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Handbook of Research in Children's and Young Adult Literature [1]

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This multidisciplinary Handbook is the first to bring together in one volume the leading scholarship on children's and young adult literature from three intersecting disciplines: Education, English, and Library and Information Science. Perspectives on readers and reading literature in home, school, library, and community settings are considered in Section I. Section II introduces analytic frames for studying young adult novels, picturebooks, indigenous literature, graphic novels, and other genres. Accompanying each chapter in Section II are commentaries on literary experiences and creative production from renowned authors and illustrators including David Wiesner, Lois Lowry, Philip Pullman, Jacqueline Woodson, Markus Zusak, Joseph Bruchac, and M.T. Anderson. Section III focuses on the social contexts of literary study, with chapters on censorship, awards, marketing, and literary museums. Editors' chapter introductions and section essays point academic and practitioner colleagues to each field's histories, contemporary concerns, and research methods, while outlining the potential for intersecting research and scholarship in all three fields.

Click here to download a brochure about the handbook [2]

Report on Narrative Research

I have been asked to develop an advanced doctoral seminar on Narrative Research. Although it is still somewhat rare to see academic writing take on much of a narrative flair, this course will be inspired by Richardson's (1994) advice that research writing should "deploy literary devices to re-create lived experience and evoke emotional responses" (p. 512). When one thinks of narrative, one usually thinks of the three essential features that mark literary text: (a) the sound properties of words, (b) the weaving of words into metaphors, and (c) the structure of the text as a whole. Thus, authors of narrative research craft their articles and books to take full advantage of the sound properties of language. They look for the potential in metaphor to make their points, and they may structure their texts to follow a more narrative design with rising action and a climax leading to falling action and an ultimate denouement. Consider the opening passage from my latest book:

Once upon a crisp autumn day, I was in a classroom observing a group of children reading a short tradebook about maps. The text described the prevailing view of the populace who believed the earth was flat, but then explained how a few brave thinkers suggested the spherical shape of the planet. Finally, the tradebook summarized the voyage of Magellan who

set out to prove new theory by circumnavigating the globe. The children--a group of confident, worldly nine and ten-year-olds--laughed over the image of the earth as flat. I suggested that even though the theory seemed amazing to us now, that they should try to imagine the courage of those who set out into their own unknown. I explained that in ancient times, people said: "At the edges of the earth, there be dragons." The boy sitting next to me immediately jerked around in his seat, looked me square in the eye, and exclaimed: "You talk just like a book!" (p. 1)

Phrases like "the prevailing view of the populace" and "spherical shape" allowed me to play with sound, especially alliteration. The idea that "At the edges of the earth, there be dragons" became a metaphor for the courage it takes to explore the unknown, as I later encouraged my readers (preservice and inservice teachers) to take courageous steps in teaching young children about literature. At the end of the prologue, I asked them to help children "discover the rich, round world of interpreting literature with children--a world that exists beyond traditional edges" (p. 6). And with regard to structure, it made sense that I began with the words "Once upon" letting the reader know right away that this is a book about children's literature and thus has strong links to fairy tales. And of course the last words of the book are "the end."

In addition to sound, metaphor, and structure, literature also relies on the unexpected. Burke calls it Trouble with a capital T: "a story (fictional or actual) requires an Agent who performs an Action to achieve a Goal in a recognizable Setting by the use of certain Means--his dramatistic Pentad.... What drives a story is a misfit between the elements of the Pentad: Trouble" (Bruner, 2002, p. 34). Thus narrative researchers--particularly in education--often take the reader through the pentad highlighting trouble and its potential resolution. Of course, not all research tales have a happily ever after ending, so trouble may prevail.

In developing this course, I'll be reading the work of a variety of narrative researchers to select the best texts for the doctoral students to read. In addition, I'll interview my colleagues in areas outside of my own emphasis in literacy, to see what seminal narrative research pieces they would recommend from their various fields of mathematics, science, philosophy, bilingual education, educational psychology, anthropology, etc. in order to meet the needs of all doctoral students in the school of education. Although I have not as yet designed key assignments for the course, I know that the students will not only read narrative research but try their hand at writing this kind of research as well.

