning to others.

Creating Professional Venues for Shared Learning

The first effort in creating a professional application of candidates' learning was replacing the final exam for the course with a mock poster session using a *gallery walk* format (Kagan, 2009). Candidates chose between a trifold display or an electronic display of required elements that were assessed with a rubric. The assessment rated the candidate's understanding of a researched instructional method, application of the method into practice, analysis of learning evidence, and conclusions as to the method's strengths, weaknesses, and options for expanded application. The gallery walk was open to all interested education faculty and students. Most teacher candidates had never attended a professional conference, so it was necessary to provide details about poster sessions and elements of a good visual display.

The poster session was divided into two segments, giving presenters an opportunity both to exhibit their posters and to act as conference attendees. In addition, each class member was assigned two posters from different peer groups to evaluate along with his or her own poster. Anonymous peer feedback was provided to presenters following the mock conference, and the final project grade represented the assessment by the course instructor.

The second element contributing to candidate motivation to excel on this project was an opportunity for outstanding posters to receive faculty endorsement to submit a proposal to the literacy conference, sponsored by the university department of education and a local reading council. In university courses, the vast majority of assignments are completed for an audience of one, the instructor. At best, recognition for a candidate's excellent work might come from the wider audience of peers in the class, but for undergraduate teacher candidates to have a venue for sharing their legitimate professional contributions beyond a course grade is rare. Making such an opportunity available on campus was a significant factor in motivating the candidates to produce their highest quality work on the project. Since no limit was placed on how many candidates could be endorsed for proposal submission, only the candidate's motivation to dig deep and produce a worthy presentation determined who was selected and who was not. As each semester has passed, the prestige of being selected to present at the conference has become more widely known and sought by teacher candidates.

The Literacy Leaders Conference

Leaders of a local reading council affiliated with the International Literacy Association had been encouraging the university to collaborate in order to develop a literacy conference on campus because the annual state literacy conference was held at a location more than five hours away, making attendance by teachers and pre-service teachers in our area quite challenging. The restructuring of the literacy

methods course assignments provided the university with renewed impetus to help establish a regional professional development conference. Jay (2015) reminds those of us in higher education of our responsibility to be literacy leaders:

It is essential for higher education professionals to participate in the larger educational community to share their expertise, exhibit leadership qualities, and enhance their own and other's instructional practices. Participation in professional organizations, regional school visits, university-sponsored conferences, and the mentoring of K-12 teachers are strongly encouraged.

(p. 8)

We found ourselves “digging deep” to begin the process, forming a steering committee comprised of literacy methods instructors, teacher candidate representatives, and officers of the reading council. This committee added information on the reading council website to promote the spring conference, accept proposals for workshops and posters, and handle registration. The registration fee was set at \$20 per teacher and \$10 per teacher candidate to provide accessibility to all and promote sustainability from year to year. Registration logistics, the buffet lunch, travel expenses for a keynote speaker, and other miscellaneous costs were covered by the reading council from the fee. The university provided the building space, programming decisions by education faculty, and costs of morning and afternoon snacks for the Saturday one-day conference.

The conference theme was published in September along with a call for workshop proposals. Workshop proposals came from faculty, teachers, and school administrators in the region. Teacher candidates whose projects had been faculty-endorsed submitted their poster presentation proposals as well. A sub-committee comprised of university faculty, invited teachers, and teacher candidates from the three areas of concentration (early education, elementary education, secondary education), together reviewed and selected proposals for the conference sessions. In January, the committee sent invitations to the accepted proposal writers, and the final schedule of workshops was published soon thereafter.

The deadline for student poster proposals was set much later, just a few weeks before the conference, to allow students from both fall and spring literacy methods courses to submit a proposal if they had a faculty endorsement. These proposals were reviewed by the steering committee and only the highest quality posters were accepted. Now headed into its fifth year, the Literacy Leaders Conference is an established campus event with a high satisfaction rating by attendees (average 4.74/5) and strong teacher candidate involvement. See Table 1 below for candidate participation in conference presentations by course and year.

Conference presentations by Pre-K/Kindergarten teacher candidates and elementary teacher candidates have been uneven; however, secondary candidates have continued to increase in conference presentations each subsequent year. The early education program (Pre-K/K) was not offered before 2013-14, so no candidates were able to participate in the conference before that date. Elementary candidates were introduced to the restructured assignment

and its connection to conference presentations in 2012-13, and secondary candidates were introduced to possible conference presentations, but it was an option not tied to a course assignment.

The Early Education program began in 2013-14, and candidates were introduced to the restructured assignment and connection to conference presentation in the spring semester only when *Language & Literacy* is taught. That year, the restructured assignment and connection to conference presentation were formally integrated into the Elementary and Secondary literacy courses in both fall and spring semesters.

In 2014-15, the conference date was problematic for many Early Education candidates due to a conflict with a long-standing Early Education event. Additionally, the Elementary *Integrated Reading & Language Arts Pedagogy* class was taught by an adjunct professor with limited commitment and understanding of how the assignment should connect to the literacy conference, and most candidates were unmotivated to participate without faculty support. Only the Secondary *Reading in the Content Areas* candidates increased their participation due to the consistency of the course instructor's commitment to the project and growing candidate interest in presenting at a professional conference.

In 2015-16, participation remained strong for the secondary students, however, elementary teacher candidate's participation remained problematic due to continued changes in course instructors. Although total numbers of teacher candidates remained substantially smaller for early education, which is only in its second year, a surprising number of these students produced a quality product that was accepted for conference presentation. One factor that appears to have had a substantial impact on quality is class size. The early education class only contained 12 students in a single section, secondary class sizes had a mean of 10 students in each section, whereas elementary course sections ranged from 17 to 24 students. As seen in Table 1, it appears that when class size is small, the proportion of those students who are able to achieve the quality required for conference participation is greater.

