Preservice Teacher *Bricolage*: Incorporating Critical Literacy, Negotiating Competing Visions

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The quality of the classroom teacher makes a tremendous difference in student learning (Bartolome, 1994; Diaz & Flores, 2001). This link between classroom teacher and student learning has understandably brought teacher preparation programs to the attention of policymakers and media, whose view may lead to a glossing over of the complexity of teacher preparation work (Cochran-Smith, 2005). In June 2013, this type of evaluation could be seen in efforts by the *U.S. News and World Report* and its partner agency the National Council on Teacher Quality to assign ratings to university-based teacher preparation programs that range from 0 to 4 based on 18 standards (NCTQ, 2013).

Yet those of us who work in teacher preparation programs recognize that the education of future teachers is necessarily complex in its practices, organization, and function. Teacher prep programs may consist of a variety of field experiences (in which preservice teachers spend time in local schools or other educational settings) and a variety of university courses (taught by College of Education faculty members, faculty from other schools within the university, and part-time adjunct professors). Sometimes, the nature and qualities of both fieldwork and coursework can vary dramatically within a single program and, given the many variables that make up university-community partnerships, even from one semester to the next.

We acknowledge that our own critical literacy perspectives are also embedded within our teacher education work, in which we consider neither language nor the teaching of literacy politically neutral (Janks, 2000; Lewison & Leland, 2002; Luke & Freebody, 1997). We openly work to cultivate future teachers' critical literacy stances. This study began with our inquiry into the effectiveness of classroom discussions, activities, and practices within a teacher preparation program intentionally designed to foster the development of critical, culturally relevant teachers through a central theme of critical literacy. As researchers, we were curious how, in a program that specifically, explicitly, and consistently incorporated critical literacy into its teacher preparation, preservice teachers demonstrated their understandings or stances of critical literacy. We framed our research with the following question: How do preservice teachers envision future classroom literacy practices at the end of a teacher preparation program that emphasized critical literacy?

Conceptual Framework

Two bodies of work guided our thinking towards this study: a) scholarship on *bricolage* as a theoretical framework and b) literature focusing on critical literacy development, particularly as it relates to preservice teachers.

Preservice Teachers as *Bricoleurs*

We conceptualize the work done by those learning to teach through *bricolage*, posited by Lévi-Strauss (1966) as the work of the opportunistic handyman (i.e., the *bricoleur*) “who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to the craftsman” to accomplish necessary tasks (p. 16-17). *Bricolage / bricoleur* has been used as a metaphor in many disciplines including everyday practices (de Certeau, 1984), discourse (Derrida, 1970; Erickson, 2004), research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001), and teaching (Florio-Ruane, 2012; Honan, 2004; Reilly, 2009) including at the level of teacher preparation (Hatton, 1988, 1997). The term itself has been modified and adapted to meet the needs of the adopter in these wide-ranging fields. In this study, we drew upon Erickson’s (2004) use thusly:

> The bricoleur, most fundamentally, is an agent who *makes use*. As the term is used currently in cultural studies to illuminate processes of intuitive, non-deliberate innovation in the production of popular culture, bricolage involves juxtapositions of elements from differing cultural traditions (i.e. bricolage in this sense is a synonym for syncretism). The elements from these differing sources are brought together in novel combinations and this makes a new style. But at the heart of the notion of bricolage lies something beyond hybridity and innovation—it is a sense of the fundamental, constitutive character of work being done in real time. (p. 166)

We use the construct of *bricoleur* carefully, however. Using (and thus conceptualizing, experiencing, and acting) a metonymic metaphor is worthy of caution regardless of the concept as it highlights some aspects while hiding others (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). *Bricolage* has been interpreted variously, including unprincipled, sneaky, ad hoc decision-making due to limited creativity (e.g., Hatton, 1988) and complex, agentive, theoretically-based improvising due to deep understanding of local context and external factors (e.g., Florio-Ruane, 2012; Reilly, 2009). Such disparate interpretations have allowed for its use to describe teaching (another term comprising widely diverging definitions) in diverse ways. Allowing one component of *bricolage* such as decision-making to stand in for the intricate, multi-faceted process of teaching calls for precision because “unlike the bricoleur fixing the broken faucet with wire and tape, the teacher of literacy is not making a repair. And the student is not a broken object” (Florio-Ruane, 2012, p. 126).

