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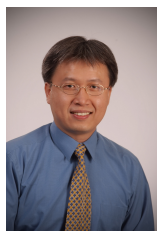
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Teaching Multiple Literacies and Critical Literacy to Pre-Service Teachers through Children's-Literature-Based Engagements

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a pragmatic way of introducing pre-service teachers to multiple literacies and critical literacy through children's-literature-based engagements. The concepts of multiple literacies and critical literacy are reviewed, and their interrelationship is explained. Two instructional engagements, which connect theory to practice through children's books, are then discussed in detail. This paper argues that the instruction of multiple literacies and critical literacy is aligned with the definition of literacy as multiple social practices, which should be examined critically. In addition, the utilization of children's books provides a feasible way to help such instruction take root in the classroom.

Keywords: multiple literacies, critical literacy, literacy education, teacher education, children's literature



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Despite the proliferation of research on literacy education, it seems challenging to put the research findings into practice in the classroom. For example, while there exist multiple forms of literacy, reading and writing are still the main literacy skills instructed in a traditional classroom. Specifically, according to National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, there are six language arts: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing (Tompkins, 2009). Street (1995) took a step further and argued that literacy education should go beyond a skill-based approach to reflect the fact that literate practices are closely tied to different social practices. Nevertheless, the instruction of reading and writing still plays a dominant role in a traditional literacy/language arts classroom. While it is true that reading and writing are important skills to learn to become literate, they are only two of the skills or language arts. The instruction with a focus on reading and writing is lopsided and does not take into consideration the social ramifications of literacy.

Similarly, while critical literacy has been intensively researched and become widely known in academia, it does not seem to take root in the classroom. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) found that “teachers have read a little and maybe attended a conference session, but they readily admit they don’t know much about what critical literacy is or what it means for them as teachers” (p. 382). In parallel, in another article, I (Lee, 2011) have presented four common myths/misconceptions that pre-service and in-service teachers have about critical literacy. Briefly, some pre-service and in-service teachers misbelieve that critical literacy is simply critical thinking, meant only for high ability students, nothing but an instructional strategy, and focused primarily on reading and writing. For example, by equating critical literacy to critical thinking, the teachers put an emphasis on higher order thinking such as analysis, evaluation, and

synthesis, a concept based on Bloom’s (1984) taxonomy, instead of investigating unequal power relations. This is also why the teachers think that critical literacy is geared only to high ability students, who are supposed to be capable of higher order thinking, while it is actually meant to empower the marginalized students to change the status quo.

In order to address the lack of knowledge and misinterpretations of literacy education, I am interested in developing instructional engagements based on a broader definition of literacy that includes, but is not limited to, reading and writing. As a literacy teacher educator, I will share my experience of how to teach multiple literacies and critical literacy to pre-service teachers through children’s-literature-based engagements. It is important to note that an engagement is different from an activity in that students in an engagement take a proactive role in learning while students in an activity may be busy doing something, such as a worksheet, but do not necessarily participate actively in, or have the ownership of, learning. Therefore, the term “engagement” is used throughout this paper to emphasize that students are involved/engaged and take an active role in an inquiry in which they are interested. In what follows, I will review research literature on the concepts of multiple literacies and critical literacy, discuss their interrelationship, and demonstrate how to develop instructional engagements that help pre-service teachers understand these concepts and apply them in the classroom.

Multiple Literacies

Approximately five decades ago, Jack Goody and Ian Watt (1963), in their classic essay in the literacy education literature “The Consequences of Literacy,” proposed what was called by Halverson (1992) “the literacy thesis” that claimed the superiority of alphabetic literacy over non-alphabetic or restricted literacy. Goody and Watt’s literacy thesis argued that the advance from pre-modern to modern society

was attributed considerably to its change in the form of literacy, i.e., from orality to writing (especially the alphabetic writing system in the West). Implicit in their argument was an assumption “that literacy with a big ‘L’ and a single ‘y’ was a single autonomous thing that had consequences for personal and social development. The autonomous model has been a dominant feature of educational and development theory” (Street, 1995, pp. 132-133).

