"Opening the Door to the Whirlwind" of British Gothic Literature:

Exploring Risk-Taking Practices in the Preservice Classroom

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Abstract

This study explores the connections, reflections, and risk-taking practices of elementary preservice teachers (n=15) enrolled in a Teaching Writing/Language Arts Methods course at a Pacific Northwest University as they engaged in a 4-week thematic unit focused on British Gothic Literature. The big questions asked about the connections and moves made both as student and beginning teacher. The study then looked at how new knowledge was infused into teaching practices. Inductive, phenomenological analysis of reading responses, informal quick-writing, narratives, lesson plans, reflections, and field notes reveal that the preservice teachers participated in the unit with enthusiasm and curiosity as students, arrived at cautious acceptance as future teachers, and then demonstrated nuanced risk-taking with the material as actual teachers.

At the intersection of beginning teacher and veteran student, preservice teachers wear both hats as they make the sometimes-challenging transition from primarily being taught to primarily teaching. They have a profound responsibility to their future students to send them into the world as thinking and empathetic members of our citizenry, an endeavor that requires a fair amount of risk as well as a healthy amount of willingness to make mistakes and even to outright fail. The college instructors that lead the preservice classroom are charged with the same responsibility, but as the more seasoned professionals should possess a variety of strategies and tools that provide preservice teachers space for taking chances in all areas of their academic and teaching lives.

The primary objectives of this study were to first explore preservice teacher experiences with a thematic unit focused on using unfamiliar literature, in this case British Gothic literature. And secondly, to examine how the resulting experiences shape and influence risk-taking activities as the students practice being teachers. In other words, the big research questions were (1) what are preservice teachers' perceptions of, connections to, and experiences with a British Gothic literature-focused thematic unit that includes a variety of reading and writing activities? And (2) does engaging with a British Gothic literature-focused thematic unit prompt preservice teachers to implement this type and other types of literature into their teaching practice and if so, how?

The Power of Literature

Literature as an effective tool in the classroom is well supported. While some have argued more generally that the value of literature is intrinsic and therefore unquestionably belongs in every teacher's toolkit (Kiefer, Hepler, & Hickman, 2007), there is also abundant evidence that using literature has specific and positive rewards. First and foremost, it influences

perceptions of and attitudes toward reading (Eldredge & Butterfield,1986; Morrow, 2003;) and

promotes reading achievement (Cohen, 1968; Galda & Cullinan, 2003). And because reading

and writing are inextricably linked, literature has been shown to influence writing ability

(DeFord, 1984; Lancia, 1997) and increase knowledge of written language and written linguistic

features (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995). It has also been shown to deepen language

development (Chomsky, 1972; Morrow, 1992) as well as understanding of and engagement with

content (Bean, 2000).

　　　In addition, literature can provide spaces where "readers encounter imaginative and

compelling situations;" where they "discover stories of prudence, justice, fortitude, and

temperance, tales of faith, hope, and charity as well as narratives that depict pride, envy, anger,

sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust" and it is through these encounters that readers develop a more

"differentiated grasp of life as well as a wider and more nuanced moral compass" (Roche, 2004,

p. 21). Using literature in such a manner is not a new concept, in fact, there is a vast amount of

rich and valuable research showing how multicultural education is dramatically and positively

enhanced when students are introduced to ethnically unfamiliar texts.

　　　For example, Christensen (2006) determined that students enrolled in a social studies

class were more amenable to critical conversations after reading and discussing graphic novels

about social conflicts in places such as Bosnia. Later, Burns (2009) discovered that first graders,

after engaging with stories about war, were able to reflect on their own visions of what a

peaceful world looks like. Such texts and the interactions with them offer readers new pathways

into understanding their role in the perpetuation of stereotypes (Glenn, 2012), how systems

rather than the individual influence society, (Williams, 2004), and the consequences of

marginalization (George, 2002). Given the possibilities and history of literature use in the

classroom, it is then reasonable to consider literature as a potential tool that might promote risk-taking in the teaching practices of preservice teachers.

