FINDING THEMSELVES IN THE “FINDING PLACE”:
EXPLORING PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES
AND VISIONS OF TEACHING LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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FINDING THEMSELVES IN THE “FINDING PLACE”: EXPLORING PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES AND VISIONS OF TEACHING LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (372 pp.)

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The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to explore preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum within the context of a middle childhood education literacy methods course. The course was pedagogically structured to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning based upon curricular and instructional principles of effective middle school classrooms. The pedagogical structuring of the course provided the preservice teachers with opportunities to explore their tensions and beliefs as current university students and future middle school content area teachers. The guided inquiry learning experiences afforded the preservice teachers opportunities for reflection, dialogic engagement, and visioning throughout the semester.

The research was guided by the following questions: How does the pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers developing professional identities? How does the pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum? Participants in the study were three middle childhood education preservice teachers enrolled in a middle childhood education literacy methods course at a private, liberal arts university. Multiple
sources of data were collected which included field notes, questionnaires, literacy narratives, electronic journals, literacy metaphor posters, reflective essays, vision statements, and interviews. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method.

Results regarding the first research question indicated that the course positively contributed to the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities. The preservice teachers gained an increased awareness, or consciousness, of their personal and professional beliefs and the influence of their beliefs on future pedagogical decision-making. Additionally, the preservice teachers gained insight, or a deeper understanding and clearer perception, as they repositioned themselves throughout the semester, identified essential characteristics of effective middle school teachers they hoped to espouse, and discovered the importance of their role in the enactment of their beliefs.

Results regarding the second research question indicated that the conceptual tool of visioning contributed to the preservice teachers’ gain in clear-sightedness, or increased clarity, in the importance of teaching literacy across the curriculum in future content area classrooms. Moreover, visioning contributed to the preservice teachers’ farsightedness as they became forward-thinkers and were able to more concretely envision multiple aspects of teaching and learning at the middle school level and how they would put their beliefs into actions. Visioning enabled the preservice teachers to create a bridge between their beliefs and goals as they looked towards the future and identified ways to turn their visions into realities.
The pedagogical restructuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course was an initial step in making changes within the same paradigm of beliefs. This involved a shift in the structure of the course from a teacher-based approach to literacy instruction at the middle school level to a student-centered approach to integrating literacy across disciplines in the middle childhood classroom. Further efforts to restructure the course will include shifting beliefs and actions across the paradigm to place a greater focus on collaborative inquiry in which curricular and instructional practices will be guided by preservice teachers’ questions and wonderings. Additionally, the restructured course can help redefine content area literacy instruction by providing learning environments in which preservice teachers continue to examine their beliefs, understand disciplinary literacy and learn to redefine the terms text and literacy in respect to their specific content areas, witness and engage in the collaborative process between literacy instructors and content area educators, and concretely envision their futures as individual and collective members of the teaching profession.
To my mom
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.”

~Lewis Carroll

The undergraduate middle childhood education literacy course was drawing to a close for the morning, and I once again instructed my preservice teachers to complete their exit slips as their “tickets out the door”. As a junior faculty member, I had begun using exit slips since the first college course I taught as a strategy to assess my own instruction and to determine the preservice teachers’ understandings that had taken place during the class, or the clarification which would be needed in subsequent meetings. The exit slips were merely 5” x 8” index cards provided to each preservice teacher on the first day of class and ultimately filled with continuous written responses between instructor and student throughout the semester. At times, the preservice teachers were required to respond to a specific posting that I generated as the instructor of the course. However, more often than not, the preservice teachers were provided free reign to write about anything that came to their minds regarding our specific literacy course or teacher education in general.

As we neared the conclusion of the semester the preservice teachers had become quite familiar with the closing routine of the class. Once all the preservice teachers had shared their thoughts and deposited their exit slips before leaving, I quickly gathered the somewhat crinkled and dog-eared index cards that were strewn on the front desk eager to
read what the preservice teachers had shared that day. As I sat in my office absorbing their words, it occurred to me that the index cards contained so much more than initially intended. Although I was often flattered by compliments about my teaching, and took all critiques and suggestions to heart, I began to see a transformation in the preservice teachers’ thought processes. In the first weeks of the semester, comments such as “Great class! I’ll see you next week” were often common. However, after a few weeks into the semester, several preservice teachers began discussing literacy strategies they felt were effective and hoped to implement in their future field experiences, or with their own children, as they began to make deeper connections between their own lives and the course content.

As I poured over the comments and prepared to write my weekly responses to each preservice teacher later that morning, another pattern seemed to emerge. I soon noticed that more preservice teachers were moving beyond basic course questions and penning queries and comments about what it meant to be a teacher and tensions they were experiencing as they navigated through their own teacher education program. “What made you become a teacher?” “Was it difficult to leave being a classroom teacher to teach at the college level?” “How can I focus on teaching literacy strategies when I am not sure I really want to be a reading teacher?” and “I still find it hard to believe that I would teach literacy.” were questions and comments from my preservice teachers that confronted me that day. I realized that what began as a way to critique my own teaching as a new faculty member had become an opportunity to give voice to preservice teachers
as they began to negotiate personal and professional tensions associated with the unintended consequences and challenges of the teaching profession.

The exit slips became a method for me to provide advice and support as the written conversations between the preservice teachers and I became deeper. I determined that the simplistic activity that had begun as an additional task many preservice teachers once rushed to finish at the end of a long class became an opportunity they looked forward to completing. Most preservice teachers also welcomed seeing the returned exit slips waiting for them on their desks when they arrived for class the following week. Often I returned the exit slips with copies of articles or links to other resources as a way to provide even more information to my preservice teachers than could typically be covered in a two hour class session twice a week. Although questions about the theoretical content of the literacy course, the teaching of strategies, and issues of classroom management were important, they often led the preservice teachers into multifaceted areas of exploration about becoming teachers.

The comments and questions I posed in response to the preservice teachers became a way for my students to share their beliefs and begin to form an identity about what it meant to be a teacher. Throughout the remainder of the semester, the exit slips became a segue into conversations, mostly after class, about tensions and issues the preservice teachers were facing inside and outside of the college classroom in which I eagerly listened, dispensed advice, and provided a direction for the preservice teachers to take. As a reflective practitioner, I determined that many preservice teachers lacked a clear focus or direction of where they were headed as a teacher even though the
preservice teachers were in their junior years and had completed several semesters in their teacher education program. Without this clear vision, it would be easy for the preservice teachers to veer off the intended path or easily take a wrong turn.

As an instructor for several years at the same institution, and reading and conversing with many preservice teachers about their beliefs and tensions, I realized that something needed to change in the structure and design of my courses. The majority of the in-depth conversations I was having with the preservice teachers regarding their beliefs and tensions were occurring after class, as an aside, not as a main component of our class. I determined that exploring how an individual becomes a teacher, as well as making explicit their tacitly held beliefs, had to take more precedence in the teacher education courses I taught in order for the preservice teachers to ultimately understand and make decisions regarding students, content, and pedagogy in their future classrooms. My courses needed to be pedagogically structured to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning and provide experiences for my preservice teachers to engage in an exploration of their beliefs and tensions in a socially situated environment where they would be able to develop a professional identity and form a vision to guide their way.

**Rationale for Study**

One of the main goals of a teacher education program in middle childhood education is to provide preservice teachers with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to effectively meet the literacy needs of their future middle school students (Hall, 2009). Traditionally, methods courses, one component of a teacher education program, have prepared preservice teachers in literacy education with a focus on
understanding the design and implementation of curriculum and instruction based on a conceptual framework of teacher development (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005). This framework most often structures courses designed to provide preservice teachers with knowledge of adolescent learners, theoretical orientations towards literacy, and the pedagogical content knowledge (How People Learn framework, National Research Council, 2000) required for effective literacy instruction across the curriculum. However, methods courses that are based on a conceptual framework of teacher development almost exclusively focus on the future students the preservice teachers will instruct rather than the development of the preservice teachers as emerging professionals (Alsup, 2006).

A sole emphasis on the cognitive aspects of learning to teach literacy has failed to address the affective components, including the beliefs, attitudes, and values towards teaching, that preservice teachers need to explore and develop in order to understand their emerging professional identities (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005) Therefore, a cognitive emphasis of literacy learning must be coupled with opportunities for preservice teachers to develop a professional commitment, not only to the students with whom they will instruct, but also to themselves as individual and collective members of the teaching profession (Bransford, et al., 2005).

The core of an effective literacy methods course in middle childhood education should be designed to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to engage in experiences that will address and challenge their beliefs and tensions towards becoming teachers and teaching literacy across the curriculum. Additionally, literacy methods
courses should be structured to guide preservice teachers’ development of visions of professional practice and teacher identity formation by promoting reflective practices and dialogic engagement within a community of learners. Literacy methods courses that are designed to address the cognitive and affective components of teaching may contribute to an understanding of the personal and professional tensions preservice teachers are negotiating and lead to the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities. Preservice teachers need experiences in their literacy methods courses to explore who they are becoming as professionals in order to form visions of the role and value of literacy in their future middle school classrooms.

**Preservice Teachers’ Beliefs towards Content Area Literacy**

Preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with a wide range of beliefs about what it means to be a teacher and how students learn (Lortie, 1975; O’Brien & Stewart, 1990; Pajares, 1992). Unlike other professions requiring advanced degrees, preservice teachers begin their professional preparation with twelve or more years of experience in traditional classroom settings (Hammerness, et al., 2005). These “apprenticeships of observation” (Lortie, 1975) often result in an oversimplified vision of teaching that undermines the extensive knowledge, planning, and assessment of practice required of effective educators (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005) in all disciplines, including literacy instruction.

Educational research, including studies on literacy instruction, was once dominated by the process and product approach to teaching and learning which focused on the classroom behaviors and achievement of students (Fang, 1996). However,
beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a shift occurred in which researchers began to investigate the influence of teachers’ beliefs on the instructional practices and student interactions that occurred in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986). A study by Harste and Burke (1977) indicated that the theoretical beliefs that teachers held were often used as filters in the planning and instruction of literacy lessons. Richardson et al. (1991) also sought to determine the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and the instruction of reading comprehension. The results indicated that the theoretical beliefs of teachers were consistent with the literacy instruction that was provided to students. Teachers who held a skills-based orientation towards reading were more likely to rely on basal readers, while teachers who ascribed to a whole language approach were often observed using authentic literature in the classroom.

More recently, Konopak, Readence, and Wilson’s (2001) research examined preservice and inservice secondary teachers’ theoretical orientations towards reading instruction in the content areas. Their results indicated that inservice teachers were more consistent in their beliefs about the reading process, choices, and use of instructional literacy strategies. A reader-based explanation of how reading took place, as well as developed, was reported by the inservice teachers. However, the preservice teachers favored an interactive explanation of how reading took place, but reported a reader-based explanation of how reading developed. The consistency of the inservice teachers’ responses was attributed to their backgrounds in educational courses and years of classroom teaching experience, whereas the inconsistency of the preservice teachers’
results was due to limited opportunities to explore and understand their beliefs and envision future decision-making practices in their teacher education programs.

The decisions that preservice teachers will make regarding the role of literacy and how it will be taught to their adolescent learners are highly influenced by their entering beliefs towards teaching and learning (Buchmann, 1987). Researchers have determined that the beliefs of preservice content area teachers regarding literacy instruction across the curriculum were more likely to be determined by their limited vantage points of teaching and learning, viewed through the lens of a student, rather than the subject and pedagogical knowledge learned in teacher education programs (Hall, 2009; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Numerous studies indicate the resistance that many preservice teachers have towards integrating literacy across the curriculum and the limited transferability of literacy strategies that occur between teacher education courses and future classrooms (Alger, 2009; Barry, 2002; Bean, 2001; Fox, 1993; Hollingsworth & Teal, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Wilson, Konopak, and Readence, 1993).

However, the beliefs and attitudes of classroom teachers towards the integration of literacy across the curriculum can be one of the most important factors in the reading achievement of middle and high school students (Nourie & Lenski, 1998). The beliefs of content area instructors towards literacy directly influence the implementation of literacy strategies into their course teachings (McCoss-Yergian & Krepps, 2010). Therefore, the ways in which preservice teachers are taught how to think about and teach literacy in their teacher education programs could potentially impact how they will address this topic with their students (Hall, 2005) and the value that will be placed on literacy
instruction across the curriculum. Tensions often arise in teacher education programs when preservice teachers become conflicted over who they want to become as professionals and who they are expected to be as teachers based on political, cultural, or societal norms (Coldron & Smith, 1999). When these tensions are left unexplored, the personal beliefs that preservice teachers hold can often act as barriers to the new knowledge they are acquiring in their teacher education programs and stymie the development of a professional identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

**Professional Identities**

Becoming a teacher is an identity forming process in which preservice teachers begin to define themselves as individual and collective members of the teaching profession (Danielewicz, 2001). Teacher identity formation is a fluid, dynamic process whereby identities of preservice teachers are shaped and reshaped through experiences and interactions in socially situated contexts (Hammerness, et al., 2005). The development of a teacher identity requires a balance between understanding the tensions associated with the personal and professional aspects of self, as well as the subject matter and pedagogical knowledge required for preservice teachers to become developing professionals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Although individual and collective teacher identities are developed and shaped in discursive environments (Gee, 1999), the majority of teacher education programs have failed to structure courses that seek to educate preservice teachers holistically and continue to be designed with an emphasis on the cognitive aspects of teaching. However, separating the intellectual from the affective components of teaching is unproductive and
a disservice to preservice teachers. Not allowing preservice teachers to discuss all aspects of their developing selves (i.e. cognitive and affective) diminishes the most important aspect of being a teacher: identity (Alsup, 2006).

Since the construction of a teacher identity is not an individual process, but involves other collectives, as well as the discourses associated with them, teacher educators must envision and structure courses that are designed to promote social interaction and activities to engage preservice teachers in the exploration of their developing selves. It is through interactions with others in a professional context that teacher identities are shaped and reshaped (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) which results in an emerging vision of who the preservice teacher wants to become (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). As preservice teachers develop visions of their classroom practice, professional identities continue to develop and can be instrumental in guiding their work (Hammerness, 2006). The pedagogical goal of a teacher education program should be to provide preservice teachers with an inquiry-based learning environment that is designed to offer opportunities for rich dialogue and engagement (Danielewicz, 2001).

**Teachers’ Visions**

Preservice teachers need experiences in teacher education programs to explore where they are going, how they will get their students there, and the gaps that may exist between their current curricular beliefs and intended instructional practices. The study of curriculum is a way of understanding the many knowledge bases and the “personal practical knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1987) that teachers construct for themselves as they interact with students, subject matter, and the community. “It’s a
combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions about how to create curriculum and make curriculum decisions that enables teachers to be responsible practitioners and learn from their own teaching” (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005, p. 187). This development of a “curricular vision” (Zumwalt, 1989) includes preservice teachers gaining an in-depth understanding of adolescent learners and the field of middle childhood education, the dispositions about how to use this developing knowledge, opportunities to practice and articulate their beliefs, and the availability of conceptual and practical tools that will support their efforts (Hammerness, et al., 2005).

One of the main challenges that preservice teachers must face is learning how to maintain the balance between the shifting demands of their content areas and the needs of their future adolescent learners, as well as deal with the tensions between their beliefs and the current norms of their discipline (Hammerness, 2006). A remedy to this challenge in teacher education is providing experiences to develop a curricular vision.

Teacher candidates must form visions of what is possible and desirable in teaching to inspire and guide their professional learning and practice. Such visions connect important values and goals to concrete classroom practices. They help teachers construct a normative basis for developing their teaching and their students’ learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1017).

Visions provide images of how teachers see themselves and who they hope to become (Hammerness, 2003). Visions shape the way that teachers feel about their teaching, and help to explain the decisions they make in their classrooms, the choices they make in their teaching, and their ultimate determination to continue in the teaching
profession (Hammerness, 2006). Visioning is a process that provides a structure for preservice teachers to express and examine their beliefs and tensions in relation to their future instructional goals and practices. Visions are grounded in preservice teachers’ understandings of what it means to identity oneself as a teacher and the demands imposed on teachers from the larger professional community (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998).

Visioning enables preservice teachers to understand their past, present, and future by encouraging them to reflect on prior experiences, examine current beliefs, and look forward to what lies ahead as a future classroom teacher (Hammerness, 2006). The visions that preservice teachers develop during their teacher education programs can influence their sense of agency, or their belief in the ability to act in future situations, that preservice teachers will take into their classrooms (Kennedy, 1999). Preservice teachers who have well-defined, focused visions will be more likely to hold true to their beliefs and be unwilling to compromise their instruction due to external educational pressures or political mandates.

Preservice teachers who learn to rely on their concrete visions are more likely to be guided by their independent thinking and deal with the challenges they will encounter in student teaching situations and in future classroom experiences (Hall, 2009). Visioning provides a rudder for preservice teachers’ work.

When a new teacher develops vision, she may not even know where she is going, but she can develop a sense of when it is appropriate to veer, when it is reasonable
to stay put and explore, and when it is important to stay the course and continue to move ahead (Richert quoted in Hammerness, 2006, p. 84).

**Statement and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. Teacher education courses must provide opportunities for preservice teachers to become active participants in their learning, construct their own understandings about what it means to be a teacher, and determine the role literacy will play in their future middle school classrooms. Literacy methods courses that are designed to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning provide experiences for preservice teachers to engage in reflective practices and dialogic engagement as they give voice to their questions and understandings through guided inquiry learning. Literacy methods courses must be structured for preservice teachers to continuously articulate their current beliefs, acknowledge their emerging professional identities, form visions of ideal images of classroom practice, and take an agentic stance towards the enactment of their future curricular decisions. The development of a preservice teacher in a teacher education program is not a linear process or series of stages through which they must progress. Rather, it is a cyclical process that acknowledges that beliefs, professional identities, visions, and a sense of enactment is continuously being shaped by the experiences of the developing preservice teacher (Figure 1).
Figure 1. The development of preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions

Although literacy methods courses are viewed as one forum to explore preservice teachers’ beliefs and tensions towards literacy and help define their curricular visions and subsequent instructional practices (Hall, 2009), limited research has been conducted on the use of visioning in teacher education programs, and more specifically in literacy methods courses. Despite the role vision plays in teachers’ lives it is rarely addressed in teacher education programs. Visioning is considered a new concept in literacy teacher education and has only recently been examined in regards to literacy beliefs and practices related to culturally responsive teaching (Hall, 2009; Turner, 2006). No studies have been found that have examined the use of visioning as a conceptual tool in literacy methods courses to explore preservice teachers’ beliefs and intended practices towards teaching literacy across the curriculum.
Additionally, few studies have connected the entering beliefs and tensions of preservice teachers to the development of their professional identities and visions. However, when preservice teachers are provided the opportunity to articulate their visions, it enables them to examine and make explicit their tacit understandings about incorporating literacy across the curriculum, the needs of adolescent learners whom they will instruct, and their role in planning and enacting curriculum and instruction.

Therefore, this study is significant because it has the potential to add to the limited research on how belief exploration and holistic experiences provided in a pedagogically structured literacy methods course can inform preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of self as content area literacy instructors. Moreover, this study can lead to the reconceptualization of literacy methods courses that aim to balance the cognitive and affective learning domains in teacher education. Opportunities for preservice teachers to articulate their beliefs and navigate the tensions of their own and society’s expectations about what it means to be a teacher can result in increased metacognitive awareness and identity growth as they begin to find their “teacher within” (Palmer, 1998, p. 29).

**Research Questions**

The following questions directed my study:

1. How does the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities?
2. How does the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum?

**Theoretical Framework**

This study was conducted through a social constructivist lens. Social constructivism postulates that individuals learn to make sense of their world and construct new meanings through active participation in socially situated contexts (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Since individuals construct multiple meanings of their experiences, I relied heavily on my participants’ views of their learning experiences throughout the study (Creswell, 2007). This involved inductively identifying patterns that emerged from my preservice teachers’ understandings as they made connections between past experiences and new concepts, engaged in dialogue, and reflected on their evolving professional identities and visions as future middle school teachers.

In particular, this study was informed by Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory is one form of social constructivism that espouses that an individual’s learning and development is informed by social and cultural contexts in which language is used as a tool for learning. The pedagogical structuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course that I instructed was designed with opportunities for preservice teachers to use spoken and written language to articulate, challenge, and perhaps alter their beliefs towards becoming a professional and teaching literacy across the curriculum in their future classrooms.
Participating in a course that was structured as a community of learners supported the premise that human learning and development are intrinsically social and interactive (Street, 2005). Preservice teachers need to receive scaffolded instruction throughout their teacher education programs, particularly in methods courses, by “more capable others” who will guide the preservice teachers across their zones of proximal development, thus enabling them to perform at higher levels with assistance than they could perform alone (Vygotsky, 1978). As the instructor of the middle childhood education literacy methods course, I served as a “more capable other” to the preservice teachers and also encouraged the preservice teachers to learn from their peers throughout the semester.

The supportive social situations that were encountered along the zones of proximal development provided a means by which the preservice teachers began to transition from students to teachers and understand the individual and collective roles they will play in the teaching profession (Street, 2005). Engaging the preservice teachers in situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) created intersubjectivity during collaborative activities through the use of language, common understanding, and problem solving (Rogoff, 1990). Guided by their teacher educators and peers, situated learning promoted the reflection and articulation of the preservice teachers’ beliefs and goals as they gained deeper insight into their future practice and were thus more in control over the formation of their professional identities and visions (Lesley, Watson, & Elliot, 2007).
Definition of Terms

Each of the following terms is defined in relationship to this research study.

**Affective domain:** the domain of learning that focuses on students’ attitudes, values, and beliefs on a particular topic.

**Cognitive domain:** the domain of learning that focuses on students’ knowledge, comprehension, and critical thinking skills on a particular topic.

**Community of learners:** a safe and supportive environment that emphasizes the interrelationships between the cognitive and affective development of preservice teachers and the context in which the learning takes place.

**Content area literacy:** the ability of students to use reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing to learn content across the curriculum (Vacca, 2002).

**Guided inquiry:** an approach to curriculum in which the teacher poses problems or questions and the students work to solve the problems and/or answer the questions (Short, 2010).

**Pedagogical structuring:** the instructional design of a course that provides opportunities for collaboration, communication, and choice in which preservice teachers examine and explore their attitudes, values, and beliefs; an exploration of content and self (Lundeberg & Levin, 2003; Richardson, 2003).

**Preservice teacher:** an undergraduate student enrolled in a teacher education program who is seeking initial licensure in one or more teaching fields.
**Preservice teachers’ beliefs:** attitudes and values about teaching, students, and the education processes that students bring to teacher education programs often based on prior educational experiences (Pajares, 1993).

**Professional identity:** one facet of an individual’s overall identity that includes the beliefs, practices, and values which will guide the future actions of a preservice teacher inside and outside of the classroom (Walkington, 2005).

**Teachers’ visions:** teachers’ ideal images of classroom practice which reflect the hopes of themselves, their students, the school, and the larger community (Squires & Bliss, 2004).

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overall introduction to the research study. It included a rationale for exploring the development of preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum in a middle childhood education literacy methods course. The significance of the problem, research questions, and theoretical framework which guided the study were identified. The key terms explored throughout the study were also defined for the reader. Furthermore, I explained how the limited research which had been conducted on the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum warranted further exploration, as well as a review of the literature in areas related to the research questions.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this literature review, I examined relevant research on key components of this study: teachers’ beliefs, content area literacy instruction, professional identity, reformed efforts of teacher education programs, teachers’ visions, and the role of teacher educators. Understanding teachers’ beliefs, including the entering beliefs of preservice teachers, enabled me to lay the foundation for this study and recognize the difficulty teacher education programs often face in addressing, challenging, and altering the deeply held beliefs of preservice teachers. A review of research on beliefs towards content area literacy instruction revealed the resistance that many inservice and preservice teachers have towards integration of literacy across the curriculum.

Studies on the emerging professional identities of preservice teachers suggested that teacher education programs are integral in shaping and reshaping the emerging identities of preservice teachers as they begin to shift their identities from “students” to “teachers”. However, professional identities are not merely based on the educational beliefs of preservice teachers, but include personal and professional aspects of self that are being negotiated throughout teacher training. Exploring the efforts to reform traditional teacher education programs provided insight into the pedagogical structuring of specific courses and programs that can help educate preservice teachers cognitively and affectively. Although balancing the cognitive and affective domains of learning is
beneficial to preservice teachers’ preparation, it is the cognitive domain that continues to be emphasized in traditional teacher education programs.

Studies on visioning provided an exploration of a powerful construct that enables preservice teachers to understand their beliefs towards learning, teaching, and self, which can lead to sound instructional decision-making practices by preservice teachers in their future content area classrooms. Finally, a review of the role of the teacher educator revealed the guiding influence that “a more capable other” must provide in order for preservice teachers to acknowledge and challenge the beliefs that will inform their professional practice.

**Teachers’ Beliefs**

Beliefs are commonly defined in the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology as “psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (Richardson, 2003, p. 2). Beliefs are distinguishable from the construct of knowledge since they are accepted as truth by the individual holding the belief, but do not require justification of truth, or epistemic warrant (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Beliefs are based on the subjective principles of evaluation and judgment, while knowledge is based on objective fact (Pajares, 1992). Beliefs are considered a form of personal knowledge, but have a stronger affective, evaluative, and episodic nature than knowledge itself (Lundeberg & Levin, 2003). Research has also indicated that beliefs, unlike knowledge, are more influential in determining how individuals organize tasks and define problems, thus making beliefs strong predictors of future behavior (Nespor, 1987).
In the field of education, teacher beliefs are defined as “tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught” (Kagan, 1992, p. 65). Nespor (1987) defined six properties of teachers’ beliefs: (1) they sometimes contain assumptions about the existence of entities beyond the teacher’s control or influence; (2) they can include conceptualizations of ideal situations that differ from reality; (3) they rely heavily on affective and evaluative components; (4) they derive much of their power from memories of specific events; (5) they are not open to critical examination or outside evaluation; and (6) the domains to which specific beliefs may apply are undefined.

The prior beliefs of preservice teachers can be one of the most influential factors affecting the learning that takes place in a teacher education program (Richardson, 2003). Therefore, teacher education programs have begun to explore the entering beliefs of preservice teachers with respect to how those beliefs will impact their learning in general or in specific content areas (Joram & Gabriele, 1998).

**Entering Beliefs of Preservice Teachers**

One goal of a teacher education program is to explore, develop, and challenge the beliefs of preservice teachers whose entering beliefs affect the manner in which they approach their teacher education programs and what they learn (Richardson, 2003). Prior to entering teacher education programs, preservice teachers have well established personal beliefs about teaching and learning (Joram & Gabriele, 1998). These entering beliefs referred to as “apprenticeships of observation” (Lortie, 1975), “folk pedagogies”
(Bruner, 1996), or “personal history-based lay theories” (Holt-Reynolds, 1992), are all founded on personal experiences and familiarity with schooling and instruction.

Although preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with deep-seated beliefs about the nature of learning, teaching, and schooling, their beliefs are often tacit and limited in scope (Pajares, 1993). Preservice teachers often view themselves as “insiders” to the teaching profession due to their first-hand experiences in classrooms for twelve or more years prior to entering teacher education programs. This paradoxical role related to learning and teaching becomes especially significant as preservice teachers begin their professional preparation (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The images of learning, teaching, students, and subject matter formed during preservice teachers’ elementary and secondary years provides a basis for interpreting and assessing ideas and practices encountered in teacher education programs (Lortie, 1975). As “insiders” many preservice teachers are skeptical of the knowledge they will gain in their teacher education courses, aside from their student teaching experiences, believing they already possess the knowledge and skills of effective educators (Richardson, 2003). These taken-for-granted beliefs may mislead preservice teachers into thinking they know more about teaching than they actually do, thus making it more difficult for them to form new ideas and practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Since preservice teachers’ beliefs are viewed from the perspective of students rather than teachers, their beliefs are often simplistic, emphasize the affective components of teaching over cognitive factors, and support a transmission model of teaching (Hart, 2002; Pajares, 1993; Richardson, 2003). Many preservice teachers
consider teaching as the passing of knowledge and the learning that takes place as the absorption and memorization of that knowledge (McDiarmind, 1990; Calderhead & Robson, 1991). When asked to imagine themselves as teachers, preservice teachers often envision themselves as standing in front of the classroom, presenting information, and providing explanations to attentive students (Bean, 1997). These views are incompatible with conceptions of teaching, learning, and knowledge that undergird new visions of reconceptualized teacher education programs.

Preservice teachers’ beliefs are viewed as filters through which the new knowledge learned in teacher education programs is interpreted (Kagan, 1992). The information acquired in teacher education courses is absorbed into preservice teachers’ own personal pedagogies as new material competes with or amends the preservice teachers’ “apprenticeships of observation” (Bruner, 1996). Prior beliefs of preservice teachers that remain unaddressed can form obstacles to instruction since more often than not, new information and perspectives, will be assimilated into existing knowledge formations (Anderson et al., 1995). However, as perceived “insiders” to the teaching profession, the prospect of addressing and challenging preservice teachers’ existing beliefs is often threatening. Most preservice teachers have had positive educational experiences and do not see the necessity of changing their beliefs. They do not envision themselves as change agents, preferring to preserve the status quo, and are prepared to teach in the manner in which they have been instructed (Pajares, 1992).

Although many preservice teachers’ beliefs are resistant to change, it is possible for teacher educators to design courses and programs that will put a greater emphasis on
the beliefs of preservice teachers. Unless teacher educators engage preservice teachers in a critical examination of their entering beliefs, and help them develop powerful visions of good teaching and strong professional commitments, the preservice teachers’ entering beliefs will continue to shape their ideas and future practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Therefore, the challenge remains for teacher education programs to help preservice teachers become questioners of their beliefs and allow for the consideration of alternative conceptions of teaching and learning as they begin to shift their identities from students to teachers.

**Beliefs towards Content Area Literacy**

Preservice teachers enrolled in teacher education programs in middle childhood education are preparing to teach adolescent learners in the main content areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The years associated with the middle school grades (ages 10-15) are a time of tremendous growth and change. Students at this level have entered the world of adolescence and are developing physically, socially, and intellectually (Tompkins, 2010). The changes that occur throughout this life stage have many implications on the academic achievement of middle school students who are often performing at a wide range of reading abilities (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Understanding the uniqueness of adolescent learners enables middle school teachers to plan curriculum and design lessons that are complementary to the changing needs of this group (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). As students are shifting from a mindset of “learning to read” in the primary grades to “reading to learn” at the middle school level (Chall, 2000), the literacy needs of students must be taken into account by preservice
teachers in order to implement instruction that will enable learners to read and comprehend increasingly complex fiction, nonfiction, and content area texts.

Adolescent literacy has been viewed by many researchers as a crisis needing to be addressed by educators and policy makers alike who have traditionally spent more time and efforts concentrating on the literacy needs of early childhood education students than learners in the middle and high school grades (Jacobs, 2008). The latest release of the Nation’s Report Card has indicated that only 34% of fourth and eighth grade students are reading at or above the proficient level (NAEP, 2013). This statistic has remained virtually unchanged in the past twenty years (Bartholomew, 2012). As a remedy to this crisis, researchers have advocated the inclusion of literacy instruction across the curriculum as one means of increasing the reading comprehension of middle school students (Hall, 2005).

The aim of content area literacy instruction is to promote literacy and learning across the curriculum (Draper, 2008). Regardless of whether content area literacy is viewed as a goal or as a tool of instruction (Fisher & Ivey, 2005; Vacca & Vacca, 2005), middle and high school teachers must work to meet the changing literacy needs of their adolescent learners. Challenges that adolescents face with literacy instruction generally begin in fourth grade when the requirements of learning are differentiated by content (Jacobs, 2008). However, by the time adolescent students are being challenged by disciplinary texts, literacy instruction has often disappeared as a critical component of the curriculum or is being taught as general study skills or strategies (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).
The underlying rationale for content area reading is often attributed to William S. Gray (1925) whose research ninety years ago determined that content area reading requires a different set of skills for the effective reading and studying of discipline-specific texts. He also concluded that different skills are required based on an individual’s purpose for reading. The term content area reading, which initially focused on helping students read across the curriculum, was broadened in the 1990s to reflect additional processes of language. Today, content area literacy refers to the ability of students to use reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing to learn content across the curriculum (Vacca, 2002).

The shift from thinking of reading as the acquirement of a discrete set of skills to literacy as a meaning making process that is socially and culturally constructed was also accompanied by a shift in the responsibility for literacy instruction from reading teachers to content area instructors (Jacobs, 2008). The mantra that “every teacher is a teacher of reading” (Gray, 1925) has been met by resistance by many content area teachers (Lesley, 2004). Many instructors at the middle and high school levels, traditionally dominated by discipline, believe that they are “conveyors of content,” not instructors of reading and writing (Topping, Wenrich, & Hoffman, 2007). They also see a disconnect between the student centered approach often used in content area literacy instruction and the teacher centered approach that most often dominates the secondary curriculum (Ness, 2007). Since research has indicated that the integration of literacy instruction into content area classes improves the academic outcomes of adolescent learners (Cantrell, Burns, &
Calloway, 2009), it is necessary for content area teachers to take an active role in literacy integration across the curriculum.

In a mixed-method study of middle and high school content area teachers, McCoss-Yergian & Krepps (2010) determined that approximately three-fourths of their participants believed that teaching reading techniques and strategies was a misuse of instructional time and a deterrent from content area instruction. The majority of their participants believed that language arts teachers were the best individuals to teach reading to middle and high school students. Participants also identified a lack of time to teach reaching in their classrooms indicating the limited minutes they had with students on a daily basis would be more effectively used to deliver content area instruction. Additionally, most participants had limited knowledge of content area literacy strategies and had not received professional development opportunities. Although, many content area teachers were efficacious in their teaching of content knowledge, most participants did not feel qualified to teach even general reading lessons to their middle and high school students. A lack of preparation and confidence with content area teachers’ literacy skills are often roadblocks to the integration of content area literacy across the curriculum (Cantrell, Burns, & Calloway, 2009).

