

Chapter 16

“Gotta Love Technology!”: Pre-Service Teachers’ Transformation in a Blended Online Multicultural Literature Course

Mary Ellen Oslick

University of Central Arkansas, USA

Ruth M. Lowery

University of Florida, USA

ABSTRACT

As universities move more and more classes online to accommodate a growing online-centered learning environment, the researchers as instructors want to be sure that they still adhere to good teaching and learning strategies and that their pre-service teachers not miss out or lose the richness associated with lively and meaningful book discussions. This article examines how the researchers integrated Glogster, an online interactive poster creation website with social networking aspects, in a blended (online and face-to-face) multicultural literature course to augment book discussions. Upon analysis of personal reflections and the class’ online forum discussions, the researchers identified three major themes that captured how these pre-service teachers responded to, and, in some cases, were transformed by the reader-response transaction of creating a “glog.” These themes were responses to new technology, reading new ideas and critical reading.

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural literature should be a part of the regular literacy curriculum. I don’t think technology needs to be included...it is in everything else already.

I agree children should not go through school without being able to see others like themselves positively portrayed in books used in their classes but I’m not sure how you can, or even why we should, use technology to do that.

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“Gotta Love Technology!”

I teach multicultural children’s literature...How can I really integrate technology in a literature discussion? I want to see and hear my students talk about the books they read...I don’t think they will really read if I have them conduct discussions on the Internet...I don’t even know how those things really work.

As teachers of multicultural children’s literature courses, the quotes above are only a sample of the responses we received when other literacy instructors were queried about whether they integrated technology into their literature classes. We wanted to “learn” the “best practices” for technology integration as we sought to move a traditional face-to-face multicultural children’s literature course to an online blended platform. One worry was that the nature of having grand conversations about children’s books might be compromised if students were not all in one place, reviewing the stacks of books each student selected and would bring in for weekly discussions. We wondered how we could ensure that pre-service teachers were truly prepared to integrate multicultural literature in their future classrooms if they were not there to “see” the books students selected to read about diverse cultures.

As universities move more and more classes online to accommodate a growing online-centered learning environment, instructors want to be sure that they still adhere to good teaching and learning strategies and that pre-service teachers not miss out or lose the richness associated with lively and meaningful book conversations (Allington, 2012). Bitner and Bitner (2002) determined that as technology has become a major force in educational settings, teachers across the nation are still struggling with how best to integrate new technologies (e.g., Web 2.0, interactive websites, apps on mobile devices, and SMARTBoards) in their curriculum. New technologies are currently emerging at such a rapid pace; many teachers quickly feel overwhelmed and may be afraid to try new approaches. Malloy and Gambrell (2006)

further determined that as primary classrooms become even more exposed to new technologies, astute teachers will try to discover appropriate ways to use these tools to enhance their classroom instruction in ways that engage their students and prepare them for what is yet to be.

According to Leu, Castek, Henry, Coiro, and McMullan (2004), “As we integrate multicultural and other types of literature in with our classroom programs we should be aware of resources and strategies we might use.... The Internet provides new and even more powerful opportunities in this area than multicultural literature alone” (p. 501). We knew we were committed to integrating technology in our traditionally face-to-face multicultural children’s literature course; however, we specifically wanted to see how we could use new technologies to implement online book discussions. We also wanted to see how this integration would affect our students, the responses to the books they read, and whether technological integration would help them as our class moved to transformative thinking about diverse populations in the United States. In the remainder of this article, we share how we integrated “Glogster,” an online interactive poster creation website with social networking aspects, in a blended multicultural children’s literature course to augment book discussions.

Beyond the Book Report: Integrating Glogster

A current challenge for many teacher educators is that we are unfamiliar with new technologies, and thus we do not use new technologies in our classes. We do a disservice to pre-service teachers when we do not model how to implement new technologies in their future classrooms. Pope, Hare, and Howard (2002) posited that there is a difference between what pre-service teachers are taught and what they are actually expected to know about technology integration. It is important that pre-service teachers learn how to

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