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Where Does the Time Go? Reading for Pleasure and Preservice Teachers

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Introduction

Teacher educators have been charged with bestowing upon preservice teachers opportunities and models that encourage their engagement in reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). In this vein, every semester I ask my students who among them has read a book for pleasure over our break, and few students raise their hands. Due to the fact that these preservice teachers are slated to be elementary school teachers who will teach reading within two years, it is important that they read for pleasure. The notion is troubling that preservice teachers of reading avoid pleasure reading. Having an elementary school teacher who does not read is akin to having a mechanic who does not drive. Thus, each semester I question why these preservice teachers are not reading books for pleasure.

An engaged reader reads with enthusiasm and often (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999). However, many college students are not demonstrating criteria within the definition of an engaged reader. In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) found that there were steep declines in the amount of literature, poetry, and fiction that young adults were reading. Simultaneously, reading comprehension is deteriorating with the United States ranking only 15 out of 31 industrialized nations regarding students' reading scores (NEA, 2004). Readers of literature are more likely to volunteer, play sports, and attend cultural events than their non-reading counterparts (NEA, 2004). With such a decline in reading for pleasure, educators and educational researchers may question what undergraduate students are doing with their time if they are not reading.

While many college students read through Web 2.0 (blogs, social media, etc.), text messages, or assigned text for class, how many read literature for pleasure? Rosenblatt (1978) believed that readers had two modes within which they experienced text, the efferent and aesthetic. When readers are responding to text in the efferent stance, they are reading to obtain information. On the other hand, when readers are reading in the aesthetic stance, they are immersed in the text and primarily reading for enjoyment. Thus, different types of reading create different experiences. In the case of 21st-century readers, reading Web 2.0 or text messages for information differs from having the experience of reading literature for enjoyment.

Reading literature for pleasure, with regard to this study, is defined as the reading of novels, short stories, plays, or poetry in one's spare time that is not for school or work purposes (NEA, 2004). It should be noted that all contemporary books were included in this definition, and there was not a distinction made with regard to the differences in the quality of literature, as readers' tastes differ. Likewise, such readings that take place in a magazine, e-reader, or online also are included. Thus, if literature is read for pleasure, it is included in this definition. This study investigated how undergraduate

college students reported spending their time. Specifically, preservice teachers were asked to log the minutes they spent engaged in various activities.

Literature Review

Aliteracy is defined as a "lack of reading habit especially in capable readers who choose not to read" (Scott, 1996). Aliteracy has become a concern for many college professors with regard to their students, including preservice teachers. This is important because reading motivation has been found to be fostered in classrooms where the teacher is a reading model to his or her students (Gambrell, 1996). Therefore, it seems of particular importance that those who will teach and motivate youngsters to read should be readers. In fact, Turner, Applegate, and Applegate (2009) recently stated that one of the qualities they feel is crucial for teachers who are becoming literacy leaders is a "profound love and respect for the printed word" (p. 254).

Reading and Preservice Teachers

Contrasting with the notion that preservice teachers should have a love of reading, recent research shows a different picture. Today nearly half of all Americans, ages 18-24, read zero books for pleasure. This is concerning when one considers that a reported 65% of college freshman read for pleasure an hour or less a week (NEA, 2004). At the same time, 75% of college freshman reported socializing, and 30% reported using online social networks for over five hours a week (Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010.) These findings coincide with the findings from the United States Department of Labor (2011) that reported full-time college students spent 3.6 hours a day on leisure and sports activities, which did not include reading. Thus, one may question why reading is not a part of those three and a half hours.

While Burgess and Jones (2010) found that college students would read when it came to coursework, it was uncommon for them to read for leisure. A study about college students' reading habits and the Internet revealed that college students enjoy spending time on the Internet more than reading for recreation (Mokhtari, Reichard & Gardner, 2009). This is despite the fact Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) recently found self-selected pleasure reading to positively impact Japanese L2 college students' reading ability. The more books the participants read, the more their reading ability improved. Moreover, research on college students' reading habits revealed that reading for pleasure was correlated with creativity (Kelly & Kneipp, 2009), a result that is especially interesting for preservice teachers for whom creativity is a desired trait.

Even more troubling is that education majors were found to read for pleasure less than other college students (Chen, 2007). Applegate and Applegate (2004) found that undergraduate education majors were unenthusiastic about

reading, a trend they named “The Peter Effect.” This term was coined after the biblical story of the Apostle Peter, who stated that he could not give what he did not have. Benevides and Peterson (2010) found that preservice teachers’ reading habits and attitudes about reading correlated with participants’ literacy scores. Thus, a teacher who does not take pleasure in reading literature may not be able to demonstrate literacy skills as well as a teacher who does read literature for pleasure.

