

***Podcasting practices: Mediators of archival work,
ELA teacher education curricula, and digital identities***

Nancy Heiss

University of Georgia, USA

Morgan King

University of Georgia, USA

Courtney Adang

University of Georgia, USA

Donna E. Alvermann

University of Georgia, USA



Peer-reviewed article

Citation: Heiss, N., King, M., Adang, C., & Alvermann, D. E. (2023). Podcasting practices: Mediators of archival work, ELA teacher education curricula, and digital identities. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 15(3), 41-52. <https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2023-15-3-4>

Corresponding Author:

Nancy Heiss
nancy.heiss@gmail.com

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Received: October 4, 2023

Accepted: September 24, 2023

Published: December 28, 2023

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how a semester-long online course in a language and literacy teacher education department coupled a podcast project with archival pedagogy and restorying to explore how ELA (English Language Arts) teachers (preservice, inservice teachers, and those seeking re-entry) worked collaboratively to enrich understandings of instruction embedded in a high-tech environment. The course was taught in the southeastern United States at the height of a global pandemic. After the semester ended, three graduate students (from a class of 21) joined the instructor to qualitatively analyze data collected during the previous 14 weeks. Data sources included digitally stored videos, archived library objects, class emails, rubrics, asynchronous discussion boards, synchronous Zoom discussions, and student-generated podcast projects. Findings point to the merit of providing agentic-learning opportunities through podcasting practices that mediated students' archival work, ELA teacher education curricula, and digital identity formation. Implications are drawn for ELA classroom teachers and teacher educators.

Keywords: *podcasts, digital literacy, identity studies, pedagogical practices.*



Journal of Media Literacy Education

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION (NAMLE)

Online at www.jmle.org

INTRODUCTION

As with any global adversity, the COVID-19 pandemic will affect education and technology for years to come. International reports issued by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) on the impact of the pandemic on various world regions have called attention to the strengths and inequities associated with information and communication technologies (ICTs) of which podcasts are a part. ICTs make it possible for virtual teaching and learning to continue in the absence of real-life interactions, but instruction and learning will be effective only if both teachers and students are well versed in those technologies. In addition to the OECD's reports, special issues of *Media Education* (Cappello & Ranieri, 2020) and *English Education* (Alvermann et al., 2022) amplified the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in relation to instructional practices that depend on technology. More specifically, according to a poll published in *EdWeek* (Prothero, 2023), podcasts rank among the top six sources that 14- to 18-year-olds in the United States consult on a regular basis when seeking information about global climate change. The significance of our focus on podcasting practices as mediators of archival work, English Language Arts (ELA) teacher education curricula, and digital identities is grounded in research that relies on the defining characteristics of each mediating element.

Context for the study

"New Literacies" – the name of the course described in this article – was a required semester-long, all-online offering that promised the 21 ELA teacher education students an immersive experience in creating their own podcasts. The instructor stated in the syllabus that "rather than simply reading, writing, speaking, and listening to others expound on what new literacies entail, [students would] be *producing* one" (Alvermann, 2021, p. 1). Enrollees were mostly pre-service teachers pursuing graduate-level courses in the university's dual-degree ELA teacher education program that would qualify them for a master's degree upon completion of their undergraduate course sequence.

Assignments preparatory to the final project included an introduction to Gee's (1996) theory of Discourse and a three-part introduction to researching the university's archives (either digitally or in-person). Other assignments supported students in building an online community that engaged them in selecting an

archived object to serve as the centerpiece of their individual podcasts. Readings and lectures related to the process of selecting an archival project were under the direction of the course instructor, three volunteer archival librarians, and a doctoral-level teaching assistant skilled in technology and research processes.

The final project involved producing a podcast episode that incorporated the following elements: a) an impactful personal or professional experience; b) an artifact from popular culture such as a book, movie, television show, or song; and c) an archival document or object (e.g., a photograph, letter, or audiovisual clip) from the university archives. Providing students with opportunities to "do" rather than merely "discuss" the required assignments mirrored current best practices in K-12 classrooms (Buckley-Marudas & Martin, 2020; Scott, 2015; Zheng, et al., 2020).

