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Teachers as Readers? Readers as Teachers? An Analysis of Readers' (and Nonreaders') Performance in Literacy Courses

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“It’s almost impossible to catch a cold from someone who doesn’t have one. And it’s almost impossible for a child to catch the love of reading from a teacher who doesn’t have it.” Jim Trelease, 2006

Objectives

We are literacy professors at three universities in a high-stakes testing state. Our students are preservice and inservice teachers enrolled in graduate programs who take a variety of literacy courses. As avid readers ourselves, we seek to instill the love of reading in our students, a process that we conduct both directly through course assignments and activities, and indirectly through discussions and informal conversations. We share books, facilitate book clubs, engage in read alouds, and assign activities such as book bags to foster literacy between school and home. We encourage our students to read not only for course-related instructional purposes, but for personal and professional reasons as well. We hope that sharing our joy of reading with students will inspire them to incorporate good children’s literature in their classrooms and to become positive role models for reading beyond curriculum mandates. We feel that this is critically important as we discovered that not all of our students who currently teach, or will teach reading

in the future actually like to read. While some openly discuss their love of literature, their favorite authors and genres, and eagerly share what they are reading, or recall their own pleasant interactions with books as children, some admit that they do not read except under duress, nor do they care to read. Interestingly, these prospective and practicing teachers who don't like reading still want their own students to enjoy reading, and to engage in recreational reading. They see no problem with the contradiction between their own reading habits and those they hope to foster in their students.

Through our casual observations over several semesters, we noticed that the majority of our students complete all assignments with passing grades, but those who do enjoy reading and who read frequently are most often the students who read beyond the assigned chapters in the textbook, and appear to “get it” more than their non-reading colleagues. That is, these students appear more engaged in class activities and “go the extra mile” on course assignments. This phenomenon is reported in the research on effective teachers (McCool & Gespeass, 2009; Hall, 2009) and spurred our interest in the connection between teachers' reading habits and their performance in literacy methods courses. The question that guides this study, then, is what is the relationship between the reading behaviors of our students and the quality of their assignments?

Perspectives

Our student population has experienced the reading process from two major perspectives. The first group, the preservice teachers (primarily undergraduates) have progressed through schools influenced by the findings of the National Reading Panel and NCLB. They are well experienced in taking standardized tests and are often products of either a scripted curriculum or one that emphasized test preparation over authentic reading and writing. According to informal surveys and conversations we've had with them, they have not been widely exposed to quality children's literature within their elementary school years, and are unfamiliar with classic literature and many genres. For example, when prompted in a class activity many students were unable to retell a fairy tale, could not name a favorite children's book, or explain the qualities of poetry versus prose.

The in-service teachers, primarily graduate students, have had the experience of being on the other side of the desk and have had years of practice administering high-stakes tests and being subjected to the sticks and carrots of the accountability movement. That is, they have been rewarded (sometimes monetarily) for high test scores but threatened with school closings, teacher transfers and elimination of funding if children's test scores do not meet the expectations of the district. These students are more familiar with quality children's literature including a variety of genres and authors, but have not been encouraged to incorporate this medium in their classrooms (Author). Specifically, many report being pressured to eliminate silent sustained reading time, teacher read alouds, or “fun” activities like Reader's Theatre in order to have more time for test preparation.

This outcome is not surprising given that teachers have reported less interest in reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Dreher, 2003, Mour, 1997), and that teachers have been reluctant to stray from a prescribed curriculum (Author; MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen & Palma, 2004). However, when teachers have been presented with high quality children's literature, they

were enchanted with the stories and illustrations and delighted with prospects for instruction (Author). Further, research indicates that teachers who are readers are better instructors (Benevides & Peterson, 2010; McKool & Gespass, 2009). In an ongoing exploration of our attempts to create “reading teachers who really read,” we began with this study, which examined the connection between the readers (and non readers) and their performance in our literacy courses.

