Chapter 17
Preparing Pre–Service Secondary English Language Arts Teachers to Support Literacy Learning with Interactive Online Technologies

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present the framework and methods they employ to integrate online learning opportunities into an English teacher education program at a large, public university in the southeastern United States. The authors focus on their efforts to extend pre-service secondary English language arts teachers' understandings of what constitutes literacy and what counts as text in the secondary English language arts classroom in a blended technology- and media literacy-focused methods course, a required component of a three-semester English Education Master's degree program. Specifically, the authors document the ways they nudge pre-service teachers to consider the kinds of literacy events they might design and the types of literacy practices they might promote to support literacy learning with interactive online technologies and popular media in English language arts classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights our efforts to prompt pre-service secondary English language arts teachers to consider the possibilities for advancing literacy teaching and learning via interactive online technologies in a blended technology- and media literacy-focused methods course. Such work requires encouraging pre-service teachers to expand their understandings of literacy and of texts. Thus, we begin this chapter by establishing our alignment with a sociocultural view of literacy and learning, by describing constructs that help teachers fulfill their roles as designers of classroom events, and

by highlighting understandings of literacy made possible by communication technologies and the ubiquity of multimodal texts. The second half of this chapter describes the context of our work, details the integration of interactive online technologies that support our goals, and considers future directions for investigating the integration of online learning opportunities in teacher education programs. Ultimately, by presenting the framework and methods we employ to support the integration of online learning opportunities in English teacher education, we hope to inform teacher educators who share our goal of developing paths toward meaningful technology integration in teacher preparation programs.

BACKGROUND

In its policy brief on 21st-century literacies, the National Council of Teachers of English (2007) acknowledges that evolving technologies, while informing the literacy practices of today's students, provide teachers with opportunities for promoting literacy learning in diverse, participatory contexts (p. 2). Recognizing those opportunities, we have worked to integrate online technologies in an English teacher education program, an effort to prepare pre-service English teachers for designing technology- and media-rich literacy events that may shape the literacy practices of the students they will serve.

This discussion of how we have integrated online technologies in English teacher education is framed by our perspectives on literacy and by how those views have informed our practice. Our goals and the literacy work we assign to pre-service teachers are framed by sociocultural views of literacy. That is, we understand that literacy is part of social experiences and that ways of practicing literacy are variable and evolve as individuals participate in literacy events in multiple settings with various types of texts. This framework provides for consideration of the literacy practices that

youth use daily (Goldman, Booker, & McDermott, 2008; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) and for reflection on how those practices can be enhanced and built upon in academic settings.

A Sociocultural View of Literacy and Learning

We advance this view in the teacher education program by focusing pre-service secondary English language arts teachers on the social aspects of literacy and on the uses of literacy in context (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005). We accept that "[l]iteracy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned" but it "is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people" (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). This broad view shifts us away from the view that literacy is a skill set employed by individuals without regard for social context (Kucer, 2005; Street, 1993/2001). This sociocultural perspective allows us, as Szwed (1981/2001) implores, to consider "the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts for their performance" (p. 422), and to recognize that the varying contexts in which literacy acts are performed may require different sets of skills. That is, a sociocultural perspective embraces Scribner and Cole's (1981/2001) position on literacy as a social practice, which posits that, beyond merely knowing how to read and write, literacy is the application of such knowledge in particular contexts and for particular purposes. This broad view of literacy aligns with that advanced by the National Council of Teachers of English (1996).

By promoting a sociocultural view of literacy, we aim to broaden pre-service secondary English language arts teachers' understandings of literacy and of texts. In the methods course described here, we encourage students to consider texts as multimodal and literacy as more than alphabetic decoding. We encourage them to acknowledge the literacies that adolescents bring to the classroom and to consider how those literacies can

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