

- Gordon, W. J. J. (1961). *Synectics: The development of creative capacity*. Cambridge, MA: Porpoise Books.
- Gordon, W. J. J. (1973). *The metaphorical way of learning and knowing: Applying Synectics to sensitivity and learning situations*. Cambridge, MA: Porpoise Books.
- Gunter, M. A., Estes, T. H., & Schwab, J. (2003). *Instruction: A models approach* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ketchum, L. (2005). *Where the great hawk flies*. New York: Scholastic.
- Joyce, B., & Weil, M. (2008). *Models of teaching* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Olson, M. (1995). Conceptualizing narrative authority: Implications for teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(2), 119–125.
- Philbrick, R. (2001). *Freak the mighty*. New York: Scholastic.
- Phillion, J., He, M. F., & Connelly, F. M. (Eds.). (2005). *Narrative and experience in multicultural education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

## CHAPTER 4

## No Less “Real” in My Mind

USING FICTION AS CREATIVE CURRICULUM  
IN AN UNDERGRADUATE TEACHER  
EDUCATION COURSE*Chris Lasher-Zwerling*

Alianza Charter School, Watsonville

*Kip Téllez*

University of California, Santa Cruz

Chris Lasher-Zwerling, M.A., is a bilingual teacher at Alianza Charter School in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. She has an M.A. in Education from the University of California at Santa Cruz and an M.A. in English from CSU Chico.

Kip Téllez, Ph.D., is associate professor and chair of the Education Department at University of California at Santa Cruz. His research interests are teacher education and second-language instruction. He earned his Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate University.

## ABSTRACT

Management, medical educators, and researchers have long identified reading fiction as a particularly useful tool in promoting self-reflection and creating a broadened professional outlook among their preservice teachers. In contrast, the research in teacher education has rarely examined the role fiction can play in developing new teachers. The research reported here invited fifty-one undergraduates enrolled in an Introduction to Teaching course to read five varied fictional works of literature on teachers or teaching. The qualitative results suggest that this innovative curriculum of fictional works helps preservice teachers understand the conflict between a teacher's personal and professional lives, the complexity of teaching, and the importance of teacher-student relationships, among other compelling themes.

Creativity and imagination go hand in hand with teaching. Differentiating instruction to effectively educate the very unique students one might find in any K–12 or teacher education classroom requires constant and inspired changes in strategies, materials, and delivery of course content. This type of teaching requires thorough self-reflection and a dedication to student learning. This approach to instruction does not come from textbooks and is not static. Why is it then that introductory teacher education courses often introduce prospective teachers to the teacher profession using unimaginative, dry curriculum?

Sharon Feiman-Nemser and Helen Featherstone (1992) argue that introductory teacher education courses are too commonly textbook driven, introducing students to a so-called practitioners' perspective on education along with a myriad of unrelated facts about teachers and schools. A field experience is also typical in such courses, encouraging potential teachers to gain direct experience in the classroom as a way to gauge whether teaching might be an appropriate career choice. However, as the aforementioned authors further suggest, this curriculum often fails to promote self-reflection and leaves students' assumptions and beliefs about teaching and teachers unaddressed.

After much personal and shared reflection, we decided that our own Introduction to Teaching course was fraught with similar shortcomings. As we considered whether our introductory course could be creatively modified to promote a deeper consideration of teaching and learning, we sought a medium that would allow preservice teachers to understand better the emotional and moral aspects of teaching.

Our search led us to read a wide variety of approaches to introductory "professional" fields courses, which focused on broadening student perspective and deepening an understanding of the profession. In our research of management and medical education, in particular, we found several instances of instructors who had identified reading fiction as a particularly useful tool in promoting self-reflection. In medical education, for example, the use of literature as an effective means of widening students' perspectives was well documented (Montgomery Hunter, Charon, & Coulehan, 1995).

Given the common use of reading fiction in other professional fields, it was surprising for us to find that few studies in education have examined the effects of reading fiction on the self-reflection and professional understanding (e.g., moral and psychological) of preservice teachers. Once we had decided to use fiction, we set out to find appropriate works, decided upon a diverse set of texts (see appendix A), and developed two primary research questions: How does the fiction used in this class illuminate a preservice teacher's beliefs about teaching in a different or more meaningful way than expository text or field experiences alone? What concerns of teaching and preservice teachers might these fictional accounts address?