The Importance of Teachers Reading For Pleasure

The Peter Effect has been found to impact preservice and inservice teachers alike (Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008). Having a teacher who is a reader is important because students are influenced by such models (Gambrell, 1996; Rogoff, 1990). Having a reading model within the classroom can be especially important to today’s children, who are growing up immersed in media (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). The Kaiser Family Foundation found that even children as young as zero to six years old use screen media for a total of 1:58 minutes a day, with most of this time spent watching television or videos. This time is compared to the 39 minutes a day these children spent reading or being read to. Thus, when these students enter school, they will benefit from being read to by a teacher and having a teacher who can introduce new books for the child to read.

Research has shown that teachers who read for pleasure have been found to be more likely to implement positive literacy practices in their classroom when compared to those who do not read for pleasure (Morrison, Jacobs, & Swinyard, 1999.) Such literacy practices are increasingly important in today’s high stakes and diverse classrooms, where the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has increased teacher requirements to improve children’s testable reading achievements (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Such testing is of concern since some young students enter the classroom with little or no early literacy knowledge.

Allington (1984) stated that children who lack experiences with books and reading usually do not perform well on kindergarten assessments. Thus, a kindergartener who begins school without having books at home or adults to read with may be starting at a disadvantage. However, Allington (1984) also feels that access to effective teachers is what matters the most. Emergent literacy includes the skills, information, and attitudes that come before formal reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Some children enter the classroom with emergent literacy skills such as knowledge of letters and sounds (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). However, some students do not have these skills. This is worrisome as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childhood Research Network (NICHD, 2005) found that emergent literacy skills, specifically oral language skills, in 4.5 year old children predicted the ability to decode words in first grade and comprehend text in third grade. Likewise, Adams (1995) stated that the acquisition of reading can be fostered by a number of preliteracy skills that materialize in the preschool years.

Furthermore, in many classrooms, children may be coming to school from homes which are not plentiful with literature or readers. Allington (1984) found children as young

as the first grade already beginning to show major differences in their vocabulary abilities, as well as the texts to which they are exposed. Moreover, Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) showed that reading acquisition in the 1st grade is linked to reading ability 10 years later. The Matthew Effect was a term used by Walberg and Tsai (1983) with regard to education and the cumulative advantage occurring in students who have a strong academic background. In other words, the Matthew Effect states that those who are rich get richer. With regard to reading, those who have greater vocabulary and more experience in reading grow quickly as readers, while their counterparts who are less successful in reading do not grow as much (Allington, 1984). In an article that specifically investigated how the Matthew Effect impacted reading, Stanovich (1986) stated that instruction may be a possible mediator for the Matthew Effect.

With the combined knowledge that preservice teachers are not reading for pleasure often, despite the fact such reading is correlated with positive practices, and that students need teachers in the classroom who read for pleasure, one may question why preservice teachers are not reading. Interestingly, Nathanson and colleagues (2008) found that the decline in reading could partly be blamed on a deficit in passion for reading. But, what is to blame for this lack of passion? Dewey (1915) believed that learning should center on children by providing activities and direction. This statement rings true for educators of college students, too. However, it is difficult for college professors to determine what weight activities, such as reading for pleasure, should have in an undergraduate program. Perhaps if teacher educators understand how preservice teachers spend their time, it would help them to better understand how to mediate natural selection of activities on the part of students with instructor-directed activities.

Purpose

This study differs from previous research as it aims to fill the gaps in the literature by focusing on how college students are spending their time when they are not completing coursework. Specifically, this research investigated whether or not preservice teachers read for pleasure, and what they do during their leisure time. The questions that guided this research were:

1. How much leisure time do preservice teachers spend reading literature for pleasure?
2. On what leisure activities do preservice teachers spend their time?
3. Is there a significant difference between the amount of time preservice teachers read literature and engage in other activities?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study included 63 university students enrolled in a language development and reading acquisition course at a large, mid-Atlantic university. The course focuses on young children’s language development and the relationship between language and reading acquisition. In this course, students learned concepts

essential to language development; language achievement appropriate at various ages; concepts of emergent literacy; models of reading acquisition and skilled reading; and major components of reading such as phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. This course is required for Early Childhood and Elementary Education majors. The demographics of the participants were consistent with elementary education majors as 93 percent were female.