Theoretical Framework

This project is rooted in experienced-based learning theories that argue knowledge is heavily shaped by life and worldly experiences (Foucault, 1989; Phillips, 1995) and in the sociocultural perspectives from Vygotsky (1978) and Dewey (1916) that maintain learners construct knowledge and make meaning through their social interactions with others. Additionally, it is grounded in adult learning theories (Knox, 1977) that argue adult learners have developed a frame of reference or "a coherent body of experience, associations, concepts, values, feelings, [and] conditioned responses that define their life world" (Mazirow, 1997, p. 5). The purpose of the resulting knowledge then is not to equip learners with the ability to describe a universal reality, but rather it is to help them function in the world (Dewey, 1929/1960; Rorty, 1979) and to complicate their established paradigms and morphing them into more inclusive and self-reflective spaces (Mazirow, 1997).

Learners become active participants as they interact with each other and with the instructor, articulating, clarifying, and reflecting on their ideas through classroom conversation and through their writing. Good classroom discussion, like writing, can "engage students in interactions to promote analysis, reflection, and critical thinking" (Goldenberg, 1993, p. 317) and provide the dialogic interaction necessary for learning to occur. Learners begin to recognize and critically think about myriad, and oftentimes conflicting, interpretations that exist around a particular text, after which they can make the move towards understanding how multiple analyses can exist together (Rosenblatt, 1978; Wells, 1999) and subsequently "monitor their

construction and apply strategies to ameliorate misconstructions and misunderstandings when they occur" (Henderson & Buskist, 2011, p. 234).

Arriving at the Teaching Table

Preservice teachers coming to teacher education programs do not arrive as blank slates; rather they enter with countless experiences and a wealth of background knowledge about a wide variety of ideas. They also arrive with well-developed personal feelings, attitudes, and opinions about what it means to be a teacher, how a classroom should be managed, and how learning happens (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Borko & Putnam, 1996; Collinson 1996; Tomlinson, 1999). Some of these predetermined thoughts are formed in the later high school years and during the first few years of college (Yoo, 2005) and some are formed through interactions with other teachers along the way (Lortie, 2002). Because preservice teachers come well equipped with their own beliefs, their willingness to try something new may not be a priority let alone a primary goal.

Given their fixed notions about teaching, it is understandable that preservice teachers are inclined to teach the way they have been taught and the way they have observed other teachers teaching (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999) unless their preconceived ideas are directly addressed and challenged in their teacher education programs (Rath, 2001). There is also evidence pointing to the inability to change their minds and to promote risk-taking in their teaching practices (Zimpher, DeVoss, & Nott, 1980). It has also been argued that changing a preservice teacher's mind is a daunting and sometimes insurmountable challenge (Bramald, Hardman, & Leat, 1995). Johnson (1994) asserts that "asking preservice teachers to test out alternative models of teaching means asking them to take major risks" (p. 451) and for many of them, this is asking too much as they repeatedly return to what feels comfortable. However, as

preservice teacher instructors, we need to encourage them to venture outside of their comfort zones and accept a certain amount of risk. Without such daring moves, there is increased danger of stunted growth and underdeveloped learning in preservice teachers (Elliott & Calderhead, 1993; Stanulis & Russell, 1999), which could then be inherited by elementary and secondary students.

Returning to more secure materials –texts, methods, and the like- can partially be attributed to what has been traditionally privileged in the classroom. For example, canonical literature tends to take precedence (Glenn, 2013) and at times, functions as a failsafe for new teachers given that it is largely accepted as appropriate for use inside a P-12 class setting. It is also helpful that an abundance of supplemental materials exist for well-known texts. Looking for supporting material such as discussion questions, activities, or other teaching ideas for *The Raven* (Poe, 1845) or *The Tale-Tell Heart* (Poe, 1843) are much easier to locate than supplemental material for something written by Le Fanu or Polidori, even though most of the contexts and tools for the more traditional texts can be adapted to suit the unfamiliar and lesser-known texts.

A new teacher, perhaps anxious about staying ahead of their students and/or getting it right, may be more likely to use literature that comes ready to teach and has already proven "tried and true" in other classrooms by other teachers. The present study examines risk-taking activity on the part of preservice teachers, not merely as students, but also as future teachers in the field. During a Teaching Writing/Language Arts Methods course, preservice teachers were asked to take a chance and read, engage with, and implement literature most of them had never contemplated let alone experienced.