Progress over Time: The Challenges and Successes

An early challenge was to change teacher candidate expectations of course-required projects. Rather than directly presenting, discussing, and testing knowledge of strategies, instructors began to require independent but scaffolded exploration on individually chosen strategies for application in their specific field placement classroom. Because the candidates were required to teach and assess their chosen strategy in a field classroom, understanding the nature of good assessment became important. Two themes emerged as the question of how to assess learning arose. Some candidates tried to justify the assumption that all students understood what only one student had demonstrated, stating that they were using ‘formative’ assessment. “The students were all busy, and I could just tell they got it” was typical in this group. Others stated, “I will give them a test at the end of the week.” These candidates felt that assessment took time away from instruction and did not recognize the purpose for tracking progress daily and making adjustments

to instruction as needed towards objectives. As instructors, we have worked to provide more opportunities for understanding the ongoing nature of assessment and its relationship to instruction. Both groups of teacher candidates required much support in learning about the many ways to collect evidence of learning, that daily assessment does not require a major reduction in instructional time, and that assessment provides valuable information allowing for modifications to increase the effectiveness of instruction for all students.

Along with the peer collaboration and sharing of their professional contributions, candidates began to accept the project assignment and recognize the value it brought them as teachers. Candidate feedback in the courses that changed from traditional to more constructivist assessment of learning has been uniformly positive, as exemplified in anonymous end of course feedback below:

“Being able to move around and look at other’s work helped me learn way more than I would have had [sic] with a test. I liked being able to ask and answer questions about things I didn’t know.”

“Although tests do measure knowledge learned, I felt like this assignment was more interactive and real life [sic] and so [it] was more beneficial to my future as an educator.”

“This is a lot more hands on [sic] than taking a test and [it] makes you learn and apply things instead of just memorizing [them] for an exam.”

“This [gallery walk presentation] was great! It made me feel important, and I got so many ideas from other students as well. Amazing experience allowing me to pull together all of what we have learned [sic] this past semester.”

“It was really fun to see everyone’s ideas and learn about research-based methods to incorporate into your own lessons.”

“I liked this rather than a formal speech. The informal presentation was more fun and the one to one contact let you get your point across. It made me want to go to conferences in the future.”

“I really enjoy being able to show off my work while seeing other peoples’ ideas and asking them questions about their projects.”

Perhaps the most telling course feedback came from a secondary social studies education major:

“I honestly would have preferred a test, but this project forces us to learn more than just studying a textbook and to [sic] demonstrate our knowledge and application simultaneously.”

Due to the increasingly rigorous standards expected for the acceptance of a conference poster, topics teacher candidates chose to research have improved over the common strategies connected to a single book or story we saw in the first year. Recent poster presentation titles have included these more complex ideas:

- Retelling Backpacks: Taking Language Development Home
- Poetry Word Choice: Using Semantic Cues in Third Grade

- I Spy Nouns: A UDL Designed Method for First Grade
- RAPping in Gym: Modifying the RAP strategy for Listening Comprehension in P.E.
- Making Literacy Stick: Active Reading with Sticky Notes in Health
- Drawing Conclusions: Critical Literacy of Historical Photos and Documents
- Inside/Outside: Supporting Inference of Character Traits
- Gallery Wall: Collaborative Writing in Gym
- Book It: Using Picture Books to Develop Schema in Middle School Choir

The timing of poster proposals was a challenge that had to be overcome during spring semester the first year. The conference was scheduled late in the semester, but the proposal deadline did not give spring semester candidates time to complete the full project before proposals were due. To get around this difficulty, the *gallery walk* poster session was held at midterm (rather than as a final project), with candidates presenting their research and how they proposed to apply it in the field classroom, and then adding their field experiences with students shortly before the conference.

This past year, our first group of teacher candidates completed the commercial teacher performance assessments being piloted in the state. Student teaching course evaluations included unsolicited comments regarding the impact the research-based project from the literacy methods courses had on this challenging task as shown below:

“The project we did last semester really helped me put it all together for the [TPA].”

“Because we had to integrate research and practice before [completing the TPA], I felt like I did a better job on it.”

“The practice I got last semester, justifying my analysis of student learning with research and theory, helped me with the [TPA] commentary.”

“The [TPA] was overwhelming on top of everything else we had to do for student teaching. I was glad I already had at least some experience identifying support to justify why something I chose to do in my teaching segment worked.”

One unexpected challenge came in year three when teaching assignments for participating faculty were shifted, and adjuncts who had not been part of the restructuring dialogue were hired to teach the elementary literacy courses. The importance of clear and regular communication regarding the conference and the link between the course expectations and conference opportunity became clear when only one elementary student created a project that met the stringent criteria required for selected participation.

Where We Are Now

In the first four years, 495 students have participated in the research-based project in one or more of their literacy methods courses. Approximately 10% of these students have gone on to present their poster at the Literacy Leaders Conference, which has had an average attendance of 158

teachers, teacher candidates, and school administrators each year. In addition to poster presentations, 19 undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates have co-presented in workshop sessions with faculty and classroom teachers, three secondary poster presenters formed a presentation group with a faculty member to present their strategies at the state literacy conference, and one teacher candidate was invited to develop her poster presentation into an hour-long workshop, which she presented at the neighboring state's Council for Exceptional Children conference. Two teacher candidates applied information they learned at the conference to design a summer academic camp on campus for middle-school students. They taught their students to analyze complex texts, translate them into screenplays, and then dramatize them in short video presentations. While some challenges continue, the positive outcomes contribute to the authors' commitment to continue fine-tuning the literacy courses' assignments to continue increasing the number of undergraduates presenting conference posters.

