

A “LITERACY AWAKENING”: THE ROLE OF STUDY ABROAD AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING FOR PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ LITERACY ENGAGEMENT

Kristie O’Donnell Lussier¹

Collin College, USA

Lori Czop Assaf

Texas State University, USA

Meagan Hoff

Texas State University, USA

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how preservice teachers (PST) became aware of literacies in global and local contexts and to understand how PST conceive of literacy after experiencing an international service learning (ISL) study abroad program in rural South Africa. For this qualitative grounded theory study, we used critical literacy and humanizing pedagogy as theoretical frames for designing the program and analyzing data. Findings show PST experienced a “literacy awakening.” They became more aware of nuanced and complex ways literacies function in a community and imagined how their understandings would shape future teaching.

Keywords: study abroad; international education; critical literacy; teacher education; humanizing pedagogy

Introduction

Teachers today are faced with the challenge of responding to an increasingly linguistically diverse student population across the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Teacher education programs must develop innovative approaches

¹ *Correspondence:* 2200 West University Drive, McKinney, TX 75071; klussier@collin.edu

to prepare students to meet the language and literacy needs of these students whether globally or locally (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). Traditional teacher education programs have been criticized for neglecting to prepare teachers to function in a “culturally pluralistic and global society” (Sue, Bingham, Porche-Burke, & Vasquez, 1999, p. 1066). One expectation is that teacher educators equip teachers and preservice teachers with the necessary tools to address issues of social justice and equity in their classrooms (Marshall & Klein, 2009). To account for this issue, we designed an international study abroad program to invite preservice teachers to “analyze the relationship between language and power” (Hadjioannou & Fu, 2007, p. 44) so that they might teach their own students how to overcome the injustices that are imposed upon them through various information sources.

Study abroad and international service learning (ISL) for preservice teachers (PST) can help PST understand literacy and language learning from an international lens (Assaf, Lussier, Furness & Hoff, 2019), become change agents at home and abroad, and give PST strategies to become meaningfully engaged in their communities. Using a framework of critical literacy (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001; Freire, 1970) and humanizing pedagogy (Salazar, 2013), this qualitative study analyzed a cohort of PST from the U.S. after they participated in an ISL and study abroad project based in the rural Eastern Cape of South Africa. The ISL project embedded PST in a community and supported them as they learned to transform themselves and their understandings of literacy while preparing to make a positive impact on their professions. Specifically, we asked:

1. How do PST become aware of literacies in global/local contexts?
2. How do PST conceive of literacy after experiencing an ISL study abroad program?

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, we review several bodies of literature and theory relevant to our study. We have identified literature framing our theoretical approach focusing on humanizing pedagogy and critical literacies; studies on community mapping as pedagogical tool for educators; and literature relevant to understanding goals and outcomes of international study abroad and service learning. These bodies of research help to both frame the contexts and goals of the study while also framing how this paper sits at an intersection where more research is needed.

The study design was framed by the theories of humanizing pedagogy and critical literacy. Humanizing pedagogy and critical literacy theories promote criticism of exploitation and oppression and a commitment to justice and equity (Freire, 2005). These ideas formed the basis for designing the study abroad ISL and grounded goals we had for the PST's learning. We sought to understand through our analysis how the PST understood concepts and attitudes related to taking on a critical literacy perspective and beginning to understand how to enact a humanizing pedagogy.

Humanizing Pedagogy

Humanizing pedagogy, as explained by Salazar (2013), combines international perspectives, which are intended to counter deficit ideologies and practices that marginalize and dehumanize students of color, with Freire's goals for education as an activist-oriented approach teaching and learning. A curriculum designed with this framework encourages PST to become more responsive to students' needs and work towards becoming agents of change. Humanizing pedagogy includes the process of “becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons who participate in and

with the world” (Freire, 1984 as quoted from Salazar, 2013, p. 126). This process of humanization fosters transformation and authentic liberation as a way of living in the world rather than following a recipe or list of techniques (Salazar, 2013). Salazar (2013) identified five key tenets to humanizing pedagogy in teacher education. The first tenet connects with literature on caring (Noddings, 2013) and relationships between teachers and students. It includes respect, trust, reciprocity, active listening, mentoring, compassion, high expectations, and interest in students’ overall well-being (Bartolomé, 1994; Cammarota & Romero, 2006). The second tenet focuses on additive approaches to teaching and learning (Valenzuela 1999). Such approaches help teachers guard against banking models that reduce students to passivity and submission that can silence students, lead to self-denigration and instill a sense of internalized failure and self-contempt (Quiroz, 2001). The third tenet highlights the individual and collective journey to critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). The journey to critical consciousness includes reflection about one’s beliefs about students and the social, political, and economic contradictions that contribute to oppressive elements of reality. According to Bartolomé (1994), this journey is a collective process built upon relationships where individuals are provided spaces to understand through dialogue. Dialogic spaces allow for problem posing and leads to ideological clarity (Bartolomé, 1994). Such critical consciousness and action can transform structures and policies that impede our own and others humanness, thus facilitating transformation as explained in tenet four. Salazar’s fifth tenet positions teachers as creative and responsible individuals who must promote a more fully human world through their pedagogical practices and principles. There are no simple lists or techniques but instead constant reflection on the tensions between theory and practice as a way of being or a stance that teachers take. Using humanizing pedagogy was useful for understanding the ways the PST did and did not make moves towards innovative approaches to teaching literacy and becoming agents of positive change.