This theorizing with the *bricolage* metaphor allowed us to take a more generous look at preservice teachers’ responses to course assignments. We selected *bricolage* as a theorizing metaphor over other terms (e.g., adaptation, improvisation, third space) because it drew attention to the varied places where tools were available for pickup. This particular term also allowed us to foreground preservice teachers’ need to operate in current and future “real time”—in university classrooms and local schools in which they work for grades and information that allow them to plan for life in schools where they will be professionally employed as first-year teachers.

Becoming a Critical Literacy Educator

Preservice teachers have been represented as using ignorance and resistance to avoid topics related to equity, power, and group membership (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Yet teacher education and research on teacher education that draws on these representations fail to acknowledge preservice teacher understandings or the complexity of the topics with which we ask them to engage; neither does it provide a productive path forward. Like Garrett & Segall (2013), "instead of understanding the struggles as problematic, as something to overcome, we embrace them as a form of coming to know, as opportunities to learn further" (p. 301).

The term critical literacy has also been defined in a myriad of ways (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002) with most definitions emphasizing the examination of multiple interpretations of text and related language and power relationships—foregrounding ideology in ways that can be difficult for many people. It has been categorized in multiple ways, with different people emphasizing various features (e.g., developing dispositions and habits, providing pedagogy and procedure; Freebody & Freiberg, 2011). Following Rogers (2013), we work from an understanding of critical literacy as "a stance toward texts, discourses, and social practices" (p. 16) that values diversity and acknowledges issues of language and power.

From this stance, engaging in critical education involves continuous, never-ending development in becoming a critical educator (Jenkins, Kramer, Labadie, Mosley, Pole, & Yavitz, 2009). Even experienced teachers new to critical literacy tend to integrate it into their instruction in some ways (e.g., challenging mainstream experiences) but not others (e.g., taking action to promote social justice; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Since preservice teachers are in the midst of forming views on what it means to be a teacher as well what it means to engage in literacy, we expect developing critical practices to take time (Mosley, 2010). The investment, however, may have value: research indicates that a critical stance "allows preservice teachers to create a sense of agency" (Scherff, 2012), a characteristic that may help shape the view of themselves as change agents who maintain a commitment to the profession (Quartz & TEP, 2003).

This article reports on a qualitative study of preservice teachers at one point in their process of undertaking critical literacy education, just before receiving their teaching certificates. Specifically, we examine how they "make use of elements" from their teacher preparation program as they engage in the work of teaching, selecting tools, and juxtaposing them with their local contexts to negotiate the syncretism constituting initial teaching experiences.

Methods

Research Context

This study was conducted in a university teacher education program committed to preparing teachers for working in urban elementary schools in a large Southeastern city, with urban schools defined by the program as those with predominantly racially, linguistically, and economically marginalized students. A stipulation of gaining entrance to the program is that upon graduation, students agree to take jobs in urban, high-needs schools within high-needs districts.

Program faculty including field supervisors tend to hold critical perspectives and work closely together, devoting one morning per month to program meetings. Every effort is made to facilitate an integrated, coherent program across the four semesters (Maymester, summer, fall, and spring) that make up the certification year. Preservice teachers begin the program of study with an intensive six-hour course titled “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy,” which asks students to explore “sociopolitical, structural, and cultural factors that influence the school achievement of students who come from diverse backgrounds” (course syllabus) through engaging with topics such as language, culture, ethnicity, social class, and gender. Preservice teachers read and discuss works by Freire, Banks, McIntosh, and others with a particular focus on Ladson-Billings’ (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy (for more information on this course, see author, 2012). In the Maymester course, students are introduced to a framework of culturally relevant pedagogy that organizes it into three teaching competencies: “an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). The theory works from a critical race theory and easily aligns with critical literacy that is then picked up and carried forward in the literacy methods courses.