The Powerful Transfer of Learning

One final, powerful example serves to illustrate how the restructuring of coursework around a research-based applied project with authentic opportunities for professional sharing can benefit teacher candidates' deep understanding of translating best practices into real classroom practice.

Vicky [pseudonym] was a social studies education major assigned to a middle school classroom for her literacy methods field placement. For her research focus, she explored *the impact of summarization on student learning*. In seeking to apply this to her own lessons, she asked students to summarize what they learned from her lesson by creating a "hashtag," such as those used on social media sites to categorize conversation threads, and then write a justification for it. Only five minutes remained at the end of the lesson for the writing task, yet students were deeply engaged and unwilling to stop when the bell rang. At least one student was overheard discussing the activity with a peer in the hallway as he went into his next class.

Vicky's poster was subsequently presented in the *gallery walk* and at the Literacy Leaders Conference, where attending area teachers viewed it. The conference steering committee later received the following unsolicited comment via email from one of the teachers who had viewed Vicky's poster:

I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed attending the conference. I actually found perhaps [sic] my best and most applicable "take-away" from the conference, not in a specific workshop, but rather through the very helpful and informative poster presentations that were prepared by [the university's] students of education. I was especially impressed with [Vicky's] poster. I felt that her *hash tag* activity would be perfect for my high school special education students who love their social media. I tried it with great results, then [I] shared it with another teacher in our school who is very 'old school.' He didn't know what a hash tag was, but I convinced him to give it a try. His students loved it and he is now planning to keep using it as well. Thanks.

Smith and Colby (2007) have reminded us that

by setting challenging tasks and providing feedback that encourages deeper processing, we as teacher educators are more likely to produce high-quality learning outcomes in our teacher candidates. In turn, sharing professionally as an undergraduate teacher candidate encourages a commitment to the profession at the beginning of their careers.

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Table 1: Teacher Candidate Conference Presentation Summary

Course	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16	
	P/T	%	P/T	%	P/T	%	P/T	%
<i>Language & Literacy</i> [Pre-K & Kindergarten]	n/a		3/14	21%	1/8	12%	3/12	25%
<i>Integrated Reading & Language Arts Pedagogy</i> [Elementary K-6]	8/83	10%	9/82	11%	1/93	1%	2/37	5%
<i>Reading in the Content Areas</i> [Secondary]	1/41	2%	5/42	12%	11/49	22%	7/34	21%

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Influence of Online Book Clubs on Pre-Service Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Jennifer Smith and Marla Robertson

Abstract

This article explores the use of an online book club with pre-service teachers, from idea to implementation. Undergraduate students from two literacy courses discussed professional texts through online discussions. The purposes of this project were to familiarize pre-service teachers with collaborative online platforms, encourage discussions that challenged pedagogical beliefs, and provide pre-service teachers with a model for continued professional development. Data from instructor observations, online discussions, and questionnaires suggest that the design of the online book club impacted pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, lesson preparation, and plans for future teaching.

Curriculum decisions often are made based on multiple factors. As literacy professors of pre-service teachers, each semester we review the expectations of the courses we teach to determine if any changes need to be made. We know that we need to prepare our pre-service teachers to understand the complex thinking that goes into decisions they will make in their future classrooms and for their own continued professional learning. During this evaluation process one semester, we contemplated changes to a literacy assessment and instruction course that we were teaching. Three topics emerged in this discussion: technology integration, teaching skills versus teaching students, and continued professional learning.

Embedding technology into literacy methods courses as well as field experiences for pre-service teachers is an effective way to influence future classroom use of technology (Labbo & Reinking, 1999; Larson, 2008). Also, in many classrooms nationwide, students are engaging in online literature discussions in lieu of traditional, face-to-face discussions. As students interact online to discuss texts that they have read, they are socially constructing individual and shared meaning of the text (Vygotsky, 1978). This is important, as a unique meaning is made each time a reader interacts with a text that cannot be replicated by the reader or other readers (Rosenblatt, 1994). Yet, when students share their ideas about a book with their peers, they are increasing their understanding of various perspectives and joining the literacy club (Smith, 1988). These differing viewpoints will be brought to their next reading and enhance future understanding. This shared language, even in digital form, can challenge our students' thinking (Moreillon, Hunt, & Ewing, 2009; Wolsey, 2004) as they consider other interpretations and synthesize all the shared information to form new ideas (Rizopoulos & McCarthy, 2009).

Online literature discussions have been used in a variety of ways (Bromley et al., 2014; Day & Kroon, 2010; Larson, 2008). These types of discussions have been used outside of the classroom as meeting places for students to

discuss books (Stewart, 2009), and studies of online student discussions report increased communication, literacy, and community building (Carico, Logan, & Labbo, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006).

In preparing pre-service teachers to practice, it is important to reinforce the idea that learning how to be a great teacher does not end the moment our students walk across the stage with their diploma in hand. Teachers are expected to continue learning how to improve their craft throughout their career, and often that professional learning is self-directed (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Literacy teachers, in particular, are encouraged to continue developing their knowledge and take charge of their professional growth (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Teacher preparation must model ways that pre-service teachers can continue their professional growth in their future teaching careers while also learning specialized skills for particular courses, and book clubs are one avenue to achieve this goal (Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010).

