

# Educating for Identity: Problematizing and Deconstructing Our Literacy Pasts

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*In order to become effective teachers of language and literacy, it is critical for teacher candidates to have a sense of who they are as literate beings, how their literacy pasts have been lived, and how this might have an influence on the students in their classrooms. As teacher educators, we should not allow teacher candidates to rest simply with the recollection of key literacy events and memories. In order to be fully aware and wide awake to the complex task of teaching language and literacy, teacher candidates need to be engaged in active discussion that involves problematizing and unpacking their experiences, memories, and stories and what they really mean in past and present conceptualizations of literacy and sociocultural contexts.*

*Pour devenir des enseignants de langue et de litt ratie, il est critique que les stagiaires aient un sens d'eux-m mes comme  tres lettr s, qu'ils soient conscients de leur pass  en mati re de litt ratie, et qu'ils aient une id e de l'influence de ces facteurs sur leurs  l ves en salle de classe. En tant que formateurs d'enseignants, nous ne devrions pas permettre aux stagiaires de se limiter   des souvenirs portant sur des  v nements relatifs   la litt ratie. Afin d' tre pleinement conscients et  veill s face   la t che complexe qu'est celle d'enseigner la langue et la litt ratie, les stagiaires doivent prendre part   des discussions actives, probl matisant et d ballant leurs exp riences, leurs souvenirs et leurs r cits personnels, et analysant leur sens selon les conceptualisations du pass  et du pr sent de la litt ratie et en fonction des contextes socioculturels.*

We are what we do, especially what we do to change what we are: our identity resides in action and in struggle. (Galeano, 1988, p. 121)

Regardless of whether we are teacher candidates or teacher educators, we each have a literacy past and a unique story to tell. Without active recollection of these stories, both positive and negative, teacher candidates may be left unaware of how these stories inform who and what they are in the classroom. For some teacher candidates, these stories may be painful to recall and to unpack, but for many, they are positive stories of love and passion for literacy. Because of this, it is important for us as teacher educators to allow multiple entry points into their stories, to provide individualized and appropriate support, and to allow multiple exit points. Regardless of whether the story is negative or positive, it is unlikely that without guidance, all students will achieve deep levels of awareness of the inherent problems in their stories. Without challenge, many are satisfied with simple recall, and as a result simply walk away with a sense of what they will definitely do or not do with students in their classrooms. Positive or negative, narrative or recollection, these stories are influential in their development as teachers; thus it is important to

help teacher candidates recall and consider these stories in contemporary sociocultural understandings in a way that allows them to

become a kind of primary text in classes, enabling us to uncover our unspoken assumptions; examine the contradictions between our pedagogies and our experiences; complicate our understandings of literacy, learning, and teaching; integrate our examined experiences into our working conceptions of literacy and learning; develop intimacy and build community. They [can] also provide us with a sense of our own authority to resist and revise the powerful culture of schools. (Wilson & Ritchie, 1994, p. 85)

The power of these stories, however, is only as strong as our ability to understand them and potentially change who we are. It is only through this understanding and our own action that we are likely to gain a sense of our own authority to do what is best for students and at times resist, or at a minimum contextualize, the demands of curriculum, standardized testing, political and parental pressures, and rapid educational changes such as policy directives, institutional initiatives, and technological changes.

Because we ask students to frame their literacy pasts in the context of story, this narrative framework can also be applied to how we approach the problematizing and unpacking of these stories in the classroom. For many students, the problem is recalling experiences and all that they mean; the events are how they go about unpacking them, making conscious unexamined assumptions, definitions, and inadequacies; the solution is ultimately the possibility that they see for change and how they envisage bringing what they have learned into the classroom in their work with their own students. By probing into the educational lives of our students, we hope to gain insight into where they are coming from (in terms of past experience) in order to understand where they are going (as teachers) and how we can help get them there (finding a balance of gentle support and challenge). Although not written as formal autobiographies, these stories do represent the lives of our teacher candidates and allow us to “learn about the nature of educational experiences and individual developments” (van Manen, 1997, p. 72).