Methods

The study was conducted in a Writing and Language Arts Methods course at a rural, land-grant university in the Pacific Northwest. During the third month of the semester, the preservice teachers enrolled were introduced to a British Gothic Literature thematic unit designed to introduce them to new literature, and to provide them with new methods and tools with which to teach writing and language arts. Every Monday for three hours, during October 2013, 15 preservice teachers engaged and wrestled with Gothic short stories while participating in various discussions, writing, and teaching around unfamiliar and challenging texts.

The Thematic Unit

The thematic unit texts included three required short stories: *The Vampyre* (Poldori, 1819), *The Sandman* (Hoffmann, 1844), and *Green Tea* (Le Fanu, 2008). In addition, preservice teachers also participated in a literature circle where they read and presented on one additional story. The options for this assignment included *The Old Nurse's Story* (Gaskell, 1852), *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886), *Fatal Jealousy* (Anonymous, 1807), and *Carmilla* (Le Fanu, 2008). A small sampling of short stories and film excerpts that provided a brief but intense exploration of the many themes and conventions associated with British Gothic literature were included as part of in-class activities.

The readings were supplemented with formal reading responses where preservice teachers responded to questions about their experience with the text or with the activities. Three of the four days included short, informal quick writing about the day's discussion or activities. The final piece of writing asked preservice teachers to take a significant moment in their lives and turn it into a mini Gothic short story. Their stories were accompanied by reflections on decisions made, risks taken, and usefulness of the assignment in both their writing and in their

teaching. The final assignment required them to prepare one literature-focused writing lesson plan, with accompanying reflection detailing the specific choices made within the lesson plan. A second lesson plan with reflection was required as part of the course and was also collected as part of the study.

Before the unit officially began, the preservice teachers were given a copy of the thematic unit. Titled, "A Character of Malignity – Unfathomable Malignity," it consisted of a rationale, goals, text list, daily lesson plans, grade scale, assignments, rubrics, discussion questions, a glossary of British Gothic themes and terms, an image cache, and a reference list. The Reading Response Prompts as well as the Narrative Assignment are included in the Appendix. The purpose for delivering a copy of the unit to the participants was to keep them apprised of the activities as well as to provide them with a model for their own thematic unit construction.

Participants

Eighteen elementary (K-8) preservice teachers registered for and completed the course, of which 15 signed and returned the consent form to participate in the study. There were 13 females and two males, and all identified as White. Thirteen arrived as Elementary Education Majors, and two as Early Childhood Majors doing a blended certificate. They were a mix of juniors and seniors within one year of entering into their student teaching, and they were simultaneously enrolled in Reading Methods, Arts Methods, and Field Work Practicum courses. The Elementary Majors were also enrolled in a Children's Dance course.

The researcher was also the instructor of the course and had completed a graduate-level British Gothic Literature course the previous semester. The texts and several discussion threads appearing in the unit came from that course. The researcher also has an extensive background in literature, including a Master of Arts degree in English Literature. In addition, a fellow doctoral

student attended each class session as a participant observer (Spradley, 1980). Each class day, for

three hours, she observed and took field notes of the overall tenor of the classroom, the

preservice teachers, and the instructor. The field notes, focused specifically on student

engagement, participation, and questions, provided necessary context for each of the lessons

listed in the unit.

Data Collection

To examine the preservice teachers' perceptions, experiences, and connections with

British Gothic literature, reading responses, narratives, reflections, quick-writes, and field notes

were collected. To answer the question of how preservice teachers' perceptions, experiences, and

connections influenced and shaped teaching practices and risk-taking within those practices,

lesson plans and reflections on the lesson plans were collected. Table 1 summarizes the type and

amount of data collected. All data was scanned into the computer as images and subsequently

returned to the preservice teachers after assessment and evaluation were completed. After data

collection ended, names were removed, and each preservice teacher was assigned a unique

alphanumeric code so as to be able to track them individually, if necessary.

