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The Use of Children's Literature in Reading: A Study of Politics and Professionalism within Teacher Education.
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Once upon a time in “an education kingdom,” the Good Teachers assembled to bestow their blessings and gifts to the new graduates while wishing them a bright future. Suddenly, an evil looking Cranky Teacher came forward cursing the excited students and prophesying that they would leave their profession out of exhaustion with reporting. Just in time, a Good Teacher intervened like a savior and promised the shocked students “unconditional hope”; a hope that would rise from love and passion of the profession and of experiencing challenging hours with eager children (p. xv). This “grim scary tale” opens Alyson Simpson’s book, *The Use of Children's Literature in Reading: A Study of Politics and Professionalism within Teacher Education*. By this story, Simpson allegorizes the challenging context of teaching for early career pre-service teachers and emphasizes the significant role of literature in literacy. Comprised of seven chapters, this volume elaborates the restrictive role of governmental directives to hinder creative teaching with children’s literature in Australia, Canada, the UK and the US. The Cranky Teacher in the tale symbolizes the political and professional measurements.

Chapter 1, *Asking the Difficult Questions*, begins with a reference to Snyder’s book, *The Literacy Wars*, which examines the conflictual relationship between policy makers and teachers on teaching reading to young children, curriculum design and appropriate pedagogy. It seems that the infiltration of power from politics to literacy has downgraded the level of education. This challenge is examined cross-culturally at macro, meso and micro levels in four countries. While politicians focus on skill-based learning, pre-service teachers underline wider views of learning derived from literature. They believe that literary texts have the potentiality for nurturing students’ imagination while exciting them. Hence, as the author contends, initial teacher educators should resist

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regulatory measurements through creative teaching of children's literature in order to enhance the level of literacy. Moreover, the high-level of the education should be a top priority in education system and pre-service teachers should develop a sound familiarity with children's literature.

Chapter 2, *Research Design: Asking the Right Questions*, evaluates the situation in which political plans tend to disempower the autonomy of pre-service teachers. As skill-based training is dominating some education systems, a question may arise on how initial teacher educators should empower the agency of pre-service teachers with confidence and resilience for challenging these reductionist imperatives. Hence, the design of the research, methodology and the choice of an applicable theoretical framework viable with epistemology of research become very important. To encompass a wider scope, the research needs to be conducted following mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) design. While previous studies collected the data through document analysis, interviews and survey, the present study uses a fourth, rarely used, tool for data gathering, namely digital stories. As a comparative study, the results revealed a blend of perspectives across cultural boundaries; they further showed how pre-service teachers creatively balanced their personal ideology with appropriate pedagogy while challenging socio-political layers of control from macro, meso and micro matrix.

Chapter 3, *Political and Professional Contexts and Controls*, examines the control of institutional and professional mandates along with curriculum design in four different socio-cultural research sites at macro, meso and micro levels. The results of the study demonstrated how teachers with weak professional identity showed compliance with educational guidelines while those with robust professional agency defied and challenged reductionist standards of teaching. Challenging such a "pessimistic view", educators should develop the sense of flexibility in young learners by exposing them to "sophisticated reading of complex text" (McGaw 2010, p. 5, cited on p. 46). As the author contends, these skills lead to the advance of literacy standards; initial teacher education prioritizes comprehension and meaning making to low-level standards such as sentence structure and vocabulary. Such a dry grammatical engagement with literary texts, as it is argued, will demotivate young learners. The author further maintains that initial teacher education supports skill-based reading while strongly underscoring the interest of reading for young learners. Students should develop everlasting passion for reading, as deep engagement with literature increases the level of literacy.

Chapter 4, *Analysis of Initial Teacher Education Programs*, comprised of two sections, examines the impact of regulatory bodies on initial teacher education programs by analyzing compulsory units of study set for pre-service teachers. It begins with a detailed explication of the macro, meso and micro matrix and their controlling impact on course documentation. In macro level, Content Knowledge, Pedagogic Content Knowledge and Technological Pedagogic Content Knowledge are explained; Professional Standards, Curriculum Mandates, Higher Education and National Testing go under meso level and micro level includes Institutional Guidelines and Personal Ideologies. Among these three categories, concepts in meso level exercise strongest constraints on initial teacher education programs. It is expected that initial teacher educators should prepare students for classroom challenges by educating them on "whatness", "whyhness" and "howness" of teaching. However, decision makers have defined boundaries for course documentation and curriculum design which delimit teachers' independence in classrooms.

Chapter 5, *Conversations with Initial Teacher Educators and Children's Literature Specialists*, is a debate (either in the form of interview, questionnaire or skype) among twenty two initial teacher education academics and children's literature specialists on the significance of children's literature for pre-service teachers. Data analysis revealed how children's teacher specialists and academics from four diverse cultural backgrounds highlighted the centrality of this literary genre in pre-service teaching education programs. This pedagogy would allow them to enjoy an effective and successful teaching in their classrooms. Initial teacher educators should also create a reading context in which pre-service teachers experience love of reading together with pleasure of literature and see it as a potential for dialogue and interaction.

Chapter 6, *Identity Formation in Initial Teacher Education*, investigates the negotiation of pre-service teachers' professional identity formation. Ideally, initial teacher educators should create the sense of resilience in teachers because when they begin their working career, they should confidently try to balance the managerial parameters with their sound understanding of teaching context in order to retain their profession. In *Thriving not just Surviving: A Review of Research on Teacher Resilience* Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011) examine the teaching status of new graduates which demands teacher's resilient identity. Resilience, they believe, is the result of vibrant relationship between "individual risk" factor like school requirements and "protective factors" (p. 185). The early stage teachers should try to develop a qualified identity empowered by "altruistic motives" and "high self-efficiency" quality in order to "thrive, not just survive" (p. 185). Furthermore, teacher's identity can be "a critical component" in classroom as teachers can act like a model for young learners (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005, p. 22, cited on p. 106). Through digital story and survey, pre-service teachers from four different cultural climates talked about their educational experiences and personal beliefs as future teachers of reading with children's literature. The analysis of the findings of digital stories showed how pre-service teachers' autonomy was threatened by external forces. Participants in the survey also underscored the value of children's literature for teachers as innovative educators. However, the survey results also revealed that some pre-service teachers lacked courage to confront the external challenges in a creative way; some were not aware of these problems and some preferred to comply with these regulations. All these factors would definitely affect the teaching outcome.

Chapter 7, *Politics, Professionalism and Position Statements*, renders an outline of the whole volume by discussing the main issues, problems, potentialities and gaps of primary teacher education for teaching reading with children's literature. It links the important concepts discussed so far regarding pre-service teaching experiences by offering four propositions which underpins the interrelatedness of the four concepts of agency, creativity, dialogic teaching and core knowledge about children's literature. The chapter also highlights the responsibility of initial teacher educators in exposing and introducing students to a wide range of children's literature so that they can make sound decisions in their classrooms as early stage teachers.

Simpson's contribution to the literature should be appreciated as she is a well-read scholar who demonstrates a wide familiarity with the area of her study with broad range of references to scholarly sources. Besides, this is the first research driven book examining the current issues related

to the role of children's literature in pre-service education programs in four different socio-cultural contexts. However, the author contends that the area of her research is not exhaustive and further study is needed to focus on pre-service teachers when they begin the teaching career, their agentive behavior, resilience and their conflictual relationship with political imperatives at macro, meso and micro levels. The findings of the book could be very insightful for decision makers, pre-service teachers, children's literature specialists, initial teacher educators and students.

References

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