

Motivating Preservice Teachers to Read for Fun

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Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) found a high prevalence of aliteracy among inservice and preservice teachers. They determined that although teachers acknowledged the importance of personal reading, few invested the time to read for fun. They further noted that preservice teachers were motivated by literacy activities that had intrinsic value rather than a graded assignment. In this article, we describe how teacher education faculty are encouraging reading for fun by integrating literacy activities that have intrinsic value to preservice teachers. We provide suggestions for teacher education faculty who want to motivate preservice teachers to read for fun.

Several studies have examined how teachers' reading behaviors impact students' reading behavior and have suggested that teachers' ability to encourage students to read may be linked to teachers' personal reading habits (Cremin, Mottram, Bearne, & Goodwin, 2008; Cremin, Mottram, Collins, Powell, & Safford, 2009). Burgess, Sargant, Smith, Hill, and Morrison (2011) examined the relationship between elementary school teachers' reading habits, knowledge of children's literature, and their literacy practices and found that teachers who were more knowledgeable of children's literature were more likely to use best practices in literacy instruction. In a study examining teachers' personal reading habits, McKool and Gespass (2009) found that although most teachers value reading as a recreational activity, only about half read for pleasure on a regular basis. Further, they found that teachers who value reading are more likely to share what they have read and are more likely to use effective instructional strategies. More importantly, they found that teachers who model recreational reading can foster a love of reading in their students. In other words,

teachers reading for pleasure is crucial as they are literacy role models for their students (Gambrell, 1996). Yet, many preservice teachers do not read for pleasure, avoid reading for fun, and are not knowledgeable about children's literature.

Guthrie and Anderson (1999) refer to engaged readers as those who read regularly and enthusiastically. In a study with preservice teachers, Applegate and Applegate (2004) noted that over half of the study participants were unenthusiastic readers. In a more recent study, Applegate et al. (2014) found similar results of low levels of enthusiasm for reading among undergraduate education majors. Applegate et al. (2014) further argue that preservice teachers cannot inspire their students to read if they are not inspired to read. However, Benevides and Peterson (2010) concluded that preservice teachers do not come into teacher education programs with high levels of reading competency or with consistently positive attitudes toward reading. Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) surveyed graduate students who were teachers or prospective teachers and found a

high prevalence of aliteracy among study participants. Although the participants acknowledged the importance of personal reading, few invested the time to read for fun. Moreover, preservice teachers reported they were motivated by literacy activities that had intrinsic value rather than a graded or assessed assignment (Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008).

Haverback (2013) notes that it is troubling that elementary preservice teachers avoid reading for fun. She further states that “having an elementary school teacher who does not read is akin to having a mechanic who does not drive” (Haverback, 2013, p. 32). Research suggests that teacher education programs need to do more to address the importance of enthusiasm for reading and encourage personal reading among preservice teachers (Applegate et al., 2014). In this article, we describe how teacher education faculty are encouraging reading for fun by integrating literacy activities into elementary education coursework and field experiences that have intrinsic value to preservice teachers. We provide additional suggestions on how to motivate preservice teachers to read for pleasure.

Although many teacher preparation programs require teacher candidates to take a children’s literature class, most teachers are not active readers, have read few classic children’s literature and have had limited exposure to multicultural literature (Akins, Tichenor, Heins, & Piechura, 2018). With this in mind, our goal is to expose preservice teachers to a variety of children’s literature by integrating literacy activities in various courses and field experiences so they will model positive reading behaviors with their future students. In other words, we aim to increase preservice teachers’ enthusiasm for pleasure reading in hopes of influencing future elementary students’ enthusiasm for reading.

Beginning with foundation courses, preservice teachers are introduced to children’s literature through various picture books that relate to topics covered in class. In an educational psychology course, a foundation level class, many topics are introduced with the aid of picture books. Reading children’s books to preservice teachers exposes them to various types of literature and models how books can connect to various course content and segue into more serious concepts and topics. For example, *Love You Forever* is read when analyzing Erikson’s psychosocial stages and *Miss Nelson is Missing* is read to introduce the chapter on classroom management. Further, other faculty members model oral reading to preservice teachers by beginning each class session reading to the class. In an upper-level education course, preservice teachers keep reading logs on personal reading choices and have small group book discussions in each class. Long after class, students are still talking about their books and sharing them with others. Preservice teachers often mention in course evaluations how they love when professors read to them and how they appreciate faculty integrating pleasure reading as part of class assignments as they would not have time to read or choose to read otherwise.

