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Learning to Develop a Culturally Relevant Approach to 21st Century Writing Instruction

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Cover Page Footnote

This article is in APA format.

Introduction

In a position statement, *Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing* (2004), NCTE outlines eleven broad principles to serve as a guide for teaching language arts. Among the key ideas in this document is the call for language arts teacher educators to consider how literacy courses can create opportunities for pre-service teachers to account for the multifaceted and multimodal world of literacy with students in K-12 settings. As our world is becoming more comfortable with digital communication, we feel it is imperative to provide layered and complex teaching experiences that develop pre-service teachers' multimodal and pedagogical content knowledge. Given that language arts methods courses provide an entry into the professional discourse of teaching writing, this study is premised on the notion that such spaces can provide support for developing pedagogical strategies that address 21st century literacy practices. This study takes up NCTE's consideration by documenting how one pre-service teacher engaged in 21st century literacy pedagogies grounded in a culturally relevant perspective with fourth grade students during a field-based methods course.

As part of our language arts methods course, we required each student to engage in course readings and discussions, maintain a writer's notebook, and compose several digital texts. The notebook and digital texts functioned in three ways during their field experience at a local elementary school: 1) as a mentor text to share with students; 2) as a resource for them to revisit when planning for strategies or understandings informed by their writing life (Ray, 2002) for weekly lessons; and 3) as a space for reflection and documentation. Given that, we were interested in understanding the link between our course content and the emerging literacy philosophy and pedagogies we saw our pre-service teachers apply in the field.

Related Literature

As literacy researchers and teacher educators, we are committed to documenting how pre-service teachers engage in practices that foster critical and multiple literacies across time and space. Our work foregrounds the identities and sociocultural influences that shape our participants' lives and is informed by scholarship that views literacy as socially and culturally situated (Dyson, 2008; Gutierrez, 1992; Heath, 1982; Lee, 2007). We are specifically interested in how the participants in this study began to develop a framework for teaching language arts with digital tools to support elementary students as they created digital stories about their lives and communities (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

In a study by Kelley et al. (2007), the authors propose that teacher education courses “provide pre-service teachers opportunities to actively engage their pedagogies under construction in order to effectively translate their beliefs into sound instructional practices” (p. 96). For the purpose of this work, we wanted those practices to include working with quality children’s literature, exploring multimodal tools (e.g., Glogster, Prezi, iMovie, and Xtranormal) during writing workshop, and crafting mini-lessons that draw upon the participants’ writing strategies and understandings (Ray, 2002). These goals are supported by the work of Florio-Ruane and Lensmire (1990) and Shrofel (1991) who found that field experience does influence pre-service teachers’ understandings of writing pedagogy. However, the above studies only focus on field experiences, not field-based courses, and they do not address learning to integrate digital tools into writing workshop. To guide our inquiry into these practices, we draw upon two bodies of work: Literacy Teacher Education (Grossman et al., 2000; Kelley et al., 2007; Morgan, 2010; Norman & Spencer, 2005; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) to learn how writing methods courses prepare pre-service teachers for their future classrooms and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to construct curriculum that responds to diverse student populations.

Review of the Literature

We situate our work among teacher educators who advocate for pre-service teachers to have authentic learning experiences that support and expand their professional stance as future literacy educators. By taking a closer look at how sociocultural influences impact teaching decisions and curricular materials, pre-service teachers are made aware of the sociopolitical contexts that position them in particular ways in school settings (Mosley, 2010). We felt compelled to situate our field experience and literacy practices in ideologically contested spaces where ideas about effective teaching were often at odds. Every semester our students (with a few exceptions) share that writing workshop is not taking place in their field placement sites. In school spaces, curriculum pacing guides and test preparation materials take away time and intellectual energy from our students and often prevent them from developing theories and strategies they are learning about in our methods course. We recommend a 60-minute time frame for writing workshop each day. However, in our participants’ field placements across different school districts, they are reporting that their cooperating teachers barely have time to assign a writing prompt on a daily basis, let alone engage students in mini-lessons, independent writing, and sharing of new learning. This realization pushed us to reconcile how our course could prepare students to make

difficult choices when designing curriculum in their future classroom with a diverse student population.

Lessons from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

When working with students who have been marginalized by structural inequities in school (e.g., lack of computers, engaging texts, qualified teachers), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (hereafter CRP) provides a framework for enacting pedagogies that honor a child's home language, literacy, and cultural practices. Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) put forth three tenets in this framework to produce students who can: 1) achieve academically; 2) demonstrate cultural competence; 3) understand and critique the existing social order. As pre-service teachers learn to navigate and make sense of the sociopolitical context of under-resourced urban schools, consequences of the digital divide become more apparent and necessary to address in literacy methods courses. When working with students who have been marginalized by structural inequities in school (e.g., lack of computers, engaging texts, qualified teachers), CRP provides a framework for enacting pedagogies that honor a child's home language, literacy, and cultural practices. These practices build on a rich history of resource pedagogies that draw on multicultural education (Banks, 1995; Gay, 1995; Nieto, 1998) and sociocultural theory (Moll, 1992; Heath, 1983; Lee, 1995, 2007).

Lessons from Literacy Teacher Education

During the course of our work, we have learned from several studies that schooling and pedagogy can be constraining to innovative or divergent literacy practices (Hull & Schultz, 2001), and creating a language arts curriculum grounded in a 21st Century Literacies framework imagines an expansion of tool use to engage in a variety of literacy practices for a variety of audiences and for multiple purposes. Our intent was to introduce this framework to our pre-service teachers as they began to craft a pedagogy and philosophy for teaching young writers from different backgrounds. Thus, the gaps in this literature guided the design of our writing methods course and overarching questions for this study. Specifically, we worked to understand how digital tools could be integrated into their writing lives and thus influence their writing pedagogy.