Methods

For the purposes of this study we utilized qualitative methods. As we are three university professors at three separate institutions in the same high-stakes testing state, we designed our study within the context of a collective case study (Strake, 2000). Using this framework we discuss our classroom experiences, including the structure of our courses, assignments, and other relevant information. Reflective Ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) was utilized to provide an overarching systematic method for analyzing the data. Specifically, we examined our teaching lives, and although all courses were under similar certification requirements, they differed according to the level (graduate, undergraduate) and course content (introduction to reading, struggling readers, and supervision). We documented our conversations, emails, and meetings through researcher notebooks and shared our responses. We also examined the artifacts of our courses including syllabi, websites, and projects following the guidelines established by Patton (2002). We carefully reviewed student assignments and comments posted on discussion boards, other online activities, and response journals. In addition, we reflected on face-to-face class sessions and conversations that we had with our students. We compared these artifacts with the statistics of each course, including final grades. We now discuss our specific cases.

First Author’s Story (Deborah Harris)

For the purposes of this study, I focused on the first literacy course required in my university’s graduate reading program. This methods course provides an overview of reading development from preschool through high school, and focuses heavily on materials and strategies for teaching reading at different grade levels. Besides increasing students’ knowledge of and skills in teaching reading, I see this first course as also developing the *dispositions* of an excellent reading teacher, which includes having a passion for reading, being a good reading model and a demonstrating a commitment to foster a love of reading in children. I added this component to the class as a result of hearing an increasing number of student comments like “all that matters anymore in schools is making sure kids pass the reading exam.”

In past semesters, students in this class tended to be primarily very experienced teachers. This semester, however, of the 60% who were full-time teachers, half of those were novices in their first or second year. The other 40% of the class was made up of students who had just completed a bachelor’s degree (only half in education), and, because of the tight job market, were going straight through for a master’s degree. In advising conversations with many of them prior to the beginning of class, I learned that most were working full time (if not as teachers then in another capacity), establishing or raising families, and taking multiple classes. They all had very demanding schedules and were juggling multiple responsibilities.

I did an initial survey with the class, asking them to describe themselves as readers, (including their reading habits and interests). Roughly one-third identified themselves as voracious or avid readers, one-third claimed to love/like reading but not have time to do it (other than assigned reading for classes), and the final third wrote that they didn't like reading and rarely did it unless required. Tina's comment is typical of students in this category: "I guess I wish I had time to read, but I don't really miss it. I never was much of a big reader."

Based on students' comments, I felt I needed to embed a variety of reading experiences into the class time itself, and to provide easy access to a variety of reading materials in order to increase the amount of reading students did in and outside of class. Toward this end, I employed the following strategies:

The Professional Lending Library.

The PLL was a rolling cart that I stocked with a variety of about 50 professional materials—journals, like *Reading Teacher* and *Language Arts*, and books that included Teacher Narratives (such as Vivian Paley's *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Torey Hayden's *Somebody Else's Kids*, and Phillip Done's *32 Third Graders and One Class Bunny*); Professional Trade Books (such as Debbie Miller's *Reading With Meaning*, Kathy Collins' *Growing Readers*, and Lucy Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Reading*), "Inspirational" Books (such as Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer*, and Jonathan Kozol's *The Shame of the Nation*), and other trade books which I called "Ideas You Can Use Right Now," (such as Tim Rasinski's *The Fluent Reader*, and Patricia Cunningham's *Phonics They Use*).

I rolled the cart in to class each day, and six times over the semester, students had to select a book, read a chapter, and post a summary/response to it on BlackBoard for other students to read. Students had choices about which books to select, which chapters to read, when they wanted to read, and how they wanted to structure their response.

All of the students liked the easy access to books, and appreciated the element of choice that was built in to the assignment. Many ended up buying some of the titles they had seen on the cart. Everyone completed the task and received full or almost full credit for the task, but I did note that the students who described themselves as avid readers approached the assignment differently than the students who were reluctant or infrequent readers.

First of all, the avid readers spent much more time than the other students looking at the books on the cart, reading the table of contents page, the back of the books, or skimming chapters. They would come up to the cart before class started, stay during the break, or linger after class to look through the books, making comments to me or to the other lingerers about certain books. They often asked to take home more than one book at once, and typically read much more than the required six chapters. They viewed the PLL as an opportunity rather than as an assignment. The less than avid readers were more likely to select a book quickly, often based on the title alone, the length of the chapters, or another student's recommendation. The written responses produced by the avid readers were generally longer and more insightful than those done by the less avid readers, regardless of the student's level of teaching experience. I encouraged the students to bring in and share quotes from the books during the 5-minute "Lines

we Love” activity I did each class session. These were posted on a bulletin board, and was strictly a voluntary activity, with no grade attached to it. Initially, the avid readers were more likely to have brought in a quote to post, and had longer explanations about what that quote meant to them and why they felt the author’s words were important.