Critical Literacy

In order to better orient our analysis towards literacy, we integrated critical literacy theories and practices into our theoretical frame (Freire & Macedo, 2005). Critical literacy can be traced to the early 1970’s when Paulo Freire challenged our understanding that literacy is more than simply about reading and writing. Described in his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2005) showed how adult literacy learners became agents of change who transformed their social situations by learning to read both the word and the world critically. For Freire (2005), critical literacy is a means of action and reflection. It is about positioning readers to pose problems and interrogate texts they encounter in the interest of social justice.

Critical literacy is typically viewed as a framework for engaging in literacy work. Vasquez (2005) referred to this framing as a way of being, where critical literacy should not be an add-on but a frame through which to participate in the world. Key tenets of a critical literacy framework include the following: a) critical literacy practices can contribute to change and the development of political awareness (Freire & Macedo, 2005); b) critical literacy involves understanding the sociopolitical systems in which we live and the relationship between language and power (Janks, 1993); and c) text design and production can provide opportunities for critique and transformation (Vasquez, 2005). According to Comber (2001) text design and production is the tenet that pushes students beyond critique and toward social action. Critical literacy theorists think of literacy as a social and political practice (Siegel & Fernandez, 2002) in which students are encouraged to read with a critical attitude toward texts and decide whether to accept or reject the messages being sent.

Community Mapping of Language and Literacy

Community mapping projects were key intersections for the PST in this study to integrate their growing understanding of critical literacy through knowledge of the community, literacy practices, and their own positions in the community. Throughout the community mapping projects, students engaged with members of the community as sources of knowledge and expertise about their environments as they observed, collected, and reflected on literacy artifacts. Community mapping is an inquiry-based, critical literacy informed activity that engages teachers in studying and learning about the language and literacies practices and events in local communities (Tredway, 2003). Tredway (2003) described community mapping as both a process and a product, encompassing both the process of discovery as well as the collection and reflection on community artifacts. For educators, community mapping is a means to learn about community assets, resources, and needs (Tindle, Leconte, Buchanan & Taymans, 2005). Community mapping offers the opportunity to challenge insider/outsider dichotomies by taking teachers outside their classrooms and into the community (Ordoñez-Jasis & Jasis, 2011) in order to question and challenge deficit perspectives about students, their families and their literacy practices.

In examining community literacy practices, scholars have looked at the functions of literacy (Health, 1983) and the domains of literacy (Farr, 2001) in order to situate literacy within daily life. Using community mapping to explore literacy around the community, in-service teachers challenged assumptions about the availability of literacy materials (Fox, 2014). The teachers in Fox's (2014) study noted unexpected discrepancies between community zones, developing a clearer understanding of the distribution of poverty within the community. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) referred to the language and literacy resources as "funds of knowledge" or the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). Moll's work was informed by collaborations with teacher-researchers doing research in the households of their students (Moll et al., 1992). Like community mapping projects, the goal of this work was to help teachers see the community as a source of literacy and language resources that can be leveraged for literacy education (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994).

Incorporating the language and literacy resources of students into the classroom requires purposeful use of the language resources of students, rather than simply celebrating linguistic diversity (Martinez, Morales, & Aldana, 2017). In a case study of an in-service teacher's use of community mapping, the teacher acknowledged that the experience helped redefine and broaden what counted as literacy within the classroom (Dunsmore, Ordoñez-Jasis, & Herrera, 2013). Working with Latinx youth, Martínez (2010) identified the ways in which the code-switching of students mapped on to educational standards, leveraging students' language practices outside of school to make connections to the formal language and literacy practices taught in schools. Likewise, Orellana and Reynolds (2008) saw the connections between the language brokering that their students engaged in within the community and the task of paraphrasing. These examples show the importance of understanding both the functions and goals of various language and literacy practices when incorporating them into teaching. The tendencies for schools to be isolated from the community limits the ability of teachers to incorporate community knowledge and assets into their teaching (O'Sullivan, 2001).