Our study fits into a larger body of research that proposes future writing teachers learn to become better writers by writing and better teachers of digital-age learners by engaging in digital literacies. There is a concern among teacher educators that our programs are not adequately

preparing candidates to teach digitally savvy students and that they are missing opportunities to draw on their out-of-school literacy practices to support school related tasks (Hagood et al., 2008; Mills; 2010). Findings from Smith and Dobson's (2011) study indicates that teacher educators need to find more opportunities to infuse web 2.0 tools in their teacher preparation programs to improve language arts instruction. Across the studies we read (Grossman et al., 2000; Morgan, 2010), literacy educators assert that pre-service teachers need instruction and support when working to develop a research based writing pedagogy.

There are two studies that help situate this issue for us and inform our thinking about preparing pre-service teachers in language arts. Grossman et al.'s (2000) longitudinal study contends that teacher education programs play a vital role in preparing pre-service teachers to become writing teachers. The authors report that the program coursework influenced how pre-service teachers taught writing as they transitioned into the classroom. In particular, the participating pre-service teachers drew connections between conceptual frameworks and pedagogical tools appropriated during their methods courses, such as writer's workshop, scaffolding, modeling, process writing, and teacher reflection, to help guide and shape their writing curriculum and their vision in becoming effective writing teachers.

Morgan's (2010) study, discusses forty-two early childhood pre-service teachers' experiences participating in a writing methods course in order to better understand how they feel about writing, what they understand about writing, and whether or not they saw themselves as writers, prior to and after participating in their writing methods course. Drawing on data collected through interviews and other data sources (e.g., pre-service teacher's reflection, course exam evaluations, etc.), Morgan found 60% of the participating pre-service teachers lacked confidence in their writing abilities, which was often the result of their interactions with teachers, grades on papers, and inconsistent writing experiences. The participating pre-service teachers voiced that learning how to read like a writer, regularly engaging in writing on self-selected topics, trying out the kinds of writing that they might assign to their students, and planning for mini-lessons were important experiences in preparing them for their future work with young writers. After taking this writing methods course, the participating pre-service teachers demonstrated and discussed growth in their confidence as writers, developed voice within their writing, and began to recognize that the process of writing can be challenging.

A reoccurring idea in the literature with this process includes learning

to view their writing as a resource for developing a classroom curriculum. For most pre-service teachers the instruction they need to be both a competent teacher and capable writer can only be found in their language arts methods course, and there are few studies that examine how effective those experiences are at preparing novice teachers to implement the pedagogies they are learning about in the field.

In a study that focused on pre-service teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers, Norman and Spencer (2005) found that pre-service teachers entered their university program with preconceived ideas regarding their own writing competencies. Similarly, the participants in our study had established opinions about how writing instruction should be approached in the classroom. Norman and Spencer's study demonstrated the importance of providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect on their own history of schooling and the effect those experiences have on their developing teaching philosophy, relationships with students, and the role they take in developing a professional identity. By engaging in reflective teacher practices (Zeichner & Liston, 1996) such as questioning assumptions that guide their weekly practice, working to understand the school environment, and constructing curriculum, we supported our students' self-reflection and documented how they translated theory into practice. Over the course of this study, reflections occurred through course assignments and after each tutoring session. Our goal was to provide space for pre-service teachers to explore their writing and then use that experience along with what they were learning about their students to construct an authentic literacy curriculum.

To better understand what happens before our pre-service teachers enter the profession our study focuses on the immediate impact a field-based methods course can have on how students take up writing pedagogy in the classroom. Although there is compelling evidence that pre-service teachers could benefit from writing practices in university-based courses, we felt that the field needs a closer look at how the students are translating what they are learning in their methods courses into observable classroom pedagogy before the course has concluded.

Theoretical Framework

As a way to understand the phenomena represented in this study, we seek to find connections among literacy teacher education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and 21st century literacies, given that these bodies of work have been addressed as separate entities in the field.

Figure 1.1. Literacy Teaching and Learning Model



Figure 1.1. This model illustrates how literacy teaching and learning is commonly recognized as separate entities.

To inform our study, we chose to draw upon the work of scholars who propose that literacies are cultural ways of thinking, reasoning, and doing (Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983; Kress, 1993; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Street 1999, 2003) to highlight the contextual nature of teaching literacy and the need to construct experiences for pre-service teachers that address these domains. By viewing literacy through this lens, our study provides a space for taking up multiple literacies, with an emphasis on digital literacies (Gainer, 2012; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Lankshear & Knoble, 2003; Ranker, 2008; Vasudevan, et al., 2010). A 21st century literacies perspective positions local literacies and teacher investment in youth literacy practices at the center of the curriculum. NCTE's definition of 21st century literacies (National Council of Teachers of English, 2009) was foundational to our course design and the goals we created with our pre-service teachers during their field-placement. NCTE defines 21st century literacies as the ability for teachers and students to:

- develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
- build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
- design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;

- manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

Specifically, as the instructors of the course, we wanted to explore how pre-service teachers would design curriculum that provided experiences for students to develop proficiency and fluency with digital tools as they created and evaluated multimedia texts. Developing 21st century teachers requires that our methods courses provide space for students to facilitate learning across modalities and employ a full-range of digital tools to develop and enrich student learning and achievement. For our study, 21st century literacies include the use of the following digital tools: “hybrid digital forms, such as wikis, blogs, multimodal texts, web 2.0 platforms, and digital media production” (Mills, 2010). Our course goals support Morrell’s (2012) idea that we have to figure out how to inject our discipline with these new tools and ways of communication as concepts such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking take on new dimensions in the media age. This call for K-12 classroom teachers to incorporate the use of digital tools with print-based literacy practices pushes the field of teacher education to think about at what points during our teacher preparation programs students are deeply engaged in conversations and interactions that help them make sense of these ideas before entering the classroom.

