

Perception's of Preservice Teachers 'Toward Children's Literature

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Abstract

Children's literature is used across the curriculum in elementary classrooms today. How is this literature viewed by preservice teachers and how will their viewpoints affect their use of literature with students? The purpose of this study was to describe preservice teachers' written responses to children's literature with geometric content. Six related, but distinct themes emerged after multiple readings of the responses; these themes depict preservice teachers who are: (1) making personal connections with literature, (2) reading for children, (3) being the teachers, (4) looking for the math, (5) finding instructional ideas, and (6) focusing on the morals.

Introduction

Over the past thirty years, children's literature has begun to be used in the elementary school classrooms in different ways than before. We now observe an increasing number of teachers presenting fiction and non-fiction trade books, not only for their literary aspects, but also for the purposes of content learning (Karllides, 1997). Consequently, researchers have considered not only what literature is being presented in classrooms, But also how teachers utilize trade books. Current preservice elementary teachers are being educated in an environment that favors the use of children's literature across the curriculum. While many preservice teachers recall entire years of elementary schooling when the teacher did not read a book aloud with the class, this is rarely the case in their observation of classrooms today.

Literature is a part of the world, not apart from it. As Gillet and Temple express it, "We don't read sawdust" (1994,p.5). We don't read books about literature, but rather about the world around us. Event novels, written primarily for aesthetic purposes, are filled with interpretations of sociology, history, Psychology, and other " content " areas. Literature encompasses and interprets the world. Because literature is situated in the world, it follows that there are many works of literature in general and children's literature in particular that lend themselves as the impetus for study in content areas.

The literature across the curriculum movement promotes the value of using children's literature in elementary schools as the jumping off point for content area learning (Whitin and Wilde, 1992; Karolides, 1997). Children are often asked to response to the literature through the uses of response journals or response logs. For example, some teachers ask students to write about particular questions after reading and at other times, teachers lead a discussion first, then ask for

free responses to be kept in one notebook. These records of responses are kept in the classroom sometimes as a part of the student's reading response logs or as a part of their journals for that particular subject. Teachers will read these journals as a means of gaining insight into student's learning and understanding of the content area. In addition, mathematics teaching is often enhanced in elementary schools by the use of children's literature. In fact, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has emphasized that mathematics in the context of human experiences will benefit school children (2000). The use of children's literature to "grip the imagination of students and teachers" (Welchman-Tischler, 1992,p.38) in mathematics learning is important enough to mathematics educators that volumes of teachers idea books have been published on the topic (Whitin&Wilde, 1992; Wilde, 1998; Welchman-Teschler, 1992).

Teachers can choose to broaden students' literature experiences by helping them delve deeper into themselves and the text. However, if the teachers themselves are not aware of the possibilities and have not had opportunities to explore the range of their own transactions with literature, they cannot be expected to be guides for their own students. With limited teacher knowledge and experience, there is a potential for literature to be not only "used" across the curriculum, but actually "abused."

The purpose of this study was to describe preservice teachers' written responses to literature with geometric content. The specific question that guided the research considered preservice teachers' written responses to three different works of children's literature with geometric content and asked: What themes will emerge as preservice teachers' written responses to children's literature with geometric content are examined and analyzed?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study included aspects of reader response theory, written responses to literature, and literature across the curriculum.

In 1938, Rosenblatt (1995) was the first researcher to emphasize the equal nature of the text and the reader in a literary transaction. This theory "focused on the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text resulting in the individual creation of the literary work of art"(Hancock, 1991,p.24). the meaning of literature is not viewed as coming directly from the text to the reader, nor as merely being a reflection of the reader. Rather, both reader and text perform a "symbolic dance."As a new entity is created resulting from the act of reading. Consequently, the reader must become an active part of the reading act, combining experience, prior knowledge, and feelings with a serious attempt to understand and interpret the author's word (Probst, 1948).