The prevailing research on community mapping has looked at established educators; however, PST can benefit from reflection on the community assets of their students as they enter into their early teaching experiences. O'Sullivan (2001) criticized teacher education

programs for not preparing teachers to situate their teaching within the community, reflecting similar criticisms from Moll and Gonzalez (1994) that education is limited when it does not reach outside the classroom. Exploring the language and literacies used in areas outside of school can promote greater understandings of the sociopolitical systems in which we live and the relationship between language and power (Janks, 1993) in and outside of school. For example, in Jackson and Bryson's (2018) study, PST used community mapping as a pedagogical tool for developing culturally responsive pedagogy. At the end of the project, the PST demonstrated evolving understandings about literacy, identified their own biases about the community, and showed a greater understanding of the connections between school and community therefore, promoting teaching as a fully human pedagogical practice. Yet, although the community mapping project incited new understandings about community knowledge, only some of the PST talked in terms of the importance of engagement within the community and many maintained underlying deficit perspectives about students. This suggests that through reflection on the language and literacy of the community, PST can begin to position themselves as agents within, and not separate from, the community (Jasis, 2000); however, a single project is not sufficient for dismantling long-held assumptions about education, poverty, and communities (Jackson & Bryson, 2018).

The community discovery and reflection undertaken within community mapping projects can help PST identify and question their assumptions about the language and literacies within a community, thereby creating the potential to question social inequities lived by their students (Darder, 1991). In becoming agents of change, PST must first understand their positioning and power within the community. In their classrooms, literacy teachers reinforce "whose language and cultural experiences count and whose do not" (Moll, 2010, p. 454); however, in order to validate the linguistic resources of students, teachers must first be made aware of the resources within the community.

International Service Learning

Often the site of community mapping is the community surrounding a school. Although PST are not yet working in a long-term teaching position with a target community, teacher education programs can use experiences such as ISL and community mapping to engage teachers in critical dialogues. In particular, as PST prepare to enter increasingly diverse classrooms consisting of multilingual and multinational students, combining the reflective practices and community wealth-oriented perspectives of community mapping with international multilingual settings is a useful endeavor for PST. Indeed, many of the goals of community mapping align with goals of international service learning such as nuanced understandings of culture in schools, teaching situated within specific communities, and how to understand interactions of students' languages in context.

Objectives for service learning go beyond simply volunteerism. Service learning enables students to gain insights, critically reflect, and learn course objectives through participatory projects outside of a traditional classroom setting (Bamber, 2015). Service learning situates students, in this case, PST, as learners who gain from the process of community interactions and service. Throughout the literature, PST who participated in international experiences reported gaining more complex understandings of schooling, connections between culture and schooling, and a more nuanced understanding of, and respect for student differences (Roose, 2001). In addition, collaboration within such programs provides PST with the added support of a community of peers with whom to engage in the meaningful dialogue that can further challenge long-held beliefs (Bamber, 2015; Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005; Parr & Chan, 2015).

Bringle and Hatcher (2011) defined international service learning as the “combination of service-learning, study abroad, and international education” (p.14). International service learning programs offer unique experiences for the practice of community mapping. Indeed, the three main features of international service learning—community-centered service activity, cross-cultural engagement, and reflection—overlap significantly with the goals of community mapping (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). ISL has typically been positioned as a means of helping students develop critical global consciousness (O'Sullivan & Niemczyk, 2015). Critical consciousness is an understanding of the world and one's own implications in larger global systems, what Freire (2005) referred to as *conscientização* or “a communal process of evolving social consciousness” (Darder, 2018, p. 112). Central to *conscientização* is the ability to recognize tensions around systemic structures and social conditions. Drawing from Freire's (2005) work, when PST develop more nuanced understandings of literacy, through ISL and community mapping, they engage in a collective analysis of power around language, literacy, and education in ways that help them understand their positioning within society and thereby learn to act upon their environment (Ordoñez-Jasis & Jasis, 2011). Thus, frames such as critical literacy and humanizing pedagogy prove particularly useful for analyzing goals and outcomes associated with international service learning and community-oriented literacy mapping projects.

Overall, in this section reviewing the literature, we connected theoretical perspectives and understandings regarding how they inform PST's ability to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. This review captured key areas that frame this study, but also demonstrated a gap where we can add to the literature as our study sits at the intersections of humanizing pedagogy, critical literacy, community mapping and literacy, and international service learning.

Methodology

This qualitative study used a grounded theory constant-comparative methodological approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is part of a larger study examining what PST gained through an ISL and study abroad experience. The ISL and study abroad took place in rural South Africa, where PST worked in local schools learning to apply the curriculum. The data for this study came from in-depth interviews with PST, field notes from the research team, written reflections, and a major assignment from the study abroad course: The Community Mapping Project (CMP). This project was designed to help the PST become critically aware of the many local literacies enacted in communities across the globe, and to help them consider how language and literacy instruction can be both inclusive and responsive to the authentic needs of the communities in which they work.

Participants

Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), six PST between the ages of 19-28 participated in this study. The PST who participated in this study were all female undergraduate university students who attended the same large, public, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) located in the southwestern United States. One participant is Asian, one is Black, and four are White. Participants were enrolled in a month-long study abroad program focused on examining and comparing cultural and linguistic policies and instructional practices between the U.S. and South Africa and an international service learning project with three under resourced schools.

Context and Setting

We are a research and teaching team. Lori is a White female university professor, while Kristie, a White female community college professor, assisted in country. Meagan is a White female doctoral candidate who conducted most of the follow-up interviews with the preservice teachers (PST) and assisted in analysis and the writing of this manuscript.