Working with pre-service teachers to develop pedagogies rooted in this paradigm builds upon literacies that students enter school with and feel competent taking up in the classroom. Thus, a 21st century literacies perspective suggests that engaging in such practices has the potential to destabilize the natural literacy hierarchies that exist in school spaces, making room for knowledge sources rooted in contemporary youth literacy practices. Situating this body of work in our course provided time and space for our pre-service teachers to think collectively about what it would look like to engage in 21st century literacy teaching during our field experience with fourth grade students. Given that, our study traces the moves of pre-service teachers to gain insight into how they conceptualized and redesigned tools (e.g., writer’s notebook and digital compositions) as resources for curriculum development.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to learn from the experience of one pre-service teacher during his language arts methods course. Drawing on a subset of data from two language arts methods courses, our research team focused on the following questions for this report:

1. How did the participant in this study come to draw upon his own process of writing and composing digital texts to support elementary students' writing development?
2. How did the participant take up the theoretical concepts presented in his language arts methods course during the field-based experience?
3. How did the participant enact tenets of CRP in a 21st century classroom?

Method

Context of Methods Course

Elementary pre-service teachers at our southeastern university are required to take three literacy courses as part of the professional development course sequence; two focus on reading and one course focuses on writing. This course was taught at Spring Oaks Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms) in a large urban city district. The first author taught a section of language arts methods working with both co-authors as teaching assistants across three different semesters. During one iteration of the course, the research team noticed a difference in how the students were engaging in the course content and began to think together about how the course was mentoring pre-service teachers to think about and implement culturally relevant approaches to 21st century writing instruction.

Although all three authors did not teach the course together (we taught in pairs across three semesters), collectively, we designed the course from a writing workshop (Calkins, 1986; Fletcher, 1992; Ray, 2002) framework with an emphasis on 21st century literacy tools (Kist; 2010; NCTE, 2007/2009) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The course was set up to build on three interrelated domains:

- Learning about yourself as a writer
- Becoming a writing teacher
- Becoming a reflective practitioner

Within each domain we created assignments that would guide our novice teachers through a set of teaching and learning practices focused on merging theory and practice. The chart below provides an overview of those assignments within each domain:

Figure 1.2. The Three Domains of Theory and Practice

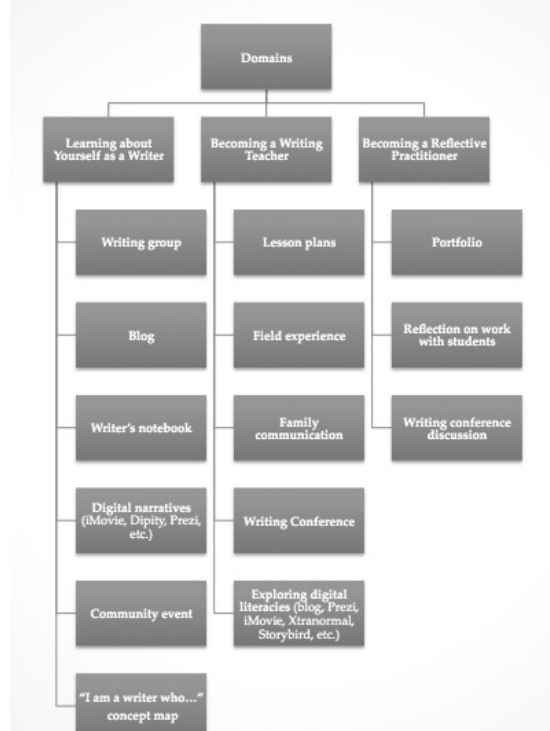


Figure 1.2. The three domains describe the focus of the language arts methods course and the types of learning activities the pre-service teachers engaged with to develop their theoretical and pedagogical understandings.

The course was set up to provide five weeks of intensive work at the university before spending six weeks in the field applying ideas the students were learning about in class. During our field-based methods course at Spring Oaks Elementary School, the pre-service teachers worked with 2-3 fourth grade students once a week for an hour. Each session involved the pre-service teachers working on a piece of writing with their fourth grade students. During this time, they were expected to take notes about the students' strengths as writers, consider what mini-lessons they could plan that would lead to growth during the next session, confer with their young writers, incorporate mentor texts, and reflect on their experience after each

working session. After our work with the fourth grade students, we would debrief back in our classroom and continue with our course for the remaining ninety minutes.

Preparing for work at Spring Oaks

Our class met on campus for the first five weeks of the semester, and during that time we set up expectations for our work at Spring Oaks. The pre-service teachers spent the first three weeks learning about themselves as writers and participated in assignments that encouraged them to trace their in school and out-of-school literacy experiences to reflect on the impact each had on their emerging teaching philosophy. They also created a digital narrative about their community, a poem that explored their identities as writers, wrote a series of blog posts in response to course readings about living a writing life, and began to document their teaching and learning experiences through the creation of a reflective portfolio.

The next few weeks of the course focused on curriculum development, building on the writing projects each pre-service teacher completed thus far in the course, curriculum documents, and the use of mentor texts. The pre-service teachers wrote letters to the students at Spring Oaks explaining the work they would be engaging in during the tutoring sessions, developed lesson plans using Prezi, and continued to respond to course readings via our course blog. The objective for this portion of the course was to begin to weave emerging theoretical assumptions with the literacy practices they were planning to introduce at Spring Oaks.

Design

Our work at Spring Oaks evolved out of a conversation Detra had with a fourth grade teacher about incorporating digital tools in writing workshop. After this conversation, the teacher discussed this idea with her grade level team and invited our class to work with their team. Before our work at Spring Oaks, the fourth grade team was not incorporating technology or other 21st century literacy practices (including the use of digital tools) in their classroom. Our work with the students provided an opportunity for the entire team to think about how this work could be done in the classroom environment.