The experiences of our students form the foundation with which they enter our program—they are not something that we can erase or rid ourselves of; they just are, as they are remembered, and as they are represented and interpreted. These experiences frame our stories and shape not only our identity as teachers, but our personal selves as well.

Framing our stories means understanding who we are and being sensitive to and respectful of who we are. Framing also means being open to the voices in books, articles, and presentations. The frames for the stories that unfold in our classrooms provide us with insights into understanding and move us toward the goal of creating classrooms that uncover the hidden possibilities for our students. (Meyer, 1996, p. 129)

Stories are one way to construct meaning or to create or form a personal identity. This identity in turn has the potential to shape teacher candidates' literature preferences, teaching styles, and modes of interaction with students. Arendt (1958) emphasized the role of one's unique life story in the creation of identity. “The disclosure of the ‘who’ through speech and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web” (p. 184). The challenge, therefore, is to help teacher candidates understand the existing web that is really the context in which they became literate.

## **Context**

This inquiry took place in a one-year professional teacher education program in a relatively small university with predominantly English-speaking, white, middle-class teacher candidates. Most of the teacher candidates ranged in age from 23 to 30, but some of them had returned for a second or third career. Although we recognize that all students come to us with varied experiences and memories, due to the population of teacher candidates, we see great similarities in their stories. Initial discussions about literacy focus on the ability to read and write, with little consideration given to multiple literacies and how sociocultural contexts affect literacy. For the most part, these students (all with a first university degree) have achieved at high levels (entry into our program is largely secured by overall average, often above 80%). They enter the program with an assumption of literacy, but this is often “undoubted and unquestioned,” and “literacy does not seem to be well understood, popularly or academically” (Graff, 1987, p. 1).

To explore these issues, the following research questions guided our study.

- How do teacher candidates construct their past as literate beings?
- How do teacher candidates’ identities as literate beings interconnect with their identities as developing teachers of language and literacy?
- Is the gathering of memories, pasts, and stories enough, or is further deconstruction required?

## **Gathering Memories, Pasts, and Stories**

Each September, close to 300 students enter our Faculty of Education; each is required to recall past literacy memories and experiences and then revisit and re-view these stories throughout the year. At the end of the year, once final assessments have been submitted, students are invited to leave us a copy of their literacy stories and reflections.

### **The Initial Invitation: Recalling Our Literacy Pasts**

At the beginning of a 72-hour course, with no formal instruction, teacher candidates are invited to recall and share with us memories of their literacy pasts, something that we have over the years referred to as their literacy stories. These stories can take any shape or form imaginable, but students are asked to touch base with the six language arts of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing. They begin with a set of prompts (Parr & Campbell, 2007, pp. 24-25) that ask them to reflect on their past literacy experiences (e.g., What do you remember about reading when you were younger? What did you like most about writing? What are your experiences with drama and storytelling?). They are then encouraged to represent their story in a style that demonstrates who they are as a literate being. Over the years, we have received memory boxes, mobiles, narratives, question-and-answer, and models.

### **Revisiting and Re-Viewing Through a Teacher’s Eyes**

Toward the middle of the year, students are invited to revisit their literacy memories through the eyes of a teacher. They are asked to comment on how they would view these experiences

through contemporary research and pedagogy and respond to questions such as: If you were teaching this student in today's classroom, what would you do to support him/her? What types of literacy events would you plan? Teacher candidates are also asked to reflect on the memories and reframe them from a teacher's perspective: What have they learned that they will in turn carry into the classroom?