Data Analysis

Using a phenomenological approach, data analysis was initially concerned with the lived

experiences of the preservice teachers (Kvale, 1996; Greene, 1997; Maypole & Davies, 2001).

During the first phase of analysis, the preservice teacher writings were read thoroughly two

times. On the second read through, the pages were cut into paragraph-sized pieces since most of

the paragraphs generally contained a single unit of thought. The pieces were then pasted the onto

large index cards. Moments of summary, specific textual analysis, and literature circle attitudes

were excluded because they were not indicative of perceptions, experiences, and connections.

Instead, attention was paid to the reflective and narrative moments that addressed either British Gothic literature and/or literature in general, classroom use, choice justification, and personal anecdotes. This process yielded 352 cards.

The second phase of analysis involved re-reading and re-viewing the data and assigning a code that appropriately described the writing of the preservice teachers. Common codes that began to appear included "Text-to-Text Connection" and "Personal Anecdote." The second phase of analysis yielded 139 cards. The third and final phase of analysis separated the cards into three general categories: Student Practice, Possible Teacher Practice, and Actual Teacher Practice. Student Practice is here defined as the moves and risks taken as a student/preservice teacher inside the teacher education program. Possible Teacher Practice is defined as what the preservice teachers, still operating on some level as students, assume they will do in the classroom regarding literature and the teaching of such. And finally, Actual Teacher Practice is taken from the two lesson plans preservice teachers crafted while participating in the unit and the course in general.

Findings

Three overarching themes emerged from the data set. The first theme included the practices of the preservice teachers as they engaged with the unit as a student. The second theme was their possible teacher practices as they reflected on how they might use this type of literature in the classroom. The third, and final theme was their actual teacher practices as they crafted two lesson plans. (1) As students, they generally enjoyed their encounter with something new, (2) as possible teachers, they mostly considered the use of such literature fine as long as it was adapted, and (3), when acting as actual teachers, they largely reverted to safer content and did not include Gothic literature in their lesson plans.

Student Practice

The time period for the required texts is the 19th century, and they, therefore, contain language that is not as familiar to these particular preservice teachers as texts with more modern language might be. As the unit progressed, and the reading embarked upon, the preservice teachers found the literature difficult to read and digest. When describing the readings, they used descriptors such as "wordy," "long," "boring," "tough," and "thick." One student lamented in a quick write how they wished they could have "selected their own literature circle book" due to the difficulty of *The Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde* (Stevenson, 1886). However, even though they found the language challenging and unfamiliar, they were still amenable to fully participating with the thematic unit.

Overall, through their quick writing, narrative reflections, and reading responses the preservice teachers enjoyed participating in the unit for many reasons. The quick writes revealed many comments about loving the exposure to a new and unfamiliar genre of literature. All of them said they had either never heard of or thought about British Gothic Literature, and although a few claimed they were familiar with Edgar Allen Poe and even fewer with Flannery O'Connor, they had little to no experience with anything outside of American Gothic writers. They were, however, eager to learn more. The final quick write revealed that many found the exploration of British Gothic literature "interesting," "exciting," and according to one student, "fabulous."

In the reflections on their narratives, most were pleased with not only the assignment, but with their ability to navigate and complete it successfully. Although there were two preservice teachers who did not find the assignment purposeful, the majority were pleased with the creative freedom the assignment allowed and found it purposeful for various reasons such as that it allowed them to "think outside the box" and to "tell their own story." One student in particular

said they thought that "the door was wide open and that they were ready to go through." Another

student claimed they "surprised themselves" with their creativity. Still others found space to

revise and edit their work and to practice writing in general. The narratives themselves

demonstrated knowledge of British Gothic elements (such as castles, labyrinths, frightful

weather, omens, vampires, and so forth) discussed and used in class. The assessments, which

were based on a predetermined rubric, showed successful convention implementation across the

board.