Before beginning our work at Spring Oaks, we were given the task of designing an assignment that would produce a digital product that could be shared with the larger school community at the end of our six-week session. Although each pre-service teacher approached their individual work in ways that supported their young writers at their points of development and

comfort, they also had to work towards planning and designing a digital literacy project that would engage their students in the process of thinking about community and identity. Below is a weekly overview of our work:

Figure 1.3. Weekly Overview for the Digital Literacy Project

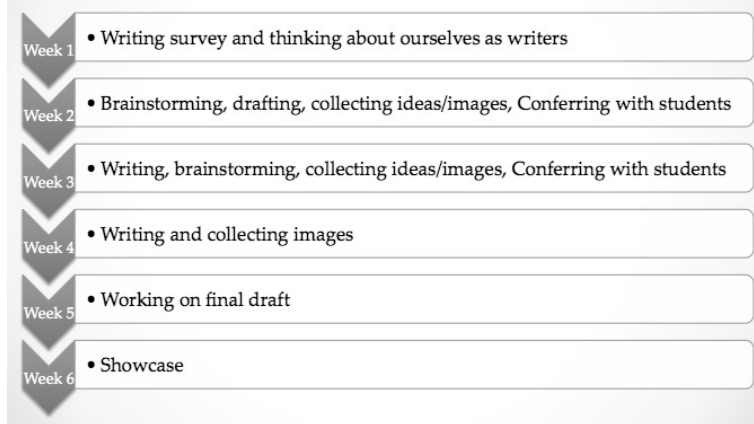


Figure 1.3. The overview provides a working schedule for completing the digital literacy project. Each pre-service teacher was encouraged to practice the specific pedagogical strategies when working with their tutees.

Participants

Thirty-five pre-service teachers who were enrolled in our language arts methods course across two different semesters were considered as participants in this study. At the end of both courses (after grades were posted), a select group of students were invited to participate in this study. The students were selected based on their interest in thinking about culturally relevant pedagogy or 21st century literacies, as made evident in their final course assignments, projects, and individual oral exams. In total, eighteen students were invited to participate and seventeen returned signed consent forms. Sixteen of the teacher candidates were female and 2 were male; both males identified as Latino; 8 were of European American heritage; 3 were Asian American; and 3 were African American. Each candidate participated in a field-based experience with a fourth grade student in an urban public school.

Selection of Cases

The research team selected 5 pre-service teachers as focal participants for a more intensive analysis of the data collected during the course and field experience. The 5 were selected based on the multi-step process designed by the research team. This process consisted of: close inspection of each pre-

service teacher's reflective portfolio; transcripts from their final oral exams; artifacts from their field experience; blog entries and reflective journals, that included analytic notes about the content and questions raised in relation to field-experience observations; and follow-up interviews that took place during each pre-service teacher's first year in their own classroom. The research team met to compare and compile notes and recommend cases. During our discussions we attended to emerging theories and practices that our pre-service teachers used to support their young writers, with specific attention to pedagogies that support culturally relevant approaches to 21st century literacies. Our final selection consisted of three cases that showcased innovative pedagogies for supporting young writers as they incorporate digital tools into their literacy repertoires.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data was collected over the course of three semesters, in a university language arts methods course. Qualitative research methods (Charmaz, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used to collect the following data sources for each case: field notes, course assignments, lesson plans, audio-taped interviews of each pre-service teacher as well as videotaped writing conferences conducted by each pre-service teacher, paired with a written reflection. All data served to triangulate patterns that emerged from each data source. Data were analyzed inductively in three phases using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the first phase, each researcher independently read, organized, and coded the data in relation to our research question. As a result, eleven categories emerged from the first phase of analysis, including teacher as a writer, teaching from our writing lives, and positioning students as writers, to name a few. Next, the team met to revisit and discuss the data for each case, specifically looking across the categories to combine and refine each category until we were confident that the four themes selected accurately captured the patterns that emerged in the data. The four themes include:

1. Becoming a Teacher of Writers
2. Engaging in Culturally Relevant Practices
3. Implementing a 21st Century Literacy Curriculum
4. Merging Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with 21st Century Literacies

Finally, each researcher independently returned to the data to reanalyze and recode the participants' dataset based on the four themes above to develop a detailed case report. The understandings listed above were evidenced through the participants' coursework, tutoring sessions with fourth grade students, classroom discussions, and planning documents. Below, we share what we learned from exploring one student's data across the four themes. We decided to focus on a subset of the data from our study to provide a rich analysis and detailed findings for our questions. As we constructed cases for this project, Cody's case revealed conceptual and pedagogical nuances that highlighted the complexities of developing and enacting a culturally relevant pedagogy while drawing on 21st century literacy tools. We present this case to puzzle through some of the issues teacher educators face when working with pre-service teachers to design and enact CRP in monolingual and/or homogenous learning spaces.

Findings

Preparing teachers for diverse 21st century classrooms is a complicated endeavor. Our students enter the classrooms with a variety of life experiences and skill sets that may or may not have prepared them for the challenges of teaching in today's classrooms. Many urban public schools are under resourced and have few digital tools that are working or are capable of producing the types of materials that are aligned with NCTE's 21st literacies definition due to inadequate band-width, server connections, or outmoded materials. These issues often rest upon the shoulders of children of color who disproportionately represent the student body of most urban public schools. Given that, our course was designed to enter these spaces with the goal of engaging students in multimedia text production and analysis. This is a departure from the position of multimedia consumers, which represents how most of the students we worked with spent their allotted time using digital tools.

This research study focuses on the ways that one pre-service teacher interpreted the tenets of CRP through a 21st century lens. Within this study, we draw on Ladson-Billings' (1994) definition of culturally relevant pedagogy, viewing it as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 18). While there are multiple paths that could lead to implementing a culturally relevant writing curriculum, we document this teacher's journey, highlighting how he drew on his students' culture, history, and background, in an effort to support them in their growth as writers, allowing them to make use of their cultural competence, which in

this case included their 21st century literacy practices, in order to achieve academic success.

Learning from Cody

Cody made a choice to return to school after working as a teacher's aid for a number of years in a middle school classroom. He self-identifies as "Chicano" and is proud to be multilingual. Cody has always loved to write but had not pursued writing as he once did; however, his time spent in the language arts methods course reminded him of this love of writing. Within this class, Cody immersed himself in his writing; he even returned to a novel that he started many years before, on his own time. He wrote about his family, his personal interests, as well as questions he had about society and teaching. He wrote in English and Spanish, often code-switching within entries.