The Adolescent Literacy Position Statement (International Reading Association, 1999) maintains that all adolescents deserve to be instructed by expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in literacy and study strategies across the curriculum. Adolescent literacy has been viewed as the “cornerstone of students’ academic success” since the literacy learning that takes place in the adolescent years
prepares the students for life inside and outside of the classroom (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011). Therefore, middle and high school teachers must be collectively encouraged and challenged to meet the literacy needs of their 21st century learners.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards provides further support for the integration of literacy across the curriculum. In the spring of 2009, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was charged with developing the first set of shared national standards that would help ensure that all students across the country were meeting the same educational expectations as they were being prepared for college and career readiness (Kendall, 2011). It was no longer considered acceptable for students in different states to be learning at different levels based on their geographic location which had often occurred with the standards based state initiatives that had guided curriculum and instruction since the 1990s (Conley & McGaughy, 2012).

A key component of the Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by 46 states and the District of Columbia, is the articulation of literacy standards across the curriculum. Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects are embedded in the reading and writing standards at each grade level K-5. However, in the secondary grades, this content is differentiated by grade band (6-8, 9-10, and 11-12) in three separate sections: Reading Standards for History/Social Studies; Reading Standards for Science and Technical Subjects, and Writing Standards for History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects. Unlike other state standards, the Common Core State Standards recognize that students read and write in different ways in various disciplines (Kendall, 2011). Preservice teachers, who are preparing to teach
adolescent students, must be prepared to meet the literacy needs of all of their students, regardless of the content areas they will instruct.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) outlines four general principles for encouraging greater numbers of content area teachers to integrate literacy instruction more fully into everyday practice. First, the roles and responsibilities of content area teachers must be clearly articulated. Additionally, every academic discipline should define the essential literacy skills and strategies required for student success. Moreover, all secondary school teachers should receive initial and ongoing professional development in the literacy of their own content area. Finally, content area teachers should be provided with positive incentives and appropriate resources for literacy instruction and integration to occur across the curriculum. When these recommendations are implemented in middle and high school settings, content area teachers may be more receptive to the integration of literacy across the curriculum.

Beliefs of preservice teachers towards content area literacy strategies. The methods in which preservice teachers are taught how to think about and teach literacy in their teacher education programs could strongly influence the literacy practices in their future classrooms (Hall, 2005). Content area literacy courses taught in teacher education programs commonly include the goal of helping preservice teachers understand that literacy is the responsibility of all teachers at the middle and high school level, not just the charge of language arts instructors (Alger, 2009). Although content area literacy courses provide preservice teachers with an overview of literacy practices, rooted in a
sociocultural context, the majority of classes devote much time to the instruction of literacy strategies (Vacca, et al., 2011).

Throughout content area literacy courses, preservice teachers are introduced to a variety of vocabulary and comprehension strategies with the expectation that the preservice teachers will serve as facilitators of learning and select strategies that will match the needs of their future students in their respective content area classrooms (Bean, 1997; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). Explicit instruction in literacy strategies in content area literacy classrooms is viewed as one of the most effective methods of improving the comprehension of adolescent students in content area classes (McCoss-Yergian & Kreps, 2010).

However, many studies have indicated that the majority of the literacy strategies learned in content area literacy courses are not transferred into preservice teachers’ future classrooms since most novice instructors leave behind a fair majority of the knowledge gained in their teacher education programs (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). This is often based on the beliefs that preservice teachers hold prior to entering teacher education programs and ultimately retain regarding their role and responsibility as future content area literacy instructors (Lesley, 2004).

Several studies document the resistance of preservice teachers towards incorporating content area literacy strategies into their future classrooms. Hollingsworth & Teal’s (1991) case study on the beliefs of secondary preservice teachers, after taking a foundational reading methods course, indicated that the preservice teachers did not use
content area literacy strategies in their field experiences since their cooperating teachers did not employ the use of many texts or strategies in their science classrooms.

Holt-Reynolds’s (1992) case study research with preservice teachers in the teaching fields of language arts and mathematics also determined that the preservice teachers were quick to reject the constructivist approach which had formed the basis of their content area literacy course and instead relied on a traditional teacher centered model of instruction. Additionally, the preservice teachers viewed lecturing as an effective instructional strategy which they perceived as an indication of knowledge of their content areas. Fox’s (1993) case study of five secondary student teachers in the field of language arts, also adopted the teacher centered approach to instruction that was the dominant method of teaching in their field setting. This approach minimized the use of incorporating content area literacy strategies into the curriculum.

Wilson, Konopak, and Readence’s (1993) case study research followed one preservice teacher throughout his methods courses and student teaching experience. The findings indicate that as the preservice teacher progressed through student teaching, a more traditional teacher centered approach was adopted over the student centered approach which had dominated his college courses. The preservice teacher relied heavily on the textbook as the main resource in his student teaching classroom and preferred to lecture during the majority of his lessons. The preservice teacher cited a lack of time to incorporate content area literacy strategies and relied instead on the methods and style of his cooperating teacher.
Bean’s (1997) case study followed the selection and use of content area literacy strategies by preservice teachers in two components of a related field experience. The study determined that the particular lenses through which the preservice teachers viewed their content areas and related field experiences influenced the beliefs and practices of the strategies used by the preservice teachers. Therefore, Bean’s recommendation was for teacher education programs to be designed pedagogically to explore the lenses through which the preservice teachers were viewing their learning and teaching experiences.

Barry’s (2002) research indicated that although half of the surveyed middle and high school content area teachers used literacy strategies in their content area classrooms, barriers to their use included insufficient time to prepare for the incorporation of literacy strategies, pressure to cover content standards, and a lack of professional development on the use of the strategies as hindrances to their effective incorporation.

More recently, Alger’s (2009) case study research based on her former preservice teachers’ use of literacy strategies in their content area classrooms during their first year of teaching indicated that some transferability did occur between the specific content area literacy course teachings and the instruction that occurred in the content area classrooms. Although some content area literacy strategies were used in the classrooms, the limited amount of reading required in the classrooms resulted in fewer strategies being employed. The strategies were primarily used as teaching activities to organize information or reduce the required reading of content area textbooks. Therefore, the content area literacy strategies were minimally engaging and were not used to motivate students’ reading of content area text.
The presentation of content area literacy strategies by teacher educators in a deconceptualized, small group setting often creates an idealized scene that is not replicated in subsequent field experiences. The use of content area literacy strategies are often minimized by four influential factors: (1) discipline-based theories and learning; (2) the culture of the classroom and the style of the cooperating teacher; (3) the lack of reflection on preservice teachers’ experiences; and (4) the preservice teachers’ own personal biographies as filters for reflection on teaching experiences (Bean & Zulich, 1992). These potential barriers to the integration of literacy strategies by preservice teachers should be considered as recommendations for teacher education programs, and content area literacy courses in particular, to include the restructuring of literacy courses to move beyond basic teachings of literacy strategies to a greater focus on the personal beliefs of preservice teachers and the empowerment that literacy can provide for all students across the curriculum. Additionally, increased attention to preservice teachers’ responsibilities and visions of being a content area literacy instructor may result in greater transferability of the lessons learned in teacher education programs to future classrooms.

**Reformed efforts of content area literacy courses.** Preservice teachers’ personal experiences with reading and writing form an important basis regarding their attitudes towards the incorporation of literacy activities into future instruction (Bean, 1994). Since teaching decisions are often framed in the context of a teacher’s past experiences (Carter, 1993), engaging preservice teachers in reflective practices regarding
their perceptions of the role and value of literacy in their personal lives and in the lives of their future students can provide important insights for teacher educators (Beers, 2003).

The past and current reading habits of preservice teachers should be explored in teacher education programs since the attitudes and beliefs that preservice teachers hold towards literacy may affect their future practices as teachers. Akyul & Ulusoy’s (2010) survey of Turkish preservice teachers determined that although the preservice teachers felt a responsibility for teaching reading, their own reading practices and use of strategies was rather minimal. A lack of time, poor reading habits, and a limited knowledge of many effective content area literacy strategies were cited as the most important obstacles to overcome. This study supports the increased emphasis on the value of content area literacy instruction in teacher preparation programs.

Daisey’s (2010) research with secondary preservice teachers enrolled in a content area literacy course involved the preservice teachers drawing images representative of their past literacy experiences in secondary school. The think, draw, reflect cycle employed at the beginning of the semester, as well as a subsequent survey conducted at the end of the course, provided insights into the potential and possibilities of the incorporation of reading experiences into the secondary preservice teachers’ future classrooms. Analysis of the preservice teachers’ drawings, reflections, and survey responses indicated that reading in secondary school was most often equated with thick textbooks, study strategies, and methods to supplement teachers’ lectures. Less than half the participants identified the authentic reading materials used in their classrooms, and a
very small percentage provided images that envisioned future instructional practices which would incorporate the use of literacy across the curriculum.

Daisey’s (2010) implications for the reconceptualization of content area classrooms include a strong focus on the preservice teachers’ attitudes and efforts to include literacy in their future classrooms, the modeling of discipline specific literacy strategies, the promotion of read alouds at the secondary level, and the inclusion of a variety of texts and resources into lesson plans that move beyond the traditional textbook. Exploring and acknowledging the entering beliefs of preservice teachers enables them to reflect on past experiences with literacy in their personal lives and consider the possibility of literacy in their future classrooms.

Nokes’s (2010) study on his restructured social studies methods course explored how the integration of content area literacy instruction throughout the course could build the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed of preservice teachers to incorporate literacy instruction in their history lessons. Participants in this study responded to a series of questions related to their knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout the semester. Analysis of the responses based on in class experiences indicated that 77% of the participants believed that teaching reading strategies was not a misuse of time, often citing that the reading skills their students acquired in their history courses would contribute to lifelong learning. However, only 31% of the participants suggested that social studies teachers should balance content area literacy instruction with the required content to be taught, and only 23% felt that content area literacy should be embedded in
the course content. These participants indicated that strategies to help foster students’ comprehension should be a part of the course, and did not require separate lessons.

Additionally, the participants completed a related practicum and reflective log. The participants’ responses after observing in an authentic classroom setting indicated that the preservice teachers had a growing awareness of the literacy and learning practices that were taking place in their field placements and were often critical of current literacy practices observed at the site. The preservice teachers also had a deeper awareness of the types of text being used in the classroom. They shifted their views of the social studies text as the primary source of information to the belief that multiple resources should be utilized in the classroom. Although the awareness that the preservice teachers had of their students’ literacy identities was lacking in most of the participants responses, overall, the beliefs that the preservice teachers had towards the inclusion of content area literacy in their future classrooms were overwhelming positive based on their experiences in authentic classroom settings.

Preservice teachers must understand the literacy development of their future students as well as their own personal development as they begin to accept the responsibility of incorporating literacy instruction across the curriculum. Freedman & Carver’s (2007) action research study sought to help preservice teachers realize their literacy responsibilities as future teachers. As teacher educators, the researchers’ goal was for their preservice teachers to understand their role as teachers of literacy and to recognize that each content area makes use of the processes of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing for specific purposes.
Analysis of reflective writing that occurred throughout the semester of a general methods and content area methods course indicated that preservice teachers began the course in a state of naïve wonder. The preservice teachers’ reflective responses contained overly simplistic views of teaching and a strong reference to their own experiences as students. The preservice teachers had little familiarity with literacy strategies at the beginning of the semester and questioned how the strategies would be incorporated into future lessons. At the midpoint of the semester, the preservice teachers moved to a state of dawning realization. Their responses were more concrete and shifted from a focus on self to their future students. They also provided more specific examples of content area literacy strategies and indicated the importance of using multiple materials in the classroom. At the end of the semester, the preservice teachers’ reflective responses moved to a state of intellectual rigor. The preservice teachers’ responses became more future oriented and contained references to the complicated nature of the teaching profession. The preservice teachers focused on students’ learning and the complexities of the reading and writing processes.

This study implies that patience is often necessary in changing preservice teachers’ beliefs. However, carefully designed teacher education programs that promote reflective practices can aid in challenging the beliefs of preservice teachers towards content area literacy instruction.

Balancing Preservice Teachers’ Beliefs and Professional Identity Formation

Preservice teachers’ beliefs are the attitudes and values about teaching, students, and education processes that are brought to teacher education programs (Pajares, 1993).
Since the beliefs that preservice teachers hold can strongly influence the learning that will take place in their teacher education program, as well as guide preservice teachers’ actions in their future classrooms, it is necessary for teacher education programs to provide opportunities to explore preservice teachers’ tacit, and often unarticulated beliefs, about students, teaching, and learning (Fenstermacher, 1979). Teacher education programs should begin this challenging task by designing a curriculum to support belief exploration and reasonable alterations (Pajares, 1993; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

The beliefs that preservice teachers’ espouse are not just educational, but often deeply rooted in personal experiences that are part of identity formation. Only providing opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on beliefs from a strictly educational viewpoint allows them to “divorce that perspective from the larger contexts of self, society, and culture, and examine their educational beliefs in a vacuum” (Greene, 1986, p. 499). When this separation occurs, preservice teachers only examine their educational beliefs through one lens. Teacher educators may even be led to believe that the educational beliefs of their preservice teachers have changed throughout their courses, when in reality this is not the case (Pajares, 1992).

Personal issues and deeply held assumptions about teaching are often overlooked. Teacher educators often adopt the safe practice of pretending to challenge the educational beliefs preservice teachers hold rather than explore the personal beliefs that are already present in the lives of preservice teachers, but often unarticulated (Pajares, 1993). Therefore, a balance must be created in the pedagogical structuring of teacher education programs to explore not only the beliefs of preservice teachers in regards to teaching,
Learning, students, and subject matter, but also the preservice teachers’ professional identities that are emerging throughout their teacher preparation.

**Professional Identities**

The emerging professional identity of a preservice teacher is one facet of an individual’s overall identity and includes the beliefs, practices, and values which will guide his/her actions inside and outside of the classroom (Walkington, 2005). The formation of a professional identity is multifaceted and based on the interpretations of a preservice teacher’s experiences, the individual’s interactions with others, and his/her position in society (Gee, 2000). Professional identity formation involves an understanding of the self within an outside context (i.e. school, community) and in relation to others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). It is through the interactions with others in a professional context that professional identities can be shaped and reshaped. The sociocultural perspective views teacher identity formation as both a product, which includes the influences on the preservice teacher, as well as a process of continuous interactions on the developing teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, a balance is needed between the personal and professional identities of a preservice teacher who must understand his/her own self, as well as the subject matter and pedagogical knowledge of the profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) identified four features of professional identities. First, professional identities are dynamic, or constantly evolving, through the interpretation and reinterpretation of a preservice teacher’s experiences (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010). Secondly, professional identity formation involves the
relationship between the preservice teacher and the context. It is the negotiation within the context and community through which the preservice teacher learns professional characteristics which can be adopted by the individual based on the preservice teacher’s vision of who he/she wants to become (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The realization of identity can lead to a sense of agency, or the active pursuit of professional development and learning, in which a teacher may feel empowered to move ideas forward, reach goals, and transform the context (Coldron & Smith, 1999). This notion includes a vision of seeing oneself as a teacher, as well as how others view the person as a future educator. The final characteristic is the acknowledgement that a professional identity is comprised of several sub-identities that may form a unique cohesive identity when a preservice teacher’s prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences are acknowledged and understood (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010).

**Cognitive and Affective Learning Domains**

Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), a tiered approach to learning in the cognitive domain, has been a model frequently used to educate students at all levels of learning (Ringness, 1975). In traditional teacher education programs, course objectives are often written to align to the hierarchical growth that is expected of students as they progress in intellectual activities that range from the acquisition of basic knowledge to the complexity of evaluation. More recently, the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy have been revised to reflect the importance of creating, the final level in the learning process. However, even with changes made to reflect modern educational practices, the purpose of Bloom’s Taxonomy remains relatively the same. The continuum of learning that occurs
throughout the cognitive domain is focused on a student’s intellectual thinking and his/her ability to complete a task when required (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964).

The affective domain of learning, which focuses on the attitudes, values, and beliefs of an individual, was developed to provide a systematic assessment of growth and a parallel to the continuum of learning outlined in the cognitive domain. “The ordering of the components is a process by which a given phenomenon or value is passed from a level of basic awareness to a position of some power to guide or control the behavior of a person” (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964, p. 27). The first level of the affective domain, receiving, aligns closely with the knowledge/knowing stage of its cognitive domain counterpart. At the lowest level, an individual becomes aware of an attitude, belief, or value. As the individual progresses to the second level, responding, he/she learns to differentiate between mere acquiescence in complying with an expectation to the attainment of satisfaction in response to a stimulus or phenomenon. The third level, valuing, is achieved when an individual shows consistency in behavior and demonstrates awareness, preference, and an ultimate commitment to a value. During the fourth level, organizing, the individual demonstrates the ability to conceptualize the value, as well as organize a value system. The final level of attainment, characterizing by a value or value complex, refers to an individual’s decision to live according to the desired value system.

The levels of attainment in the affective domain are focused on the process of internalization, or the inner growth experienced by an individual, as he/she moves from the exploration of an attitude, value or belief to an overt acceptance of a desired behavior. Progression through the affective domain of learning “represents a continuous
modification of behaviors from the individual’s being aware of a phenomenon to a pervasive outlook on life that influences all his actions” (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964, p. 30).

The holistic education of a student requires teaching and learning in both the cognitive and affective domains. However, it is the affective domain that has become neglected in the design of many educational courses, specifically at the college level. A review of general education courses at colleges and universities by Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964) determined that many courses were initially designed to include objectives aligned to both the cognitive and affective domains of learning. However, as the courses continued to be taught and revised, objectives related to the affective domains of learning had “eroded due to the difficulties of grading and assessing students’ interests, attitudes, or character development” (p. 29).

Moreover, the intellectual activities assessed through the cognitive domain were considered public matters and easily measurable. The acquisition of students’ knowledge could be systematically measured through achievement testing and membership in honor’s societies as a demonstration of students’ intellectual abilities. In contrast, the measurement of attitudes, values, and beliefs were considered private matters and much more difficult for teachers and society to gauge in terms of growth and development since a student’s achievement in the affective domain was viewed as future-oriented, and concerned his/her ability to engage in a behavior or make a decision when it was appropriate after learning he/she had the ability.
Additionally, a focus on students’ learning based on an exploration of attitudes, values, and beliefs was feared to result in the indoctrination of an individual to a prescribed belief system. Indoctrination is defined as “an attempt to persuade and coerce the individual to accept a particular viewpoint or belief to act in a particular manner, and to profess a particular value and way of life” (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964, p. 18). Indoctrination became viewed as the antithesis of education which always sought to provide students with free will and individual decision-making opportunities. Therefore, the emphasis on teaching students using both domains of learning shifted to a more easily perceived measurement of cognitive development.

Another assumption underlying the affective domain is the belief that the development of cognitive objectives would automatically result in the learning of affective behaviors. The majority of cognitive objectives have an affective component, and educators hope their students will develop a belief or value system towards the content being studied. Teachers have often viewed the attainment of an objective in the cognitive domain as the achievement of a goal in the affective domain or vice versa. Teachers often present their students with information intended to change their students’ attitudes or beliefs, or they attempt to develop their students’ interests and motivation for material in hopes of their students will learn the intended content in depth.

In many courses, cognitive and affective objectives are sought simultaneously. However, due to the implicit nature of objectives in the affective domain, emerging from their cognitive domain counterparts, many teachers are not cognizant of the need to consciously focus on both aspects of learning. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that
affective behaviors will automatically develop. Appropriate learning experiences must be provided for students in order for both cognitive and affective objectives to be successfully met (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964).

While it was once assumed that attitudes, values, and beliefs were slow to develop and assess, the opposite is often true. Affective behaviors can undergo even quicker transformations than cognitive behaviors when consciously focused upon in the learning environment. “Even though the whole school system rewards the student more on a can do than a does do basis, it is the latter which every instructor seeks” (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964, p. 60). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers examine their own beliefs and design courses that will promulgate both the cognitive and affective domains of learning in order to meet their students’ intellectual and attitudinal needs.

**Reformed Teacher Education Programs**

Although individual and collective teacher identities are developed and shaped in discursive environments (Gee, 1999), the majority of teacher education programs have failed to structure courses that seek to educate preservice teachers holistically (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998). Traditionally, teacher education programs have centered on developing the cognitive aspects of learning to teach with a focus on preservice teachers’ understanding of content and pedagogical knowledge (Bransford, et al., 2005). In traditional teacher education programs, the preservice teachers are treated as passive learners in which the instructor is considered the transmitter of knowledge and subject matter expert (Ashton, 1990). This model of teacher education inundates preservice teachers with hundreds of definitions, teaching strategies, and disconnected theories that
fail to challenge preservice teachers’ beliefs about the processes of learning or their visions of self as future classroom teachers (Lundeberg & Levin, 2003). This traditional approach to teaching and learning has resulted in teacher education programs being viewed as the weak intervention between preservice teachers’ past educational experiences and future teaching positions (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

In contrast, a reformed pedagogical structuring of teacher education programs provides opportunities for preservice teachers to consider and articulate their own attitudes, values, and beliefs, hear the perspectives of others, and defend challenges to their beliefs as they begin to define themselves as teachers (Lundeberg & Levin, 2003). Reformed teacher education programs promote content-rich, learner-centered teaching that emphasizes preservice teachers’ conceptual understandings. Opportunities are provided for preservice teachers to think critically, solve problems, and learn concepts that are personally relevant. Reform-based models of teacher education encourage teacher educators to become effective listeners in an effort to elicit preservice teachers’ thinking (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Pedagogically structured teacher education programs that provide opportunities for collaboration, choice, communication, community, and constructivism, anchored in sound instruction, has the potential to change the beliefs of preservice teachers through an exploration of content and self (Richardson, 2003).

A reformed approach to teacher education includes the development of a theoretically grounded view of teacher preparation that emphasizes the development of knowledge by the teacher educators and preservice teachers who are involved in the processes of learning (Tatto & Coupland, 2003). This approach provides preservice
teachers with a deep understanding of subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge, accommodations to meet the needs of diverse learners, the arrangement of learning situations that enable the preservice teachers to contribute to their own learning and understanding, and the creation of learning communities that engage preservice teachers in reflection, critical thinking, and knowledge ownership, as well as an exploration of the personal and professional selves of the preservice teachers (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005).

Reformed teacher education programs are challenged to include the exploration of preservice teachers’ beliefs into their curriculum including the identification of beliefs to explore and the methods to potentially change those beliefs. Changing the beliefs’ of preservice teachers in their teacher education program is often difficult. Tilemma (1994) determined that many preservice teachers did not change their beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching during the course of their teacher education programs. The short duration of a teacher education program coupled with limited opportunities for field work outside the student teaching experience were cited as reasons for the lack of change in the preservice teachers’ beliefs in the study. However, specific strategies that affect preservice teachers’ beliefs can be incorporated in the pedagogical design of a teacher education program to foster awareness of fundamental assumptions, the value of the emergence of new beliefs, and how these beliefs inform the identity of the developing teacher (Pajares, 1993).
Pedagogical Structuring of Reformed Teacher Education Programs

One aim of a teacher education program is to understand the formation of teacher identities, the underlying beliefs, and the subjectivities preservice teachers are negotiating as they participate in a variety of classes and begin to understand the affect the courses have on them as developing professionals (Danielewicz, 2001). Successful teacher education programs help preservice teachers make connections between and among courses and content, make links between on-campus courses and field experiences, collect and analyze student data to inform instructional decisions, and provide continuous guidance to preservice teacher through explicit instruction (Risko, 2009).

Since preservice teachers are not naturally inclined to develop characteristics of effective teachers independently, teacher education courses must be pedagogically structured to explain, demonstrate, evaluate and support the preservice teachers in a supportive, risk-free environment. Pedagogy is the process of structuring activities, interactions, events, and assignments in teaching according to ideas that will complement theories of identity development and belief exploration (Danielewicz, 2001). Pedagogy is more than teaching; it is about promoting self-understanding and self-identity that stems from purposefully designed learning encounters (Vygotsky, 1978). Teacher education programs can design courses with principles of pedagogy in mind to promote the exploration of beliefs and development of teacher identities through structural and performance standards. Structural principles of pedagogy inform the approach to the course design and methods, describe general properties that characterize the curriculum, and shape the class environment. These principles include the promotion and
incorporation of dialogic engagement and reflective inquiry. Performance principles of pedagogy concern what individuals do and focuses on the actions of teachers in learning situations. These principles include a focus on the development of agency and enactment in preservice teachers.

**Structural principles of pedagogy-dialogic engagement.** Teacher education programs should provide a rich dialogic environment in which preservice teachers can explore their emerging personal and professional selves. Through dialogic exchanges, social knowledge and identities are constructed. Dialogic engagement enables preservice teachers to explore and question their own developing beliefs and visions, as well as their peers (Hall, 2009). The most important aspect of dialogue is the form and nature of the exchange that occurs between two individuals (Bakhtin, 1986). The dialogic form consists of two parts-utterance and answer. One person speaks and the other responds. Meaning is created at the point where two or more voices come into contact. The dialogic process also contains the ethical component referred to as “answerability”. As participants engage in dialogue, they are also responsible for the meanings that are created since all statements are subject to the judgment and reaction of the listeners.

The many similarities that often exist in preservice teachers’ backgrounds, including their limited classroom teaching experiences, might suggest that preservice teachers’ perspectives would be quite similar and reinforce their beliefs, however, this is not often the case. No two individuals will have the same interpretation of spoken or written text despite the similarities that may appear to exist (Hall, 2009). Each person’s prior experiences are unique and allow for differences in interpretations to occur even in
the most seemingly similar groups (Bakhtin, 1986). The social interactions between preservice teachers and others in the collective may expose the preservice teachers to alternative beliefs and perspectives that may have been unarticulated otherwise (Hall, 2009). Dialogic engagement can also result in varying degrees of power and influence on the developing identities of preservice teachers since regardless of the images of self preservice teachers project, they cannot control how others will perceive them. The experiences that are created between speakers and listeners are always a collaborative effort and may contribute to new understandings as professional identities emerge and new visions are developed through participation in a discursive environment.

A teacher identity is constructed through the interaction of internal and external forces in the midst of social interaction, which occurs through engagement in multiple discourses (Alsup, 2006). In linguistics, discourse refers to the concrete actions or the actual interpersonal activities that involve language; the language itself used by individuals to make meaning and communicate (Danielewicz, 2001). Discourses are also defined as “ways in which language functions in specific contexts and on social and ideological relations which are constructed in and through language” (Williams, 1983, p. 39). However, Gee (1999) expanded the definition of d/Discourse to include more than spoken and written language but the incorporation of activities and actions that are both internal and external along the mind-body-spirit continuum.

It is d/Discourse that allows preservice teachers to bring personal subjectivities, or ideologies, into the classroom and connect them to their developing professional selves. Alsup’s (2006) qualitative study of six preservice secondary language arts
teachers used a narrative approach to understand the emerging personal and professional identities of the developing preservice teachers. Through careful pedagogical structuring of a methods course, which included opportunities for participation in various genres of discourse designed to facilitate dialogic engagement, Alsup encouraged her preservice teachers to engage in “borderland discourse” to understand the connections between past and present experiences in their lives. Borderland discourse is one form of discourse in which personal and professional subjectivities come into contact at the “borderland” (Gee, 1999) or a newly created space that integrates the personal and professional selves (Jenkins, 1996). It is through borderland discourse that the preservice teachers became critically reflective and learned that a teacher identity is more than a singular subjectivity but rather a continuous sense of becoming (Britzman, 1991).

The preservice teachers who engaged in frequent borderland discourse were more likely to successfully navigate the tensions associated with becoming a teacher and the narrowly defined professional role that has been culturally defined of educators (Alsup, 2006). The preservice teachers who narratively expressed tensions associated with student vs. teacher selves, personal beliefs vs. professional expectations, and educational ideologies vs. practical methods of instruction, were far likelier to pursue a teaching position upon graduation and remain in the teaching profession in subsequent years.

Alsup’s (2006) research has many implications for teacher education programs to promote the identity development of preservice teachers. Opportunities should be provided for preservice teachers to articulate their “apprenticeships of observation” (Lortie, 1975) or their reliance on imitation of teaching and decision making processes
gleaned from their own experiences in classroom settings. Failure to make tacit assumptions explicit can result in curricular and pedagogical practices that will not meet the needs of their future students. Preservice teachers also need a forum to speak about their emerging understandings of teaching, societal expectations, and their developing situated identities in a supportive environment. Additionally, preservice teachers should be encouraged to engage in the use of borderland discourse. Engaging in borderland discourse does not merely move preservice teachers from one discursive space to another (student to teacher). Rather it provides an ambiguous space of reflection and becoming where preservice teachers can experiment with who they are and what the teaching profession entails individually and collectively.

**Structural principles of pedagogy-reflective practices.** Undergirding the structural principles of reformed teacher education programs is engagement of preservice teachers in reflective practices. Preservice teachers need opportunities to engage in reflective inquiry regarding their own beliefs and how those beliefs will inform the decisions they will make in their future classrooms (Clark & Medina, 2000). Reflecting on their own learning can help preservice teachers take the first step in making their own assumptions about teaching and learning explicit. Providing time for preservice teachers to reflect and discuss the learning conditions and situations that enable them to actively learn can be an effective method since a causal relationship exists between a teacher’s reflective practices, pedagogical skills, and students’ achievement (Marzano, 2012).

Once students have had the opportunity to identify key characteristics of positive learning experiences in their own educational histories, they are often more prepared to
make sense of what they are learning in their teacher education programs about teaching in general, or in specific content areas. Courses for preservice teachers may be even more effective if they include opportunities to monitor their own learning in the course to help them appreciate how being metacognitive can help facilitate greater understanding. By making tacit theories explicit, preservice teachers can continue to evaluate their assumptions and make changes throughout the semester. Preservice teachers must become reflective practitioners and engage in “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action” (Schön, 1983). “Reflection-in-action” refers to an educator reflecting and changing behavior in the midst of teaching. “Reflection-on-action” encourages teachers to look back on what was taught in order to guide future teaching experiences (Schön, 1983). Both components of reflection can be instrumental in the development of a preservice teacher’s sense of self as an emerging professional.

Reflection is a key component in the creation of a preservice teacher’s professional identity. Through reflection, preservice teachers can become in tune with their sense of self and come to understand how the self fits into the larger context with others (Ezer, Gilat, & Sagee, 2010). Since most preservice teachers’ professional identities are tentative and unarticulated, there is a call for teacher education programs to provide a context to explore preservice teachers’ identities through various formats. Teacher education programs need to provide a wide range of situations and experiences in which teachers can interact, develop, and become aware of their possible identities (Coldron & Smith, 1999).
Teachers’ professional identities can often be defined in terms of a narrative of their lived experiences (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Narratives written about teachers and their practice, as well as the discourses, in which they engage, provide opportunities for exploring and revealing aspects of the self. Thinking, writing, and sharing the history of reading and writing enables an individual to construct beliefs about how students learn to read and write, as well as how literacy will be taught in the classroom (Boggs & Golden, 2009).

Literacy narratives can be used to promote reflective thinking and instruction of literacy practices. The use of literacy narratives in teacher education programs often focuses on the role of literacy in the lives of preservice teachers and their past experiences of learning to read and write (Grisham, 2000). However, literacy narratives may also contain preservice teachers’ connections between their literacy histories and their current beliefs and practices towards teaching language arts (Moje, 1994). Moreover, the autobiographical writings can also include the developing identity of the preservice teacher as a literacy educator and address the conflicts which may exist between preservice training and field experiences in authentic classroom settings (Gomez, 2009).

Preservice teachers can gain insight through critical reflection opportunities as they engage in self-inquiry through the telling and interpreting of their own stories (Brown, 1999). Reflections on teachers’ past experiences can help them find their voice and can aid in the formation of their literate identities, a sub-category of professional identity. Literate identities are defined as a sense of self as a literate person and the
knowledge and beliefs about literacy practice inside and outside of the classroom (Drake et. al, 2001, Gomez, 2005). However, increased opportunities are needed to engage preservice teachers in self-inquiry as professional identities and visions emerge throughout the teacher education program.

The use of new literacies has also provided preservice teachers to engage in reflective practices electronically. On-line discussions have the potential to influence and even change preservice teachers’ beliefs because they can provide alternative perspectives from peers and instructors who may be viewed as “more capable others”. The multiple perspectives that emerge throughout electronic dialogues may not have been previously considered by the preservice teachers and have the potential to alter their existing beliefs. On-line discussions engage preservice teachers in the processes of reflection, feedback, support, evaluation, questioning, and problem solving (Lundeberg & Levin, 2003). Since preservice teachers are required to articulate and defend their own beliefs about topics under discussion, on-line dialogue may be viewed as a valuable tool for influencing preservice teachers’ beliefs (Lundeberg & Levin, 2003).

Increased opportunities to engage in critical reflective practices can result in the promotion of reflexivity in a teacher preparation program. A reflexive pedagogy is one that “uses reading and writing as vehicles for constructing, deepening, and challenging students’ and teachers’ understandings of their subjects and themselves” (Qualley, 1997, p. 137). It involves using language to make, change, or question a preservice teacher’s understanding of self in relation to other individuals in a certain situation. Reflexivity is a form of self-awareness and instrumental in the development of teacher identities. It
involves preservice teachers actively analyzing past events and experiences with the goal of critique and revision for the purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in beliefs and behavior. “Being reflexive allows preservice teachers to reinvent themselves by returning to experiences or understandings and rethinking them and in the process creating selves that take into account new ideas and experiences as beliefs are challenged and changed” (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 158). Identities are produced by this reflexive process as prior assumptions about self and others are recognized and evaluated in light of the learning context (Danielewicz, 2001).