According to their reading responses asking them about the specific texts, all were able to

find a pathway to and connect with the stories. *The Vampyre* (Polidori, 1819) sparked interest

and memories as they remembered that they did "like vampire stories" and most of them made

connections to other authors such as Stephanie Meyers and Anne Rice, and to other texts such as

Dracula (Stoker, 1897) and even the old television show *Dark Shadows* (Costello, 1966). Two

reminisced about Halloweens past and "hanging out with family members who loved everything

Gothic and dark." After reading *The Sandman* (Hoffmann, 1844), they pondered over whom they

empathized with, Nathaniel or Klara, making connections to our present love of technology as

well as to negative experiences with former significant others. In addition, following our

discussions of *Green Tea* (Le Fanu, 2008) where poor Reverend Jennings is menaced by an evil

monkey, every student had a story about a time when either they or someone they knew were

terrorized by an animal, be it a dog, cat, crow, or squirrel.

The final reading response asked them to talk about their experiences and connections in

terms of the overall unit. The same words appeared repeatedly and included descriptors such as

"exciting," "rewarding," "educational," "beautiful," "spectacular," and "intriguing." Although

there was an Early Childhood major who claimed they did not find the unit "super helpful," most

wrote statements like "I developed an appreciation of Gothic Literature," "I want to read more,"

"It actually wasn't that bad," and one student even lamented their birth in this time period

claiming, "I was born in the wrong era. I feel I would fit in better in 18th/19th century London."

Clearly, the preservice teachers, in regard to their own personal learning as students, were

deepening their understanding of and engagement with the content of the unit.

Possible Teacher Practice

As the teachers they think themselves to be, the preservice teachers considered how their

learning during the unit impacted their future teaching practices. In the final quick write, many

addressed the possible use of British Gothic literature in the classroom. They wrote sentiments

such as "it was so fun and will be great to bring into the classroom with some adaptations of

course." Three thought that Halloween was a great time to talk about this kind of literature and

one student "really thought it was useful for students to get at their own stories." Not everyone

was pleased with the unit activities. There were two who decided the unit was "not applicable in

any way to their own future teaching" and that "religious beliefs and risk of parent offense would

never allow them to bring this kind of literature into their classroom."

In the final reading response, they were asked about the possibility of bringing literature

into the classroom and all but three were enthusiastic about the possibility of teaching with

literature, saying not only that it was "possible" but also "desirable." The reasons for such a

move included "important messages," "building vocabulary," "contributing to a student's well-

rounding," "building a love of reading," "sparking interest in new things," "connecting to the

lives of students," and "introducing students to new perspectives and cultures." Most attached

qualifying statements to their affirmative answers. For example, they added statements such as

"if it is age-appropriate," "but it would have to adapted," or "but it is more appropriate in the upper grades."

There was also concern about future students' attitudes about English and literature. Some of them remembered the boring classes they took in middle school and high school and vowed to remedy this issue in their own classrooms, claiming that early exposure to literature and more specifically, unfamiliar literature that connects to students' lives, will help decrease the "dread" and "boredom" that kept them from loving and understanding older stories and other texts. Two did not share the above sentiments, and as Early Childhood majors they disapproved of most literature in the classroom because it had too high a potential of being too mature or too complex for children. They cited fear of "angry parents," "developmental issues," and an anecdote about a scary story heard in a first-grade classroom that did not go well.

According to field notes from the first day's discussion, much excitement was generated over the possibility of using age-appropriate scary stories in their lesson plans. One student claimed that teachers "need to teach them about real life." However, subsequent writings suggest a reconsideration as well as a demonstration of a deep anxiety around the type of literature and the age of the students- ideas that may have been already firmly implanted as they entered the course and the unit, as researchers such as Borko & Putnam (1996), Calderhead & Robson (1991) and Tomlinson (1999) have argued.

Actual Teacher Practice

Of the 30 lesson plans collected, 21 plans included the use of literature to teach a writing concept. Nine plans did not and instead, implemented other tools such as technology and drawing. Of the 21 that included the use of literature, four included a type of Gothic literature while the remaining 17 chose to include other types of reading. One of the Gothic-focused

lessons used an unnamed Edward Gorey image that was part of a larger exhibit, "Elegant

Enigmas: The Art of Edward Gorey," held in Boston, 2011. The second one brought in a grade

school-friendly video adaptation of *Frankenstein* (Vaughn, 2010). The clip is part of a YouTube

series titled *Speakaboos,* where readers tell truncated versions of popular stories and poems.