The use of literature as a tool for learning and reflection has many advocates—Dorothy Walsh (1969) is foremost among them. In her classic work, *Literature and Knowledge*, Walsh (1969) notes that literature brings with it a specific kind of knowledge, "an experience to be experienced" (p. 130), while noting the novel's capacity to teach as a relic of a specific culture within a specific historical context, what Walsh has called realization. "Literary education," she writes, "can enormously expand the range of humanistic understanding" (p. 133). By way of clarification, Walsh does not equate this understanding with a search for clear answers but instead suggests that "the realm of literary art is a realm too diverse, too various, too rich in multiple perspectives, to provide anything in the way of simple directives" (p. 134). Tzachi Zamir (2002) makes a similar point, suggesting that using literature for the sake of learning must never be equated with pure didacticism or functionalism.

Our interest in the role of fiction as a tool for reflection on teaching grew out of a more foundational concern that asks how readers interpret texts. As teachers with an abiding belief in reader response theory, we approached our work with preservice teachers from a poststructuralist stance, relying on the work of Roland Barthes (1974) in particular. Such a view demands that we recognize how the experiences of our readers influence their reading of fictional works; indeed, like many teachers of literature, we take a distinctly phenomenological approach to reading, sharing David Bleich's (1978) view that readers must be encouraged to create an inner dialogue between their own experiences and the texts they read. Further, sharing this dialogue with other readers serves to refine the negotiation of meaning between the text and the reader.

We have also been greatly influenced by the work of Judith Langer (1989), whose concept of envisionment offers a particularly engaging view on how readers create their own conceptions of the text. As we hope will become clear, our pedagogical aims are all oriented toward the creation of a negotiated dialogue between the reader's experience and the text. The pedagogy that we share builds directly on the foundation laid down by this research.

While we consider the work of poststructuralist theory important in our work, we also rely on an earlier tradition by building on the arguments John Dewey (1934/2005) made in *Art as Experience*, as well as drawing a theoretical frame from neopragmatic philosophers such as Richard Rorty (1989), who speaks openly on the "uses" of fiction. Rorty (1989) suggests that literature, unlike writing in the social sciences, gives the reader "the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'" (p. 196). Edmund Gordon (1990) also recognizes that fictional and imaginative works help us to understand different cultural, social, and epistemological points of view and, like Rorty (1989), points out that the underlying explanations for human phenomena are often better explored in artistic and fictional work than in typical social science

research. Rorty's (1989) claim, in particular, encouraged us to wonder whether fiction could promote a better understanding of teaching than either research on teaching or anecdotal, autobiographical accounts of teaching.

Another source we found useful was Robert Coles's (1989) book, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. This book examines how literature, from Leo Tolstoy to William Carlos Williams, has affected the author's own understandings of his patients and his medical students. Coles emphasizes the moral analysis and reflection that stories can ignite in their readers and mentions many examples of students', doctors', and teachers' experiences in using literature to make connections to real human experience. He concludes that the power of imaginative stories lies in their ability to promote self-reflection, and in how readers, whether they be medical students, English teachers, or college students, can make connections between their own "moral conduct" and the "moral imagination of writers and the moral imperative of fellow humans" (p. 205).

Studies regarding the research literature on fiction in the medical professions demonstrated that fictional works can encourage cultural competence among nursing students (e.g., Anderson, 2004) and self-awareness among preservice physicians and nurses (Charon et al., 1995). In public administration classes, researchers have used fiction as a means to capture students' imaginations and lead to richer conversations (Marion, 1988). In management education, researchers have reported that using fiction can give a sense of the "plurality," or multiple perspectives of the various participants in organizations to preservice management students (Cohen, 1998).

A few writers within teacher education have argued in favor of using fiction in preservice education courses as a way of creating a deeper understanding of and useful reflections on children and youth (Marlowe & Maycock, 2001; Morrison & Rude, 2002; Tama & Peterson, 1991; Wear, 1989). In particular, William Morrison and Harvey Rude (2002) suggest several benefits of using literary fiction over common textbooks in special education teacher programs. They argue that fiction serves as a tool for helping preservice teachers sympathize with students who have learning challenges. We relied on their paper for our own theoretical framework, hoping to add to the research regarding the use of fiction with preservice teachers. Mike Marlowe and George Maycock (2001) studied preservice teachers' reactions to fictional works on special learners. Their aim is to help emerging teachers understand students, while ours is to help emerging teachers understand teachers and teaching through using a creative curriculum of fiction.

Carrol Tama and Kenneth Peterson's (1991) work comes closest to our interests. They developed a set of alternative readings (both fiction and nonfiction) and later asked their teacher education students for their reactions. Their cursory data analysis suggested that the works (e.g., Mike Rose's *Lives on the*

*Boundary*) resulted in a "grounding effect" on the students, that is, reading works of literature provides students with a more realistic understanding of what they might expect to experience as teachers. The mixing of fiction and nonfiction works in this study was compelling to us, but we wanted to focus on the use of fiction alone. Finally, Delese Wear (1989) recommends using fiction but does not engage in work with students and thus reported no data. There appears to be a need to fill in gaps in the research relating to the use of a creative curriculum that includes works of fiction in teaching preservice teachers.