Rationale and Purposes for Our Online Book Club

Traditionally, students in our pre-service classrooms spend a great deal of time reading the assigned textbooks for the course, incorporating the strategies into lesson plans for their field-based practicums, and reflecting on these teaching experiences. We found that our students were successfully incorporating the literacy strategies discussed in class, yet often sold back the textbooks, full of great teaching strategies and ideas, at the end of the semester. If much of our course was built around the information in the textbooks that we hoped our students would bring into their future classrooms, we realized that much of the information would be lost or forgotten if they did not open the books again.

As we brainstormed potential activities to help our pre-service teachers understand the importance of continued learning, we identified several key elements as important. First, we wanted our students to realize that teacher professional development is ongoing and often incorporates reading of professional literature. Second, we felt it was important for pre-service teachers to become familiar with online educational platforms. Third, we wanted our students to have another place for conversation and learning to occur as a way to develop a community of learners (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996) because our classes only met once a week. We hoped that our students would experience a shifting of beliefs about reading, writing, and dialogue as overarching ideas in teaching and learning. After considering these elements, we decided to incorporate an online book club into our course syllabi.

Our conceptualization of an online book club was grounded in a social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978) and reader response (Rosenblatt, 1994a; 1994b) perspective. An

essential element to the shared meaning-making of texts was the influence of language, both oral and written. We drew upon Rosenblatt's transactional theory, understanding that no two reading events are the same, as each time a reader interacts with a text, a unique meaning is constructed. Thus, when the reader uses language to discuss his understanding of the text he is consequently furthering the understanding of those who listen. This new understanding from the discussions will then influence any subsequent readings that the reader engages in. Likewise, we drew on Vygotsky's work that social interaction, often in the form of language, is essential to learning and development. Allowing students to collaborate and learn from each other was a central component of the shared meaning-making we hoped would occur within the book club discussions.

Our online book club included pre-service teachers from two sections of a literacy assessment and instruction course. Each section was taught by one of the authors. All students within the two sections participated in the online book club, as this was a course requirement. However, only data from the 31 students who signed the informed consent form are discussed in this article.

The course incorporated a field-based teaching experience during the second half of the semester where the pre-service teachers worked one-on-one with an elementary student from a local school. The first half of the semester was devoted, in part, to learning about various literacy assessments that could be used to identify elementary students' needs. As our pre-service teachers designed their lesson plans during the second half of the semester, they were expected to use their analysis of these assessments to create individualized lessons.

Online Book Club Design

As we designed the online book club for this course, we considered current professional books that could be read quickly and were representative of the type of book an in-service teacher would read. Although students' participation would be graded, we wanted the assignment to be an authentic experience. This notion of authenticity influenced us throughout the planning process as we considered five specific topics: the online platform, choice of books, expectations, time frame, and a culminating project. We created these topics based on our personal experiences teaching pre-service teachers and our experiences with book clubs.

Online Platform

Consistent with The Technology Integration Planning Cycle for Literacy and Language Arts (Hutchison & Woodward, 2014), we considered our instructional goal and approach before choosing a platform. We also wanted our pre-service teachers to become familiar with an online discussion platform they could use with their future students, and we knew they were more likely to do so if they were familiar with the tool themselves. We chose to use Edmodo (2017) because it was designed for use by teachers and students. It included features such as password protection, small group

options, and apps for mobile devices. Each class had their own account, and groups were divided within each class based on the different books.

Choice of Books

Consistent with our philosophy of the elements included within literacy instruction, we decided to choose books that reflected the areas of reading, writing, and dialogue. It was important for us to choose books that were different from traditional pre-service textbooks, including length and readability. We were careful to select books that we felt would be engaging and hopefully motivate our pre-service teachers in the future to choose their own books for continued learning.

The three books that we chose included *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) to reflect the area of reading, *A Writer's Notebook* (Fletcher, 1996) to discuss writing, and *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004) to engage our students in thinking about language and dialogue. Consistent with traditional literature circles (Daniels, 1994), we felt it was important to allow our pre-service teachers a choice in the book they read. We discussed each book in class, gave each student a ballot, and asked them to rank the books in the order they were most interested in reading. These ballots were used when we formed the book club groups, and we ensured every student was assigned to a first or second choice book (see Figure 1).

Expectations

It was important for us to consider our expectations for the online book club and to share the expectations with our pre-service teachers. First, we expected that students would engage in meaningful conversations about the books they were reading. Second, we expected that all students would participate and contribute to the online discussions as they would be asynchronous and allow students to post their thoughts at their convenience. We were conflicted about whether the students should receive a grade for their participation as we wanted the discussions to be authentic and not forced. In the end, however, we concluded that the online discussions were a class assignment, and attaching a grade to the assignment would accurately reflect their participation. We designed a rubric to promote rich discussion among the group members that included references to (a) the quality of the online contributions, (b) requirements for consistent posting, (c) inclusion of new ideas, (d) inclusion of questions, (e) responses to peers' contributions, and (f) connections to assessment or instruction. Students were expected to post a minimum of three comments per week, including a combination of questions, insightful replies, and comments to stimulate further discussion. It should be noted that we did not participate in the online discussions as the expectation was for the students to create meaning among themselves without an instructor to refer back to and answer the questions they posted.

Timeframe

We decided to implement the online book club early in

the semester. The pre-service teachers would begin teaching in local elementary schools mid-semester, and we wanted to ensure they had finished their book discussions prior to their lesson planning. While we did set boundaries on the timeframe (four weeks to discuss the books online), the students met with their group members in class and decided together how many chapters they wanted to discuss each week. After the online discussions were complete, each group had several weeks to decide how they wanted to share their newfound knowledge with their classmates.