Teacher Read Alouds.

Each semester, in addition to the picture books I read to students, I select a novel and read a chapter each session. This activity exposes students to award-winning novels and helps establish a sense of community as we laugh, cry, and share thoughts about a common book. For the graduate students, their immediate response upon seeing or hearing a children’s book is to consider how they would use it in the classroom. I try with the read alouds to have them first respond efferently, to see that they can engage in natural conversation about a book without a teacher launching directly into question mode (i.e., “What was the author’s purpose in writing this book?” or “What is the problem in the story?”) Students rush to class so as not to miss hearing books like *Because of Winn Dixie*, *All of the Above*, *Esperanza Rising*, or in this case, Karen Hesse’s *Just Juice*, a touching story of a young girl who struggles to learn to read. If a student missed class, they often emailed me or other students to find out what happened in the chapter that was read, or even went out and buy the book so they could read that chapter. Student comments during class (“I looked forward to this all day!), and responses on their final survey (“I never cried about a book before, but when you read us *Love that Dog* and you were crying and everybody in the class was crying, I was crying too. Now I see what you kept telling us about the power of children’s lit”), indicated that the read alouds were powerful. For the students who had described themselves as non-readers, this was the activity that I felt most contributed to their growing interest in reading. They would come up and ask if I could suggest more books like the one read, or asked if the author had written other books.

In reviewing my field notes, I noted that the avid readers, at least initially, had an easier time “just talking” about the book than the non-readers. As I’d close the chapter and wait for someone to share a response or make a comment, the avid readers were typically the first to talk, ask a question, or to initiate a topic for the group to take up. They more easily made connections between the book and other books or their own feelings and experiences. They had a wider range of responses, talking about the characters, the events in the story, the author’s language, the images they saw while listening. The less experienced readers tended to have simpler responses, focused on a part they liked, or what they thought might happen next.

What-We’re Reading-Now.

At each class session, I asked one or two students to bring in and share very briefly with the class whatever materials they had currently read, were reading now, or were on their bedside tables about to be read, a kind of an adult level “blessing” of the books (Gambrell, 1996). Students signed up to share, and in all cases but one (who “just wanted to get it over with”), the students who signed up first were the most avid readers, judging by the sheer number of materials that they brought in, the enthusiasm with which they shared, and the fact that I had to stop them from talking over their allotted time. The teachers and teacher candidates who liked reading brought in a wide range of things—magazines on all kinds of topics, newspapers,

cookbooks, novels, informational text, children's books—sometimes even needing wheeled suitcases to bring in their materials. As the semester went on and the less enthusiastic readers began sharing, they not only had fewer materials, but they had less to say about the books they did read. Still, the conversation that resulted from this sharing was valuable for all, readers and non-readers both, as they learned more about one another as people, about their hobbies, talents, and interests. They found common ground with people they might not otherwise have talked to (e.g., “Oh I read one that too & loved it), and started exchanging books and magazines. One student wrote on her final survey: “My favorite thing was when we got time to hear about what each other was reading and to swap books with each other. I actually became friends with Michelle after she told us about those Griffin books and let me borrow hers.”

Second Author's Story (Linda Serro)

I have always believed that wide reading makes one a more reflective and creative thinker. Everything I read about topics such as literacy, motivation, learning, and creativity lead me to connections and new knowledge about my work with teachers and students. I wanted my graduate students to have the same exposure to interesting ideas beyond their textbook and journal articles. I wanted them to experience ideas from thinkers such as Miller (2009) and Pink (2009). I wanted them to read from other fields and from reflective pieces on teaching while giving them choice in what they read and how it related to their professional lives. I also wanted them to taste just a little bit of many books. Therefore I often read aloud examples of good children's literature. A favorite and admired children's author, Patricia Polacco discusses the topic of struggling readers in several of her books. I read *The Bee Tree* (1998) which centers upon a young reader who is frustrated and bored by the experience until her grandfather helps her to make the connection between work and the sweet reward. Chasing a bee to find the hive (and consequently honey) became a lesson for the young reader who then realized that some things do not always come easily. Her grandfather reinforces this notion by spooning some honey on the book so that she could savor the sweetness. Responses to this book spill into the coursework as students are reminded that for many of their young students, reading is a difficult process. I then continue the importance of a good and dedicated teacher in her work, *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. (Pollacco, 2001).