The study abroad program started five years ago in collaboration with a non-profit organization in South Africa committed to serving a rural Eastern Cape community by setting up school-based computer labs and providing volunteers to teach computer literacy skills in the schools. As part of the university-based study abroad program, the PST took one reading course and one curriculum and instruction course focused on culturally diverse literacy instruction with an emphasis on supporting language learners. The PST attended five class meetings in the U.S. before departing for their four-week program in South Africa. While in South Africa, the preservice teachers attended 2-3 class meetings per week where they discussed their service learning activities as well as relevant readings on language, education, and cultural issues. Preservice teachers also spent time learning about the predominant language (isiXhosa) and cultural traditions of the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

The PST participated in two service learning projects while in South Africa. One was a week-long “camp” where South African secondary (grade 6 and older) students worked with the preservice teachers to address a social issue in their local community and created digital stories or other digital artifacts to represent possible solutions. The second service learning project took place in two local schools with primary grade (K-7) students. The PST worked with students to create digital movies focused on the purpose and meaning of school and helped students develop their English-language skills. All of the South African students spoke isiXhosa as their native language and Zulu and English to varying degrees of fluency as additional languages. English language instruction does not formally begin until grade 4, so students were encouraged to code switch and use their language of choice. The South African students all lived in the local informal settlement with a population of approximately 3,000 individuals. The majority of improvised housing was constructed with plywood, corrugated metal and sheets of plastic. In order to resist negative presumptions, we referred to the informal settlement as “the village.” Similar to physical boundaries between informal settlements and established neighborhoods across South Africa, we lived in a six bedroom, brick house across from the village in a relatively wealthy beach community.

The PST completed several assignments in which they analyzed and critically reflected on their own beliefs and positionality as well as that of the South African students' experiences. They completed the CMP (Ordoñez-Jasis & Jasis, 2011) along with a variety of other assignments such as the cultural reflection journal which served as additional data sources for this study. In completing the CMP, the PST walked throughout the community, took pictures of examples of literacies they found, interacted with community members, analyzed their findings, and presented their work to each other. While the CMP was a key focus of this study as the PST directly connected their learning about the community with what they recognized about literacy specifically, other assignments supported their literacy understandings and cultural reflections (See figure 1 Course Assignments and Data Sources). At the time of the data analysis, three participants had graduated, begun their teaching careers, and we conducted additional interviews a year out from the study abroad in order to reflect on how their understandings of literacy and teaching evolved in their professional lives. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

Figure 1: Course Assignments and Data Sources

Reading Reflections	Title of article/reading you responded to and date: a) 1 paragraph that responds to the reading b) 1 question c) 1 golden line d) 1 connection to service learning
Service Learning Tutoring and Lesson Plans	Monday –Friday you will work one-on-one and in small groups with South African children. Write daily lesson plans and reflections based on your work with the students. Lesson plans must include language learning strategies and modifications.
Writer's Notebook and Cultural Reflections	You will write every day. Once in South Africa, you will write a 3-4 cultural reflections evaluating your responses and struggles with living in South Africa.
Personal Writing and Self-Reflection	You will write one autobiographical piece and use this piece to create your digital story. You will write a reflection.
Annotated Bibliography of South African Children's Literature and Mini Lesson	You will create an annotated bibliography of 8 South African children and/or young adult literature.
Digital Story	You will create a digital story highlighting personal and educational experiences and language learning in light of the historical, political, institutional, and cultural contexts.
Community Mapping	Community Mapping is an inquiry-based method that can help teachers place literacy learning in context by connecting students' life realities to school instruction. For this assignment, you will map the cultural, linguistic and literacy "geographies" (Moll, 2010; Ordoñez-Jasis & Jasis, 2011) of the Chintsa community. You will document the language(s) and literacies present in the area by taking photos/videos, observing the community, writing field notes, and interacting with the people who work and live in the area.
ABC Project – Autobiography, Biography, and Cross Case Analysis	You will interview another person in South Africa, analyze the interview, and then write a 2-3 page paper that highlights her/his educational trajectory in a thematic fashion and compares and contrasts your experiences with those of your interviewee.

Data Analysis

During the initial stages of the larger project, we undertook several rounds of open coding on interviews and work produced by the PST for their study abroad courses. After several iterations of open coding of open-ended interviews, themes such as “imagining future self as teacher” and “language power” emerged from the data, but one theme that connected across many issues was literacy. After the initial phase of open coding, we refocused our analysis on literacy, framing the data and existing themes within a critical literacy perspective.

In their reflections on literacy, language power, and community literacy, the PST particularly highlighted the Community Mapping Project (CMP) as a process wherein they reflected most on literacy, and more specifically, wherein they often questioned and recognized the prevalence, nuance, and value of multilingual literacies in the rural South African community. Therefore, for this paper, we focus our analysis on how the PST discussed local languages and literacies and their shifting identities as future teachers, focusing on data sources from the PST-produced CMPs along with relevant supporting data from PST’s interviews and other written assignments.