Culminating Project

We felt it was important for pre-service teachers to have a basic understanding of all of the material and how each topic (reading, writing, and dialogue) could be applied to their teaching. The groups were provided with a rubric for a whole-class presentation and instructed to provide a handout for all classmates. The rubric included elements such as (a) overview of the book, (b) connections between the book and assessment/instruction, and (c) references to how the book had influenced the group members. Students were given freedom to decide how to present the content of the book they read with their classmates, what format (technology infused or traditional) to use for the presentation, and details regarding the handout. The culminating project will be further discussed in the “Instructor Observations” section of this article.

Implementation and Observations

Using the considerations discussed above, we implemented the online book club into our pre-service assessment and instruction classes, excited about the potential outcomes to student learning and thinking. This section documents the impact the book club had on our students, on our classroom community, and on us as the instructors. We first discuss our observations as the instructors of the courses and then present student responses from the discussions and an end-of-the-semester questionnaire.

Instructor Observations

There was an undeniable excitement among the pre-service teachers about the different books. After creating the book groups, we were reminded of the power of choosing a book. Our students were interested in reading different books, which was evident in their rank ordering on the book choice forms. As students began reading, they started talking about the books offline as well as online. The students were excited about their reading, eager to engage in discussions with us or their classmates regarding the material, and delighted to share personal accounts related to their books. One of the students shared that she was reading her book during another class and was asked about it by her instructor. After sharing and discussing the book, the instructor stated that she planned to use it with her future classes. Several of our students discussed a desire to read additional books by the same author as their chosen text. These observations illustrate that the students experienced the power of shared meaning making and suggest that many of them may continue

their personal professional development by seeking out further reading material.

After the students concluded their online discussion, they began creating their culminating presentation as a way to share their book with the class. We observed that the students felt a responsibility to their classmates and took the assignment of presenting the contents of their book and online discussions seriously. The groups were creative in their dissemination of the material, as we observed groups choosing to present the important pieces from their book using a handout, brochure, PowerPoint, or Prezi. The uniqueness of the presentations reminded us that when students are given creative freedom, the product is often better than expected.

Student Online Responses

As we read and reread the discussion threads, we documented the types of responses the pre-service teachers were posting. We first looked for responses that addressed an aspect of our rubric, including questioning peers, building off peers' responses, discussing specific parts of the reading (including quotations), explaining why it was important or interesting, and making connections to teaching. Since the online discussions were graded using the rubric, we were curious whether these considerations would show up in the responses. We found that some responses fit into additional categories, such as text-to-self connections, references to the purpose, and general enjoyment of the book. This section provides examples of the types of online discussions that were occurring within the different groups and is divided into three categories: (a) connections to personal experiences, (b) the power of dialogue, and (c) moving beyond the rubric. All names are pseudonyms, and all excerpts from the online discussions have been copied verbatim without correction. While some of the online posts did contain errors in conventions, students were not graded on the grammar and mechanics of their online responses. We understood that online writing in this format is often informal and unpolished and did not expect them to publish a submission that required multiple drafts and revision.

Connections to personal experiences. The responses within the online book club indicated that the pre-service teachers were reading the books carefully and making connections to their own experiences. Often, a student would post a new idea that referenced a specific aspect of the reading, explain why the excerpt was chosen, and provide either a personal connection and/or how the idea could influence teaching. These new ideas frequently received replies, as other students built off the initial post and offered additional connections, teaching ideas, and occasionally asked questions.

The three books that pre-service teachers read for the online book club included many examples of exemplary teaching practices. Throughout each of the online discussions, students made connections between examples in the text and their own experiences, both positive and negative. Often, students shared a text-to-self connection and also discussed implications for teaching. Below is one example of a text-to-self connection and teaching implication from a student reading *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004):

...I also want to quote that “the greater the gap between teacher and learner, the harder teaching becomes” (pg 7). Because of the distance we want to avoid, we should know when to be explicit and with which students. In my senior calculus class, the majority of the time, I spent it quietly and continuously pulling my hair (literally and figuratively) because I had no clue what was going on. I didn’t want to ask my teacher for help because now I know that my affective filter was very high because he made me feel pressured, uncomfortable, and anxious. He assumed that everyone knew what was going on, but sadly I didn’t and I ended with a D in the class :(We have to remind ourselves to be explicit teachers as much as we can and especially for those that may need additional support instead of just implying that our students “already know.” Now I fully understand that language is not transferred but constructed. (Elise)

This response shows that the student was not only making a text-to-self connection, but using it to transform her thinking about the language that teachers use. Likewise, a student reading *A Writer’s Notebook* (Fletcher, 1996) also posted her text-to-self connection:

Yesterday as I was doing homework at my kitchen desk I had the back door open because it was such a beautiful day (also my dogs can go in and out at will). A leaf blew in the door and I was sitting there and picked it up and decided to tape it in my writer’s notebook. I thought about how great the sun felt, how there was a nice breeze, I could hear kids laughing outside (they were off school yesterday) on the sidewalk, it was just a moment in time I wanted to remember. So now when I open that book and see that leaf, I can feel those feelings all over again. I think this is what our book is all about. (Monica)

The above response demonstrates the student’s ability to not only comprehend the text, but implement its philosophy into her own life. She now understands the importance of documenting experiences with not only words, but with memorabilia that will help her remember her feelings, physical sensations, and noise from a specific moment in time.