Not surprisingly, Goody and Watt’s “Literacy” or autonomous model met with challenges. Among them were criticisms from Shirley Brice Heath and Brian Street. In opposition to the autonomous model, they proposed a shift to plural approaches, which have come to be called the “New Literacy Studies” (NLS):

[NLS] attempt[s] to grapple with the power relations that pervade literacy practices; to find new ways of linking the linguistic, the cognitive, and the social; and to confront the meanings of schooling and literacy in circumstances of worldwide economic downturn. (Collins, 1995, p. 80)

Not only did NLS advance a theory of multiple literacies, but it also replaced the autonomous model with an ideological model where situated approaches to literacy are emphasized (Collins & Blot, 2003). That is, literacies are situated in social contexts and power relations.

Shirley Brice Heath used an ethnographic method to investigate the nature and development of literacy. In *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Heath (1983) studied three communities in a city of the Southeastern United States: Roadville, a white working-class community; Trackton, an African-American working-class community; and Townspeople, a composite portrait of middle-class town residents of both ethnicities. In tracing the children’s language development, Heath (1983)

showed that the deep social differences among Roadville, Trackton, and Townspeople were manifested in their literate practices at home and in school.

For example, the teachers reported that many children in Trackton could not even answer the most basic questions like “What is your name?” and “Where do you live?” Heath (1983) found that the meanings and uses of the questions differed between the children in Trackton and those in Townspeople due to their socioeconomic backgrounds. Specifically, the school discourse contained questioning patterns novel to the children in Trackton, but familiar to those in Townspeople. As a result, the children in Trackton could hardly find connections between their home literate practices and the school discourse and were usually misjudged as slow or at-risk in school. In contrast, the children in Townspeople had the upper hand because their home literate practices resembled those in school. Therefore, their competence in home literacy paved the way for their learning of school literacy. Heath’s (1983) work taught us that there is no universality to literacy. Instead, there are many literacies such as home literacy, school literacy, work literacy, etc. Prioritizing one type of literacy against another is ignoring the impact social aspects have on literacy development.

Similarly, Brian Street (1984, 1993, 1995) contended that the meaning of literacy is situated in social contexts and varies from one to another. Street (1984) studied the fruit-growing villages around Mashad in North East Iran. The villagers in Cheshmeh, for example, attended the maktab, a Koranic religious school, and learned the Koran, which is supposed to be “the Word of God” and invariant in nature (Street, 1984, p. 135). However, Street (1984) observed that the entrepreneurs in Cheshmeh adapted the religious literacy they learned from the maktab to commercial purposes

to help them do business with people in the surrounding villages. Therefore, Street (1984) argued that literacy is multiple and subject to individual interpretations although it may be first acquired in a textually invariant context, e.g., the Koranic religious school. He proposed that literacy is not singular and is closely tied to social practices.

What we can learn from both Heath and Street is that it is not literacy itself, but literate practices situated in social contexts that play an essential role in deciding whether one is literate or not. One is considered literate when his/her literate practices are aligned with those defined to be literate. In addition, there are multiple literacies and literate practices. For example, while reading traditional print texts is considered one form of literacy, composing non-print texts, such as singing, drawing, and dancing, is another form of literacy that should be valued as well.

Connection between Multiple Literacies and Critical Literacy

The concept of multiple literacies shows that all literacies, along with their corresponding social practices, should be respected and embraced as possible vehicles for learning. However, Nieto (2010) also warned us that because we are “concerned with equity and social justice, and because the basic values of different groups are often diametrically opposed, conflict is bound to occur” (p. 257). Therefore, the instruction of multiple literacies should be based on the understanding that social practices are never fixed and thus should be subject to critique. Passively accepting the status quo of any set of social

practices is simply perpetuating the ideologies embedded in those practices. Yet substituting one myth for another without critique contradicts the fact that no literacy, along with its social practices, is superior to any other.

Consequently, it is important to assume an inclusive attitude toward a different culture. Yet it is questionable to accept as legitimate, for example,

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the view in a culture where women are not allowed to receive education simply due to their gender. Including multiple social practices in literacy education is not romanticizing and embracing them blindly. Instead, it acknowledges that differences exist and should be examined critically. This is where critical literacy comes into play. On the one hand, critical literacy recognizes that literacy is

situated in social practices and varies from culture to culture. On the other hand, it does not take each culture’s literate practices for granted but investigates them critically.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy, conceptualized as an active engagement with print as well as non-print texts, is concerned with critiquing relationships among language, social practice, and power. It is derived from, and linked closely to, the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian philosopher, activist, and educator.