Purpose and guiding questions

Our purpose for this research study was to explore how podcasting, as both a medium and a set of practices that inform one's digital identity, might enrich conventional ELA teaching and learning via archival pedagogy and *restorying*. As participants in the study and co-authors of this report, we were guided by the following questions:

1. How do podcasting practices mediate archival work, ELA teacher education curricula, and one's digital identity?
2. How does restorying support learner agency and a sense of ownership in an ELA teacher education course that is not print-centric?

Conceptual framework

According to Slabon et al. (2014), restorying involves "rewriting and discussing personal, student-generated, domain-relevant stories to promote conceptual application, critical thinking, and ill-structured problem solving skills" (p. 506). The act of restorying a historical event or artifact through the lens of a "past personal experience may result in deeper internalization of...content and transfer of learning" (Slabon et al., 2014, p. 506). Sharing personal experiences through restorying can promote community within the classroom, allowing peers to learn from one another's experiences and interpretations of history. Further, the act of restorying through intentional writing promises powerful stories that may lead to action, particularly when youths act as advocates for their peers

(Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016).

Such intentional writing often elicits further conversation through *backchanneling* (Wright, 2021) as people aurally discuss the content in public spaces such as Zoom (breakout) rooms, conferences, or classrooms to demonstrate solidarity around causes. Our class developed a sense of solidarity by sharing personal experiences and discussing our perspectives on why we were creating podcasts.

Literature review

While multimodal approaches to learning – including the use of podcasts – are by no means novel, they disrupt conventional classroom practices where the written word is often considered the default method of assessing knowledge and where other modes of learning are often ignored or discouraged (Bell, 2019; Guertin, 2010; Selfe, 2009). Our review of the literature also revealed that pushing back against conventional book learning often still feels unprecedented for students and teachers alike. However, preservice teachers who have had opportunities to engage in new literacies are more likely to “promote technology-infused learning environments when they become in-service teachers” (Heo, 2009, p. 421).

Phillips (2017) found that students often experienced some anxiety when they learned they would be creating a podcast, and Bell (2019) suggested such a response was rooted in “having been unmoored from the comfort of known conventions and expectations” (p. 60). However, creating podcasts also gives learners an active role in the classroom narrative, allowing them to “engage in restorying processes that place them at the center of their literate worlds and [...] which affirm their lived experiences and identities” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 332). Giving students the opportunity to bring their “wealth of resources and experiences” (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017, p. 339) into the classroom by means of podcasting allows them “a slice of the agency” (Wright, 2021, p. 51) teachers experience when they plan and deliver lectures.

Encouraging students to dive into historical archives affords them additional learner agency as they devise a narrative that supports both a historical account and their own experience – a restorying of sorts. Restorying requires that we critically interrogate our identities, experiences, and preconceived notions of which stories have been told and how we can tell them differently. Gee

(2013) notes that people learn best when they can examine information “in terms of experience, contexts, and interests” (p. 43). Research supports storytelling as an effective teaching method (Hung, et al., 2012; Sumara, 2022), but the *restorying* of the stories of dominant cultures may be particularly important for marginalized identities. Restorying demands a critical examination of ourselves and our world as we “look at everything around [us] with new eyes” (hooks, 1994, p. 117).

This kind of restorying is more likely to occur in environments where both students and educators are open to novel interpretations of history and how such interpretations relate to their life. Thus, students should be encouraged to bring their individual resources – their language, culture, and passion – into the classroom and utilize this prior knowledge to create a strong foundation for higher level learning (Guertin, 2010; Kornelsen, 2006; Nieto, 2013). Such interest-driven practices call for self-exploration and self-expression (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017), processes that enable students’ voices to challenge unexamined assumptions about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Inviting students to document their lived experiences in relation to both historical artifacts and popular culture assists them in considering the past while acknowledging the present – the crossroads that Block (2007) equates to identity construction.

METHODOLOGY

Design and setting

To frame this semester-long research project, we chose a site-specific case study design (Maxwell, 2013), bounded by the curriculum of a required course on new and digital literacies in the language and literacy education department’s online master’s degree program at a research-intensive university in the southeastern United States. The study, which was conducted while the authors’ university observed health and safety protocols necessitated by COVID-19 conditions, consisted of a remote learning model of instruction approved by the university. Using the advice of Maxwell (2013), we framed our research questions in relation to the purpose, setting, and participants, which gave us the advantage of providing “a focus on the specific beliefs, actions, and events [we might] observe or ask about, and the actual contexts within which these are situated, rather than seeing [them] as simply manifestations of

abstract, context-free categories” (p. 79). Similar to Maxwell’s thinking, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) critiqued the earlier conception of qualitative research methodology that uses coding and categorizing to produce abstract, thematic “chunks” (p. viii) of information – free of participants’ situated, complicated, and sometimes conflicting views on a topic.