Findings

Overall, one key finding of the study was how through their experiences and reflections, the PST experienced a “literacy awakening,” where they expressed a shift in their understanding of what counts as literacy in the schools and community and how that impacts their roles as teachers. This literacy awakening related to both the nuances of literacy beyond written language and the prevalence and value of literacy within communities that face deep poverty and lack of educational resources (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). In many ways, PST pushed back against subtractive views of language and literacy and grappled with new pedagogical ways to embrace the varied and multiple local literacies discovered in the community. However, in several ways, the PST were not able to fully realize critical literacy or enact a humanizing pedagogy. In this section, we present findings showing ways the PST showed a growing awareness of global/local literacies and how they presented their conceptions of literacy. Several key themes dominated the data from the PST:

1. Literacy existing beyond verbal and textual means
2. Language, literacy, and power
3. Socio-economic issues and literacy
4. Interpersonal literacy

“There Are Different Ways to Do Literacy”

Literacy is not a practice existing in isolation, and the PST showed they were becoming aware of the many ways *literacy exists beyond verbal and textual means*. As they learned about the community, the people, and the values the community members held, the PST saw how practices such as recycling, not smoking, and religious beliefs were demonstrated and reinforced through texts and literacies in the community. They reflected on their expanding notions of literacy by connecting texts with community values and attitudes about literacy. Fae specifically noted her realization that “I knew other people had different cultures, but I didn't know that it has such a big impact on interactions and things like [literacy].” She went on to connect her learning specifically to the CMP: “I learned that there are different ways to do literacy, because we had a literacy mapping project.” Amelia also revealed a specific change of mind while doing the CMP, saying, “I never really thought about using visuals like, using

the resources around me... I learned a lot from... the community that you're, that the students are immersed in and bringing that into um...to their education."

Even at a very basic level, Karina and Kelly noted that non-verbal cues relate to literacy. They said, "Even the color of the trash bin hints to the fact of what the container is used for," and they went on to show an understanding of how social contexts impact literacy; even if a "sign has no words on it the person looking at it would have to have background knowledge about the subject to be able to understand it." Fae and Jacquie also reflected on this use of non-verbal communication, comparing, "words on the sign [that] are written in English, but by it having the store name in bold font and a red arrow that is pointing at the right direction, people can figure out that it means a place is located at a certain spot." Fae and Jacquie also observed this dynamic in the classroom, remembering "using our hands to direct [the students] is very helpful, and soon they make the connection with us pointing and saying 'this way,' or 'sit here.'" Further, they started to implement using visual literacies in the classroom. They explained "while working in the classrooms with the learners, we had them create maps showing their perceptions of how they viewed their school." Jacquie noted the dynamic nature of literacy in her interview, stating that literacy "can be a visual or it can be anything with lettering or print in any language posted up around town or on signs or anywhere in a room."

Karina also connected formal literacy with cultural literacies in her writing. Thinking about her experiences with students in the classroom, she remembered "that they can understand [literacy] more academically" when connecting their learning with community norms such as was present in one Xhosa teacher's classroom. Karina observed the teacher's "classes and... their song and dance and storytelling," which helps the students make connections." Amelia, too, notes the connections students made between students' music and their learning. In reflecting on how this would impact her teaching, Karina wanted to encourage reciprocity and the incorporation of cultural capital: "I'll ask them words in Xhosa, or things in their community, their dancing, their singing... so I had them teach me their dances that they do at home to make it, you know? So like, they had more ownership—like I'm teaching her our dance moves."

"They Value and Care"

The theme of *language, literacy, and power* relates to how PST identified how various texts and literacies in the community brought awareness to language inequities and differences among other issues related to power and language. One issue some of the PST discussed was the paradox that despite the seemingly copious amounts of English-language texts, the primary language of the majority of the community was not English, but isiXhosa, which is the native language of the region, often shortened to Xhosa. As they understood more about the challenges students faced in the local school system, Fae and Jacquie discussed how they felt "being able to read English is a huge privilege in South Africa," whereas in their home settings, they would never have questioned a paradigm of language and privilege. They reflected that teachers "must have had an educated background in order to teach...children songs in multiple languages and write in English on the board." Fae questioned the dynamic of mandatory language acquisition, saying:

Learning another language is really hard. It's really, really hard... [and] everyone has to learn English in all these different countries. I met a few people who know two, or three, or four different languages. It was just very interesting to me, like, 'I've never learned another language'... why do people

in the United States only know one language, or maybe two? I just feel like for us it's more privilege, but for them, in other countries, it's automatically, they have to, it's a part of their curriculum.

Karina and Kelly took note of how literacies in the community reflected the political power dynamics and relative values local government placed on different people groups, specifically stating “the city values the trash bins and litter control on the beach side of [the city] more than the township,” even though they note in their reflections how they each learned from the Xhosa community about their own values for recycling and cleanliness in the community. When local government “stopped picking [the trash cans] up... this angered the community members.” In trying to think of how this issue could be connected to their future teaching practices, they suggested “a lesson could be teaching the children the power of litter control and recycling. They could then write a petition to a city council member about increasing their local recycling services.” This issue was an important one for Karina and Kelly as they continued to reflect on how this power dynamic was played out in interviews weeks and months after the ISL study abroad.

