

Looking Beyond and Looking Within: Discovering Literate Lives

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Abstract

To examine the differences between a foundations course in literacy versus a traditional methods reading course for preservice teachers, this paper explained the assessment, required readings, and pedagogical approaches for a foundations course in literacy at a small liberal arts university. The on-going tensions to not marginalize a required content area literacy course needed for state certification requirements were analyzed. By analyzing my own complex course, *Fundamentals of Literacy Learning*, and defining my research question (What extent does a teacher education course challenge preservice teachers to think deeply about their own “best practices” for use in the K-12 classroom?) refined my own instructional practices by reflecting on assessment, teaching, and learning in my interactions with graduate students. These findings have the potential to encourage other colleagues to document the pedagogical approaches involved in teaching critical pedagogy for other teacher education programs.

Introduction

In many universities across the nation, the “teaching of content reading course” has not evolved since the reports of the mid 1980s (e.g., A Nation at Risk and Education for Excellence Act). Although many reading courses must meet state certification requirements, these courses often follow a reading sequence approach that has yet to become effective in today’s teaching environment (Allington, 2001). In actuality, as professors involved in teacher education, perhaps we must re-

examine our course work and ignite the passion in our students with innovative strategies and critical pedagogy. We must teach our preservice teachers in the same innovative manner that we expect them to employ in the classroom when teaching literacy learning and social justice. If theoretical principles and practices are explored, then a required state mandate course needs to implement effective content literacy learning strategies as well as the understanding of critical literacy through reading and writing from elementary school to high school.

Education is undeniably value-laden and literacy is at the core of all social change. If our society is placing the blame for social ills on public education, then studies by scholars like Snow (2002) and Gee (1991) are confirming the belief that the “best” schools in America don’t challenge the K-12 students to think deeply. Perhaps with new state and national mandates, the right time has come to take critical literacy a step further and examine teacher education programs to see if course work in teacher education programs is challenging our future teachers to think even more deeply or to question “best” practices.

The conceptual framework for the teacher education programs at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri, becomes the heart, hand and soul for designing coursework. The Missouri Department of Education’s conceptual framework identifies three principles that undergird the work of the professors, graduate students, and preservice teachers in the programs. As Chair of the Department of Education at Rockhurst University, I am confident the department teaches for social justice, for reflection on moral values, and for a liberal arts approach to subject matter (Teacher Preparation in the Jesuit Tradition, 2002).

The Department of Education at Rockhurst has had a long history of questioning critical literacy. For example, in November of 2002, I presented a paper on “*the challenge of unlocking the sequence of reading courses in an undergraduate program*” at the National Council of Teaching English, Atlanta, Georgia where I unfolded my belief in a constructivist view of literacy development (Au, Carroll & Scheu, 2001; Calkins, 2001). This endeavor supported instructional teaching practices that aim to develop students’ understanding, ownership, and flexible use of reading and learning strategies in the context of reading worthwhile literature and non-fiction texts (Allington, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2000).

In order to examine and document the importance of my renewed interest in preservice teachers’ growth in literacy development, I began examining the nature of content area literacy strategies within the broader context of critical pedagogy. My research question examined the extent to which a reading content teacher education course challenges preservice teachers to think deeply about their own “best practices” and to contemplate their beliefs for challenging K-12 students’ metacognition about literacy.

Understanding content area literacy from the centrality of praxis, authentic literacy in practical application, rather than a technical competence opened the pathways to a further study in the preservice graduate students’ content area literacy

course. My personal goal is to refine my own instructional practices by reflecting on assessment, teaching, and learning in my interactions with my graduate and undergraduate students during the course of a given semester.