Historically speaking, critical literacy has its roots reaching deep into critical theory, philosophy, linguistics, and discourse studies. Within English-speaking countries, the translation and publication of Paulo Freire’s work to English in the 1970s, along

with his collaboration with Donald Macedo and Ira Shor, mark a watershed in the development of critical literacy as a distinct theoretical and pedagogical field. (Knobel, 2007, p. vii)

Freire advocated adult literacy campaigns in Brazil and reformulated education as a “site for emancipation, empowerment, and social justice” (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. 5). In his pedagogy of the oppressed, Freire (1984) proposed that literacy education embodied in reflection and action is meant to empower the underprivileged through a dialogical process. He argued that educators should teach students to read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). For Freire, being literate means not only the ability to read texts, but also the capacity to take action to transform the world and promote social justice.

Building on Freire’s work, Anderson and Irvine (1993) defined critical literacy as “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations” (p. 82). Hence, the goal of critical literacy “is to challenge these unequal power relations” (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 82). Literacy education perceived from this critical slant is no longer merely the instruction of literate skills such as reading and writing. It is broadened to include the fostering of the ability to problematize and redefine ideologies depicted in the texts and power relations experienced in our daily lives.

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) reviewed a range of definitions of critical literacy that appeared in the research and professional literature for a span of three decades and synthesized them into four dimensions: (a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice. The first dimension, disrupting the commonplace, is to question the

routines, beliefs, habits, theories, practices, etc. that we encounter and are used to. It focuses on interrogating our everyday world, including “how social norms are communicated through the various arenas of popular culture and how identities are shaped by these experiences” (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008, p. 8). The second dimension, interrogating multiple viewpoints, is meant to make difference visible and subject it to critical scrutiny instead of striving for consensus and conformity. Luke and Freebody (1997) suggested that multiple and contradictory accounts of an event be juxtaposed to investigate whose voices are heard and whose voices are missing. The third dimension is focusing on sociopolitical issues such as gender bias, bullying, and poverty that are related to students’ lives. It goes beyond the personal concerns and attempts to situate them in the sociopolitical contexts/systems (Boozer, Maras, & Brummett, 1999). The last dimension is taking action and promoting social justice. It is aligned with Freire’s (1984) proposition that literacy learners should be actors rather than spectators in the world. The purpose is to empower the underprivileged to challenge unequal power relations, redefine them, and take action to transform their status quo.

The aforementioned concepts of multiple literacies as multiple social practices and critical literacy, especially Lewison et al.’s (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy, serve as the bases for the multiple literacies engagement and the critical literacy engagement. Before these two engagements are discussed in detail, I will go over the context where the engagements were taught, as well as the participants who took part in the engagements.

Context and Participants

I teach in the teacher education program at a Midwestern university in the U.S. The university is located in a city where there are an increasing

number of immigrant students. The student population is very diverse in one of the city's P-12 school corporations with which I work closely in placing the pre-service teachers for their practicum. This school corporation is largely urban with a 45% Caucasian, 24% African-American, 16% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 9% multiracial student population. All schools in this corporation include at least four racial/ethnic groups, while most schools contain five or six. Yet most of the pre-service teachers in the teacher education program at my university are middle-class Caucasians and have little experience working with minority students. Most of them grew up and went to school with peers like themselves. Therefore, the practicum provides a great opportunity for them to interact with students from diverse backgrounds.

A total of twenty-eight pre-service teachers participated in the engagements in the spring 2015. There were twenty-three females and five males, and all of them were white. They were in the first of a series of three literacy methods courses required for the elementary teacher education program. The pre-service teachers taking this course were primarily in their junior year, and there was a thirty-hour practicum requirement attached to this course. I was responsible for teaching the course as well as supervising their practicum.

The instructional engagements based on the concepts of multiple literacies and critical literacy were an important part of this course. One of the features of the engagements was that children's literature was used. This was because the elementary students, whom the pre-service teachers were trained to teach, enjoyed reading children's books or listening to someone read the books to them. The discussion that follows is divided into the multiple literacies engagement and the critical literacy engagement.