The role of the students and teacher in a classroom is formed by the teacher's philosophy about students and how they learn (Karnowski, 1997). The teacher is the final decision maker in the determining what literature is studied and how that literature is presented. In a reader response classroom, the teacher would view students as active participants and decision makers in their own learning and closely examine his/her own ethical criteria, understanding that it affects all he/she says and does in the classroom (Rosenblatt, 1995). The teacher's influence cannot be overstated. Common to most research on reader response to literature is the focus on the teacher and the environment he/she creates in the classroom (Heald-Taylor, 1996;Karnowski, 1997;Eeds& Peterson, 1991;Rosenblatt, 1995). O'Flahaven (1995) discusses the central role of the teacher in the reading

of literature in the classroom, writing that the very act of a teacher allowing or disallowing discussions of personal interpretations of literature sets the tone for all literature discussion.

Rosenblatt is explicit in her emphasis on what Dewey calls the vicarious experience of the writing, “the reader seeks to participate in another’s vision--to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain insights that will make his won life more comprehensible”(1995, p7).

Emig discusses the power of writing in *Writing as a Mode of Learning* (1977). She cites Bruner and Piaget’s three major ways we deal with actuality (enactive, iconic, and symbolic) and claims they are all at work when we write. The fact that writing requires the use of the hand, eyes and brain points to the idea that the more modalities involved in learning, the more it will “take.” The slower pace of writing over reading makes it an excellent reflective learning tool and Emig explains that we write at our won pace, just as we learn at our won pace. Because writing is also slower paced than speaking, Atwell (1987) explains that writing gives students time to consider their thinking, and can even spark new insights that may be missed in conversation.

Writing is more than a cognitive activity. According to Barton (1991), it has many affective dimensions as well. This points up the individuality of writing, it is just as individual as the learning process. According to Vygotsky’s work (1978), writing is a complex cultural activity, not simply a motor skill and occurs as a part of a natural progression of communication development. “ Children should be taught language, not just the writing of letter” (p.119).

Researchers have used written responses to literature as vehicles to analyze content and understanding of text (Atwell, 1987; Flood & Lapp, 1994; Kelly, 1990; Many, 1991; Russell, 1994; Sipe, 1998). Flood and Lapp (1994) found that writing provides an opportunity for readers to reflect upon what the story means to them and further research has shown that students who write about what they read better understand the texts (Kelly, 1990). Purves, et al. draw these notions together as they continue Rosenblatt’s theme of exploration through literature and write, “ Writing, unlike the other avenues for response, offers an opportunity to explore what we think and to record that exploration simultaneously” (1995, p.151).

Many (1991) used written responses to successfully analyze fourth, sixth, and eight graders’ responses to literature, and Nash (1995) found that through analyzing writing student response to literature, she gained insights into children’s reading behaviors as well as an understanding of their individual interpretations of text. Burton (1992) summarizes the value of writing, stating, “We find out what we think when we write” (p.26).

A literature-based approach to teaching reading is relatively new (Karnowski, 1997). Books are being presented in classrooms because they are interesting and motivating, not only teach reading skills (Slaughter, 1993). Hennings (1993) promotes the instructional value of reading across the curriculum as she writes “ if reading instruction is to be effective, it must take place across the curriculum as students read within variety of disciplines” (p.363). Towery (1991), Schiro (1997), and others have developed criteria for literature presented in classrooms; it should be developmentally appropriate, have literary value, and present accurate information. Texts presented for study across the curriculum may be fiction or non-fiction informational books, but reading strategies can be varied depending on the needs of the particular students.

The role of reading across the curriculum has been studied and researchers have found both reading and writing to be effective tools to introduce, teach, and reinforce the learning of mathematics (Drake & Amspaugh, 1994; Siegel & Borasi, 1992; Fonze, 1995; Wood, 1992). Reading can be used to augment content area instruction (Siegel, Borasi, Fonzi, Sandridge, & Smith, 1996). These authors view reading as a generative meaning making process with active participation from the reader being integral to the process. Using specific strategies to help students make sense of the mathematical concepts served to be very effective in promoting mathematical problem solving in their studies with middle school children. Siegel and Fonzi (1995) report on the findings of a long-term study that is part of the well know “Reading to Learn Mathematics” project in New York. Their findings promote mathematical learning as a constructive process that actively involves the learner as opposed to being an act of transmission from teacher to student.