Their mission, according to their Facebook page is to "inspire a love of reading in children

through storytelling," and *Frankenstein* is one of many clips available.

Of the remaining lesson plans that employed a type of literature, Fairy Tales and

Children's Literature were the most often used types. The fairy tales included unspecified

selections such as "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," and a few paragraphs from the original

version of *The Little Mermaid* (Anderson, 1837). There were also other stories that might be

considered more fable than fairy tale such as unspecified versions of "The Three Little Pigs" and

"The Princess and the Pea." A few preservice teachers also selected from *Fractured Fairy Tales*

(Scieszka, 1996) as companion pieces. The Children's Literature category included *Junie B.*

Jones and a Little Monkey Business (1993), and *Flying Over Brooklyn* (2003) as well as

selections from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1990) and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

(1865) appropriate for elementary school children. One preservice teacher created a lesson that

used *Anansi the Spider* (2009), a children's book about a West African trickster deity.

Of the three who chose poetry, two used selections from Shel Silverstein (2000/2006)-

Hug-O-War and *Noise Day*- and one used *Skippyjon Jones and the Big Bones* (Schachner, 2007).

For the Young Adult literature, select passages from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

(Rowling, 2009) appeared. In the "Other" category, the texts were small samples from the U.S.

Constitution and *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813), as well as the unnamed "popular stories in

multiple genres." In addition, one preservice teacher used the science fiction short story, *There*

Will Come Soft Rains (Bradbury, 1950).

The reflections that accompanied the lesson plans revealed preservice teachers' insights

about their specific literature choices and overall ideas about using literature in their teaching.

There were several who did not provide reasoning and justification for their text selection, but

many indicated they had selected their texts because of either their or their student's previous use

or knowledge of the texts, as the following responses indicate.

Emily: "I love Shel Silverstein's poems. They are fun and entertaining and most students
                  are aware of him."

Catherine: "I am using fairy tales because students love fairy tales."

Isabella: "I picked Anasi because I have used it before and I knew what I could do with it
                  and had seen good ways and not so good ways to approach it."

Jonathan: "Last semester, I had the opportunity to read *Frankenstein* in one of my classes.
                  Frankenstein is a classic and was a fun read. The obvious hurdle was the difficult
                  language to read and length of the writing. I found a YouTube video that
                  addressed both concerns."

Manfred: "The constitution is something that most people are familiar, but most students
                  don't understand how powerful the writing is."

It would appear that although a few beginning teachers reverted to more familiar literature, there

were moves being made that demonstrate more careful thinking about its inclusion.

Also present was commentary about literature in general and its place in the classroom.

Most responses included descriptors such as "fun," "balance," "imagination," and "well-

rounded" as well as phrases such as "building on what the student already knows," "capturing

interest," and "inspiring creativity." The following responses capture the pervasive positive attitude that appeared in the reflections.

Agnes: "By teaching a lesson using fiction, where the students can use their favorite

                characters, I am hoping to develop a love for writing."

Antonia: "With all of my new found knowledge on how to teach literature I can honestly

                say I am extremely excited. When I have my own class I will definitely be

                creative when teaching literature. There is so much that I can do with it and so

                many genres that I would like to cover. When I was in school I can't remember

                ever going over sci-fi or horror. These two genres were always fascinating to me

                and I assume [would be] interesting to other students. I want my students to have

                the opportunity to learn about a variety of genres, so that when they go to the

                library they will have a richer understanding of what to look for and what they

                like."

Based on their lesson plan reflections, most of these particular preservice teachers were heading in the right direction with the overall, big idea of incorporating literature into their teaching practices.

Discussion

It is important to note that while only two future teachers used British Gothic literature in their lesson plans, most of their discussion and teaching practices were indicative of deep thinking in two areas: (1) how to bring literature into the classroom and (2) how their own experiences compared to the experiences they wish for their future students. They engaged in and at times, wrestled with British Gothic literature, writing about their insights and struggles along the way. They watched trailers for scary movies and felt comfortable to share what scares

them, all while reading some admittedly dense prose. They made strong connections between the

presented material and their authentic, lived experiences and then made beginning moves to

incorporate similar material into their own teaching practices.