### **Memories, Pasts, and Stories: A Representative Sample**

We have selected four stories that we believe represent and capture the essence of what our students submit: (a) concrete representations, (b) responses to prompts, (c) factual narratives, and (d) imaginary narratives. The balance of men's and women's stories is reflective of the proportion of male to female candidates in our Primary/Junior division (approximately a 1:15 ratio of male to female). Heather's literacy past is represented by a group of mini-stories as she places a set of concrete articles into her memory box. Elizabeth's story begins with her experiences in a foreign country learning not only English, but also Chinese. Cheryl's recollections are in direct response to the prompts that she felt best captured her literacy memories. And finally, Jason's story recounts an exploration of himself as a boy as he grapples with fantasy and fact.

**Heather.** Heather grew up in a small town with a local history, one that she eagerly recounts. Reading and writing were important to her formation as her childhood did not include the influence of television. Heather is a quiet and relatively shy person, and her story took a form that reflected perfectly her sense of self—hands-on, practical, concrete—a memory box with a collection of objects that she used as stimuli to recount a series of mini-stories.

In her memory box, she placed articles such as:

- a flashlight that aroused fond memories of reading under the covers, all the way until the end;
- a copy of *Anne of Green Gables* as Anne was a character to whom she could relate;
- a story she had written and for which she had been praised;
- a journal that enabled her to write through difficult times in her life and use writing as a means to “express feelings about what was happening around [her]” and “understand not only how [she] was unique, but also how [her] uniqueness was valuable”; and
- a quotation journal where she recorded “words of wisdom, humor, sadness, and joy ... the wisdom of people who had a deep sense of self and who constantly reflected on the meaning of life” (Parr & Campbell, 2007, pp. 20-21).

Heather's story is full of insight into *her* development as a literate person. She talks about (a) how formative our first memories of school can be, (b) the importance of a positive comment, (c) the need for reflection and practice, (d) the importance of acknowledging the need to express oneself in multiple formats (music, writing, visualizing, and speaking), and (e) the need to relate to others face to face and in her reading; of Anne, she says, “She was a girl who was searching for ‘kindred spirits,’ and I felt that, had I known her in real life, I would have been one of those special friends.”

Heather's memory box certainly demonstrated an awareness that her literate identity was shaped by these experiences and memories, but her reflection did not delve much further than her own personal identity. End-of-year reflections demonstrated the necessity to provide students similar to her with concrete experiences with all the language arts so as to allow them to explore who they are, to reflect consciously, to solve problems, and to practice until they feel comfortable. Although Heather did not overtly adopt a critical stance toward her own experiences, she did give some thought to the similarities of her experiences to those of the students that she would be teaching. In a one-year professional program, this is a reasonable starting place. As she gains more experience in the classroom, she will encounter students who have never found a book that has made them want to read all night under the covers with a flashlight; we hope that this will prompt her to dig through her memory box so as to enable her truly to understand her students, and in turn, further understand her experiences of earlier years.

**Cheryl.** Cheryl was a teacher candidate in her late 20s who decided on teaching as a second career after starting in early childhood education. Her stated goal was to be a Kindergarten teacher. She was enthusiastic about the entire teaching endeavor, and in keeping with her down-to-earth, practical nature, she approached her literacy account in a straightforward, Socratic manner, creating a question-and-answer form.

Cheryl focused primarily on the transactional and interpersonal qualities of literacy, using memories of receiving and writing letters: "Today as an adult, I still enjoy writing and receiving personal letters and cards from people I know. I feel that this is a more personal and sincere way of communication." As she reflected on this, she became aware of the importance of the connections between writing and reading; she remembered realizing from her early years learning to read these letters that *someone had written this*.

When she reflected further, Cheryl also revised her earlier assumption that literacy is the ability to read and write by adding the vital role of oral language:

I now feel that general language development is the foundation of literacy. Once a child has the ability to communicate verbally with family and peers, they can begin to develop the understanding that what they are speaking can also be delivered through symbols.

Cheryl clearly retained her powerful belief in the central role of interpersonal communication as a foundation for literacy, particularly communication between children and close family members and friends.