As a consequence of our decision to offer context-dependent interpretations of the participants’ discussions of their podcasting experiences, we purposefully did not use an analytic procedure that would have required analyzing and applying data to produce categories. Instead, what was of particular importance to us were the patterns in podcast practices that connected people’s beliefs and actions. Following Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) call to think with theory, we considered Gee’s (1996) theory of discourse as we analyzed our data. From a methodological perspective, this process involved “plugging one text into another” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 1). That is, we focused intently on what Heiss, King and Adang were repeating and restorying – or, as Jackson & Mazzei (2012) would say, “re-viewing” – as we reflected on our podcast practices.

Learners enrolled in the course

Twenty-one students enrolled in the course during spring semester 2021, but only 19 finished due to pandemic-related reasons. In their self-introductions (uploaded to a discussion board), 14 identified as master’s degree students in English education (with all but two teaching full time). Three were enrolled in the college’s Education Specialist degree program, and two were from the department’s Ph.D. programs in English Education and TESOL/World Languages. Those currently teaching reported they had less than 1 year to 16 years of experience. No one in the class had previously made a podcast, though King had offered podcasting as an option for a final project in her classroom. Self-ascribed identity markers (e.g., cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic, and gender) were prevalent. So, too, were statements about previous experiences with technology in general. The rationale for including this background information is to make explicit that Heiss, King and Adang represent the majority of their classmates. Although the instructor (Alvermann) sent all members of the class an email that invited them to participate in writing up the study’s data, only three

volunteered and signed the internal review board’s required consent form.

Subjectivity statements

Nancy Heiss (a first-year enrollee in the department’s M.A. degree program) identified as a homeschooler of her five children, who ranged in age from 3-13, and a former ESL teacher.

Morgan King (a first-year enrollee in the department’s M.Ed. program in English Education) identified as an 11th grade public school teacher of American Literature and an alternative ELA course for honors and gifted STEM students. She teaches with a social justice focus that engages students in critical literacies related to current events, social movements, and cultural phenomena.

Courtney Adang (in her second semester working toward an Ed.S. degree in Language and Literacy P-5) taught 4th grade from 2004-2009 in a public school and 1st grade from 2013-2019 in a private school. Her studies focus on the education of immigrant and displaced populations, cultural assimilation and the role of teachers in a student’s transition.

Donna Alvermann (the instructor for the course, with a Ph.D. in language and literacy education) was a former classroom teacher in Texas and New York public schools for 12 years prior to entering literacy teacher education at the university level. White and cisgendered, she identified as a social justice teacher with specialties in digital literacy education and archival pedagogy.

Procedures

The course was divided into three roughly equal segments. Archival Encounter #1 provided time for introducing the structure of archival pedagogy and course content on how Gee’s (1996) theory of Discourse relates to exploring digital identity (see, for example, an excellent video introduction to Discourse by Scott, 2014). Students uploaded original responses to required course content via the asynchronous discussion boards (commenting critically on at least three of their peers’ responses) and participated in one of three synchronous Zoom discussions (scheduled for different evenings) of no more than seven students plus an archivist or librarian from the university’s special collections libraries. Archival Encounter #2’s synchronous Zoom discussion in the same small groups focused on how to search archival collections and provided practice in analyzing objects of digitized content from the university’s

archives. Students were also required to select at least one archival item that would serve as the centerpiece of their podcast (the assumption being that the item selected would align with their sense of developing a digital identity as a K-12 and/or high education teacher, illustrating the “crossroads of the past, present, and future” mentioned by Block, 2007, p. 27). Archival Encounter #3 provided time for students to create their own podcasts using the Anchor.fm application (app) to move from a written script to a podcast published on Anchor.fm or Spotify. The final Zoom discussion (again within the same three groups) focused on how archival pedagogy had provided students a structured space in which to create their digital identities through podcasting, a reflective backchannel for participants to fully consider the impact of their restorying experience.