**Performance principles of pedagogy.** In addition to structural components of a teacher education program, performance principles of pedagogy can give voice to preservice teachers through the discussion and promotion of agency and enactment. Agency is defined as the power to act, make decisions, exert pressure, participate, or remain strategically silent (Kennedy, 1999). Preservice teachers must develop a sense of agency to maintain internal motivation towards the teaching profession when external forces of schooling (i.e. mandated curriculum, high stakes testing, diverse students’ needs, and low wages) may lead to questions of career choice.

Developing agency and a teacher identity is often viewed as a reciprocal process. Since agency is considered the starting place of doing, involving the will to act, then teacher education programs must consciously cultivate preservice teachers’ beliefs in their abilities to accomplish their goals as future educators (Bransford, et al., 2005). By encouraging preservice teachers to develop and express visions of ideal classroom practice in the context of meaningful experiences that foster self-representations, then
internalized visions of self (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991) can be articulated. These visions can promote the principle of enactment in which preservice teachers will give voice to their ideologies and put their beliefs, feelings, and ideas into action in future middle school classrooms while providing opportunities for their own adolescent learners to explore developing senses of self.

**Teachers’ Visions**

Becoming an effective teacher is a multifaceted process that involves learning to attend to numerous factors in the classroom setting. Kennedy (2005) identified six main areas of teachers’ concerns: (1) covering desirable content; (2) fostering student learning; (3) increasing students’ willingness to participate; (4) maintaining lesson momentum; (5) creating a civil classroom community; and (6) attending to their own cognitive and emotional needs. Many teachers struggle to balance the concerns competing for their attention and rely on habits, rules of thumb, or a specific method or theoretical orientation to meet their daily challenges (Duffy, 2002).

However, the pedagogical knowledge that teachers possess is not merely enough to ensure the successful instruction of their students. Teachers must also understand that the complexity of the teaching profession requires the ability to weave together a variety of strategies and materials and learn to incorporate instructional modifications that are best suited for the situation in which they find themselves (Duffy, 2002).

Successful teachers are not dependent on personal beliefs or prescribed teaching methods to direct their instructional practices, but form visions to help them reach their goals and meet their students’ needs. Duffy (2002) defined a teacher’s vision
as “a conscious sense of self, of one’s work, and of one’s mission…a personal stance that arises from deep within the inner teacher and fuels independent thinking” (p. 334).

Visioning is a process that provides a structure for examining how teachers’ beliefs inform their instructional practices (Squires & Bliss, 2004). Although visions are derived from teachers’ beliefs, visioning is not an idealist notion but a concrete sense of purpose that provides a clear direction for a teacher to move forward (Kennedy, 2006).

The goal of visioning is for teachers to develop as independent thinkers who will make instructional decisions based on their personal commitments to their students and teaching (Duffy, 2002). Teachers’ passions for their own missions and ideal classroom images inform and guide their thoughts and actions over a particular method, theory, or program. Teachers who are guided by their visions continuously adjust, adapt, and invent their practice and are always aware of their destination (Hammerness, 2003). Visioning also enables teachers to change directions when roadblocks are encountered in order to reach their determined goals (Kennedy, 2006).

Hammerness (2003) articulated five elements of teachers’ vision statements that can be used to structure the ideal images of their classrooms: (1) the sights and sounds of the classroom; (2) the role of the students; (3) the role of the teacher; (4) the curriculum and how it relates to students’ learning; and (5) the relationship between the classroom and the greater society of the 21st century. Although teachers’ visions are vivid, powerful, and concrete, they can evolve over time and vary across three dimensions (Hammerness, 2003). The focus of the vision, identified as the central interest, may be sharply defined images or blurry and vague ideas. The range of the vision is based on the
scope of the focus. A narrow or specific range may be centered on an individual student or classroom, while a panoramic or broad range may take into account the entire school or surrounding community. The distance of the vision refers to the relation of the teacher’s vision to his/her current practice. Visions may be very close or quite far from the actual reality the teacher is experiencing.

Squires and Bliss (2004) relied on the use of teachers’ vision statements to provide support and clarification of their research with literacy teachers. Their study involved analyzing the responses and observations of two elementary reading teachers towards their beliefs and practices in regards to the use of literature circles in their classrooms. While responses from a modified Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) (DeFord, 1985) and observations for one of the participants indicated coherence between beliefs and classroom practice, a disconnect was determined between the stated beliefs and observed practices for the second participant.

Therefore, the researchers analyzed the vision statements written by both participants to move beyond what literacy choices were made and how they were enacted to why specific literacy practices were employed in the classroom. The vision statements allowed both participants’ voices to emerge and the beliefs that the two participants had in common made deeper sense to the researchers despite an outward difference in observed classroom practices.

Visioning can also be an effective tool to clarify how the beliefs of preservice teachers will influence their instructional practices in their future classrooms (Hammerness, 2003). Helping preservice teachers understand and develop visions can
potentially aid them in becoming effective classroom teachers. Providing preservice teachers a forum to focus on vision enables them to explore their beliefs and also understand the limitations of their perceptions (Hall, 2009). In a supportive course context, vision can help scaffold preservice teachers and sustain their sense of self-efficacy, or their belief in their ability to accomplish future tasks. Visioning provides a means to surface and examine existing beliefs, challenge beliefs, and understand the gap that may exist between preservice teachers’ hopes and their intended practice (Hammerness, 2003).

Preservice teachers’ visions are often influenced by their developing professional identities and are continuously constructed and reconstructed based on the experiences, social interactions and context of their teacher education courses. Hall (2009) determined that the formation of her preservice teachers’ visions was hindered by the conflicting personal beliefs and societal expectations of being a literacy teacher. Hall’s participants engaged in a book club based on the concept of culturally responsive teaching during a literacy methods course and were asked to share their visions of becoming culturally responsive literacy teachers in their future classrooms.

The participants’ initial visions were based on an autonomous model (Street, 1995) of literacy in which a skills-based approach to reading and writing practices was predominately identified. However, midway through the course and book club discussion, 96% of the preservice teachers envisioned becoming a teacher who would promote culturally responsive practices in his/her classroom. Three-fourths of the participants also indicated that they would take an activist role in their teaching.
However, when given a choice at the end of the semester if the preservice teachers would enact their vision and not compromise their instruction or compromise and, therefore, marginalize their students in order to achieve a positive social status with their colleagues in a future school setting, over 88% were willing to compromise their visions and preserve the status quo in order to be considered favorably by their colleagues.

These disappointing findings support the understanding that preservice teachers’ beliefs “play an important role in their development and enactment of their professional identities and visions” (Hall, 2009, p. 314). Despite the initial positive reactions of the preservice teachers towards their vision of becoming culturally responsive teachers, the participants did not envision a place for culturally responsive teaching in their classroom. Since Hall’s use of visioning was based on one specific aspect of the literacy methods course, the use of book clubs, she recommends that visioning and professional identity development form the foundation of methods courses to ground the instructional decision making practices of preservice teachers.

Teacher education programs that are pedagogically structured to support the development of visioning help preservice teachers determine their purpose for teaching, commitment to the teaching profession, and identify realistic steps to accomplish their goals. Additionally, teacher education programs also help preservice teachers develop episodic visions, or more context specific views, thus helping them understand that classes will not be ideal places every day. Visioning provides preservice teachers with the inner strength to maintain their professional focus when they encounter the challenges of student teaching and first year teaching positions (Veenman, 2004) and can result in
the agency and courage to make informed decisions in future classroom experiences (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998).

Hammerness’s (2004) case study research with two first year teachers determined that the teacher who lacked vision struggled to maintain her passion for teaching and left the profession due to the challenges she faced as a novice instructor. However, the teacher who demonstrated clarity in her vision was able to handle the conflicts she was experiencing between her personal teaching beliefs and pressures regarding accountability and standardization. Teachers who have a clear sense of vision understand that there will always be doubts, concerns, and questions in their daily teaching practices. However, with vision, educational dreams and goals still remain attainable and can provide the motivation needed for teachers to move forward in making their visions a reality.

**The Role of the Teacher Educator**

The role of the teacher educator is integral in designing and facilitating courses that will give voice to preservice teachers’ beliefs and support the formation of visions of intended classroom practice. If beliefs predict action, than teacher educators must help preservice teachers to identify, challenge, and perhaps alter their beliefs in a deliberate and ongoing way as they consider teaching and learning practices in general or in specific content areas in light of their emerging professional identities and visions of teaching at the middle school level (Lesley, 2004).

In order for preservice teachers to explore new pedagogical knowledge and develop visions of self, it is imperative that they are guided by a teacher educator who is
a knowledgeable, experienced, and a more capable other. Teacher educators can play a vital role in helping preservice teachers’ identify and examine the beliefs that guide their visions and provide reasonable alternatives (Hall, 2009). Pajares (1993) advocates the creation of dissonance, or tension, in teacher education programs as a method to challenge preservice teachers’ beliefs. Encouraging preservice teachers to behave in a manner that is inconsistent with their current beliefs, attitudes, or values, such as using a constructivist model rather than a transmission model of teaching, can help the preservice teachers experience success with different educational approaches. Opportunities for dissonance can result in new perceptions since change always follows rather than precedes a modification in behavior. Creating dissonance can also occur when teacher educators serve as mediators who challenge or call attention to inconsistencies in the beliefs of preservice teachers (Rokeach, 1968).

Moreover, teacher educators need to be models of thinking for their preservice teachers and the exploration of their beliefs, professional identities, and emerging visions. Pajares (1993) recommends that teacher educators employ a Socratic method in the classroom to illuminate the tacit beliefs of the preservice teachers and create meaning through the processes of questioning and clarifying. Additionally, teacher educators can play the role of adversary in the Socratic method by helping preservice teachers’ challenge their taken-for-granted conceptions that often undermine the acquisition of new knowledge.

Before teacher educators can expect their preservice teachers to engage in practices to address, challenge, and alter their beliefs about teaching and learning and
form visions of intended classroom practice, teacher educators need to engage in their own form of self-study (Hall, 2009). Self-study enables teacher educators to explore aspects of the hidden curriculum in the structuring of their own courses. Often the teaching methods, assignments, and evaluation designed and enacted by the teacher educator may be in conflict with the intended goal of providing a democratic course designed to meet the needs of their 21st century learners (Pajares, 1993). An examination of teacher educators’ beliefs, or folk pedagogies, is necessary to guide the exploration of preservice teachers’ beliefs, development of professional identities that balances personal and professional expectations, and the formation of visions that will direct their future instruction (Hammerness, 2006).

**Summary**

The review of literature related to this study has provided a background into preservice teachers’ beliefs regarding teaching, in general, and specific beliefs in the area of literacy instruction across the curriculum. Preservice teachers’ beliefs most often predict the actions that will take place in their classrooms. However, as the research has indicated, the beliefs of preservice teachers are often tacitly held and frequently remain unexplored in traditional teacher education programs. Resistance towards integrating literacy practices in content area classrooms continues to exist among middle and high school instructors. Although some teacher education programs have made a concerted effort to implement reforms that address the cognitive and affective components of becoming a teacher, the majority of programs are still based on traditional conceptual
frameworks that neither acknowledges the developing professional identities nor visions of preservice teachers in their future classrooms.

Some research exists on the reformed efforts of teacher education programs to provide courses that are based on inquiry learning in which reflection and dialogic engagement undergird the instruction. However, there is no specific research that links the pedagogical structuring of reformed teacher education courses to the development of preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and the role of visioning in literacy methods courses. Therefore, this study sought to explore how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities. Additionally, the study focused on understanding how the pedagogical structuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. I sought to determine if a literacy methods course that was designed to stimulate reflective practices and dialogic engagement would aid in the preservice teachers’ understandings of becoming instructors of middle childhood education. This study was significant because it added to the limited research on the development of preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities and the use of visioning as a conceptual tool within a middle childhood education literacy methods course. The use of visioning was specifically focused on the preservice teachers’ beliefs and tensions towards teaching literacy across the curriculum. I used a qualitative case study approach to explore the experiences of the preservice teachers as they were provided opportunities to actively participate in the middle childhood education literacy methods course, constructed their own understandings of what it meant to be a teacher, and developed a voice in their own learning.
This chapter contains an overview of the research design and the rationale for selecting case study as the methodology used in this study. I describe the context of the study, including the site where the research was conducted, as well as the protocol which was used for the purposeful selection of the participants. Then, I explain the data collection methods and data analysis procedures which were used throughout the research. I also include a description of the specific methods which were used to ensure trustworthiness, and the limitations of this study.

**Qualitative Case Study**

Qualitative research emphasizes the process a researcher uses to understand the meaning that an individual or group assigns to a problem or situation (Creswell, 2007). Often referred to as “research with words,” qualitative research involves the collection of data in a natural setting, data analysis that is inductive in nature, and the establishment of patterns or themes which form the basis of the researcher’s findings (Yin, 2011). The findings of a qualitative research study can give voice to participants, provide an interpretation and description of the questions under exploration, add to the professional literature, or suggest a call for action (Creswell, 2007).

Case study research involves the in-depth study of a phenomenon or social unit which is explored through one or more cases in a bounded setting or context (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis, the case, is the main focus of the research. The unit is bounded and finite in terms of time, space, or components describing the case (Merriam, 2002). In case studies, the researcher attempts to search for meaning and understanding within the case that is anchored in real-life situations (Merriam, 1998).
Case studies are selective and focus on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined (Stake, 1995). A qualitative case study results in a thick description of the phenomenon under study containing depictions and images elicited from the participants (Merriam, 1998). Due to the purposeful selection of a case, generalizability of the findings is not possible. However, the selection of multiple cases, or the study of subcases, can lead to the transferability of the findings to other settings (Yin, 2009).

Case study was the methodology of choice in this research study as I attempted to understand how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to the preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The study was classified as a collective or multiple case study. The multiple cases were selected from one particular middle childhood education literacy methods course. The case study also involved the collection of multiple data sources which helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Data was collected from the preservice teachers through participant-observation, written and visual documents, and interviews. This case study was bounded by time (fall 2012 semester) and setting (middle childhood education literacy methods course).

**Context of the Study**

**Setting.** This case study was conducted with preservice teachers enrolled in the *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* literacy methods course during the fall 2012 semester at a private, liberal arts institution of higher education. The university,
located in Northeast Ohio, offers undergraduate teacher education programs in early childhood education, middle childhood education, adolescent/young adult education, and mild/moderate educational needs. The university also offers graduate teacher education programs in leadership, literacy, mild/moderate educational needs, and educational technology. During the semester in which the study was conducted, the university had a total enrollment of 4,177 students in its combined undergraduate and graduate programs. The enrolled students were 57% female and 43% male and were representative of the following: 6% African American, 1% Asian, 80% Caucasian, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Unspecified, and 4% other.

All education courses in the Division of Education at the university in which the research was conducted are based upon a conceptual framework designed by the full-time faculty members. Although the goal of the conceptual framework is to provide a structure for meeting the needs of the preservice teachers enrolled in education courses, the focus of the majority of the methods courses has primarily centered on the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge of the candidates. The integration of technology, awareness of diversity issues in education, and the dispositions related to the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the preservice teachers have been viewed as secondary components and have not been given equal consideration in the planning and teaching of many courses including *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* (Figure 2).

Therefore, the site and more specifically the middle childhood education literacy methods course, were selected to study since understanding how the pedagogical structuring of a literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to preservice teachers’
emerging professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum in a traditional teacher education program had been limited in the review of professional literature. Additionally, I was the instructor of the middle childhood education literacy methods course and sought to understand how the pedagogical structuring of the course that I designed informed the emerging professional identities and visions of the preservice teachers whom I instructed. By making my positioning known to my participants and engaging in practices that helped to ensure the trustworthiness of my
study, I intended to control for my own biases in my dual role as researcher and instructor.

**Course.** *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* is a required course for all middle childhood education majors, regardless of their chosen teaching fields. Since most preservice teachers in middle childhood education were pursuing a combination of three of the four content areas at the university in which the research was conducted (mathematics/science, mathematics/social studies, or science/social studies), they often entered the literacy methods course with some resistance and questioned the purpose of the course as future content area teachers.

*Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* is typically taken in the junior year, often in conjunction with other content methods courses, and has been traditionally designed for preservice teachers to study the techniques, materials, and philosophical approaches to reading instruction for students ages 8-14. Included in the course were the following topics: reading comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, writing, integrating literacy instruction across the curriculum, using literature to teach reading, assessing learners, and teaching reading in diverse classrooms. In the past, the course was predominately teacher-centered and focused on providing preservice teachers with a wide range of literacy strategies that could be implemented in the middle childhood classroom language arts classroom. Although the knowledge of literacy strategies can contribute to the success of preservice teachers in the field, the overemphasis on strategy instruction in the course did not provide a forum for the preservice teachers to engage in experiences that would help them examine their beliefs, articulate the role literacy would play in their
future content area classrooms, and reflect on the development of their professional identities.

The first step in the pedagogical restructuring of the course involved making changes within the same paradigm of beliefs which centered on how the course was taught to preservice teachers (Short & Burke, 1996). The course was reconceptualized to meet not only the cognitive needs of the preservice teachers, but also their affective needs by providing opportunities for the preservice teachers to explore the content of literacy instruction, but also the tensions associated with becoming future content area teachers at the middle school level through guided inquiry (Figure 3). Pedagogical structuring is defined as the instructional design of a course that provides opportunities for collaboration, communication, and choice in which preservice teachers examine and explore their beliefs, attitudes, and values within a community of learners (Richardson, 2003). A learning community provides a safe and supportive environment in which respect, high expectations, choice, collaboration, responsibility, and active involvement pervade all aspects of the teaching and learning that takes place. Teacher education programs and courses that are designed as learning communities emphasize the interrelationships between the cognitive and affective development of the preservice teachers and the context in which the learning takes place (Hammerness, et al., 2005).
How is *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* taught to preservice teachers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designed as a teacher-centered course</th>
<th>Designed as a student-centered course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused on the future middle school</td>
<td>Focused on the professional identities of the preservice teachers, as well as the future middle school students the preservice teachers would instruct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students the preservice teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would instruct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum based on best practices of</td>
<td>Curriculum based on the integration of literacy instruction across the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>literacy instruction in the middle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school language arts classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduced preservice teachers to</td>
<td>Introduc<strong>ed</strong> preservice teachers to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general literacy strategies</td>
<td>more specific content area literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasized the cognitive domain of</td>
<td>strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on the coverage of course</td>
<td>Balanced the cognitive and affective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material</td>
<td>domains of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused on guided inquiry learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.* Initial changes in the pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*

The class met on campus during the first ten weeks of the semester for approximately four hours per week. During the on-campus portion of the course, the preservice teachers were engaged in experiences and assignments that were designed as guided inquiry opportunities. Guided inquiry learning involves the teacher determining specific lines of inquiry related to the topic of study in order for the students to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the topic (Short, 2010). The assignments included writing literacy narratives, creating literacy metaphor posters, dialoguing with
peers through electronic journaling, microteaching lessons and leading pedagogical discussions of their decision making processes through reflective essays, and writing vision statements that articulated the preservice teachers’ ideal images of classroom practice. The assignments were specifically designed to meet both the cognitive and affective domains of learning for the preservice teachers within the restructured learning environment (see Table 1).

The last five weeks of the semester, the preservice teachers completed supervised field experiences in local middle school classrooms in order to plan and teach a curricular unit of instruction in an authentic setting aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Although the preservice teachers no longer met on campus during the last weeks of the semester, conversations persisted through electronic journaling which provided opportunities for the preservice teachers to continue their dialogic exchanges and reflective practices.

Throughout the entire course, the preservice teachers were encouraged to explore their personal and professional aspects of self as they began to negotiate their own and society’s expectations of becoming teachers of middle childhood education and their role in teaching literacy across the curriculum. All experiences in the course were designed to provide the preservice teachers with opportunities for dialogic engagement, reflective practices, and visioning as they explored the teaching of literacy across the curriculum, as well as their own developing professional identities through guided inquiry learning (Figure 4).
Table 1

*Aligned Course Assignments to the Cognitive and Affective Learning Domains*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Domain (Bloom, 1956)</th>
<th>Affective Domain (Krathwohl, 1965)</th>
<th>Aligned Course Assignments/Structure of Learning Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Creating (Compiling information in a different way.)</td>
<td>5. Characterizing (Holding a particular value or belief that can influence behavior.)</td>
<td>Opportunities for continuous reflection, dialogic engagement, and visioning to aid candidates in their understanding of the influence of their beliefs on instructional practice and positioning as future middle school teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Evaluating (Making judgments about information.)</td>
<td>4. Organizing (Putting together different values by comparing, relating, and elaborating on what has been learned.)</td>
<td>Vision Statements: Written reflections completed at the beginning and end of the semester to share concrete images of future classroom practice shared with the instructor and discussed informally throughout the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Analyzing (Examining and breaking information into parts.)</td>
<td>3. Valuing (Attaching a value to the acquired knowledge.)</td>
<td>Literacy Metaphor Posters: Creation of electronic posters depicting literacy beliefs shared in a whole-class setting. Reflective Essays: Critically-reflective writing and dialoguing within a community of learners in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Applying (Using new knowledge to solve problems in different ways.)</td>
<td>2. Responding (Actively participating in learning.)</td>
<td>Literacy Narratives: Written reflections regarding literacy beliefs shared with instructor and in informal classroom dialogues. Electronic Journals: Electronic dialogues within a community of learners to reflect and share beliefs on professional identity and literacy topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understanding (Demonstrating understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, and interpreting.)</td>
<td>1. Receiving (Passively paying attention to information.)</td>
<td>Whole-class and small-group instruction on effective literacy practices for middle school students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Remembering (Exhibiting memory of information.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the course was reconceptualized to focus on the curricular and instructional recommendations of the Association for Middle Level Education’s (2010), *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*. The newly designed learning opportunities were relevant to the preservice teachers as they were encouraged to make connections between their individual beliefs and the needs of their future students in discipline specific classrooms. The course was integrative by providing the preservice teachers opportunities to envision multiple facets of teaching and create overall visions to guide their way. The course was challenging by focusing on the preservice teachers’ belief exploration, critical thinking skills, and defining rationales for teaching literacy across the curriculum. Additionally, the course was exploratory and pushed the preservice teachers to determine who they wanted to be as future educators.
The physical classroom where the on-campus course was taught enabled the preservice teachers to learn and explore in a positive learning atmosphere. Through an eTech Ohio grant, the physical environment of the university classroom was designed the previous year as a model middle school learning environment. The top half of the walls was painted sky blue, whereas the bottom half of the walls was painted grass green. The traditional stationary desks and chairs were replaced with movable tables and chairs that were configured into four clusters. The classroom contained a cart of technology equipment that was available to the preservice teachers at all times and included iPods, iPads, netbooks, and laptop computers. Additionally, lap desks and bean bag chairs were placed throughout the room for use by the preservice teachers. A wind chime, which hung in the corner of the classroom, was used to call the preservice teachers to attention and/or quiet the class. The learning environment was calm, colorful, and promoted a sense of community and collaboration.

Prior to the beginning of the fall semester, I received consent to conduct research during my middle childhood education literacy methods course from the chair of the education division of the university in which the research was conducted. I also received approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board to engage in research during the 2012-2013 academic year.

Participants. Eleven preservice teachers were enrolled in Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education during the fall 2012 semester. The class included seven female and four male preservice teachers majoring in middle childhood education, and were representative of the following teaching fields: language arts/mathematics (2);
language arts/science (1); language arts/social studies (2); mathematics/science (3); mathematics/social studies (2); science/social studies (1). Additionally, one female graduate student pursuing a master’s degree in special education was enrolled in the course.

During the second week of the semester, I informed the preservice teachers of the research study I was conducting in conjunction with their course throughout the fall semester. The preservice teachers were informed of the purpose of the research and their opportunity to become a participant. I also discussed my dual role as the instructor of the course and the researcher of this study. The preservice teachers had an opportunity to ask questions about the nature of the research and were reassured that no known risks existed with their participation in the research besides those normally present in the college classroom. The preservice teachers were told that participation in the research study was voluntary, and their decision to participate in the study would not affect their grade or standing in the course. The preservice teachers would not be compensated for their participation in the research and would have the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

The preservice teachers were asked to consider their participation in the research study which involved the collection of data from classroom observations, written and visual documents which would be completed throughout the course, and participation in three interviews throughout the semester. Regardless of their participation in the study, all preservice teachers enrolled in the course would be completing all the required assignments that would form the basis of data collection. The interviews would be the
only additional source of data collection required of the purposefully selected participants. During the third class meeting, all preservice teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A) in order for me to learn more information about the preservice teachers, as well as their interest in participating in the research study.

The questionnaire involved the preservice teachers stating their teaching fields, sharing their current beliefs about the role of literacy instruction across the curriculum, and indicating their willingness and availability to participate in this study. The completed questionnaires were collected and reviewed. Three to four participants were to be purposefully selected based on their areas of concentration in middle childhood education (language arts/mathematics, language arts/science, language arts/social studies, mathematics/science, mathematics/social studies, or science/social studies), desire to participate in the research, and their availability to be interviewed throughout the semester.

The preservice teachers who were selected to participate in this research study were chosen based on purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling involves the selection of participants in a deliberate manner and is the typical protocol for the choice of participants in case study research (Yin, 2011). The intended goal of the sample was to select participants who represented diversity in their middle childhood education teaching fields and expressed varying beliefs towards literacy and the teaching of literacy across the curriculum at this point in the semester. Once the selection of the participants had been made based upon their responses to the questionnaire, the preservice teachers were
notified of their participation during the third week of the semester. The preservice teachers were then provided more detailed information regarding the study and an explanation of informed consent. The preservice teachers were encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of the study. After all questions had been answered during the meeting, the preservice teachers were asked to sign the consent form and were provided a copy for their records (see Appendix B).

A brief description of the participants in the research study follows. (All names are pseudonyms.) A summary of the participants is provided in Table 2. A summary of the participants’ initial literacy beliefs is provided in Table 3.

Table 2

Participant Summary Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Teaching Fields</th>
<th>Campus Extracurricular Activities</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Middle Childhood Education (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>Science; Social Studies</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Served in the Army for 10 years; Seeking first college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Middle Childhood Education (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>Language Arts; Social Studies</td>
<td>Varsity Basketball Player</td>
<td>Taught by his mother who was a middle school language arts teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Middle Childhood Education (Undergraduate)</td>
<td>Mathematics; Science</td>
<td>Sorority Vice President; Office of Community Outreach assistant</td>
<td>Parents immigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela; Spanish spoken by parents at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Participants’ Initial Literacy Beliefs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Home Literacy Experiences</th>
<th>School Literacy Experiences</th>
<th>Identification as a Current Reader and/or Writer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Positive in language arts classes; Negative in content area classes</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sean.** Sean was a 38-year old male undergraduate student entering his senior year at the beginning of the research study. Sean entered the military upon graduation from high school and served in the Army for approximately ten years. After leaving the Army, he was employed as a corrections officer at a local penitentiary. Sean decided to put his military benefits to use and enrolled in the university as a middle childhood education major in the teaching fields of science and social studies. Sean was married and the father of two teenage sons.

During the second week of the semester, Sean completed the Preservice Teacher Questionnaire regarding participation in the research study. The entire class had received an overview of the study, and was provided class time to complete the questionnaire. Sean expressed that he had a high interest in participating in the study. He believed that literacy was “paramount in today’s classroom’s for academic success” (questionnaire,
September 12, 2012). He stated that his school and home experiences had contributed to his literacy beliefs. However, he wanted to provide his students with an opportunity he had not had as a student. From these statements, it seemed that Sean would have an interesting story to share. Although Sean did not feel that he would personally gain from his participation in the study, he expressed that he “had a long past and interesting experiences with education”. He was looking forward to sharing these experiences and wanted to “help others in the field”. Sean’s thought-provoking responses, high interest in participating in the research, nontraditional background, and availability to meet outside of class were all reasons that he was selected as one of the participants.

**Sawyer.** Sawyer was a 20-year old male undergraduate student in his junior year at the university. He was a middle childhood education major in the teaching fields of language arts and social studies. Sawyer was from a long line of educators in his family. His parents were both teachers in the local school district in his hometown, and his grandmother and grandfather had also served as superintendents in neighboring school districts. In high school, Sawyer attended a Teacher Preparatory Academy, and was the valedictorian of his senior class. At the university, Sawyer was a member of the men’s varsity basketball team. He was also employed as a lifeguard at the university recreation center.

Sawyer, along with his classmates, learned of my research study during the second week of the semester. Sawyer completed the Preservice Teacher Questionnaire during class, and indicated that he had a high interest in participating in the study. I was initially impressed by his current beliefs regarding literacy in which he stated, “I believe
literacy is an important part of middle childhood development, educationally and emotionally” (questionnaire, September 5, 2012). Sawyer also expressed how his beliefs were influenced by his mother and her role in his literacy development as both a parent and an educator. I wanted to explore Sawyer’s beliefs further and learn more about his mother’s role in his literacy beliefs, as well as his beliefs regarding literacy instruction during the adolescent years. Sawyer stated that he was interested in the study because he was curious to see how his views compared to other preservice teachers preparing to teach at the middle school level. Although, Sawyer had a busy schedule, he indicated that being a participant would be manageable and fun. Sawyer’s past experiences being educated by his mothers in middle school language arts classes, his current beliefs regarding the importance of literacy in both the social-emotional and cognitive domains of adolescents’ learning, and his willingness to be part of the study, resulted in his selection as a participant.

**Kim.** A 20-year old junior, Kim was a female undergraduate student majoring in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of mathematics and science. Kim grew up in a neighboring suburb, but lived on campus. She was heavily involved in campus activities, including an elected leadership position in her sorority. She also worked in the Office of Community Outreach planning and participating in local community service projects, as well as alternative winter and spring break trips. Additionally, Kim worked part time at the university bookstore.

Kim shared in her Preservice Teacher Questionnaire that she “hated reading and writing” (questionnaire, September 5, 2012), but believed that connections should be
made between literacy and content area instruction. Although Kim had strong negative views regarding her own beliefs towards literacy, her additional responses on the questionnaire indicated that she had a willingness and desire to learn more about literacy instruction including methods to integrate literacy strategies into her future mathematics and science classrooms. Kim’s initial beliefs towards literacy stemming from her past educational experiences, her openness to learning more about literacy instruction, and her availability to participate in the study resulted in her selection as a participant in the research.

**Data Collection**

“Case study data collection involves a wide array of procedures as the researcher builds an in-depth picture of the case” (Creswell, 2007, p. 132). The experiences of the purposefully selected participants were examined throughout the semester to understand if the pedagogical structuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to the preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The participants’ experiences were explored through the collection of multiple sources of data. The main sources of data collection throughout this study were participant-observations, written and visual documents (i.e. questionnaires, literacy narratives, literacy metaphor posters, electronic journal entries, pedagogical discussion essays, and vision statements), and interviews. Table 4 indicates the weekly data collection schedule for participants throughout the semester.
Table 4

Weekly Data Collection Schedule for Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Week of Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant-Observations/ Field Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Metaphor Posters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Discussions and Reflective Essays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision Statements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Journal Entries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 indicates the amount of data collected from the three purposefully selected participants. Table 6 indicates the amount of data collected from all the preservice and inservice teachers who were enrolled in Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education during the fall 2012 semester.

Table 5

Amount of Data Collected from Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Total Number of Field Note Entries</th>
<th>Total Number of Pages of Written Documents</th>
<th>Total Time of Recorded Interviews</th>
<th>Total Number of Pages of Transcribed Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1:57:24</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1:48:21</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1:08:57</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>4:14:02</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Observation/Field Notes

One of the most common data collection methods in a qualitative research study is the researcher’s field notes. I sought to make an active reconstruction of the participants’ experiences in our shared classroom setting during the on-campus portion of the course through participant-observation. Descriptive and reflective notes were recorded in my researcher’s journal regarding my experiences in the setting as well as the participants’ gestures, social interactions, and scenes within the physical environment throughout the participant-observation period (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Yin, 2011). The field notes were not merely a passive recording, but rather an active representation of the participants’ personal practical knowledge in action (Connelly & Clandinin, 1987) as
they engaged in discourses about becoming middle childhood education teachers and the role literacy would play in their future classrooms (Figure 5).

Table 6

*Amount of Data Collected from All Members Enrolled in the Course*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Total Number of Field Note Entries</th>
<th>Total Number of Pages of Written Documents</th>
<th>Total Time of Recorded Interviews</th>
<th>Total Number of Pages of Transcribed Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1:08:10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1:07:54</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2:08:15</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1:40:17</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2:00:21</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1:08:57</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyla</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1:12:10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallory</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1:24:52</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0:59:31</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1:15:51</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1:48:21</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1:57:24</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>18:00:03</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Documents

The collection of written documents can be a source of rich data in a qualitative case study. The label “documents” is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of written, visual, and physical materials that are relevant to the research (Merriam, 1998). Several of the documents collected throughout the research were classified as personal documents, or first-person accounts, that described the participants’ beliefs, experiences, and actions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Although personal documents written by participants are often subjective, they are considered a reliable source of data in case study research and provide great insight into the participants’ attitudes, values, and beliefs (Merriam, 1998).

Questionnaires. Questionnaires (see Appendix A) are a form of data collection in qualitative research that can be used to gather factual information or garner insights from participants regarding characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs about the phenomenon under study. Questionnaires are a measure of self-reporting in which researchers must
rly on the accuracy and honesty of the responses provided by the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In my study, a questionnaire was used to aid in the purposeful selection of the participants in my study. The questionnaires enabled me to elicit information from the preservice teachers’ regarding their areas of concentration in their middle childhood education program, entering beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum, and their willingness and availability to participate in a research study throughout the fall semester.