If our society is placing the blame on public education for a variety of social ills, then studies by scholars like Goodlad (1984) and Sizer (1984) are confirming the belief that the “best” schools in America don’t challenge the K-12 students to think deeply. The research field of self-study (Loughran & Russell, 2002) was designed for teacher educators to understand and improve their teaching about teaching. Tidwell (2002) utilized self-study to deepen her own understanding of the tensions and conflicts of the university’s expectations for rigor, and her own values and actions with her individualized students. Perhaps the time has come to take it a step further and examine teacher education programs to see if coursework is challenging our future teachers to think even more deeply or to question “best” practices. Instead of worrying about passing state examinations, we need to start focusing on the “real” issues concerning the illiteracy rate in our schools. Let’s not state that no child should be left behind but as educators start helping every child work one step beyond. “What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore, the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.104).

The self-study method allowed my research question to deepen as the data collection began with the on-going observations recorded in my journal, self-reflections, and focus on Standard 5 of Missouri’s Standards for Teacher Education Programs and Missouri’s Beginning Teaching Standard (MoSTEP BTS). Missouri’s MoSTEP BTS are aligned with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 2003). Standard 5 states:

Standard 5: The pre-service teacher uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students’ development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

Performance Indicators: The pre-service teacher

- ◆ Selects alternative teaching strategies, materials, and technology to achieve multiple instructional purposes and to meet student needs;
- ◆ Engages students in active learning that promotes the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance capabilities. (DESE [online])

Systematically analyzing Standard 5 of Missouri’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) program assessment, allowed the self-study approach to take greater depth in theory and practice. Preservice teacher education candidates must demonstrate achievement of the MoSTEP BTS and the Department of Education’s conceptual framework in both their portfolio and their student performance. *Fundamentals of Literacy*, a graduate course in our programs, specifically addresses Standard 5 of the MoSTEP BTS. The standards in the portfolio were

originally assessed holistically on a pass/fail basis. The evaluation of the portfolio then evolved to a 3-point Likert-type scale (3 = Exceeds Standard, 2 = Met, 1 = Not Met). Recently, the cooperating teacher as well as the university mentor evaluated the standards during the student teaching semester. Data from ED 6020, Fundamentals of Literacy Learning (the critical literacy course taught prior to the professional semester), course grades, Standard 5 portfolio ratings by cooperating teacher, and Standard 5 university mentor ratings were collected and analyzed using the SPSII statistical analysis. Findings of student performance in professional settings as well as during the content area literacy course deepened my analysis and mapping for program improvement.

Student mean ratings in student teaching on each of the 10 MoSTEP standards range from 3.4 to 3.86 (4 point scale) and the correlation between University Supervisor and Cooperating Teacher rating is .37, a high correlation indicating consistency of evaluation. The argument is made that both the mean ratings and the correlation between raters meet the 75% heuristic for sufficiency. The student mean rating of student teachers in fall 2003 for Standard 5 was 2.73/2.71, giving validity of theory to practice.

The study's participants included 25 graduate, preservice teachers enrolled in a 3 credit hour course for fourteen weeks. Although the sample was consistent for the past three semesters, spring 2003, fall 2003, and spring 2004, it was the 25 graduate students from fall 2003 who were identified in this study. This class was unique in that usually the class was co-listed with undergraduate and graduate students, but in fall 2003, only graduate students enrolled. The majority of these students were preservice teachers in secondary education (grades 9-12) with various content areas: foreign language, sciences, social studies, English, mathematics, and business education; with a remaining one fourth of these students who were already teaching in Elementary Education and were enrolled in Track II of our M.Ed. program in Literacy. The remaining fourth desired to become teachers in grades one through six. By combining elementary and secondary education teachers as well as graduate and undergraduate students, the class discussions became lively. On the very first day of each semester, these students are given Chapter One of *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, "The Importance of the Act of Reading" by Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) to read and respond through discussion. If our true mission as educators is to empower students to reshape their lives and their world, then we must model that we are cultivating habits of reflection on values of reading and writing in our own courses.

By modeling the use of comprehension strategies such as predicting, self-questioning, visualizing, and summarizing (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000) on my first night of class in authentic reading contexts, my students are observing the "teacher" in teacher education. By the end of the semester, students are asked questions such as:

- ◆ As a pre-service teacher concerned about content area literacy, explain

how delving deeper with questions helps your students strengthen their prior knowledge with new ideas?