The power of dialogue. One of our purposes for engaging the pre-service teachers in online discussions was for them to experience the power of dialogue (including written dialogue) and its impact on learning. A review of the online discussions illustrated that the students were building on each other’s posts, providing support, and learning from the collective whole. For example, the following post reflects a student who was overwhelmed with the amount of information she had read. One of her peers offered another perspective when presented with a plethora of material:

Original: When reading this book, I noticed myself getting a little overwhelmed with the information. There is so much good information that I want to incorporate in my classroom. I know if I take it slow and do a few things at a time, instead of forcing all of the conversation starters in the book, things should go smoothly. Is there anyone else feeling overwhelmed with the information? (Catherine)

Reply: As far as being overwhelmed, I’m more so enlightened. There was so much stuff that I had no clue about. I know words can have a huge effect on people as well as actions, but this book was so good with

information and how in depth it was. I didn’t think that I would be so engaged with this book but from page to page I was gaining so much knowledge from this short reading. This is definitely a book that I must keep handy when I go into my field of work. (Danica)

The students in this example were engaging in a conversation that is important at any level of a teaching career. Often teachers are overwhelmed with the vast amount of material they are responsible for teaching or the plethora of great ideas from seasoned educators that they would like to implement. The support that is provided through the reply post provides another perspective when presented with large amounts of information.

Furthermore, many students replied to each other, as they built upon an original idea or brought new information to the discussion. For example, the following post from a student reading *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) received four responses:

I really enjoyed how Mrs. Miller responded to all the negative comments about not preparing the students for the future. I feel like she was dead on with the response stated in the book, “..if the real world means years of comprehension worksheets and test practices.” Then she agreed that she was not preparing them. How many adults participate in worksheets and test practices? NONE. How many read for pleasure or are required to read in various other situations? Almost all. So I would have to say Mrs. Miller is doing a great job preparing her students for the future, and the fact that her students return to her classroom to visit her and discuss new books they have read indicates she is doing a great job as a teacher. (Karen)

This lengthy post was typical of many responses shared by pre-service teachers. This student included specific information from the text, including quotations, an explanation about why she felt this information was important, her personal feelings regarding the information, and implications for teaching. This post received four replies, which included discussion regarding reasons for agreement with specific ideas, additional evidence from the text to support and continue the conversation, personal connections, and implications for teachers.

Moving beyond the rubric. Even though the online discussions were a graded component in our classes, we hoped that pre-service teachers would engage in authentic conversation as they read and made sense of their different books. We noticed that many original posts were lengthy and included a summary of the chapter(s) read. It was clear to us that these posts were influenced by the rubric and the graded component of the online book club, as we would not expect such elaborate summaries within a discussion outside of school. However, we were pleased that students did not only post lengthy summaries of the book but often built off each other’s responses as they engaged in online dialogue regarding how the reading influenced them and their thoughts on teaching. Thus, it appeared that the online discussions were not only a place to showcase evidence of reading the chapters, but also a space to engage in authentic conversations related to new learning. One student summed

up her feelings regarding the online discussion as a final post:

It has been great speaking with you all and discussing the ins and outs of this book. I hope you continue to be inspired to write as a way to explore your own thoughts and to extract the inner chambers of your mind. (Rebecca)

Indeed, the pre-service teachers used the online discussions to engage in purposeful discussions that challenged their thinking and provided them with new insights.

Student Questionnaire Responses

At the end of the semester, pre-service teachers completed a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was two-fold. First, we sought to understand whether their involvement with online discussions of their book, as well as the information gained from the group presentations on the other two books, influenced the ways in which they taught their elementary student during the semester. Second, we wondered if our pre-service teachers felt that any of the books, including the one they read themselves, and the exposure they had to the other two books through the class presentations, would influence their future teaching. The questionnaires were not graded. The questionnaire asked pre-service teachers their name, course section, the book they read, and three open-ended questions. Table 1 shows the questions and types of responses.

Of the 29 pre-service teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 25 stated that the book they read influenced how they taught their elementary student at the end of the semester. Two pre-service teachers said “no,” and two had ambiguous responses such as, “I think” and “both yes and no.” The two “no” responses came from *A Writer’s Notebook* (Fletcher, 1996) groups and qualified this response stating that the framework of the lessons required for the course restricted the kind of writing they could do with their elementary student. Fifteen out of the 29 pre-service teachers stated that ideas learned from the presentations of the other two books influenced their teaching. Most who responded “no” qualified that they wanted to read the other two books in the summer, or in the future, or that they did not have time during this class to incorporate the ideas from the other books into their lessons. For example, one pre-service teacher answered, “No, BUT I really want to read them this summer!” (Amy) and another said, “No. However, I really did like the suggestions that were given in ‘the writer’s notebook.’ I will be using those in my future classroom” (Condalesa).

Integrating ideas into lesson plans/interactions. Most pre-service teachers noted that their online book club reading influenced their teaching. For example, one pre-service teacher who read *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) stated:

The book pushed how big it is for students to read and enjoy reading so they will continue to read in the future. I used this information by choosing wisely the books my student was going to read during the practicum by making sure it was a book that would interest him. (Simone)

Another pre-service teacher in the same group stated, “I feel that choosing books that were interesting to [elementary student name] made a HUGE difference! She was engaged

during read alouds and also when it was time for her to read, she was engaged with the books” (Julie). It should be noted that the premise regarding book choice in *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) is for students to choose their own books. Our pre-service teachers were working with elementary students one-on-one, providing guided reading instruction based on assessment data. Therefore, while the elementary students did not have free range of book choice, these comments suggest that the pre-service teachers internalized the importance of a high interest text for students. In this context, that meant either carefully choosing a book for the lesson based on the elementary student’s interests or providing the student with several books to choose from.