In addition to sharing examples of high quality children's literature, I emphasize the importance of professional books to supplement the information provided in the selected textbooks. I have used Literacy Bags with many classes but for this study, I focused on two graduate classes in reading: Assessment in Literacy (17 students) and Instruction for Struggling Readers (15 students). I selected books that related to the course content in some way, even if it would require analysis and synthesis on the part of the student to find the connection (see Table 1 for selected book titles). The assignment was completed weekly for approximately 8 weeks and accounted for 5% of their final grade in the course. The literacy bags were colorful canvas bags that included a book and journal. Students chose a new literacy bag each week and were required to read one chapter from the book and reflect on that chapter in a journal.

Table 1

Selected Book Titles for Graduate Courses for Teaching Struggling Readers

- Afflerbach, P. (Ed.). (2010). *Essential readings on assessment*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Allington, R. (2009). *What really matters in response to intervention*. Boston: Pearson.
- Burkins, J. & Croft, M. (2010). *Preventing misguided reading*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- England, C. (2004). *Uphill both ways: Helping students who struggle in school* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. & Vaughn, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Response to intervention: A framework for reading educators*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Layne, S. (2009). *Igniting a passion for reading*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Miller, D. (2009). *The book whisperer*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, P. & Keier, K. (2010). *Catching readers before they fall*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Walpole, S. & McKenna, M. (2007). *Differentiated reading instruction*. New York: Guilford.
- Wisniewski, R., Padak, N. & Rasinski, T. (2011). *Evidence-based instruction in reading*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Wolff, D. (2009). *How Lincoln learned to read*. New York: Bloomsbury USA.
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Before they wrote their response, they read the reflection by the previous student and wrote a rejoinder to that student. Some of the journals covered several semesters and different classes so the current students had an opportunity to read responses from different perspectives. Each entry was signed and dated. At the beginning of class each week, students shared one or two insights they had gotten from the reading and reflection. At the end of the semester, students had the opportunity to re-read journals and see what responses had been written to them. This would often spark a reflective discussion about insights and connections to the books. As the final assignment, students were asked to reflect upon the literacy bag experience and evaluate its value to their teaching and professional growth.

I noticed that the self-identified readers would often read more than one chapter, sometimes finishing the whole book in a week. They would add titles to their “wish list” to purchase at a future date. Readers would make more connections between the course text and content and the book bag chapters. They would also make connections among the books in the literacy bags. In general, readers were more reflective in their written responses and sharing in class.

All of the comments by students at the end of the semester were positive except for two students out of the 22 reviewed. It should be noted that these two students were new teachers with less than one year of experience as a paid professionals. For all students, there was a minimum impact on final course grades. I analyzed the data (class discussions, field notes, and end-of-semester surveys) and noted the emergence of the following themes:

Joy of discovery.

Students reported that they enjoyed the exposure to a variety of new books as well as revisiting “old friends.” Many commented upon the fact that they were so busy in their teaching lives that they were not familiar with the newer titles. Through the book bag project, students were able to sample a new book each week and through sharing, were exposed to many more examples of high quality children’s literature.

Enthusiasm of selection.

Students discussed how difficult it was to select books from the vast number of books published each year. The journal provided in the book bag contained entries by students over several semesters, providing reviews by local colleagues. Students found these reviews quite helpful as they planned for instruction in their own classrooms. Additionally, they particularly enjoyed the sharing sessions where other students gave a brief oral report of the book that they selected for the week.

Freedom of choice.

Students were invited to select a different book bag each week, allowing them choice. They delighted in this opportunity as they often expressed their frustrations with the scripted curriculum that they were forced to use in their own classrooms. Several remarked that they would employ this strategy with their students, particularly struggling readers who often are bored with predictable texts.

