

21st Century Digital and Global Teacher Preparation Efforts: A Content Analysis of Major Assignments and Assessments in Stand-Alone Children's Literature Courses

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Abstract

The expansion of technology access and digital devices has engendered the need for different approaches with literacy instruction in order to adequately prepare individuals to be active and successful participants in a digital and global environment. The purpose of this study was to explore how stand-alone children's literature courses have been transformed to address 21st century digital and global preparation efforts among preservice teachers. A content analysis methodology was employed using publically-accessible course syllabi for stand-alone children's literature courses required in Generalist (Grade Level EC-6) initial certification programs offered among educator preparation programs in Texas. Analyses conducted identified a total of 372 types of major assignments and assessments within which 18 were specific digital preparation efforts and eight were specific global preparation efforts. Limitations and discussion are addressed, which included two recommendations for educator preparation programs.

Keywords: children's literature, preservice teachers, digital literacies, globalization, educator preparation

In a 21st century technology-driven society, the term literacy has taken on new meanings which include digital literacies. Within an educational environment, digital literacies encompass how students “negotiate the digital world” (Jacobs, 2014, p. 101). However, the concept of digital literacy goes well beyond the integration of technology. This type of technology knowledge entails the literacies, or practices, that are used to engage in meaning-making productions through the use of digital tools (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). Recognized as “an essential requirement for life in a digital age” (Bawden, 2008, p. 30), digital literacy has reshaped traditional notions of literacy.

The 21st century society has also enhanced the interconnectedness of people all over the world (Stewart, 2012). Technology has ushered in limitless opportunities for the amalgamation of countries and economics, which has necessitated the importance of globalizing education. In a globalized educational system, students develop knowledge and skills that prepare them to succeed in a constantly evolving, technology-driven society. Although literature once cited the presence of a digital divide due to inequities related to technology access, recent literature has

acknowledged that this gap has narrowed significantly (Cohron, 2015). However, the expansion of technology access and digital devices has engendered the need for different approaches with literacy instruction in order to adequately prepare individuals to be active and successful participants in a digital and global environment (Cohron, 2015; Hicks & Hawley Turner, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, the conceptual framework for this study draws upon literature that has identified the key concepts that underpin a 21st century classroom. In a digital and global environment, teacher educators must ensure that they develop preservice teachers' "pedagogy for preparing 21st-century literate students" (Zygouris-Coe, 2016, para. 2), rather than their use of "technology as a tool for the acquisition or transmission of existing knowledge and practices" (Burden, Aubusson, Brindley, & Schuck, 2016, p. 14). Teacher educators must transform literacy preparation approaches to prepare future teachers to navigate successfully within a transient 21st century digital and global learning environment (Muilenburg & Berge, 2015).

As teachers assume responsibility for 21st century classrooms, they must establish a "culture of literacy" that merges all aspects of language, literature, communication, technology tools, and culture to promote learning among all students (Moore & Grisham, 2015, p. 23). Teachers in today's classrooms must be skilled practitioners who establish technology-infused learning environments that develop students' global awareness (Cook, Bell, Nugent, & Smith,

2016) and foster students' competence with the 4Cs: creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016).

Context of the Study

Scholarship published within the past five years concerned with preparation efforts related to 21st century digital and global competence fell into the following categories:

- scholarship that explored programmatic educator preparation efforts with digital competence (e.g., Instefjord & Munthe, 2016; Tondeur et al., 2012);
- scholarship that explored specific preparation approaches for digital competence, such as technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) (e.g., Tondeur, Roblin, van Braak, Fisser, & Voogt, 2013; Yan, 2012);
- scholarship that explored digital competence among preservice teachers (e.g., Lemon & Garvis, 2016; Maderick, Zhang, Hartley, & Marchand, 2016);
- scholarship that explored programmatic educator preparation efforts with global competence (e.g., Jean-Sigur, Bell, & Kim, 2016; Poolea & Russell III, 2015);
- scholarship that explored specific preparation approaches for global competence (e.g., Oh & Nussli, 2014); and
- scholarship that explored global competence among preservice teachers (e.g., Brooks, 2015; McGaha & Linder, 2014).