Reading Log Procedures

Participants completed a reading log, in which they were asked to report the amount of minutes they spent on given activities over the course of a week. In addition to logging these minutes, participants recorded the amount of time they engaged in other pleasurable activities. Participants were to keep the reading logs with them during the day, which enabled them to record events as they occurred; this procedure was put in place to help the preservice teachers create an accurate log of the activities as they took place. Likewise, participants were better able to document an accurate time allotment for the activity. If a participant only completed a portion of the reading log, that log was excluded from the study. Due to the many requirements of the course, as well as the participants' other courses, reading logs were used only for one week. Data from the Reading Logs were collected at two different time points during the semester. For one group of participants, data were collected in the beginning of the second week of classes. This week was chosen, as participants felt this was the time in the semester that they had a substantial amount of free time in which to participate in leisure activities. For another group of participants, the week in which these activities were recorded was in the middle of the semester (between midterms and finals) during a time when classes were in session. This week was chosen, as participants were in the middle of their semester.

As a class, the participants brainstormed the pleasurable activities they pursue most often during a week. Then, participants were asked to record on a daily basis how many minutes they pursued the following pleasurable activities: read literature (this includes novels, short stories, plays, and poetry); read magazines or newspapers; use email, Facebook, Twitter, or search the Internet; talk on the telephone; text; watch television; and watch movies. In addition, participants had the opportunity to record any additional reading activities in which they participated. Preservice teacher participants did not record reading activities that were associated with work or school, as the focus of this study was to hone in on the minutes participants spent exclusively reading for pleasure. At the end of the week, participants added up the total amount of minutes they spent on each of these activities.

Results

To answer question one, "How much leisure time do preservice teachers spend reading literature for pleasure?" the reading log responses of preservice teachers were read and analyzed. Preservice teachers reported that daily they spent an average of 67.79 minutes reading literature for pleasure. However, 44% of the participants reported reading zero minutes, and 78% reported reading one hour or less.

For question two, "On what leisure activities do preservice

teachers spend their time?"

preservice teachers reported spending their time on various other activities, of which the following were most reported: texting, watching television, using Facebook, searching the Internet, and talking on the telephone. The activity that took most of the preservice teachers' time was texting. In fact, participants reported texting for an average of 540.49 minutes, and only two participants reported they did not text. Watching television or movies (463.12 minutes) and using Facebook or other social networking (361.57 minutes) were the second and third most popular sources of activity. The fourth and fifth most reported activities were talking on the telephone with friends and family (199.55 minutes) and searching the Internet for pleasure (176.57 minutes). Refer to Figure 1 for a summary of activities.

To answer question three, "Is there a significant difference between the amount of time preservice teachers read literature and engage in other activities?" paired sample t-tests compared the minutes spent reading literature for pleasure and various other activities. Results indicate that there is a significant difference between the amount of time spent reading literature and engaging in other activities, such as texting $t(63) = 4.33$, $p < .000$; using Facebook or social networking $t(63) = 5.78$, $p < .000$; talking on the telephone $t(63) = 3.53$, $p < .001$; and surfing the Internet $t(63) = 2.96$, $p < .004$. A Bonferroni adjusted alpha for conceptually grouped outcomes to control Type I error was used. These findings revealed that the preservice teachers spent a significantly greater amount of time engaging in various activities rather than reading literature.

Limitations

Before discussing the implications of this study, it is important to acknowledge the factors that limit the findings. First, the participants in this research attended the same university and were enrolled in a reading and language course with the same instructor. Therefore, the ability to generalize this research may be limited. Also, the data collection took place for a week during the semester. Perhaps the results would vary if data were collected during participants' summer or winter break from college. Lastly, the information from the reading logs is based on self-reports. The participants were responsible for reporting an accurate account of the activities in which they participated, and the precise time they spent on the activities.

Discussion

While Rosenblatt (1938) conjectured that it was the job of teachers to help human beings realize that literature can be a source of pleasure, many preservice teachers do not read for pleasure themselves. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the amount of time preservice teachers spend reading literature for pleasure. Further, this research aimed to identify how preservice teachers spend their time in terms of reading literature for pleasure and other activities. The findings have significant implications for teacher educators and educational researchers alike.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of these findings is the fact that so many participants reported that they

did not read or read very little literature for pleasure. This absence of reading literature is of concern, especially when the participants consist of preservice elementary school teachers who are enrolled in a reading methods class. In fact, within two years, the majority of these participants will begin teaching reading to children who are in kindergarten through fifth grade. The lack of time they spend reading books may potentially impact their ability to teach reading.

First, one's ability to teach reading may be affected by one's lack of being a model of reading. Rogoff (1990) stated that modeling was one factor that encouraged reading behaviors in young emergent readers. The implication of this statement is that one who does not model reading is limited in ability to help another learn to read. For example, if a teacher is reading a book for pleasure and comes upon a passage he/she does not understand, he/she will use strategies to help him/her discern the exact meaning of the passage. By doing this, the teacher will have used the metacognitive reading strategy of comprehension monitoring (Baker & Brown, 1984). Not only will this teacher understand this strategy, but he/she will have had an experience with this metacognitive strategy to share with the students. Thus, this teacher will be able to better explain the metacognitive strategy he/she used when reading while teaching the student. Also, the teacher most likely will have more reading strategies in his/her repertoire due to the fact that he/she uses them when reading, which the teacher can then share with the student. This knowledge and modeling of reading strategies is important to both the teacher and those who are learning to read.

