ABSTRACT

Participatory literacy practices include the ways in which individuals interpret, make, and share as a way of connecting in our digitally mediated culture. This chapter is a culmination of an across-university partnership created between the two authors and the pre-service teachers that collaborated online about teaching and learning. Three threads of participatory literacy practices are shared within the chapter including 1) the use of blogging across university settings, 2) the implementation of digital professional learning communities (PLCs) to connect and collaborate with other pre-service teachers, and 3) the formation and participation in digital literature circles to co-construct meaning from children’s literature. This chapter includes the authors’ attempts at collaboration across university settings using different tools, platforms, and resources. This work is an example for other teachers and teacher educators to consider how we can help pre-service teachers be part of the participatory culture and provide an even wider community of learners.
INTRODUCTION

Teaching in the 21st century requires a unique skill-set to address the competencies necessary to be successful in the changing climate of schools. For teachers of literacy in particular, it is considered a requirement to know and be able to teach these specific skills in order for students to be productive citizens. For example, navigating and evaluating website content is a learned aptitude that students must grasp in order to traverse in literacy tasks using digital content (Cho, 2013). As a result, it becomes a professional responsibility for teacher educators to embed 21st century literacy skills into literacy methods coursework (Mitchell, 2017). This includes carving out time for introducing and modeling digital proficiencies, and it also includes varied opportunities for pre-service teachers to take risks and engage in digital content and experiences. The goal of integrating technological experiences into literacy pre-service education programs is to illustrate how authentic and meaningful opportunities with digital tools and content can, with the proper amount of scaffolding and support, transform literacy learning. This transformation requires that pre-service teachers learn to use, and teach students to use, digital literacy practices to represent, construct, create, and explore. These types of experiences can help to create 21st century learners that are productive, experienced with multi-modalities, and connected with a wider audience (Roswell & Wohlwend, 2016).

As a result of social networks and the connected technological landscape of schools, a “participatory culture” has emerged, and new media technologies are making it possible for people to interact with digital tools in new ways. This participatory culture has members who define what is significant in the culture, and develop new technologies that enhance communication and participation in this culture (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robinson, 2009; Jocson & Rosa, 2015). Members in a digital culture take up participatory literacies, which offer ways of interpreting, making, and sharing digital multimedia and allows members to participate in it (Roswell & Wohlwend, 2016). As a result, teachers working in schools have an obligation to help youth learn how to use digital literacy tools effectively in multiple participatory cultures (Jenkins, et al., 2009). Again, this responsibility has a ripple-effect that impacts teacher education programs and the preparation of pre-service teachers entering classrooms expected to be ready to teach in tomorrow’s schools.

We focus on three threads of participatory literacy practices that are embedded within the examples shared in this chapter. The examples illustrate: a) The importance of a connection to a wider professional learning community (PLC) to address literacy practices; b) Specific ways to connect pre-service teachers to a larger PLC beyond the scope of their own university walls in an online environment; and c) Different tools and experiences that pre-service teachers can “try out” to enhance their own literacy teaching. Specifically, we focus on participatory literacy practices that would be and could be used in schools with students. The highlighted practices exemplified in this chapter include: a) the use of blogging across university settings to learn from one another about technology integration; b) the implementation of digital professional learning communities (PLCs) to connect and collaborate with other pre-service teachers; and c) forming and participating in digital literature circles to co-construct meaning from children’s literature and share pedagogical practices and ideas. These practices were developed from research conducted between the two authors and the pre-service teachers in the classes with those authors, located at geographically different university settings.