In considering this scholarship base, it would seem natural that 21st century digital and global preparation efforts would also be infused throughout the literacy curriculum.

Scholarship available within the past five years also reported various techniques used by teacher educators with preservice teachers, such as use of multimodal and digital communication practices (e.g., Hundley & Holbrook, 2013; McTavish & Filipenko, 2016), non-print texts (Dobler, 2015), and literature as a tool to widen global perspectives (Durand, 2015).

Although endeavors are underway to improve educator preparation efforts with 21st century digital and global competencies, much more work still remains (Burden et al., 2016; Muilenburg & Berge, 2015). Within educator preparation programs' literacy curricula, we became interested in exploring how literacy courses were being transformed, particularly courses that are deeply rooted in traditional literacies, such as a children's literature. Viewed as a beneficial and powerful tool during literacy instruction (Gaffney, Ostrosky, & Hemmeter, 2008; Serafini & Moses, 2014), much literature has advocated for the inclusion of stand-alone children's literature coursework in educator preparation programs (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002; Greenberg, Walsh, McKee, 2015; National Council of Teachers of English, 2004; Tunks, Giles, & Rogers, 2015). Based upon this pedagogical understanding, we formulated the following research question to guide our study: How have stand-alone children's literature courses been transformed to address 21st century digital and global preparation efforts among preservice teachers?

Methodology

Sampling

We utilized purposeful sampling methods to conduct this study. We also limited the

sample to include university-based, traditional educator preparation programs (EPPs) for the certificate area of Generalist (Grade Level EC-6). At the time that this study was conducted, there were 69 state-approved entities that fit these conditions (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Next, we conducted web searches on each university's website to locate Generalist (Grade Level EC-6) initial certification program information for each EPP. Once program information was retrieved, we examined the coursework to determine if a stand-alone children's literature course was a requirement for all students seeking Generalist (Grade Level EC-6) certification. This examination revealed 53 EPPs, which we used as our study sample.

Data Collection

Six years prior to this study, the Texas legislators passed House Bill 2504, which required all state universities to post on their website information for each credit bearing undergraduate course offered, including a course syllabus. Course syllabi must also include a description of each major assignment and/or assessment. Hence, we conducted subsequent web searches on university websites to locate course syllabi from the most recent semester in which stand-alone children's literature courses were taught at EPPs in our sample. Among the 53 EPPs, 28 EPPs had course syllabi that were accessible electronically. As shown in Table 1, 47 course syllabi were collected from EPPs at public universities. Among the private institutions, follow-up web searches were con-

ducted using the name of each private institution and the title of their children's literature course. These search efforts produced five syllabi. A total of 52 course syllabi were collected with course dates ranging from Spring 2011 – Spring 2016.

Analysis Procedures

In order to explore our research question, we conducted a content analysis using the collected syllabi. Conducting a content analysis of course syllabi has been a successful method used to explore the presence and extent of specific elements within a course's planned learning experiences (Barrett, Cottrell, Newman, Pierce, & Anderson, 2015; Sweifach, 2015). For this study, we applied content analysis procedures as described by Stemler (2001) in order to "examine trends and patterns" (para. 4) among the data.

Using the syllabi collected for this study, a member of the research team created a spreadsheet to assist with retrieval of each major assignment and/or assessment from each course syllabus. In order to ensure accuracy with retrieval efforts, four undergraduate students also collected the data separately and findings were compared. Once accuracy of data retrieval was confirmed, the research team met to develop an emergent coding scheme with which to analyze data systematically (Stemler, 2001). First, the research team conducted independent reviews of the data and developed a preliminary checklist. Second, the research team met to compare their findings. During this meeting, the research team engaged in discussions to resolve differences present on their preliminary checklists and created a revised version. Third, the research

team used the revised checklist to apply the coding scheme independently with the data collected from three randomly selected syllabi in the sample. Members of the research team compared their findings and engaged in discussions until they reached 100% accuracy with coding patterns. Finally, the research team coded the remaining syllabi separately and met to create a final summary sheet of their findings.