**Literacy narratives.** The participants engaged in writing literacy narratives during their middle childhood education literacy methods course to reflect on past literacy experiences at home and/or school and how those experiences had influenced their current thinking about the role of literacy in their own lives and the lives of their future middle school students (see Appendix C). Many teacher preparation programs begin with an examination of preservice teachers’ personal experiences as a productive way to trigger discussions of beliefs and biases as well as to build more universal knowledge. Engaging students in writing and sharing educational autobiographies and narratives assist preservice teachers in critically examining their own educational experiences as they become ready to engage in more formalized teacher education courses (Coulter & Smith, 1999).

Literacy narratives can be used to promote reflective thinking towards literacy practices. The use of literacy narratives in teacher education programs have traditionally focused on preservice teachers’ past experiences of learning to read and write (Grisham,
2000). However, literacy narratives may also contain preservice teachers’ connections between their literacy histories and their current beliefs and practices towards teaching language arts (Moje, 1994). By providing some guiding questions, the preservice teachers were able to not merely reflect on their past literacy experiences but also began to connect their past with their present beliefs and tensions towards teaching literacy across the curriculum. Through autobiographical writing, the preservice teachers’ professional identities began to emerge since personal narratives do not simply reflect identity but can be considered a form of self-representation (Aslup, 2006; Craig, 2010).

**Literacy metaphor posters.** Each participant employed the use of technology and created a literacy metaphor poster representing the teaching of literacy across the curriculum (see Appendix D). A metaphor is a “cognitive device for organizing and relating information” (Massengill Shaw & Mahlios’s, 2008, p. 32). The identification of metaphors in teaching and literacy enabled the preservice teachers to reflect on their own learning and experiences in their teacher education program. These visual representations were supported with written reflections, in a variety of genres, and provided the preservice teachers an opportunity to share their emerging beliefs about becoming teachers and incorporating literacy in their respective disciplines in the middle childhood classroom.

**Pedagogical discussions and reflective essays.** During the course, the preservice teachers designed a curricular unit plan that was then adapted to teach in the field. Each preservice teacher selected one of their four created lesson plans and taught the lesson to their peers using a microteaching format. After the microteaching experience, each
preservice teacher led a pedagogical discussion about the teaching of his/her lesson within a small community of learners (see Appendix E). Prior to this discussion, the preservice teachers were required to post their lesson plans to Blackboard, an electronic learning management system, for other members of the learning community to review.

Each preservice teacher also wrote a reflexive essay explaining his/her pedagogical choices demonstrated in the lesson. The reflexive essay included a discussion of research and theory from texts and information the preservice teacher had learned in class that supported his/her pedagogical choices, anecdotal or narrative evidence from past classroom experiences (either as a student or preservice teacher) demonstrating the appropriateness of these choices, and a discussion of the preservice teacher’s personal beliefs and how they were consistent with his/her pedagogical choices. A summary of this essay served as a guide for the pedagogical discussion within the community of learners, with the leader posing additional questions to the class that facilitated discussion.

**Vision statements.** Throughout the semester, the preservice teachers were asked to critically reflect on their experiences as participants in a community of learners throughout their middle childhood education literacy course and subsequent field experiences. The preservice teachers were required to create vision statements that addressed where they were headed as future middle school teachers, as well as the role and value that would be placed on literacy instruction across the curriculum in their classrooms (see Appendix F).
Guiding questions were provided to elicit the preservice teachers’ images of their ideal classrooms that encouraged them to envision the curriculum, teacher’s role, students’ role, and any greater connections to the school community based on their emerging professional identities and knowledge gained throughout the course.

**Electronic journal entries.** Small groups (4 members) of preservice teachers, randomly assigned by the instructor, formed an electronic community of learners to dialogue about the experiences of being a participant in the middle childhood education literacy course using the electronic journal feature of Blackboard (see Appendix G). The preservice teachers were required to post a journal entry in response to prompts posed by the instructor throughout various weeks of the on-campus and the field components of the course. The preservice teachers were also required to read the posts of the other members of their electronic learning community and respond to at least one other member’s comments and/or reflections by established deadlines. This assignment enabled the preservice teachers to become reflective learners as they negotiated the personal and professional expectations of the teaching profession and the role of literacy in middle childhood education classrooms.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Qualitative interviews enable the researcher to take a more conversational role with the participants compared to the format of structured interviews. Qualitative interviews can be open-ended or semi-structured enabling the participants and researcher to form an individualized relationship since a uniform behavior or demeanor is not required of the researcher with each participant (Yin, 2011). Although general questions
can be used to guide the interview, if needed, a qualitative interview promotes a two-way interaction between the researcher and the participants and encourages questions to be posed to the interviewer by the participant.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each of my purposefully selected participants three times throughout the semester (see Appendix H). The interviews took place at weeks five, ten, and fifteen of the semester which coincided with the midpoint and end of the on-campus portion of the course, as well as the culmination of the field experience. All interviews were conducted in my office located on the campus of the university where the research took place, and were scheduled for approximately thirty minutes in length. Each participant received an email which confirmed each meeting time.

Individual interviews were conducted during the first and third rounds of the interviews. However, a change in format became necessary for the second round of interviews due to the weather conditions that affected the entire campus. Therefore, small group interviews were conducted with the participants during the last week of the on-campus methods class. The decision to conduct small group interviews was made due to the severe weather from Hurricane Sandy which had resulted in the closing of the university campus for one week and the delay of the field experience portion of the course for a few days.

Rescheduling the individual interviews with all the participants was initially proving too burdensome on the preservice teachers since Sawyer and Kim had been physically displaced during the storm and were trying to balance the tensions of
completing the on-campus portion of their methods classes and beginning the required field component of their courses. However, the participants were eager to participate in group interviews with their peers. A strong classroom community had been formed throughout the first ten weeks of the semester. Therefore, the preservice teachers were comfortable sharing their views with one another and enjoyed the additional opportunity to dialogue with their peers. The group interviews were held based on the participants’ availabilities. The first group interview was conducted with Sean and Kim. One individual interview with Sawyer was conducted due to scheduling conflicts with the timing of the other group interview.

Each participant was asked to complete an audio-recording consent form prior to the recording of any interview (see Appendix I). The participants received a copy of the audio-recording consent form for their records. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded based on the constant comparative method.

Prior to the interviews, questions were developed which were bounded at the beginning and end of the interviews to serve as an invitation and culmination of the conversation (Creswell, 2007). Beginning with a “grand tour” question enabled me to establish a broad topic or scene before delving into more specifics (Spradley, 1979). For example, I began the first round of interviews by asking my participants to share their thoughts on having to take a required literacy methods course regardless of their middle childhood teaching fields. The third round of interviews began by asking the participants to describe the field component portion of the course. The participants’ responses to these questions helped guide the remainder of the interviews.
The interview questions used for this study had been conducted with preservice teachers participating in a pilot study of this research in a previous semester, and had been refined as a narrowing of the main research questions. The proposed questions were used to guide each interview; however, due to the conversational nature of qualitative interviews, new questions and topics of discussion often emerged.

As the researcher conducting the interviews, I attempted to establish and retain rapport with my participants by creating a comfortable environment to engage in conversation, invite questions, and be a good listener by taking cues from the preservice teachers regarding the light-hearted or serious nature of the conversation. I also tried to keep the conversation flowing by refraining from close-ended questions and speaking less than the participants. Additionally, I attempted to remain neutral throughout the interviews in words and actions in order to refrain from biasing the responses of the participants (Yin, 2011).

**Rationale for Data Collection Methods**

Table 7 presents a rationale for the use of each data collection method.

**Data Analysis**

“Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 157). Data analysis of the multiple case studies involved the following steps.
Table 7

*Data Collection Methods Rationale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Research Question Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation/ Field Notes</td>
<td>• Provided an ongoing source of data throughout the on-campus portion of the course through the examination of the preservice teachers’ gestures, body language, and social interactions regarding their developing professional identities and beliefs.</td>
<td>#1: Professional Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>• Elicited the preservice teachers’ current beliefs towards the teaching of literacy across the curriculum.</td>
<td>#1: Professional Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gauged the preservice teachers’ willingness and availability to participate in the research study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aided in the selection of the participants through purposeful sampling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Narratives</td>
<td>• Enabled the preservice teachers to make explicit their tacit understandings towards becoming a teacher and literacy.</td>
<td>#1: Professional Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provided the preservice teachers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how past experiences were informing their beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum in their future classrooms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Metaphor Posters</td>
<td>• Provided insight into the current beliefs of the preservice teachers’ towards literacy instruction and their emerging visions of the role literacy would play in their future classrooms.</td>
<td>#2: Visioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Discussions and Reflective Essays</td>
<td>• Provided an understanding of the choices the preservice teachers made in their lesson planning.</td>
<td>#1: Professional Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouraged the preservice teachers to connect content and pedagogy learned in class to their own lessons and become cognizant of the pedagogical choices that were made in their lessons, which might impact future lesson planning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Data Collection Methods Rationale (Continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Research Question Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Vision Statements      | • Used as a conceptual tool for preservice teachers to articulate their current and changing beliefs towards literacy instruction across the curriculum throughout the on-campus portion of the course and after the completion of the field experience.  
  • Provided insight into the preservice teachers’ professional identities as a result of their participation in the middle childhood education literacy methods course. | #1: Professional Identity  
#2: Visioning                  |
| Electronic Journal Entries | • Provided a forum for reflective practices as the preservice teachers articulated their beliefs and learned to question existing ideologies as new perspectives were introduced to them from their peers.  
  • Enabled the preservice teachers to develop emerging professional identities in which personal and professional aspects of the self began to come to light within a community of learners. | #1: Professional Identity  
#2: Visioning                  |
| Semi-Structured Interviews | • Provided an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of preservice teachers’ entering beliefs and alterations that occurred throughout the middle childhood education literacy methods course.  
  • Enabled the preservice teachers to share the personal and professional tensions they were experiencing in their search for professional identities.  
  • Aided the preservice teachers in articulating the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum and their role in literacy instruction in their future classrooms. | #1: Professional Identity  
#2: Visioning                  |
Data Management

During the fall 2012 semester, I created an organized file for each of my cases that included all sources of data collection. As the instructor of the course as well as the researcher, I was cognizant of my positioning throughout the study and the ethical decisions I made. Therefore, data collection and management were the only steps in the data analysis process that I made during the fall 2012 semester. The additional steps of data analysis began in the spring 2013 semester after the preservice teachers had completed the course and grades had been submitted.

Each preservice teacher’s file contained copies of his/her:

- informed consent forms
- literacy narrative
- literacy metaphor poster/reflective paper
- electronic journal entries
- pedagogical essay
- vision statements
- interview transcripts

Category Construction

In the spring 2013 semester, I began the data analysis process for my multiple sources of data. I decided to work with the each source of data as it had been completed chronologically throughout the fall semester. I engaged in the step-by-step process of beginning with one source of data (i.e. Sean’s literacy narrative). As I read the data source, I identified comments and jotted down codes that I found to be potentially
relevant to the study. After reading the entire document, I reread the codes and notes, and grouped similar codes together. I then read my next participant’s literacy narrative (Sawyer) and completed the same process. The notes and codes of significance from the second participant were then compared to the first participant using the constant comparative method (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This process continued within and across cases for each data set with all codes merging into one master list (Merriam, 1998).

The analysis was inductive in nature. I let the categories emerge out of the data rather than relying on predetermined categories (Stake, 1995). However, all categories were considered tentative until all data sources were analyzed. Throughout the data analysis process, I periodically recorded my thoughts in the forms of memos which enabled me to voice my feelings during this process (Figure 6).

**Category Refinement**

The next step in the data analysis process took place during the spring and summer of 2013. I reviewed the categories which had been identified in the preliminary step of category construction. Several categories were combined, thus resulting in category refinement, and the identification of preliminary themes. A color-coded system was employed to identify responses according to each theme. Any data source that would relate to a specific theme was categorized according to a specific color. After all the data sources had been analyzed separately and across cases, I looked collectively at all data sources in order to provide evidence to support each specific theme.
**Final Theme Identification**

Finally, based on the preliminary themes that emerged from the data sources and the support gathered for each, I identified two specific themes, awareness and insight, which answered my first research question regarding the contribution of the course on the preservice teachers’ professional identities. Two specific themes, farsightedness and clear-sightedness, were identified for my second research question regarding the contribution of the pedagogically structured course on the preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. Discussion of the findings shows the interconnectedness between the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and visions of future practice.

**Researcher’s Role**

One of the main characteristics of a qualitative study is the researcher’s role as the key instrument of data collection. I collected data throughout this study by observing the behaviors of my preservice teachers, examining documents completed in conjunction with the middle childhood education literacy methods course, and interviewing preservice teachers in an attempt to understand how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course informed their emerging professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. Since I was the instructor of the middle childhood education literacy course, in which the majority of the data collection took place, I was cognizant of how my role shifted throughout the study and how my dual-role may have influenced the direction of the research (Schram, 2006).
I tried to approach this key piece of the research process systematically. I used my organizational skills to create hardcopy files for each of my participants. The files currently contain the informed consent forms, documents collected throughout the semester (i.e. literacy narratives, literacy metaphor posters/reflections, pedagogical discussion essays, vision statements, and electronic journal entries), and interview transcripts.

I began the process by working alphabetically (by participant) through each document and kept to this system. The documents/transcripts were analyzed in the order in which they were completed by the participants throughout the semester which may indicate growth or change in the preservice teachers’ beliefs throughout the course.

The review of the data began by reading each document by participant. Next, I reread the document and pulled out key words/phrases or quotes that resonated with me as important to the study. The key words/phrases and quotes were then typed into a chart. This process was repeated for each participant by document. After all the key/quotes and quotes were gathered by document and transcript, the chart was reread and preliminary codes were assigned to the pieces of data. A review of the preliminary codes will be used to determine initial categories.

Figure 6. Sample data analysis memo

As the researcher and instructor of the middle childhood education literacy course, I was “fully present as a human researcher” at a co-participation level (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) with my participants. This positioning required me to make my role awareness overtly known to my participants. However, I was also aware that my role changed throughout the study as I shifted roles from an observer, or passive receiver of data, to an active pursuer and generator of data (Schram, 2006). Regardless of the role I enacted in the field at various moments, my sustained presence in the field contributed to
a heightened awareness and sensitivity of my participants’ experiences and understandings that would not have occurred with limited researcher participation in this study.

Trustworthiness

In all qualitative research studies, issues of trustworthiness including the credibility of the study must be addressed in an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Credibility focuses on whether the results are consistent with the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Merriam, 2005). Generalizability is often difficult with qualitative studies, especially case studies, since the participants have been purposefully selected as the bounded units to be studied in the research. However, what has been learned in the qualitative study can often be transferred to similar situations which may be encountered in the future (Merriam, 2005). In order to ensure trustworthiness in this study, I relied on triangulation of the data collection methods, peer debriefing, member checks, reflexivity, and the use of a researcher’s journal.

Triangulation

The principle of triangulation refers to the goal of the qualitative researcher to corroborate a particular event, description, or fact reported as a finding in the research study. “In collecting data, the ideal triangulation would not only seek confirmation from three sources but would try to find three different kinds of sources” (Yin, 2011, p. 81). Triangulation is one strategy proposed by Maxwell (2009) to combat threats of validity in qualitative research and to help ensure that the same conclusions that emerged from my study would be similar to another study being conducted through the same lens or
orientation. The data collection from participant-observations, various course documents, and interview transcriptions provided triangulation and helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

**Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing, or peer review, can provide an external check of the research processes (Merriam, 1988). A peer debriefer is often given the opportunity to read the preliminary data analysis and “assess whether the findings were plausible based on the data” (Merriam, 2005, p. 26). A peer debriefer can serve as a “devil’s advocate” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) at times, in order to ask questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations of the research (Creswell, 2007).

As an additional assurance of trustworthiness, I enlisted the aid of a peer debriefer. My peer debriefer was a colleague in the Division of Education who held an administrative and literacy faculty position. She had also been one of my graduate instructors, and had been instrumental in encouraging me to pursue a terminal degree. My colleague was extremely supportive of my academic pursuits, and was genuinely interested in my research study. Thereby, agreeing to serve in this role.

My original plan was to meet with my peer debriefer at designated intervals throughout the data collection and analysis phases to report on my progress, share my successes, and seek advice with any challenges. I wanted my peer debriefer to provide advice, honest feedback, question any unclear aspects of the research, and push my thinking forward. In short, I wanted her to be a critical colleague.
Unfortunately, my original plan did not materialize. After agreeing to serve in the role of peer debriefer, my colleague became an ACE (American Council on Education) Fellow for the 2012-2013 academic year which entailed intense work in higher education at another university out of state. Due to her busy schedule and new responsibilities, formal debriefing sessions did not occur. Instead, informal conversations were held about my research, albeit on an inconsistent basis. When my colleague returned to our university after her fellowship ended, she received a promotion as the Assistant Provost and left the Division of Education, which once again limited our engagement. However, I still gained from sharing my research design and findings with my peer debriefer. She provided some constructive advice on the structuring of the course, agreed with the findings, and saw the value in restructuring specific teacher education courses. Although my interactions with my peer debriefer were limited, her feedback provided me with support, increased confidence, and helped move my research forward.

**Member Checks**

Member checks are formal or informal opportunities to test data categories, interpretations, and conclusions with the participants in the study from whom the data was originally obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks can provide the opportunity for the participants to judge the preliminary findings and correct or challenge inconsistencies in the data collection process. Stake (1995) advocates having case study participants take an active role in their research study and including them in member checks.
The participants in my study had the opportunity to engage in member checks during the summer of 2013 as a qualitative measure of trustworthiness. I sent each participant, via email, a summarization of my preliminary analysis based on the descriptions and themes which emerged throughout the data collection period. The participants were asked to read the summarization and respond in detail to support, clarify, or challenge my findings. Waiting until the course had concluded helped to ensure the trustworthiness of my study and the ethical considerations of being the researcher and also the instructor of the course. All three participants responded to my email request, and agreed with the findings of my study.

**Reflexivity**

Throughout the study, I continuously engaged in the critical self-reflection process known as reflexivity. Reflexivity encourages the researcher to “explore the ways in which the researcher’s involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon, and informs such research” (Nightengale & Cromby, 1999, p. 28). Reflexivity can be subdivided into personal and epistemological critical self-reflection. Personal reflexivity encouraged me to reflect on how my personal values, interests, and experiences shaped the research. Epistemological reflexivity encouraged me to take an in-depth look at how the research questions defined and/or limited the study, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the process of reflection on the knowledge and assumptions that were made throughout the research (Nightengale & Cromby, 1999). By continuously engaging in a reflexive process throughout my study, I became more conscious of my biases, values, and experiences that informed my research (Creswell, 2007).
**Researcher’s Journal**

Reflective writing, through a researcher’s journal, provided me the opportunity to become a stronger, more reflexive researcher, as I pondered all facets of my study. Journaling enabled me to keep a “dual focus” on what I was learning and what may have kept me from learning throughout my study (Peshkin, 1992). I used my researcher’s journal to record and elaborate on my decision-making process throughout the study. Keeping a research’s journal enabled me to articulate any concerns, express feelings, describe events, establish goals, evaluate progress, pursue ideas, and structure my thoughts (Borg, 2001).

Additionally, I recorded and elaborated on emerging concepts and themes throughout my data collection period through the process of memoing. Strauss (1990) defined memoing as the written version of the internal dialogue that takes place throughout the research. The memos were dated and detailed in nature from the beginning of the study and were used as a reflection tool throughout the processes of data collection and analysis.

My researcher’s journal also served as an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), or comprehensive description of the decision making processes that took place throughout my study. I used a template to systematically record the decision-making processes, the rationale for the decision, and my reflections on that decision. The audit trail provided a description of my data collection and analysis procedures throughout my research which could help enable others to understand the decision making processes that occurred in this study (Merriam, 2002).
Limitations

Two limitations of my study based on the pedagogical structuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course have been identified. These limitations are the timeframe of the data collection period and my role as the researcher and instructor of the course.

Data Collection Period

The data collection period for my research study took place during a single semester (fall 2012), which may be seen as a limitation of the study. Although I only spent four months with my participants, I was able to gain numerous insights from informal and formal conversations that took place during the on-campus portion of the course, the range of documents collected during this period, and the interviews that were held at specific times throughout the semester. Although contact with my participants continued throughout the entire fifteen week semester, I did not physically follow my participants into the field portion of the course. I was not assigned as the university supervisor for Sean, Sawyer, or Kim, and therefore, relied on their statements and depictions of their field experiences to contribute to the study. However, observing the preservice teachers in their respective field placements, and dialoguing with their cooperating teachers could have provided another source of data for the research. Since my research was classified as a qualitative case study, bounded by time (fall 2012 semester) and space (single middle childhood education literacy methods class), I did not choose to continue to follow my participants in subsequent semesters who would have been enrolled in other teacher education courses after this time.
Researcher’s Role

The second limitation of my study was my dual role as the researcher and instructor of the course. Although this may be viewed as a limitation, I truly was able to keep my subjectivities and biases in check throughout the research. The research itself was very rarely spoken about in the confines of the regular class periods. The preservice teachers and I simply engaged in the cognitive and affective domains of literacy learning within the supportive classroom community. My participants and I established and maintained rapport throughout the research study and beyond. I do not believe that I would have been able to collect such rich data had I not been a consistent factor in all aspects of their teaching and learning. Additionally, waiting to analyze the data until after the course had concluded and grades had been submitted enabled me to keep the two aspects of the course separate, with the preservice teachers understanding that their grades were not tied in any way to their participation in the study or their beliefs expressed throughout the semester.

Summary

The design of this qualitative case study involved the use of multiple methods of data collection. These rich sources of data enabled me to understand how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed to the development of the preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. Analysis of the data helped me determine whether a middle childhood education literacy methods course that is designed cognitively and affectively actually aids in the development of the emerging professional
identities of preservice teachers and their visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum.

The findings of this study can support the efforts to reform literacy methods courses to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to learn the cognitive aspects of teaching literacy in a future middle school setting, as well as time to explore the affective components that will inform their developing professional identities. When a literacy methods course is pedagogically structured to provide preservice teachers opportunities for dialogic engagement, reflective practices, and visioning, they may be able to more clearly define themselves as middle school teachers, see the roles they and their students will play in their learning, and plan for the curricular and instructional practices that will be enacted in their future classrooms.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how preservice teachers’ professional identities and beliefs of teaching literacy across the curriculum developed during a middle childhood education literacy methods course. The course, *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, was pedagogically structured to provide the preservice teachers with opportunities to explore their emerging professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum in their future middle school classrooms. Pedagogical structuring is defined as the instructional design of a course that provides opportunities for collaboration, communication, and choice in which preservice teachers examine and explore their attitudes, values, and beliefs. It is an exploration of both the content and the self.

Throughout the semester, the preservice teachers participated in a variety of guided inquiry activities, both on-campus and in the field, that promoted self-discovery, as well as an exploration of their past literacy practices, current beliefs about teaching literacy across the curriculum, and future implications for their middle school classrooms through reflection, dialogic engagement, and visioning. By discussing tensions, beliefs, and visions throughout the course, which balanced the cognitive and affective domains of learning, the preservice teachers gained a greater understanding of their developing
professional identities, as well as the importance of how their beliefs could potentially affect future curricular and instructional decisions.

Figure 7 illustrates how the middle childhood education literacy methods course, *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, was pedagogically structured to create and recognize the tensions the preservice teachers were experiencing during their junior and senior years in their middle childhood education program. The pedagogical structuring of the course provided a supportive environment in which the preservice teachers were encouraged to explore their past and present beliefs while simultaneously envisioning their future by engaging in a variety of learning opportunities throughout the semester which challenged their thinking and pushed them forward.

![Professional Identities Diagram]

*Figure 7. Navigating tensions in Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*
Exploring the preservice teachers’ professional identities aided in the formation of concrete images of future instructional practice, while visioning helped the preservice teachers more clearly identify their positioning as future middle school teachers. The specific course assignments provided the medium for the preservice teachers to navigate their tensions and gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectivity between their developing professional identities and visions of future instructional practice.

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study in which three preservice teachers enrolled in the course, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim, were purposefully selected as participants, and studied as individual cases. The individual cases were then examined as a collective case study using cross-case analysis to determine the similarities and differences among the cases.

The research was specifically guided by the following questions.

1. How does the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities?

2. How does the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum?

This chapter presents the findings of the study organized in the following way. Each individual case begins with an introduction to the participant followed by an in-depth examination of the beliefs and visions expressed by the participant in the specific assignments completed during the on-campus portion of the course and during the field
experience in an authentic middle childhood classroom. The cross-case analysis of the three individual cases resulted in the emergence of themes which identified the contributions the pedagogically structured middle childhood education course had on the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum.

**Sean**

I first met Sean on August 27, 2012 on the first day of class in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*. Through initial introductions, Sean shared that he was a 38-year old nontraditional undergraduate student majoring in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of science and social studies. Sean was also pursuing a middle childhood generalist endorsement which would enable him to teach all subject areas in self-contained fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classrooms. He was enrolled in the university as a full-time student and was a senior in the teacher education program. Sean lived in a neighboring suburb, and commuted to campus daily (field notes, August 27, 2012).

Throughout my numerous conversations with Sean during the semester, I learned he had grown up in a nearby suburb and was one of four children. He had not enjoyed school, spent limited time engaged in literacy activities, and had not received much academic support from his parents while growing up. After getting in trouble with the law during his senior year of high school, Sean decided to join the Army, much to his parents’ disapproval. The military provided a structured life for Sean, who became a young husband and father to two sons during his time in the Army. After serving in the
military for twelve years, Sean found himself involved in a bitter divorce and a custody battle for his two sons. He also transitioned into a new career working for the sheriff’s department as a corrections officer. This occupation left Sean unfulfilled, but he continued working in this profession for seven years due to the stability of the position, respectable pay, and good benefits. Sean’s second wife, who was a family and marriage counselor, encouraged Sean to explore other career options. Although Sean had had negative experiences throughout most of his schooling, he had always dreamed of having a profession in which he could truly make a difference in the lives of adolescents. Therefore, he decided to use his military benefits and enrolled in the university with aspirations of becoming a middle school teacher.

It was evident from the first day of class that Sean had an outgoing personality and a drive to succeed. He entered class with a 3.969 grade point average which he hoped to maintain during his senior year. However, he expressed apprehension for the current semester since he was enrolled in four additional methods courses which included Assessment of Teaching and Learning, Adolescent and Young Adult Literature, Middle Childhood Social Studies Methods, and Reading in the Content Area. Sean knew that all of the coursework and field components associated with each class would be demanding, and that the semester would most likely be challenging. However, even with a busy schedule, Sean was enthusiastic about being a participant in the study. Data were collected from Sean throughout the fall 2012 semester which included both the on-campus and field components of the Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education course.
On-Campus Learning Opportunities

During the on-campus portion of the course, which comprised the first ten weeks of the semester, Sean completed several assignments that encouraged reflection and dialogic engagement of his beliefs, as well as the visioning of his future middle school classroom. These assignments included a literacy narrative, a vision statement, electronic journal entries, a literacy metaphor poster, and a pedagogical discussion/reflection. Additionally, Sean participated in two interviews during the on-campus portion of the course. The first interview occurred during the fifth week of the semester which was the midway point of the on-campus portion of the course. The second interview took place during the tenth week of the semester which was the end of the on-campus portion of the course. The interviews provided an opportunity for me to dialogue with Sean, and learn more about his beliefs and visions expressed at various points in the semester.

Literacy Narrative. The first assignment of the semester was the completion of a literacy narrative. The preservice teachers were asked to reflect on their past experiences as readers and writers at both home and school. They were also encouraged to reflect on how their past experiences had influenced their decisions to become teachers at the middle school level. The purpose of the assignment was for the preservice teachers to think about how past literacy experiences were contributing to their current beliefs and future instructional practices. I wanted the preservice teachers to realize that they all had unique literate identities that were facets of their overall professional identities. The beliefs that the preservice teachers held might influence what would be taught, as well as how it would be taught in their future classrooms. The literacy narratives provided me
greater insight into the lives and beliefs of the preservice teachers in my class. The literacy narratives were read and further discussed during the first round of interviews with my participants.

Sean’s literacy narrative expressed his negativity towards schooling in general, and literacy in particular. Sean grew up in a home in which he believed education was not valued. His mother was a housewife who had dropped out of school in the eighth grade. Sean’s father completed high school but never talked about his past schooling, or inquired about his children’s education. He had been employed as a machinist at a local tool and die shop until he retired in 2010. Sean never saw his mother engaged in any literacy activities. His only recollection of his father engaged in literacy practices involved the reading of technical manuals which provided his father with detailed information on how to repair vehicles. Sean stated,

I was raised during the 1980s in a blue collar family with the attitude that school was something you do and then you get a “real job”. I do not remember any discussions about school work growing up except for the occasional pat on the back for a good grade and a harsh scolding for the bad grades. I do not remember ever being read to or encouraged to read on my own (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

During our first round interview, Sean continued to discuss the lack of parental involvement in his schooling. He admitted to intercepting his midterm report cards sent home in the mail that his parents did not seem to even notice since his mother was busy
with the children and his father was always working. At times, however, Sean’s parents were aware of his grades and reacted harshly. He recalled,

I always got punished for school, like I would either get spanked or grounded. Then, literally like a couple of days later it was like it never happened. They [parents] would never talk about it. They would never be involved. They would never go to a parent-teacher conference. And I really don’t know what would have happened if I would have gotten awesome grades. Would my parents have been more supportive? (transcript, September 28, 2012).

Sean also viewed his educational experiences at school as negative. He recalled experiences in his classes that provided few choices and even less differentiated instruction. Therefore, the classes did little to motivate him as a reader and writer. Sean stated,

When I went to middle school there was a “factory” approach to teaching. All students were taught the same way and it produced the same results. The main focus of this style of teaching was a simple formula: lecture, listen, memorize, regurgitate. I was not a fan of this style of mechanical teaching back in those days, and I was extremely pleased when I discovered the times have changed. This traditional style of teaching is obsolete, and the focus is on the student where it belongs (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Sean admitted that he put forth little effort throughout middle and high school. He rarely read any books himself, and instead began relying on the blurbs on book jackets or his friends for help with his assignments. His grades fell to mostly D’s and F’s
in high school, and he was required to take summer school classes in order to graduate. Sean attributed his lack of effort to both his home and school experiences and the low expectations placed on him from his parents and teachers. “I believe it was this environment and family dynamics that lead to the lack of pressure when it came to academics” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Joining the Army immediately after high school provided Sean with a military career. However, it left him unsatisfied, and he felt he had nothing to show for himself after serving in the military for twelve years. Sean’s employment as a corrections officer perpetuated this belief. Sean believed that working with inmates with limited education made him feel like “a dried sponge” (transcript, September 28, 2012). He was never engaged in stimulating conversations, and went about his daily routines feeling like a “worker bee.” However, it was during Sean’s employment at the sheriff’s department that he began to read in between his rounds. Reading was the only permissible activity allowed while on duty, and Sean began to spend a considerable amount of time reading while the inmates were sleeping.

After serious “soul-searching” Sean quit his position as a corrections officer and enrolled in the university as a full-time student in 2010. His past educational experiences at home and at school contributed to his decision to become a middle childhood education teacher. Sean believed that middle school was where he would have the most impact as a teacher since this had been a critical turning point in his own educational background. It was during his middle school years when Sean became disengaged with school and began earning low grades. However, in the college classroom, Sean felt he
had an advantage over his peers who were traditional undergraduate students. He had witnessed many changes in curricular and instructional practices with his own sons, and had seen “the progression of what literacy used to mean during traditional teaching and what it means now” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Reading and discussing Sean’s literacy narrative was a powerful experience for both of us. Sean’s reflections showed how significant his past educational experiences were in shaping the teacher he envisioned becoming. Sean became aware that although his educational experiences had been rather negative both at home and at school, he believed he was capable of providing educational experiences for his students that would be contrary to his past.

**Vision statement.** In addition to reflecting and dialoguing with peers throughout the semester, the preservice teachers were also encouraged to envision their roles as future middle school teachers and the role that literacy would play in their future content area classrooms. Visioning was a conceptual tool the preservice teachers used to become forward thinkers on specific aspects of their teaching which were often influenced by their past and present educational beliefs. An initial vision statement was completed during the third week of the semester by the preservice teachers. Visioning was also a topic of discussion during the first and second round interviews with my participants.

Sean had a clear vision of his desired role in his future classroom from the beginning of the semester. Sean stated that he wanted to be a role model for his students and teach his adolescent learners both academic and life skills. He felt that his own life experiences had prepared him for this role. Sean envisioned teaching in a student-
centered classroom which was contrary to his own educational experiences. He stated, “Students are to be a part of the learning process, not being drug behind the teaching machine. I believe students are at the center of the learning process, and it is imperative to have students involved and active in this process” (vision statement, September 10, 2012).

Sean envisioned literacy to be an important aspect of his classroom with a focus on his students having the literacy skills necessary to be successful in all areas of instruction. He wrote, “If I want my students to read a book about the solar system, but half the students struggle with the terminology in this reading, then I have failed to enhance the lesson” (vision statement, September 10, 2012). Sean wanted to provide his future students with opportunities to learn in different formats including small group instruction, independent reading, and classroom discussions.

Sean and I further explored his beliefs during the first round of interviews. Sean shared that part of his vision was based on a field experience observation with an eighth grade science teacher the previous year. Sean felt a connection with his male cooperating teacher who was approximately the same age as Sean. This teacher had a very structured classroom which appealed to Sean’s military background. However, Sean also observed a balance between strict order and opportunities for the students and teacher to joke around with one another.