Multiple Literacies Engagement

The purpose of the multiple literacies engagement was to guide the pre-service teachers to know the concept of multiple literacies, see it in action, and then experience it personally. The engagement consisted of three parts: (a) reading about multiple literacies, (b) seeing an example through a children's book, and (c) experiencing multiple literacies personally.

Reading about Multiple Literacies

Not surprisingly, reading is usually the first step to knowing more about things in which we are interested. Harste's (2003) article titled "What Do We Mean by Literacy Now?" was assigned for the pre-service teachers to read and discuss. In this article, Harste argued that two important insights about research on literacy education are the propositions of multiple literacies and literacy as social practice (as pointed out before in this paper). All of the pre-service teachers were required to read this article. Two or three of them signed up as student-led discussion leaders to lead the discussion (each pre-service teacher had to sign up to lead the discussion of at least one assigned reading during the semester). The purpose of the discussion was to find the underlying issues presented in the article, make controversies and points of contention visible and open for debate, encourage the class to identify their own issues and responses, and invite everyone to participate. The discussion of the article helped the pre-service teachers understand the concept of multiple literacies better. However, their understanding was still on the theoretical level. This was why the next step was to introduce the pre-service teachers to an example where multiple literacies are practiced.

Seeing an Example through a Children's Book

A children's book is designed to appeal to a wide audience and focus on a story, told with humor and unforgettable language (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013). It presents issues in a way to which readers can relate. For this reason, I chose to use a children's book in this engagement in order to make a difficult concept, i.e., multiple literacies, more manageable for the pre-service teachers to grasp. In addition, a children's book offered a feasible way for the pre-service teachers to introduce elementary students to an otherwise-difficult-to-understand concept.

I chose Yashima's (1955) *Crow Boy* to demonstrate the importance of including multiple literacies in the classroom. *Crow Boy* features a boy named Chibi, which means "tiny boy," in a small Japanese village. Chibi is an outcast at school because he is different from the other children. Day after day, Chibi is faced with feelings of isolation and rejection. After five years, a new teacher, Mr. Isobe, notices Chibi's knowledge and skills that distinguish him from the other children. He displays Chibi's artwork and writing (though no one but Chibi can read his own handwriting) on the wall and admires his knowledge of the natural world. On the day of the school talent show, Mr. Isobe introduces Chibi's talent: imitating the voices of crows. Chibi amazes the crowd with many crow calls: calls of baby crows and older crows, alarms, happy calls, and finally the voice of a crow on an old tree near his far-off mountain home. When the teacher explains that Chibi has learned this talent during his daily walk from the far side of the mountain, everyone comes to respect and

appreciate Chibi. From that day forward, he became known as "Crow Boy."

My approach was to read the first part of *Crow Boy* and then invite a few pre-service teachers to take turns reading the rest of the story aloud to the class. After that, the pre-service teachers were asked to discuss in small groups the connections they had in relation to *Crow Boy*. Bullying, cultural diversity, and education of minority students were some of the connections they made. When asked to relate *Crow Boy* to the Harste (2003) article "What Do We Mean by Literacy Now?" that the pre-

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service teachers had read previously, multiple literacies stood out among their responses. Specifically, in a traditional classroom where reading and writing are valued most, Chibi is considered "at-risk" or "low-achieving" regardless of his talent in drawing and imitating the voices of crows. Yet when multiple literacies, i.e., Chibi's artwork, handwriting, and ability to

imitate crows' voices, are embraced by Mr. Isobe as acceptable forms of literacy in the classroom, Chibi is considered literate and becomes a member of what Smith (1988) calls the "literacy club."

Harste (2003) proposes that we as literacy educators should know what kinds of literate practices are in place in the classroom. We need to understand who benefits from such literate practices and who is marginalized. To make the classroom a place where students feel their home literacy is honored, we should also reflect on what literacy, along with its corresponding social practices, we have to put in place to make students' home literacy legitimate in the classroom. The goal is to foster a learning environment where students

are not alienated from the school literacy. In parallel, Leland, Harste, and Helt (2000) studied three fourth graders who were labeled learning-disabled in their early schooling and struggling with the traditional school curriculum, which equated literacy with written language. Leland et al. (2000) found that when the definition of literacy was expanded to include alternative “sign systems (art, music, drama, language, movement, math, and so forth) as representing the various ways humans have developed to mean,” these three formerly labeled “learning-disabled” students were able and willing to make and share meaning through alternative forms of literacy (p. 106).