Amelia and Vivian focused on how literacies and texts in the community reflected and reinforced political power. They noted how the prevalence of politically-oriented Xhosa-language texts and the people’s talk about the issues led them to “infer that the citizens of Chintsa are interested in politics and stay informed about the upcoming election. They value the state of their nation and seem to care about the countries [sic] future.”

Jacquie and Fae went on to reflect on how different texts were meant for different people groups – “this text is for everyone [because it] is in all three of the...languages” spoken in the community: isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and English. Amelia and Vivian likewise took note of the power dynamics in different language texts:

All throughout the town, there are two spelling variations of the town name... [sometimes] side by side. The road sign is spelled Chintsa and the local business signs are spelled Cintsa. The texts are close in proximity yet different. Cintsa is how people who speak Afrikaans spell the town’s name. We know that during the Apartheid reign, Afrikaans was the language of the oppressors. Road signs like the one pictured would have been spelled the Afrikaans way. After Apartheid ended, the government replaced road signs to honor the local language. Chintsa is how people from the Xhosa culture spell the name of their town. This leads us to wonder why local businesses choose to spell the name of the town the Afrikaans way even though this is a Xhosa cultured community.

However, when proposing how this idea could be made relevant to their future classrooms, Amelia and Vivian thought “This could be used in a classroom setting to teach the importance of respecting other’s cultures,” backing off from the more serious power dynamics of racial oppression they noticed.

“Whether They Had Money or Not”

When PST reflected on *socio-economic issues and literacy* they posed and reflected on questions about poverty and/or materialism. Most of the PST reflected on socio-economic issues related to literacy both within the classroom as well as throughout the wider community.

In her interview, Amelia reflected on her observation that “some schools and places just might not have enough money to get [teaching and classroom] resources. Um and you know, for languages that don't have as many literacy resources I might, I feel like it's very important to build those literacy resources” so students whose first language is isiXhosa are not left out. She noted that classroom literacy inequity was not something she had thought about before, saying she “didn't really...think about literacy in other languages. It's just not something that um, I'm really that like used to hearing about.” Jacquie and Karina likewise took note, with Karina saying “they were still very much lacking in the literacy department. I know at the other schools, there was barely anything on the walls and they didn't have any books.”

Vivian noted a change of mind in her assumptions about children facing extreme socioeconomic inequities. She was surprised that the children really desired to learn to read; her assumptions were challenged when she interacted with children “so eager to know what I was reading in English.” Though Vivian went on to note her observation of literacy being built through community, when “students [were] helping each other,” her reflection did not reach a critical standpoint when she concluded her thoughts, saying, “When students don't have a lot of material things they realize that they have each other. To me that sense of unity and helpfulness is beautiful.” Amelia, too, noted that in her conversations with Vivian, they were talking about feelings of both guilt and gratitude in light of the very new experiences they had working with the community.

Kelly and Karina wondered about attitudes groups of people with differing economic status held about each other, specifically noting various texts about security systems. They noted, “there are only alarm signs on this [richer] side which makes us wonder does the beach side value safety more or is the more prosperous side fearful of the poor and feel like they could steal from them because they live so close?” They continued on, though, observing that “some people in the township don't even have locks on their doors or doors at all. The two sides value safety very differently and it is easy to see through [the texts of] this community literacy.”

In different ways, the PST observed and reflected on socio-economic issues and inequities while trying to understand the community as they faced their own existing assumptions. After noting a gap between texts on electric safety and certain actual events, Fae and Jacquie were startled by the measures people faced to obtain a utility the PST took for granted: electricity. A man in the community “was in desperate need [of power in his home]. Despite the sign being posted, he proceeded to mess with the box which led to him getting electrocuted and dying.”

Kelly and Karina made the statement that some people “are living in poverty but put satellite television on their priority list of things to budget for,” and continued to connect that to a vision of a future classroom, suggesting a “game of ‘real life’ for the children so that they could understand the value of money and importance of prioritizing.” Jacquie also noted the presence of television and cell phones, but took a more neutral tone in her reflection, saying “I'm just ‘ok, maybe they have shack homes but some homes they are nice.’ They just lived in that community.” In a later interview, she also noted that while going to people's home “it's not the best living conditions, but they're still like, ‘Welcome. Let me tell you about this,’ I don't know, it was just so welcoming, whether they had money or didn't.”