As we continued our conversation, Sean shared a vision of teaching that was based on mutual respect. He confided, “I got smacked by my mother and father until 16 years old” (transcript, September 28, 2012) which resulted in a feeling of powerlessness.
Sean believed that showing respect for his students would empower them, increase their motivation to learn, and help build their confidence. He shared, “When I was in school, I was afraid to raise my hand. I didn’t want to make mistakes. I didn’t have that safe environment like we talk about” (transcript, September 28, 2012). Sean continued to discuss the importance of creating a classroom environment that was physically and emotionally safe. He insisted that he was not going to take an authoritarian stance like his parents, but instead promote an equal relationship between teacher and students.

During the second round interview, Sean and I continued to discuss his visions of becoming a middle childhood education teacher and teaching literacy across the curriculum in light of his upcoming field placement in a fourth grade language arts and social studies classroom. At this point, Sean had met with his cooperating teacher who was a veteran educator with over twenty years of teaching experience. Sean admitted that after observing the fourth grade classroom he was rather nervous about the upcoming five-week field experience. He explained that his previous field placements had been in older middle school grades in single content areas where he felt more comfortable. Sean stated, “I literally sat in her class, and I felt out of my element. There’s a lot more going on. I feel like I’ve bit off more than I can chew this semester” (transcript, November 5, 2012). Sean continued to discuss his belief that he lacked adequate content knowledge in the field of social studies to instruct his fourth grade students. He shared, “When I sat with my cooperating teacher, she was talking a lot about government and economics, and other social studies areas, and I felt bad because some of the stuff she was talking about I was nodding my head, but I really don’t know or remember” (transcript, November 5,
2012). As a nontraditional student, Sean had taken many of his required social studies courses years ago; therefore, he realized that he would need to spend time refreshing himself on certain concepts in order to adequately meet the needs of his students.

Although Sean expressed his apprehension about teaching social studies, he had a clearer view on the importance of teaching literacy across the curriculum by the end of the on-campus portion of the course. Sean shared,

For me, it [the course] was a challenge. I guess the word for me would be it kind of awakened me. Luckily I had this class before I met my teacher because she’s very adamant that literacy is everything. If I would have walked into her class about three months ago and told her how I felt, like I believe literacy is only for language arts, we would have been off on a bad foot. Now that I’ve had your class, I can’t believe how misinformed I was. It’s [literacy] definitely integrated into every content area (transcript, November 5, 2012).

Sean’s early visions reflected his desire to be a positive influence in his students’ lives. He believed that establishing rapport was necessary for creating a learning environment based on mutual respect. Although Sean saw the importance of integrating literacy across the curriculum, his main focus was not on the curricular and instructional practices of teaching his students science and social studies. Instead, his primary goal was to provide a learning environment that met the various needs of his students to be successful in all aspects of their learning. By the end of the on-campus portion of the course, Sean’s beliefs towards literacy instruction were stronger. He was beginning to
see the importance of integrating literacy into all content areas in order to meet his future middle school students’ needs.

**Electronic journal entries.** At the beginning of the semester, the twelve preservice teachers enrolled in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* were randomly divided into three electronic communities of learners in which they posted journal entries and responded to members of their small group discussion boards via Blackboard, an electronic management system used by the university. The electronic journal postings occurred throughout the on-campus portion of the course during the third, fifth, and eighth weeks of the semester. The electronic journal entry assignment enabled the preservice teachers to share their beliefs about becoming teachers at the middle school level, and receive advice, support, and feedback from their peers. As the instructor of the course, I posed writing prompts for the preservice teachers to reflect upon, share, and respond to topics that seemed relevant at certain points in the course. I read all the journal postings throughout the semester, but chose not to enter the dialogues. I wanted the preservice teachers to engage in these exchanges with their peers, and not feel pressure to respond in certain ways to the instructor of the course.

Sean was a member of Group C of the electronic community of learners and corresponded throughout the semester with his peers Greg, Kim, and Natalie. These preservice teachers were all traditional undergraduate students majoring in middle childhood education in the fields of mathematics/social studies, mathematics/science, and language arts/mathematics respectively. Kim was also a participant in this study.
The first journal prompt invited the preservice teachers to share their feelings at the beginning of the fall semester which was often a challenging time for students as they transitioned into the rigorous demands of college coursework after a long summer break. The preservice teachers were asked to reflect and respond to the following:

_The beginning of the new academic year often evokes feelings of stress and anxiety as students struggle to balance numerous assignments and responsibilities. What personal and professional tensions are you negotiating at this point in the semester? How are these challenges influencing the learning that is taking place in your classes, particularly your methods courses? What would help you balance these tensions?_

Sean shared with his electronic learning community his feelings of stress, anxiety, and self-doubt at the beginning of the semester. He admitted being pessimistic and a procrastinator with assignments which increased his levels of stress. Sean was also apprehensive about taking four state examinations required for licensure which would need to be successfully completed within the next academic year. Sean wrote,

_This semester is by far the most anxiety I have felt since I began my teaching program almost two years ago. I thought it would be less stress the closer I got to the end, but instead the opposite happened. The biggest concern I have right now is taking the four state exams and passing them. The student teaching and field work this semester does not bother me, especially since I learn the best doing hands-on. One of my biggest flaws is being pessimistic. I have a very good grade point average, but I still doubt myself nonstop. My wife is a great supporter and_
extremely optimistic, and she always gets on me about being so critical of my academics. I need to start listening more to her and change my mindset and become more positive and confident about the future tests. My other flaw is being a procrastinator, as I sit here and type this post the day before it is due. I know that if I could learn how to counter that I would be much better off professionally and academically. I am sure many students are struggling with some of these same flaws. What are your thoughts? (electronic journal, September 10, 2012).

The feedback that Sean received from his peers helped him realize that he was not alone in his feelings. Kim and Natalie also described themselves as procrastinators. Natalie offered practical advice such as making to-do lists and utilizing planners in order for Sean to become more organized. Kim replied, “I think you are very well organized and sometimes it is a good thing to stress out and be critical of your academics because it pushes you to do well” (electronic journal response, September 13, 2012). Kim provided a different perspective for Sean to consider as he continued to move forward and tackle the numerous requirements of the semester. Greg also responded to the three members of his group, and admitted to struggling with the same time management issues that Sean, Kim, and Natalie were dealing with at the beginning of the fall semester. Greg stated, I am right there with you guys on this. My first semester here as a freshman, I was terrible with time management skills and got so far behind that I struggled to get a GPA that was eligible to play sports! I struggled with basketball and trying to find time to not get distracted in the dorms and having to get my homework
done and study for things coming up. I try to make to do lists at times. That way I stay on track and become more focused. That way I know what needs to get done and I am not wasting time and/or getting distracted by other things that aren’t worth my time and effort. Natalie, you are so right that organization is something that always needs to be practiced because once you can achieve that, you take a lot of unnecessary time off of your workload in a day that seems to never be long enough (electronic journal response, September 15, 2012).

The first journal prompt of the semester enabled Sean to share his tensions as he began his senior year in his teacher education program. Sean made his tacit beliefs explicit, and learned that his peers were facing many similar challenges. Dialoguing with one another from the beginning of the semester also aided in the formation of classroom community.

As the preservice teachers progressed with their studies and learning about the qualities of effective literacy teachers at the middle school level, I was interested in learning the preservice teachers’ beliefs on the expectations they felt society placed on middle school teachers. Therefore, the second journal prompt of the semester asked the preservice teachers to reflect and respond to the following:

*Our society has many expectations about what it means to be a teacher and what should be taught in the classroom. What expectations do you believe society has placed on teachers at the middle school level? Do these expectations vary by content area? Do you feel these expectations are realistic?*
Sean’s posting centered on the pressures believed teachers faced from parents and school districts for their students to earn high grades especially due to the demands of high stakes testing. Sean posted,

I believe that the expectations placed on teachers today in some districts are a heavy burden. Parents nowadays seem to think that teachers should be able to teach their child everything they need to know and do so in an effective manner that ensures a perfect grade. If their son or daughter does not receive a grade that the parent feels is acceptable, there is a chance that the blame will be placed on the teacher or district in general. The additional stress of recent times with standardized testing places another burden on teachers today because they are judged by the district and parents alike on these high-stakes test scores. The biggest problem I see with this attitude is that many students cannot be analyzed in such a rigid manner. There is more to assessments than standardized tests. Each content area does have different expectations because of America’s overall standing compared to the rest of the world. An excellent example of this is mathematics. Japan in particular scores significantly higher on math scores than Americans. This adds additional pressure and expectations on math teachers across America (electronic journal, September 20, 2012).

Sean’s posting was insightful as he shared his beliefs about the expectations that were placed on today’s teachers. His posting was clearly focused on the area of assessment and the demands placed on teachers to ensure their students make the needed progress to achieve academically as measured by standardized tests. Preparing and
passing his own required licensure examinations was one of the main tensions Sean was dealing with during the semester. Therefore, it was not surprising that this was the focus of this posting.

However, Sean’s posting did not specifically address expectations at the middle school level or the needs of adolescence at this time in their development. Additionally, Sean only referenced his beliefs that math teachers were held to high standards due to the higher rankings of Japanese students compared to American students in this content area. As a future science and social studies teacher, Sean failed to address either of his content areas.

Although Natalie’s response to Sean’s post mirrored his beliefs that the demands of standardized testing was an unfair burden on today’s teachers, it was Greg’s posting during this dialogic exchange that provided a different viewpoint for Sean to consider. Greg also stated that teachers can become very overwhelmed by all the demands placed on them to prepare students academically and personally. However, his belief in a “one day at a time approach” would help keep these demands in perspective and perhaps more manageable. Greg stated, “We have a job to help shape these students’ identities and we can be great role models for them and affect them in all kinds of ways just by the way we treat them and show our interest in them. If we, as teachers, stay focused and work on things day by day, I believe we can succeed in the classroom with our students and in their daily lives” (electronic journal, September 23, 2012).

Greg’s posting gave Sean another perspective that he had not considered originally. Greg discussed the importance of middle school teachers preparing their
students in academics, but also in life skills. Greg’s beliefs that teachers have the power to shape their students’ identities through their actions provided some insight to Sean, who had focused only on the cognitive aspects of assessing students. However, Sean’s response to Greg stated how difficult this would be in light of all the demands placed on teachers. He stated,

I agree with you that as teachers we need to take it one day at a time. I believe this is one of those professions that if we look at the big picture there is a chance to get overwhelmed. I agree with your statement about parents expecting teachers to teach both content and preparation for life skills. Many districts shortened the length of class times to 45 minutes, and I have personally witnessed how much pressure this puts on teachers just to cover the content, let alone attempting to add additional skills. I know some teachers do not even have enough time in the year to sufficiently cover the grade level standards, therefore, the expectations of a teacher having the time to cover the other areas you describe is very difficult if not impossible (electronic journal response, September 24, 2012).

Although Sean stated in his response to Greg that he agreed with his beliefs, Sean’s statements still questioned if it was possible for a teacher to truly teach important life skills to early adolescents in light of the curricular demands and time constraints that teachers encountered on a daily basis. These views were contrary to the views expressed a few weeks prior in Sean’s first vision statement. Sean’s initial vision statement indicated his desire to balance the teaching of academics with life skills. However, a few weeks later Sean doubted the reality of meeting his students’ varied needs. Although he
still had doubts, engaging in a dialogue with his peers provided Sean with a new perspective that would contribute to his positioning as a future middle school teacher.

The third journal prompt of the semester was completed approximately two weeks prior to the preservice teachers entering the field. I wanted the preservice teachers to reflect and share their beliefs about teaching literacy in an authentic middle school classroom after learning more about effective literacy practices and the importance of meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of their future middle school students. The preservice teachers responded to the following:

*Learning about literacy in the college classroom can be quite different from teaching literacy lessons in an authentic middle school classroom. As you prepare to enter the field in a few weeks, what areas of literacy instruction do you feel most confident in teaching? What areas concern you? How will you address these concerns?*

Sean stated that there was always a contrast between learning concepts as a college student in a classroom setting, and then having the responsibility as the teacher in an authentic classroom. He posted, “When you are a college student, learning about teaching philosophies, strategies, content, and classroom management can seem pretty straight forward in a college setting. However, as most people find out very quickly, once you get to an actual classroom and you are standing there all alone in the front with 30 kids staring at you...things are much different” (electronic journal, October 13, 2012).

Sean expressed that he felt very prepared to enter the field because of the instruction he had received from his professors throughout the semester. Although, he
was a bit nervous that he would be asked a question by a student in which he would not know how to respond, he felt confident in most areas of literacy instruction. However, he agreed with Natalie’s posting that teaching fluency could be difficult in the middle school grades, since the majority of fluency instruction tends to occur during the primary years. He stated, “I plan to address these concerns by falling back on what I have been taught in the classroom by my professors. I will also use my prior schema about how kids learn, what motivates them, being a father, and common sense. I hope this will be enough” (electronic journal, October 13, 2012).

Sean’s response to Natalie’s apprehension of entering the field, and teaching specific literacy components, showed Sean’s increased knowledge of the affective domain of learning to teach adolescents. Although we had discussed several methods for helping middle school students become fluent readers, Sean was showing his growth in understanding the developmental process of reading and how middle school students’ attitudes can often impact the learning that takes place in the classroom. Sean posted to Natalie,

I think you will do just fine in the field! Just remember everything you have learned in the program and BE YOURSELF! I agree with you that the fluency part of literacy is going to be extremely hard to teach mainly because I feel it is something that you are supposed to learn at an early age. If students fall behind in literacy at the primary grades, it is very difficult for them to catch up in the later grades, and there is an issue of how it makes them feel. They are usually
embarrassed in their abilities and this can also influence how they respond to your teaching style (electronic journal response, October 13, 2012).

The electronic journal postings during the on-campus portion of the course enabled Sean to reflect and dialogue with his peers about his beliefs in becoming a future middle school teacher and his role in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Sean honestly shared his anxieties with his peers at the beginning of the semester, but learned Greg, Kim, and Natalie were also experiencing many of the same tensions which helped to put his doubts into perspective. Sean also gained insight through the dialogues and realized that being an effective middle school teacher was more than just teaching content. His visions of meeting his students’ cognitive and affective needs could happen if he took a “one day at a time approach” as suggested by his peer, Greg, in order to achieve this goal. Additionally, Sean expressed an increased confidence in teaching literacy in his upcoming field placement. He discussed the importance of providing instruction that would enhance his students’ literacy learning while also taking his students’ social and emotional needs into account.

**Literacy metaphor poster.** During the fifth week of the semester, the preservice teachers were asked to create literacy metaphor posters using the software Glogster to visually depict their beliefs regarding teaching literacy across the curriculum in the middle school classroom. After the preservice teachers had written literacy narratives and reflected on their past literacy beliefs at home and school earlier in the semester, I wanted the preservice teachers to express what literacy currently meant to them. The preservice teachers were given the freedom to create the posters using a variety of
backgrounds, text, music, videos, or images to illustrate their beliefs. In addition to creating their literacy metaphor posters, the preservice teachers were also required to reflect on their designs, and had the option to complete their reflections as traditional essays, poems, or songs. The preservice teachers had the opportunity to share and explain their posters with the class.

Sean’s literacy metaphor poster consisted of a background of an old-fashioned chalkboard with the words “I has to learn English” written ten times in cursive handwriting. The poster also contained in the upper left corner the silhouetted image of a man in prison with a thought balloon stating, “I am dumb. It is hopeless.” Near the center of the poster on the right side were two images, an open door and an open book. The final image Sean included in the lower left corner of the poster was a silhouette of a man standing on top of a mountain with the thought balloon stating, “Unlimited possibilities!” (See Appendix J).

Sean explained in his reflection that “the overall metaphor is how a student struggling with literacy may feel before, during, and after their quest to improve” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 1, 2012). Sean explained that his background image of the grammatically incorrect sentences written on the chalkboard could represent a struggling English language learner or a student who was behind in language arts. Sean also stated that he selected the background because of his own past literacy experiences. He explained, “The background art also interested me on a personal level because it reminded me of when I was in the primary grades and my teachers would
make me write sentences on the board as punishment” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 1, 2012).

Sean explained that his poster was meant to be read from top to bottom and provided a rationale for the inclusion of each selected image. He included the image of the man behind bars because he believed that students who often struggle with literacy feel like prisoners. He stated that he wanted to find an image that represented this belief and would be simply yet powerfully stated. Sean’s next two images, the open doorway and open book, represented the opportunities that literacy can offer a student, and that literacy can truly open the door to new adventures and learning opportunities. The final image on Sean’s poster was purposefully selected to be a contrast from his first image of the prisoner. He explained,

The last picture I chose was a silhouette of a person with their hands out, possibly standing on top of a mountain, with a beautiful sunset in front of them. This image represents the freedom that the person would feel after improving their literacy skills. I decided later in the design process to put a bubble above the person that says, “Unlimited Possibilities!” to be the polar opposite of that same person on the top of the poster.

Sean’s literacy metaphor poster reflected his current literacy beliefs in a powerful way. Sean spent the majority of his youth and adult years viewing literacy with a negative connotation. He understood what it was like for a student to struggle learning to read, write, and comprehend not only in language arts classrooms, but also in various content areas. His work for seven years as a corrections officer also was symbolic since
he equated being a struggling reader with a sense of confinement, just as he had witnessed numerous inmates who had limited educational opportunities.

Sean’s literacy metaphor poster also showed his changing beliefs. Although he may have struggled as a student in the past, Sean was aware that educational opportunities, specifically literacy, were a way in which a person could break free of their hopelessness and find truly unlimited possibilities to learn and grow personally and professionally. Sean expressed that it would be his responsibility to make this belief a reality for his future students. He summarized, “I believe it is one of my duties as a teacher to make sure that students do not view literacy as a prison cell, but show them that it can be a powerful tool to open new doors which can lead to unlimited possibilities” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 1, 2012).

**Pedagogical discussion and reflective essay.** During the eighth week of the semester, the preservice teachers were required to plan a literacy lesson that focused upon one specific aspect of literacy: fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, or writing. On the assigned due date, the preservice teachers met in groups based on their electronic community of learners and took turns presenting their lessons in a microteaching format. After the lessons were taught, the preservice teachers were asked to reflect upon the pedagogical decisions made in their lessons, and wrote a reflexive essay in which they critically critiqued the lessons taught to their peers.

At this point in the semester, the preservice teachers had gained a considerable amount of knowledge regarding effective literacy instruction at the middle school level and how to plan meaningful lessons that integrated literacy across the curriculum. The
microteaching assignment enabled the preservice teachers to plan and present a lesson with their peers in preparation for teaching in authentic middle school classrooms during the last five weeks of the semester. However, as the instructor of the course, I wanted the preservice teachers to become cognizant of the pedagogical decisions that were made while planning the lessons as they considered the selection of texts, grouping strategies, activities, and assessments.

The preservice teachers met with the members of their electronic learning communities during the next class session following the microteaching assignments to dialogue with their peers using their reflexive essays as springboards for their conversations. This assignment encouraged the preservice teachers to consider how their past and current views of literacy were contributing to the choices they were making in planning literacy lessons, and provided an opportunity to consider any changes that would help strengthen the lessons if they were taught in the future.

The objective of Sean’s microteaching lesson plan, geared for a fourth grade science class, was for the students to compare and contrast organisms from prehistoric times with present-day organisms by reading the text *The Visual Dictionary of Prehistoric Life* (McCord, 1995). Sean wanted to motivate his students by having them pretend they were scientists who had just invented a time machine. This time machine would enable the students to travel back in time in order to learn about prehistoric organisms. The lesson included whole group and small group instruction, the completion of a graphic organizer, and an opportunity for journal writing.
Sean’s reflexive essay explained the pedagogical decisions made in his lesson. Sean’s past experiences as a student greatly influenced the decisions reflected in his lesson plan. Sean’s struggles with literacy were partly based on his lack of motivation in school due to a “one size fits all approach.” Therefore, Sean became more aware of the need to plan lessons that would cater to different modalities. He stated, “I understand that it is extremely difficult to reach every student and keep them motivated, interested, and involved, but there are technological tools and teaching strategies that can be incorporated into each lesson to ensure that it will involve as many students as possible” (reflexive essay, October 22, 2012).

Sean also addressed his current beliefs regarding teaching literacy across the curriculum, and how those beliefs influenced the pedagogical decisions made in his lesson plan. He spent a considerable amount of time finding an informational text that would provide his students with accurate information on the prehistoric times. Sean also selected a tree diagram for the students to complete while discovering their new information. Additionally, Sean wanted the students to complete a journal entry as their own reflection of the information learned in the lesson. The tree diagrams and journal entries were to serve as assessments of the lesson.

Sean shared, “My current beliefs about teaching literacy across the curriculum have changed significantly since my last semester in the teaching program” (reflexive essay, October 22, 2012). Sean stated that he was more aware of selecting literacy strategies that could enhance lessons in other content areas besides language arts, and
based his lessons on both language arts and content area standards. Sean further reflected,

The lesson plan that I have created for my microteaching session is an excellent example of my personal development. Before this methods course, I did not think of literacy as something that should or could be incorporated into a lesson plan for subjects such as science and social studies. Now, I have realized that literacy is very important across the curriculum because it is the foundation of properly learning and understanding the content for all subjects, not just language arts (reflexive essay, October 22, 2012).

Sean’s lesson was effectively planned and taught, and his discussion with the members of his electronic community of learners further supported his pedagogical decisions. His peers were engaged throughout the lesson, and felt fourth grade students would be motivated by various aspects of the lesson. Their suggestions of incorporating technology provided Sean another possibility to enhance his lesson and present information that went beyond a traditional text.

By completing the various components of this assignment which included the planning, teaching, reflection, and discussion, Sean became more aware of the influence of his past and current beliefs on the pedagogical decisions in his own lesson planning. Sean expressed the need to make his lesson relevant, engaging, and motivating to his future students which had been lacking in his own instruction. The course was teaching Sean that literacy was not to be taught as a separate subject, but can be an integral component of all content areas. The dialogues with Sean’s peers, who provided positive
feedback, also contributed to his growing self-confidence as a future middle school

teacher. Sean knew that he could effectively plan lessons that would meet the cognitive

and affective needs of his students.

**Pedagogical structuring.** Although Sean stated during our first round interview

that he was not originally interested in taking another literacy course during his teacher

education program, he was complimentary of the way *Reading Instruction in Middle

Childhood Education* had been structured during the fall 2012 semester. He enjoyed that

the course was much more than learning literacy strategies, and appreciated that literacy

had been defined in different ways to include the use of a variety of texts, presentations,

interpretations, and technology (transcript, September 28, 2012).

Sean also believed that the classroom community which was formed during the

on-campus portion of the class contributed to his development as a future teacher. He

compared the pedagogical structuring of our methods course to another methods course

he was also taking during the fall semester. He shared his thoughts at the end of the on-
campus portion of the course. Sean said,

I think it really had a lot to do with your teaching style. Your class is long, almost
two hours. And, to me, that’s like really long for me to be concentrating on one
thing, but you always kept it interesting, and it never felt like I was sitting looking
at the clock. It was always energetic, and you had a good balance on how you let
some students kind of joke around and kind of reeled them back in. But, then I go
to my very next class, and I’m not lying to you, this whole classroom, this

classroom is filled, and not a single person makes a peep. It’s dead quiet for the
whole hour sitting there. And, I thought it was always funny because twice a week I would see a contrast of, you know, one class really fun and energetic. There’s so much talking and stuff going on, and then I go on to the next class. It’s literally dead quiet. You could hear a pin drop. There is no classroom community (transcript, November 5, 2012).

Sean continued to reflect on his past educational experiences in which he had sat in numerous classrooms that were lecture-based and had unmotivated him as a middle school and high school student. Being a member of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, and engaging with a community of learners reinforced Sean’s beliefs and visions of the teacher he wanted to become and the learning environment he wanted to provide for his students. He stated, “So, I think with your class, it was just really interactive, and it reinforced how I believe teaching should be anyway because I didn’t have that in high school or junior high, and it really, really made me struggle. So, once again it reinforced the difference between lecture and interactive, or classroom climate and no classroom climate” (transcript, November 5, 2012).

**On-Campus Summary**

The pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* contributed to the development of Sean’s professional identity and his beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. The course assignments enabled Sean to explore his past and present beliefs and future visions of teaching at the middle school level with a specific focus on the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. Engaging in reflection, dialogic exchanges with his peers and instructor, and envisioning his role in
his future classroom, enabled Sean to make his tacitly held beliefs explicit and further defined who he wanted to be as a middle school teacher.

Sean entered the literacy methods course with a negative attitude, personal tensions, and questioned the need to take another literacy course as a future middle school science and social studies teacher. The literacy narrative assignment provided Sean the opportunity to reflect on his past experiences and begin envisioning his future as a professional. Sean’s past experiences at home and school, including other college literacy courses, had greatly influenced his beliefs. Sean grew up in a family in which his father worked long hours and his mother was busy raising four children. Therefore, Sean received little to no support from his parents in regards to his academics. Moreover, the curricular and instructional practices that he experienced as a student, specifically in middle school and high school, contributed to his lack of motivation and academic struggles. Additionally, another literacy course, *The Teaching of Phonics*, that Sean had been required to take in his education program had little relevancy to him as a future middle school teacher, thus contributing to his belief that literacy would not be a major component in his future science and social studies classroom.

Sean expressed his anxiety and stress at the beginning of the semester which was focused primarily on his own challenging course load and looming exams he was required to pass for state licensure. However, as the semester progressed, Sean began to grow in his professional development. The dialogic exchanges Sean engaged in with his peers throughout the semester, including his electronic journal postings, contributed to his changing beliefs and development. Sean gained confidence as he realized that other
preservice teachers were also experiencing similar tensions and doubts about being truly ready to enter the field and teach middle school students. His peers also offered new perspectives to consider which contributed to Sean’s understanding of the need to focus on his students’ social-emotional growth in addition to their cognitive needs.

Through the literacy metaphor poster assignment, Sean gained a deeper understanding of his current literacy beliefs. Although his poster contained reference to a person’s struggles with literacy, Sean also focused on the endless possibilities that literacy could provide to all students. He also learned that he was capable of planning effective lessons which would engage and motivate his learners. Sean was able to plan lessons that were based not only on science and social studies standards, but language arts standards, as well. Sharing a lesson with his peers in a microteaching format, and critically reflecting and discussing his pedagogical decisions represented in the lesson helped Sean further understand how his own past experiences were influencing his future decisions as an educator.

Sean benefitted from engaging in learning opportunities throughout the on-campus portion of the course that encouraged reflection and discussion of his beliefs and visioning about his role as a teacher and the instructional practices that would take place in his future middle school classroom. Additionally, being a member of a classroom community provided Sean with support and increased his confidence as he began his field experience in an authentic middle school classroom for the remainder of the semester.
Field Experience

During the last five weeks of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, the preservice teachers no longer met on campus. Instead, each preservice teacher completed a required field experience in a local middle school classroom. Sean was placed in a fourth grade language arts and social studies classroom in a local suburban middle school. Upon receiving his field experience placement information, Sean immediately contacted his cooperating teacher, Mrs. Barber, and spent a day meeting with her and observing in her classroom prior to the official start of the experience. Sean entered the field with a mix of emotions. He had never completed a field experience in a fourth grade classroom, so he was apprehensive about working with students at the lower level of the middle school grade band. Sean was also nervous about teaching social studies. He questioned his content knowledge in this area and knew he would have to refresh himself on specific topics that would be taught during his time in the field. However, Sean expressed a confidence in teaching language arts, and looked forward to putting the theory learned in our course into practice.

In the past semesters of the course, once the preservice teachers entered the field, there was little to no communication between the instructor and the preservice teachers, and the preservice teachers and their peers. This was a common complaint amongst preservice teachers in the past who often felt disconnected from the university during their field experiences with placements scattered across Northeast Ohio. Therefore, continuing the dialogic exchanges in the electronic journals was a significant change in the pedagogical structuring of the course, which promoted communication and
collaboration amongst the preservice teachers and sought to maintain the classroom community which had formed throughout the on-campus portion of the course.

The pedagogical restructuring of the course provided the preservice teachers with opportunities to continue reflecting, dialoguing, and visioning while observing and teaching in local middle school classrooms. In addition to the planning and teaching of literacy lessons, the preservice teachers continued posting in their electronic journals and wrote a final vision statement of the semester. The third round interviews were also an opportunity to discuss each of my participants’ field experiences in-depth and further elaborate on topics shared in the electronic journal postings and final vision statements of the semester.

**Electronic journals.** As the course instructor, I wanted the preservice teachers to continue to have a forum in which they could honestly discuss their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as they began observing and instructing middle school students in authentic classroom settings. The electronic journal entries completed in the field occurred during the eleventh, thirteenth, and fifteenth weeks of the semester.

The fourth journal posting of the semester coincided with the preservice teachers first week in their field experience. The fourth posting asked the preservice teachers to provide an overview of their field placement and reflect on the literacy practices that were initially observed. The preservice teachers were asked to respond to the following prompt:

*Provide a brief overview of your field experience (i.e. setting, grade level). What is one observation you have made regarding the literacy instruction that is taking*
place in the classroom? Has anything surprised you about the expectations/philosophy that the school and/or teacher has regarding literacy instruction?

Sean continued to dialogue with Greg, Kim, and Natalie, the members of his electronic community of learners, throughout his field experience. Sean described his field experience as overwhelmingly positive. His cooperating teacher, Mrs. Barber, treated Sean like an equal in her classroom. He immediately was provided the opportunity to get involved in the classroom, which was different from previous field experiences. In the past, Sean had felt like a “visitor” in other cooperating teachers’ classrooms which was the opposite of his personality. He said, “As a nontraditional student and having a background in the military, I need to be in control, or I feel like I’m not learning or I’m not part of something” (transcript, December 10, 2012). His posting at the beginning of his field experience expressed not only his enthusiasm for being in Mrs. Barber’s classroom, but also the positive instructional practices that Sean was observing. He shared,

My cooperating teacher uses several different content books to enhance each lesson that she gives in the classroom. There is a classroom library that takes up one of the walls in the classroom that each student gets to choose from each week. One thing we discussed about literacy was how passionate she is about the importance of literacy in middle school across all content areas. My teacher has been in the field for over twenty years, and she made it clear that she is very passionate about always keeping her lessons relevant and having a literacy aspect
integrated into each one. I was pleased that I had this class [Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education] before being assigned to her classroom because I finally understood the importance of literacy in all content areas besides language arts (electronic journal, November 8, 2012).

Natalie’s post also expressed her enthusiasm for her placement which was also in a fourth grade language arts and social studies classroom although in a different district. Natalie and Sean engaged in a dialogue regarding the similarities of their placements and positive beginnings of their field experiences. Sean posted to Natalie,

I am so glad you seem to be in the same boat as me! I have little to no stress anymore! The first day was “controlled chaos” and it was pretty overwhelming, but once I got to know each and every student, the cooperating teacher, and the schedule, I felt completely at home! I show up every day at 8 am and I stay to around 5 pm. I have a smile on my face every day, just like you! My cooperating teacher gives me additional lessons and responsibilities every day, and I am always ready for the challenge and the experiences. She (my CT) also has a library along one of the walls and has a huge selection of books across many genres. She has the students silent read at least 30 minutes every day and they get a different book every week, one from the actual school library and one from the classroom library. After the first week, I have become so familiar with the CT and students, I feel like I have been teaching with the kids for a year! I know I definitely make the right career move. Teaching fits me to the core! (electronic journal response, November 15, 2012).
Sean’s field placement enabled him to see effective literacy instruction in action. His cooperating teacher modeled the best practices that we had spent the first ten weeks of the semester learning and discussing. She valued literacy and integrated literacy across all components of the curriculum. Mrs. Barber maintained an extensive classroom library that too often disappears in the middle school years, provided sufficient self-selected reading time for her students, offered the fourth graders choices in their reading selections, and provided her students with relevant, meaningful lessons on a daily basis. It was during the field experience that Sean began to truly see the connection of theory to practice and the ways in which literacy instruction could effectively be taught across the curriculum.

The fifth journal entry of the semester focused on the teaching of literacy lessons in the middle childhood classroom. At this point in the semester, the preservice teachers had been in their field experience placements for approximately three weeks. This posting was an opportunity for the preservice teachers to share one of their lessons with their electronic community of learners, and reflect on areas for further growth. The preservice teachers responded to the following:

*Describe a literacy lesson that you have recently taught in your field placement.*

*What successes did you have teaching this lesson? What challenges, if any, occurred during the lesson? If you could teach this lesson again, what specific components would you change? Why?*

Sean wrote in his electronic journal about a language arts lesson that he taught to his fourth grade students on writing arguments based on Benjamin Franklin’s claim that
the wild turkey should have been the national bird of our country instead of the bald eagle. Sean discussed teaching a mini lesson on facts and opinions before the writing assignment as a review for the students. This particular lesson enabled Sean to teach using small group instruction, which he found to be successful. He stated, “This was the first time I did a lesson where I had small group work, and I really enjoyed it. I could give individual students, especially struggling readers, the attention they required.” Although his lesson went well due in part from the help he received from his cooperating teacher, Sean realized he would not always have another educator in the classroom. Therefore, he would need to consider how to successfully manage small group instruction on his own (electronic journal, November 19, 2012).