Experiencing Multiple Literacies Personally

The last part of the engagement was designed to help the pre-service teachers not only understand the importance of including multiple literacies in the classroom, but also experience multiple literacies personally. I began by writing the word “duck” on the board and asked the pre-service teachers to jot down on a piece of paper what came to their minds when they saw or heard this word. The connections they made to “duck” often included “a bird,” “a bird with feathers,” “cute little ducklings,” “quack,” “ducks in a lake,” etc., which were listed on the board. I did not comment on, or ask why they came up with, the connections before everyone had a chance to contribute to the list. Once in a while, I was pleased to hear such connections as “It reminds me of hunting,” “I like roasted duck,” and “You duck when a ball comes toward you” because they were different from the rest (recall that literacies are related to social practices).

After the list seemed to be exhaustive, I asked the pre-service teachers why they made the connections. Their reasons ranged from one simple statement such as “It’s cute” to a long story about a duck hunting expedition. My next question for

them was, “Why does the same word ‘duck’ mean different things to you?” This question pushed the pre-service teachers to think about how a word is given a meaning or meanings. My goal was to guide the pre-service teachers to understand that the word “duck” is interpreted in many ways because we have different “experiences” with it. Furthermore, our experiences are closely tied to our social practices. For example, I asked one of the pre-service teachers why she thought the duck was cute. She said that she fed ducks in the lake near her house when she was little. She loved the way they ate and thought that they were so cute. In this case, the duck was given a meaning, i.e., “It’s cute,” based on her past experience or social practice with the duck. Similarly, the word “duck” reminded another pre-service teacher of his duck hunting experience (again, his social practice). Therefore, duck hunting stood out among other connections due to his experience with ducks.

The pre-service teachers were able to understand that literacy is multiple and closely tied to social practices. The “duck” experience enabled them to connect personally to what they had read previously about the concept of literacy in Harste’s (2003) article. In addition, they became aware that we have different interpretations of the seemingly same phenomenon, e.g., the duck, due to our different social experiences/practices. Prioritizing one kind of literacy along with its social practice over others runs the risk of “othering” or marginalizing people or students who are not familiar with the prioritized literacy.

An example of how the pre-service teachers had understood the concept of multiple literacies and applied it in practice was manifested in a lesson plan created and implemented by a group of four pre-service teachers. The lesson plan was the final project where the pre-service teachers were required to design and implement a lesson plan related to one of the themes discussed in the

course. This group chose to do a lesson plan on multiple literacies. Their lesson plan was built on a Burmese student (an English language learner) with whom one of the pre-service teachers worked in an after-school tutoring program housed at the university where I teach. Instead of focusing on what the student could not do, the pre-service teachers identified his strength and interest in dramatization or acting out (one form of literacy usually not valued in a traditional classroom). They read a book to the student and then guided him to write a script for his skit and let him act it out to show his comprehension of the book. This group implemented the lesson plan, video recorded the student's skit, and showed it during their lesson plan presentation. It was an example of how the pre-service teachers put their knowledge of multiple literacies into practice.

Critical Literacy Engagement

The critical literacy engagement also consisted of three parts: (a) reading about critical literacy, (b) seeing an example through a children's book, and (c) applying what was learned. Upfront, I had to remind the pre-service teachers of the connection between multiple literacies and critical literacy. Specifically, through the multiple literacies engagement, the pre-service teachers understood the importance of including multiple literacies, along with their corresponding social practices, in the classroom. However, not all social practices should be embraced blindly before they are examined critically. To show the importance of critical literacy, I asked the pre-service teachers, for example, if it was right to embrace a social practice where women are not allowed to be scientists simply due to their gender. Not surprisingly, all of the pre-service teachers disagreed with such a social practice. In this way, they understood the important role critical literacy plays in the classroom where multiple literacies/social practices are included. Following is a detailed account of the

three parts of the critical literacy engagement that helped the pre-service teachers transform a theoretical concept into a personal experience.