Because the promotion of reflection of some kind is one of the goals of this study, we want to provide a provisional definition of the term. We do not think that an operational definition is warranted in this case, and others who have used the term have also used more general definitions. For instance, Donald Schon (1983) whose landmark work, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, defined reflection as a professional habit of the mind. Schon's work tends to emphasize reflection on the technical aspects of teaching, which is not our intention. Our "reflective" goal in this study is based largely on another landmark work on teacher reflection, Kenneth Zeichner and Daniel Liston's (1987) study on teaching student teachers to reflect. Their goal was to encourage preservice teachers to see the wider consequences of a teacher's action and reappraise the daily moral dilemmas of teachers. One might say that their goal was to "problematize" teaching so that teachers-to-be would not be so easily convinced that teaching was the delivery of content alone. Since this watershed work, many other teacher educators have further defined the term. For instance, Peter Hoffman-Kipp, Alfredo Artilles, and Laura López-Torres (2003) have cast reflection as a form of cultural-historical activity theory, in which

reflection is understood as a process that is embedded in everyday activities situated in school cultures that are social in nature, where interactions with others are an important medium in which reflection occurs. Teachers interact with colleagues in goal-directed activities that require communication and the exchange of ideas where reflection itself is not contained wholly in the mind of the individual but is "distributed" through sign systems and artifacts that are embedded in the social activity. (p. 250)

The result of this type of reflection is a widening of the individual's conception of teaching. This is the kind of reflection we were hoping to elicit in our own students through the use of an innovative and creative curriculum of varied literary accounts of teachers and teaching as we engaged in our research study.

Specifically, we are suggesting that reading fictional accounts of teaching encourages deep reflection, potentially offering an exploration of teaching worlds that *could* be. In fiction, authors are free to explore relationships and predicaments

that one might never encounter in practice but that, if believable, cause us to reconsider the conditions of teaching.

Of course, the selection of the fictional works we invite students to read is critically important in any such endeavor, and it surprised us to find so few compelling works on this topic. Learning from teachers is a nearly universal experience, and yet few fiction writers find the classroom a suitable context for a novel. After two classes in which we experimented with various works, we settled on the following books: *The Water Is Wide* by Pat Conroy, *One Child* by Torey Hayden, *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* by Leonard Ross, *A Jest of God* by Margaret Laurence, and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark (see appendix A for a synopsis of each book). Some "classic" novels were tried and failed. For instance, *To Sir with Love* by Edward Ricardo Braithwaite was not selected; students had found it too "dated."

## The Study

The university course used as the site for this study was an Introduction to Teaching course of 120 students. (A syllabus of the course in one of its more recent iterations can be viewed at <http://people.ucsc.edu/~ktellez/e180w07.htm>.) The class requirements included a variety of assignments (e.g., a letter to a former teacher; a scholarly education article summary and review; a lesson plan/presentation/reflection; a response journal; thirty hours field experience in an elementary or secondary teacher's classroom; an interview with their observation teacher; and a group literature circle presentation). The required texts of this course were two books of essays about becoming a teacher and one of six different literature circle books. The literature circle books were all narratives written by or about teachers, or works of fiction about teachers. While some of the students in the course read nonfictional accounts of teachers or teaching (e.g., Tracy Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren*), this study examined the effects of the fictional works only. Of the 120 students enrolled in the course, 51 read works of fiction.

Our chief question was how effective were these works of fiction at introducing students to a practitioner's perspective in teaching, as well as inspiring a level of reflection deepened by fictional works. In order to understand what students learned about teachers from fiction and how fiction allows another perspective than other curricula used in the course, three types of data were examined: (a) open-ended "quick-writes"; (b) student literature circle presentations; and (c) semistructured interviews (see appendix B).

The "quick-writes," averaging one handwritten page each, were completed by all students who had attended the lecture the last week of the course and completed after students had presented their literature circle books in section class.

Students answered the prompt, "What did you learn about a teacher's perspective from reading, planning, and presenting the book you read for your literature circle?" The inclusion of planning and presenting the book of fiction as well as the actual reading of the book in the "quick-writes" prompt is an acknowledgment that the discussion of the book between group members also contributed to student learning. The quick-writes data and literature circle presentations were audio-recorded, transcribed, and organized by themes and categories.