This work is just a small piece of the picture wherein preservice teachers connected on a

personal level, which is demonstrative of their open and curious minds. In addition, these

particular preservice teachers are beginning to develop an understanding of and appreciation for

trying something new. Being aware of their own past as well as their less positive, or "boring,"

experiences in the classroom has put them in a position to think critically about and analyze what

they want for their own students.

Pratt (2002) argues for places of "social and intellectual spaces where groups can

constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of

trust, shared understandings, and temporary protection from legacies of oppression" (p. 17).

Expanding on Pratt's thinking, Gomes and Carter (2010) suggest that an awareness of

stereotypes has to exist before critical discussion can occur. As a parallel, awareness of their own

pasts might need to be more thoroughly developed in the preservice teachers before they can take

risks with different genres and writing activities. The following students (names have been

changed) concisely sum up the awareness that developed:

Emilia: "I think that if we were exposed to more literature, we would have a better

               attitude about it later."

Julia: "It's important to get students out of their comfort zones. Later in life,

               students will be reading and analyzing all sorts of things so in order to prepare

               them, I want to expose them to all types of reading. Reading a variety of material

also allows students to see different perspectives. I want my students to

understand that the world is seen through different eyes in different ways."

Some of the attitudes and comments could be attributed to the researcher's own

background and experience with the subject. Five students wrote that their favorite part was the

"passion for and knowledge of the subject." The second researcher noted at least once per class

session that "students looked engaged" and "students seemed receptive" as they moved through

each three-hour session of literature and methods. When asked to define "engaged" and

"receptive," the second researcher explained that students looked alert, were making eye contact,

and endeavored to include their own connections and insights into the discussion. She also noted

on the second day that the instructor "sounded very knowledgeable about the topic" as they were

provided examples and specific details about related texts.

Their text selections can be attributed to a variety of reasons. As referenced above, some

picked what they liked or what they or their students were or might be comfortable with. The

abundance of fairy-tale themed lessons may have been the result of their concurrent Children's

Literature course where they were fully enmeshed in various versions of fairy tales and their

fractured offspring. Connecting and adapting course material to fit different needs is a good use

of time for busy beginning teachers. The science fiction loving preservice teacher who was so

excited to "finally introduce Ray Bradbury," has since been the researcher's office to

breathlessly explain how she is not only taking a British Literature course but has received

permission from the course professor to craft and present a thematic unit as her final project. As

she turned to leave, she happily exclaimed, "And I'm totally using Gothic Literature!"

British Gothic literature presented these future teachers with a scaffolded space with

which to work through unfamiliarity- both in language and in content, a skill they may be able to

transfer to their reading of and reflection on more diverse and multicultural texts. There were

certainly a few who were relieved to have the unit come to a close and who plan on never using

this type or any type of literature in the future. Such reactions were expected, and through self-

reflection, a level of comfort was reached with the fact that not everyone has to be as enamored

of the material as the instructor is. Nevertheless, the rest of the future teachers provided good

evidence that they have come to a more nuanced understanding and that they have expanded

their thinking as well as their repertoire of strategies for their future classrooms.

Future Directions

One month of instruction does not a risk-taking teacher make and, as Johnson (2011)

argues, if "teachers seek to change students' initial negative perceptions about classroom

materials, [then] they must offer them in-depth, repeated experiences that contradict their

misconceptions" (p. 218) and it is reasonable to suggest that the same holds true for preservice

teachers. Regardless, one month provided a good starting point, although in the future, it may be

better idea to more fully embed such instruction rather than having it stand alone as an isolated

and rather stark unit of instruction.

Incorporating different literary genres also provides a place for future direction and

would also allow spaces for preservice teachers to connect their personal experiences with the

material. For example, Contemporary Literature could also be embedded into a course to open

spaces for discussions about marginalized voices or Historical Fiction where students entertain

alternative interpretations and constructions of historical events and figures. The student, who

was excited about bringing in Science Fiction, connected her work with her own passion about

literature with futuristic settings and time travel. And finally, it is difficult to draw solid, long-

term conclusions about a specific set of preservice teachers after a few short weeks of

interaction. Tracking and talking with them as well as collecting artifacts and interviews as they move into their student teaching and beyond would help provide a bigger, more accurate picture of their risk-taking activities as far as literature is concerned.