A pre-service teacher in the *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004) group stated, “Yes, it allowed me to monitor how I spoke to my student (as well as others). It provided me with examples of phrases to use and the pros and cons to the phrase” (Carrie). A reader from *A Writer’s Notebook* (Fletcher, 1996) group said:

Yes, yes, and yes. My student was having a difficult time in writing so I never thought about writing this sort of way. It was engaging for him to do writing activities that dealt with close observation/writing about his thoughts. I am definitely encouraging my future students to keep a writer’s notebook. (Priscilla)

Many pre-service teachers stated that learning about the other books also influenced their teaching during their practicum. For example, a reader in *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) group stated:

Choice Words also influenced the way I taught this semester because it made me take a look at the way I worded the things I was saying. *A Writer’s Notebook* taught me different ways to teach writing and to get students excited about writing which I used in my teaching this semester. (Karen)

Influencing future teaching. Twenty-eight of 29 pre-service teachers commented that their reading would influence their future teaching with a “yes,” “definitely,” or “absolutely.” The one remaining pre-service teacher stated that each book would “probably influence me in teaching at some point. It just depends...” (Cindy). For those that felt their online book club reading would influence their future teaching, they provided a variety of reasons. For example, a reader in *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) group stated:

Definitely! I will have book clubs and take book recommendations from my students! I will give them class time to read a book of their choice and assess their learning by hearing their “group talks.” I want to instill a love for reading in my students and model being a “life reader” as well. (Julie) A member of the writing group said, “*A Writer’s Notebook* gave me numerous ideas to conduct a writer’s workshop in a classroom and to have students see a different side of writing. I hope this will open doors for many that dislike writing” (Priscilla). Most pre-service teachers said that their own book would influence their teaching. Several mentioned their desire to read the other books if they had not already done so. All pre-service teachers seemed to understand the importance of the topics of each book selection.

Outcomes

Both of us have taught this college course with and without the online book club. We were excited to see the overall topics of reading, writing, and dialogue internalized in our pre-service teachers from their experiences.

Components that Worked

The online discussions were clearly influenced by the expectations in the rubric. While we initially worried that the graded aspect of the online discussions would interfere with the authenticity of the dialogue, we were pleased that the conversations illustrated rich discussions as pre-service teachers shared not only summaries of the readings, but questions, extension of peers' contributions, and connections. Indeed, it appeared that the students were purposeful in their online discussions to meet the expectations of the rubric. The rubric gave broad guidelines, but it was not limiting, which contributed to the insights into different perspectives and ideas.

Following the completion of the online discussions, we agreed that the lessons created by the online book club classes seemed more focused on their elementary students learning rather than fulfilling a college course requirement. Pre-service teachers seemed to make the connection that literacy lessons had a purpose beyond teaching a skill to a student based on an assessment. The teacher/student relationship became more of a focus because of understandings gained from engaging in reading of professional books designed for teachers. Pre-service teachers appeared to be more thoughtful in their lesson preparation and during their lessons, particularly on their book club topic: choice in reading, careful conversations, and incorporating writing.

Considerations for Future Online Book Clubs

Pre-service teachers were informed of their book group several weeks before the online discussions began and had ample time to purchase the book for their discussion. Most students were prepared with the appropriate text and ready to read by the date specified. However, we had several students who did not purchase their books until the last minute, impacting their participation during the beginning of the online discussions. In the future, we may provide the books to the students as part of a course fee to ensure that each student has the necessary text to read.

Another problem that we encountered at the beginning of the online discussions was that several pre-service teachers participated minimally (or not at all) the first week. This lack of participation was partially, but not entirely, related to the students who had not purchased the book. The online discussions were graded by us on a weekly basis. After students received the graded rubric from the first week, we noticed that the majority of the minimal participators early in the book club began posting more often and contributing to the shared meaning making. Since the rubric appeared to influence student participation, we realize that we need to put more of an emphasis leading up to the discussions on the expectations of the book club.

Professional Relevance

The purpose of including an online book club in our pre-service teacher educator courses was multi-faceted. We wanted to make our students familiar with using technology within the classroom context, knowing that if pre-service teachers are familiar with a specific site they are more likely to use it with their future classes. We wanted to not only teach the skills defined in the course syllabus but also address the importance of continued professional development as a way to transform teaching. Overall, the online discussions addressed the purposes defined as we observed pre-service teachers using technology as a discussion tool, engaging in rich discussions about the content of the books, and rethinking how they plan to teach and interact with students. The questionnaires provided additional support that the discussions within each group and the group presentations to the whole class influenced pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, lesson planning, and plans for future teaching.

The online book club that we integrated into our two pre-service teacher educator classes allowed us to incorporate our own pedagogical beliefs that (a) professional development is ongoing, (b) technology integration is essential and another place for conversation, and (c) allowing pre-service teachers to engage in discussions about a shared text can influence their learning through exposure to professional literature and others' perspectives. As we teach and shape the next generation of educators, we continue to look for ways to integrate authentic learning opportunities that teach students, not just skills.

Table 1 *End of semester questionnaire data*

Question	Positive response	Negative response	Ambiguous response
Did the book you read as part of the online book group influence how you taught your student this semester? Please explain.	25	2	2
Did any of the other books from the online book club influence how you taught your student this semester? Please explain.	15	13	1
Do you feel any of the books read for the online book group this semester will influence your future teaching? Please explain.	28	0	1

Figure 1. *Ballot for book choice*

Online Book Club

Place a 1 next to your first choice, a 2 next to your second choice, and a 3 next to your last choice.