Reading about Critical Literacy

Since the purpose of this engagement was to help the pre-service teachers internalize critical literacy and apply it in the classroom, the emphasis was not placed on a comprehensive survey of the historical and theoretical background of critical literacy, but on its practical application. Therefore, the Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) article titled "Taking on Critical Literacy: The Journey of Newcomers and Novices" was chosen for the pre-service teachers to read and discuss in class. It provides an overview of the theoretical basis of critical literacy and a viable framework, i.e., the four dimensions of critical literacy, to put it into practice. In the article, Lewison et al. (2002) gave examples of what newcomers (who did not know what a critical literacy curriculum looked like) and novices (who had some prior background with critical literacy and had recently begun classroom implementation) did or did not do in regard to each dimension of critical literacy. As the pre-service teachers were "newcomers" to critical literacy, reading about these teachers' experiences helped them foresee, and cope with, the challenges they might face in implementing critical literacy in their future classrooms.

Seeing an Example through a Children's Book

To see the four dimensions of critical literacy in action through children's literature, the pre-service teachers and I share-read *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting (1991). *Fly Away Home* is a picture book written from the perspective of a boy who lives with his father in an airport. They live in the airport because they do not have a home. They learn that the trick of living in the airport is not getting noticed. To avoid being caught, the boy and his

father have to be on the move constantly to stay in crowded locations. Although they have made friends with other homeless families in the airport, there is a sense of hopelessness about their situation until the boy sees a trapped bird finally escape from the airport. After the reading of *Fly Away Home*, the pre-service teachers were given some time to discuss in small groups how this story related to the four dimensions of critical literacy. Then they came together as a whole class to share what they had come up with in small groups. Below was a synopsis of the class discussion.

First (first dimension: disrupting the commonplace), this book is concerned with homeless people, especially those living in an airport. Homeless people are often portrayed (or misrepresented) as lazy, unclean, or even dangerous. For example, when I asked the pre-service teachers about the stereotype we had about homeless people, some said, "They are lazy and don't want to work." "That's why they are homeless," they continued. *Fly Away Home* disrupts the stereotype or the commonplace we have about the homeless by showing that not only adults, but also children can be homeless. In this story, the boy is homeless due to his mother's death and his father's unemployment (even though he has been constantly on the lookout for a job). As a result, the boy and his father have lost their home and ended up living in an airport.

Second (second dimension: interrogating multiple viewpoints), the voice of the homeless is usually unheard in a mainstream society. Our view of the homeless often comes from the perspective of those other than the homeless. The pre-service teachers agreed that *Fly Away Home* presented a

voice from the marginalized and helped them see the issue from a different perspective.

Third (third dimension: focusing on sociopolitical issues), the pre-service teachers had no problem finding that the main sociopolitical issue in the story is homelessness. This story presents the issue through the boy's-eye view. The story not only depicts the boy's personal experience, but also reflects an issue that happens to many people in our society. It alludes to a social phenomenon that is still not fully addressed by our government and social system. By linking the personal to the social, this story helped the pre-service teachers see the complex interconnection between an individual

plight and a systemic problem in relation to homelessness.

Fourth (fourth dimension: taking action and promoting social justice), I asked the pre-service teachers what action they could take, after reading *Fly Away Home*, to promote social justice or to make our society a better place. One possible action they suggested

taking was to volunteer at a local food pantry to help the poor and needy. Another possible action they came up with was to help organize a campus-wide food drive. They were aware that to be critically literate is not only knowledgeable of literacy skills such as reading and writing, but also willing to put knowledge into practice by helping the homeless in this case.

Applying What Was Learned

After the pre-service teachers saw how to use the four dimensions of critical literacy through children's literature, this part of the critical literacy engagement invited them to put all they had learned into practice. In addition, they had to

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tie it to Lewison et al.'s (2002) article they had read previously. Specifically, the pre-service teachers were asked to define each of the four dimensions of critical literacy and cite Lewison et al.'s (2002) article to support their definition. They also had to connect each of the four dimensions to a children's book of their own choosing, explaining how the children's book helped put each dimension into practice. For the fourth dimension (taking action and promoting social justice), they had to suggest what action to take to promote social justice.

