Stories That Transform Teachers: The Use of Fiction Across Teacher Education Programs

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### SUNY-Potsdam Demographics

It’s easy to make friends and find people who share your interests. Our campus is small and with an 18 to 1 student/faculty ratio, so are our class sizes.

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>*African American/Black</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>219</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>255</td>
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<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUNY Potsdam & Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The Potsdam Pledge

SUNY Potsdam strives to be:

A Diverse Community-celebrating our differences and learning from our diversity

The Potsdam Graduate

The Potsdam faculty believes that:

An educated person is one who can thrive and provide leadership in our complex, ambiguous and mutable world. We seek to graduate scholars as citizens of the world.
Objectives

Given this context

• To “practice what we preach” in terms of reflective practice and collaboration

• To understand how our professional and personal selves intersect and affect pedagogy through the use of fiction

• To find ways of extending our students’ understanding about diversity and difference as they become “self examiners”
Guiding Questions

1. What are our stories as teacher educators using integrated fiction?

2. What specific strategies do we consider most effective?

3. What are our challenges?

4. What is the significance of our work?
Methodology

1. **Reflective Practice & Self Study**
   - Qualitative, biographical tradition, using auto-ethnography/self study allows for optimum exploration of issues (Samaras 2011)
   - Narratives of 4 teacher educators from diverse cultural backgrounds and across teacher education programs (Loughran, 2007)

2. **Narrative Inquiry**
   - The personal narratives provide a value for the construction, interpretation, and valuing of selves as learners and teachers, allowing for reflection and learning from each other (Kitchen, 2009)
Data Sources

1. Self study
   • Personal narratives
   • Course outlines – strategies for student engagement with fiction
   • Exit interviews / surveys from students

2. Narrative Inquiry
   • Secondary sources - samples of fiction utilized in course work
   • Students’ responses to fiction
Developing self-study narratives in response to key questions

Analysis of self-study narratives, categorizing codes, developing themes.

Agreement on Emergent Themes

Significance of Themes

Connections with the Literature Review

Implications
Fiction defined

“Narratives about characters trying to overcome problems or deal with difficulty. They are often described as ‘waking dreams’ that people use to find meaning in their lives”.

(Tompkins 2010, p.290,)
What the Research Says

Transformative qualities of stories and storytelling:

• Potential to unmask for readers’ and listeners’ aspects of life that often go unnoticed (Thein et al, 2007)

• Extension of students’ understanding as self-examiners. (Encisco, 1997)

• Engagement of students in critical literacy (Rosenblatt, 1995)

• Understanding what it is to be an outsider or a member of a minority group (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011)

• Biblio-therapeutic (Crago, 1999)
On Using Fiction-Our Stories
Background Influences

• Early readers, exposure to multiple genres including indigenous fiction during our early childhood reading experiences
• Experienced the use of literature in graduate course work
• Concern that indigenous authors were often silenced in a legacy of colonialism
• Emphasis on immigrant identity, second language learners and inclusive learners
Activities & Assessments

• Literature Circles
• Literature Logs
• Critical Written Responses
• Creative Responses
• Entrance & Exit Surveys
• Read Aloud/Dramatic Reading
• Checklists/ Rubrics
Culturally Responsive Fiction

- Sold by Patricia McCormick
- Boys Without Names by Kanthi Krishna Sheth
- What Happened to Lani Garver by Carol Plum-Ucci
- Walker's Crossing by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
- Brotherhood by Janet McDonald
- Drowning Anna by Sue Mayfield
Ableism occurs when, as a result of stereotypical social beliefs and attitudes, people with disabilities are ignored, devalued or misrepresented in media (Haller, 2010).
Working with students having emotional & behavioral difficulties revealed a need for students to broaden their experiences...through the use of fiction.
Literature Circle Groups

Students engage in exploring fiction through collaboration and thoughtful discussions.
Creative Responses
Challenges

• Meeting professional and state standards for beginning teachers
• Not silencing students with one’s personal belief system and privilege
• Creating a library of appropriate books for students that has relevance to their future roles as teachers
• Resistance from students – increasing course work, how related to final grade or certification exams
Significance

We seek to:

• facilitate reflective practice for us as teacher educators as well as our students
• model what we preach in terms of respect for cultural differences and social action
• promote inclusive classroom climate and culturally responsive pedagogy among our students.