

A Preservice Teacher's Developing Conceptions of Multiple Literacies and Literacy Instruction: The Case of Sarah

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ABSTRACT

The student population in this country is becoming increasingly diverse. Students of color are already the majority in the fifty largest school districts; one in four of all students is poor; and increasing numbers are language minorities. In contrast, the current teaching force is only 12 to 14 percent nonwhite, and there is an increasing number of white prospective teachers who have experience with diverse populations. These statistics highlight the importance of adequately preparing preservice teachers for the instruction of diverse students. The purpose of this study was to investigate how preservice teachers perceived and interpreted students' multiple literacies in school and non-school settings. Insight into these issues will inform the broader question of how teacher educators can help preservice teachers learn to incorporate non-school literacies into classroom literacy instruction, a crucial element of effective literacy instruction. This paper discusses the perceptions and interpretations of one of four research participants, gathered through pre- and post-term interviews and questionnaires, as well as field observation and interviews. The study found that field placements in multicultural school settings can provide valuable experiences for preservice teachers. However, they may not enable them to directly experience diverse students' multiple, non-school literacies. An additional field placement in a non-school setting may be more conducive to doing this, with more probability of influencing preservice teachers' conceptions of literacy instruction. It may instruct preservice teachers in how to incorporate non-school literacies into classroom literacy instruction, a crucial element in the education of diverse students.