Students also commented on the value of this course activity. The majority made positive statements about the sense of classroom community that stemmed from the book shares. This community context also provided a vehicle for the exploration of new ideas. Here students discussed ways in which books may be utilized in the classroom, especially in assessment and remediation of reading difficulties. Their responses, both oral and written, made connections between the children’s book and the content of the course. This process did encourage the readers in the course to read more than the one chapter requirement. Two students, however, opted to read only what was required and reported frustration with the assignment and saw no value to it. One responded with the comment, “I like to read the first chapter before reading the book.”

I believe that the book bag project helped me to meet my goals. Students saw value and enjoyed the exposures to many authors and texts. Further, they were able to apply the ideas to their professional lives. Like Tricia in *The Bee Tree* they walked away with the sweet taste of honey. “The honey is sweet, and so is knowledge, but knowledge is like the bee who made the honey, it has to be chased through the pages of a book!”

Third Author’s Story (Nancy L. Williams)

I have always incorporated children’s literature in my classroom as a first and third grade teacher, included them in professional development as an elementary school supervisor, and showcased them in my university courses. For the purposes of this study, I focus on a graduate course required for a masters degree in reading education. This course is one of the capstone experiences in the program and provides an overview of administration and supervision of reading programs. The content of the course emphasizes the leadership role of the reading professional, including coaching and professional development. Among course requirements was participation in a book club. Students were invited to self-select one of five books with instructions to read, reflect, and to make connections to their personal and professional lives. The book clubs met each class session, either in a face-to-face or online format. The books (as noted in Table 2) were selected because they presented unique challenges to teachers in general, and to literacy leaders in particular, and evoked stimulating conversations. All books focused upon excellent teaching in response to mandated (and often), scripted curriculum within the context of high-stakes testing.

Table 2

Books selected for Book Club Participation

Title	Author	Publisher/Year	Summary
<i>Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it</i>	Kelly Gallagher	Stenhouse, 2009	The author makes the case for providing authentic reading opportunities for students in this age of testing.
<i>Why school? Reclaiming education for all of us</i>	Mike Rose	The New Press, 2009	The author provides insights and practical, authentic applications that offer alternatives to a high-stakes testing context.
<i>Possible lives: The promise of public education in America</i>	Mike Rose	Houghton Mifflin, 1995	The author showcases exceptional teachers and their students throughout the USA
<i>The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life</i>	Parker J. Palmer	Jossey-Bass, 2007	The author documents heroic teaching practices in what he calls a “toxic environment.”
<i>Holding on to good ideas in a time of bad ones: Six literacy principles worth fighting for</i>	Thomas Newkirk	Heinemann, 2009	The author provides alternative instructional practices in response to what he labels “the curse of graphite” in a high-stakes testing environment.

Thirty students were enrolled in this class and all were seeking reading certification. 83% were elementary-focused, with the remaining 17% at the middle or high school level. Most had some teaching experience but several (27%) entered graduate school immediately upon completing an undergraduate degree in education and had limited experiences in schools. As the advisor to the reading program and as an instructor of prior courses, I had the benefit of knowing all of the students in this class and was familiar with their prior academic behaviors (including their self-identification as readers).

Prior to the beginning of the course, I posted information about the books online via BlackBoard and invited students to email me with their preference. I found it interesting that the readers were the first to respond and offer their choices; however, the book clubs tended to be balanced between readers and non-readers, and experienced and novice teachers. The students obtained the books in a variety of ways (which in itself was an interesting finding). Most did purchase the book but several opted to borrow it from the library. During the face-to-face class sessions, students were required to bring their book along with notes and/or other means to participate in the book club. Most (with the exception of students who had library copies) highlighted text and had “sticky notes” which prompted them of things that they wished to share with the group. The non-readers quickly completed discussions and did not make deep connections between the content of the course and the content of the book. The readers, on the other hand, tended to have much to say about what they had read and how it connected to their professional and personal lives in addition to course content. This practice continued in the written online responses. Non-readers were brief in comments, and tended to summarize what was read. Readers made lengthy comments that connected to their personal and professional lives. As I examined these comments, reviewed field notes and my reflections, I coded and categorized their responses into three themes: *Community*, *High-Stakes Testing*, and *Making Changes*.