- ◆ What type of asking questions will you use in your specific content area?
- ◆ As a preservice teacher who understands how students learn and develop, how will you provide learning opportunities that support intellectual, social, and personal development of all students by utilizing the cueing systems during reading?

In the final night of class, students were presented a final survey question concerning my research question for this study. I interviewed them on the key concepts that aided their development in understanding the significance of literacy as empowerment for social change. “Greg,” a sixty year old graduate student in Secondary Education Biology, remarked:

Obviously, critical literacy is the fulcrum of social change. Freire would say not education. The fact that we need to understand the significance of a concept rather than mechanically memorizing it. A schema is a person’s prior knowledge built or activated from memory stores. When students struggle to fit new information into their schemas, I will suggest they stop and ask themselves what they already know about the topic.

“Frank,” a young thirty-year-old white male in Secondary Social Studies, states a further illustration of critical literacy:

Critical literacy not functional literacy is the goal for social change. Literacy is necessary to knowing your history. Cueing systems are clues that readers can and should use to gain meaning from a text. Giving students these “maps” can give those options when they are struggling. Demystify reading for students and show them how reading is done. Reading is not something you either can do or cannot do; it is a matter of experiences and strategies used to derive meaning from text.

After interviewing “Frank” on the last night of class, I then reread his reflection-position paper on Freire. “Frank” wrote the following text-to-text connection:

With the awareness of the different purposes behind literacy comes the recognition that teaching literacy is political. This is an essential realization if a teacher is to teach critical and liberatory literacy. “The myth of the neutrality of education . . . the point of departure for our understanding of the fundamental differences between a naïve practice, and astute practice, and a truly critical practice (Freire, p.38).” . . . In my social studies classroom, I will teach the future decision makers of our democracy how to critically approach the material they are given, to understand where the information comes from and the motivation behind it, and to give my students the resources to enact change in our system of government . . .

“Bethany,” a graduate student with a B.A. in business, is seeking Elementary Education initial teacher certification. “Bethany” in her literacy journal illustrates the liberal treatment of subject matter through strategic teaching:

Differentiated instruction is another approach to helping students understand, appreciate, and apply the central concepts of a discipline, specifically English. In the elementary classroom, literacy workstations is a strategy I will implement to accomplish this objective. Literacy workstations create valuable opportunities for teachers to provide differentiated instruction to each of their students. "Only through careful, intensive, observation can teachers... effectively help each child as an individual. This is the way teachers individualize instruction (Yellin, Blake, & De Vries, 2000, p.98). After observing a student's behaviors, a teacher can plan his/her rotations through the workstations in order for him/her to have the opportunity to practice certain strategies. Additionally, teachers can modify particular activities within literacy workstations to accommodate the needs of a particular student. Also, literacy workstations can provide motivating and engaging learning opportunities for students. Whereas during whole group instruction students are required to work at their zone of proximal development (an instructional level), literacy workstations give students the opportunity to work at their zone of actual development, an independent learning level at which students should experience the motivating satisfaction of success (Vygotsky as cited in Jacobson, 1998, p. 311). . . . In conclusion, if the ultimate goal of a democratic society is to develop critical thinkers and lifelong learners, than the elementary classroom is an essential component in the learner's journey to becoming a critical thinker.

I can still remember the first time that I was introduced to the "say something" strategy. Lucy Calkins at the Reading and Writing Institute at Teachers College in New York modeled it for me. At that time, Calkins (2001) was still in the draft stage of writing the *Art of Teaching Reading*, and was reading an excerpt from one of her future chapters. She stopped reading and glanced through the lecture hall and stated, "say something." She wanted us to see the importance of "reading aloud" contrasted with "reading out loud to your students." The aim was to develop the habits of a "readerly life" by talking about the texts. This strategy made such a lasting impression to my own habits as a reader, that I soon incorporated this strategy into my own teaching. As the semester progresses, my students are then assessed by using a rubric for the "say something" strategy. By reading *Mosaic of Thought* by Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmerman (1997) my students discuss the characteristics for proficient readers to bear in mind as they monitor comprehension and then articulate this comprehension. For example, proficient readers use questions to focus on author's intent and to clarify meaning.