Sean dialogue with two members of his electronic community of learners, Natalie and Greg, in response to their posts detailing literacy lessons taught in their fourth and fifth grade classrooms respectively. Sean responded,

I totally agree with what both of you have said about teaching the 4th and 5th graders. You have to be very clear and concise with your expectations. You also have to make sure that they are on task and focused throughout the entire lesson, which luckily I have become quite proficient at (hats off to my awesome CT [cooperating teacher]! She has given me the best advice and wisdom!) My closing comment and advice is something my cooperating teacher has taught me in the last three weeks and it has been an incredible learning lesson for me as a future teacher. 1. Always give the students a reason behind why they are reading or doing an activity. 2. When constructing a lesson plan, think of the little things,
such as what should students do when they finish a worksheet early. When you have all your bases covered, you are that much more prepared. 3. Always state your behavior expectations to the students before each lesson and be clear and concise in your instructions (electronic journal response, November 26, 2012).

Sean’s posting and his dialogic exchange with his peers, Natalie and Greg, showed his continued growth as a young professional. Sean was able to critique one of his recent lessons which integrated the language arts and social studies content areas, and recognized the challenges of managing small group instruction as the only teacher in the classroom. He also shared practical advice from his cooperating teacher with Natalie and Greg who were grappling with some of the same issues in their middle school classrooms related to providing clear instructions and setting expectations for their students. Sean also expressed his new found confidence as a teacher, crediting his cooperating teacher for her sound advice and guidance throughout his teaching experience.

The final journal prompt was completed at the end of the semester and was intended for the preservice teachers to reflect upon how their beliefs of teaching literacy across the curriculum may have been reinforced or altered after completing their field experiences and working with middle school students for the last five weeks of the semester. The preservice teachers were asked to reflect and respond to the following:

How has your experience in an authentic middle childhood classroom supported or challenged your beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum?

What specifically contributed to these beliefs?
Sean response showed his enthusiasm for teaching and the lessons he learned throughout his time in his fourth grade classroom. He posted,

My experiences in an authentic middle school classroom have challenged many beliefs I had about teaching, lesson planning, literacy, differentiated learning, confidence, diversity, expectations, classroom management, time management, and even more, but this is all that my brain at 11:00pm can think of at the moment. Needless to say, this experience was simply amazing towards my goal in becoming an effective teacher in today’s diverse classroom. The challenges I have been hearing about in college are real because I saw so many of them first hand. A fourth grade student on a 9th grade reading and comprehension level sitting next to a fourth grade student still on a 2nd grade reading level...I saw that, and to go a step further, I had to find effective lessons and strategies to efficiently teach literacy and content to both of these students while under a time constraint. I have improved my abilities tremendously, but I have a million miles to go (electronic journal, December 4, 2012).

Sean’s posting showed his ability to bridge theory to practice as a teacher. Throughout the course, we had discussed many of the issues that Sean addressed in his journal entry. However, it was not until Sean was actually teaching in his fourth grade classroom that he was able to understand more deeply the challenges that teachers face on a daily basis in order to meet the needs of their students. Even though Sean gained a dose of reality during his five week field experience, he was not deterred. He realized that he still had a lot to learn as a teacher, but he was ready for all the demands that were ahead.
Sean’s postings during his field experiences showed a new found confidence as he enthusiastically described his placement in a fourth grade classroom and engaged in dialogues specifically with Natalie and Greg in which advice was shared and encouragement was offered. Sean’s veteran cooperating teacher became a role model for him, and it was clear that Sean benefitted from being placed in her classroom. Moreover, Sean learned the realities of being a classroom teacher which he articulated in his postings. He realized that teaching was indeed a demanding profession; however, he was certainly up for the challenge and looked forward to the future.

**Vision Statement.** Sean’s final vision statement completed during the fifteenth week of the semester, showed an increased clarity in his vision. Although Sean had begun the course with a rather clear vision of his role as a future teacher and the role of his students, his vision of teaching literacy across the curriculum, was less defined. However, the experiences provided during the on-campus portion of the course, as well as in the field contributed to a sharper focus by the end of the semester.

Sean envisioned his future classroom as feeling like a “second home” where all students would feel important and valued. Sean had discussed the importance of establishing rapport and creating a learning environment based on mutual respect throughout the semester, which he accomplished during the field. He said, “I had to get to know my students for a million different reasons. I wanted to get to know who they were, not just their ability levels, but their personalities” (transcript, December 10, 2012). Sean still envisioned himself as a role model for his students, but also wanted to serve as a guide to provide individualized instruction to all his adolescent learners.
One of Sean’s biggest revelations in the field was the various achievements gaps among students in the same grade, and the challenge to differentiate instruction. Although Sean had advocated the importance of differentiating instruction earlier in the semester, his field experience contributed to Sean’s understanding that he would need to take responsibility in order for this individualized instruction to occur. Sean stated, “Every student is different in his/her learning style and using this individual approach will maximize the student’s ability to understand the content and apply it to their lives” (vision statement, December 9, 2012). He expanded on his thoughts during our third round interview. He said, “The biggest hurdle I found was how do you take a 45-minute lesson and effectively meet every individual student’s needs? I never would have guessed there was that big of a gap” (transcript, December 10, 2012).

Sean described his cooperating teacher as being “smart across the whole spectrum of content areas,” and credited Mrs. Barber with showing him more strategies to differentiate instruction, and provided learning opportunities that supported the fourth grade students’ varied needs across the curriculum. By the end of the semester, Sean also expressed his desire to teach at the lower levels of the middle school grade band. Although he initially envisioned himself as an eighth grade science teacher, his experiences in a fourth grade classroom changed his views. He enjoyed being in a classroom in which multiple subjects were taught to his students. He believed that literacy could be more easily integrated when several disciplines were taught by the same teacher opposed to integrating literacy in a single content area classroom. Sean believed that literacy easily “gets lost” in upper level middle school content classrooms, and
enjoyed being able to have the time to focus on literacy practices with his younger students.

Sean saw the need for literacy to be a component in the planning and teaching of all lessons across the curriculum. His lessons would provide the needed differentiation to support students of various reading and writing abilities. Sean stated, “This is important because there is such a large gap between skill levels that students will get lost without having an effective teacher that understands these differences and can close these gaps through superior lesson planning” (vision statement, December 9, 2012). Sean envisioned a classroom where content area lessons would be relevant to the students’ lives which would contribute to engaged and motivated learners. Sean also stated, “Every student will show personal and academic growth while they are in my classroom and learn new life skills that they can use at home and in the community” (vision statement, December 9, 2012).

Moreover, Sean’s positive field experience enabled him to further understand his developing professional identity and reinforced Sean’s decision to become a middle childhood education teacher. Sean’s increased confidence and beliefs in his own abilities to be an effective teacher had helped shape his vision. He shared, If you had just asked me two months ago, like, you know, what is a 4th grader capable of, or what are you capable of as a teacher, or what kind of a rapport can you get with students only after a month of being there...I would have failed the whole test. Like, I would’ve never known. I mean, I couldn’t believe everything I learned. It was like I always knew that teaching can be rewarding. But, like, I
really got a sense of that this month. You know the classic, Confucius saying, “If you get a job you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.” It’s so cliché, but it’s totally true. I tell you, I quit careers where I was making $30.00 an hour with full benefits to do this. This kind of reaffirmed that, like, I’m serious. I felt more rewarded in this month than I have in my military career. This definitely confirmed that I made an awesome choice (transcript, December 10, 2012).

Sean’s final vision statement showed evidence of professional growth in his role as a future middle school teacher and the instructional decisions he would make in his future classroom. Although Sean knew from the beginning of the semester that he wanted to create an environment where his students’ personal and academic needs were met, his second vision statement indicated a clearer view of how he would accomplish his vision. He shared the importance of planning lessons that would provide a variety of learning opportunities and differentiated instruction in order for all students to feel successful both personally and academically. Sean realized the challenges in making his vision a reality in his future classroom. However, his knowledge and understanding from his successful completion of Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education would contribute to the carrying out of Sean’s vision.

**Field Experience Summary**

The field experience component of the course aided in Sean’s developing professional identity. Sean entered the field with some reservations about teaching fourth grade students in the content areas of language arts and social studies. However, his focus shifted from his own tensions to meeting the needs of his students. Sean saw
firsthand the necessity in providing for the individual needs of his students who were at various reading levels in his classroom. He was guided and supported by his cooperating teacher who became a mentor to Sean. Sean even began sharing the advice he received from his cooperating teacher with his peers during his dialogic exchanges in his electronic journal. Moreover, the field experience reinforced Sean’s decision to become a middle childhood teacher.

Additionally, Sean’s vision of teaching literacy across the curriculum became more clearly defined after witnessing the integration of literacy in language arts and social studies classes during his field experience. His cooperating teacher’s passion for literacy pervaded all aspects of her teaching, and reinforced for Sean that literacy needed to be an integral aspect of all disciplines in order for his students to become successful in all content areas.

**Conclusion**

The pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* positively contributed to Sean’s developing professional identity and beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Sean benefitted from exploring his past and present beliefs, and realized the impact his beliefs were having on his future positioning as a middle school science and social studies teacher. The assignments that Sean completed during the on-campus portion of the course, within a community of learners, enabled him to reflect, dialogue with peers, and envision his future classroom while learning effective instructional practices of teaching literacy in a middle childhood classroom. The field experience component of the course also enabled Sean to more
clearly understand his role as a future middle school teacher, and reinforced that he was truly capable of providing his future middle school students with learning opportunities in a safe and supportive classroom environment.

Although Sean entered class with a negative view towards reading and writing, his beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum changed throughout the semester. He began to understand the importance of literacy in all content areas, and believed that literacy instruction must be differentiated for students in order to for them to be successful in all aspects of their learning. Sean successfully planned and taught lessons that included both language arts and content area standards, and found ways to integrate literacy in science and social studies lessons. His beliefs regarding literacy instruction were reinforced during his field experience in a fourth grade classroom in which his cooperating teacher seamlessly integrated literacy instruction in her language arts and social studies classes.

Sean’s vision of his role as a future middle school teacher and the instructional practices that would take place in his classroom became more clearly defined throughout the semester. Sean was able to use visioning as a conceptual tool to provide direction in accomplishing his goals. Visioning was a concrete way for Sean to focus on the important aspects of teaching and learning and his role as a future teacher.

Sean and I have maintained a professional relationship since the end of the study. Sean enrolled in a subsequent literacy course that I taught during the spring 2013 semester during which we continued to discuss his personal and professional beliefs. Sean and I also met informally on a weekly basis during the fall 2013 semester during
which Sean completed his clinical practice (student teaching) experience. Sean completed his first session of clinical practice in a sixth grade science classroom, and his second clinical practice experience in a ninth grade social studies classroom in the same school district. During the clinical practice experience, Sean was required to complete a Senior Seminar course on campus. Therefore, he stopped by my office on most Monday afternoons before his class in order to share his experiences and receive my advice on many different aspects of teaching. Sean described his clinical practice experiences as rather average. It was hard for him to not compare his student teaching experience with the overwhelmingly positive field placement he had experienced during our Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education course. However, Sean’s beliefs and his vision of who he wanted to be as a teacher and how he wanted to teach enabled him to continue moving forward.

Sean successfully completed his clinical practice experience, passed his required licensure exams, and graduated from the university in December 2013. He worked as a substitute teacher in several local school districts during the spring 2014 semester, and became employed as an educational consultant at a local science center during the summer of 2014. He was hired as a fourth grade science and social studies teacher in a local suburban middle school for the 2014-2015 academic year, and continues to envision his future as a professional in the field of education.

**Sawyer**

I met Sawyer the first day of the fall semester on August 27, 2012. He entered *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* with a sense of confidence and
assuredness as he carefully selected his seat for the semester, and engaged in idle conversation with some peers before class began (field notes, August 27, 2012). After an icebreaker activity, Sawyer was the first preservice teacher who volunteered to introduce himself to the class. Sawyer was a 20-year old traditional undergraduate student majoring in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of language arts and social studies. He was also pursuing a middle childhood generalist endorsement which would enable him to teach in self-contained fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classrooms. Sawyer grew up in a small, rural town in Central Ohio, and was recruited to play basketball for the university. He lived on campus, and was employed as a lifeguard at the university recreation center. Sawyer also shared with the class that his mother was a middle school language arts teacher who had instructed Sawyer during his own middle school years.

Through numerous conversations, I learned that Sawyer was descended from a long line of educators. In addition to his mother teaching middle school language arts, his father was a physical education teacher in his hometown elementary school. Therefore, Sawyer had been instructed by his father in physical education classes from kindergarten through fifth grade. His father had also been Sawyer’s varsity high school basketball coach, which had often presented challenges for both father and son. Sawyer’s maternal grandmother and his paternal grandfather had also served as superintendents in local school districts during their educational careers. Sawyer’s younger sister, who was a high school senior during the time of the research, had also planned to major in education in college and pursue a degree in early childhood education.
Sawyer entered class as a junior in the teacher education program. He had a 3.443 grade point average at the beginning of the fall 2012 semester, and presented himself as a serious preservice teacher, who was trying hard to balance the demands of being a college student and a varsity athlete. *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* was the first and only methods course that Sawyer took during the fall 2012 semester. In addition to our course, he was enrolled as a full-time student in other required core courses for his major including astronomy, biology, mathematics, and American Literature. Data were collected from Sawyer throughout the fall 2012 semester during the on-campus and field components of the course.

**On-Campus Learning Opportunities**

During the on-campus portion of the course, which comprised the first ten weeks of the semester, Sawyer completed several assignments that encouraged reflection and dialogic engagement of his beliefs, as well as the visioning of his future middle school classroom. These assignments included a literacy narrative, a vision statement, electronic journal entries, a literacy metaphor poster, and a pedagogical discussion/reflection. Additionally, Sawyer participated in two interviews during the on-campus portion of the course. The first interview occurred during the fifth week of the semester which was the midway point of the on-campus portion of the course. The second interview took place during the tenth week of the semester which was the end of the on-campus portion of the course. The interviews provided an opportunity for me to dialogue with Sawyer, and learn more about his beliefs and visions expressed at various points in the semester.
Literacy narrative. Sawyer began his literacy narrative by expressing his love for reading and writing. However, he also stated that being an avid reader and writer was not a part of himself that he easily shared with others. Sawyer explained this tension, “Both have been a secret passion of mine. I say ‘secret’ because athletes are not supposed to enjoy forming words into imaginative sentences, or get lost in an unknown world for hours at a time” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). Being an athlete was an important aspect of Sawyer’s identity. He had played varsity basketball throughout his four years of high school, and had earned numerous awards and recognitions for his talents. Sawyer’s immediate family had also excelled in athletics. His father had been a collegiate basketball player and a well-respected high school coach, and his mother had swum competitively throughout her college career. Additionally, Sawyer’s younger sister was a talented volleyball player who was in the process of being recruited by several Division I universities. Although academics were a priority in Sawyer’s life, it was also evident that the competitiveness of sports played a major role in shaping his identity as he worked hard to excel in both academics and athletics.

Sawyer’s literacy narrative credited his mother with sparking his interest in reading. He shared vivid memories of being read to by his mother daily, and enjoyed reading personalized books that his grandmother had made for him and his sister when he was a little boy. His mother’s passion for reading and writing was instilled in Sawyer from an early age, and he spent a considerable amount of time reading and writing for personal enjoyment throughout his school years. The book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, by J.K. Rowling was also a major spark in Sawyer’s motivation to read
and write. He began reading the first book of the series in the fourth grade, and stated, “*Harry Potter* just threw me over the edge. I loved it. I wanted to have that world” (transcript, September 26, 2012). Sawyer and his best friend began writing their own stories based on the world of *Harry Potter* while in middle school; however, he was cautious about sharing his reading and writing passions with most of his peers and fellow teammates. Sawyer shared, “I was a closeted geek, beyond belief. I still have those stories, too, and sometimes I’ll read them for the heck of it” (transcript, September 26, 2012).

Although Sawyer was the valedictorian of his senior class, he shared that he did not consider himself a strong reader. Sawyer believed he was a slow reader and often struggled with fluency, although he was able to comprehend material quite easily (transcript, September 26, 2012). Sawyer’s competitiveness on the court often translated into the classroom in which he felt the pressure to be a fluent reader. He stated,

That was always something I kind of struggled with a little bit, too, because I was considered one of the smart kids. It’s like I kind of had to live up to that. When we had to read sections in class out loud, I read slow [sic]. And, if we had to read anything in a specific amount of time, you know, I got jealous or mad at the people who got further ahead of me than I was. I felt I had to keep up with them (transcript, September 26, 2012).

Sawyer was instructed by his mother in language arts classes during fifth, sixth, and seventh grades Although it was often challenging to have his mother as a teacher, Sawyer became even more passionate about literature in her classroom, and reflected on
the influence of her teaching style on his visions of becoming a middle school language arts teacher. His mother showed enthusiasm for each book she taught and read with her classes, and made it apparent that each page contained important information for the reader, which helped to motivate her students. Sawyer stated,

That is how I want to help my students learn to love reading. I want to present the information as not only vital, but also interesting to my students. The same is true with writing. I want the students to feel as if they are telling their audience something that is crucial to understand rather than present information in a way that is considered boring. I believe that all writing is the process of telling a story, whether it be a research paper or a creative analysis (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Sawyer and I discussed during our first round interview several classic and contemporary young adult literature titles that he enjoyed, and hoped to teach in his future middle school classroom. These titles included *The Giver*, by L. Lowry; *Where the Red Fern Grows*, by W. Rawls; *The Hunger Games*, by S. Collins; and *Divergent*, by V. Roth. It was evident that reading was still a major part of Sawyer’s life. However, he still was not able to openly embrace his passions for reading and writing with his college friends and teammates stating, “I’m a jock. I’m not supposed to like reading” (transcript, September 26, 2012). He admitted to being homesick his freshman year, and although he was a member of the varsity basketball team, he always refused offers to socialize with the team on weekends, and instead found comfort in reading and writing in his dorm room. It was not until his sophomore year that he became more social as a college
student, but still preferred spending his free time reading and writing if he was given the choice.

Given Sawyer’s beliefs about reading and writing, I was surprised to learn that he had not initially intended on becoming a middle school language arts teacher. Although following in his parents’ footsteps into an educational career was never a doubt, Sawyer originally planned on becoming a high school science teacher. However, after taking numerous upper level science courses in high school, he decided that he did not want to pursue that discipline. Since he had always enjoyed history, Sawyer entered college as a history major with an education minor. However, during his first semester, he began to question the realities of securing a high school social studies teaching position upon graduation. He began talking to a former high school teammate and current university student in middle childhood education who encouraged Sawyer to pursue this grade band. Sawyer changed majors and began coursework in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of science and social studies. However, once again the science courses were not interesting him, and he knew he needed to make a change. Sawyer engaged in a conversation with his mother at the end of his first semester freshman year, and she encouraged him to become a language arts teacher. His love of reading, writing, and grammar made this teaching field an ideal fit for him. Therefore, Sawyer made another change and decided to major in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of language arts and social studies.

Although Sawyer had a strong interest in both language arts and social studies, he admitted in his literacy narrative that his enjoyment with reading and writing in school
was often limited to assignments that he found personally interesting or provided him a choice in his learning. Reading textbooks and writing essays in other content area classes were not appealing to him. As a strong student, Sawyer was able to do well in all subject areas, but found most of his courses lacked relevancy to his own life. As Sawyer began envisioning his future role as a teacher, Sawyer felt he was straddling the line between being a college student and a future teacher. He feared not being able to teach his future middle school students how to understand the content. He stated, “I just have that fear. Because everyone has told me I’ll make a great teacher, but can I explain this [content] to my students? Like I was saying we all have our own understandings, but you can’t really explain your own understandings” (transcript, September 26, 2012).

The tensions and doubts that Sawyer expressed regarding his professional identity at this point in the semester were partially based on his past experiences as a student navigating high school history and government classes. He remembered sitting through government classes and thinking to himself, “Why must I understand this? Why, if this is so boring, must students be forced to learn the subject?” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). He felt it would be difficult to evoke the same positive attitudes towards social studies classes that he had towards language arts. However, Sawyer recalled one particular assignment in his government class in which he and his fellow classmates were charged with writing their own versions of the Constitution based on their knowledge of the U.S. government, but were also encouraged to use their creativity. This writing assignment appealed to Sawyer, and made the content more relatable and enjoyable. “Through literacy, we were gaining the knowledge of the importance of government and
how it helped a society to function and strive” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Even though Sawyer expressed his struggle to clearly see the integration of literacy in social studies at this point in his teacher education program, he believed that he would need to find creative ways that would appeal to his future students such as presenting historical content as an interesting story. “History is, after all, one giant story consisting of multiple authors” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Sawyer’s reflection of his past literacy experiences at home and school contributed to his initial visions of teaching at the middle school level. He saw literacy as an essential component in his future students’ cognitive and social-emotional growth. Sawyer realized that his role was to share his own passion for reading and writing with his students, and cultivate this interest in his students by making his assignments meaningful to their lives. He shared,

I believe that my love of reading and writing is essential for teaching at the middle childhood age. I know how extremely distracting life is for early teenagers, and those distractions can vary in intensity depending on each student. My goal and my duty as a teacher, I feel, are to make my subjects as interesting and appealing to my students as I possibly can. It is not enough to merely present the information. I, as the teacher, need to show my own interest in literacy, and let it be known that I am just like my students. At times, I find certain reading and writing tasks to be boring, but I find ways to push through and make the tasks bearable and interesting. For me, reading and writing is an art, and I have a love for that art. As a future educator, I will strive for each and every one of my
students to find the love for reading and writing, no matter how big or small that love is (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Sawyer’s literacy narrative and our further discussion during the first round interview, engaged Sawyer in the reflective process of exploring his past and present beliefs regarding literacy instruction, and his visions in teaching literacy in his future middle school classroom. Sawyer’s love for reading and writing stemmed from his mother who promoted literacy as a parent and as his middle school language arts teacher. Sawyer’s initial visions of teaching language arts were based on his mother’s teaching style and her ability to make young adult literature come alive for her students. She was also instrumental in encouraging Sawyer to select language arts as one of his teaching fields. Although Sawyer spent a considerable amount of time reading and writing for pleasure while growing up, he often had to force himself to complete reading and writing assignments in other content area courses that he considered boring and irrelevant to his life. Therefore, he expressed some uncertainty with the integration of literacy in his future social studies classes.

Although Sawyer initially expressed that reading and writing were secret passions of his due to his stereotypical belief that athletes were not supposed to enjoy those activities, Sawyer’s beliefs were contributing to his developing professional identity in a contrary way. Sawyer believed in sharing his love of reading and writing with his students, and honestly discussing the challenges he faced at times with completing certain assignments that were not interesting to him. Sawyer was beginning to show awareness in not only meeting the cognitive needs of his students, but also focusing on the affective
domain of learning, in which his adolescent learners’ attitudes, beliefs, and values would be acknowledged as contributing factors in their learning during the middle school years.

**Vision Statement.** At the beginning of the semester, the preservice teachers enrolled in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* were asked to complete vision statements that addressed specific areas of teaching and learning. The preservice teachers shared their visions of their roles as future teachers, the learning environment which would be created in their classrooms, the curricular and instructional practices that would guide their teaching, and their views on being a part of the greater school community. Visioning was also a component of many of the assignments that were completed throughout the semester including the literacy narratives, electronic journal entries, literacy metaphor posters, and pedagogical discussions. The preservice teachers were continuously encouraged to acknowledge their past and present beliefs as they developed their professional identities and envisioned their future content area classrooms. Discussions of Sawyer’s visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum were also discussed during the first and second round interviews.

Sawyer’s first vision statement completed during the third week of the semester showed his desire to provide his students with a strong academic program within the confines of a relaxed and supportive classroom environment. Sawyer envisioned teaching in a student-centered classroom that was the opposite of many of the learning environments in which he had been instructed during his own middle school and high school years. He stated, “I feel a relaxed and fun environment. I remember how some of my classrooms in school felt like a prison because they were so bare. I don’t want my
students to feel intimidated. I want them to want to come to class” (vision statement, September 10, 2012). Sawyer’s vision of his future classroom was based on the physical and emotional classroom environment that his mother had created as a middle school language arts teacher which helped encourage and motivate her middle school readers.

During our first round interview, Sawyer shared,

It’s weird. I kind of want it [future classroom] to look like my mom’s room. She’s got books everywhere. She’s got posters for reading and stuff, and it’s just that she had it set up in a way where it is comfortable and relaxing for students. I would like to have that. I know that it’s not likely because of how big classes are now, and how small classrooms are. But, I’d like to have it look like, “Oh, this is where we’re supposed to read” (transcript, September 26, 2012).

At the beginning of the semester, Sawyer saw himself as a teacher who would be a “strict enforcer, but understanding and fun, as well.” He acknowledged that his statement seemed quite contradictory. Sawyer wanted to be viewed as a respected teacher who would hold firm to his expectations and not be taken advantage of by his future middle school students. He clarified his beliefs during our first round interview. He said, “I want to come off as strict in the sense that I want the work done. But, I also want to be the type of teacher where they [students] can come to me if they have a problem. I mean, I had teachers where I was afraid to ask them a question. Would they get mad at me? Would they think I was stupid? It’s just, I want them to feel comfortable around me” (transcript, September 26, 2012).
Sawyer believed his main role was to present the content to his students in order to aid in their understanding and planned to assess his students “periodically” to gauge their growth and progress. He believed in teaching based on the standards and expectations of the school district in which he would be employed. Sawyer also hoped his students would be active learners in his classroom. He believed that his future middle school students should be actively engaged in their learning, and participate in assignments and discussions which would benefit not just themselves, but also their peers.

Although Sawyer was pursuing a middle childhood education degree in the teaching fields of language arts and social studies, his preference was for a future language arts teaching position. He envisioned a classroom in which his students would be learning about grammar and story elements, reading and discussing contemporary novels and short stories, and sharing thoughts and reactions through writing. In Sawyer’s first vision statement he did not specifically acknowledge the role literacy would play in a future social studies classroom.

As the on-campus portion of the course was coming to a close and the field component of the course was drawing near, Sawyer and I discussed his visioning of his future classroom once again. After numerous classroom discussions regarding the importance of literacy integration across disciplines, and the completion of a unit plan incorporating components of literacy within various content areas, Sawyer had a clearer vision of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The practices of teaching thematically and planning a unit in which all disciplines were addressed had been eye-opening for
him. He said, “See, this unit stuff is something new to me” (transcript, November 8, 2012). Sawyer also began to broaden his own definition of literacy. He shared, “I’ve come to realize, too, that literacy is not just words. It’s numbers, too, and pictures. You could even incorporate movies, too, and say, ‘Hey, write a paper on how math was incorporated into this movie’” (transcript, November 8, 2012).

Sawyer also began envisioning the collaboration that could take place between colleagues of different content areas. He looked forward to planning thematic units that would take into account multiple content areas, and even more clearly saw himself as a future social studies teacher who would still be able to tie in his love of literature by collaborating with his language arts colleagues. He either pictured himself selecting literature that would address the historical time period he was teaching, asking for advice and recommendations for reading materials from the language arts teachers, or creating a unit plan in which his future students would read and discuss a piece of related literature in both their language arts and social studies classes.

Sawyer’s visioning throughout the on-campus portion of the course showed growth in his professional development, and an increased understanding in the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. Sawyer’s goal as a future middle school teacher was to provide his students with a strong educational foundation in the content areas he would teach. However, he also wanted to be an approachable teacher his students could easily turn to for help and advice not only in academics, but also with personal tensions they may be experiencing during their middle school years. Although Sawyer still had a penchant for teaching language arts, his on-campus experiences in Reading Instruction in
Middle Childhood Education enabled him to more clearly see how literacy, and specifically literature, could be integrated across the curriculum by collaborating with his content area colleagues.

**Electronic journal entries.** At the beginning of the semester, the twelve preservice teachers enrolled in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* were randomly divided into three electronic communities of learners in which they posted journal entries and responded to members of their small group discussion boards via Blackboard, an electronic management system used by the university. The electronic journal postings occurred throughout the on-campus portion of the course during the third, fifth, and eighth weeks of the semester. The electronic journal entry assignment enabled the preservice teachers to share their beliefs about becoming teachers at the middle school level, and receive advice, support, and feedback from their peers. As the instructor of the course, I posed writing prompts for the preservice teachers to reflect upon, share, and respond to topics that seemed relevant at certain points in the course. I read all the journal postings throughout the semester, but chose not to enter the dialogues. I wanted the preservice teachers to engage in these exchanges with their peers, and not feel pressure to respond in certain ways to the instructor of the course.

Sawyer was a member of Group B of the electronic community of learners. Throughout the semester, he engaged in dialogic exchanges guided by journal prompts (see Appendix G) with Beth, Mallory, and Nina who were traditional undergraduate students majoring in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of language arts/mathematics, mathematics/science, and language arts/social studies respectively.
The first prompt of the semester invited the preservice teachers to share the tensions they were experiencing at the beginning of the fall semester as they returned to the college classroom after summer break.

Sawyer classified himself as a worrier in his first journal posting. He was concerned about managing his school work as well as his basketball schedule. As a member of the men’s varsity basketball team, Sawyer had numerous basketball related responsibilities in preparation for the start of the season later in the fall semester. Although Sawyer was anxious to maintain his high grades and be a contributing member of the team, his posting showed that he was able to put both responsibilities in perspective. He stated,

The way I cope with these stressors is that I look at my schedule now as a test for my future career. I want to teach and coach after school. How will I handle both of those jobs at the same time? I try to take every day as a step towards where I want to be in two or three years. These challenges are not only stressful, but also a motivation. I am motivated to keep my grades up and to do well in each of my classes. I am motivated to perform at my best in my methods course, especially while in the field for the second half of the semester. These challenges are just that, a challenge for me. As stressed as I am, I surprisingly enjoy it (electronic journal, September 9, 2012).

Sawyer’s posting showed that he was already thinking about his future as a professional. His aspirations to teach and coach at the middle school level were already a motivator to Sawyer as a junior in college. He realized that in order to handle multiple


commitments and responsibilities, he would need to rise to the challenge. Sawyer commented on Beth’s posting in which she also shared her stress in balancing coursework and numerous leadership positions including being the editor-in-chief of the university newspaper, a resident advisor, and a member of a sorority. Although Beth was extremely busy, she also felt motivated to succeed. Sawyer’s reply to Beth showed his desire to see the positive in his situation. He stated, “It is nice that you are able to take stress and make it into something productive. What I need to work on is to make my work and tasks less stressful and more enjoyable” (electronic journal response, September 16, 2012).

The second journal prompt of the semester encouraged the preservice teachers to reflect and share their beliefs on the expectations society holds for middle school teachers today. Sawyer’s electronic community of learners shared differing viewpoints on this topic. Beth and Mallory believed that teachers, especially at the middle school level, were unfairly charged with teaching not only the required content, but also life skills to their students. Both Beth and Mallory felt that middle school teachers must frequently take on the role of parents, and believed those expectations were often unreasonable. Sawyer, however, shared his differing beliefs. He posted,

I believe society has placed a lot of expectations on middle school teachers. We, as middle school teachers, deal with critical time periods for students. During middle school, students go through many transitions, physical, emotional, and mental. This particular age is where most bullying starts to become more severe and where cliques begin to start. Some students develop early, almost having a
high school attitude, whereas some are slow to develop and still have that elementary personality. Part of our duty as a middle school teacher, as well as preparing our students for high school and achievement tests, is to help our students transition during this next stage in their development. We need to have a better understanding of our students, almost on a personal level, in order to help them succeed and develop. These expectations for me are realistic. We are not just in our students’ lives to teach subjects. We are there to be role models and mentors (electronic journal, September 23, 2012).

Sawyer’s posting showed his understanding of middle childhood development and the transitions that students are experiencing physically, cognitively, and socially during this time period. Sawyer believed his future positioning as a teacher was to be a mentor and role model in order to guide his students to success. He saw the importance of balancing the cognitive and affective domains of learning in order to meet his students’ needs. Instead of shying away from this responsibility like some of his peers, Sawyer was ready to embrace this challenge.

Sawyer engaged in a dialogue with Nina regarding this posting who had expressed her understanding of the difficulties experienced by middle school students, but also was concerned about the time constraints that teachers face, and the realities of taking on a parenting role to meet both the cognitive and affective needs of her future students. Sawyer shared his thoughts on Nina’s posting. He stated, “It’s difficult to realize that we may be parents before we actually have families ourselves. It’s up to us to make sure our students go through a middle school experience the best way possible. It
is not only our job to teach the content standards but also to help each student though emotional and difficult times” (electronic journal response, October 1, 2012).

Even though Nina still expressed the challenge to meet her future students’ needs based upon their differing developmental levels, she agreed with Sawyer on the importance of being a role model for her students. She replied, “I also feel we are in our students’ lives to be role models and mentors. I feel like as a teacher we are put on a pedestal by not only our students, but also by their parents. We need to make sure that we continue to live up to those ideals” (electronic journal response, October 2, 2012).

This journal prompt elicited many different responses from the preservice teachers. Although some preservice teachers expressed their reservations with teaching the content and also life skills, Sawyer had a clear view on his role as a future teacher. He embraced the challenge of meeting his students’ differing needs, and understood the importance of becoming a teacher who would be considered a mentor to his future middle school students. Sawyer was able to articulate his beliefs, and offered a different perspective to some of his peers.

The third journal prompt of the semester focused on the preservice teachers’ beliefs towards their preparation in teaching literacy in their upcoming field experiences. Sawyer’s posting reflected his confidence in teaching reading to his middle school students in his upcoming field placement. He hoped to instill in his students a love of reading, although he realized that his time in the field would be limited to approximately five weeks. Nevertheless, he felt even in a short amount of time that he could make a
difference in his students’ lives by sharing his own passion towards reading. However, Sawyer expressed reservations with teaching writing. He stated,

I am very concerned with teaching writing. While I love to write and understand it, I’m afraid I will not be able to transfer my understanding to my students. I am particularly afraid to make a grammatical error or a spelling error in front of my students. I think the best way to address these concerns is to just make sure I present the information in a way that is best for the students to understand the topic, rather than how I would understand it. As for making grammatical and spelling errors, I need to make sure I am watching my writing carefully, and if I do make a mistake, use that mistake to teach my students (electronic journal, October 15, 2012).

