

Chapter 22

Diverse Literature and Place-Based Education Through Study Abroad, Partnerships, and Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

As the reading lives of teachers are also connected to their reading instruction with their early childhood and elementary students, one emphasis of preservice literacy courses is to encourage future teachers to read and consider diverse texts and the emotional and empathetic connections with them. Through the development of an appreciation for diverse picture books and their value within classrooms, preservice teachers are more prepared to integrate these texts throughout the content areas. This chapter explores place-based education in a teacher preparation program and (1) defines and provides theoretical support for using place-based education to prepare preservice teachers to instruct with children's literature; (2) discusses five ways the authors engage preservice teachers in place-based education: Children's Literary Tour of London and Paris (study abroad), Children's Book Festival Collaboration, Family Literacy Nights, Partnerships with Librarians, and Instagram Challenges; and (3) discusses each of these research-informed experiences and shares examples.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is one of the first courses that often gets eliminated from teacher preparation programs striving to condense their programs, with fewer programs in the United States still teaching one course devoted to this topic (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] 2018). Many faculty

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and administrators claim that children's literature can be integrated into other courses and may not be robust enough to stand alone as one course in the limited 120 credit hour degree plan. While decisions about reducing course credit requirements are often difficult, one argument for maintaining children's literature as a course is to highlight the value of children's literature in understanding the social, political, developmental, and economic impacts on society and teaching. These lessons should be part of any teacher preparation program and can better prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) for early childhood and elementary (P-6) instruction.

If traditional children's literature courses are dwindling in their pervasiveness, diverse children's literature courses are also on the decline. Unlike traditional children's literature courses, diverse children's literature courses provide PSTs with books from a range of cultures, identities, and lived experiences that more closely mirror the lives of their early childhood and elementary (EC/ELE) students than traditional works (Bishop, 1990; Crisp et al., 2016). As the diversity of the student population increases as well as society's acknowledgment of that diversity, so should the books presented to young children. Rather than focusing on books that only depict one perspective, educators are being prepared to engage young readers with inclusive, diverse perspectives.

Despite classrooms today being more diverse than they have ever been, the demographics of elementary teachers remains largely the same, mostly female and mostly White (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2016). Since most PST preparation programs are largely teaching a demographic of PSTs with differing backgrounds than the EC/ELE students they will teach, it is imperative that future educators are trained in culturally responsive pedagogies (Savage et al., 2011). In elementary classrooms, these practices should include integrating diverse children's literature across the curriculum as an essential component of the EC/ELE experience and through place-based connections (Szabo & Golden, 2016). One way of implementing these practices is through the creation of anti-racist and equitable spaces that include diverse classroom libraries encompassing vast, diverse examples of cultural representation (Bishop, 1990; Boyd et al., 2015).

Literacy scholars advocate for including a variety of literature in any teacher preparation course, and especially children's literature courses. The authors also argue that reading and studying these texts is not enough to help PSTs better understand how to instruct and how to develop their literacy skills. To truly understand this wealth of knowledge, PSTs need experiences and opportunities to engage with diverse children's literature in authentic settings with others. In fact, literature often develops more than just literacy skills, such as fostering empathy, social-emotional intelligence, content knowledge specific to disciplines outside of literacy, and cultural knowledge of an increasingly globalized society.

As the reading lives of teachers are also connected to their reading instruction with their EC/ELE students (Kozak & Martin-Chang, 2019), one emphasis of preservice literacy courses is to encourage PSTs to read and consider diverse texts and the emotional and empathetic connections with them (Lombardi, 2019) while deepening their understanding of human interactions (Oatley, 2011). In connecting comprehension, community, and perspectivity through experiences (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1980), this aids PSTs and their own teaching of future EC/ELE students in recreating these practices. With exposure to the many areas of diversity in children's literature available and through training in acquiring, reviewing, and implementing lessons using this literature, pre-service teachers are more prepared to serve the diverse EC/ELE students of their future classrooms. Through the development of an appreciation for diverse picture books and their value within classrooms, PSTs are more prepared to integrate these texts throughout the content areas (Serafini, 2011; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2013).

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