“Literacy Impacts Lives”

In their own ways, each of the PST grappled with how their understandings of literacy evolved beyond words on a page. They began to recognize and understand *interpersonal*

literacy. The PST connected texts to social norms and practices as they realized that literacy is a socio-cultural phenomenon. In their CMP, Amelia and Vivian made connections between the texts posted at a local restaurant, the way the people discussed the establishment, and the attitudes present, in which they participated. They noted that

The establishment [is] full of lively groups of people derived from all kinds of cultural backgrounds,” in a casual atmosphere, which was reinforced by texts reading “‘If you’re not barefoot, you’re over dressed.’ This sign indicates that the institution is a casual place without the expectation of a dress code.

In her interview, Vivian remembered how even family dynamics she expected based on her own life—such as sibling rivalry and teasing—were challenged when she learned about communication and values with the members in the community. For instance, when talking with a student, Vivian assumed joking about teasing her siblings would translate across cultures, but she was surprised when the student was taken aback by the suggestion that she would not value her brother. Vivian said “Like it’s not even a joke to them, to think about it, like that, like picking on your brother, she was like ‘no of course I love him, what kind of question is that?’”

In her conversations with students, Vivian realized how creating trusting relationships based on mutual understandings in fact assisted with teaching academic literacies.

Kelly discussed what she learned from observing and participating in a newly formed “reading club” in the community:

It was very new but to see the impact it was already having on the children and on the families and building the confidence of even the parents, the adults, with them reading to the children. The children are gaining from it by hearing someone reading aloud and the parents are building confidence in their own literacy skills.

One interpersonal dynamic that Karina noticed was the perceived connection to speaking English and being highly educated. This was similar to the reflections from Fae and Jacquie about the relationship of English and education, but Karina specifically connected it to social literacies comparing different contexts: “people think that you’re smart because you speak English – which isn’t true” for people from her background.

Fae and Jacquie summed up the CMP, reflecting that “we gained knowledge on how literacy impacts the lives of the people in the community.” Jacquie realized the true integration of literacy in the community while preparing her CMP: “we walked around the community and we saw what was posted up and even around the schools there was a lot of literacy going on. They were exposed to it and visuals, letters, and words. I saw a lot of that going on.” When it comes down to reflecting on essential aspects of teaching, Fae said “It’s showing people that you care and that you’re interested in their life and their culture and you want to do something about it, or help them advance”; her “approach to teaching changed.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how preservice teachers (PST) became aware of literacies in global and local contexts, as well as understand how PST conceive of literacy after experiencing an international service learning (ISL) study abroad program. Overall, the

PST responded to their international service learning and community literacy projects by showing how their understandings of literacy and literacy's role in people's lives are complex, nuanced, and grounded in social understandings of communication. Indeed, they realized aspects of literacy they had never noticed before, from understanding what qualifies as literacy to social and political implications of literacy practices. Some of the PST responded in more critical ways than others, and sometimes the PST's reactions remained shallow. Still, in light of the literature, we will discuss how 1) the PST became aware of literacies in global and local contexts, and 2) ways in which the PST showed their conceptions of literacy after experiencing an ISL study abroad program in light of broader research.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy was one of the key lenses through which we analyzed data from the PST. Gaining and developing a sense of political awareness is one key goal of critical literacy pedagogy (Freire & Macedo, 2005). Through their interviews, journals, and course projects, the PST showed how they were gaining awareness of the current political climate of the community in which they were teaching and learning, engaging in the opportunity for not only a more complex awareness of literacy, but for critique and transformation of their own biases, and potential transformation of their conceptions of themselves as future teachers. Most of the PST discussed local politics and elections, often further reflecting on differences across the globe. They attributed much of their literacy learning to understanding community texts as well as learning from members of the community through interactions related to the community mapping project. Others such as Fae connected political and social power more abstractly in discussions of how and when different languages took precedence in schools and community locations. Indeed, noticing and grappling with meaning about relationship between language and power is another critical component of a critical literacy practice (Janks, 1993). In their awakening to non-verbal literacy, Karina, Kelly, and Amelia reflected on how the use of visual and gestural communication facilitated students' learning and broke down hierarchies of English language power. In various ways, each of the PST in the study noticed how language was used to demarcate community boundaries, showing who belonged and who did not. Many, including Jacquie, Fae, Karina, and Kelly questioned how English could have preeminence in a community where a majority did not speak the language natively.

Community Mapping/Community Literacy

Despite the fact that much of the prevailing literature on community mapping relates to teachers who are already in service, we found that the community literacy mapping project was a valuable tool for PST. At its very core, the CMP enabled the PST to interact with community members in meaningful ways as they collected and reflected on community artifacts (Tredway, 2003); through this process, we saw that they were able to learn about community assets, resources, and needs (Tindle et al., 2005) as well as funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). They reflected on assets such as caring interpersonal literacies within the community, and all of the PST reflected on what resources the community both possessed and lacked. However, even though recognition of community needs is important, the fact that some of the PST dwelt simply on the lack of resources was a troubling point, and underlines the fact that even though students may become more aware of literacy, they still may lack a true critical perspective that challenges deficit notions of poverty in some communities. A focus on have and have-not dynamics does not work to enable a humanizing pedagogy. This proved to be a tripping point for some more than others.