In addition to the research on reading and writing strategies that are effective in promoting math learning, some research has been done to examine the relationship between literature and mathematics teaching and learning. Whitin and Wilde (1992) wrote *Read Any Good Math lately?* to provide teachers with ideas to integrate the use of children’s literature in math classrooms.

“Through books, learners see mathematics as a ‘common human activity’ (NCTM, 1989) that is used by people in different contexts for different purpose” (Whitin, 1995, p.134). Besides Whitin and Wilde’s work, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) published a booklet authored by Rosamond Welchman-Tischler (1992) that delineates ways to use children’s literature to teach mathematics. Welchman-Tischler writes, “Children must find mathematical experiences interesting if they are to achieve their mathematical potential, and using literature as a springboard is one way to capture their interest” (p.38). In addition to the NCTM, the International Reading Association and the National Council for Teachers of English have made statements promoting the use of writing across the curriculum. Each of these scholarly organizations has included calls for teachers to take advantage of the close relationship of writing to learning across the curriculum.

Smith (1995) writes that “literature selections that encourage teachers and children to make authentic connections between mathematics and other curricular area essential” (p.288). She takes children’s literature used for mathematical study one step further when she suggest that books may not have to explicitly about mathematics in order for them to be used in the mathematics classroom; those with a more implicit or subtle math theme are also valuable resources.

Slaughter (1993) views the benefits of integrating literature across the curriculum as being two-way, with literacy development being enhanced as well as the content area. She believes the different systems of communication (art or mathematics, for example) provide students with the opportunity to view information from different perspectives.

Michael Schiro (1997) convincingly writes about asking students as young as elementary school age to evaluate both the literary merits and the mathematical merits of children’s literature with mathematical content. The integrity of the literature as well as the integrity of the mathematics need to be preserved if we are to make good use of literary reading in mathematical study. Exposure to good literature is a vital component of a student’s education, but the way this literature is presented and transacted with is as important as the quality of the literature itself.

Methodology

Data for this study are a part of a larger study that was designed to describe preservice teachers' written responses to literature with geometric content and to attempt to correlate the stances and content of their responses with their scores on a measure of geometric thought and with their scores on a measure of orientation toward literature.

Participants and Context

The participants were 85 (78 females and 8 males) preservice elementary teachers who were enrolled in reading and mathematics methods courses at a university in the Midwestern United States. Students in two reading methods course, one mathematics methods course, and one integrated reading and mathematics methods course were asked to participate. While the participants were not selected at random, all students who were enrolled the course and who agreed to participate were included in the study.

The methods courses were the instructional setting for the study and participation in the study was a part of the normal course work. As a required portion of all of the courses, preservice teachers tutored an elementary or middle level student in mathematics and /or reading.

The average age of the participant was 22.7 years. Fifty (58.8%) of the participants were seniors, 32 (37.6%) were juniors, and 3 (3.5%) were students who had bachelor's degrees and were returning for teacher certification. Seventy-five (89.3%) Caucasians were the largest group of the participants (88.2%), with non-Caucasians, (African-Americans, Latino/as, Native Americans, and other) making up the remaining 10 (11.8%).

Three works of children's literature with geometric content were selected for use in this study. They are *the Greedy Triangle* by Marilyn Burns (1991), *Grandfather Tang's Story* by Ann Tomper (1990), and *A Cloak for the Dreamer* by Aileen Friedman (1994). I selected possible books first by reading Whitin and Wilde's *Read Any Good Math Lately?* (1992) Then by considering possible books using Schiro's Children's Mathematics Trade Books Evaluation form (1997).

A Cloak for the Dreamer is written by Aileen Friedman and illustrated by Kim Howard. It is one of the collections of Marilyn Burns Brainy Day Books that integrate mathematics with children's literature selections. The theme of individuality within the context of a family's love is apparent throughout. In this slow paced and calming story, a tailor with three sons expects each of them to be initiated into his trade. The father gives each an opportunity to design and sew a cloak for the archduke, with requirements that they be colorful and provide protection for the archduke from the elements. The two eldest sons, with their own artistic interpretations, create beautiful and useful cloaks. However, the youngest son, Misha designs his cloak not with sensibility of a tailor, but with the eye of a traveler. With the circles of its design representing the oceans, meadow, desert, and routes of faraway lands, it meets the criteria for colorful, but will not keep out the wind and the rain. Rather than be harsh with his son, the tailor and his oldest sons redesign the circle cloak to be Misha's gift as they send him out to follow his dream of traveling the world. The illustrations are of soft jewel-tones, with the text fitting within each two-page spread illustration and the setting is presumed to be the 19th century in a European or Russian city. The Mathematic *A Cloak for a Dreamer* was implicit, flowing nicely with story.