Cheryl's reflections on her own literacy experiences developed rapidly into what she might be able to take with her into her teaching. She was mainly interested in "how children will be able to begin the process of learning to read and write"; of how they can be "introduced to a whole new world of wonder and imagination"; and how they "continue to learn more and more about literacy and communication, the same way that I have at this point in my life." She saw her chance to teach children as an invitation to think about how she has learned and is learning and how she can use this in a practical way to teach young children.

Cheryl's thinking has the beginnings of a critical stance. How much more critical thought is needed at this point, and what direction should this take? We can hope that her realization that she understood from an early age that when she read something, it was written by someone, will inform her teaching. Clearly young children in Kindergarten can begin critical awareness with

this understanding and can go on from there to explore the *hows* and *whys* of authors' and illustrators' decisions and their effects on them as readers and viewers. It would appear that Cheryl has this awareness and will be eager to communicate it to her students. And for now at least, this may be sufficient.

**Elizabeth.** Elizabeth chose to write a biographical narrative in the third person. Her professed love of stories may have prompted her to take this point of view, but perhaps she also desired to gain objective distance. Her story is overall a positive one, but not without its challenges because she started school in Canada with English as her first language, and as the child of professional diplomats continued her schooling in Taiwan during the critical years for emerging literacy in Grades 1-3, where she acquired Chinese as a second language.

Elizabeth was young, in her early 20s, a white, mid-to-upper-class teacher candidate who came to the Faculty of Education as a highly accomplished, conscientious student whose goal was to become an excellent teacher. Her story expressed the belief that her own positive early experiences in becoming literate had motivated her to enroll in university English studies and then to pursue a teaching degree: "It was because I had a positive experience with literacy as a child that I wanted to be a teacher. It was because my childhood teachers modeled good literacy strategies that I developed such a healthy love for language." As it turns out, Elizabeth will begin her teaching career with a Kindergarten assignment in a Toronto-area public school with a large number of English-language learners.

Elizabeth began her story with her early memories of loving to read and write stories at school and at home.

Elizabeth wrote many stories in Grade 1. She liked writing about her family best. She wrote about her new school and her new friends. She liked writing better than drawing, counting, and playing in the gym. She liked writing stories as much as she liked to sing. And that is a lot. She practiced her letters at home and tried to make them fancy like her mommy did. She wrote fancy stories at home and mommy put them on the fridge.

This early love of reading and writing is not diminished in spite of of the demands of her university studies. "She still loved to read and write. Literacy had helped Elizabeth to make sense of the world." It is worth noting that Elizabeth's later reflections on her initial story did not lead her to question her assumption that literacy is all about reading and writing and little else. After her year in the Faculty of Education, she remains primarily interested in her own processes as a reader and writer: "Although I definitely spent more time reading, the amount of writing that I did was incredible!" Elizabeth toys with questions about creativity and technology, but does not appear to take a fully critical stance:

Now the bulk of my writing occurs on the laptop. Although I appreciate the fact that I am being exposed to technology, I miss handwriting things. I find that although typing allows much more flexibility with its editing features, I am more creative with a blank piece of a paper and a blue pen. *The writing that takes place in my life right now is mostly to represent learning, rather than writing to understand. I still enjoy journaling every evening, and it is during this time that I feel that I am writing to understand.* (emphasis added)

Elizabeth claims to take a critical stance, but does not explore it to any great depth. She simply states that writing her personal literacy story

has helped me to reflect critically on my experiences as a language learner, and has helped me to understand that the only reason that I am now studying to be a teacher here at the Faculty of Education is that from a young age, I was inspired with a passion for language.

Elizabeth's positive experiences, including her privileged position (past and present) may have contributed to a slowing of her progress as a critical thinker, perhaps temporarily. For a teacher educator, it is difficult to judge when to nudge this development and when to allow it to happen over time.