Conclusion

Ruminating on the subject of risk-taking, the vampire Lestat tells readers "very few beings really seek knowledge in this world. Mortal or immortal, few really ask. On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers they have already shaped in their own minds -- justifications, confirmations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on. To really ask is to open the door to the whirlwind" (Rice, 2004, p. 380). What an eloquent phrase for precisely what teacher educators want from their preservice teachers as they embark on their own teaching journey where it is imperative that they foster creativity and innovation in themselves and in their own students.

Appendix

Additional Texts and Materials

- *Mama* (2012) trailer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74sTGp6kVro

- *The Sandman* (1992) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjgHbRrnjhU

- *Buffy vs. Edward: Twilight Remixed* (2009) http://www.rebelliouspixels.com/2009/buffy-vs-edward-twilight-remixed

- *Hyde and Hare* (1955) http://www.ulozto.net/live/xtuDbDZ/bugs-bunny-hyde-and-hare-1955-avi

- *Brontë Sister Power Dolls* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NKXNThJ610

Reading Response Prompts

1. What do you know about vampires? Are they something you have ever been or currently are interested in? Polidori's *The Vampyre* is considered the first literary vampire story. Do you like it? Why or why not? This is considered the first vampire novel. What is it doing and why might it be considered "gothic"? How does Lord Ruthvayne compare to other vampires you know of? Would you have done what Aubrey did? Why or why not?

2. What major themes do you see at work in this text? Pick one and expand on how Hoffman explores this theme. Weigh in on how effective Hoffman is at this task. Who do you, if at all, feel bad for in this story? What makes it scary? Or not? Does it have relevance to contemporary issues? Does this story remind you of any other tales you've heard?

3. Thus far, we have read three stories and watched a few movie clips. What is your take thus far on the British Gothic tradition? Why do you think this way? Do you think that all types of literature can be integrated into a P-12 classroom? Why or why not? What types of benefits or limitations do you foresee by attempting this move?

4. Does this story remind you of anything you have read before? If so, what and why? If not, how is this text similar and different from the texts we have read thus far? Why do you think this? The monkey in this story is quite menacing. Can you think of a time when you were menaced by an animal? If not, what about someone you know? How did you react? How did the scene play out?

Gothic Narrative Assignment

Narrative is a significant way in which humans interact with each other and make meaning or sense out of their lived or personal experience. Stories shape our identities and while often told for entertainment, they can also create a sense of shared history, linking people together; they can provide psychological healing. Reading or listening to the narrative of someone who faced a life crisis similar to one you are experiencing can help you through the crisis. They can also help the writer deal with the crisis they can provide insight, facilitating the discovery of values, the exploration of options, and the examination of motives. Whatever the reasons, one of the worst reasons is to fulfill an assignment, so take care in selecting the period for this one so that you are not merely "doing your assignment." This space is for you to demonstrate your knowledge of gothic conventions and to write about a day in your life that you found especially moving, challenging, enlightening, troublesome, etc.

Assignment: Think of one day that was especially interesting or eventful and turn it into a 500-word Gothic short story. Make use of the themes and conventions we have discussed in class, borrowing the language and tone of the novels and texts we have encountered during this unit. Be specific and concrete and include sensory detail. The story should have a clear purpose and only span the course of one day or less.

Reflection: Spend some time re-reading your narrative when it is all finished and ready for submission. Why did you pick the day you did? Were there other days you considered? Why didn't you pick them? What strategies did you use to complete this assignment and why? Was this assignment purposeful to you? Why or why not? This section should be 400-600 words.

Table 1

Collected Data

Type	Amount
300-word Reading Responses	60 (4 per participant)
100-word Quick-Writes	45 (3 per participant)
500-word Gothic Narrative	15 (1 per participant)
300-word Gothic Narrative Reflection	15 (1 per participant)
Lesson Plan	30 (2 per participant)
300-word Lesson Plan Reflection	30 (1 per participant)

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