## The Participants

One student representing each work of fiction was interviewed using a semistructured protocol based on the design suggested by Tom Wengraf (2001). The resulting five interviews, four female and one male undergraduate, were also recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Each interview lasted from twenty to forty minutes and was conducted in an informal setting after the academic quarter had ended. Participants for the interviews were chosen based on quick-write data, willingness, and fictional work read. Because students self-selected books to read, only those students who selected a fictional work were part of the interview participant pool.

Initially, we attempted to use quick-writes data to determine which participant to interview for each work of fiction. Quick-writes comments that were particularly interesting or unique and needed elaboration in order to be better understood identified the first group of students who were asked to participate in the semistructured interviews. The subsequent interview data (five students), the open-ended response quick-writes data (fifty-one students), and the project presentations (twelve audio-recorded presentations) were analyzed to determine what students had learned about the perspective of a teacher from the fictional accounts and what students reported as being different or unique about their experience of reading and learning from a work of fiction in contrast to other curricula employed in this course.

## The Results

Our overall data revealed that 94 percent of the participants reported reading fiction as a positive learning experience and that the assignment to read a book about a teacher and present a creative book report with other students was a worthwhile and valuable exercise. Various themes that emerged from the data included (a) the difficulties of reconciling teachers' personal lives with teachers' professional lives (the thoughts and feelings of a teacher, how the personal and

professional lives of a teacher are intertwined, and how teacher beliefs affect what and how a teacher teaches); (b) the importance of student-teacher relationships (the influence of a teacher over students and the influence of students over a teacher); and (c) the complexity of teaching (the complexity and difficulty of being a teacher, the importance of differentiating instruction according to student needs, cultural differences between teachers and students, and the power administration has over a teacher).

Students also indicated that reading fiction allowed them to gain a unique perspective due to their emotional involvement in the story. The presentation of a teaching situation from multiple viewpoints and the knowledge that the story is not "real" gave the preservice teachers more time and a safer place for reflection than a field experience. Additionally, the stories allowed readers to experience a teacher's thoughts, motivations, and experiences beyond the classroom and see how such thoughts and experiences affected their teaching. The comments of the undergraduate participants indicate that the innovative and creative curriculum of reading fiction in preservice education courses supports the growth of reflective teachers.

## Data Sources

The three forms of data gathered for this research—presentations, "quick-writes," and interviews—offered varied answers to the research questions presented:

### PRESENTATIONS

The audio-recorded student presentations were as varied as the books students read and offered insight into what particular themes students felt were important enough to present to other students and the instructors. Because these presentations were graded, they cannot be taken strictly as direct evidence of what students really thought of the book (i.e., what students chose to present may have been influenced by knowing that their presentations would affect their overall grade in the course)—nor can it be presumed that these presentations are the opinion of one or all students in the presenting group. However, the presentations are evidence of a group effort to present the themes that they found to be most important or pertinent to the course. Presentations included haiku poetry summaries, skits from the different stories, a "big book" of the story, letters written from different characters perspectives, a modern day parody, an interview panel with story characters and historical figures, and a skit with characters talking to a psychologist. Themes emerging from students' creative presentations

included (a) how teachers' beliefs affect practice; (b) how outside school factors affect classrooms; (c) teachers' personal and professional lives; (d) the difficulty and complexity of teaching; (e) student-teacher relationships; and (f) critiques of pedagogy.

Though each presentation focused on some aspect of teaching from the novels read, the presentations that focused on a teacher's perspective were those that addressed the themes of a teacher's personal lives in contrast to their professional lives, and how teacher's beliefs affect practice. Presentations that focused on these particular themes gave the most evidence that participants were considering teaching from a teacher's point of view. Presentations that focused on how outside school factors affect teaching, the difficulty and complexity of teaching, and student-teacher relationships to some extent also addressed issues of education from a teacher's perspective. However, such themes took into account a more general understanding of how schools work. True evidence of student "realization" of a different perspective came from presentations whose themes focused on teachers as individuals, as human beings whose own personal beliefs and emotions were affected by and in turn affected their professional life.

Though each presentation offered a slightly different interpretation of the book read, some books seemed to be more or less effective in eliciting student responses that focused on a teacher's perspective. For example, the presentations of *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* focused on the complexity of teaching and pedagogy critiques. Students tended to present this book from the perspective of the student, Hyman Kaplan, and gave very little evidence of an attempt to understand the teacher's perspective. None of the Hyman Kaplan presentations fully addressed the perspective of a teacher or indicated a better understanding of the teacher's perspective, but each did attempt to understand the book from the perspective of a student and did address the complexity of teaching in some way. In contrast, the presentations of *A Jest of God* offered substantial evidence that the novel had encouraged the type of reflection we had hoped for.