Community

Students enjoyed meeting weekly in their book club and made strong connections between the text, and their personal and professional lives. One student captured this concept by stating:

I have enjoyed the Book Club experience and have appreciated the opportunity to gather around this book with a wonderful group of fellow students. We have shared our joys and frustrations as we have looked for ways to connect with Dr. Palmer’s message and have learned to respect our differences and celebrate our common commitment to teaching with excellence.

Another student voiced her opinion about the power of community and the importance of reaching out beyond establishing a classroom community for your students.

I believe that some of the most profound things that I read were about creating a community not just within your classroom, but, with all other educators. It is so easy to forget that teaching is a profession that is isolated. It is a profession of collaboration.

Finally, one student opted to use this forum to make a public apology for her (perceived) misbehavior.

Hey everyone...I don't know if you all will be checking this since we are done with our book but I just wanted to say Thank you to listening to me for the last few weeks. I know that I was a "Debbie Downer" at times and complained a lot.

High-Stakes Testing.

Students had a lot to say regarding this topic, particularly as most of the books addressed it and offered alternative teaching practices. The more experienced teachers bemoaned the practice of the administration of so many standardized tests, along with the consequences of failure. One student commented.

My old principal used to try to treat TEST as a bad four letter word that we should not utter until a few weeks before the test, but the reality is that we we're measured as a school, teachers and intelligence of our students based on the high stakes tests. I think we need to figure out a new system to evaluate the learning and teaching occurring in the classroom as well as the student achievement. There needs to be a way to combine all aspects of the classroom environment and not solely rely on a single test given at a single moment in time.

Interestingly, the students did not dwell on this topic. They were clearly frustrated about the process but after an initial verbal “purge” they began to focus on how things can be improved and the changes that they would make in their own classrooms.

Making Changes.

The students were invited to share how the reading and sharing of these texts through the book club influenced them. The comments were overwhelmingly positive and full of hope, and anticipation of continued community.

...there is hope for literacy education in the future if enough people decide and believe change is possible.

I know with my personality, resistance does not energize me, but change does. I like change; however, I know I need support to help me go through the process.

...what we can offer to one another are of inestimable value. I trust that we can continue this relationship during the coming weeks and months as we anticipate the beginning of a new school year, with its unique collection of opportunities and challenges.

...after reading the book and getting everything out I am ready and excited to start the new school year. Hopefully my class will be a little less boring and lot less quite, but I just wanted to say thanks for helping me through it!

One student (who is an avid reader and outstanding student) commented about her teaching practices.

This chapter made me reflect about my own independent reading time in my classroom and the one on one reading conferences I have with my students. When I first started doing these conferences three years ago, I stressed to the kids to come with a few "sticky notes" to share. Well, the students did attempt to do this, but complained to me that when they are reading they want to read and not stop and write down on a sticky note any comprehension breakdowns or any connections. So I stopped asking them to use sticky notes. The result has been very successful. Our conferences are lively discussions about the books they are reading. The IR time is the one part of the Reader's Workshop that I refuse to give up. My students enjoy this time and I have to give a 5-minute warning so they can come to a stopping point.

This same student summed up her experience with reading and sharing within the book club with this eloquent statement.

We need to point out that as our job gets harder with the addition of extra curricula, we have to remember that teaching and learning is not all about the testing as many of our administrations and politicians enforce. It is about the small, everyday miracles of learning and discovery. Educational value can and should still be found in a group of children pouring over books together, partners talking out a resolution to a conflict, or students helping each other water the classroom plants. It is about teaching students that it is okay to wonder and marvel, and not about how many problems they can compute in a minute. As the world of high-stakes testing continues to forge ahead, we have to be vigilant about creating a generation of children who are still in love with learning despite the drill-and-practice, regurgitation model that is happening as schools prepare students' for these exams. If we're going to critique public education, we have to provide alternative measures so that education does not become equated with mundane tasks.

I was impressed with the process of the book club. Students quickly bonded and were eager to share their thoughts about the world of high-stakes testing, and possible alternative teaching practices. Through reading these professional texts, the students were able to make connections to the content of the course and to their personal and professional lives. Again, the readers were more thoughtful in their comments, made more frequent responses (responding to their colleagues online) and wrote longer responses. They were eager to return to their classrooms and make changes.