Grandfather Tang's Story : A Tale Told with Tangrams is writing by Ann Tompert and illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker. The story beings with Grandfather Tang and his granddaughter, Little Soo, sitting under a peach tree entertaining each other by making shapes with their tangram pieces. Grandfather Tang then begins a story of the fox fairies, traditional Chinese

characters, who compete in a rivalry that turns dangerous as they change themselves into one animal after another, with one always in pursuit of the other. Completing the story-within-a-story format, the book ends with grandfather and Little Soo bringing their day to an end as they form their tangrams to be images of themselves relaxing together until they are called to supper. The theme of the book seems to be friendship between friends, but also between generations of the same family. The illustrations have the spare lines and muted colors reminiscent of Chinese scrolls, with each animal that the fox fairies transform themselves into being represented in bold black with the seven shapes delineated. Because some readers may not view the tangrams as mathematical, this book is more explicitly math-related than *A cloak for Dreamer*, but not over in its presentation.

The Greedy Triangle is written by Marilyn Burns and is illustrated by Gordon Silveria. It is a Marilyn Burns Brainy Day Book, part of a series of children's literature publications that seek to present mathematics as being imaginative and accessible. The main character, a triangle with a pleasant life and many friends, becomes bored with doing the same old things. He approaches the local shapeshifter who agrees to give him one more angle and one more side. The Greedy Triangle, now referred to as "shape," discovers new, exciting things to do and be as a quadrilateral, but he quickly becomes dissatisfied again. Each time the shape returns to the shapeshifter, he gains a side and angle, finally coming close to resembling a circle. He is unable to keep his balance, has abandoned and been abandoned by his friends, and realizes he wants to be himself again. With a theme of being true to one's own self, the author takes an unlikely protagonist and creates a character that is very human-like. The illustrations are bright and the writing is clever; the reader is surprised by all the places the various shapes can be found and is presented with the correct mathematical terminology for each polygon. Throughout the text, the shapes are described using the correct terminology and while each shape is equilateral, they are all illustrated accurately. The mathematics concepts in *The Greedy Triangle* are the most explicit of the three books used to elicit responses in this study, with the very title and the way the main character changes evoking mathematical thinking.

Data Collection and Analysis

A phenomenological approach was used for data analysis with the goals being to obtain fundamental knowledge of the written responses, to look for patterns in response content, and to interpret and describe the meanings of their responses. The written responses were representative of the writers' emotions, thoughts, wonderings, personal situations, and reflected their sense of self on the day they were written, and so were complex and challenging to analyze. In order to ascertain the patterns of their responses, I used a four-step phenomenological plan put forth by Marshall and Rossman (1989). First, information was gathered as I read and reread the written responses to literature. Second, I put forth patterns that emerged from my consideration of the data. These patterns were triangulated through meetings with two other readers who both had backgrounds in children's literature and who provided additional insight into the nature of preservice teachers' responses to literature. Third, three readers evaluated the patterns that were put forth for validity and comprehensiveness. Categories were adjusted if valid alternative views were presented and steps two and three were repeated as necessary. Fourth, patterns that emerged and were agreed upon by the three readers were interpreted and related to current theory and practice in elementary classrooms and in teacher preparation programs.