The *Jest of God* presentations included a news interview skit and artistic posters of the themes of the novel. Both of the presentations focused on the character Rachel, the teacher who narrates the story. Students interpreted Rachel's actions in her classroom as linked to the other occurrences in Rachel's life. Their focus on the teacher's perspective included judgments on Rachel's choices and connections to the time and situation in which Rachel found herself. One participant in the second presentation reported that she liked the book because it was a "feminist novel." She shared in the presentation, "It shows the expectations and frustrations that women have to go through because of society's standards, and how not being a mother has taken a toll on her . . . how everyone else sees her . . . the fact that she's not a mother." These presentations suggest that *A Jest*

*of God* is an effective and creative tool for leading students to examine moral dilemmas and “realize” what teaching might be like.

## QUICK-WRITES

The themes we uncovered in the “quick-writes,” though similar to the themes of the presentations and most certainly influenced by the activity of creating group presentations, offered a much more specific and detailed explanation of what students felt they had learned from the novels they read. As previously mentioned, a total of fifty-one responses to the fictional works were collected and analyzed.

Based on a textual analysis of the quick-writes, three primary themes emerged: (a) connecting teachers’ personal and professional lives; (b) student-teacher relationships; and (c) the complexity of teaching. Though some of these themes overlap (any of them could be categorized as the “difficulty and complexity” of teaching), they are organized to the specific focus of the quick-write. A particularly thoughtful example of a student comment that fits the theme of “connecting teachers’ personal and professional lives: how teachers’ beliefs affect what and how a teacher teaches” came from a student who read *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The student reflects,

Through Miss Brodie, however, I learned that there is a definite distinction between a creative approach and a self-righteous creative approach. . . . Teaching is not about creating clones of yourself (i.e., the Brodie set). Teaching is about helping an individual gain the tools necessary to become whoever and do whatever they desire. (personal communication, November 29, 2004)

Here is another student example that addresses this same general theme of a “teacher’s personal and professional life” but from a participant who read a different work of fiction, *A Jest of God*: “I learned that what a teacher does in the classroom affects all of their lives and that what happens at home to a teacher can’t necessarily be left out of the class either. In the book, Rachel’s emotional and social problems came into the classroom far too often” (personal communication, November 29, 2004). This student noticed that teachers’ personal and professional lives are intertwined and that teachers should be aware of how their personal and professional lives affect one another. Another participant writes of similar realizations: “It is interesting to think that teachers are regular people who deal with their personal lives outside the classroom as well. She (the teacher) had conflicts between the relationships in her life with her mother, her friend, and her colleagues at school” (personal communication, November 29, 2004).

This student began to understand how teachers, like all people, have multiple worlds in which they exist and that those worlds are all part of a teacher’s life.

A quick-writes explanation was categorized under “student-teacher relationships” if the student mainly discussed the teacher’s interaction with students as opposed to a specific focus on the teacher’s thoughts or beliefs alone. Students who read *One Child* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* mentioned the importance of the teacher-student bond in being an effective teaching practitioner. One student wrote,

In our group we had some great discussions about the power and control teachers have in their classrooms and over their students. Miss Brodie from the novel really took advantage of her position of power and became over-involved with her students’ lives and choices. This book taught me that there is a limit to how involved a teacher should get with their students. (personal communication, November 29, 2004)

Another student, who read *One Child*, also discussed the boundaries of student-teacher relationships in terms of limiting involvement with students as a necessity of the teaching profession: “I feel one of the biggest things I learned was how to foster a teacher/student relationship. . . . There comes a point in each school year where as much as you would want to keep your students for many years, you have to let go so they can grow and become self-sufficient” (personal communication, November 29, 2004). These two novels seemed to encourage students to look at teaching from this perspective, to consider the teachers and their responsibilities while also considering the necessity and limits of developing relationships with students.

“The complexity of teaching” was the most prominent theme. Students who read *The Water Is Wide* overwhelmingly discussed the complexity and difficulty of teaching in terms of cultural conflict between teachers and students, the control that administration has over teachers, and differentiation of instruction. A few of the students who read *One Child* also discussed the difficulty of teaching but more in terms of the difficult choices a teacher might have to make. One noted, “It is hard to explain what I learned from *One Child*, but I really did. It kind of made me realize how grossly unprepared I am both to be an adult and a teacher. I’d like to tell myself that I would do the brave things Torey did, but would I?” (personal communication, November 29, 2004). Also of interest in the quick-write responses were data that referred to why students felt that fiction was a different or useful curriculum to use in this course. One student felt that

reading a fictional account of a teaching situation was no less “real” in my mind than reading a piece of non-fiction because after a while

characters are people and people are characters. The fictional aspect of this book allowed me, the reader, to see the various viewpoints of teachers, administrators, and students with the same relative objectivity. In non-fiction someone is usually telling the story—it's the teacher or the students. While both perspectives may be presented, only in fiction is one able to flow through all of the perspectives with ease. (personal communication, November 29, 2004)