Still, for instance, even though Vivian focused on the differences in resources between the community and her own education, she recognized the power of caring relationships (Salazar, 2013). She as well as others such as Karina and Fae recognized changes in their thoughts about insider-outsider dynamics (Ordoñez-Jasis & Jasis, 2011). Understanding positioning and power to become agents of change was perhaps one of the loftier goals of critical literacy and humanizing pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Moll, 2010; Salazar, 2013). Most of the PST were able to recognize power dynamics such as political systems, and the power reflected behind the use of different languages in various contexts. They began to show understanding of their own positionality when reflecting on how they saw using their learning in future classrooms. Karina and Kelly, for instance, made connections to the community issue of recycling and imagined how their role as teachers could be used to empower the students' roles to develop a voice for change.

International Service Learning

Studies have shown how international service learning (ISL) study abroad programs can benefit PST in the short and long term (Assaf et al., 2019). Many of the PST gained more complex understandings of school and culture through their experiences, similar to Roose (2001). For instance, in several statements, Amelia and Vivian noted how they considered their own assumptions about language and its role in education. While we saw these two enter into dialog with their assumptions, other PST such as Jacquie and Karina entered into more meaningful dialog to challenge long-held beliefs and wonder about actions they could take in their future classrooms (Bamber, 2015; Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005; Parr & Chan, 2015).

Some of the PST, including Vivian and Fae, for instance, were candid about how they were becoming aware of totally new literacy and language dynamics they had never been consciously aware of before. In developing a critical comparative perspective on the roles, powers, and positions of language and literacy, PST showed they were developing a critical global consciousness, which is increasingly important for teachers in a globalized world, where they are likely to teach in increasingly diverse settings (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012; O'Sullivan & Niemczyk, 2015).

Conclusion

Overall, findings from this study show that not only may an ISL study abroad benefit PST in understandings of the world and implications in larger global systems, or what Freire (2005) called *conscientização*, a humanizing pedagogy and critical literacy perspective on design of the program can facilitate future teachers' understandings of the role and prevalence of many literacies inside and outside the classroom. Further, projects such as the CMP can: assist PST in recognizing values of the communities in which they work; help PST understand and contextualize needs of the students with whom they work; and help PST form more critical perspectives on their role in power dynamics underlying educative environments. Future research may benefit from data and perspectives not only on the PST perspectives, but also from the students and community members with whom they interact to gain a fuller understanding of how critical consciousness dynamics played out for the community. Longer term projects may even analyze how the PST participants went on to navigate elements of *conscientização* in their professional lives later on.

The PST were challenged to conceive of themselves as potential change agents in empowering students and student literacies, and many of them rose to the challenge and continue to grow in their understandings. Teacher preparation programs today and in the

future must develop innovative ways to prepare PST to engage critically in a culturally pluralistic society (DeVillar & Jiang, 2012). Issues of social justice and equity will exist whether they are recognized or not, but programs that expand notions of literacy and promote critical ideologies prepare PST to act as agents of change in their classrooms and communities.

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About the Authors

Kristie O'Donnell Lussier is a professor of English and Integrated Reading and Writing at Collin College. She is a graduate of Texas State University where she earned a Ph.D. in Developmental Education- Literacy and an M.A. in Rhetoric and Composition. She is also a graduate of Southwestern University where she earned a B.A. in English. Kristie's professional interests lie in literacy education, academic literacies, postsecondary educational transitions, and the role of language in personal and educational development. Kristie is a qualitative researcher, and has presented and published on college student literacy development, teacher education in international and multilingual settings, student identity development, humanizing pedagogy, and language and literacy development in international settings.

Lori Czop Assaf is a professor at Texas State University in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Lori teaches undergraduate and graduate literacy courses and is the Coordinator for the Early Childhood- 6th ESL Undergraduate Program. For the past seven years, she has facilitated a study abroad program in rural Eastern Cape of South Africa and works closely with children and schools in the local community. She is a Fulbright

Scholar and spent 3 weeks in Indonesia in March, 2019 working with university faculty, local classroom teachers and primary grade students teaching language and literacy instruction. She was the past director of the Central Texas Writing Project and believes in the knowledge and expertise of teachers. Her research includes teacher education, literacy assessment, writing instruction, international service learning, and multicultural teaching and learning with a special focus on emergent bilinguals and English language learners.

Meagan Hoff is a PhD Candidate in Developmental Education at Texas State University. She earned an MA in Cross-Cultural and International Education from Bowling Green State University as a Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Fellow. Her research focuses on the academic literacy development of students from refugee backgrounds. In her dissertation, Meagan is examining academic literacies of students from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds as they study in an American competency-based college program. During her service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin (2007-2009), Meagan became interested in the intersection of language, literacy, and education. Her research focuses on how students can leverage their linguistic and social resources within new educational contexts. Her dissertation research challenges narratives that portray refugees as illiterate and undereducated and instead offers a foundation for new narratives that portray refugees and skilled, resilient, and resourceful. In addition, her research highlights the essential role of academic support systems in helping students navigate new education systems.