Findings

Analyses conducted identified a total of 372 types of major assignments and assessments within the following seven categories: Collaborative Class Interactions, Peer Oral Communication, Learning Experiences beyond the Classroom, Class Presentations & Performances, Technology/Digital Tasks, Traditional Assessments, and Written & Visual Artifacts. As shown in Table 2, almost one-third of all of the assignments and assessments were categorized as:

- *Written & Visual Artifacts* (n = 172, 46%). Although a large variety of assignments were represented, most of the assignments in this category required preservice teachers to compose a wide variety of written reflections, assemble collections of literature, create instructional resources, and engage with research tasks.
- *Class Presentations & Performances* (n = 52, 14%), the majority of assignments in this category entailed preservice teachers' engagement with (a) individual presentations, (b) partner and group presentations, and (c) dramatic performances within the walls of classrooms at their respective

universities.

- *Traditional Assessments* (n = 46, 12%), preservice teachers' understandings of course content in this category were measured through quizzes, tests, and examinations.

Surprisingly, less than ten percent of all major assignments and assessments were categorized as Technology/Digital Tasks (n = 33, 9%). Almost half of the assignments within this category involved preservice teachers' creation of digital artifacts or participation in asynchronous online discussions. Although ten other types of technology and digital tasks were present in children's literature course syllabi, the number of references for each of these was minimal.

The categories of Collaborative Class Interactions and Peer Oral Communication each contained the same number assignments (n = 25, 7%). Within Collaborative Class Interactions, preservice teachers collaborated with their peers during class primarily in literature circles or group tasks. With respect to Peer Oral Communication, preservice teachers communicated among their peers mostly in small groups or as a whole group.

The final category, Learning Experiences beyond the Classroom, contained the least number of major assignments and assessments (n = 19, 5%). Over half of the assignments within this category were field experiences with children, such as reading aloud with children or presenting a lesson to a class at an elementary school. Two of the assignments in this category (community service and professional development) were listed as extra credit; therefore, these were optional learning experiences made available to the preservice teachers.

Analyses also revealed 18 specific types of spe-

cific digital preparation efforts among the major assignments and assessments. Closer examination of these types demonstrated that two were directed by the teacher educator. In other words, preservice were engaged with a technology-infused learning experience prepared by the teacher educator. The remaining 16 types were preservice teacher-directed, meaning that preservice teachers were expected to utilize various technology tools to complete required assignments.

Using this same analytic approach, we identified eight types of specific global preparation efforts. Closer examination of these types showed no presence of teacher educator-directed assignments. Moreover, within the eight types that were identified as preservice teacher-directed, two types were noted as extra credit. Thus, these extra credit assignments would be optional assignments that preservice teachers would elect to complete.

Limitations and Discussion

As described in our methodology, we limited our analysis to course syllabi collected from university-based, traditional EPPs for the certificate area of Generalist (Grade Level EC-6). We applied this limitation because EPPs are bound by state educator certification rules, which have differences among certification areas and program types (i.e., traditional and alternative). Another limitation of this study was the data that was collected from course syllabi. We viewed each syllabus as a permanent record of stand-alone children's literature courses. However, as Barrett et al. (2015) noted, "... syllabi may be incomplete, may lack detail, and are sub-

ject to change throughout the semester” (p. 257). A final limitation would be related to our use of manifest content during analyses. According to Berg (2001), manifest content describes the “elements that are physically present and countable” (p. 242). For example, in order to be coded as a specific type of global preparation effort, we looked for explicit references related to development of preservice teachers’ globalized perspectives. In other words, identification of global preparation efforts were limited to assignments that developed preservice teachers’ ability to “perceive and know the people and cultures within their world” (Merrill, Braskamp, & Braskamp, 2012, p. 306). Therefore, to meet the exploratory purpose for our study, we felt that using interpretive analytic techniques with latent content was not appropriate.