_____ *Choice Words*

_____ *A writer's Notebook*

_____ *The Book Whisper*

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BOOK REVIEW

The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing

Author: Ruth Culham
Publisher: S. Viscarra & C. M. Lambert, Eds.
ISBN: 9780872070998
Reviewer: Jennifer R. Jackson, Marshall University

About the Author

Ruth Culham, author of more than 40 teaching resources, holds specialty degrees in Library Science and Elementary, Middle, and Secondary English Education. During her 19 year teaching career, she was honored as the English Teacher of the Year. Culham is a current contributor and Writing Department Editor for the *Reading Teacher*, president of the Culham Writing Company, and former Unit Manager of the Assessment Program at Education Northwest in Portland, Oregon.

Culham is well known as the author of *6 + 1 Traits of Writing*, as well as many other educational books and resources. Her latest work, *The Writing Thief*, is both an information rich text and a kind of “how to” for educators who want to both spark students’ writing interest and give them reasons to write. At first glance, *The Writing Thief* appears to be a guide of strategies for teaching writing, but a deeper look reveals much more. In addition to these teaching strategies, this well-organized text also helps the reader learn ways to strengthen their own writing skills.

Mentor Text and Catchy Titles

A former English teacher, Culham’s extensive range of books and materials help teachers who seek to enhance their teaching of writing. This book follows in that vein, and is written in a down to earth style that helps teachers think about how to successfully use mentor text and about what students think about when it comes to writing. The creative chapter titles, an example of which is, *Start Here: Stop Doing Dumb Things*, reveal the overall tone of the book. The author’s voice is direct, friendly, and personal. The reader feels as though she is attending a workshop and Culham is speaking to her about elements such as the what, why, and how of teaching effective writing by using mentor texts.

Mentor texts are books or other literary formats that students can use to help support them during a particular writing task or challenge. Mentors, of course, guide or support others across important life thresholds, from teenagers in need of role models to employees beginning new careers. The idea of a mentor text is that it can have a mentoring influence on a writer, and can be used to motivate and support student writing. With over 100 pages dedicated to the understanding and use of mentor texts, this book provides rich examples and ideas ready for use in the classroom.

Culham provides examples of mentor texts that are easy to understand. These examples can promote new ideas that may inspire the teacher searching for techniques to motivate and engage students in writing. Culham demonstrates how to use picture books, chapter books, and everyday text as mentor texts. Teachers will appreciate the easy to follow structure and features of *The Writing Thief*.

Chapter Insight

Each chapter provides useful information that builds on readers’ interest in learning how to motivate and engage students in purposeful writing. In Chapter 1, *Time to Rethink the Teaching of Writing*, Culham tackles the need for student writing in a purposeful and meaningful way. This chapter provides sensible things to do in order to strengthen motivation for student writing. Chapter 2, *The Power of Mentor Texts for Writing*, goes further in describing mentor texts, and explaining how to identify and use mentor texts for student writing. The last three chapters of Culham’s book are reserved for specific types of writing. Chapter 3, *Informational Writing*, explains why and how to use informational texts and gives explanations and examples that help the reader better understand this type of writing. Chapter 4, *Narrative Writing*, focuses on the power of both fiction and nonfiction narrative writing, and offers teachers specific ideas for including more nonfiction reading and writing in the classroom. This chapter is of particular interest due to the current emphasis on including more high quality nonfiction in every classroom, which is supported by Common Core State Standards. The last specific type of writing is addressed in Chapter 5, *Argument Writing*. Often thought of as identical to persuasive writing, Culham describes argument writing as being in the “same zip code” as persuasive writing, but she clearly defines the difference between the two genres and demonstrates effective argument techniques that can enhance student writing.

Each chapter of this book is rich with reasons for addressing writing with students, how to effectively attend to student feelings toward writing, as well as providing examples that are ready to use. Valuable information from one chapter to the next keeps the reader motivated and engaged throughout.

Text Features

Culham has designed this book to appeal to anyone who seeks to strengthen not just their students' writing, but their own. Throughout *The Writing Thief*, readers find text boxes and icons highlighting topics such as Author insights, Notes From Ruth, Traits, Key Quality, and Book Type. Authors discuss their experiences as writers in "Author's Insights," underlining Culham's claims that reading and writing are critical to every writer's growth and development. "Notes From Ruth" complements each author's story by offering Culham's response to those stories. "Traits of Writing" and "Key Qualities" guide teachers through a deeper understanding of each writing genre, highlighting ideas, organization, voice, and word choice used in writing instruction. Various book genres are easily identified with icons, which is another feature that makes this book easy to navigate.

Additional features of this book include a table of contents, index, and an appendix that includes reproducible items such as signs, cartoons, and passages. The usefulness of these features further demonstrates Culham's understanding of a busy teacher's workload. As an educator herself, Culham understands how students feel about writing as well as what they need to motivate and engage them in writing. Teachers will appreciate Culham's use of best practices to reach all students and enhance their writing ability.

Summary

Culham's appealing format will provoke those interested in teaching and learning, to pick up *The Writing Thief* and begin thumbing through its pages. Once they discover the very user friendly structure of the book and see the plethora of educational resources it offers, they will likely decide that it is the right one for their needs.

Understanding the importance of literacy and how it encompasses all aspects of the classroom is part of the instructional foundation for teaching. Teachers who approach literacy as a practice that is within all subjects and woven throughout all classrooms, will have a better understanding that writing should be approached the same way. *The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing* helps teachers focus on what we need to do in order to strengthen student writing, and to become better writers ourselves.

About the Reviewer

Jennifer Jackson is an Assistant Professor at Marshall University teaching undergraduate literacy courses in the teacher education preparation program. Her current focus is on effectively preparing preservice teacher candidates for the K-12 classrooms. She is interested in following first year teachers to gain a better insight as to how colleges can better prepare future teachers for the classroom, focusing on methods and strategies to motivate and engage students specifically in the areas of reading and writing.

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