Starting even on the first night of the course, I modeled the "say something" strategy as I began reading Chapter One, "The Importance of the Act of Reading" in *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*:

The *texts, words, letters* of that context were incarnated as well in the whistle of the wind, the clouds in the sky, the sky's color, its movement; in the color of the foliage, the shape of the leaves, the fragrance of flowers (roses, jasmine); in tree trunks; in fruit rinds (the varying color tones of the same fruit at different times- the green of a mango when the fruit is first forming, the green of the mango fully formed, the greenish-yellow of the same mango ripening, the black spots of an overripe mango- the relationship among

these colors, the developing fruit, its resistance to our manipulation, and its taste). It was possibly at this time, by doing it myself and seeing others do it, that I learned the meaning of the verb to *squash*. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, pp. 30-31)

I read these words by Freire several times before I understood how my own experiences influenced the texts and allowed me to express my own thinking after rereading his writing. It was not until my colleague from Ghana actually visualized for me how she would pull a mango from a tree in her own backyard and the juice would roll down her arm as she *squashed* the mango into her own mouth that I fully understood his meaning. By using the “say something” strategy and then having students express their own thinking about the text, as a reader I was able to visualize and create my own mental images to understand the non-fictional text of Freire. As the semester continued, I read aloud to my students from many genres not just required readings. As Calkins (2001) stated at Teachers College, teachers need to understand the importance of reading aloud many times and for many purposes. The U.S. Department of Education’s Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1984) goes so far as to state, “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud in the home and in the classroom” (as cited in Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984, p. 23). I find myself following this suggestion by also reading aloud to start every class. Sometimes I begin with a great children’s book such as, *Gleam and Glow* by Eve Bunting or poetry from E.E. Cummings, and other times I find myself reading aloud to help my students talk and think about the text in books. In many of the chapters of the required text, *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader’s workshop* (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997), there will be a poem or an excerpt from a great work of literature. In fact, Chapter One of *Mosaic of Thought* begins with a poem by Billy Collins called, *First Reader*. We often choose an excerpt from this book to illuminate class discussions on the struggles that many students have with text. By examining the process of reading, my students soon realize that if we want all students in all grades to think, talk, write, and listen to the text, as teachers we need to stop asking the predictable and factual questions and move to the open-ended critical questions.

By beginning the course with *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (Freire & Macedo, 1987), my proficient readers identify confusing ideas, and themes. Preservice teachers who are fluent readers realize early on that if they are not thinking about their own thought processes as they read, then they are not thinking critically or analytically. This focus lays the foundation for my course as we begin exploring comprehension strategy instruction. With the aid of the other required readings for this course: *The Art of Teaching Reading* (Calkins, 2001), *Content Area Reading* (Jacobson, 1998), and *Misreading Reading: The Bad Science That Hurts Children* (Coles, 2000) an inquiry workshop approach to content topics: writing, talking, questioning, sharing, reading, and thinking unfolds.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (1969) confirmed that the study of content area is really the study of language:

Biology is not plants and animals. It is language about plants and animals. History is not events. It is language describing and interpreting events. Astronomy is not planets and stars. It is a way of talking about planets and stars. If you do not know the meanings of “history words” or “astronomy words,” you do not know history or astronomy. This means that every teacher is a language teacher. (p. 102)