In our course, Cody read scholarly research that encouraged teacher practitioners to draw on students' cultural and linguistic repertoires to construct a curriculum that meets their interests and academic needs (see Cahnmann, 2006; Damico, 2008; Ghiso, 2011; and Ladson-Billings, 1995). With these theoretical perspectives foregrounding his practicum experience, Cody was motivated and encouraged to "try out" some of the theoretical concepts and ideas with his two fourth-grade students. Thus, before Cody began his work at Spring Oaks, he thought deeply about how to incorporate multicultural mentor texts, how to draw on students' cultural and linguistic resources, as well as how he might share his writing experiences and writing he composed in his writer's notebook, on his iPad, and other digital spaces as a platform to develop an authentic writing curriculum for his students.

Image 1.1. Valuing a Writer's Notebook



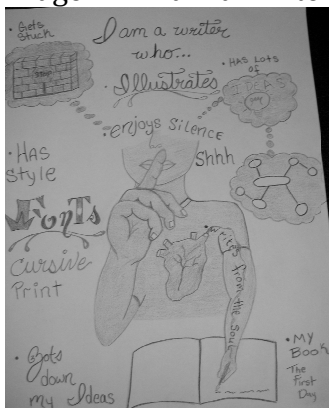
Becoming a Teacher of Writers

In reflecting on what it means to be a teacher, Cody explained, "In Mexico, the word for teacher is 'maestro,' however, there, it is a word that is respected

and honored. A child's maestro is one who leads them in life, teaching them what they need to know to be great people." Cody was particularly excited about sharing his love of writing with his future students. In his personal blog, he writes, "I can't explain this feeling I have, but it's as if I can't wait to become a teacher, so I can encourage my students to become writers." Throughout our course he began to explore that aspect of his personal and teaching identity. As a student in our course he developed ideas about student choice, writing resources, and how to create daily authentic writing experiences for his students. These ideas were informed by his writing life, course readings, and knowledge acquired through his weekly work with two fourth grade students.

Cody's writing life. In a course reflection Cody wrote, "I have started to find the writer who once was inside. I now use my journaling as an opportunity to write and get down ideas." In addition to journaling, Cody regularly made use of his blog, which was a space where Cody and his classmates posted their thinking about what they were learning in class and in their work with students. Cody went above and beyond the course requirements, making a choice to reflect regularly on the relationships he formed with his students, sharing his thinking about what it means to be a teacher, as well as writing about topics that were important to him. For example, in one entry, Cody discussed his tattoos, explaining, "Each one tells a story," and reflecting on how he will be perceived by others because of the "stories" he tells in displaying these images on his body. He also explored his writing life in course assignments, like the example below that showcases his ability to use words and images to convey the complexity of being a writer.

Image 1.2. I am a Writer Who...



"I'm a writer who...gets stuck, has style: fonts, cursive print, gets down my ideas, illustrates, enjoys silence: shhh, writes from the soul, and has lots of ideas."

In many entries, Cody used poetry to write about issues of importance to him such as religion, identity, and family. Below are two entries that provide insight into how he expressed these ideas.

Poem 1: Identity

I am...

Mexican
 Smart
 teacher
 father
 brother
 son
 lover and fighter
 funny
 a thinker
 a student
 honest

Poem 2: I am From...

I am from Aztlan
 The land of my people
 Dondé cai la lluvia de oro
 Soy de un nation of Warriors
 Fighting to keep our land
 Being kicked out of a country that once was ours

I am from Azteca
 Con sangre de indio
 That flows though my veins
 Soy de Mexico
 The home of mis padres
 And Tejas, the place of my birth
 Soy de my language
 Spanish, where words like trucha, orale, and simon
 Are as common as hello or goodbye

I am from Calle
 Where as chavalones we use to roam the streets protecting the barrio
 Young street soldiers with no fear in our hearts

Soy de casa
 A two-bedroom home for six people
 Stuck in the middle of the flats, our barrio
 Chicano park where we use to play
 My family having my back en tiempos Buenos y Malos

I am from the food we consume
 Tortillas, rice and beans con fideo
 Y cuando celebramos
 Tamales, menudo, mole y una bionga
 Soy de mi fe
 I pray to Jesus, la virgen de Guadalupe y todos los santos
 And when my daughter gets sick,
 I clean her with an egg and light a blessed candle

I am from Aztlan
 All that I write and more
 Proud of who I am and where I come from
 Soy de mi brown skin
 Which sets me apart.
 A minority whose numbers out number
 But have no voice, cause nuestro voz es en español

I am from Aztlan
 Hasta que me muero

Crafting his teaching philosophy. Cody's writing in our course led him to return to a project that he began quite some time ago; he explained, "I have even dug out my novel that is still a work in progress, but now I devote time each week to finishing and publishing it, even if it's just one book for my shelf." Reflecting on this process he wrote, "I began writing during my free time. I spent hours writing down my ideas as they flowed onto the paper. What I ended up with was hundreds of pages and a severe case of writer's block." Cody recognized that this experience of writing a novel served a greater purpose in his teaching life, as teachers of writers must call upon their understandings of, and experiences engaging in writing when working with their students. He pointed out that in addition to having knowledge of different genres, "we must know not only the process of writing but also how we understand that process in order to teach it." In fact, he drew on his own writing life to provide examples of some of the kinds of lessons we might

teach young writers. Referencing Katie Wood Ray's (2002) thinking that most writing occurs away from a writer's desk, Cody shared the importance of teaching students to generate ideas, providing suggestions regarding how to hold on and come back to an idea that strikes a writer while he is out and about, living his life and not in a place to sit down and write.

In thinking about what he learned through his own work as a writer, Cody mentioned the role that mentor texts can play for our students, commenting on how he has been drawing on the work of another author as he has been writing his novel. Cody shared that the writing in which teachers engage might serve as models for our students and will demonstrate to our students that we do the same things that we are asking of them. In one entry, he wrote, "By using our journal to show them examples of our own work, they will see that we are writers." As he worked with students in the field component of his language arts methods course, Cody shared his own writing as well as other mentor texts in an effort to better support his students in their own work as writers.