Throughout our courses, we encourage preservice teachers to check out books from faculty members’ libraries of children’s books and to begin informal book clubs. During teaching methods courses, preservice teachers read fiction and nonfiction books related to math, science, and social studies topics and explore various trade books that can be used for instruction. Preservice teachers find books that augment what children are learning in content areas and are encouraged to read to children as part of their field-based lessons. We especially promote social justice books that provide a

historical or contemporary context on challenging issues.

Preservice field experiences also support recreational reading. For example, each year preservice teachers in multiple education classes participate in the One Book One School project by attending local elementary schools to read excerpts from selected books to students (<https://readtothem.org/programs/one-school-one-book/>). Preservice teachers are guest readers, and for some this is the first time they have read to a group of students. The elementary schools provide the identified books to the preservice teachers so they can practice before reading to students. An added benefit to this project is that many of the preservice teachers are invited back to the classrooms to continue book discussions with students.

Another field experience opportunity we provide is the Lunch Bunch project, which allows preservice teachers to participate in a lunch time reading club. The Lunch Bunch project pairs preservice teachers with small groups of K-5 students for an informal book club during the elementary students' lunch period. While the elementary students eat their lunches, the preservice teachers read aloud and then ask students to react to what was read. The main purpose of the club is to read for pleasure. During the reading session, there is no set structure and the discussions are always determined by student interest and input. The books read are chosen from the Sunshine State Young Readers Award Books and both the elementary students and preservice teachers get to keep a copy of the book. Allowing elementary students and preservice teachers to keep the books they are reading gives young students a sense of ownership and helps preservice teachers build their collection of children's books. It is not surprising that when the Lunch Bunch

program ends, many elementary school students want to continue to participate because it was fun. Since the Lunch Bunch was limited during COVID-19, an additional format was developed. Using the university's online learning platform, a goodnight reading program was created where preservice teachers read bedtime stories to local elementary children. The preservice students met online with the elementary students to read picture and chapter books to the K-5 students. Lists of books or chapters were sent home with a QR code and web address so that families could login and also interact with the reading activity. The elementary students had physical copies of the book so they could follow along. Although this format was started due to COVID restrictions, we plan to continue with the goodnight program when restrictions are lifted.

We also partner with an after-school reading club that emphasizes literacy and STEAM in a way that promotes the love of reading, math, science, engineering, technology, and the arts. In this club, students choose books from a wide selection of literature, discuss these books with their peers, and freely explore a variety of artistic pursuits based on their selected books. We provide opportunities for preservice teachers to participate in this club as well as other school-based reading clubs to meet their field experience requirements. We also offer independent study courses that allow preservice teachers to participate in these types of literacy activities.

We know children benefit academically when taught by teachers who are enthusiastic about reading and who engage their students in reading for pleasure (Haverback, 2013). It is our goal to get preservice teachers excited about reading for fun so they can ignite this passion in their students. Below is a list of suggestions that

teacher education faculty can do to motivate reading for fun among preservice teachers.

What Can Teacher Education Programs Do Now?
Develop reading clubs (both at the K-12 and university levels) where students can select, read, and discuss books.
Allow preservice teachers to complete field experience hours in after-school reading clubs.
Read to preservice teachers on a regular basis in education courses.
Pair-up with the local library to encourage preservice teachers to get to library cards.
Share information with preservice teachers on book checkout and drop offs at local libraries.
Ask preservice teachers to create read-a-loud tapes/videos of their favorite books to share with each other (and teachers in local schools).
Purposely infuse different genres of literature in teacher preparation classes.
Share free online book resources with preservice teachers.
Encourage preservice teachers to read all types of books (i.e., fiction, non-fiction).
Require preservice teachers to include children's books when teaching.

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