Sawyer’s posting continued to show the development of his professional identity. He realized that being a strong writer himself, or understanding the content, was not merely enough to ensure his future students would learn the required information or successfully complete writing assignments. The challenge for Sawyer would be finding effective methods which would aid his students in their understanding. Sawyer also feared making mistakes in front of his students. Yet, he was able to articulate that making mistakes, although not ideal, could become a teachable moment.

Mallory’s reply reiterated for Sawyer that making mistakes as a teacher was a reality. However, it could also provide an opportunity for a teacher to discuss acceptance with middle school students of their own and others’ mistakes. Mallory stated,
I like that you mentioned being afraid to make grammar or spelling errors. I completely agree, but it’s a good idea to use it as a way to teach students and also let them know that it’s okay to make mistakes as long as you fix them. It stresses the importance of revising and editing. Writing makes me nervous as well, so I hope that we can both find a way to teach our students so that they can enjoy and understand it (electronic journal response, October 20, 2012).

The realities of teaching at the middle school level had been discussed extensively throughout the course. Beth, Mallory, and Nina expressed their own anxieties about teaching literacy in their field placements and their main concern about effectively differentiating instruction for students at various reading levels. Sawyer’s reply to Nina indicated that he was able to see that Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education was helping to prepare himself and his peers not only for the field experience at the end of the fall semester, but as future experiences, as well. He shared, “I have always struggled translating my understandings into ways that are easy for others to understand. It’s going to be difficult and new for us, but that is the purpose of this methods course, I feel. It will prepare us for our student teaching next spring, as well as our future careers” (electronic journal response, October 21, 2012).

Although Sawyer expressed some doubts about entering the field and effectively teaching writing to his students, he also shared his beliefs in becoming a teacher who would use his developing pedagogical content knowledge to ensure that his future students would have a firm grasp on the material he was teaching. Sawyer, like many of his peers, feared making mistakes in front of his students. Yet, Sawyer was able to
understand that he and his middle school students could learn from their mistakes and use those moments as opportunities to grow. Sawyer realized that his literacy methods course was preparing him for his future as an effective middle school teacher.

The electronic journal assignment provided Sawyer an opportunity to reflect and share his beliefs about becoming a middle school teacher and teaching literacy to future adolescent learners. The exchanges that took place throughout the on-campus portion of the course enabled Sawyer to gain more insight into his beliefs. Although Sawyer was balancing his academic and athletic responsibilities, Sawyer viewed his busyness as a challenge, and a good test for his future as a middle school teacher and basketball coach. He also clearly articulated the need for today’s middle school teachers to be more than content area instructors. Sawyer believed that he was responsible for the academic needs, as well as the social-emotional needs of his future students. His strong views provided a new perspective for his peers, Beth, Mallory, and Nina to consider who expressed differing viewpoints on the role of middle school teachers in the 21st century. Sawyer was also able to share his reservations with teaching writing in his upcoming placement, but also saw the possibility of making mistakes as a teachable moment, which was reinforced by his peer, Mallory. Sawyer continuously viewed the demands of becoming a future middle school teacher as a challenge he was ready to face head on.

**Literacy metaphor poster.** During the fifth week of the semester, the preservice teachers were asked to create literacy metaphor posters using the software Glogster to visually depict their beliefs about teaching literacy across the curriculum in the middle school classroom. After the preservice teachers had written literacy narratives and
reflected on their past literacy beliefs at home and school earlier in the semester, I wanted the preservice teachers to express what literacy currently meant to them. The preservice teachers were given the freedom to create the posters using a variety of backgrounds, text, music, videos, or images to illustrate their beliefs. In addition to creating their literacy metaphor posters, the preservice teachers were also required to reflect on their electronic posters, and had the option to complete their reflections as traditional essays, poems, or songs. The preservice teachers had the opportunity to share and explain their posters with the class.

Sawyer’s literacy metaphor poster did not adhere to any specific theme. Instead, the top portion of the poster represented Sawyer’s teaching field of language arts while the bottom portion represented his teaching field of social studies. The two distinct areas of the poster were separated by a quote in Sawyer’s own words which stated, “To some, stories are just stories, but only if they can’t appreciate its [sic] value.” The images selected for the language arts portion of the poster included an alphabet chart, a collection of adolescent/young adult book covers, and the quote, “Stories are one’s escape, a get-away to places normally only visited in dreams” (See Appendix K).

Sawyer’s inclusion of the alphabet chart represented his basic definition of literacy, simply the ability of an individual to read and write. Sawyer stated, “To be literate means one must understand the sounds and the meanings of each letter and how they work in words” (literacy metaphor poster, October 3, 2012). The cluster of book titles represented both Sawyer’s past and future. The specific book titles which included *The Giver*, by L. Lowry; *The Hunger Games*, by S. Collins; *Where the Red Fern Grows*,
by W. Rawls; *A Stanger Came Ashore*, by M. Hunter; *Red Dog*, by B. Wallace; and *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, by Avi, were all books that had resonated with Sawyer as a middle school student. He also hoped to read these titles with his future middle school students. “The books I chose to include are books I feel will provide essential meanings to my students, as well as appeal to their interests” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 3, 2012). The included quote also represented Sawyer’s beliefs regarding literacy. As he had shared earlier in the semester, he had a passion for reading and writing. Reading and writing various stories had been a way for him to escape reality and enter new worlds. Sawyer also hoped that reading and writing would be a positive outlet for his future students.

The bottom portion of Sawyer’s literacy metaphor poster contained a collage of images associated with the broader scope of social studies. These included a tablet depicting hieroglyphics, sculptures representing ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, the American flag, the bald eagle, the word “citizenship”, United States and world maps, and a Wordle of terms associated with social studies. In addition, Sawyer included the following quote from John F. Kennedy. “History is a relentless master. It has no present, only the past rushing into the future. To try to hold fast is to be swept aside.”

Sawyer explained that being literate in social studies today meant understanding other societies’ cultures and governments, learning to interpret American laws and documents, and reading and navigating various types of maps. Sawyer understood that social studies encompassed a range of more specific topics including history, government, politics, economics, and geography. As a future social studies teacher, it
would be Sawyer’s responsibility to educate his middle school students in various aspects of this teaching field. Sawyer acknowledged that being successful in both subjects would require his students to have strong literacy skills in order to truly understand the content. Sawyer summarized the inclusion of his selected quotes by stating, “I’d hope that I can make stories feel as an escape for my students, and they will understand and appreciate a story’s value. I want to instill in my students that we must all learn not only from our own pasts, but also the history of others in order to function and grow” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 3, 2012).

Although Sawyer’s literacy metaphor poster visually represented his two separate teaching fields, his reflection showed his understanding of the importance of literacy in both areas. However, Sawyer realized that the success of his future students would require more than the teaching of the content. He shared,

I feel it is difficult to explain literacy to a middle school student. There are not too many students at that age that appreciate the value of a novel or the knowledge gained from reading and writing. During middle school, students are going through more changes (physically, emotionally, and mentally) that seem, to them, far more important than understanding the content in a particular subject. It is my role as an educator to show the importance of being a successful reader and writer, and how life greatly depends on both outside of school. What I must do is stress the importance in a way that appeals to their interests (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 3, 2012).
Sawyer’s literacy metaphor poster represented his current beliefs regarding the teaching of literacy. Sawyer expressed his beliefs by focusing on each of his teaching fields, language arts and social studies, separately. However, his reflection showed the need for his students to be literate in both content areas. Although he did not specifically discuss the integration of language arts and social studies classes, it was clear that literacy instruction would be a necessary component in both areas for his students’ comprehension of the content. However, Sawyer expressed the need to provide instructional practices that balanced his future students’ cognitive and affective domains of learning. It would not be enough for Sawyer to ask students to read, take notes, and complete assignments in any discipline that did not motivate or provide relevancy for his students. Sawyer knew that finding a way to balance the cognitive and affective needs of his students and connect his students in school and out of school literacy practices would be the key in helping his students make literacy practices important aspects of their lives.

**Pedagogical discussion and reflective essay.** During the eighth week of the semester, the preservice teachers were required to plan a literacy lesson that focused upon one specific aspect of literacy: fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, or writing. On the assigned due date, the preservice teachers met in groups based on their electronic community of learners and took turns presenting their lessons in a microteaching format. After the lessons were taught, the preservice teachers were asked to reflect upon the pedagogical decisions made in their lessons, and write a reflexive essay in which they critically critiqued the lessons taught to their peers.
By this point in the semester, the preservice teachers had gained a considerable amount of knowledge regarding effective literacy instruction at the middle school level and how to plan meaningful lessons that integrated literacy across the curriculum. The microteaching assignment enabled the preservice teachers to plan and present a lesson with their peers in preparation for teaching in authentic middle school classrooms during the last five weeks of the semester. However, as the instructor of the course, I wanted the preservice teachers to become cognizant of the pedagogical decisions that were made while planning the lessons as they considered the selection of texts, grouping strategies, activities, and assessments.

The preservice teachers met with the members of their electronic learning communities during the next class session following the microteaching assignments to dialogue with their peers using their reflexive essays as springboards for their conversations. This assignment encouraged the preservice teachers to consider how their past and current views of literacy were contributing to the choices they were making in planning literacy lessons, and provided an opportunity to consider any changes that would help strengthen the lessons if they were taught in the future.

Sawyer planned a writing lesson for sixth grade students, which was then taught using a microteaching format to the members of his electronic community of learners. Sawyer’s objective was for his students to use a specific graphic organizer, Spokes and Wheels, as a prewriting activity to summarize the first chapter of *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). He began the lesson by showing the movie trailer of *The Hunger Games* (Lionsgate, 2012) which he hoped would be motivational to future middle school
students. Prior to the lesson, Sawyer had learned that the other three members of his group had previously read the novel. Therefore, his peers had familiarity with the text, and did not have to spend a considerable amount of time rereading the first chapter in order to complete the writing assignment.

The Spokes and Wheels graphic organizer was new to the other members of Sawyer’s group. Although the preservice teachers had been introduced to and completed several graphic organizers during our class, Spokes and Wheels was not a graphic organizer that we had used. Sawyer’s selection of this particular graphic organizer was based on his past experiences as a middle school writer. Sawyer shared in his reflexive essay that he believed it was essential for middle school students to learn how to organize their thoughts before completing a writing assignment. Though, as a middle school student Sawyer had not truly understood this importance. He stated, “In middle school, prewriting activities were almost forced upon me, and then I didn’t really care for the activities. Until now do I truly understand their importance” (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012). Seeing the relevancy of instructional resources and being given choices in using a variety of graphic organizers helped Sawyer see the potential of these writing aides.

Sawyer was introduced to the Spokes and Wheels graphic organizer by his mother when he was a fifth grade student in her language arts classroom. The graphic organizer resonated with Sawyer, and he continued to use the strategy to organize many of his own writing assignments throughout middle school, high school, and college. During his lesson, Sawyer explained the purpose of the prewriting strategy to the members of his
small group. He provided each member a Spokes and Wheels template and explained that in the “wheel” the students would write the main topic or a topic sentence for the paragraph. Then, each “spoke” would contain a specific detail or supporting sentence related to the main topic. If a student was assigned to write a five paragraph essay, he/she would complete five sets of spokes and wheels to organize their thoughts. The spokes and wheels would then be used to guide the actual writing assignment.

The members of Sawyer’s small group were able to successfully complete the prewriting activity, and shared during the pedagogical discussion that they felt the graphic organizer could be used effectively with middle school students. Sawyer’s peers believed that the strategy had a universal appeal to it, and it could be utilized across the curriculum to organize a variety of writing assignments. The small group also complimented Sawyer on using a contemporary text in his lesson. They believed that middle school students may be more motivated to summarize a chapter that had interest and relevancy to their lives. They also suggested to Sawyer, that he spend more time modeling the strategy with adolescent writers. Although each of the members of the small group were able to grasp the concept easily, they felt middle school students might need more guidance the first time they were asked to complete a prewriting strategy using Spokes and Wheels.

Sawyer’s lesson was geared for a language arts class; however, his experiences in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* had increased his understanding in the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. He shared, “I feel as if my beliefs on teaching literacy across the curriculum are greatly reflected in this lesson. I believe
literacy is reflected in all other subjects, not just language arts or reading” (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012). Sawyer was realizing that middle school students often have difficulty summarizing and successfully completing writing assignments in all disciplines. Therefore, he wanted to provide a scaffold for his students as they prepared to write. Although Sawyer had personally liked using Spokes and Wheels to organize his own writing, he planned on introducing many prewriting strategies and graphic organizers to his future middle school students. He shared,

My Spokes and Wheels lesson would not be my only form of a graphic organizer. For some, Spokes and Wheels may not work in helping to organize thoughts onto a piece of paper. I want to give my students all the possibilities I am able to provide in helping them become better students, as well as better writers.

Literacy is a tricky concept. It takes practice to become well developed in a particular area. I hope to instill the same type of practice I received as a middle school student in reading and writing to my very own students. I feel that, with the help of graphic organizers, helping my students achieve better writing skills will ultimately help them to improve in other subject areas (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012).

The planning, teaching, and reflecting that occurred during this assignment enabled Sawyer to acknowledge his past and present literacy beliefs and envision the literacy practices which would be used in his future classroom. Sawyer selected the Spokes and Wheels graphic organizer because it had personal meaning to him. He was introduced to the strategy as a fifth grade student in his mother’s classroom, and found it
to be quite successful in the organization of his thoughts. Over a decade later, Sawyer was still using the strategy to guide his writing as a college student. Sawyer wanted to share the success that the graphic organizer had for him with his future students. Although he reflected that he would need to introduce a variety of strategies in order to meet his students’ individual needs. Just because Spokes and Wheels had helped him become a better writer did not mean that all students would embrace this prewriting strategy. Additionally, Sawyer showed growth in understanding that becoming a successful writer was necessary in all content areas. The support that he would provide his future students as a language arts teacher could help them find success as writers in other disciplines, as well.

**Pedagogical structuring.** Sawyer entered *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* in the fall 2012 semester with a positive attitude. He expressed during our first round interview that he “honestly liked” the class, and felt from the beginning of the semester that the course would be very beneficial to him as a future middle school language arts teacher (transcript, September 26, 2012). Sawyer remained complimentary of the pedagogical structuring of the class as the on-campus portion of the course was drawing to a close. Sawyer expressed that the course had motivated him to read even more, and he gained a stronger foundation in teaching language arts which he believed would contribute to his effectiveness as a future middle school teacher (transcript, November 8, 2012).

Sawyer also shared the importance of the classroom community which had been established during the on-campus portion of our course, on his positive attitude towards
the class structure. He stated, “I think you gave us a little bit of freedom. You got a feel for our personalities, and you let us share those in class instead of holding someone back like in a usual class. I mean everything we did, you allowed us to sit there and discuss a little bit. While we took notes, it wasn’t like dead silence and stare at the board. We constantly discussed, and you immediately sparked a conversation with us” (transcript, November 8, 2012). Sawyer also appreciated that the activities, ideas, and strategies presented during class were always options for the preservice teachers to use in their future classrooms. Sawyer said, “It wasn’t like, ‘Hey, this is what you have to do.’ It was almost like a suggestion. If you don’t like it, don’t use it” (transcript, November 8, 2012). The classroom community provided Sawyer with a support system that he knew he could rely on during his field experience and beyond.

**On-Campus Summary**

The pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* positively contributed to Sawyer’s developing professional identity and beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. The opportunities that the course provided for reflection, dialogic engagement, and visioning enabled Sawyer to be himself and share his beliefs about teaching and learning in a supportive community of learners. He gained from the literacy practices that were shared in class, but also enjoyed that he had the freedom to make his own curricular and instructional decisions which were reflected in his coursework.

Sawyer entered class with a positive attitude towards reading and writing, and envisioned himself as a future middle school language arts teacher. However, he
believed that being a reader and writer were not practices typically associated with being an athlete. Therefore, Sawyer often kept his love of literacy hidden, and had not readily shared his passion and beliefs until this course.

Writing a literacy narrative enabled Sawyer to make his tacitly held beliefs explicit. He acknowledged his love of reading and writing for his own pleasure, and credited his mother with sparking this interest. However, he also shared the challenges he had faced with completing reading and writing assignments in other disciplines throughout middle and high school due to a lack of motivation and/or interest. Therefore, he began to show awareness in the importance of openly sharing his beliefs with his future students in order for them to see the importance of literacy in all content areas.

The electronic journal assignment further promoted the exploration of Sawyer’s beliefs about himself as a future middle school teacher, as well as the role literacy would play in his classroom. Sawyer shared with his peers his beliefs that middle school teachers needed to provide students with a strong foundation in the content areas within a classroom environment that would promote the social-emotional growth of his adolescent learners. Sawyer’s point of view differed from the majority of his electronic community of learners, but also provided his peers with a new perspective as they continued to envision their positions as future middle childhood teachers.

Sawyer shared his current beliefs about teaching literacy across the curriculum in his literacy metaphor poster. Although his two teaching fields of language arts and social studies were depicted separately in his poster, his reflection showed awareness in the specific literacies of each discipline, and the need for future students to be literate in both
areas. Sawyer also gained further awareness and understanding of the influence of his past and present beliefs on his lesson planning during the pedagogical discussion/reflection assignment. Although Sawyer’s lesson focused on one particular prewriting graphic organizer that had been introduced to him by his mother during his own middle school years, he understood that not all students would benefit from this particular scaffold. Therefore, he knew that he would need to provide his future students with ample learning opportunities and strategies that would appeal to their interests and needs.

Sawyer’s vision of becoming a future middle school teacher was heavily influenced by his mother who had been his language arts teacher in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. His initial visions mirrored not only the physical classroom environment his mother had created, but also the instructional practices that were employed in her classroom. However, by the end of the on-campus portion of the course, Sawyer began to move out from his mother’s shadow, and felt more confident in standing on his own as he prepared for his field experience in a seventh grade classroom.

Field Experience

During the last five weeks of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, the preservice teachers no longer met on campus. Instead, each preservice teacher completed a required field experience in a local middle school classroom. Sawyer was placed in a seventh grade language arts classroom at a local suburban middle school with Mrs. Thomas who had twelve years of teaching experience. Sawyer entered the field with a mix of excitement and nervousness. Although Sawyer felt confident in teaching
the language arts content, he had continued to express his anxiety throughout the semester in being able to effectively present the information in a manner that would aid in his middle school students’ understanding.

The field experience associated with *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* was Sawyer’s first methods experience which would differ considerably from past field experiences in which he was primarily an observer. In addition to observing in a seventh grade classroom, Sawyer was required to plan and teach a minimum of five literacy lessons, and critically reflect on his planning, learning, and teaching in the field. Additionally, Sawyer was asked to continue posting in his electronic journal, and to write a vision statement at the culmination of the experience.

In the past semesters of the course, once the preservice teachers entered the field, there was little to no communication between the instructor and the preservice teachers, and the preservice teachers and their peers. This was a common complaint amongst the preservice teachers in the past who often felt disconnected from the university during their field experiences with placements scattered across Northeast Ohio. Therefore, continuing the dialogic exchanges in the electronic journals was a significant change in the pedagogical structuring of the course, which promoted communication and collaboration amongst the preservice teachers and sought to maintain the classroom community which had formed throughout the on-campus portion of the course.

The pedagogical restructuring of the course provided the preservice teachers with opportunities to continue reflecting, dialoguing, and visioning while observing and teaching in local middle school classrooms. In addition to the planning and teaching of
literacy lessons, the preservice teachers continued posting in their electronic journals and wrote a final vision statement of the semester. The third round interviews were also an opportunity to discuss each of my participants’ field experiences in-depth and further elaborate on topics shared in the electronic journal postings and final vision statements of the semester.

**Electronic journals.** As the course instructor, I wanted the preservice teachers to continue to have a forum in which they could honestly discuss their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as they began observing and instructing middle school students in authentic classroom settings. The electronic journal entries completed in the field occurred during the eleventh, thirteenth, and fifteenth weeks of the semester. The preservice teachers were guided by specific journal prompts (see Appendix G).

After approximately a week and a half in their field placements, the preservice teachers were asked to provide a brief overview of their field experiences and their initial observations about the literacy instruction that was occurring in their classrooms in their fourth journal posting.

Sawyer completed his methods field experience in a seventh grade language arts classroom in a local suburban school district. Sawyer’s initial impressions of his students and the literacy practices that were taking place in his classroom were positive. Sawyer described his students as bright and well-behaved. He felt they were able to grasp concepts quite easily, and exhibited a maturity for their age. He also posted,

Literacy in the class is very important. The students are expected to read or write every day in class. Something that I liked especially was that the teacher has her
own library in her classroom. She has her own bar code scanner so the students can check out books. The students follow a genre directed system. Students are supposed to read so many books out of a certain genre a number of times throughout the quarter/year. This was something I didn’t necessarily expect. They also utilize journals. They are constantly writing in them. I feel as if this is something I would want to implement in my future classroom (November 15, 2012).

I was pleased that Sawyer was able to experience the effective instructional practices that his cooperating teacher, Mrs. Thomas, was providing for her language arts students. We had discussed in class many times the value in providing students with time to read and write on a daily basis. The preservice teachers also learned the importance of providing access to a variety of reading materials in the classroom. Therefore, I was impressed that Sawyer’s cooperating teacher had an extensive classroom library that contained many different genres. Sawyer knew that classroom libraries often disappear in the middle school grades; therefore, it was refreshing for a local teacher to see the value in providing her students with classroom reading materials. Additionally, Sawyer was positively affected by the use of journals in the seventh grade classroom. Although we had discussed the benefits of journal writing in class, seeing the practice in action helped Sawyer visualize its place in his future classroom.

Mallory and Beth both responded to Sawyer’s post, and expressed an enthusiasm for the literacy practices that were taking place in his classroom. Mallory stated, “I do think it is amazing that the teacher has her own library for students to check out books. I
think that journal writing can have many uses, and would be useful to have in a middle school classroom. I would definitely like to implement journals into my future classroom even if it is a math or science classroom” (electronic journal response, November 18, 2012). Beth also stated, “I completely agree--an official classroom library is definitely a surprise! I also love that Sawyer’s classroom has journals. I think it is a great way to get students more interested in writing. It can also serve as a good outlet for students to talk about their thoughts” (electronic journal response, November 18, 2012).

The replies that Sawyer received to his fourth journal posting reiterated the value of using a variety of literacy practices in the middle school classroom. Sawyer, Beth, and Mallory were all surprised by the extensive classroom library in Sawyer’s classroom, knowing the rate at which classroom libraries diminish during the middle school years. The peers also saw the value in making journals a component of their future middle school classrooms. Mallory discussed including journal writing in her future math and science classroom, while Beth expressed the outlet journal writing could provide for middle school students to share their thoughts and feelings. These comments provided Sawyer with an even greater rationale for employing the use of journals in his future middle school language arts and/or social studies classroom.

The fifth journal posting of the semester required the preservice teachers to share one particular literacy lesson that had been recently taught in their field experiences. The preservice teachers were to not only provide an overview of the lesson, but also reflect on the successes and challenges of the lesson and changes that could be made to strengthen the lesson for the future.
Sawyer shared with the members of his electronic community of learners a lesson he had taught to his seventh grade language arts students on Latin root words. He discussed reviewing the previous week’s lesson on Greek root words and the instructional practices he had employed with his students including the use of online dictionaries, a matching game, crossword puzzles, and exit slips. Sawyer felt the lesson went well, overall, and was pleased to have received positive feedback from several of his students. However, he acknowledged the challenge of managing the learning environment while the students were physically moving around the classroom to match Latin root words with their correct meanings. Sawyer also admitted that it was difficult for the students to transition from the matching game activity with peers to the independent journal writing assignment that followed the game. Sawyer considered including more interactive components to this lesson if it were to be taught again in order to appeal to his students’ preferences for working cooperatively and physically moving around the classroom (electronic journal, November 19, 2012).

Beth’s response to Sawyer acknowledged the amount of preparation that he had put into planning the lesson, and encouraged him to keep finding opportunities to actively engage his learners (electronic journal response, November 24, 2012). Sawyer replied to Mallory during this dialogic exchange and agreed with her regarding the difficulty in maintaining control while students were engaged in interactive activities. He stated, “Keeping middle schoolers in control when you allow them more freedom, especially when they have the ability to be loud and move around is difficult. I found that out yesterday when I played the note card game with my students. They were allowed to get
up and move and be a little more loud than usual, and to get them focused when they had to work on something else was pretty difficult” (electronic journal response, November 20, 2012). Sawyer also acknowledged Mallory’s decision to engage her students in Reader’s Theatre which was an activity the Sawyer had not personally enjoyed as a student. He replied, “I like how you are utilizing Reader’s Theatre because I don’t necessarily like it. It seems like, however, your students are responding well to the strategy and your lesson did go well” (electronic journal response, November 20, 2012).

Sawyer’s posting and dialogic exchange with his peers continued to show growth in his developing professional identity. Sawyer was able to critically reflect on one of his language arts lessons, and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of that lesson. Sawyer demonstrated his understanding of middle school students’ development, and planned a lesson that would appeal to their desires to socialize and work cooperatively with their peers. He realized that including more opportunities for his students to be interactive could have been instrumental in maintaining student engagement.

Sawyer also was aware of the need to manage the classroom in order for his students to effectively learn the content. He was able to see firsthand the importance of planning a lesson that took into account the transitions between activities, and the need to provide behavior directives for his students to follow. Sawyer was also able to recognize Mallory’s strategy selection of Reader’s Theatre and its effectiveness with her middle school students. Although he did not personally like Reader’s Theatre, hearing the success it had in a peer’s classroom provided him with a new perspective on the selection and use of varied strategies that may appeal to his future adolescent learners.
Additionally, the support that Sawyer received from his peer, Beth, helped build his confidence as a novice educator.

The final journal prompt of the semester asked the preservice teachers to reflect and share their beliefs regarding the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. At this point, the preservice teachers had completed both the on-campus portion of the course, as well as field experiences in local middle school classrooms. I was interested in learning if their beliefs had been challenged by their experiences in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*.

Although their experiences were quite varied, all of the members of Group B described their field placements as positive. Sawyer was able to plan engaging language arts lessons for his seventh grade students and experience the value that was placed on literacy instruction in his middle school classroom. Sawyer had expressed throughout class on several occasions that he feared literacy instruction was not very strong in today’s middle school classrooms. He felt that many adolescents lacked motivation to read, and were subjected to lessons that were unstimulating. Sawyer shared in his post, "Being in the class that I am in now has greatly spiked my interest in teaching middle school even more; however, I am a little worried. The class I was in was very well behaved and had no inclusion students, so I fear that I will be challenged a lot more in my next placement. These students responded very well to literacy. They were always willing to learn new writing strategies and eager to read. One particular student was so eager to read that she was reading two books at one time. When the students finished a book, they were so excited to fill in the
teacher on what happened in the book or what she thought of it, too. This makes me really excited to be a reading/language arts teacher in the hopes that literacy in truly making a comeback in education (electronic journal, December 3, 2012).

Sawyer’s posting showed his growing understanding of teaching at the middle school level. He realized that his seventh grade language arts class was not typical of all middle school classrooms. His students were engaged in reading and writing practices on a daily basis. They were eager to complete reading and writing assignments, and did not present many classroom management challenges. Sawyer knew that future classes would require him to have stronger classroom management skills and require more approaches to differentiated instruction. However, Sawyer also was motivated by the enthusiasm of his students and cooperating teacher towards literacy, and believed that planning engaging literacy lessons for his students could result in motivated adolescent readers and writers.

Sawyer also benefited from reading the postings of his peers regarding their field placements. Sawyer was only completing one literacy methods course during the fall semester. Therefore, his placement requirement was in a middle school language arts class. However, his three peers who comprised his electronic community of learners were enrolled in multiple methods courses which required placements in classrooms of two or more disciplines. Beth completed her field experience in a language arts and mathematics classroom, while Mallory and Nina were placed in language arts and social studies classrooms. Sawyer’s peers shared their beliefs of the integration of literacy across the curriculum after having witnessed literacy instruction across disciplines.
Mallory posted, “I have seen and understand how important it is for students to have literacy skills in order to succeed in their other content areas” (electronic journal, December 3, 2012). Nina shared, “My experience in an authentic middle school classroom has 100% supported my beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum. I saw firsthand how vital literacy truly is to every part of school” (electronic journal, December 9, 2012). Beth posted, “As for my beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum, I think it is absolutely a necessity. The more literacy that the students have tied in with other classes, the better readers and writers they will become” (December 4, 2012).

Sawyer grew in his understanding of integrating literacy practices across the curriculum. At the beginning of the semester, he expressed his reservation with teaching literacy in future social studies classes. However, engaging in a dialogic exchange with his peers who had witnessed successful literacy integration across the curriculum provided a new perspective. He stated,

I completely agree that social studies and language arts are very important to tie together. I feel we, as teachers, need to make that connection for all students and show our students how every subject is related to each other in some form. We need to make sure we are making the information relevant, and by connecting them with other subjects would help to make them relevant (electronic journal response, December 9, 2012).

Sawyer was able to reflect and articulate in his electronic journal postings the importance of planning lessons that would motivate and interest his middle school
students. He experienced firsthand a local middle school classroom where students were activity engaged in reading and writing practices on a daily basis, utilized an extensive classroom library, and wrote frequently in personal journals. Although Sawyer was not placed in a multi-disciplinary classroom for his field experience, he gained perspective from his peers who posted their beliefs on the value of teaching literacy across the curriculum after being eye witnesses to integrated literacy instruction in their field experiences. This enabled Sawyer to understand the importance of connecting his teaching fields of language arts and social studies, and envisioning lessons and instructional practices that would be relevant to his future students’ lives.

**Vision statement.** Sawyer’s final vision statement, completed during the fifteenth week of the semester, showed clarity and a deeper understanding of his vision of becoming a future middle school teacher. At the end of the semester, Sawyer was more clearly able to see the physical learning environment of his future classroom. He saw the importance of posting classroom rules and expectations for his students to follow as reminders to his students of the importance of completing their assignments and being respectful to all members of the classroom community. Sawyer wanted to create a classroom that was stimulating for his students both cognitively and affectively. He stated, “I do not wish to have just posters based on my subject areas, but also posters that are motivating or have some sort of interesting or inspirational context” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sawyer also envisioned having a classroom library regardless of the content area he would teach. He envisioned an area in his classroom
that would contain large pillows, comfortable chairs, and adequate lighting for his future middle school students to engage in reading and writing.

Sawyer still believed his primary role in the classroom was to educate his students in the subject areas he would teach according to the standards and expectations set forth by his school district. Though, he was no longer focused on being a “strict enforcer”. Instead, he described himself as wanting to be a guide instead of a teacher in order for his students to make their own discoveries and connections, not just through the direct instruction from their teacher. Additionally, Sawyer’s role as a future classroom teacher expanded. He envisioned himself as being a mentor and a role model to his students. He wanted to be a person his students could look up to as a teacher and also a member of the community. Sawyer realized he needed to conduct himself appropriately inside and outside of the classroom in order to be a true role model for his students.

Although Sawyer had envisioned from the beginning of the semester a student-centered classroom in which his students would actively learn with and from one another, his vision statement at the end of the semester showed increased clarity. He stated, “I want my students to be constantly active in their learning. I want them to be the ones generating ideas and to give me their own insights on materials taught throughout a lesson, and not just rely on me to do the teaching. I don’t want students to get answers from one another, but I would like them to be actively engaging one another’s minds” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sawyer planned on providing his students with choices in regards to reading, as well as the completion of assignments. He also acknowledged the reciprocal nature of teaching by sharing, “I feel a lot of learning is
done by watching others. Students can learn from one another as much as they can learn from a teacher. I want to promote this in my classroom. I want my students to know that they can rely on one another, as well as their instructor” (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

By the end of the semester, Sawyer saw his future middle school students reading a variety of novels that spanned genres, and named the same titles in his final vision statement that he had represented on his literacy metaphor poster. *The Giver*, by L. Lowry; *The Hunger Games*, by S. Collins; *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, by Avi; *A Stranger Came Ashore*, by M. Hunter; and *Where the Red Fern Grows*, by W. Rawls had been some of Sawyer’s favorite titles as a middle school student. He wanted to introduce his students to those titles, and hoped that they would evoke the same passion for reading as the novels had for him years ago. Sawyer also envisioned his students engaged in writing activities and discussed his intended use of graphic organizers. Sawyer had shared earlier in the semester his success with using graphic organizers as a prewriting strategy, and a scaffold for his own writing assignments. He had also introduced his peers to the Spokes and Wheels graphic organizer during his microteaching lesson. Sawyer believed engaging his students in prewriting activities would aid his students in becoming strong writers. Although Sawyer had some specific texts and writing assignments in mind for his future middle school students, his vision statement at the end of the semester reinforced his desire to provide his students with many choices in their literacy practices.
As a future language arts teacher, Sawyer initially believed that the role of literacy in his future classroom was rather “self-explanatory” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). However, Sawyer’s vision of teaching literacy in other content areas had been less clear earlier in the semester. After completing the on-campus and field components of the course though, Sawyer had a clearer vision and shared his beliefs in the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum. He discussed the possibilities of using novels to teach and/or complement topics that were being discussed in a science or social studies class, and understood that each discipline has its own literacy. He stated, “For social studies, my students would be learning literacy in a different manner. They would be reading, no doubt, but literacy in social studies also entails reading and interpreting maps and laws regulated by nations. It is important that students know these concepts. Again, support will always be offered by me or fellow students. I am always willing to help students understand the concepts” (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Sawyer also understood that part of his role as a future middle school teacher would be to help his students realize that literacy undergirds all subject areas. Sawyer believed that too many content area teachers feel burdened by covering their own curriculum, and therefore did not focus on literacy practices in their content areas. Sawyer shared,

Teachers, I feel, are straying away from implementing literacy and are becoming too attached to their own lesson plans and the curriculum. Most teachers are leaving the teaching and implementing of literacy up to the reading/language arts teachers. I want to ensure my students understand the importance of literacy and
that it is not only limited to reading/language arts, and that all subjects covered in school have something to do with literacy (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Sawyer also had a clearer view in being a collective member of the teaching profession by the end of the course. Sawyer believed that his own vision would provide direction for him as a future middle school teacher. However, Sawyer also realized that many of the decisions he would make in his classrooms would have to be communicated to parents, colleagues, and his administration. He shared, “My vision for my classroom and its success and the vision of the community must co-exist and reflect one another” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sawyer realized that as a teacher, he would need to work with his students, parents, fellow teachers, and administrators in order to make his vision a reality.