Using a phenomenological approach with triangulation was appropriate for this analysis of the written data because the goal was to accurately describe and interpret preservice teachers' responses rather than to look toward the generalizability of them. When possible, consensus was

reached; when this was not possible, I made the final decision on the individual response statements. Traditionally, triangulation led to the expectation of a “singular proposition about the phenomenon being studied (Mathison, 1998, p.13). Nevertheless, in this study, the purpose of the triangulation was less to come to consensus on individual statements and more to provide me with confirmation or alternative views of the written responses. This is considered to be appropriate by Mathison (1988), Denzin (1989), and Huberman & Miles (1994). Denzin notes that agreement can never be complete because each rater approaches the data from “unique perspective that reflects past experiences, personal idiosyncrasies, and current mood” (1989, p.236). For this reason, investigator triangulation led to a broadening of my understanding of written responses to literature, but the ultimate categorization of response theme was my province.

In this study, I fulfilled the role of observer as participant (Glesne, 1999, p.44). My role was primarily one of observing, but reading books aloud to the participants to elicit written responses was a participatory role. There was interaction between the participants and me in the style and delivery of reading and in the discussions that often ensued with participants after the written response sessions that may have influenced the written responses to literature. Some participants chose to discuss the books with me, sometimes asking for author and publication information, sometimes wondering how they could use that particular book with their elementary-aged tutees.

The study involved the participants in reading and responding in writing to literature with geometric content. The literature selections were read orally by me and participants were asked to respond in writing at the reading response sessions. Before each book was read, participants were asked to listen and consider their thoughts during the reading. After I read the books orally to each of the four classes, participants were asked to simply “fill a page” with their thoughts about the book (Sebesta, Monson, & Senn, 1995). They were asked to think not only as preservice teachers, but also to respond from a personal standpoint. This was emphasized because I had experienced asking preservice teachers to respond in writing to two of the books used in this study in previous semesters and had found that they wrote only from their perspectives as future teachers. This may be because the setting for the reading and responding was the reading and mathematics methods courses, as it was in the study. Just as the books that were used had to present both quality mathematics and quality literature to facilitate responses to both, the participants needed to consider their roles as individual readers and writers and as future teachers so it would be possible to elicit responses representative of their true transactions with literature.

Results and Discussion

Preservice teachers who were read aloud to in methods course were found to use children’s literature more often when working with children, were more likely to create games and teaching statements utilizing children’s literature, and were found to have more personal enjoyment of literature (Andrews, Moss, & Stansell, 1998). Moreover, Zancanella (1991) found a strong relationship between inservice teachers’ personal approaches to literature and their teaching of literature. These connections between exposure to literature and teaching of literature were illustrated in this study. It was common for participants to discuss the books with each other or with me after responding in writing, and it was just as common for them to refer back to a previously read book in their written responses to the current book. Many of the participants also commented on the pleasure they derived from listening to books being read aloud.

While this study focused on a discussion of the finding and attempts to find trends among the preservice teacher participants, this does not diminish the very individualized nature of literature

response. The responses were written by real people who in many respects could not be easily categorized. These people were university students whose laudable goal it is to become teachers; this is the common thread that binds them together. Despite the fact that the participants were a homogenous group of people in some aspects, each approached the literature from his/her own personal situation with his/her own background knowledge, experiences, and emotions.

The preservice teachers' participation in this study not only provided data for analysis, it also gave them the chance to practice responding to literature. Unless preservice teachers are given the opportunity to experience a literature response approach to children's literature, they will not be able to translate that experience into a variety of opportunities with literature for their future students. Unless they examine their personal approaches to literature study and literature across the curriculum, they cannot change their attitudes and beliefs. As Newman (1987) writes, "Before we can change our attitudes and beliefs, we have to know what they are" (p.736).

Six related, but distinct themes emerged in the multiple readings of the responses to three works of literature and in discussions with the raters of the response statements. These themes depict preservice teachers, in written responses to literature with geometric content, who are: (1) making personal connections with the literature, (2) reading for children, (3) being the teaches, (4) looking for the math, (5), finding instructional ideas, and (6) focusing on morals. Following are descriptions and discussions of the themes.

Making Personal Connections with Literature

Many participants related the books to their won lives, as has been found to be crucial to quality literature engagement (Karnowski, 1997; Lukens, 1982; Purves, et al., 1995). Their responses highlighted parts of their won lives that the stories evoked as they listened to the books being read aloud. *Grandfather Tang's Story* elicited responses filled with yearning for family connections, as one participant wrote, "How I wish had grandparents to spend time with!" and another wrote, I never was close to my grandfathers due to divorce and never had long talks with either of them. I wish I could have shared family traditions like they did in the story."