Another comment addressed the emotional perspective of the fictional teacher:

By reading *One Child* it gave me the emotional state of the teacher as well as hopes, aspirations, and downfalls, and disappointments. Rather than a non-fiction book where the teacher might feel the need to write in a more scholarly approach and might not even express her own feelings too deeply, this book allowed the reader to be touched by the children in the same or perhaps similar way a teacher would be touched. She also covered some problems that the non-fiction writers and educators discussed in detail in our readings. Yet, I will probably remember more from the fictional reading of *One Child*, than the other books. (personal communication, November 29, 2004)

This quote is of particular interest within the context of the research questions of this study. That the student found reading fiction more memorable, or somehow a stronger lesson than reading expository text, supports Wear's (1989) hypothesis that fiction "can portray" problems in teaching that expository text cannot (p. 54). The participant suggests that the emotional experience of reading the book adds to the power of fiction over nonfiction as a way to understand a teacher's perspective.

## INTERVIEWS

The five semistructured interviews focused on the participants' perceptions of the teacher in their works of fiction and the differences between fiction and other curricula used in the course such as classroom observations, reading essays about teaching, course lectures, and other writing assignments. (See appendix B for examples of interview questions). Each participant read a different work of fiction, and thus each had a different insight as to why fiction was a useful curricular medium to use in an introductory education course.

The interview participant who read *A Jest of God* was a female junior undergraduate. She reported that the experience of reading fiction was different from her classroom observations in that "the teacher is put on a pedestal [in a classroom]," that they are not really a "person," whereas "the book really gave

you background on what's really going on in a teacher's life" (personal communication, April 2, 2005). The book allowed this participant insight into the reality of being a teacher that gets past the façade that one might observe from the outside, from sitting and watching a teacher at work. That *A Jest of God* is written in first person most likely influenced this student's observations, for the entire novel is written as the uncensored thoughts of a teacher as she encounters an odd but not unbelievable life. The student also became aware through her experience of reading this book that "school is like a spider web that affects every part of her [the teacher's] life" and that this realization will give her a new "perspective" with which to consider the profession of teaching (personal communication, April 2, 2005).

The interview participant, a senior male undergraduate, who read *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* also indicated a better understanding of the motivations of a teacher. He found the book more helpful in understanding the perspective of a teacher than his classroom observations because he "had a longer time to get the perspective of Brodie." Even though *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is written in a very different style than *A Jest of God*, both of these participants found value in these works of fiction, which allowed them to really understand a teacher's perspective over a classroom observation.

The interview participant, a female freshman undergraduate, who read *One Child* also found the experience of reading fiction to be beneficial in getting to understand a teacher's perspective, but her assessment directly related to the medium of fiction: "The book is beneficial because it is a relief to know it is just a book. You can take time off. There is an emotional attachment though it is not real [really happening]" (personal communication, February 16, 2005). This particular participant was very effusive in her enjoyment of reading the book and, during the presentation and in her quick-writes, repeatedly stated how much she loved reading *One Child*. She assessed the benefits of reading and of having an imaginative experience over a real experience as being the unlimited time she was allowed to reflect on what was happening in the story, as well as the safety of knowing that the situation in the book was fictional.

The interview participant, a female junior undergraduate, who read *The Education of Hyman Kaplan* found the literature circle assignment useful in that it allowed her "to see another perspective." She also felt that reading fiction about teachers was a beneficial assignment in this class in that, unlike in her observation classroom, she was able to see "the result" of an assignment and was better able to see different "aspects and effects" of teaching. This participant felt that the lens fiction afforded her was more holistic than what she was able to understand as an outsider who observed snippets of real classroom experience. Like the other interviewees, this participant appreciated what the book she read allowed her to "experience," while at the same time stating that being in a real

classroom and observing was meaningful and helpful in developing her understanding of what it means to teach and be a teacher (personal communication, March 20, 2005).

Like the other interviewees, the junior female undergraduate who was assigned *The Water Is Wide* found the experience of reading fiction a unique way to understand teachers. When comparing her observation teacher to Conroy (the main character) from the novel, this participant was quick to point out that she felt Conroy was an inferior teacher. Yet, she appreciated that she could see “into Conroy’s head” more than her observation teacher’s, and that the book allowed more understanding of Conroy’s “background and history.” “The book was more in depth about the person,” she explained, observing, “Mr. B [her observation teacher] was more in depth about the teaching” (personal communication, April 2005).