As soon as educators begin realizing that *WE* are all teachers of literacy, then change will begin. Unfortunately, we live in a time, when researchers and theorists cannot even agree on a definition for reading or for literacy. The sixth edition of *Understanding Reading* summarizes Frank Smith’s research that in order to understand reading researchers and teachers must consider not just the eyes but also the mechanisms of memory and attention, anxiety, risk taking, the nature and uses of language, the comprehension of speech, interpersonal relationships, and sociocultural difference to aid in children’s learning. “Reading is experience. Reading about a storm is not the same thing as being in the storm, but both are experiences. We respond emotionally to both, and can learn from both. The learning in each case is a by-product of the experience.” (Smith, 2004, p. 70). Smith (2004) states many times that the purpose of schooling is to ensure that every child is given full membership in the club of literacy. Author Ralph Peterson (1992) also confirms this theory in his book, *Life in a Crowded Place*.

John Dewey in *Experience & Education* (1938) challenges the reader to “call up in imagination the ordinary school-room, its time schedules, schemes of classification, of examination, of examination and promotion, of rules of order, and I think you will grasp what is meant by ‘pattern of organization’” (p. 18). I believe that Dewey would agree that many teachers even today are still acting as judge and jury in relation to student work. Teachers are afraid to allow all students to join the club or the community of literacy. Dewey believed “everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had” (p. 27). As educators of preservice teachers, we must lead our future teachers to move beyond the mechanical uniformity of mandated state curriculums and testing. In *The Art of Teaching Reading* by Calkins (2001) she states, “nonfiction reading has come to mean plowing through dry, impenetrable textbooks, often poorly written and dense with undigested facts” (p. 438). By requiring the strategy notebook, a compilation of pre- during- and post-reading strategies for each content area, I have tried to implement assessment and instruction as a seamless web to release the imagination in my future teachers.

In my syllabus for fall 2003, I revised my requirement of the strategy notebook to include more writing in connection with the readings and tentative schedule. Following is an excerpt from my syllabus:

Criteria for Reader’s (Literacy Strategies) Notebook 15%

- ◆ Organization: Notebook is divided into four sections including a table of contents. More sections may be added if needed.

◆ Sections should include:

1. **Personal essay on philosophy of reading and writing** (the essay should show careful and interesting thinking on the single topic of reading and writing) The essay should include various parallels and connections for the diversity of individuals in a classroom. The essay should abide by the rules of standard written English. You may also reflect on the Department of Education's conceptual framework as you develop your own philosophy.

2. **Annotated instructional strategies for reading:** This section should include at least 20 strategies with two-three sentences describing the reading strategy. Strategies should be varied and consider the impact of the diverse learner in your particular content area. Strategies that use technology to enhance the teaching of reading in the specific content area may also be included.

3. The third section should include **methods for monitoring, recording, evaluating and reporting the performance of individuals in the area of literacy learning.** At the close of each class session, you will be given a specific strategy or diagnostic learning log to monitor your own success of the material. This may also be used with your own students as a way to monitor performance.

4. The final section is for your reflective essay on the **Portfolio Standards.** This class will assist you in CORP (Collect, Organize, Reflect, and Present) model of the portfolio by meeting the following standards: Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) standard 1 demonstrates the central concepts of literacy learning. The unit ensures that candidates possess the knowledge, skills, and competencies defined as appropriate to their area of responsibility. DESE standards 2, 3, and 5 will be accomplished through the Strategy Notebook. Please visit our website for a copy of the Portfolio Standards. You will write a reflective essay addressing one of the standards after choosing your artifact for this course.

Your notebook will be evaluated on your creativity, thoughtfulness and logic of the four sections; coherence and documentation in the notebook will also be noted. (Pellegrino, 2003)

