

## **Class Exploration to a Campus Library Curriculum Center to Develop Book-Building Capacity for Teacher Candidates**

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*The purpose of this pilot was to examine the effectiveness of the practice of providing opportunities for undergraduate elementary education teacher candidates to explore the campus library curriculum center as a group regularly during class time. During their visits, teacher candidates were guided in selecting and analyzing children's literature for their future teaching. The research was focused on how these visits impacted teacher candidates' understanding of children's literature and literacy development. Data were collected through a survey administered at the conclusion of the course and responses were probed further during one-on-one interviews. Candidates described these visits as beneficial in exploring literature collaboratively and deepening their knowledge about curricular materials available to support and enhance their teaching. Teacher candidates were able to develop skills in choosing appropriate texts embodying targeted characteristics. They benefitted from the shared sociolinguistic experiences selecting and examining texts in the curriculum center with teacher and peer support. The results of this investigation suggest that these exploratory curriculum center visits may be a promising practice for teacher educators to include in children's literature courses.*

Children's literature plays a special role in the elementary school classroom. Books for children provide academic and personal benefits, including the growth of imagination and inspiration, the development of empathy and cultural understanding the development of content knowledge, and the fostering of reading and writing skills (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2010). Teacher preparation programs seek to produce teachers who have a love of books and a wish to share that love with their students (Russell, 2005). The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) standards for teacher preparation programs include the requirement that teachers be "familiar with, able to use, and recommend to students many reading materials based on different topics, themes, and a variety of situations and consisting of different types, including stories, poems, biography, non-fiction, many categories of literature written for children, and texts from various subject areas" (ACEI, 2007, p. 5).

Teacher education professors are thus called to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to access a variety of children's reading materials to enhance their own familiarity and exposure and to plan ways to share these materials with their future students. Professors in

children's literature and literacy methods classes have often come to class wheeling carts full of books to share with their students and/or have sent their students to the libraries on campus and in the community to independently peruse books. Through the children's literature courses taught by the first author, we decided to study another approach. This course was enhanced by well-planned field trips to the campus library to collaboratively investigate the children's literature collection there together. This article will present a model for designing and implementing these on-campus field trips and share student responses to this endeavor.

## **Review of Research**

The careful selection of reading material is essential for literacy development and both parents and educators have come to recognize the multiple levels of benefits derived from selecting appropriate reading material. In addition to the ability to know literacy content knowledge for effective teaching, the students must also possess curricular knowledge involving the vast array of materials available and how to appropriately use them (Shulman, 1986). Over the last 50 years, research suggests the importance of matching children and books, and children's literature has been found to have important effects on children's development, both cognitive and emotional (Kiefer, 2004). Teachers find that they need guidance in selecting books that are interesting as well as developmentally appropriate for children (Saranch & Spodek, 2010). Guidance can come through examining award-winning books and becoming familiar with other criteria that children and adults can use when making decisions about reading particular books. For example, many books are chosen based on memorable language and memorable objects (Welsch, 2008). Multicultural significance (Boutte et al., 2008) and genre-based selections (Papas & Pettegrew, 1998) are also salient. Other researchers point to the value of matching texts with the background knowledge of children (Simmons & Kameenui, 1998) and the appropriate difficulty level (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Considering favorite authors and books that come in series may also be significant (Rosenhouse et al., 1997). Kurkjian and Livingston (2005) investigated the vital and relevant questions in choosing the "right book for the right child for the right situation" (p. 786). The authors explored how educators can use a book evaluation framework to encourage children to "become lifelong readers who read a wide range of literature for a variety of purposes" (p.787).

A course on children's literature can be of great value to teacher candidates to help them learn how to choose and use books (Kutzer, 1981; Peacock, 2004). Research has not yet examined the use of library field trips within such a course.

### **A New Perspective for On-Campus Literature Exploration**

Our elementary and special education programs include a freshman-level children's literature course that provides opportunities for teacher candidates to explore a wide selection of children's books across a variety of genres. This class traditionally includes a single session with a library specialist at the library to demonstrate to teacher candidates how to access materials for assignments. Additionally, a tour of the library curriculum center was provided so the candidates could find children's books and materials for specific course assignments. After this first planned field trip, teacher candidates were expected to visit the curriculum center on their own time to select books for these assignments independently.

When teaching this class previously, the instructor often brought in a cart full of books for genre exploration, author studies, examination of Newbery and Caldecott Award winning texts, and for the purpose of facilitating discussions about how to plan meaningful literature learning experiences for children using literature. Immersing teacher candidates in authentic literature was vital, but candidates were not getting any scaffolded experience in choosing books. The instructor was doing the work of selecting books to bring to class for a particular purpose.