## Conclusions

We began our study with the somewhat inchoate belief that fictional works on teaching would promote preservice teacher reflection in a way that other curricula and experiences could not. We strongly felt that an innovative and interactional curriculum that included creative literature group presentations would encourage both creative and unique teaching and learning experiences for our undergraduates. As we reflected back on our original motivation for the study, we realized that we were also willing to require our students to read these works because fiction about teaching had meant so much to us.

It now appears that our generalization was a qualified success, qualified partly because not all the works appeared to be of equal value. Though the themes that students described in the data of this study are varied across the five works of fiction, a careful analysis of the data shows that some of the works of fiction seem to have been more helpful in introducing students to the perspective of a teacher and encouraged the kind of reflection we sought. Though all books were reported as useful and all students described learning more about the topics of teachers and teaching from the literature circle assignment, participants who read *A Jest of God*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and *One Child* seemed to be more moved to deep reflection about teaching and teacher’s lives.

These three books seemed to be those that matched our students’ conception of teaching as they had experienced it. As Langer (1989) notes, readers undergo a process of interacting with the text and are influenced at each point by their own life circumstances. The book that seemed least likely to promote reflection, *The Education of Hyman Kaplan*, lacked sufficient “envisionments”

(Langer, 1989) for our students. As we considered this fact, it became clear to us that *Kaplan*, although written from the teacher’s point of view, is set in an adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom and in an earlier era (1930s). We should point out that the book resonated deeply with both of us, but we had both taught adult English learners and could appreciate the tender classroom moments in the novel that may not have been so obvious to our students.

While our intent in the research was not necessarily to determine which of the books we selected was the best for our students, we are suggesting that *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* seemed to promote the deepest reflection—owing to the manner in which Muriel Sparks’s engaging work explores most deeply the relationship between a teacher and her students. Because Miss Brodie’s methods are questionable at times, students could consider carefully the moral implications of a teacher’s work without the concern that this was a real teacher teaching real youth. Most importantly, perhaps, the book helped them to reflect on the larger goals of education and the transparency of the teacher. Teaching, they grew to realize, is not about the teacher but rather about student learning.

If we are to trust the developmental literature on teachers, this insight seems to come only after years in the classroom. We are not suggesting that the students in our course who read *Brodie* will enter the classroom focused entirely on student learning, unconcerned with their own glory (or shortcomings) as teachers, but it was indeed exciting to see preservice teachers reflecting on this idea so early in their development.

Finally, as we read over the transcripts and quick-writes and considered the students’ shifting “selves” and identities as they negotiated the course, we were struck by how much they altered their views from beginning to end. Although finding change over time was not part of our research, we could not help but notice it. Clearly, their direct experience observing and assisting in classrooms had altered their views on teaching and, of course, inspired much reflection about the kind of teacher they wanted to be. We also came to notice their references to the fictional works as sources of reflection. There was an almost daily reconstruction of their identities as emerging teachers (St. Pierre, 2000).

## Implications for Future Study

Future research regarding the use of fiction in preservice education courses might focus on which teaching strategies are most effective for fictional texts; how to fruitfully integrate students’ field experiences and other course curricula into fictional studies; and a description of the criteria that mark fictional works that are particularly successful in allowing preservice teachers to critically assess



and broaden their understanding of teachers and the teaching profession. As prospective teachers move from student to teacher, introductory education courses are critical in the development of a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the teaching profession. We believe our study has shown that fiction can offer a unique view of teachers and teaching, a view that assists preservice teachers to reflect deeply on important themes.

## Appendix A

The following is a list of titles and plot summaries.

### *THE WATER IS WIDE* BY PAT CONROY

This story accounts the experiences of a teacher and his students as they struggle to learn amidst great poverty, racism, and limited resources on an island off the coast of North Carolina during the late 1960s.

### *ONE CHILD* BY TOREY HAYDEN

This story describes the year in the life of a special education teacher and an extraordinary student who is placed in her classroom. This book has previously been used in special education and literature research (Marlowe & Maycock, 2001; Morrison & Rude, 2002).

### *THE EDUCATION OF HYMEN KAPLAN* BY LEONARD Q. ROSS

The chapters in this humorous work of fiction each account a different class period in an adult ESL school and relate the misinterpretations and difficulties experienced by the adult immigrant students and their teacher as they attempt to learn and teach English.