In looking at our findings, we discovered that a large number of assignments presented preservice teachers with learning opportunities to foster their development with learning and innovation skills (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2016). As shown in Table 5, collected data pointed to several examples of assignments in stand-alone children’s literature courses where preservice teachers were likely to use and develop their skills with creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. We argue that continued inclusion of these types of learning experiences is vital for preservice teachers. Although educational systems are fundamentally grounded in the development of students’ disciplinary knowledge, it is equally critical that teachers promote students’ development with learning and innovation skills to prepare them for success within 21st century digital and

global environments (Kereluick, Mishra, Fahnoe, & Terry, 2013).

With respect to digital competence, we were disappointed that the data did not show a larger presence with specific digital preparation efforts. We acknowledge that a significant number of assignments implicitly suggested preservice teachers’ usage of technology tools to create meaning-making productions, such as the creation of instructional resources would most likely involve the use of word processing tools or access to electronic resources (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). However, our analyses focused upon manifest content that explicitly referenced ways in which preservice teachers developed understandings related to establishing a “culture of literacy” in their future classrooms (Moore & Grisham, 2015, p. 23). With this in mind, cultivating digital competence among preservice teachers must go well beyond the mere integration of digital and technology tools and focus upon development of preservice teachers’ pedagogy for teaching students within 21st century digital and global environments (Burden et al., 2016; Zygouris-Coe, 2016).

We held similar concerns with the presence of specific global preparation efforts. Although the analyses with manifest content may have been a limiting factor, the lack of teacher educator-directed assignments and the narrow scope of preservice teacher-directed assignments strongly suggested that this preparation effort requires attention. Exposing preservice educators to a wide variety of cultures and perspectives through diverse

texts is a beneficial and effective way to foster global competency (Dwyer, 2016). However, extending preservice teachers' connectivity with others worldwide is of equal importance. In a 21st century digital and global environment, global competency is concerned with "connecting, creating, collaborating, and communicating across a global network" (p. 136).

Based on these discussion points, we developed two recommendations. First, we noted that our search efforts for relevant literature that focused upon digital and global competence among teacher educators was incredibly sparse and resulted in only one publication (Krumsvik, 2014). Just as frequent and ongoing professional development among practicing teachers is important, teacher educators must also have opportunities to engage with high-quality professional development experiences related to preparation efforts within 21st century digital and global environments. We recommend that educator preparation programs provide teacher educators with adequate resources and support to stay current with educational trends and learning expectations so that they may remain relevant with their preparation efforts.

Second, literature published over the past 16 years has noted that educator preparation programs have begun to eliminate or alter the delivery of content from stand-alone children's literature courses (Hoewisch, 2000; Tunks et al., 2015). We wondered if this might be related to the perceived relevance of the course's content, especially since it has an historic grounding in traditional literacies, such as reading. However, children's literature has been deemed an invaluable tool during 21st century literacy instruction (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2015; Cetin & Bay, 2015;

Monobe & Son, 2014; Serafini & Moses, 2014; Sun, 2016), and preservice teachers must be trained in how to select, evaluate, and incorporate children's literature into effective literacy instruction (Bouley, 2011; Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejía, 2003; Hug, 2010). With this in mind, we strongly advocate that educator preparation programs keep stand-alone children's literature courses as one of their program requirements and carefully consider how to transform these courses to better accommodate the development of digital and global competencies among preservice teacher candidates. We encourage teacher educators to engage in curriculum transformation endeavors collaboratively (Moffat, 2010) and consider employing innovative course redesign techniques, such as concept mapping (Simon, 2010), teaching portfolios (Quinlan, 2002), and peer reviews (Mager et al., 2014).