**Jason.** Jason was one of three male students in his cohort of 40. His stance was largely philosophical, both in class and out, and he drew largely on his experiences with literature to support his opinions and experiences, all of which he claimed to encourage in his students. He considered Ursula LeGuin one of his favorite authors. His imaginary narrative blends his obvious need to reconcile fantasy and fact. *The Boy and the Mask* (Parr & Campbell, 2007) began on the Island of Storybooks "a wonderful place of writers and readers" where the boy loved storybooks, and reading and writing "amazingly incredible, beautifully fantastic storybooks." He "loved creating worlds to play in and characters to play with, bringing to life castles and dragons, pirates and ships right from the page." This was home to him until he awoke one day to find that he had outgrown his costumes and saw his props for what they really were: products of his imagination. "His sword seemed less of a sword and more a cardboard cut-out." As he explored the island, he saw another island in a faraway place: one filled with buildings, machines, and people in strange costumes. Masking himself, the boy traveled to the Island of Facts where he learned "to read books about figures and facts," how to "write research papers and experimental procedures," and to question, "what, when, where, how, and who?" In the conclusion the boy meets what he considers "a strange group of people." One brave girl challenged him to think beyond these questions and demanded the removal of his mask. To his question of Who are you? she confidently responded, "Can't you see? We are sailors and scholars, pretenders and thinkers, writers and readers of books of all fashions." As any good story concludes, the two sailed off together and explored a new way to be, "reading and writing, to who knows where. I guess we'll find out when they get there."

Jason's story is indeed one of identity formation. Writing in true literary style, he sets up a problem and a solution with many events in between. The ultimate problem was the rediscovery of himself after time spent in a world where he felt the need to be masked. Interestingly, his comrade was a girl. Is it possible that in Jason's younger years it was more acceptable for boys to deal with facts and scientific things whereas girls spent a greater amount of their time in fantasy and fairy tale? And although his story does recount some imaginative work and pretending, most of this was in his younger years. As he grew older, the boy began to recognize a "horrible feeling of nothing and oldness" and a "feeling of empty inside." Is it possible that fantasy and story for a time in his education were not valued and his creative spirit not kindled? Writing in the third person, Jason removes himself somewhat from his story, almost watching it from afar. When questioned about this, he could not really explain his choice of point of view other than to say that he stepped back as a distant observer of his life and left his character masked. Given his literary and philosophical background, he was ready to see the links between his own identity, what he had read and written, and those with whom he interacted. He understood that his literacy past involved both fantasy and fact, which allowed allow him to remember treasures, "an

ability to imagine things that can't be measured and a sense of wonder" and to his companion he brought a language "to see the stars as gas and fire." The sharing of identity at the end of Jason's story tells us that he recognizes that literacy is a social endeavor, one that requires mutual construction and conflicts between values and identities. As a teacher candidate and as a teacher, Jason brought these values and philosophies into the classroom; he encouraged fantasy and fact; he communicated his views with colleagues; and he found himself continually in a state of becoming.

### **Reexamining, Problematizing, and Deconstructing**

#### **Problematizing Our Teacher Education Practice: Arrogant Perception or Perceived Immunity?**

Reviewing students' literacy pasts, how they were represented, and how they were reflected on throughout the year, we discovered that we had adopted a relatively non-confrontational, non-interference model that *supported* students as they recalled memories and reframed them in the context of their developing teacher stories. Unfortunately, we found that we were doing little from a critical standpoint. Although we naively believed that we were making a difference in the development of their professional identity, we now realize that many of the stories and resultant philosophies were idealistic and mainstream. We had neglected to problematize the stories and help students deconstruct in the conceptualization of literacy that *we* supported and believed in.

Is it possible that we had inadvertently adopted what has been referred to as "arrogant perception"? Without realizing it, were we undermining our teacher candidates' "efforts to consider the viewpoints of differently situated others" (Ford, 2004, p. 340)? When we asked our students to participate in literacy events that were reflective of a broader conceptualization of literacy, when we talked about the importance of acknowledging discourses and individual identities, we were not calling them back to their stories in a way that allowed them to examine assumptions and misperceptions and move beyond a traditional, conventional view of literacy. We now realize that perhaps we considered ourselves relatively immune to the wide-awake teaching of literacy that we were demanding from our students.