### *A JEST OF GOD* BY MARGARET LAWRENCE

This first-person story of a teacher's life in 1960s Canada weaves classroom and personal experiences together. The novel is about the personal growth of a spin-

ster teacher and how social norms affect her perception of herself and her job. Tama and Peterson (1991) and Wear (1989) recommend this text.

### *THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE* BY MURIEL SPARK

This classic work of fiction, set in Scotland during the 1920s, follows a group of students and their avant-garde teacher as they challenge social norms and redefine their roles as student, teacher, friend, and confidante.

## Appendix B

The following are interview questions (semistructured interview).

1. Describe \_\_\_\_\_ (a character) from the book you read. What kind of teacher was he/she?
2. Did you think that the character was realistic? Why or why not?
3. Did they do anything that you wouldn't have done? Why or why not?
4. What do you think their philosophy of teaching was? Did you agree with their philosophy of teaching? Why or why not?
5. Did you feel differently about the character when you finished the book than when you first started reading? If yes, what happened that made you feel differently about the character?
6. What were the character's strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
7. Could she or he have been a better teacher? How?
8. Did the character's personal life interfere with her or his professional life? How?
9. Do you feel that you understood \_\_\_\_\_ better than the teacher in your observation classroom? Why or why not?
10. How was the experience of reading the story about \_\_\_\_\_ different and/or more or less beneficial than your classroom observation experiences in understanding the mindset of a teacher?
11. Did he/she remind you of any teachers you have had? How?
12. Do you think you would be like \_\_\_\_\_ if you become a teacher? In what ways or why not?
13. Do you plan to become a teacher? (If yes) Have you always wanted to be a teacher? What kind of teacher do you imagine yourself being?
14. Do you think that reading this book has influenced your ideas of what it is like to be a teacher? How?

15. How was the experience of reading the book different or more or less meaningful than the other assignments of the class?

## References

- Anderson, K. L. (2004). Teaching cultural competence using an exemplar from literary journalism. *Journal of Nursing Education, 43*(6), 253–259.
- Barthes, R. (1974). *S/Z: An essay* (R. Miller, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bleich, D. (1978). *Subjective criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Charon, R., Trautmann Banks, J., Connelly, J. E., Hunsaker Hawkins, A., Montgomery Hunter, K., Hudson Jones, A., Montello, M., & Poirer, S. (1995). Literature and medicine. *Annals of Internal Medicine, 122*(8), 599–606.
- Cohen, C. (1998). Using narrative fiction within management education. *Management Learning, 29*(2), 165–181.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Conroy, P. (1972). *The water is wide*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Dewey, J. (1934/2005). *Art as experience*. New York: Perigee.
- Feiman-Nemser, S., & Featherstone, H. (1992). *Exploring teaching: Reinventing an introductory course*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gordon, E. (1990). Coping with communicentric bias in knowledge production in the social sciences. *Educational Researcher, 19*(3), 14–19.
- Hayden, T. (2002). *One child*. New York: Avon.
- Hoffman-Kipp, P., Artiles, A. J., & López-Torres, L. (2003). Beyond reflection: Teacher learning as praxis. *Theory into Practice, 42*(3), 248–254.
- Kidder, T. (1989). *Among schoolchildren*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Langer, J. (1989). *The process of understanding literature*. Albany, NY: Center the Learning and Teaching of Literature.
- Laurence, M. (1983). *A jest of God*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marion, D. (1988). Using fiction to expose a fundamental theme in American public administration. *Teaching Political Science, 15*(2), 44–49.
- Marlowe, M., & Maycock, G. (2001). Using literary texts in teacher education to promote positive attitudes toward children with disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 24*(2), 75–83.
- Montgomery Hunter, K., Charon, R., & Coulehan, J. (1995). The study of literature in medical education. *Academic Medicine, 70*(9), 787–794.
- Morrison, W. F., & Rude, H. A. (2002). Beyond textbooks: A rationale for a more inclusive use of literature in preservice special education teacher programs. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 25*(2), 114–123.
- Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ross, L. Q. (1937). *The education of Hyman Kaplan*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Spark, M. (1961). *The prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Philadelphia: Lippencott.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Post-structural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(5), 477–515.
- Tama, M. C., & Peterson, K. (1991). Achieving reflectivity through literature. *Educational Leadership, 48*(6), 22–24.
- Walsh, D. (1969). *Literature and knowledge*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Wear, D. (1989). What literature says to preservice teachers and teacher educators. *Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(1), 51–55.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Zamir, T. (2002). An epistemological basis for linking philosophy and literature. *Metaphilosophy, 33*(3), 321–336.
- Zeichner, K., & Liston, D. (1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review, 57*(1), 23–48.