Data sources

Instructional materials, including PDFs, videos, and links to readings and podcasts about discursive identities, archival pedagogy, and New Literacies Studies were made available on the university’s online learning system. A series of two asynchronous discussion boards and three synchronous (Zoom-recorded) discussions focused students’ attention on activities directly tied to their podcast projects (e.g., directions for brainstorming a topic worthy of archival investigation, writing an essay on digital identities, strategies for searching the university’s special collections libraries, and archival document analysis guidelines); these conversations were considered throughout our analysis. Rubrics for each activity provided evidence of students’ progress throughout the course.

At the conclusion of the semester, Heiss, King and Adang wrote reflections representing their unique experiences in podcasting while considering the experiences of the other 16 class members, whose final podcasts were published online, and whose communication regarding coursework had been available visibly through the asynchronous discussion boards and audibly in recorded synchronous (Zoom) discussions. The following reflections comprise the bulk of our data sets, but we feel they are more than raw data. They represent the end result of our analysis and discussion of the first three authors’ experiences in restorying an archival document to create a podcast, in the context of our observations as class participants.

We share these below.

Heiss’s reflection. I felt apprehensive about producing a podcast because although I’ve had plenty of experience writing papers and making slide presentations, creating a podcast was a new experience. However, our instructor revealed in the syllabus that she had gone through this process herself, saying, “I rarely attempt to teach anything that I’ve not already tried myself” (Alvermann, 2021, p. 3). Throughout the semester she spoke openly about the difficulties and enjoyment she encountered while creating her own podcast, which helped foster a sense of community within our classroom.

Given the prompt to examine “what major events have changed you, shaped you, influenced you, shook you” (Alvermann, 2021, p. 8), we were challenged to come up with five potential topics for our podcast. Our class shared some very difficult, personal experiences. For me, writing about my life was rather cathartic. While my final draft was only 500 words, my original write-up exceeded 5000, and I had a hard time editing it down to the appropriate length. Many other students exceeded the word limit, seemingly excited to discuss their experiences. I ended up merging a few major life events into a single podcast and used these experiences coupled with insights from my archival document to help me reframe some difficulties my own child was experiencing with literacy and communication.

In addition to helping me over a homeschooling hurdle, learning about Gee’s (1996) theory on Discourse helped me define myself as a writer and educator and approach my identity as a speaker and podcaster. I took this course during the second semester of my first year in my master’s program. Throughout this first year I often felt out of place among my peers because I did not work in a traditional classroom setting. The same is somewhat true of my writing. I have been writing my entire life, but I’ve never felt able to call myself a writer.

Despite not being a teacher in a brick-and-mortar institution and while my writing might be more personal than professional, I came to understand that by engaging in these fields, I was – *am* – those things. In our group meetings, my team encouraged me to rephrase thoughts prefaced with *just*, especially when I would try to *justify* my identities (e.g., “I’m *just* a stay-at-home mom,” or “I’m *just* in my first year of the program”). Their reminders to confidently approach my ideas and identities in conversation crept into my podcast, “You’re a Poet, Do You Know It?,” which discusses imposter syndrome, communication, and education.

When I first began working on my script, I was overwhelmed by the seemingly disparate resources we

needed to integrate into our podcast. However, as I worked to connect my life experiences with both contemporary and historical media, I developed a better sense of identity and an understanding and ownership of a piece of history. Examining someone else's experience alongside my own helped me explore alternative points of view and consider the way my story connects to history as well as how I fit into contemporary society.

I don't know whether the people whose stories I drew from would agree with my interpretation of their story, or feel that our experiences were remotely similar, but I enjoyed the freedom to interpret my selected archival documents in a way that helped me make sense of my story. An assignment of this nature risks the possibility that it will only further validate the experiences of the dominant Discourse. However, the requirement to dig into the archives for a primary resource, which I had to interpret through my lived experience (that is, without a textbook, lecturer, or other expert presenting the information first) created a unique opportunity to confront my own biases and consider whether the interpretation of history I was taught in school remains valid when considering firsthand accounts from the past. I feel our class was not only challenged to restory history so it fit our narrative, but to restory our personal narrative as we grappled with how issues from the past have shaped who we are in the present, as well as how we can help shape the future.

King's reflection. As a first-semester graduate student and a second-year teacher, I was inspired by our instructor's discussions about her own podcast. I also felt relief knowing I had already sent two semesters' worth of students on that very journey, and they all survived. But as the instructor explained her purpose for podcasting alongside us, I realized I had failed my students by ignoring bell hooks' (1994) advice to "not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share" (p. 21).