#### **Problematizing Literacy Pasts: Reconstructing Literate Identities on the Edge of Comfort**

In our roles as teacher educators, our instructional modeling is at the heart of how teacher candidates view their predominantly conventional stories and how they problematize and deconstruct them. As literacy educators, we recognize that our literacy pasts are influenced by predominantly white, middle-class cultural and educational values and that our struggles were minimal. Even our initial invitation and approach are reflective of our own ideologies and literacy backgrounds. This is deliberate. We are interested in how students respond in their own diversity to these invitations. We do our best to facilitate exploration as opposed to directing product.

For as long as we can both remember, we have been readers and writers; we can both identify long lists of favorite texts from childhood onward that have shaped who we are as literate beings. We are increasingly conscious of how privileged we were in the past and are today. We revisit and problematize our stories each time we encounter a new story, whether it

has been lived by a student in a classroom, a teacher candidate, an author, or a colleague. We do not leave *our* stories uninterrogated. This is where we begin with our students. Our stories are first told orally and then interwoven and unpacked throughout the course through discussions, reading aloud, and course readings; even our responses to students' assignments provide them with a glimpse of our literate identities. We find that the longer we teach, the more we are put in a position where we have to deconstruct and reconstruct our literate identities in the context of new stories and contemporary practice and research.

Where we are limited by our perspectives and contexts, we draw on vicarious experiences through diverse texts (e.g., *Nokum is My Teacher* by David Bouchard and *Freedom Writers* by Erin Gruwell, in both print and film versions). This provides our students with both implicit and explicit modeling. Here our own stories are used as a site to discuss the

paradox of literacy as a form of interethnic communication which often involves conflicts of values and identities, and accept [our] role as one who socializes students into a world view that, given its power here and abroad, must be viewed critically, comparatively, and with a constant sense of the possibilities for change. (Gee, 1990, p. 68)

This being the case, however, we continue to grapple with the extent to which we problematize and deconstruct teacher candidates' literacy pasts. Do we push just to the edge of the comfort zone knowing that this is often where growth takes place? Do we push to the other side? Do we let them decide for themselves? Whatever we do, we know that we can only problematize and deconstruct to the extent that there is possibility for change: too much and it may frustrate and discourage; not enough and it may leave them in a position of maintaining the status quo.

We address resistance explicitly by labeling it and by providing a safe environment to uncover insights and contexts for this resistance. By speaking their own stories and listening to those of others, many students realize that they have to consider stories other than their own supplemented by children's literature such as *Crow Boy* by Taro Yashima, *Frederick* by Leo Lionni, and *Marianthe's Story: Painted Words and Spoken Memories* by Alike. We provide many opportunities to explore, understand, question, and debate various ways of being with literacy. Students' responses range from kicking Frederick off the island for "lack of work ethic" to describing covers of books "as potentially frightening children in the classroom." This range includes discussions of technology that provoke comments such as "that's not real reading." Resistance expressed by teacher candidates may stem from intellectual and emotional naïveté about what constitutes teaching and learning (Palmer, 1998) and inexperience with populations that are culturally and linguistically diverse and may include those with learning exceptionalities.

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy; it is our task to simply move students from where they are to where they could be (Clay, 1998). Students like Cheryl and Jason are ready to dig a little deeper; they have already entered the territory of self and are looking at their literacy pasts as formative to their literate and teacher identities. Some like Heather and Elizabeth are just embarking on this adventure. Interestingly enough, in the five years that we have engaged teacher candidates in this inquiry, we have never encountered students who were so shattered by their literacy past that they could not see their way forward; perhaps such people either choose alternate grade levels or simply do not enter the teaching profession.