Program faculty work throughout the program to extend thinking about issues introduced in the first course, via content within each individual course, attention to the teaching done in the field, and activities such as the problem/solution project in which the preservice teachers identify a societal issue (e.g., homelessness, immigration) and work together to address it (Author, 2011a).

This study focused on the program’s four-course literacy strand and 21 preservice teacher participants. The participants were primarily women (91%) and ethnically self-identified as 47% African American, 5% Asian American, and 47% European American. Program literacy courses took place at partner locations in urban settings including elementary schools and a non-profit organization. The first author was the professor for all four literacy classes for the cohort in which the study was conducted. The second author provided an etic perspective to the work. The third author worked closely with the program and had taught program courses in the past to other groups of students.

The first author structured her courses in ways intended to resolve dichotomies often found in teacher education programs by: a) working to integrate literacy methods with conceptual social justice tools, b) providing structures in which preservice teachers could develop practical teaching abilities, and c) working to enable preservice teachers who could succeed in today’s urban schools while also envisioning schools that transcend current obstacles (Grossman, McDonald, Hammerness, & Ronfeldt, 2008). It is important to note that working to address these dichotomies brought about inconsistencies from the literacy course instructor as she worked to fulfill goals that often compete against each other. She prioritized, however, creating assignments to support preservice teachers in their development of critical literacy concepts and practices. Given that she looped with the preservice teachers, she was able to link the assignments not only between university coursework and elementary classroom settings, but also across the full scope of the initial certification program. Her intent was to structure a connected and sustained learning experience with critical literacy, consistently scaffolded by a knowledgeable other, herself.

The first literacy course immediately followed the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy course described above. In this summer literacy course, preservice teachers began to learn about critical literacy through focusing on teacher and child language. They engaged in critical literacy themselves as they responded to readings (e.g., Johnston, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994) and maintained a writer's notebook about what they noticed about the world around them. The course took place on-site at a camp run by a local non-profit whose purpose was to support recently resettled refugee families. As a part of the course, each preservice teacher assisted a child aged 5-11 in literacy development while learning to conduct instructional activities (e.g., interactive read-alouds, guided reading) from a critical perspective on a topic of interest to the child. A core project of this course was also to compose a multimodal cultural artifact in which they reflected on a culture that shaped them.

Developing understandings of critical literacy proceeded in the second course through a consistent focus on teacher and student language and an increased focus on text. In this course, preservice teachers continued to respond critically to course readings (e.g., Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003; Ray, 2006), tutored a small group of elementary-aged children on standards-based topics, and completed related assignments (e.g., lesson plan writing, critical discourse analysis of five-minute teaching-segment).

In the third semester, students took the third literacy methods course in addition to a course in language acquisition taught by the same instructor (first author). Across these two courses, they again responded critically to readings (e.g., Buhrow & Garcia, 2006; Vasquez, 2010) and tutored small groups of elementary-aged children. The key assignment this semester required a critical stance on the standards-based topic for small group literacy lessons.

The first author had deliberately designed the four-semester literacy strand to give preservice teachers explicit, scaffolded experiences in learning and teaching through critical literacy perspectives. For their final project, preservice students created a paper in which they envisioned their first-year classroom, taking into account that they would soon be interviewing and expected to speak articulately about their literacy program to principals and others on hiring committees.

Data sources and analysis

Two primary data sets were collected for this study: a) the end-of-program visioning papers in which preservice teachers envisioned their future classroom (McElhone, Hebard, Scott, & Juel, 2009) and b) transcriptions of a formal end-of-program interview with each student. Secondary data included literacy course evaluations and syllabi from all program courses taken by students prior to certification. Data were analyzed inductively using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The three researchers individually open-coded the visioning papers and interviews.