Being a novice teacher, I admittedly was, and often still am, unwilling to take risks. I chose to live vicariously through my students' experiences. They trekked the mountain as creators of podcasts and I acted as a distant field-guide, pointing them to blogs by podcasters, podcast masterclasses, etc. I avoided the engaged pedagogy that asked *me* to grow, to change, to be empowered. I knew what podcasts provided me as a consumer of stories, often crafted lessons around stories featured on *Ear Hustle*, and supplemented written non-fiction with episodes from *NPR*. Selfishly, listening to student-produced podcasts sounded like a welcomed change from grading stacks of narrative essays. It was

not until I took the risk as a student myself that I understood the transformative power of unleashing my voice. I can now understand what it felt like to be the voice behind the story.

I took on the role of podcaster with enthusiasm, along with some deep-seated fear. I turned inward, trying to categorize each of my "badass scars," as our instructor called them. I realized my scars had much to do with interrogating my internalized identities: my whiteness, my womanhood, and my middle-class upbringing. The opportunity to explore my identity as a teacher felt revolutionary; I finally felt invigorated by the opportunity to look at myself critically. I scavenged through archives in the school's Special Collections Library and uprooted the reminiscences of my spotty knowledge about my Chicago roots, housing discrimination in the city and across America, and the socialization of suburbia in the country. My episode "Gusty Divisions: Reflections on Suburbia & Beyond" was born. Through peer meetings, my group noticed how similar our topics were; each of us had the intention to unearth aspects of our identity. We became resources for one another as we took on some identities that were the same and others that were much different. I realized that my story about whiteness, privilege, and middle-class notions of poverty was bigger than this course.

My personal transformation truly began when I saw my journey of restorying as a resource for myself, my loved ones, students in my classroom, and even strangers. Therefore, my curiosity and self-exploration sourced both personal and professional healing. Prior to this class, I dismissed the importance of my own curiosity, specifically my curiosity to dig deeper into my whiteness. Through this experience, I have learned how to define myself positively, creatively, and therapeutically. Our instructor modeled this as she shared her podcast script. Modeling is a way for us as learners and educators to change and heal; it is essential in bridging our personal lives with our classroom application. When we model such experiences, we also acknowledge the unlearning we must do to re-story our lives. I can no longer accept being a distant, silent, almost invisible resource in my classroom. I am no longer unwilling to explore my story in the way I ask my students to explore theirs. When we think about our own voice, the way we choose to share it, how and when we choose to be intimate, and where we place ourselves within a moment of time, we see what it means to be *with and amongst* each other's voices. bell hooks (1994) described how our voices are a feature of our transformation: "The engaged voice must never be fixed

and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself” (p. 11). In other words, we are constantly restoring.

Adang’s reflection. Having taught in a classroom for twelve years, I am considered a veteran teacher; however, I have never felt more like a student than I did in this New Literacies course. I was unfamiliar with digital literacies and at first glance the syllabus was an enigma to me. Locating archives to help tell our own stories felt like working backward.

Our first step was to decide whether the podcast would be a professional or personal topic. My initial thought was to use my classroom teaching experiences to create a professional podcast. I planned to explore things that worked, things that did not work, and the factors that changed my teaching practices from year to year, depending on the needs of my students. This outline seemed straightforward and manageable, akin to a fluffed-up lesson plan. However, I could not separate (or ignore) the personal aspects that accompanied my experiences in the classroom and concluded that I would need to shift gears and dive into some murky, personal waters, and thus my podcast “ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) and Precious Time” was born. Unique to this course is the way our instructor encouraged interpersonal relationships among students to develop at their own pace. Each student was tasked to choose five possible topics for their podcasts. We established peer groups to review each other’s options and offered and received feedback about which topic seemed to be the best candidate. This part of the project proved invaluable as we read and digested very personal story ideas. In our online forum, peer interactions mirrored my past experiences with in-person colleagues before the pandemic began. The course’s structure allowed us to interact personally with our peers and the community that developed through the semester helped me feel a social/professional connection that had been absent due to pandemic precautions. Having resigned from teaching to begin my current program of study, I was energized by the idea of round-table discussions, making connections, and building relationships – benefits of classroom experiences that dwindled during the pandemic. However, our instructor’s course structure encouraged students to cultivate these relationships while navigating this podcast journey.