As he gained more access to colleagues in the field through various field experiences he was participating in during our course, he noticed that many teachers fear teaching students to write because of their own negative experiences in the writing classroom. Cody was adamant that he will provide his students with a different experience. He wrote, "I promised myself I wouldn't be that teacher who destroys a child's love for writing, even if I have a fear of it." Cody voiced the need to re-think the role that writing might play in our own lives as well as in the lives of our students, commenting, "If they understand that they are in a safe environment that celebrates them as writers, then they become the writers we want." He was developing the stance of an advocate who understood the importance of creating a safe space so students feel comfortable to use their voices.

He also began to recognize that writers learn to write through writing and pointed out, "In order for anyone to be good or proficient in anything they must do whatever they are trying to do more and more until they learn." Cody compared the experience of a writer learning to write with his own story of learning to speak English. He explained in his reflective paper, "Just like when I was in school, my English didn't improve until I began stepping out of my silent phase and attempted to use English. What I found was the more and more I used English, the better I got at it. The same thing happened with my writing." This new understanding prompted him to draw on the work of Ray and Laminack (2001) by crafting a philosophy of teaching that positioned writer's workshop as "a period of time, not a task." He understood that students needed a predictable schedule so they begin to think like

writers and develop an understanding of how to prepare themselves for this work, grow as thinkers, and use their writing to create change. In our last interview he summed up this sentiment by stating, “If they are to make a difference one day, they will do it with their pen.”

Theory into practice. Like so many teachers and researchers who advocate for the implementation of a writer’s workshop, Cody voiced the importance of creating a classroom space in which students are positioned as decision-makers and are expected to make choices about what they read and write. Before our fieldwork at Spring Oaks, he spent some time reflecting on his role as a facilitator of learning, not the sole owner of knowledge. During our field experience, he put that idea into action by helping his students learn how to evaluate their writing, not solely relying on his feedback to make improvements. It was that same commitment to growing writers that led him to introduce his students to a wide variety of genres and authors, making transparent options they had for sharing their work. During our course, Cody shared a variety of digital tools with his students as choices for them to consider when it was time to present their writing. In the end, Cody’s students decided on popular web 2.0 tool, Xtranormal, which they had initially introduced to Cody. This process linked Cody’s theory with his practice.

Engaging in Culturally Relevant Practices

Cody spent a lot of time thinking, reflecting, and planning for ways to integrate culturally relevant practices in his teaching. He drew on multiple sources to inform his developing perspective, but his personal experiences were the anchor for his thinking about how to incorporate a student’s culture into the curriculum. In his reflection, he described how his schooling experiences, language, culture, and identity as a Chicano influenced his thinking about culturally relevant pedagogy. He advocated for teachers to recognize students’ individual experiences, culture, and language as resources in order to develop a curriculum that is authentic, student-centered, and responsive to students’ interests and needs.

While preparing for his work at Spring Oaks, Cody began to imagine how the ideas he was reading about in class would inform the decisions he made on a weekly basis with his fourth grade students. He pushed back on the representation of culture that he was privy to as a K-12 student and currently as a pre-service teacher in a course assignment by sharing, “We have heard that culture to most teachers means the 3 F’s: fun, festivals, and food. But we need to move away from that way of thinking. In order for us to teach to good culturally (relevant) pedagogy, we must have some

competence in the culture of our students.” He also began to raise questions such as, “How do we become teachers who use good teaching and honor our students’ use of their home language, while using pedagogy that is culturally relevant?” to consider how teachers might create a space in which students’ funds of knowledge are valued and built upon. Along with his questioning of how to integrate students’ cultural and linguistic practices in his lessons, Cody created a list of mentor texts written in Spanish and English to share with his students as guides for the content of their writing. For all purposes, Cody was planning to work with one or two students of color, who probably shared linguistic or cultural practices with him. He took this opportunity very seriously, and was very deliberate and thoughtful about how to introduce each phase of the project to honor his students’ cultural identities. However, when he was paired with his students at Spring Oaks, he learned that neither shared his cultural or linguistic background.

All of the work he did to get ready for this field-based experience did not match up with the students with whom he was paired, and he had to figure out how this would impact his planning and teaching. He already planned to build rapport with his students and work to get to know their interests, strengths, and anything else they would feel comfortable sharing with him during their time together. He intended to spark and support their thinking about writing in their native language to push back on monolingual policies that silenced students’ attempts to make sense of their world in their first language; he was ready to take up the tenets of CRP, but envisioned a different audience. The hard work for Cody was the shift he had to make about what it meant to be a culturally relevant teacher for students in a middle-class predominately White school.

First, he created a survey with several other students in the course to get a better sense of how the fourth graders positioned themselves as writers and individuals in the classroom. Table 1.1 highlights the types of questions he planned to ask and use as a guide to create lessons for his students. Cody and a few of his peers planned an interactive get-to-know-you activity that asked students to stand, jump, raise a hand, or go to the other side of the room if the question or prompt resonated with them as a writer. Each of the pre-service teachers took a turn at recording the children’s responses. During the debriefing session, the pre-service teachers discussed what they learned about their students through implementing this activity, reflecting on how they might draw on this information in their curriculum development.

Table 1.1. Interactive student survey about writing

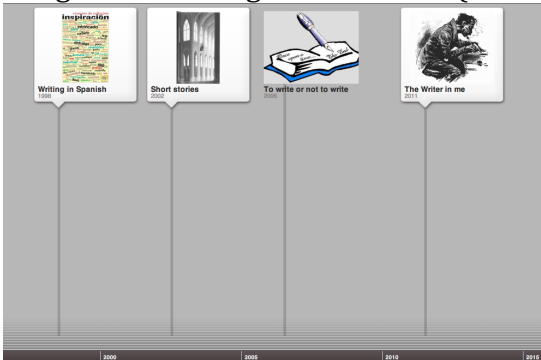
<i>Categories Developing an understanding of...</i>	<i>Prompts</i>
Students interest in writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Likes writing... ▪ Enjoys writing about themselves... ▪ Loves to read and write about topics that interest me... ▪ Likes to write about my feelings... ▪ Likes to write stories... ▪ Writes for fun...
Linguistic Repertoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Likes to write in Spanish...(follow up question: Do you like to write in any other language than Spanish?)
Experience as a writer/Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sometimes struggles to find inspiration... ▪ Likes to write on paper, not on a computer...
Genres of preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loves to write in blogs... ▪ Likes to write children's books...

