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EXPLORING MULTIMODALITY, LITERACY AND LEARNING WITH YOUNG ADULT FICTION

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Keywords: literacy, technology, English Education, curriculum, preservice teachers, young adult literature, critical literacy.

Summary: the author examines how preservice English teachers engaged a sociocultural and critical approach to literacy instruction and the tools of a web-based classroom to discuss young adult fiction with adolescents. A sociocultural approach to literacy instruction emphasizes meaning making as an iterative process between text and a reader’s lived social, cultural and linguistic experiences. The author planned and facilitated this project with a secondary language arts teacher as part of a semester long course on adolescent literature from 2006-08.

Research questions:

• (How) do preservice English teachers draw on a sociocultural approach to literacy instruction using the tools of an online classroom?

• Within a sociocultural frame, how do participants engage with multimodal, digital forms of text (including literacy practices such as reading images and posting to online discussion forums) to analyze and interpret young adult fiction?

Method and main points of the study: within a case study framework, data was generated through preservice teachers’ audiotaped planning sessions; archived web-classroom data; document collection; and a series of focus group interviews conducted at the end of the project with preservice teachers and adolescents.
who volunteered to share their insights. Through use of sustained inductive and
deductive coding procedures applied across the data set, a series of key categories
emerged that were used as themes to address the research questions. These
key categories included: participants’ constructs of “community” as a resource
for making meaning with young adult fiction; multimodal texts as contributing
to adolescents’ critical readings of text; and the use of social network sites such
as Facebook as resources to interact with text within the space of a web-based
classroom.

Conclusions and Contributions: Findings from this research suggest that English
preservice teachers in this study applied a sociocultural approach to literacy
teaching, using multimodal and digital tools, to prompt a critical reading of their
selected works of young adult fiction. Findings also suggest that participants’
social, cultural and material experiences offered few resources for critically making
meaning with their reading selections. I discuss two implications from these findings
to conclude this work. The first is that digital, multimodal tools offer possibilities
for broadening students’ sociocultural knowledge in ways that are important for
democratic engagement. A second key implication is that institutions of higher
education need to develop preservice teachers resources for interrupting racist,
classist and sexist ideologies that function to resist equitable teaching practices. I
suggest that computer-mediated tools, such as online classrooms, offer a medium
for this critical work. Findings from this dissertation work suggest technologically-
mediated environments as important spaces for prospective teachers to learn
as a “community of practice” (LAVE & WENGER, 1991) in their development
as reflective practitioners. Studies have documented digital spaces as harboring
multiple affordances to provide a collaborative environment for teacher candidates
to discuss “the values, norms and habitual ways of seeing which belong to the
Teaching profession” (FERRY, KIGGINS, HOBAN & LOCKYER, 2001, p. 4). Ferry
et al. contend that central to CMC as a learning rich environment is its potential
for prospective teachers to practice being a “community of practice” to facilitate
“immersion in the discourse of the teaching community” (p. 4).

References:

mediated communication to form a knowledge-building community in initial teacher
education. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for
Research in Education, Freemantle, Australia.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.