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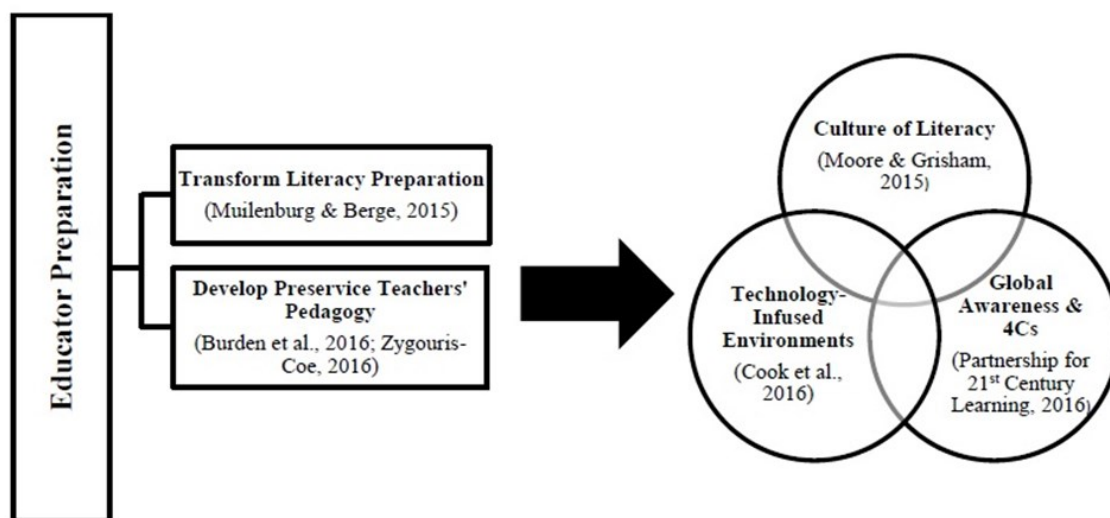


Figure 1. Conceptual framework that depicts visually the literature-based concepts underpinning the relationship between educator preparation and 21st century classrooms in a digital and global environment.

Table 1. *Summary of Syllabi Collected*

EPP	Type	Number of Syllabi	Semester	EPP	Type	Number of Syllabi	Semester
1	Public	2	Spring 2016	15	Public	3	Spring 2016
2	Private	1	Spring 2011	16	Public	5	Spring 2016
3	Private	1	Fall 2014	17	Public	3	Spring 2016
4	Public	1	Spring 2016	18	Public	3	Spring 2016
5	Public	2	Fall 2015	19	Private	1	Fall 2015
6	Public	1	Spring 2016	20	Public	1	Spring 2016
7	Public	1	Spring 2016	21	Public	1	Spring 2016
8	Public	1	Spring 2016	22	Public	1	Fall 2015
9	Public	3	Spring 2016	23	Public	1	Spring 2016
10	Public	1	Fall 2015	24	Public	4	Spring 2016
11	Public	3	Fall 2015	25	Public	1	Spring 2016
12	Public	1	Summer 2015	26	Public	1	Fall 2015
13	Private	1	Spring 2015	27	Private	1	Winter 2015
14	Public	4	Spring 2016	28	Public	3	Spring 2016

Table 2

Major Assignments and Assessments in Stand-Alone Children's Literature Courses

Major Assignments and Assessments	Frequency
Collaborative Class Interactions	
Literature Circles	11
Group tasks	10
Partner tasks	2
Reading/writing workshop	2
Peer Oral Communication	
Small group discussions	10
Whole group discussions	9
Peer feedback exercises	6
Learning Experiences beyond the Classroom	
Field experiences (e.g., read aloud to children, teach a lesson at a school)	10
Visit libraries and/or bookstores	4
Service learning projects	2
Interview a child	1
Community service (*extra credit)	1
Professional development (*extra credit)	1
Class Presentations & Performances	
Individual presentations	18
Partner and group presentations	13
Dramatic performances (e.g., Reader's Theater, poetry, "Jackdraw")	10
Read aloud to peer/small group/class	7
Choral/shared/poetry reading	3
Share originally created book	1