We identified two dominant themes throughout the data sources. First, preservice teachers generally left this program familiar with the demands of teaching in today's classrooms. Following Erickson (2004), they understood "the fundamental, constitutive character of work being done in real time" (p. 166). Second, they made selective use of course content in the "novel combinations" they planned for their first year teaching. This second observation led us to return to the visioning papers and look closely for patterns of selective use of content, specifically around the topic of critical literacy given its deliberate focus in the program.

We undertook this second layer of analysis separately, independently coding visioning papers then meeting to discuss our analyses. We compared and contrasted our codes and notes related to how preservice teachers envisioned their first year teaching and the relationships of these visions to coursework and critical literacy.

As a result of this inductive analysis, we noticed an apparent separation between pedagogy and ideology seen in the visioning papers, which prompted us to undertake a close analysis of the additional data sources: program syllabi and informal literacy course evaluation feedback forms completed at the end of each semester. Across these data sources, the bricolage lens allowed us to articulate clear patterns in both how the preservice teachers defined their work as teachers and the tools they selected to pick up and use in their work. The course instructors and the course texts they selected tended to advocate for progressive pedagogical methods as optimal (i.e., education in which students learn collaboratively through purposeful experience with a strong focus on understanding and process; Dewey, 1938). Due to the critical ideological stance from which ~~they~~ faculty worked, they often but not always described and enacted critical emancipatory pedagogy in which knowledge and power relationships are examined and taken on (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). Course instructors also understood, though, that the rhetoric around teaching, including that which the teacher candidates encountered in their field-placements, tends to work from understandings of teaching as a transmissive process, particularly in the context of high-needs communities. In turn, course instructors openly recognized the need for teacher candidates to be able to share information with students through more direct means of teaching (e.g., lecture).

Findings

Defining the Work

In identifying the central purpose they were to address with their work, preservice teachers, on the whole, reflected understanding of the tremendous undertaking they would soon face as classroom teachers of record. As one representative student wrote, "[The responsibility] makes me feel a lot of pressure! I am nervous to be completely in charge of a classroom and to have the power to influence my students' views on literacy for the rest of their lives" (1778450). They took their work as teachers seriously and had appropriately ambitious goals for their students in which they worked to develop "active, thoughtful, proficient readers, writers, speakers, and listeners" (1803293).

Critical orientations

While these goals indicated understanding of school contexts, they did not tend to incorporate a critical ideological stance. Only one preservice teacher included critical literacy in ways recognized as reflective of course content:

> I want them to be critical readers. This means I do not want them to blindly believe everything they read, but to question everything: the author's motives and perspective, the information in the book, different sources of information, and how the content portrays people and events (evidence of bias). (1807474)

This preservice teacher, while asserting a critical stance toward student interaction with texts, did not engage at the level of taking action on behalf of social justice, making decisions similar to experienced teachers new to critical practice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). In her vision, she described progressive pedagogical methods (i.e., reader's and writer's workshops) to address reading and writing goals, but her proposed writing goals did not reflect the same critical ideological stance seen in the reading goals. The student continued:

> As far as the writing side of my program goes, I want my students to feel like authors. I want them to think about what they are writing about and the best ways to portray that information. I want them to understand different genres of writing and the forms and structures that go along with each type. I want them to feel free to experiment with different writing styles, whether it is working on a few, on many different ones, or putting styles together to see if a new style emerges. I want them to understand how to use formal writing conventions, but not be so overwhelmed by them that it stifles their writing. (1807474)

Endeavoring for students who take on the identity of writers through acting, thinking, and feeling as writers is indicative of progressive writing pedagogy. The ideological stance in the student's description is more difficult to discern: it could reflect a hegemonic and assimilationist perspective, a critical emancipatory viewpoint, or any number of positions on the continuum that could have these particular goals. This student's statement is representative of how many preservice teachers articulated their literacy-focused goals, easily identified with progressive education yet unconnected to a particular ideological perspective.