The Greedy Triangle brought responses related to participants' own feelings of inadequacy: "I am like that, always feeling my happiness is somewhere just around the corner, but out of reach" and "It makes me think about why I want to be other things in life. For example, when I try to be something else, will I get tired of it and go back to the original style?" one Participant felt a personal message was delivered by the book, as he/she wrote, "Freedom of choice. That is a big area in my life right now so it was easy to pick up on that." Another participant related the story to friends' struggles with identity: "I know how those friends felt because I have had friends who change who they really are to fit in or have fun and I felt neglected and I didn't like being around them any more because they weren't the same person." In addition, one participant wrote an emotional response linked to the mathematics, "Geometry is one of the most uninteresting things to me. I absolutely love math, but I don't like shapes."

One participant took a special interest in an aspect of *A Cloak for the Dreamer*, writing, "this book simply shows me how things in life can easily be adjusted to become perfect. Misha used circles. He thought it was a failure, but all it needed was simple adjustment."

Reading for Children

Daniel Hade (1993) a professor of children's at Pennsylvania State University, explained his student's focus on reading books for children, "My students are acutely aware they are reading *children's* literature, so when they read, they seem to read not just for themselves, but also for the children's they imply as readers" (p.6). This was also the case for the participants in this study who assumed knowledge about children's taste in literature. Examples of this are the following responses: "I know children would really love this books." "Most children would relate to this story in some way." "Older children would enjoy it"; "I think students would enjoy this book because of the magic feel and the old time sitting."; and "it's a fun story and would keep the children interested."

Some would disagree with the assumptions made by preservice teachers in this study. Dyson (1990) argues for an eclectic approach to literacy in the classroom: "Clearly, there can be no rigid expectations for how children respond to school literacy activities ... what does deem essential is recognition of the diversity inherent in literacy and its development" (p.203)

Being a Teacher

For many participants, their future roles as teachers are pervasive in their responses. They are constantly searching for ideas and materials with which to teach. As one rater put it, they are looking for "magic tricks" to teach math and other content areas through literature. There are abundant ideas in teacher practice journals and entire books for using children's literature to teach concepts in content areas. One example is Whitin and Wilde's (1992) collection of ideas that integrate children's and mathematics. The popular Instructor magazine includes regular features of ready-made activities for using literature across the curriculum to enhance content area learning.

Two participants illustrated the tendency to search for well- developed ideas for teaching mathematics by writing, "To me, the sign of a good piece of literature to use in a classroom is on where ideas for activities jump out at you as you read it," and "The creation of these types of books have given me great ideas on how to make math a liked subject, not a dislike one" another participant picked up on a way to promote mathematics without children's advance knowledge, writing, "This would get the students interested in the tangrams before they realize they were actually related to math." One participant explained how the books shows students there are multiple ways to complete task, writing, "this would be excellent so students could realize that even when doing the same project, there are different ways to do it right" one response represents many others who felt that their personal opinions about a book did not matter if it would be a good tool for a particular purpose in the classroom. This participant wrote, "I personally wouldn't buy this book, but as a teacher, I feel it would be a good book to keep in my classroom."

Hade (1993) is concerned about preservice teachers who choose to read for the implied child reader instead of for their won enjoyment, explaining, "my students were closing off possibilities of meaning for themselves, depriving themselves of experience with literature" (p.6). One particular response highlights this tendency and the importance of their future roles as teachers that is descriptive of many of the participants: "I felt it was really hard to write as a person because I am always looking for new ways to help young people as a teacher."