Second, preservice teachers who are reading models will motivate their elementary school students to read (Gambrell, 1996). Motivating youngsters to read could be difficult to do if the teacher does not enjoy reading. While many teachers are likely to gravitate toward teaching in the same manner in which they were taught (Kagan, 1992), a teacher who is a reader may have a greater range of motivating experiences from which to teach reading. For instance, teachers who truly love reading will be more likely to identify with their students as a reader. Not only will they be able to guide the elementary school students in the process of learning to read, but they also will be able to share their experiences with text. Thus, teachers can share stories of their favorite books, places they like to read, reasons they like to read, and characters with which they identify. This motivation will further their students' excitement for reading.

Third, while it is a concern that there was a significant difference in the amount of time preservice teachers spent reading for pleasure compared to other activities, another interesting finding was how the participants were using their time. Specifically, the substantial amount of time participants spent texting, on the telephone, and using Facebook is of consequence. While other activities may lend themselves to indirect reading (i.e., searching the Internet or blogging), texting, talking on the telephone, and using Facebook are all aspects of socializing that may not lend themselves to incidental reading or learning.

With regard to the great amount of time spent socializing through technology, the findings in this study are in line with

those of Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, & Pryor (2010). In this study, the preservice teachers spent a lot of time texting or using Facebook. This is notable, as this is the current way in which college students are socializing. However, during these times, they are effectively alone but attempting to connect with others they may not even know. Perhaps they could achieve the same level of fulfillment by interacting with a character from a new book or reconnecting with a "friend" from a book they read years before. Additionally, socializing also could take place in conjunction with reading through book clubs or literature circles.

Teacher educators can introduce and incorporate literature into preservice teachers' lives through new technology to create social situations, like Facebook, e-readers, and blogs. By using these technologies, preservice teachers may feel more technologically savvy and enjoy a social aspect that technology provides while reading. In turn, this may enhance their desire to read. Another way socializing can be introduced to preservice teachers is through literature circles or book clubs, whether in person or online. These reading groups are one way to have students experience reading for pleasure. Through such groups, preservice teachers will have the opportunity to engage in literature by discussing character development, plot, and other aspects of the book with other preservice teachers. In the end, if students have fingertip access to literature and are given opportunities to be social, as they currently have when text messaging, perhaps they will choose to read more literature.

Conclusion

Technology is evolving every day. Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook have been introduced to our culture, and college students are allocating much of their time to these new activities. The findings of this study show that college students are not spending time reading literature. Applegate and Applegate (2004) stated that one way to recreate reading enthusiasm is through college courses. Perhaps as educators, we can leverage Dewey's (1915) ideas and work more socialization into reading activities in the classroom through technology.

This study is significant to professors and educational researchers as it begins to shed light upon the activities on which undergraduate students are spending their time. Future research should focus on expanding this study and investigating why preservice teachers are choosing other leisure activities over reading. Further, educational researchers need to explore how to engage preservice teachers in reading activities that will motivate them to use their time to read books for pleasure as past research has shown that such reading has been linked to positive teaching practices and creativity. Finally, teacher educators must continue to delve into ways in which reading can be incorporated into the busy and technologically savvy lives of our undergraduate preservice teachers.

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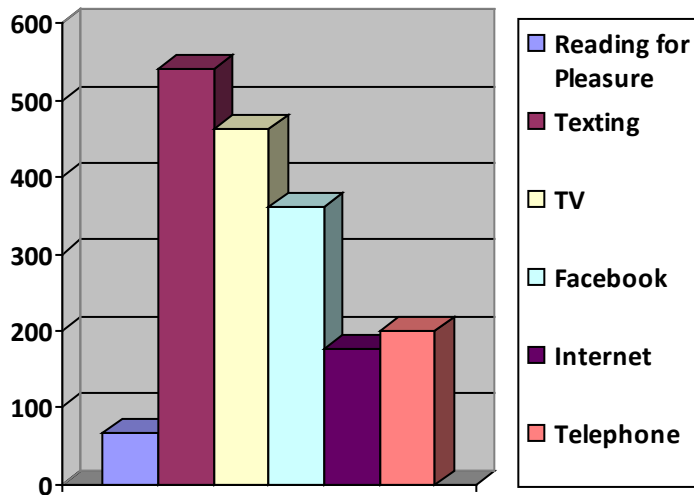


Figure 1. Number of Minutes in a Week Preservice Teachers Spent on Leisure Activities

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