Progressive orientations

Though a few students took up traditional, transmissive instructional goals and the student described above planned to implement critical literacy to some extent, the vast majority of preservice teachers described goals that reflected a progressive orientation towards literacy instruction. For the most part, preservice teachers wanted their students to be fully engaged in meaningful work in ways that acknowledged the importance of affective factors. As one preservice teacher wrote:

> I believe all students are literate. I have many goals for my literacy program. First, I want to create strong readers and writers. I want to create an environment where my students feel safe stepping outside of their comfort zone and sharing what they have learned. I want my students to enjoy reading and writing. I want my students to be exposed to a variety of texts and writing styles. I want my students to be confident in their ability to read and write. (1808554)

Within the collective set of progressive goals expressed by students, some used the word critical to mean critical thinking. Others used the word ambiguously with no clear connection to hallmarks of critical literacy such as power or marginalized perspectives. For example, when one student writes, “My students will know themselves to be boldly authentic writers and intellectually critical readers of diverse texts” (1805380), it is not clear how the terms authentic or critical are being used. They did not define or contextualize the terms in ways that made a clear indication of intent or would be recognized as part of the critical literacy discourses from which we worked. It is possible (and we are hopeful) that these ambiguous statements could reflect a (small) approximation towards critical literacy practice (Mosley, 2010). Furthermore, because progressive pedagogy was not the norm in their field placements, we are cautiously optimistic about these visions, seeing them as an improvement on the status quo.

Tool Selection

Our analysis indicated that preservice teachers, like a *bricoleur* working with the tools at hand, took up content from their university courses and field placements in sophisticated ways, making fine-grained decisions about which elements of their teacher preparation work would serve them best within current education conditions. They made use of available information in ways that reflected the “fundamental, constitutive character of work being done in real time” (Erickson, 2004, p. 166). As they juxtaposed different learning models and instructional approaches, they perforce omitted other elements, as evidenced in what was included and left out of their visioning papers and interviews.

Taking into consideration the multiple, varied experiences within the teacher preparation program, their available toolkit for use was sizeable. Yet, some tools were more likely to be picked up than others. Two related categories predominated: curricular structures and a certain kind of course text.

Curricular structures

The curricular structures taken up by preservice teachers were those commonly associated with their expressed progressive goals. Dyson (1993) would likely consider these selected curricular structures permeable as they could easily allow children’s outside-of-school experiences and ways of talking to come inside the classroom for use in instructionally productive ways. Almost all preservice teachers included morning meetings and writer’s workshops in their visioning papers. Many included reader’s workshop and/or literacy centers. In order to fulfill their stated goals in addition to perceived competing obligations, preservice teachers often merged these curricular structures with components prevalent in the field placements. In the following example, a preservice teacher describes how she plans to implement the comprehension strategies discussed in the fall literacy class and one spring course text with the curriculum used in her field placement:

> During the mini-lesson, I will introduce and review making connections, making mental images, inferring, predicting, asking questions, taking notes and strategies to use when you get stuck on a word (and probably some other things as they come along). To keep myself and the students organized and focused on the purpose of the mini-lesson, I intend to use Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings. I have used this structure with America’s Choice and Buhrow & Garcia recommend it. I also find that it reminds me of skills/concepts to

> emphasize during Guided Reading and frames my questions for students during closing. (1797331)

According to the data, then, the structures had the potential for responsive, relational classroom experiences but were implemented with such variety that the novel combinations created fluctuated widely. At times, these tools were blended with other more traditional tools (e.g., state-provided textbooks, spelling tests, etc.). For example, in write-ups of writer's workshop, a few preservice teachers referred to both writing process and writing prompts. Or, in one description of literacy centers, a center had children alphabetizing words from a spelling list. So while the original intent of the curricular structure may have been progressive in nature, the way the structure was implemented was not entirely so. The curricular structures' malleability allowed for permeability, but also for rote learning.

