Chapter 18
Critical Ways of Thinking and Learning:
Pre-Service Teachers' Exploration Through Text

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ABSTRACT

It is important for teacher preparation programs to develop 21st century skills, suggested by the Common Core State Standards as necessary for student success, with the pre-service teachers who will be expected to incorporate these skills into their pedagogy. This chapter traces the critical thinking tools practiced in two different pre-service teacher education courses. A commonality between the courses was the use of particular young adult literature novels to explore critical thinking with pre-service teachers. The authors first identify and explicate six critical ways of thinking and learning employed with pre-service teachers. Second, the authors frame critical thinking through the use of multiple narratives with pre-service teachers. All of the critical thinking tools described in the chapter are supported with examples and provide valuable suggestions for teacher preparation programs.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are expected to be able to teach 21st century skills upon entering the profession. These skills include: communication and collaboration; creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem solving; and information, media and technology (Johnson, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that pre-

service teachers practice 21st century skills, including critical literacy, in educator preparation programs in order to become more comfortable with these skills. The most profound enactment of 21st century skills combines critical literacy and critical thinking, which provided the impetus for this research. This chapter contributes to the body of knowledge concerning pre-service teachers experiencing critical ways of thinking and learning through their study of young adult literature.

BACKGROUND

Children's and young adult literature (YAL) in the United States disproportionately represents majoritized identities, implicitly sending the message that those identities have more value (Crisp, Knezek, Quinn, Bingham, Girardeau, & Starks, 2016; Koss, 2015; Short, 2018). For the purposes of this research, YAL is defined using Cart's (2008) explanation,

"Literature," which traditionally meant fiction, has also expanded to include new forms of literary – or narrative — nonfiction and new forms of poetry, including novels and book-length works of nonfiction in verse. The increasing importance of visual communication has begun to expand this definition to include the pictorial, as well, especially when offered in combination with text as in the case of picture books, comics, and graphic novels and nonfiction. (n.p.)

Although there has recently been an increase in the number of books featuring minoritized groups, underrepresentation still exists (Bulatowicz, 2017; CCBC, 2018; Short, 2018). This lack of representation negatively impacts readers (Short, 2018), including pre-service teachers. When readers encounter texts that authentically feature identities that differ from their own, they may form connections with the characters, increasing empathy and diminishing bias (Lifshitz, 2016; Short, 2018).

"Brooks and McNair (2009) point out that books reflecting the lives of children of color do more than represent a culture, they also can contest negative racial depictions in the media and invite discussions about social injustice" (Short, 2018, p. 293). When disproportionately few books published each year represent the lives of minoritized groups, or when a single story told about minoritized groups finds publication more readily, stereotypes may be reinforced rather than challenged (Adichie, 2009; Koss, 2015). Exposure to myriad diverse texts may provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to examine the lenses through which they view themselves and the world (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Hendrix-Soto & Wetzel, 2018; Shanahan & Dallacqua, 2018). The opportunity to encounter and critically analyze texts that function as mirrors, windows, and/or doors may affect their understanding of themselves and others, as well as shape literature selection in their future classrooms (Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014). Further, critical literacy as a pedagogical framework for reading diverse YAL can lead to transformative experiences for pre-service teachers (Hendrix-Soto & Wetzel, 2018; Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Shanahan & Dallacqua, 2018).

Although there are numerous definitions of critical literacy, overall it refers to the practice of querying texts and the world in which those texts exist (Hendrix-Soto & Wetzel, 2018; Shanahan & Dallacqua, 2018). Literature mirrors reality as well as shapes it (Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2016). Texts can be used to support or weaken the social constructs within which they are created and published; thus, no text is neutral in its production or its use (Hendrix-Soto & Wetzel, 2018; Shanahan & Dallacqua, 2018). Likewise, readers approach texts from a place of non-neutrality; readers' identities, experiences, and

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