Cody used these prompts in an effort to gain insight into how these students thought about writing and how they might approach a writing assignment. The prompts, themselves, suggest the assumptions Cody had about the kinds of writers he might encounter, such as, students who like to write for fun; students who write in more than one language; students who see connections between their reading and writing; and students who understand their writing preferences. This survey provided helpful data for him to use when thinking about supporting his students' growth and development as writers.

Next, Cody used this information to plan lessons that built upon the students' interests and strengths. But, he also included space in these lessons to share his writing and let the students learn about his interests, culture, and writing life. Below are several images taken from Cody's lesson plans, course assignments, and writer's notebook that he shared with his two fourth grade students. Image 1.3 displays important writing milestones that took place in Cody's life. During his working sessions with the students he shared these artifacts to show his progression as a writer, often focusing on

his identity and how it had shifted over time as well as some of the struggles he had encountered along the way. Images 1.4 and 1.5 highlight the work of rediscovery in which he engaged in our language arts course and draw attention to how he integrated his interests and culture into his writing.

Image 1.3. Writing Life Timeline (via dipity.com)



From the left: Writing in Spanish, Short Stories, To Write or Not to Write, and The Winter in Me

Image 1.4. Entry from Cody's Writer's Notebook



Image 1.5. Cody's Heart Map



From the literature, Cody was learning that being culturally relevant meant being fully present in the lives of his students and viewing teaching and learning as a reciprocal process (Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011). Sharing these artifacts helped his students see him as a teacher and a learner, who was experimenting with new ideas and ways to share information with others through his writing. It was at this point in the course that Cody began to realize that culture was present in the absence of linguistic, geographic, or ethnic markers. Each time he shared these artifacts using a digital tool (his iPad), both students' engagement peaked and they began to talk with him about websites and on-line communities they visited and enjoyed. He made the connection that youth culture, which is defined by Wolcott as: "a set of knowledge, attitudes, and affiliations shared by young people, best understood as a number of different subcultures derived from larger parent cultures. Youth cultures are shaped by historical, social, and economic forces." (2007, p. 904), may be the key to enacting the culturally relevant pedagogy in this space.

Implementing a 21st Century Literacy Curriculum

During our course, Cody gained first-hand knowledge in learning how to navigate roles and negotiate the tensions of incorporating technology in the literacy curriculum. As part of the course, he had the opportunity to work with students on the creation of a digital poem. In reflecting on this experience, he explained, "In the beginning, I wasn't sure how I was going to get my students excited about writing poetry. Then they heard that we were going to be using digital media to aid their writing. This was the moment that

they were sold on the idea of using computers to do poetry.” Throughout the experience of working with his students, Cody noticed how motivated his students seemed to be when they had the opportunity to compose using digital tools. In fact, he notes that his students seemed to think of the opportunity to use technology in the classroom as a “reward,” rather than simply a tool to communicate. This seems to echo sentiments in the field that after the novelty of technology wanes; the tools are treated as reward. The goal in our course was to find a way to integrate digital tools into the process, however, we learn through Cody’s work that this task is not always easy to accomplish.

As technology continues to advance, so do the needs of our students and the types of texts they engage with in and out-of-school. Technology has provided our students with the ability to access texts that are no longer confined to text-only materials with one-dimensional images. In this digital age, students are using various tools to gain access to texts filled with complex images, graphics, symbols, sounds and animation. Thus, it is pertinent that teachers learn how to incorporate these tools as part of a literacy curriculum (Morrell, 2012).

Cody was able to engage in the following 21st century literacies with his students because he experienced them as a student in our class and used those experiences to craft a more informed pedagogy with his students:

- Use of a variety of digital tools to communicate with an audience;
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others;
- Design and share information to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

The incorporation of technology into Cody’s teaching created a shift in the roles of teacher and students. In reflecting on his experience working with his students to create a digital poem, Cody noted, “They have learned

and taught me how to use digital tools, such as Prezi, Glogster, and Xtranormal as a means of their writing.” Although he was once a bit resistant to incorporate technology into his writing instruction, the experience of working with young writers on digital poetry led him to rethink what he will do in his own classroom. In his portfolio reflection, he wrote, “I think I have been swayed to the idea of using digital media within the confines of my own classroom. I enjoy learning new things from the kids and the kids applying what they learn in the classroom to other media.” He also shared some uncertainty regarding access to resources, a legitimate concern most classroom teachers are confronted with on a daily basis. Cody raised the following question, “Will I always be able to use digital media? With budget cuts, that means more teachers have to share resources, so I can’t plan on always having laptops in my room.” Although he saw the benefits of using digital tools, he is also wary of how structural issues could impact his ability to teach this way in his future classroom.

Merging Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with 21st Century Literacies

Cody planned for his students to experience culturally relevant pedagogy, one in which their cultural competence was valued and recognized as a resource, and most importantly, a pedagogy that would support their path toward achievement and academic success. When thinking about the implementation of culturally relevant practices, Cody spoke about the importance of language and culture and its role toward academic growth and achievement. However, in the context of our tutoring, culturally relevant teaching looked different from what Cody had conceptualized. In our field-based course, Cody was placed at Spring Oaks Elementary, a predominantly White, upper-middle class community where the majority of students were monolingual. This realization forced Cody to rethink how culturally relevant pedagogy might be negotiated in this particular context.

During his tutoring sessions, Cody drew on the theoretical concepts and pedagogical strategies he learned from his course readings such as making use of mentor texts, a writer’s notebook, and process writing to develop an authentic literacy curriculum for his students. As Cody worked with his students, he began to observe a noticeable difference in their motivation for writing when they were given a chance to write and to learn in situations where technology was incorporated. As a result, he made a decision to present his lessons, making use of an iPad, a 21st century digital tool that seemed to capture his students’ attention and engage their interests. Recognizing how eager his students were to make use of this tool in their

own work, he looked for ways to incorporate the iPad and other digital tools to read, brainstorm ideas, and to compose.