A macrostrategic framework (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) became the basis for section three of the strategy notebook. My students were given the macrostrategic framework for their readings. This framework was the foundation to construct their own thinking of their own context-specific pedagogy, and to constantly develop and improve on their own theory to practice strategies. This strategy allows the learner to become transforming intellectuals and not passive technicians. One of my former students addressed the importance of understanding and using formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continual intellectual, social, and physical developments of the learner (MoSTEP, Standard 8) in her strategy notebook. She focused her second reflective essay for the course on portfolios. She stated, "portfolios are a valuable tool to use as an assessment because they show the "continual, intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner" (Jacobson, 1998). Calkins (2001) states, "assessment is the stance that allows us to learn from

our students and thus to teach them” (p. 137). By utilizing the strategy notebook as both an informal and formal assessment, it truly becomes a form of communication that is cyclical. Calkins wrote in *the Art of Teaching Reading* that we utilize assessment so we can support and extend children’s strengths, move them to slightly harder texts, and hold ourselves and our students accountable for reaching clear and explicit goals. As I reflect on my student’s essay, I realize that this student was beginning to theorize about her practice, and practice what she has theorized.

“Mary Catherine,” a thirty-one year old graduate student, created a newspaper to express her views of the required readings. In one article she entitled: “Rockhurst University Graduate Student Makes Text-to-Self Connections with Freire,” she wrote:

By inviting me to think about my thinking, Paulo Freire has inspired me to get my students motivated to think about their thinking. As my content area is business, I have an enormous amount of opportunity to engage my students in metacognitive thinking. With all the ethical dilemmas surrounding the world of business, the discussions among students in class are a perfect venue to explore differing points of view and thought processes. When studying product development, it will also be interesting to facilitate the conversations of thoughts, ideas, and opinions related to the variety of stakeholders involved in a new product. . . . As I will also be a teacher of critical literacy, I need to continue monitoring my own practices as well as the strategies of other proficient readers. The last comment I’d like to make regards a quote from the book, *Mosaic of Thought*, We find thousands of wonderful classrooms, pockets of excellence sprinkled around the country, but we rarely see those classrooms being studied and replicated. We rarely see the systematic spread of best practices. (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 53)

The data seem to confirm that there is no one key to success for the teaching of content area literacy strategies. Oversimplified approaches can never be adopted in any teacher education program. Literacy is multi-layered and complex. The complex concept of literacy must always target the importance of strategies utilized in making meaning whether in structures of individual skills, abilities, and knowledge by connecting social practices and functions to ideological values and political policies. As Louise Rosenblatt (1998) stated as early as the 1950’s, reading is making meaning and literacy is a transactional process. Rosenblatt (1998) stated that meaning is not fixed. The time has come to reflect on Rosenblatt as well as Connie Weaver’s (1994) research that stated that Rosenblatt’s theory should be developed into understanding schema and scaffolding so that all students can learn. As educators, we do need to support our students as we attempt to understand their world and then provide the tools for comprehending and learning to exist. As educators, we will administer tests. Jacobson (1998) writes, “Over-reliance on test results puts a substantial number of students at risk of being classified as failures. Moreover, it is likely to give all students a distorted view of learning by encouraging the idea that learning is not an enjoyable, ongoing process, but something that must be done to pass a test” (p. 333).

In closing, of the 23 of 25 students interviewed, I noticed the transformational view of every preservice teacher challenging his/her self to become a teacher of literacy not just a teacher of content. Each of my students reflected on the challenge to apply his or her own knowledge of successful reading strategies to their students in their classrooms in an effort to promote and instill critical and lifelong literacy.

I would like to suggest the importance of using the Question Answer Response (QAR) strategy with our preservice teachers as just one more key strategy of proficient readers. The strategy was developed by Taffy Raphael in 1982 and further elaborated by Jeanne Jacobson (1998) in *Content Area Literacy*. The QAR strategy is excellent for grades K-12, but should also be modeled in our teacher education courses. The simplicity of this strategy masks the deep value it offers the student and teacher in assessing comprehension of reading. This strategy helps the learner to become better readers and writers. It requires metacognition as part of the process. According to the QAR strategy, the teacher should utilize text explicit questions (found directly in the text) and text implicit questions (requires applying schema). Once the preservice teacher has mastered this metacognition process, he or she can then implement the strategy to differentiate instruction to improve student learning. “The QAR instruction is especially valuable for children who have difficulty constructing meaning beyond the literal level, because it shows that answers to some questions are not ‘right there’ in the text” (Paris, 2003, p. 9).