After email discussions with peers, I decided to create my podcast around my transition from teacher to becoming my mother’s caregiver and a first-time mother, myself. I did not know what expanse of time I would include, what “characters” to include, and how

emotionally involved I might become. A classmate helped me find my first archival document, which set the stage of how this podcast might be organized. It was at that time I began to understand the working-backward appearance of the course. I gleaned this realization: find the archival object and explore it. Does it resonate with my (re)storying? I understood the process of locating an archival object, diving into it, and deciding if my own voice was represented in the item.

At the beginning of the course, I did not fully appreciate how we were *becoming* media podcasters until it was time to submit our final projects. As I reflect on where my podcast began and where it landed, I realized the value of having the agency to control content. At first this notion was intimidating, but that feeling turned into *empowerment* within the final product. Creating a podcast was new to me and it came with mixed feelings. It felt intimidating to step outside my comfort zone. Fifteen years have passed since I was last a college student, and to say that technology and literary agency have changed would be an understatement. When I started this journey, I created a mantra to get me through some challenges: I’m not here to show you what I know, I’m here to show you what I am learning. At the beginning of the course, our instructor revealed that she had recently created her own first podcast. She undertook the same method she wanted her students to embrace – be vulnerable, face discomfort, and feel agency over one’s content and its message. I recall my former students feeling similar fear and discomfort when I, as their teacher, would introduce a new unit with which I was completely comfortable but which the students were unfamiliar with. A teacher’s comfort level may be anxiety-inducing if the teacher views the task (e.g., podcasting) as “easy.” However, our instructor modeled a nuanced approach to innovative (and inclusive) teaching. I will use these pillars of guidance to convey to my students that teachers are often the students, as we learn from each other daily.

Alvermann’s reflection. My reflection focuses on the triangulation process recommended by Maxwell (2013) and its expansion by Jackson and Mazzei (2012). This process, which involved a fair amount of restoring on my part, is detailed in the section titled “A Post-Study Reflection.”

Analytic plan

After the course ended, Heiss, King and Adang met with the instructor of the course (Alvermann) via

weekly, and later biweekly, Zoom sessions to devise an outline for structuring the study’s write-up. Writing collaboratively produced opportunities for “seeing and then seeing again” (Hellman, 1973, p. 3) through layered reflections that encouraged us to reinterpret our original analysis and sometimes even change what we had previously viewed as relevant or irrelevant to our purpose for conducting the study. We shared our reflections ahead of our Zoom meetings via Google Docs. This enabled a “public viewing” amongst our team in terms of how we were modifying our interpretations of the data sources.

After two months of intensive collaborative analyzing and writing as a means of aligning the study’s

purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, methodology, and findings, we realized that we needed descriptive data available from the podcasts of class members who elected not to join the post-course, write-up group. This analytic step was initiated by the instructor for the purpose of developing a descriptive summary that captured the titles and grouped them to inductively produce the three themes shown in Table 1. It is important to note that Heiss, King and Adang had access to the same data sources that Alvermann and the rest of the 16 students had due to the instructor’s openness and her desire to encourage a sense of community within the online course.

Table 1. *Triangulation of Thematic Podcast Elements Across 19 Class Members*

Creator	Podcast theme and titles
<i>Vulnerability in using personal history</i>	
Heiss	You’re a poet, do you know it?
Classmate A	Isolation
Classmate B	Why words matter
Classmate C	Why don’t we have more Hispanics attending college?
Classmate D	Why’s the classroom library so white?
Classmate E	Connections are everything
<i>Transformations from the personal to the social</i>	
King	*Gusty divisions: Reflections on suburbia and beyond
Classmate F	*Called to teach—now what?
Classmate G	*We built this discourse on rock and roll
Classmate H	*Cultivating student love for reading and writing
Classmate I	*Free the books, free the reader!
Classmate J	It starts now—a conversation on diversity... in literature
Classmate K	Multidimensional literacy in the ELA classroom
<i>Opening up to risks and the unknown</i>	
Adang	ALS and precious time
Classmate L	*Self-reflection as a source of empowerment
Classmate M	The gamble of life—you can’t always win
Classmate N	Female athletes and the struggle for respect
Classmate O	Creating community
Classmate P	It’s the principle, principal: Addressing the divide

Note. All podcast titles marked with an asterisk (*) were, as of 2023, retrievable when searched for by title in the Spotify database. All others were either not publicly published or were removed from the database.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section briefly reviews the purpose of the study in anticipation of answering its two guiding questions.