The pre-service teachers were given a week to find an appropriate children's book for this assignment. After they came back with their children's books, one class period (approximately three hours) was set aside for them to work in pairs on this assignment. I was available in class to conference with those who had questions about the assignment. At the end, each pair was invited to present the assignment before their peers. Through this hands-on experience, the pre-service teachers were able to apply critical literacy instead of only reading about it. Seeing their classmates' presentations also helped them clarify possible confusion, investigate critical literacy from multiple perspectives, and enhance their understanding.

In addition, the pre-service teachers were connected to Rally to Read, a non-profit community-wide literacy outreach event, where they volunteered to design literacy activities to engage children from an urban school corporation. The pre-service teachers also helped with other activities in the event such as setting up the booths and giving out free books and food. Through Rally to Read, the pre-service teachers had an opportunity to advocate for socioeconomically disadvantaged children. One of the pre-service teachers took a step further and signed up to volunteer at Big Brothers Big Sisters where a child (the little brother/sister) usually from a low socioeconomic family is paired with a mentor (the

big brother/sister). Below is the pre-service teacher's reflection about her work with her "little sister":

I am nowhere near perfect with supporting her but I am working on being the best big sister I can be. I am one of the few support systems that she has and it is hard to not get frustrated. It requires a large amount of patience and care but in the end it is worth it. When I know she is going home to eat microwaved eggs, I remind myself how lucky I am to be able to be an important part of her life. I want to help her develop into a successful woman and know that she can achieve anything she sets her heart to. She does not have to follow in the footsteps of her family members. She has told me before that she wants to be a teacher someday but doesn't think she is smart enough. It breaks my heart that she thinks that so we work on homework together and go to the library. I have been encouraging her to set dreams and goals in life and she has become much more optimistic.

The above examples showed that the pre-service teachers did not only understand critical literacy, but also put it into practice by making a positive impact on the people in their community.

Conclusion

This paper presents a pragmatic way to teach multiple literacies and critical literacy through children's-literature-based engagements. Multiple literacies and critical literacy are not as distant from us as they appear to be. They are actually related closely to our daily lives though we are not discursively aware of them. We are exposed to multiple literacies on a daily basis and thus need the ability to analyze them critically with critical literacy. The fact that multiple literacies and critical literacy are part of our lives is reminiscent of what is emphasized throughout this paper: literacy has a

close relevance to our social practice or daily experience. Therefore, the instruction of multiple literacies and critical literacy is much needed in school and makes explicit what we do every day in relation to literacy. Not teaching them ignores the important aspects of literacy education we can hardly afford to do without.

Undeniably, it is challenging to implement multiple literacies and critical literacy in the classroom, especially for pre-service teachers who are still learning about, and have little experience with, them. This paper proposes that using children's books is a viable way to introduce pre-service teachers to multiple literacies and critical literacy. Children's books present difficult issues in a way that is comprehensible to adults as well as children while the significance of the issues presented in the books is not compromised. As discussed previously in this paper, the importance of embracing multiple literacies in the classroom is foregrounded in the children's book *Crow Boy* where the boy, labeled as an at-risk reader and writer, is literate in alternative forms of literacy such as his artwork, knowledge about plants and insects, and ability to perform a variety of crows' voices. Through this book, the pre-service teachers as well as elementary students are given a forum where the issue of multiple literacies

in relation to literacy education is confronted, discussed in more depth, and connected to their lives in and outside the classroom. Similarly, through the reading of the children's book *Fly Away Home*, the pre-service teachers as well as elementary students are exposed to the four dimensions of critical literacy: disrupting the commonplace, investigating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action to promote social justice. The book is narrated from a boy's perspective and makes the homeless issue relatable to children. Through the four dimensions of critical literacy, the readers are invited not only to examine the homeless issue critically but also to take action to help the poor and needy.

In the beginning of this paper, I argued that our classroom practice does not match what we have researched and found about literacy education. I demonstrated that the discrepancy between theory and practice, specifically in the areas of multiple literacies and critical literacy, can be mitigated through the instructional engagements based on children's literature. I hope that this paper will serve as an invitation to all literacy educators/practitioners to put what they "know" about literacy education into what they "do" in the classroom.

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