

Chapter 5

Staying Connected—Rooting Literacy Courses in Current Topics and Relevant Teaching Practices

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ABSTRACT

There is often a disconnect between what students learn in a university setting and what they will experience as in-service teachers. Literacy is commonly seen as the heart of all knowledge and is usually the core of educator preparation programs. This chapter describes several strategies and tools which education preparation programs can use to keep their literacy course content connected to current issues and instructional trends. The contents of this chapter will be rooted in relevance and engagement as well as provide ways to enhance instruction and prepare preservice educators for the future of literacy instruction.

INTRODUCTION

There is often a disconnect between what students learn in a university setting and what they will experience as in-service teachers. Literacy is commonly seen as the heart of all knowledge and is usually the core of educator preparation programs. This chapter describes several strategies and tools in which education preparation programs can use to keep their literacy course content *connected* to current issues and instructional trends. The contents of this chapter will be rooted in relevance and engagement

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8725-6.ch005

(Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Cambria & Guthrie, 2010) as well as provide ways to enhance instruction and prepare preservice educators for the future of literacy instruction.

Moving from the learning of theories to actual implementation (Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009; Fiszer, 2004) and practice is a key milestone for preservice educators. This chapter will provide descriptions of suggested practices that could be implemented in educator preparation program literacy courses. Additionally, it will cover the following topics: integrating technology, understanding significant and current topics, using literature circles and conversations in lessons, and the importance of critical literacy social justice literature. From enduring a pandemic, to being twenty years into the 21st century, current education programs should be reimaged to engage and equip pre-service teachers to be innovative, resourceful, and effective.

This chapter will seek to:

- Incorporate critical literacy within literature circles to explore and reflect on social justice topics and literature.
- Provide updates to curriculum and course delivery through technology integration.
- Enhance courses by getting students to seek and explore “hot” or current literacy topics.

The relevant connections and exposure to growth opportunities that are modeled within educator preparation programs, have an impact on teacher candidates, and set them up to be reflective and effective teachers.

BACKGROUND

The educator preparation program in which pre-service teachers receive their training is one that can leave a lasting impact on their classrooms throughout their career (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006). From the philosophies that are presented, the models of teaching that are shared and the style in which the pre-service teacher is exposed to influences their own philosophies.

Typically, educator preparation programs have focuses on their college or department’s mission or frameworks. In most programs, although students are required to complete general education requirements, depending on the program, a variety of core subject courses are required for completion. Within those courses, literacy is usually in the forefront--as literacy is commonly a foundational subject for all other subjects. Because literacy education is such an integral part of educational preparation programs, the instruction and ideas presented to pre-service teachers must be current, connected, innovative, flexible, and effective.

Educator preparation programs will greatly benefit from embedding technology tools and resources in their literacy courses to prepare pre-service educators to be innovative and prepared for the level of engagement needed to effectively reach and meet the needs of their students. In preparation for the future, teacher candidates will benefit from having more exposure to lessons, resources, and strategies that will help them with online and virtual learning knowledge of digital literacies (Hagood, 2012), and how they can facilitate the use of such sources with their own students (Hicks & Turner, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2018).

Students in K-12 settings often have the exposure and access to digital literacy tools, but their academic learning does not always connect with their learning and usage outside of a school setting (Him-

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