Our purpose was to explore how podcasting (as both a medium and a set of practices that inform one’s digital identity) might enrich conventional ELA teaching and learning via archival pedagogy and *restoring*.

Question 1: How do podcasting practices mediate archival work, ELA teacher education curricula, and one's digital identity?

Creating podcasts as a final project for the course opened a space in which students were free to use their voices in narrating their stances on a topic with which they identified. Because the projects were to be published online, students took care to create finished projects that were enjoyable to listen to, but which also were truthful to their emerging identities and faithful to the account they learned about through their archival document. While podcasts are an aural medium, the behind-the-scenes processes involved in creating a podcast are multimodal. Most students found the process of researching in the archives, writing a script, recording segments, and incorporating their sound segments to be highly enriching. Although two of the 19 students in the course (neither of whom participated in the write-up group) attempted to insert segments of HD videos into their podcasts by calling out the associated links, the remaining 17 recognized the need to rely on sound alone, even to the point of aurally describing what a video or other multimodal resource conveyed.

A second finding that pertains to how podcast practices mediated students' emerging digital identity draws from data found in course-embedded emails, posts to asynchronous discussion boards, and Zoom-recorded small group meetings. These data sources revealed patterns of student vulnerability in terms of sharing personal histories, social risk-taking, and risks of the unknown (see Table 1). Notably, not a single student in our class had ever been tasked with creating a podcast and initially felt intimidated and overwhelmed by all the steps involved in podcast production. The reaction of doubt and anxiety that pervaded our classroom does not seem to be an anomaly; instead, it appears to be a regular occurrence when teachers incorporate podcasts and other convention-bucking multimodal practices in their classrooms (Bell, 2019; Phillips, 2017). As the reflections of Heiss, King and Adang indicate, it took time and trust in their peers and the course instructor for them to examine feelings that were contributing to how they approached the final course project. Taking the whole class into account, some students mentioned the mentoring they experienced, both formally in library help sessions and synchronous lectures with the instructor, and informally within their peer groups; others attributed their willingness to dig deeper into their emerging digital identities to having participated in certain course

activities (e.g., brainstorming potential topics of interest to research in the university's archives). Still others alluded to the course instructor's vulnerability in sharing her own self-doubts about creating a podcast.

A third finding addresses how podcasting practices mediated students' archival work. Because students could choose their own topics for their podcasts, often drawing on human emotions, moods, and feelings – with many remarking that they found it difficult to separate the personal from the professional in their narrative – it was sometimes difficult to find a relevant archival document. When this occurred, archivists and librarians responsible for the collections would assist the student researchers in locating a relevant archival resource by email or through a scheduled Zoom session.

Question 2: How does restorying support learner agency and a sense of ownership in an ELA teacher education course that is not print-centric?

Students in the podcast study repeatedly recalled how Alvermann's openness regarding challenges she faced while producing her podcast helped them feel at ease, illustrating the idea that when educators "bring their entire selves into the classroom, including their identities" (Nieto, 2013, p. 13)—and specifically, for our findings, their challenges—students feel more comfortable with sharing their own identities, as well as challenges they may encounter on their own educational journeys.

As students worked through the technological barriers surrounding podcast production, they moved from a place of anxiety (similar to what Bell, 2019, and Phillips, 2017, observed in their experiences introducing new digital literacies to a classroom), to one of empowerment, having gained confidence in working with ever-evolving technological platforms. This alone was a restorying of the view that struggling is akin to failure. Because of Alvermann's candid discussion about her own challenges in producing a podcast, students recognized that they were not alone in experiencing challenges, which led to students openly discussing challenges they faced while completing the final project both synchronously during Zoom discussions or asynchronously in private or group messages. Their discussions were not limited to technological issues, however. Students also showed this same sense of camaraderie regarding challenges in selecting (and restorying) an archival document.

