

Chapter 1

Critical Reading, Critical Literacy, and Critical Classrooms: The Power of Using Picturebooks With Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Critical reading and critical literacy are skills that preservice teachers need to cultivate not only in their future students, but also in their own literacy practices. Picturebooks have the unique power to facilitate critical reading and critical literacy with preservice teachers. This chapter analyzes critical reading, critical literacy, and the power of picturebooks and then presents three approaches for using picturebooks to develop critical reading and critical literacy skills with preservice teachers: (1) field-based coursework with multicultural children's literature, (2) analyzing voices and perspectives in read-alouds, and (3) analyzing wordless picturebooks. Through intentional use of picturebooks in educator preparation programs, preservice teachers can gain the expertise necessary to use picturebooks to craft their own critical classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

In literacy methods courses, sharing picturebooks with preservice teachers is a fairly typical practice, especially when working with preservice teachers who wish to work in elementary contexts where picturebooks are common. However, picturebooks are not just for use with elementary-aged children; they can be highly beneficial for preservice teachers who intend to teach across K-12. Because many picturebooks can deal with difficult issues, they can serve as entry points into deep and complex conversations addressing prejudice, social justice, inequity, and morality. When reconceptualizing preservice teacher preparation in literacy education, what *more* can teacher educators do with picturebooks to prepare preservice teachers to be transformative stewards of literacy in K-12 settings?

According to Freire and Macedo (1987), “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (p. 35). Preparing future teachers of literacy therefore requires developing their skills with not only making meaning from words, but also making meaning from students’ worlds. As the student population grows increasingly diverse, with every state having a higher percentage of students of color than teachers of color (Boser, 2014), how do educator preparation programs prepare preservice teachers to “recognize the importance of students’ socio-cultural, religious values, and the influence their cultural backgrounds have in their quest to succeed in their educational endeavors” (Taylor, Kumi-Yeboah, & Ringlaben, 2016, p. 42) when, according to hooks (1994), “most of us were taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal” (p. 35)? The issue requires significant training and experiences for preservice teachers, and picturebooks provide one remarkably powerful vessel for this work.

In this chapter, an overview of critical reading, critical literacy, and the unique power of picturebooks will be provided. Next, the authors explain three approaches they implement when using picturebooks with preservice teachers to model critical reading and critical literacy to scaffold future teachers in their development of their own critical classrooms.

BACKGROUND

When used intentionally, picturebooks have the power to transform classroom instruction for all grade levels. In this section, the distinctions and overlaps between critical reading and critical literacy will be explained. In addition, the power of picturebooks as a unique genre that juxtaposes words and pictures will be explored, along with the specific relationship between picturebooks and principles of social justice.

Critical Reading and Critical Literacy

While the terms “critical reading” and “critical literacy” sound like they could be synonyms, there are significant distinctions between these two ways of approaching reading (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001). The first term, critical reading, focuses on examining the relationship between the reader, the writer, and the subject, as depicted by Aristotle’s rhetorical triangle. In this relationship, the writer uses structures and rhetorical devices to communicate an intended purpose to an intended audience. The

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