CHALLENGING PRESERVICE TEACHERS' ASSUMPTIONS: USING THE READING/WRITING WORKSHOP MODEL TO LAUNCH PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

A RESEARCH PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Addressing the significant need for literacy education instruction, Missouri teacher preparation programs require eight credit hours of literacy coursework for all preservice teachers. Preparing these future teachers—many of whom lack confidence in their own reading and writing skills—is a salient research topic. Guiding students in re-examining their assumptions around the role of literacy in their own learning will support meaningful integration of these fundamental skills in instructional design. This transformation of students' frames of reference requires a challenge to their current conceptions of literacy, a holding space for exploration, and meaningful reflection.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), students' writing performance declines as they advance into secondary grades. Consequently, the Common Core State Standards (2010) include cross-disciplinary literacy standards, "predicated on the idea that content area teachers will use their expertise to teach, guide, and engage students in the reading, writing, speaking, and language relevant to the respective discipline" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). This is especially relevant in content areas like science, as literacy can support student understanding of the identities, activities, and patterns of thinking within the field (Pytash, 2013). Likewise, writing in math "provides opportunities for students to demonstrate mathematical understanding and construct arguments" (Martin, 2015).

Here, the researchers employed the Reading and Writing Workshop format, common in elementary and middle grades, to individualize instruction, engage students in self-directed learning, and facilitate differentiation and formative assessment (Teague et al, 2012). Recent research has explored the use of this model in the content areas, providing opportunities for application and synthesis of learning and information about student understanding. However, as Wendt (2013) notes, "the typical math or science teacher may lack the support and training necessary to fully implement the teaching of literacy."

Additionally, this redesign intended to support teacher candidates' examination assumptions about literacy. This transformation is supported through structured reflection and group discussion on course content and on individual worldviews. Thus, our data collection instrument was adapted from Brookfield's Critical Incident Questionnaire (1986) to increase student focus on specific, practiced, and meaningful reflection.

To accomplish this, the researchers redesigned Application of Content Area for Middle Level Learners as a reading/writing workshop on a "block" schedule where each taught four sessions of workshop and we co-taught additional sessions together. Student responses from the CIQ revealed an appreciation of the safety of the community engendered by class discussion and peer and teacher feedback, but also noted

a frustration with the instruction switching from reading to writing workshop in alternating weeks and a lack of perceived connection of our coursework with interdisciplinary literacy.

In the second iteration of the course redesign, two changes were made to accommodate these frustrations: each class session included linked reading and writing workshops and field observations were replaced with seminar sessions. Seminar sessions incorporated Paideia discussions around educational philosophy, content-area group discussions about field observations, and book discussions around ancillary texts that addressed content-area specific literacy. Initial feedback indicates that this transition has supported students in exploring their assumptions around education; engaging in deep discussions around the connections between their beliefs, the curriculum, and their observations; and rethinking the role of literacy in their future classrooms.

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