Because of the order in which steps for the final project had to be completed, students brainstormed

meaningful personal experiences prior to searching for an archival document. Thus, students were placed “at the center of their literate worlds” (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 332) and the restorying that occurred happened as students sought to find an archival document that related to their experience. Thus, rather than seeking to validate history through their experience, students found that their experiences were validated through history. Allowing students the agency to select a topic that was deeply personal to them encouraged students to become passionately engaged in their learning process (Slabon et al., 2014; Wright, 2021), while active class discussions surrounding possibilities of archival documents to restory alongside a student’s given topic helped that student feel like their identity and experiences were valued (Nieto, 2013; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

On being called to act as English teacher educators

A concomitant struggle in effecting ELA teacher education curricular change is the tendency to hang on to the old for fear of introducing unnecessary stress in students’ lives. As our study confirmed, departing from traditional paper-and-pencil methods of instruction tends to elicit anxiety in students (see also Bell (2019) and Phillips (2017)). Print-centric ELA teacher education curricula have stood the test of time, regardless of new tech advances arriving (and departing) at rates so high as to make ‘keeping up’ impractical. However, we’re reminded of Kornelsen’s (2006) advice to consider loosening the reins of strict curricular control so that students’ sense of agency can surface, and their learning can remain relevant.

Finally, we recognized the need to welcome potential disruptions of dominant English teacher education curricula that center print at the expense of other valuable modes of expression. Considering those other modes, in turn, has the potential to welcome additional voices into classroom discussions. We felt it was particularly important that students in the class (who were largely comprised of preservice and inservice teachers, as well as those seeking re-entry to the teaching profession) got to experience producing a podcast, rather than merely discussing theories about the inclusion of new and digital literacies in teaching, since this increases the likelihood that they will include similar learning opportunities in their own classrooms (Heo, 2009).

A post-study reflection

Maxwell’s (2013) recommendation to triangulate is based on the earlier work of Fielding and Fielding (1986) who demonstrated the value of using different methods of data collection as a means of checking on one another. However, Maxwell (2013) noted that triangulation is not a panacea and may risk preserving rather than eliminating original author biases; thus, he argues that “validity threats are made implausible by *evidence*, not methods” (p. 128, emphasis in original). Methodologically, we had not initially considered questioning the degree to which the themes derived from podcasts by Heiss, King and Adang were representative of the other 16 students in the course. Once Alvermann recognized this omission, she discussed it with her co-authors.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) called for researchers to avoid simply confirming their preconceived ideas but rather embrace the idea that we “might not, or cannot, know anything with certainty” (p. 31). Referring to the limits of our ability to know for certain what one has experienced, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) challenged researchers “to think [...] in ways such that we become attentive, almost obsessed with the snags” (p. 31) in otherwise seemingly transparent findings. Consequently, Heiss, King and Adang reflected on how individual biases might have informed their earlier analysis of and reflections on restorying. Those later reflections are presented next.

Heiss’s Snag. An assignment such as this might only serve to validate the experiences of the dominant Discourse. However, the requirement to search in the archives a primary resource, and then interpret that artifact or document through the lens of their lived experience created opportunity to confront one’s own bias and consider whether one’s interpretations of history are valid.

King’s Snag. I see in my reflection an idea of restorying that is accommodating to dominant identities. Perhaps we should be centering our work in ‘unstorying’ – removing the power of the story that already exists, and undoing the confines of the narrative that already exists. As a white, middle-class woman, it’s easy for me to position myself as a ‘restorying’ activist. But this keeps the original story running, it doesn’t dismantle any structure.

Adang’s Snag. I completed my M.Ed. in 2005; many teaching colleagues and I were not provided the guidance or resources to best meet a student’s unique needs. Providing preservice and inservice teachers the

physical resources and guidance is a step in the right direction in how we help our students navigate nuances of social media, communication, and ultimately their individual experience.

Thus, an unexpected implication grew from their retrospective self-inspections. Specifically, all four co-authors gained a new respect for potential limitations surrounding restorying as well as triangulation methods.

On the role of audio in future research

In an age where multimodal can mean the more visual, aural, kinesthetic, and tactile the mix, the better, one might be hard pressed to argue for podcasting because of its dependence on audio. Attending solely to sounds in a podcast, separate from the distractions of video, movement, and touch, can evoke meaningful learnings, intensify feelings, and prompt actions on the part of listeners. In some instances, sound, as a medium and research method, has been shown to restory or disrupt what is traditionally read as a research-based instructional practice of longstanding value (Wargo et al., 2021), which reinforces the importance of audio and opportunities for disseminating the human voice. It also has the potential to change and enrich ELA teacher education curricula.

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