Course texts

Mingling experiences from field and coursework to form their own individual plans, many preservice teachers incorporated distinct ways of thinking about literacy instruction that have not always been seen as complementary (Author, 2011b). These curricular structures were promoted in the other prevalent tool: course texts. Over the program of study, hundreds of articles and books were assigned for required reading with the preservice teacher cohort held accountable for much of the reading through written responses, in-class quizzes, and instructional demonstration in the field of an understanding of the reading content. Some of these texts promoted a particular ideological perspective such as the critical perspective taken up by Loewen (2007). Others were quite practical in nature, intended to serve as a how-to guide for implementing particular instructional methods (e.g., Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005). Still others were more explicitly theoretical in nature, but within practical contexts (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Johnston, 2004). A variety of ideological stances were represented in the course texts with encouragement to read all from a critical perspective.

Most of the program-level readings were not taken up in the visioning papers. No single article was included in more than three papers. Of the thirteen books and multiple articles assigned during the literacy courses alone, over half of the preservice teachers referenced six books in ways that indicated plans to use content: a) *Ladybugs, tornadoes, and swirling galaxies: English language learners discover their world through inquiry* by Buhrow and Garcia (Stenhouse), b) *Make it Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Texts* by Hoyt (Heinemann), c) *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* by Fountas and Pinnell (Heinemann), d) *Reading with meaning: Teaching comprehension in the primary grades* by Miller (Stenhouse), e) *Teaching with intention: Defining beliefs, aligning practice, taking action* by Miller, f) *Study Driven: A Framework for Planning Units of Study in the Writing Workshop* by Ray (Heinemann). Seventeen preservice teachers included an additional book assigned and discussed in their classroom management course, *The Morning Meeting* by Kriete (Northeast Foundation for Children). Most of the selected books promoted progressive methods but did not explicitly align with an ideological stance.

The books picked up as tools shared notable characteristics. First, all were published by three publishing divisions devoted to producing professional books for teachers. Heinemann and Stenhouse, each publishing three from the list, have histories of publishing books for teachers that are “warm, readable, practical” (Fletcher, 2010, p. 155). Reflective of teacher-focused missions, Heinemann’s catchphrase is “dedicated to teachers” (www.heinemann.com/) with Stenhouse holding “professional resources by teachers, for teachers” as a marketing tag (www.stenhouse.com/). The third, Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. is a not-for-profit founded by “public school educators who had a shared vision of bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day” (https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about-northeast-foundation-children).

These books elevate the practice of teaching, affirming the role of teacher as they contextualize practical methods within one or a small number of classrooms through thick description and numerous photographs. Five of the seven books also have accompanying video from which clips were shown and discussed in class, allowing for further clarity of what it might mean to apply the author’s vision to one’s own classroom. All but one of the seven was written by teachers or former teachers now working as educational consultants. As Ray (2006), one of the texts’ authors, has said about this genre:

> What would you call what I write exactly? I’ve always struggled with this. When laypeople find out I am a writer and ask what kind of writing I do, I always have trouble answering. I usually say, “I write professional books for teachers,” but the response I often get is, “Oh, you write textbooks.” And then I have to try and explain how they are not textbooks. But what are they, exactly? (p. 54-55)

In response to the course feedback question, “As you consider your development as a teacher, what aspects of these courses benefited you most?,” the books listed above were frequently included. Instructor modeling of pedagogical strategies and videos were also mentioned in response to this question with comments such as “The modeling of the chapter book read-aloud was great! The videos of Debbie Miller were also helpful in creating a vision for my classroom” (anonymous).

Ultimately, preservice teachers defined their work in ways that acknowledged the importance of the job of elementary teacher and described it in ways that reflected progressive orientations. As they planned, they picked up particular curricular structures and course texts to carry forward into the work. They did not always use the tools as originally intended, however.