Looking for the Math

Mathematical concepts do not need to be explicit in a book in order for it to be used in the mathematics classroom (Smith,1995). However, some participants in this study had difficult finding what they deemed to be "real" mathematics in the books. *A Cloak for the Dreamer*, in

particular, elicited confusion from some participants who knew that this study was being conducted using children's literature with geometric content. Responses along this vein include: "I wasn't sure if the book was intended to integrate reading and math. If it was, I didn't really see where the integration fit in besides the discussion of various shapes."; "I don't see a lot of math in this book."; "I really don't think this book serves my uses as a teacher. It's a good story, but it doesn't deal with math in a way in which I would use it."; and "This is obviously providing some use of shapes, but I'm not sure if it is enough to use as math concept book." Unless the mathematics was explicit, as in the case of *The Greedy Triangle* or *Grandfather Tang's Story*, some participants did not view the literature as useful for mathematics learning in the classroom.

Finding Instruction Ideas

Literature can be a part of the process of learning in a content area, not just a method to develop interest in a topic (Short & Armstrong, 1993). The participants in this study did seem to view the works of literature to be valuable resources for introducing topics as well as developing conceptual understanding. The written responses to the three works of literature are filled with ideas for ways to use these books with children. Some of instructional ideas could be classified as being respectful of children. The content, and the literature, while others are much less so. The ultimate test of these ideas, of course, would be in the future classrooms of these prospective teachers, as some ideas could be respectful or disrespectful depending on the disposition of the teacher and lesson. Illustrative respectful ideas are the following response excerpts: "the students could be challenged to figure out how the father plans to fix the cloak."; "What a fun way to introduce tangrams."; "The students could experience shapes that do not fit together, such as circles, and work with them until they did fit together."; and "I would let the students work with tangrams and tessellations after we read the book."

Two examples of instructional ideas that seem to be less respectful of students, the content area, and the literature are, "The use of shapes would be good for lower level math students." And "I would read this to my class if I wanted to get them settled down after being outside."

Focusing on Morals

A major theme found in the written responses was the preservice teachers' predilection to focus on the moral issues presented in the three works of literature. Hade (1993) view this as a detriment to literary experiences, writing about a children's literature student who responded didactically a book, "Too many of my students appeared to be committing the heresy that this student had done: reading a piece of fine literature as one would a moral tract" (p.2). He further explains, "They believe that meaning is hidden for a child and that an adult is needed to make meaning clear...they see children as passive sponges. They see children in need of control" (p.9). Hade is adamant in his disdain for moral readings of children's literature, but does show that it is a common way for preservice teachers to respond to children's books. This was borne out in the responses in this study.

Some participants touched lightly on the moral nature of the stories, writing responses such as, "this had great morals behind the story." And "I like this story because it models value and some morals." Other participants wrote about specific morals they think would be valuable to teach to children found in the literature: "I would use this book for several topics. One would be manners and politeness...to help teach students not to be greedy or selfish and not to ignore your friends." And "children could learn what respect means, what role models are for."

Gooderham (1993) draws a distinction between moralizing and providing a moral environment for children as he writes, “ There is, however, a difference between moralizing on the one hand and moral structure, development, and education on the other” (p.115) he would probably be comfortable with the following two responses: “ I think it shows what knowledge and wisdom we can learn from elders.” And “I can put this into a religious context. I place the Shapeshifter as God and the little triangle as an unsatisfied human. The Shape shifter is willing to turn the shape into anything he wants to be. However, in the end the shapeshifter knows that the little shape is happiest as himself.”

Conclusion

Research such as this descriptive study can begin to paint a picture of preservice teachers’ responses to literature, but the picture may never be completely drawn. Galda and Cullinan (1994) recognize this when they write, “It may also be that the essential nature of the importance of literature in literacy learning cannot be measured fully” (p.533). Regardless of the outcome of research, it is imperative the teachers make available quality fiction and informational literature for their students. The criteria for good children’s literature varies, but Bishop (1992) suggests that it should be “... well written, tell a good story, have strong characterization, and offer a worthwhile theme or themes children could be expected to understand” (p.49). All literature shared in the classroom should be expected to meet these criteria. A richer, more meaningful literary experience can be gained when good literature with a variety of content is read, written about, and discussed. Lukens (1982) writes “ literature at its best gives both pleasure and understanding” (p.178). She suggests that the process of exploring a work of literature gives the reader an opportunity to consider the human condition on his/her own terms in cooperation with an author.