## **Future Steps and Research Directions**

In essence, we now know that as literacy educators, we have stepped out of what we consider to be a non-confrontational or non-interference approach to the teaching of language and literacy, one that would stretch understanding without causing discomfort to the point that it interferes with one's sense of identity. We neglected to challenge our students to see beyond the ideal of their literacy stories to how they are shaped by educational, political, and cultural contexts. In the same way as we push our students, as literacy educators we must also examine our own stories, teaching and personal, and seek what might continue to perpetuate idealized and naïve views of literacy.

### **Situating Teacher Candidates' Literacy Stories in Contemporary Conceptualizations**

As teacher educators, we must ensure that we prepare our teacher candidates for the present reality of literacy and that we are not sending them out to simply teach as they were taught and/or to reproduce "existing inequalities and inequity" (Kellner, 2004, pp. 26-27) with regard to literacy. Many teacher candidates come to professional education programs with an assumption of literacy, largely shaped and formed by the contexts in which they became literate with teachers whose beliefs and assumptions reflect Western or North American educational and social ideologies where:

- literacy was considered to be a technological skill related to print; it is a generalizable ability;
- literacy represented a concept or skill that looked the same in each student;
- literacy was a static skill that could be applied regardless of purpose or use;
- literacy was neutral and unbiased; it did not favour any particular content, view of the world, habit, practice, interest, value, attitude, or practice;
- it was assumed that literacy enhanced cognitive potential, greater opportunities for economic and social development, and higher levels of success in life;
- oral cultures were not literate cultures;
- literacy enabled individuals to be in control of their world. Literacy meant power. (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 1990; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; Olson & Torrance, 2001; Street, 2003)

It is critical that we support teacher candidates as they situate their stories and how they choose to recall them in traditional or conventional conceptualizations as summarized above and contemporary conceptualizations that at the urging of worldwide researchers acknowledge the limitations of these statements. Although we would like to think that we have moved beyond this in contemporary classrooms, the reality is that in most contexts, conventional forms of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) continue to be valued over others, and so students who can read and write are privileged over those who can listen and speak, view, and represent. Without active deconstruction of teacher candidates' literacy stories, these conceptualizations will be left intact; traditional assumptions about language and literacy will go unquestioned; and traditional or tried-and-true strategies will be implemented, further leading to the mismatch of

student, curriculum, and practice. On the other hand, teacher candidates who are nudged or prompted to problematize, question, and deconstruct are likely to see the limitations of how they were taught and how they are inclined to teach without action and struggle on their part.

### **Situating Teacher Candidates' Literacy Stories in Sociocultural Practices**

Given diversity in education and the continually shifting nature of literacy, we now realize that we need to dedicate more space and time for teacher candidates to consider their stories in the sociocultural contexts and sociolinguistic practices in which they developed. This is not new, as Garrison (2003) points out; philosophers as diverse as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida have emphasized the historical sociolinguistic practices of a culture and how they combine to form a person; many of these practices were developed through complex processes of education of which teacher candidates have little awareness. Moving beyond recall to critical and creative reflection is not a simple task, as assumptions of literacy and structures of personal identity often get in the way, but it is probably “only by creative reflection upon our constitutive cultural structures [that] we come to possess unique minds of our own” (Garrison, 2003, p. 423), and this makes it a worthwhile venture.

When considering our own natures as partly already made by the culture into which we are thrown as Heidegger (1962) so famously put it, and as also in the process of being, how can we best reconstruct, deconstruct, and go on to form creative and critical understandings of ourselves? This involves understanding ourselves both for ourselves and for those whom we are leading into increasingly diverse classrooms, communities, and cultures of teaching and learning, particularly those exposed to Western conceptualizations of literacy. These are questions that we are left with, both for ourselves and for the teacher candidates whom we encounter each year. Through this set of complex questioning and interrogation, that of self, we will come to know more completely and more complexly who we are as literacy learners, who we are or might become as literacy educators, and how these identities are interwoven.

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