Our Collective Points of View

We analyzed the collective findings of our individual case studies and noted several similarities across all three campuses and courses. First, our combined student population was representative of the overall teaching population (Author) in that most are young, female, white, and hail from the middle class. All were admitted to our respective colleges of education within a graduate elementary education program or a masters program in reading (K-12) education. As such, these students met initial admission requirements and were expected to maintain above average academic performance. Therefore, all of our students as identified in this collective case study successfully completed all requirements of the courses. The question guiding our study, “What is the relationship between the reading behaviors of our students and the quality of their assignments?” does not have a simplistic answer. Our basic assumption, that readers were better students does seem to hold true, although a limitation of our study is that we were not able to discern a higher numeric grade for these students due to the structure of rubrics developed for each assignment. In these instances, most of the readers went beyond the ceiling of the rubrics provided for each class assignment. For example, students were invited to participate in many joyful reading activities without stating specific length of responses, the number of connections needed to personal and professional lives, and a specific definition of what constituted joyful reading. We purposely created these rubrics to encourage reading rather than mandate it as simply another assignment. As we wished to “practice what we preach” and adhere to philosophies presented in the texts we advocated (i.e. Miller, 2009; Newkirk, 2009). Specifically, we did not wish to devalue the appreciative nature of the tasks with highly targeted questions and guidelines.

Some of our students self-identified as avid readers and reinforced this position through thoughtful statements and writings. Further, they were willing to do more than what was expected on class assignments. For example, when invited to read one chapter, several read the entire book, or wrote lengthy responses. Others corresponded with us via email or initiated informal conversations before and after class about books that they were reading. Conversely, we observed that the non-readers made fewer connections between books and their personal and professional lives and were hesitant when invited to share their pleasure readings. These non-readers often shared that reading was not an important pastime in their homes, that they were too busy, too active, or simply not interested (i.e. I’ll wait for the movie to come out). In short, reading was valued as a critical process for academic success but pleasure reading was not part of their personal or professional cultures.

Our classroom practices, including text selections were similar. For example, we all emphasized the importance of choice. Students were invited to read from a wide selection of high quality texts through book clubs, book bags, and various classroom activities. The participants read for a variety of reasons and a variety of texts. Some read professional books for inspiration; some read children and young adult literature for instructional ideas. Still others read simply for pleasure. Readers were enthused about authentic course activities and were eager to share good books with others, and sought ways in which they could extend the community experience. For example, one group was inspired to create a website to share with others long after the course was completed. Another group formed a book club that met bi-weekly at different students' houses for dinner where they and the first author would bring children's books to share. Our text selections were also remarkably similar with books authored by favorite children's authors (i.e. Polacco, DiCamillo), and professional texts (i.e. Allington, Gallagher, Miller).

Students across all three cases were keen to make personal classroom connections and voiced positive views of improving their teaching lives. They delighted in the communities and friendships established through the sharing of books and the participation in the classroom assignments and activities that we established.

However, we also advocate that affective accountability (Author, 2006) must be considered when preparing literacy leaders and teachers. Affective accountability recognizes the joy of learning, particularly with the use of authentic reading materials such as high quality children's literature.

Educational Importance

We believe that we have modeled the role of good literature in the personal, professional and instructional lives of our students. In this continuing climate of accountability, we consider the research which supports our discoveries; that the love of reading has easily been "put on the back shelf" in favor of sanctified scripted curricula. Further, we hold the orientation that the pleasure and inspiration that is generated by good books can result in both academic and affective accountability that the benefits of good literature extend beyond the passing of a high-stakes test.

As we continue in our work as teacher educators, we notice that this journey as colleagues and friends improves our own instruction. We share ideas that foster joyful and pleasurable reading- particularly as it relates to our students' professional lives. We provide opportunities that celebrate the power and delight of reading for fun as well as instructional purposes. We continue to share our success stories about students who entered our courses with little enthusiasm about pleasure reading but by the end of the semester began to value this pastime, and who now proudly proclaim themselves as readers. We confirm that the readers who enter our classrooms do tend to be better students, but we also know that the non readers who may not have been mentored by book-loving parents and/or teachers, can and should be exposed to course activities and assignments that foster the love of reading. Therefore, we believe that it is essential for teacher educators to "go beyond" the academic accountability that is demanded

by certification requirements and incorporate joyful reading in every course.

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