On participant in this study obviously found both pleasure and understanding from *Grandfather Tang’s Story*, writing, “ First, on a lesser, surface level, it reminds me of Calvin and Hobbes and the transmogrifies. Deeper than that, however, I enjoy this book for its ability to carry on, in a sense, an old tradition of storytelling in a modern world.” The power of narrative was demonstrated in the written responses in this study. This seems to be a good sign, as researchers have found a strong relationship between teachers’ personal approaches to literature and their teaching of it. Unless teachers themselves are engaged readers, it will be impossible for them to model engaged reading for their students. It also follows that unless teachers are personally engaged in mathematics, the modeling process cannot take place.

The preservice teachers’ written responses to literature show that they do seem to love a good story, but that passion is tucked slightly behind their concern about their future roles as teachers. The participants seemed to separate their won reading from the reading they will do with their future students. It is perfectly understandable for preservice teachers in a methods course to be concentrating on their futures. However, it is worrisome in some ways. Because many of the preservice teachers in this study don’t read with their own pleasure foremost, they are robbing themselves of valuable personal experience with literature.

The tendency of the participants to read for the implied child reader, making assumptions about individual children they have never met, is very troubling. It seemed at times that the future teachers couldn’t stop themselves from reading to find out what would be a “good” story that includes moral concepts their future students “need” to be taught. This seems to be a particularly dangerous way to respond to literature. Hade (1993) differentiates reading a work of literature from reading a moral tract. It seems this group of preservice teachers felt it was their responsibility to make the meaning

clear to their students, assuming that their students would not be able to think through issues for themselves.

The influence of the elementary teacher must be juxtaposed against the influence of the university professor of teacher education. It has been almost fifteen years since Andrews, Moss, & Stansell (1985) wrote about the value of reading aloud to preservice teachers in methods courses, but it may be that reading aloud is not enough. Are teacher educators sufficient models of personal engagement in literature and mathematics? Are we setting expectations high enough for our preservice teachers? Do we really expect them to not only know the math and the literature, but also to know how to relate to it personally, then go on to teach it to their future students? Are we helping them discover the total engagement that is possible when one takes responsibility for finding personally meaningful experiences in mathematics, literature, and in their work with children? In other words, can we take literature and mathematics from the level of ought to the level of caught? Many university students seeking to become teachers do so because they love children. I as well as others believe that is not enough. Jill May wrote *Children's literature and Critical theory* (1995) with the primary purpose of forcing readers to consider themselves as role models, censors, and conveyors of attitude. As she writes in the volume:

Rarely does a student say that she has entered the field of elementary education because she wants to help children learn new ways of thinking or consider new concepts that will help them as adults... because they have never developed reading habits, have never allowed themselves time to reflect on ideas, and have never explored divergent points of view, they lack a philosophy about the role of lifelong learners and they consider children's literature a teaching tool to use in skills units" (1995,p.5).

While this appears to be somewhat harsh, it is important to note that reading literature with children should be raised to a much more sophisticated level than has been the case; respect for the literature is paramount, but more crucial is respect for the children who will be our students.

We, as educators must carefully examine not only *what* literature we present to children and *how* we utilize it, but also thoughtfully challenge ourselves to be readers ourselves so that we can help children to be the same. Rosenblatt (1995) considers reading well, transactionally, with the ability of individuals to create and maintain a democracy. She puts the reader, the text, and the author in a kind of three ring circus, with the spotlight being shared by all three. Rosenblatt takes issue with the teacher being the arbiter of literary knowledge, the only one who really knows what the author or text means. Instead, the reader is responsible for transacting with text to create the meaning as well as to defend that meaning. Reading (and perhaps doing mathematics) transactionally is much more demanding for students and teachers than a top-down model of teaching and learning. Louis Rosenblatt's writing has been a driving influence in my explorations with literature and provides an concluding caution and challenge:

I am not under the illusion that the schools alone can change society. However, I can reaffirm the belief uttered so many years ago: We teachers of language and literature have a crucial role to play as educators and citizens. We phrase our goals as fostering the growth of the capacity for personally meaningful, self-critical literary experience. The educational process that achieves this aim most

effectively will serve a broader purpose, the nurturing of men and women capable of building a fully democratic society. The prospect is invigorating! (1990,p.107)

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