Creating Powerful Pedagogy with Preservice Teachers

For well over a decade, I've shepherded the children's literature methods course for preservice teachers (EDUC 4311), and while myriad questions about my practice have occupied me over the years, one central query continues to tug on my thinking: how can I help preservice teachers learn to create powerful pedagogy? For me, the term "powerful pedagogy" means curriculum, instruction, and assessment that engage children deeply in literature, moving well beyond the basic comprehension of text and into opportunities for active and analytical reflection about literature. My interest in this question is hinged to a central assignment in which my preservice teachers work in teams to develop a literary unit of instruction for an elementary classroom of children. The facets of the assignment are multiple. How effective is their children's literature section, and do the trade books they choose link well to each other in critical ways? Do the preservice teachers provide a sound rationale for the importance of their unit choice? In other words, why will it be meaningful for children? What

big curricular pieces will enable them to accomplish their goals? Will the children engage in literary discussion or in writing, and/or in the arts? How will the preservice teachers link their unit to state standards? In what ways will each of their individual lessons stay on the trajectory of the central unit goals? How will they evaluate how well their children are learning? And how will they adapt their instruction to meet the needs of all children?

To assist the preservice teachers in this endeavor, I've developed model units, collected exemplary units from previous students to showcase, and both lectured and conducted small group discussions of varying aspects of the unit assignment. I serve as a mentor and a partner to each team, offering suggestions, loaning trade books and academic articles, and pointing out places for fresh ideas. Finally, I evaluate the unit assignment in stages over the course of the semester from the proposal through the first, penultimate, and final drafts. But the dilemma remains the same. While some students quickly latch on to the idea of powerful pedagogy, others need much more help in learning to create curriculum, instruction, and assessment that will draw children deeper and deeper into literature.

In earlier studies of my practice, I've followed preservice teachers as they learned to engage individual children in literature (e.g., Wolf, Carey, & Mieras, 1996), and I've explored preservice teachers' evolving understandings of diversity (e.g., Wolf, Ballentine, & Hill, 1999). But I've never researched the unit assignment. The PTSP Project on Teaching and Learning offers me the opportunity of doing just that. At the end of fall semester, 2005, I'll have the final drafts as well as the revisions of all the units created by my 60 students. I'll select fifteen students - five whose understandings of powerful pedagogy came very quickly, five that took more time to come to such understandings, and five where the understandings came quite late or perhaps weren't well understood even at the end of the course. Then using the unit drafts in stimulated recall sessions (putting the unit on the table and going through each of the sections in turn), I'll interview the selected preservice teachers to hopefully uncover when and how their "Aha!" revelations occurred and when they didn't, concentrating in particular on what aspects of the unit creation were the easiest as well as the most difficult. After completing one round of audio-recorded, individual interviews, I'll transcribe and analyze the data for preliminary patterns. Then I'll conduct a second round of interviews to present the patterns to the individual preservice teachers to triangulate my preliminary findings. In addition, this second interview will help me tease out the nuances in the patterns.

Creating powerful pedagogy is hard but essential work. If preservice teachers fail to grasp the concept during their time at the university, when they become teachers it is likely that they will fall into the trap of following the advice of their textbooks lockstep or creating a series of disconnected activities that will ultimately fail to engage children in literature. And this is clear: If children are denied the opportunity to engage in reading, they will not become readers. Thus, this PTSP project will allow me to track very young teachers as they learn to discern between "fun" but often-silly activities for children, and serious teaching that will help children become thinking individuals. The results of this study will naturally fold back into my practice, helping me understand how to communicate more effectively how powerful pedagogy is essential to the art of preservice teachers' future teaching and, even more important, their children's future learning.

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