As I close by sharing my syllabus, please note that the QAR strategy is applied over time, and later the students respond throughout the process by reflecting within the framework of identifying which type of question they are answering. Strategic teachers must aid their students in making meaning from the text by asking the reader specific types of questions either explicit or implicit and modeling to their students that they do have the resources they need to find the answer. In this way, the reader can learn the key to unlocking the knowledge needed in the reading process. What a simple way to encourage critical pedagogy and higher levels of comprehension in our university classrooms and in all classrooms in general! Raphael (1986) defines types of questions: *right there* (this means that the answer is right there in the text to locate the answer), *think and search* (this means that the reader must search multiple places in the text to locate the answer), *author and you* (this requires the reader to think about what he/she found in the story), and *on my own* (these are questions that the reader can answer without the text, but reading the text helps the reader consider knowledge he/she already has) are identified during independent reading, the entire community of learners become metacognitive and transformational intellectuals (p. 241).

In the syllabus for ED 4020/ED 6020, *Fundamentals of Literacy Learning*, the five required texts will continue to be used for my course. All graduate and undergraduate preservice teachers will reflect on this quote from a required text based on the writings of Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987):

Illiteracy not only threatens the economic order of a society, it also constitutes a profound injustice. This injustice has serious consequences, such as the inability of illiterates to make decisions for them or to participate in the political process. Thus, illiteracy threatens the very fabric of democracy. It undermines the democratic principles of a society. (p. vii)

This quote is the heart and soul of my being and reinforces my goal of teaching for social justice, which in many ways is synonymous with critical teaching. It is my hope that my preservice teachers will become leaders in their community by taking an active role in meaningful problem-solving activities. Literacy is at the core of all social change. I believe that as professors involved in teacher education that we must reexamine our course work and ignite the passion in our students with innovative strategies and critical pedagogy. By adding the macrostrategic framework, I realized that not only did this course cover research and practice, but also the significant component of policy-making entered the dialogue on literacy learning.

To summarize, this self-study created a dialogue for preservice candidates involved in the teaching of content literacy. The study examined the deliberate and sustained effort of the ‘teacher’ in teacher education to create challenging pieces of text for each preservice teacher. By modeling reading strategies, the preservice teacher noticed what good readers use to overcome the struggle with difficult text and became aware of their own thinking abilities. The preservice teacher candidates in ED 4020/ED6020 consciously applied strategies to reconstruct meaning, when their own understanding broke down.

The self-study research method gave me the opportunity to share with my students what to do in order to help them remember what they read. I shared my own books with them where I modeled the key characteristics of proficient reading by using the strategies of rereading, skimming and scanning, rereading again, jotting notes in the margins, using sticky notes, and talking about the text with my peers. In an email from the spring 2004 semester, “TR,” a graduate student from San Antonio, Texas wrote:

Dr. Pellegrino: one of the interesting points that both Freire and Keene address regarding the act of reading is understanding how memory and consciousness shape the way in which we read, understand and comprehend a given text. In reading the world before the word, Freire seems to suggest that the world (as a living entity itself) is ultimately our first real text because our natural surroundings provide a framework for us to understand our relationship to ourselves and our relationship to the world in a manner that fosters learning and growth. Consider Freire’s commentary that he “Learned to read and write on the ground of the backyard of my house, in the shade of the mango trees, with words from my world rather than from the wider world of my parents.” Similarly, Keene addresses this idea in a somewhat similar way when Billy Collins’s poem evokes certain memories from her past. It’s an interesting idea that reminds me of Faulkner’s great line from “Light In August” in which he states “memory believes before knowing remembers.” Great line & I think this continual process of discovery is central to Freire and Keene’s thought. Reading is an act, but not merely an act of reading just the written word on the page, it involves quite more than that.

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