This project came from discussions about the value of providing children with the opportunity for choosing their own books (Walker, 2008). The course was redesigned to incorporate the self-selection of children's literature into this course for motivation and optimum learning. The instructor engaged the class in a discussion about their own experiences with summer reading lists, teacher assigned reading, and choosing their own texts. As expected, the teacher candidates expressed that they preferred choosing their own books rather than having a teacher assign a book or books. The instructor realized that although she enjoyed sharing an extensive book collection with the teacher candidates, these books were her favorites and not the teacher candidates' choices. This project addressed this situation by adding a 15-minute library field trip to the end of each class. The class had been focusing on collaborative learning, the reasons why collaboration is a powerful classroom approach, and how they could use this

approach in their teaching (Dixon-Krauss, 1996), so teacher candidates were placed in pairs to collaborate as library partners.

At the library, each pair chose one or two books in a given genre or demonstrating a particular focus such as author study, multicultural exploration, or award-winning class. They were expected to give a brief summary of the book for the next class, why they chose it, and if the book crossed any other genres or demonstrated any other foci as described above. The instructor also participated and brought a text or two to class as an integral member of the teaching and learning class community.

During class, the pairs used the selected book for the class activity. For example, when exploring the genre of informational texts, the instructor modeled the use of an anticipation guide for the development of pedagogical content knowledge, or teaching knowledge, in the area of literacy instruction (Shulman, 1986). The class was provided with an authentic anticipation guide about the book, *Amazing Whales* (Figure 1) as well as template for the construction of anticipation guides for future book selections to add to their teaching repertoire. Teacher candidates completed the first part of the anticipation guide individually before the teacher's oral reading of the book and then completed the final part after reading. Then, each pair was given a blank anticipation template and asked to design one for their text and present it to the class. After this activity, the pairs added their work to an online class reference list and displayed the books on a table for exploration so teacher candidates were able to physically examine each text. At the close of each 75-minute class, the group reviewed the next area of study and headed to the curriculum center to return the books explored and borrow books for the next area of study.

Figure 1: Anticipation Guide

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

		<b>Anticipation Guide</b>			
<b>Before Reading</b>				<b>After Reading</b>	
Agree	Disagree			Agree	Disagree
1.	_____	_____	A blue whale's tongue weighs as much as an elephant.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	All whales are big.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	Whales breathe air.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	A group of whales is called a herd.	_____	_____

## **Teacher Candidate Responses to Field Trips to Campus Library Curriculum Center**

Data were gathered from a survey (Appendix A) administered by the instructor to all teacher candidates at the conclusion of the classes surveyed. There were 12 students in the first section and 10 in the second section. Responses were probed through one-on-one interviews with students who volunteered to participate. These data provided information on the candidates' perspectives regarding the usefulness of their library activity. Candidates reported that the implementation of this practice exposed them to a variety of literary genres to use in their future teaching, and revealed how much literature is available for their use. One teacher candidate wrote, "The curriculum center has a vast amount of books at my disposal." Instead of having the professor select books for them to examine, candidates were able to practice choosing books from a wide collection of texts. This assisted the teacher candidates in learning how to select literature for specific learners in relation to grade level, reading level, and developmental appropriateness. One teacher candidate noted, "These books have helped me to evaluate what other books should be introduced in each grade level." Another commented, "It was interesting to see the different reading levels of books." The concept of determining appropriate reading levels of books for different learners and grade levels was emphasized as candidates made their choices within the curriculum center.

### ***Collaborative exploration of books***

Most (20/22) candidates reported that the collaborative exploration of books was more beneficial to them than going to the curriculum library on their own. The group trip was helpful in navigating the collection there. One candidate noted, "This helped because it was often hard to find what I was looking for, so going as a group helped." Another wrote, "It was beneficial because we were able to learn the curriculum center as a class rather than on our own." The physical space of the curriculum center was demystified for these students. Candidates explained, "Now I understand where the general sections are," and "I know where books are and can find them easily now," and one noted, "I even help my friends when they want to look for a book. I learned how to search things on shelves without always using the Internet."

The children's literature collection had a unique shelving system that candidates were able to learn together. One candidate indicated, "I was able to understand the codes on the books

and I could find specific types of books with the help of the codes. Children's literature has many different genres and other specifications to look for when selecting books." Overall, teacher candidates were exposed to the resource of the curriculum center through this process and developed confidence in utilizing this resource.