Technology/Digital Tasks

Digital artifact (e.g. PowerPoint, Prezi, digital story, e-book, digital map)	10
Asynchronous online discussions	6
Review books on website	4
Compile and evaluate online resources (e.g. websites)	2
Interact with non-print texts (e.g., videos, films, internet resources)	2
Post digital artifacts online (e.g., digital presentations, videos)	2
Synchronous online discussions	2
Blog participation	1
Inquiry-based webquest	1
Literature compilation in database software	1
Virtual lesson	1
Website creation	1

Traditional Assessments

Quizzes	15
Mid-term exam	13
Tests/exams	9
Final exam	8
Practice Certification Test	1

Written & Visual Artifacts

Written reflections (e.g., journal entries, reflective essays, teaching philosophy)	35
Literature compilations (e.g., annotated bibliographies, notecard file, notebook)	31
Instructional resources (i.e., extension activities, lesson plans, strategies)	28
Research tasks (e.g., author/illustrator study, literacy topic, awards, genre)	22
Analysis tasks (e.g., illustrations, poems, songs, texts)	11
Writing assignments (e.g., text summary responses, book reviews, essays)	9
Planning/prewriting (e.g., experience chart, movie script, storyboard, story map)	6
Evaluation tasks (e.g., texts, literature resources)	5
Written information for peers	5
Audio and video components (e.g., pictures, audio recordings, video recordings)	4
Original books/poems	4
Daily writing/class notes	3
Poetry illustrations	2
Parental communication (e.g., parent guide, inventory sheet, letter)	2
Visual presentations	2
Case study	1
Dear Reader letter	1
Self-evaluation rubric	1

Table 3. *Types of Specific Digital Preparation Efforts*

Teacher-Educator Directed Assignments	Preservice-Teacher Directed Assignments
Inquiry-based webquest	Document event with pictures
Virtual lesson EdPuzzle.com	Audio record an event
	Video record an event
	Compile online resources (e.g., websites)
	Create a PowerPoint
	Create a Prezi
	Make a book trailer using a movie maker application
	Create a digital story
	Literature compilation recorded in Excel spreadsheet
	Viewing of films, video clips, internet resources
	Create an e-book
	Create a digital literacy life map
	Create a digital presentation
	Include hyperlinks in digital presentation
	Use Weebly website platform to display research project
	Conduct reviews of web resources

Table 4. *Types of Specific Global Preparation Efforts*

Teacher-Educator Directed Assignments	Preservice-Teacher Directed Assignments
	Select and read multicultural texts
	Diversity tracking and reading log
	Read and track books from diverse cultures
	Service learning project
	Discussion item to gain different perspectives
	Multicultural literature circle
	Community service (*extra credit)
	Professional development (*extra credit)

Table 5

Presence of Learning and Innovation Skills among Major Assignments and Assessments

Skill	Definition	Examples of Representations
Creativity	The ability to think of new ideas and exhibit innovation, originality, and inventiveness (Partnership for 21 st Century Learning, 2015).	Brainstorming in planning/prewriting Creation of original works Designing presentations Developing new ideas with others Use of dramatic elements Use of symbolic elements
Collaboration	The ability to work with others effectively and civilly as an equal contributor (Partnership for 21 st Century Learning, 2015).	Discussion groups Group and partner tasks Literature circles Reading/writing workshop
Communication	The ability to listen and express oneself effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication methods in diverse contexts and settings (Partnership for 21 st Century Learning, 2015).	Digital productions Field experiences Group, individual, and partner presentations In-person and online discussions Peer feedback exercises Reading aloud to others Written productions
Critical Thinking	The ability to use reasoning and higher order thinking skills, such as reflection, analysis, and evaluation (Partnership for 21 st Century Learning, 2015).	Analysis tasks Development of instructional resources Evaluation tasks Research tasks Written reflections

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