Discussion

Preservice teachers develop within multiple worlds, each of which holds various competing discourses (Toll, Nierstheimer, Lenski, & Kollof, 2004). They apprentice with classroom teachers who are themselves navigating the competing demands of multiple stakeholders with varied educational visions (Florio-Ruane, 2012). University coursework is taught by different faculty members who assign multiple course texts, with each person and text comprising a distinct collection of ideological perspectives. Plus, preservice teachers bring their own histories and accompanying ideologies. Furthermore, as they develop, factors outside of teacher preparation continue to influence (Cowan & Mickleborough, 2009). The inconsistencies that come from the intersection of these competing yet overlapping ideologies would be perplexing for even the most perceptive educator. Yet preservice teachers can productively navigate the multiple expectations and constraints, making decisions that integrate different aspects of the polyphony

(Lampert, 1985; McElhone, Hebard, Scott, & Juel, 2009; Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008).

In this report of the degree to which preservice teachers adopted a critical literacy stance as they envisioned their future teaching, we used *bricolage* as a metaphor, finding it helpful to describe how they took up tools from an urban teacher preparation program and adapted them to meet the unique needs of their local contexts. In other words, they selected available resources from one of several spheres of influence and transformed their use to meet immediate needs.

Significance

We found both practical and theoretical scholarly significance from this research. On a broad scale, as teacher education faces increasing public scrutiny, it seems important that, rather than identifying individual programs or types of programs as effective or ineffective, educational researchers provide more nuanced information related to which program components are working well, which components could be better implemented, and most importantly, how the different components fit together.

In a related issue, it could be that preservice teachers' writings reflected their complex negotiations between university and larger, public discourses around contemporary education. As with all studies of preservice teachers, it is important to recognize that assignments turned in for grades have panoptic (Foucault, 1977/1995) effects in which students are aware that their performance impacts their grades. Rather than passive absence, it is possible that the small degree of explicit reference to ideological stances could indicate active resistance. Knowing their literacy instructor well after four courses with her, preservice teachers were familiar with her ideological perspective and how it related to pedagogical practices. Conflicting stances could easily have been intentionally masked.

While teacher educators face increasing pressure to prepare preservice teachers for current urban schools within large public school systems, we found that effective course content gave preservice teachers an opportunity to envision something different than what they saw in the field. While many of the more progressive literacy practices found in course readings could be seen in the envisioning papers, we knew that not all of the preservice teachers would see such practices in their classrooms. Nevertheless, it was evident that the course readings—particularly ones that offered extensive photos of progressive literacy educators at work in their classrooms—impacted their thinking about their future teaching. The level of contextualization provided by some writing styles and their accompanying videos allowed preservice teachers to envision themselves using the proposed content, even when, as in the case of the Miller books (2002; 2008) which described privileged students attending well-resourced suburban schools, their local contexts would vary considerably. These texts were tools selected to "make use."

But the other practical and scholarly significance we gleaned from this study was the need for a renewed valuing of becoming a teacher (Britzman, 2003) and repudiating of the assumption that teachers emerge from preparation programs as final, finished "products" of the educational enterprise, already experts in their field with little need for growth. One crucial point we were reminded of during this study was our own continual status as "becoming" educators, the constant need for reflection, revisiting, re-imagining, and redesigning. Rather than providing disappointments or opportunities to fault our students, this study offered an opportunity for us to examine our own practices and assumptions. By using this study as a site for self-critique, the first author has altered the literacy strand of the preparation program, adopting a course text that incorporates a critical literacy stance and is written in a style that elevates teaching, like those promoting the visions that came through clearly in the visioning papers. Such self-critique, coupled with a keen consideration of the academic tools available, allow all learners—including teacher educators—to act as bricoleurs to address pedagogical dilemmas and create something new.

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