The sociolinguistic sharing of the experience was also found to be beneficial. A candidate explained, "I enjoyed being able to talk to the rest of the class about their choices and my own. I was also glad there was teacher support." One candidate explained, "When I was by myself, I didn't feel as engaged; I just walked around. " Candidates wrote about the benefits of "assisting each other in choosing books," and "bouncing ideas off each other." When the class was at the curriculum center, they often gathered in a corner and sat on the rug. One student found, "I liked the intimacy of the curriculum center. It encouraged discussion." Another student wrote about the value of the shared experience explaining, "There is a sense of camaraderie and support. I like hearing about others' selections and the reasons behind choosing them." Another comment summarizes the appreciation for the shared experiences: "I think in this type of activity, being a group is really important."

Two of the 22 students offered a different perspective, indicating that they preferred going to the library on their own, one explaining, "going to the library myself gave me my own time and thoughts that are not rushed." Another agreed, "I enjoy going on my own because it both forces and allows me to explore things rather than just being told. When I go on my own, I can take time to fully search for just what I need."

### ***Organization***

On a practical note, the weekly library explorations scaffolded these freshmen in assuring that they borrowed and returned items regularly without incurring the dreaded "library hold" on their registration accounts due to lost library items. Candidates explained the value of having "an allotted time" for returning items indicating that this allowed them to feel "much more organized in this class than others." One wrote, "Overall, class visits helped me stay organized in returning items because it would be a reminder that I have books out." The weekly visits were set up so that candidates were able to "return books just as I was checking out new ones."

## **Promising Practice**

Class field trips to a campus library curriculum center, as an integral part of a children's literature course, were found to be effective in developing the book-choosing capacity for teacher candidates. The field trips assisted candidates in the collaborative exploration and evaluation of books. It helped students gain skills in locating appropriate books within an extensive collection and provided a context for meaningful sociolinguistic sharing about children's literature and choosing books for instruction. Teacher candidates involved also benefitted from the organizational support in borrowing and returning books for class. The capacity to choose quality books for instruction is critical for teachers entering the field (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2010; ACEI 2007). A noteworthy implication from findings in this investigation suggests that providing a foundation of teaching knowledge in concert with curricular knowledge about materials used for instruction can support prospective practitioners in the field (Shulman, 1986; Pontrello, 2011). Teacher who can find the "right book for the right child for the right situation" (Kurkjian & Livingston, 2005, p. 786) will be equipped to deliver meaningful and effective instruction for all learners. Class field trips to the campus library curriculum center as part of a children's literature class may be one promising practice to assist teacher candidates in achieving this worthy goal.

## **Implications for Further Study**

Future research could examine the effectiveness of this practice in greater detail including pre and post surveys and interviews and possibly the use of a control group. Systematic study within the library, of specific approaches, used during the class explorations could enhance the possibilities for learning within this promising practice.

## Appendix A



### EDE 121: Introduction to Children's Literature and the Arts Survey

During the semester, some days the professor brought children's books to class for you to work with, and other days the class went to the curriculum center to choose children's books. The purpose of this survey is to find out your opinions on these two techniques.

**Directions: Please circle the best response to the questions below and write a comment.**

<p>How beneficial was it when the professor brought children's books to class for you to analyze?</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Extremely beneficial</td> <td></td> <td>Neutral</td> <td></td> <td>Not at all beneficial</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>4</td> <td>3</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5">Comments:</td> </tr> </table>	Extremely beneficial		Neutral		Not at all beneficial	5	4	3	2	1	Comments:				
Extremely beneficial		Neutral		Not at all beneficial												
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Comments:																
<p>How helpful was it to go to the curriculum center as a class and choose children's books to analyze?</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Extremely beneficial</td> <td></td> <td>Neutral</td> <td></td> <td>Not at all beneficial</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>4</td> <td>3</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5">Comments:</td> </tr> </table>	Extremely beneficial		Neutral		Not at all beneficial	5	4	3	2	1	Comments:				
Extremely beneficial		Neutral		Not at all beneficial												
5	4	3	2	1												
Comments:																
<p>Do you think that you will be more likely to use the curriculum center in the future due to the library visits in this class?</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Definitely more likely</td> <td></td> <td>Neutral</td> <td></td> <td>Definitely no affect</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>4</td> <td>3</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5">Comments:</td> </tr> </table>	Definitely more likely		Neutral		Definitely no affect	5	4	3	2	1	Comments:				
Definitely more likely		Neutral		Definitely no affect												
5	4	3	2	1												
Comments:																

How did the visits to the library, if at all, enhance your understanding of children's literature and literacy?

Would you rather visit the library on your own or as a class? Why?

Do you think that class visits helped you stay organized in returning items?

Was the timing during class (the last 15 minutes) to visit the curriculum center beneficial or do you think an alternative time during class would have been better? Why?



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