Image 1.6. Cody with one of his students

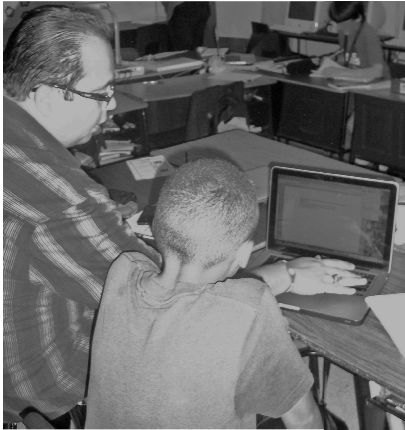
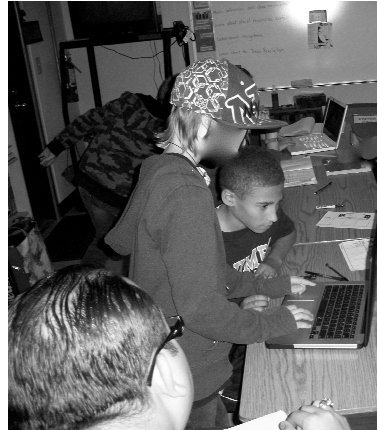


Image 1.7. Cody with both of his students



What we can learn from Cody's case is that engaging in culturally relevant practices in today's classroom means incorporating 21st century literacies. As such, Cody's experience helped us come to understand the need to re-envision what it means to prepare pre-service teachers for literacy instruction in which culturally relevant pedagogy and 21st century literacies are interwoven, rather than compartmentalized.

Discussion and Implications

Figure 1.4. Literacy Convergence Model

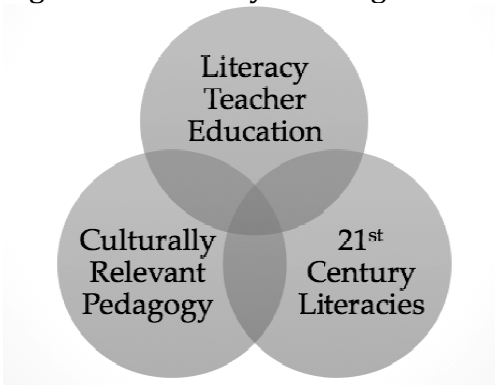


Figure 1.4. This model re-envision a new conceptualization of literacy teaching and learning as interwoven bodies of work.

Cody's work in our course helped him establish ideas about developing a rich writing life that could inform his language arts curriculum. His case presents new ideas for us to consider as we prepare teachers for engaging in 21st literacy teaching. Three important ideas about cultivating pedagogical content knowledge in language arts that draws on a 21st century literacies framework informed by CRP emerged as new understandings for our team to consider.

First, we learned that integrating digital tools into a print-based learning community could engage and challenge students as well as create tensions about the purpose of writing and the process for accomplishing that task. Cody's case reveals a thoughtful young educator who is gaining confidence as a teacher of writers, but apprehensive about how and when to introduce digital tools into the writing curriculum. In this experience, he had the students write their ideas on paper, edit them on paper, and then design their digital project. Although our course placed a strong emphasis on engaging in 21st century literacy practices such as creating and analyzing multimedia texts, Cody expressed concern that the digital tool was overshadowing the writing. As instructors, this signaled to us that regardless of our intentions, Cody envisioned using technology to showcase a finished product, not as an integral part of the composing process. Therefore, his experience in our course exposed the tension of when to incorporate digital tools into the writing process.

Our second lesson involves the selection of cooperating teachers and field-based methods course sites. Cody's case points to the need for pre-service teachers to have cooperating teachers in their regular field placement site (space they are assigned in their teacher education program) who are exploring 21st century literacies in their teaching and express a willingness to mentor novice teachers as they develop new practices; such a partnership can only be strengthened by additional work in a field-based methods course examining similar ideas. Although the data suggests that Cody and his peers were able to develop an informed perspective and emerging philosophy about digital tools in writing workshop, this six-week experience in a controlled environment cannot replicate the tensions they will face in a typical school context (e.g., curriculum, resources, infrastructure, etc.).

The third idea requires us to reimagine a culturally relevant approach to writing workshop in the 21st century. We propose that youth culture and 21st century literacy practices are interconnected and that developing a culturally relevant approach to teaching writing would entail experimenting with multiple digital tools as well as print based literacy practices. Cody could observe an immediate positive response from his students when he

introduced the project they would be working on together. However, he had a difficult time connecting the students' involvement with 21st century literacies as part of their cultural practices. As a result of the course readings and discussions that took place in our course, Cody firmly developed a philosophy of culturally relevant pedagogy that foregrounded language, race, and achievement. While our course provided the opportunity to intertwine these frameworks, without explicit guidance in how to do so, Cody, along with the majority of the students in the course, saw these as separate entities. The findings also make evident that it is not enough to simply introduce students to a culturally relevant framework; we have to work with them so they can effectively tailor CRP to their students. Doing so would assist pre-service teachers in developing a curriculum that is not only relevant, but also allows them to develop an awareness why they should be teaching from this perspective. The inclination of our students to separate these frameworks, along with the absence of their work to develop nuanced understandings of power relations that are connected to language, race, and achievement, reveal the need for coursework to provide explicit opportunities to create pedagogies that foster critical consciousness.

Cody's case leaves us pondering how to design field-based methods courses in which students engage in digital literacy practices to encompass curriculum standards and support an emerging pedagogical philosophy for teaching writing. In the Policy Research Briefs on 21st Century Learning and 21st Century Literacies, NCTE (2007/2009) makes a compelling argument for the need to prepare educators to implement 21st Century Literacy instruction. In particular, NCTE suggests that pre-service teachers should have opportunities to develop competence in their own use of technologies to scaffold the incorporation of technology into the curriculum. This case represents the above ideas in practice as well as provides insight into pre-service teachers' development of writing identities; documenting classroom practices that draw on a variety of pedagogical tools to scaffold writing instruction; and exploring methods for teaching writing to pre-service teachers that foreground digital literacy.

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