**Field Experience Summary**

The field experience component of the course positively contributed to Sawyer’s developing professional identity. Sawyer’s beliefs about his positioning as a middle school teacher had been primarily based on his own school experiences, and the instruction he had received from his mother as his middle school language arts teacher. However, the field experience enabled Sawyer to gain more confidence in his own abilities, and realize that he was capable of being a teacher who could effectively plan meaningful and relevant literacy lessons for his language arts students.

Although Sawyer’s field placement did not span other disciplines besides language arts, he gained a greater understanding of classroom literacy practices that were beneficial to middle school students. He ended the field experience with a deeper
understanding and appreciation for providing his future students with opportunities for continuous engagement in reading and writing practices, and choices in their own learning. The field experience contributed to his more clearly defined vision that literacy instruction was not the sole responsibility of the language arts teacher, but a collaborative effort among all content area teachers at the middle school level.

Conclusion

The pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* positively contributed to Sawyer’s developing professional identity and beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Exploring past and present beliefs, and envisioning his future language arts and social studies classroom enabled Sawyer to more clearly understand his future role as an effective middle school teacher. Sawyer readily engaged in the on-campus assignments that provided him an opportunity to dialogue with peers and reflect on his own beliefs while simultaneously envisioning his future as a middle school teacher. The field experience provided Sawyer the opportunity to see best practices in action, and to continue envisioning a classroom in which middle school students would be motivated and engaged learners.

Although Sawyer entered class with a positive attitude towards reading and writing, his beliefs towards teaching literacy in future language arts and social studies classes became more clearly defined throughout the course. He realized that he needed to share his passion for reading and writing with his future students, and design instructional practices that would contribute to his students’ literacy successes, not only in language arts classes, but in social studies classes, as well. By the end of the course, Sawyer truly
believed that he could be an effective middle school teacher who could successfully meet the cognitive and affective needs of his adolescent learners.

The professional relationship that began between Sawyer and me in the fall 2012 semester developed into a true mentor/mentee relationship. I had the pleasure of instructing Sawyer in a subsequent literacy course during the spring 2013 semester, and we researched and presented together on the use of technology in middle childhood education methods courses. Sawyer also invited me to join a book club that he started with another preservice teacher that semester. We enjoyed reading and discussing several adolescent/young adult novels during the spring and summer of 2013. I also conducted an independent study with Sawyer during the fall 2013 semester in Adolescent and Young Adult Literature in which we met weekly to discuss not only great books, but also his continuous development as a future middle school teacher.

Sawyer completed his clinical practice experience in a sixth grade language arts and social studies classroom in a suburban middle school during the spring 2014 semester. I served as his university supervisor, and I also conducted a research project with Sawyer and his cooperating teacher on the benefits of co-teaching during clinical practice. Sawyer’s clinical practice experience was extremely positive. He benefitted from working with a veteran cooperating teacher who provided Sawyer with an equal balance of freedom and support. I was also able to provide Sawyer with advice on literacy instruction and teaching at the middle school level throughout the experience. It was very rewarding to see Sawyer truly transition from a college student into a confident young professional.
Sawyer graduated in May 2014, and accepted an offer to teach seventh grade language arts for the 2014-2015 academic year at the school in which he completed his clinical practice experience. Throughout the final two years of his teacher education program, Sawyer truly developed his own professional identity and continued to use visioning as a conceptual tool to guide his professional decisions and provide direction in meeting his goals. Sawyer will truly be an asset to the teaching profession, and I look forward to what lies ahead for him personally and professionally.

Kim

Kim and I met on the first day of our Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education class on August 27, 2012. Kim introduced herself to the class as a 20-year old junior majoring in middle childhood education in the teaching fields of mathematics and science. She was also pursuing a middle childhood generalist endorsement which would enable her to teach in self-contained fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classrooms as a future educator. Kim grew up in a neighboring suburb approximately twenty minutes from the university, but lived on-campus. She was highly involved in many campus activities such as serving as the vice president of her sorority. Kim also worked with the Office of Community Outreach on campus to plan service learning opportunities and alternative winter and spring break trips for university students. Additionally, she held a part-time job at the university bookstore (field notes, August 27, 2012).

Through further conversations during the semester, I learned that Kim was the younger of two children in her immediate family. Her older sister had earned a degree in occupational therapy in a neighboring state, and was currently enrolled in graduate school.
while working full-time as an occupational therapist in a medical center. Kim’s father was born in Venezuela, and immigrated to the United States as a young man. He worked full-time as a mechanical engineer. Kim’s mother owned and operated a local day spa where Kim worked during summer breaks. Although Spanish was spoken primarily by her father at home, Kim and her sister were not fluent Spanish speakers.

Kim entered *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* with a 3.405 grade point average. During the fall 2012 semester, she was enrolled in a chemistry class as well as three additional education methods courses which were *Assessment of Teaching and Learning, Adolescent and Young Adult Literature*, and *Reading in the Content Area*. Kim presented herself in class as a positive young adult who was used to balancing her academic requirements and leadership/service roles on campus. Therefore, she was eager to participate in the study even though it would be an extra commitment. Data were collected from Kim throughout the fall 2012 semester during the on-campus and field components of the course.

**On-Campus Learning Opportunities**

During the on-campus portion of the course, which comprised the first ten weeks of the semester, the preservice teachers completed several assignments that encouraged reflection and dialogic engagement of their beliefs, as well as the visioning of their future middle school classrooms. These assignments included a literacy narrative, a vision statement, electronic journal entries, a literacy metaphor poster, and a pedagogical discussion/reflection. Additionally, the members of the study participated in two interviews during the on-campus portion of the course. The first interview occurred
during the fifth week of the semester which was the midway point of the on-campus portion of the course. The second interview took place during the tenth week of the semester which was the end of the on-campus portion of the course. The interviews provided an opportunity for me to dialogue with the participants, and learn more about their beliefs and visions expressed at various points in the semester.

**Literacy Narrative.** The first assignment of the semester was the completion of a literacy narrative. Kim was asked to reflect on her past experiences as a reader and writer at both home and school. She was also encouraged to reflect on how her past experiences had influenced her decision to become a teacher at the middle school level. The purpose of the assignment was for the preservice teachers to think about how past literacy experiences were contributing to their current beliefs and future instructional practices. I wanted the preservice teachers to realize they all had unique literate identities that were facets of their overall professional identities, and that the beliefs that the preservice teachers held might influence what would be taught, as well as how it would be taught in their future classrooms. The literacy narratives provided me greater insight into the lives and beliefs of the preservice teachers in my class. The literacy narratives were read and further discussed during the first round of interviews with my participants.

Kim’s literacy narrative reflected the negativity she felt towards reading and writing during her own schooling. She stated, “Throughout experiences in grade school, I hated writing, and did not enjoy pleasure reading. I was the type of student who procrastinated with papers and reading. I never proof-read my essays, and when I was encouraged to go to the writing lab, I never took the opportunity to enhance my writing”
The only positive memory Kim had of reading during grade school was based on the Accelerated Reader program. Kim recalled being recognized as an “accelerated reader,” and admitted to only reading books and taking the corresponding Accelerated Reader tests in order to receive prizes and compete against her fellow classmates.

As a middle school student, Kim recalled an increased focus on reading in the content area and a specific course designed to help students increase their literacy skills across disciplines. However, Kim did not feel that she benefited from the class. She shared, “During middle school, there was a designated time in our schedule for a class called RICA: Reading In the Content Area. We read different articles in math, science, English, and history. If I could get out of RICA class time, I would” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). Kim also discussed the negativity she felt towards being forced to write specific essays in a college-level mathematics course which had been required for her middle childhood education mathematics teaching field. Kim shared, “In college, I took a mathematics class where I had to read math related articles and write essays in a proper manner. It ruined the whole class for me. I enjoy math, but I hated writing papers in such a strict manner” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

The negativity and tensions that Kim shared in her literacy narrative resonated from limited choices and experiences that were provided to Kim throughout her schooling. Although the majority of her past experiences were described as negative, Kim did express some positivity towards reading and writing on her own terms. Kim shared that when she was engaged in writing, it was always for personal expression. She stated,
“Writing for me was a way to express certain memories. I wrote when I traveled. I wrote when I experienced an opportunity I was grateful for, and most importantly, I wrote when I wanted to write” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). Although limited, the opportunities Kim had been given to choose her own texts in middle school still resonated with her as a college student, evoked positive memories, and were influencing her future instructional practice. She shared, “Realistic fiction can allow children that age [middle school students] to find a way to relate to reading and writing. Books like The Outsiders, by S.E. Hinton and Holes, by L. Sachar are still books today that I enjoy reading. They are books I can introduce to my students to help them find something to relate to and enjoy reading like I did” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Kim expressed an indifference towards her past literacy experiences at home during our first round interview. Kim shared that her father was born and raised in Venezuela, and although he had lived in the United States for years and spoke and read English, he did not engage in any literacy activities for pleasure at home. Additionally, Kim did not witness her mother involved in any personal literacy practices. Kim explained that her mother had not gone to college, and although education was implicitly valued by her parents, it was not readily talked about. Therefore, Kim tried to emulate her older sister, and looked to her for guidance and support. She stated, “My sister is kind of the one who I’ve followed. She’s older than me, and she did school first and everything” (transcript, September 26, 2012). The successes that Kim’s sister had experienced at school positively influenced Kim throughout her own educational journey, which in turn contributed to her desire to become an educator.
Although Kim did not identify herself as an avid reader and writer as a young adult, she believed in the importance of providing her future students with a variety of literacy opportunities. Kim attributed this belief to the knowledge she had gained thus far in her education courses, and she had begun making connections between literacy and her own teaching fields. She shared,

Even though I never appreciated reading and writing, I grew to an understanding of the two areas. Within my first semester at college, my education classes taught me that reading and writing are vital to children. I started reading more articles and relating them to my own classroom. I believe that providing literacy in the content areas, such as math and science, is important. Reading and writing activities can help students analyze, interpret, and communicate mathematics ideas. In the process of writing, students clarify their own understanding of mathematics and sharpen their communication skills. They must organize their ideas and thoughts more logically, and structure their conclusions in a more coherent way. Science and reading complement each other well because of the similarities between reading skills and science process skills. The meshing of the skills in both subject areas make them natural partners for integration (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

As a future educator, Kim expressed a desire to provide her middle school students with literacy instruction that was the opposite of the majority of her educational experiences. Kim recognized that literacy instruction could be an integral component in
her content area classroom by planning and implementing an integrated curriculum that would be relevant to her adolescent learners’ lives. Kim shared,

    I want my students to see and understand what I didn’t discover in reading. I want to provide books and articles that will enhance my content area and provide an opportunity for my students to express their thoughts. I believe that a great teacher can manage the classroom time. To make use of such a compacted day, one must teach “smart.” One way to do this is to implement an integrated curriculum where more than one subject is taught at the same time (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Writing a literacy narrative provided Kim with an opportunity to reflect and share her beliefs regarding reading and writing. Kim’s literacy experiences at home had been rather indifferent, and she viewed her school literacy experiences as negative. However, Kim showed awareness in the importance of literacy instruction at the middle school level, and providing her students with varied educational opportunities that would enhance her students’ understanding in the content areas of mathematics and science. Kim had learned to value literacy primarily through the instruction she had gained in her college-level education courses, and was determined to be a middle school teacher who would make the most of her instructional time by integrating literacy across the curriculum.

**Vision statement.** In addition to reflecting and dialoguing with peers throughout the semester, the preservice teachers were encouraged to envision their positioning as future middle school teachers and the role literacy would play in their future content area
classrooms. Visioning was a conceptual tool the preservice teachers used to become forward thinkers on specific aspects of their teaching which were often influenced by their past and present educational beliefs. An initial vision statement was completed during the third week of the semester by the preservice teachers. Visioning was also a topic of discussion during the first and second round interviews with my participants.

Kim’s initial vision statement expressed her desire to be an enthusiastic teacher who would create a positive learning environment for her students. She stated, “I see myself as the crazy teacher running through the classroom keeping my students’ attention. I envision being a performer and helping my students learn in a fun way” (vision statement, September 10, 2012). Kim expressed during our first round interview her decision to select mathematics and science as her two middle childhood education teaching fields. Kim had always been a strong math student during her elementary, middle, and high school years, but felt the math instruction she had received lacked in variety and enthusiasm. Therefore, she was hoping to be a more dynamic math teacher. She shared, “So, I’ve always liked math, and I think that when I was in school it was always the same, and no teacher ever made it fun or anything. That’s what I want to do with my students, like I want to make them like math” (transcript, September 26, 2012).

She also expressed her desire to teach her future middle school science classes in an enthusiastic way. Kim shared, “I started liking science class in 7th grade, and I just think it’s fun and crazy. You really have to have the personality to do experiments, like it’s entertaining your students the whole time. I’m in a chemistry class right now, and he [professor] just performs for us every single day” (transcript, September 26, 2012).
Kim strongly believed in providing her students with opportunities for active, engaged learning. She said, “My students are active learners in my ideal middle school classroom. I want my students to perform everything they learn. Students play a huge role in their learning. I will instruct and perform for my students, but the students will reach their goals by being just as active as me” (vision statement, September 10, 2012).

As a future math and science teacher, Kim was aware that some of her middle school students might find the subject areas boring or difficult. Therefore, she planned to address those issues by employing a variety of reading materials other than the traditional textbook, and utilizing a variety of prereading strategies to introduce her students to content area topics and vocabulary. Although her initial vision statement lacked some specificity to the integration of literacy across the curriculum, Kim stated that, “Literacy will be very important” (vision statement, September 10, 2012).

During our first round interview which occurred during the fifth week of the semester, Kim and I continued to discuss her visions of her future middle school classroom and her developing professional identity. Kim’s interest in becoming a teacher had begun when she was in second grade, and her decision to become a member of the teaching profession had never wavered throughout the years. As a junior in the teacher education program, Kim was increasingly viewing herself as a teacher, and more clearly seeing the connections between theory and future practice. She shared, “I think I’m seeing myself more as a teacher. Like every day, I think about my classroom, and what I’m going to do. At the end of last year and now this year, I’ve started to see everything
from the teacher aspect rather than me just learning the material, like I see it like that now. I see it a lot different” (transcript, September 26, 2012).

Near the end of the on-campus portion of the course, Kim and I continued our discussion during our second round interview which occurred during the tenth week of the semester. As Kim prepared for her upcoming field experience, she expressed an enthusiasm to observe and teach middle school students, but she was also nervous in her abilities. Kim more clearly saw herself in the role of the teacher, and envisioned her first week. She shared, “The first week I go into the field experience, I’m going to literally observe and get to know my students, what I want to do, just kind of watch the teacher, and feel out the environment” (transcript, November 5, 2012). Although Kim was excited to teach the content, she believed that establishing a rapport with her cooperating teacher and students was equally important.

Kim’s visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum had also increased in clarity by the end of the on-campus portion of the course. Once a reluctant reader and writer, Kim shared her desire to have a classroom library in her future middle school classroom, and had begun looking through her old books at home to see if any titles could be incorporated into her field experience lesson plans. Kim explained, “I see myself using it [literacy] every day now. Whether just reading a page from the math textbook in the beginning of math class, or something little like that” (transcript, November 5, 2012). Kim also shared how the planning of lessons for a required unit plan completed during the on-campus portion of the course had positively influenced her decision to integrate literacy across the curriculum. She explained, “In doing these unit plans, I started one of
the lesson where I turn the lights off and have the kids come in a little reading circle. I have little glow in the dark stars all around, and I read aloud to them from the weather space book. That’s what I see my classroom like now. So, it’s kind of cool” (transcript, November 5, 2012).

Kim’s visions of being a future middle school teacher became clearer throughout the on-campus portion of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*. Kim had dreamed of becoming a teacher since she was young, and often envisioned her future middle school classroom. Kim’s initial visions focused primarily on her desire to be an enthusiastic teacher who would make learning fun and enjoyable for her students. However, as the semester progressed, Kim grew in her understanding that teaching at the middle school level required more than having fun. She began to more concretely envision curricular and instructional practices that would integrate literacy within her mathematics and science classroom, while still providing her students with active, engaging learning opportunities.

**Electronic journal entries.** At the beginning of the semester, the twelve preservice teachers enrolled in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* were randomly divided into three electronic communities of learners in which they posted journal entries and responded to members of their small group discussion boards via Blackboard, an electronic management system used by the university. The electronic journal postings occurred throughout the on-campus portion of the course during the third, fifth, and eighth weeks of the semester. The electronic journal entry assignment enabled the preservice teachers to share their beliefs about becoming teachers at the
middle school level, and receive advice, support, and feedback from their peers. As the instructor of the course, I posed writing prompts for the preservice teachers to reflect upon, share, and respond to topics that seemed relevant at certain points in the course. I read all the journal postings throughout the semester, but chose not to enter the dialogues. I wanted the preservice teachers to engage in these exchanges with their peers, and not feel pressure to respond in certain ways to the instructor of the course.

Kim was a member of Group C of the electronic community of learners and corresponded throughout the semester with her peers Greg, Natalie, and Sean. These preservice teachers were all undergraduate students majoring in middle childhood education in the fields of mathematics/social studies, language arts/mathematics, and science/social studies respectively. Sean was also a participant in the research study. The electronic journal postings were guided by specific prompts (see Appendix G).

The first journal prompt invited the preservice teachers to share their feelings at the beginning of the fall semester which was often a challenging time for students as they transitioned into the rigorous demands of college coursework after a long summer break.

During the fall 2012 semester, Kim was balancing being a full-time student and holding two leadership positions on campus. Many of the duties associated with being the Vice President of Membership for her sorority, and being a trip leader for alternative winter and spring break trips had already begun during the summer months. Therefore, Kim entered the fall semester already feeling overwhelmed, and admitted struggling to keep up with her responsibilities. Kim shared in her first posting, “Although academics have been and always will be my top priority, I feel as if this semester I have already
started to push aside the importance of reading and finishing assignments on time”

Although Kim felt challenged to meet all of her deadlines and requirements for her courses and extracurricular activities, she found comfort in attending her classes. She stated, “Class is my breakaway from all the tensions. When I step foot in a classroom, I feel as if my mind drifts into teacher mode, and everything I have to accomplish in a day’s time is put on hold” (electronic journal, September 10, 2012).

Kim engaged in a dialogic exchange with her peer, Natalie, regarding the first journal prompt topic. Kim and Natalie commiserated with one another and offered each other support. Natalie congratulated Kim on being elected to her sorority position, and understood the demands of maintaining high grades while working and/or being involved in additional campus activities. The peers discussed the importance of keeping “to-do” lists, staying organized, and setting goals in order to have a successful semester.

Kim’s first electronic journal posting reflected her developing professional identity. Even though Kim was inundated with numerous responsibilities associated with her campus activities, her education classes provided a temporary escape from the pressures she was experiencing. Being engaged in her coursework made Kim feel like a teacher, and she began focusing on how the information she was learning on-campus could apply to her future classroom.

The second journal prompt of the semester encouraged the preservice teachers to reflect and share their beliefs on the expectations society holds for middle school teachers today. Kim’s second posting of the semester reflected her belief in teaching her students
the academic content, as well as life skills in order for them to be successful middle school students. Kim shared,

I feel like teachers in the middle school don’t just have the content to prepare for.
I also think that middle school teachers are expected to teach behavior expectations to the students to help them grow into mature students. I think that these expectations are realistic for a middle school teacher because as teachers we care for our students. The junior high school years are the years where students go through many changes and need inspiration to guide them (electronic journal, September 23, 2012).

Kim’s beliefs were not entirely shared by her peers, Natalie and Sean. Both Natalie and Sean felt that middle school teachers faced unrealistic expectations to meet academic content standards as well as serve in a parenting role. Greg’s posting, however, echoed Kim’s beliefs. He shared with his peers the important role they have as future middle school educators to help inform their students’ identities. Although Greg admitted it would be a challenge, he also stressed a “one day at a time” approach to keep from being overwhelmed and remain goal-oriented. This advice resonated with Kim and she posted in her reply to Greg that taking this approach would help her meet the numerous needs of her future middle school students. The exchanges during the second journal posting provided Kim an opportunity to share her beliefs, express her differing viewpoints from some of her peers, and gain advice on how to make her beliefs a reality.

The third journal prompt of the semester focused on the preservice teachers’ beliefs towards their preparation in teaching literacy in their upcoming field experiences.
As the field experience portion of the class drew near, Kim reflected and shared her changing beliefs about literacy, and her role in providing literacy instruction for her future students. She posted,

I am excited to be in a classroom and be able to teach. I never pictured myself enjoying literacy, but after the first few months of this year, I truly have grown a new found love for reading and writing. I think learning about literacy and actually teaching literacy lessons can be very different, because I think it really depends on how teachers present the topics (electronic journal, October 14, 2012).

Kim also discussed in her journal posting her concerns about teaching writing to her students. Kim shared her belief that writing could be a powerful tool for self-expression, but admitted that she did not engage much as a writer during her own middle school years. Kim understood that she would need to motivate many of her middle school students to write, and believed that she should become more engaged with writing herself and contemplated keeping a journal. Kim also shared her interest in conducting future research specifically in ways to motivate middle school writers.

Greg shared in his response to Kim that he agreed teaching writing could be challenging for any novice teacher. However, he reminded Kim of all the resources and strategies that had been learned and discussed in Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education that she could use in her middle school classroom. Greg posted, “I have a good feeling that all the notes and knowledge we are learning in this class alone can help us. All the handouts that we are given will guide us with options to approach teaching writing in the classroom” (electronic journal response, October 22, 2012).
reply encouraged Kim to make a connection between the content and pedagogical knowledge she was learning in class and the opportunities she would provide for her adolescent learners in the field.

The electronic journal assignment provided Kim with a forum to share her beliefs about becoming a middle school teacher and the role that literacy would play in her upcoming mathematics and science classrooms. Kim shared with her peers the tensions she was experiencing at the beginning of the semester as she worked to balance her full-time course load with several extracurricular responsibilities. However, being enrolled in multiple education classes made Kim feel like a teacher and inspired her to envision her future middle school classroom and her role as an educator. Kim expressed throughout the dialogic exchanges her desire to provide a strong academic foundation for her students, but also focus on the social-emotional needs of her adolescent learners. She received advice from her peer, Greg, and believed that taking a “one day at a time approach” could enable her to make her visions of accomplishing this goal a reality. Additionally, Kim expressed through her posts her changing beliefs regarding literacy instruction. At the beginning of the course Kim shared her negativity towards reading and writing. However, as she continued developing as a young professional, she was increasing aware of the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum, as well as practices she could personally engage in to model, motivate, and integrate literacy into her content areas.

**Literacy metaphor poster.** During the fifth week of the semester, the preservice teachers were asked to create literacy metaphor posters using the software Glogster to
visually depict their beliefs about teaching literacy across the curriculum in the middle school classroom. After the preservice teachers had written literacy narratives and reflected on their past literacy beliefs at home and school earlier in the semester, I wanted the preservice teachers to express what literacy currently meant to them. The preservice teachers were given the freedom to create the electronic posters using a variety of backgrounds, text, music, videos, or images that illustrated their beliefs. In addition to creating their literacy metaphor posters, the preservice teachers were also required to reflect on their designs, and were given the option to complete their reflections as traditional essays, poems, or songs. The preservice teachers had the opportunity to share and explain their posters with the class.

Kim selected the metaphor of literacy as a bridge for her future middle school students. She explained that “as students read and write, they take a bridge to many places and learn many things. I think this metaphor is very fitting to the way I view literacy because as a teacher I see my students advancing every day and taking the right path to find their own special light” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 8, 2012). Kim’s literacy metaphor poster showed her understanding of the universal nature of literacy, as well as her belief in the integration of literacy in the content areas of math and science. Kim’s glog contained an image of a lighthouse in the upper right corner, and a picture of a bridge in the lower left corner. Kim’s selected images of the bridge and lighthouse represented her belief that being literate provides students with multiple opportunities to learn, grow, and discover themselves. Kim wanted to provide her future
middle school students with choices and experiences as they followed their own path with a light to guide their way (See Appendix L).

In the center of the glog were the front cover images of two picture books, *Math Curse*, by J. Scieszka and *Science Verse*, by J. Scieszka. Kim was becoming increasingly aware of the importance of teaching literacy across the curriculum, and introducing her students to a variety of texts beyond the traditional textbook. She explained,

Since my two areas of focus are math and science, I think it is important to find books to incorporate into lessons, and be able to teach classes differently. With these books, it turns everyday problems into math and science problems. I can incorporate these books into my classrooms by starting the day with reading a problem from the book and having my students solve it together (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 8, 2012).

Additionally, the glog contained two quotes related to the importance of books and reading. The first quote stated, “Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. They are engines of change, windows on the world, lighthouses erected in the sea of time” (Tuchman, 1980). Kim explained her selection stating, “This quote personally shows how important literacy is across the curriculum, and how math and science are nonexistent without this foundation” (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 8, 2012). The second quote captured on the glog by Dr. Seuss (1978) stated, “The more that you read, the more things you’ll know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.” Kim identified Dr. Seuss as one of her favorite children’s authors, and
she believed this quote was a simple yet effective way to summarize the power of reading.

The literacy metaphor poster assignment provided Kim an opportunity to reflect and creatively share her current literacy beliefs. Kim’s poster reflected her belief that literacy was truly the foundation of all content areas. Being literate would enable her students to make their own choices and guide them towards their own educational goals. As a future middle school math and science teacher, Kim showed awareness in selecting texts such as *Math Curse*, by J. Scieszka and *Science Verse*, by J. Scieszka to relate to her students’ lives, make content come alive, and enhance their problem-solving skills through the use of children’s literature. Although Kim believed that literacy would light her students’ way, she was also beginning to more clearly see her role in guiding her students in becoming successful adolescent learners.

**Pedagogical discussion and reflective essay.** During the eighth week of the semester, the preservice teachers were required to plan a literacy lesson that focused upon one specific aspect of literacy: fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, or writing. On the assigned due date, the preservice teachers met in groups based on their electronic community of learners and took turns presenting their lessons in a microteaching format. After the lessons were taught, the preservice teachers were asked to reflect upon the pedagogical decisions made in their lessons, and write a reflexive essay in which they critically critiqued the lessons taught to their peers.

At this point in the semester, the preservice teachers had gained a considerable amount of knowledge regarding effective literacy instruction at the middle school level
and how to plan meaningful lessons that integrated literacy across the curriculum. The microteaching assignment enabled the preservice teachers to plan and present a lesson with their peers in preparation for teaching in authentic middle school classrooms during the last five weeks of the semester. However, as the instructor of the course, I wanted the preservice teachers to become cognizant of the pedagogical decisions that were made while planning the lessons as they considered the selection of texts, grouping strategies, activities, and assessments.

The next class session following the microteaching assignment, the preservice teachers met again with their electronic learning communities to dialogue with their peers using their reflexive essays as springboards for their conversations. This assignment encouraged the preservice teachers to consider how their past and current views of literacy were contributing to the choices they were making in planning literacy lessons, and provided an opportunity to consider any changes that would help strengthen the lessons if they were taught in the future.

Kim designed a lesson for a fourth grade science class on the topic of weather. The lesson planning provided Kim with an opportunity to integrate literacy and science standards into one well-planned lesson. Kim shared, “During this microteaching lesson, I took something I am so enthusiastic about, weather, and incorporated in the lesson something I am newly intrigued by, literacy” (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012). Kim selected a nonfiction text to share with her students to teach about four specific natural weather hazards: tornadoes, hurricanes, droughts, and monsoons. Kim began the lesson by reading aloud to the entire class from her selected text and showing a short video clip
of each weather hazard. Then, the students were divided into cooperative groups and were asked to read sections of the text independently. Later, the students worked with their cooperative groups to complete an attribute web related to their specific weather hazard. The webs completed by each cooperative group were shared with the entire class as a culminating activity. Reviewing the completed attribute webs enabled Kim to assess her students’ comprehension of the text and the identification of key characteristics of each weather hazard.

Kim’s lesson was well-planned and well-taught to the members of her electronic community of learners using a microteaching format. The preservice teachers were engaged in the lesson, and enjoyed the variety of instructional approaches that Kayla provided for her learners. The lesson was well-paced, and was developmentally appropriate for a future fourth grade science class. Kim considered differentiation in her lesson and grouped students heterogeneously in order for her stronger students to scaffold their peers. She also promoted the importance of listening by requiring each student to identify a characteristic of another group’s weather hazard after listening to the whole class presentations. The students recorded these characteristics on exit slips which Kim collected as an informal assessment.

The pedagogical decisions that were reflected in Kim’s lesson plan were partially based on the knowledge she had learned in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*. Throughout the semester, Kim had learned about the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum, how to use a variety of strategies to help students understand the literacies of other disciplines, and how to select reading materials to
supplement traditional content area textbooks. Kim explained her rationale for not using a traditional textbook in her lesson. She shared,

With the thought of literacy being a base for the curriculum, I started off with using a supplemental book about weather that engaged the students with fun facts and vivid pictures. Using text different from the textbook helps to keep the students interested in reading, which then helps them to continue growing as learners. I also think the strategies I have learned thus far in this course continue to encourage cooperative learning that I believe creates a community for learning (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012).

Kim’s pedagogical decisions made in her lesson plan were also based on her past experiences as a reader and writer, and her changing beliefs about the importance of literacy. As a student, Kim had often had limited choices in her reading materials and assignments. She was given little freedom to think on her own, make relevant connections, and use her creativity to express her understanding of a topic. Therefore, she vowed to become a teacher who would provide her future students with numerous opportunities for collaboration, choice, and communication. She shared,

I have never enjoyed reading, and never found an interest in any of my English classes. These past courses [literacy methods courses] have showed me how important reading is and now I have grown an appreciation for reading. I believe that I was never taught about reading and literacy in an enthusiastic way. I was given a textbook and was told to define vocabulary, make a Venn-diagram of the text, and organize the text in a sequence. I was told which books to read and how
to interpret each character. For this lesson, I have taken into consideration how I felt about literacy, and have made sure to show that I am enthusiastic about reading as a teacher. I wanted to stress the importance that as a student you do not need to read a text a certain way and do the same thing repeatedly to be a strong reader (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012).

Designing, teaching, and reflecting on a lesson that integrated literacy into a science class challenged Kim in a positive way. She selected strategies and resources to motivate and engage her learners, and utilized a variety of instructional techniques to aid in her students’ comprehension and to assess their understanding of the topic. Moreover, Kim grew in her pedagogical knowledge and gained an increased awareness of the instructional decisions that would be made in her lesson plans. She stated,

It was interesting to teach a lesson based on an English content standard. It made me readdress my pedagogical thinking. My belief on pedagogy has always been that teaching is like putting on a performance to the students. I now feel confident enough to say that no matter what I am teaching, it truly is a performance that you put on for your students. You must incorporate all different “acts.” I feel that I have truly implemented new pedagogical approaches in this lesson, and I have discovered a new meaning of pedagogy (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012).

The opportunity Kim had to not only plan and teach a lesson, but also to reflect and dialogue with her peers during the pedagogical discussion/reflection assignment aided in the development of her professional identify. She was becoming increasingly
aware of the teacher she wanted to be in her future classroom. Additionally, she articulated her stronger belief in the value of literacy instruction in all content areas.

**Pedagogical structuring.** Kim entered *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* not knowing many details about the course. She shared during our first round interview that she had neither known that the class was a methods course nor understood the format of the class in terms of the on-campus component and required field experience (transcript, September 26, 2012). She also shared during our second round interview that she had not initially been interested in taking a literacy methods course as a future mathematics and science teacher. Kim shared, “I think like for the first two weeks, I’d look at Eliza [classmate], and be like, what did we get ourselves into? I mean, it was just about literacy, like I didn’t care. Sorry, that’s how I’m going to put it” (transcript, November 5, 2012). I appreciated Kim’s honesty, and was pleased that her beliefs about the course had changed during the semester. By the end of the on-campus portion of the class, Kim expressed her positive feelings towards the pedagogical structuring of the course. She shared how her behavior during *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* differed from some of the other courses she was currently enrolled in during the fall semester. Kim said, “The other classes we have I literally will be sitting there doing other homework, which I know is bad. But, I couldn’t do that in your class and not that I’d even want to” (transcript, November 5, 2012).

Kim enjoyed the interactions she had with her peers throughout our class which provided her an opportunity to physically move around the classroom for certain learning activities and dialogue with her peers on numerous occasions. She recognized the close
classroom community that had developed naturally among the members of our class, and how she felt supported as a college student and future middle school teacher.

**On-Campus Summary**

Being a member of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* during the fall 2012 semester positively contributed to Kim’s developing professional identity and her belief in the integration of literacy in her future middle school mathematics and science classrooms. The pedagogical structuring of the course provided a forum for Kim to make her tacitly held beliefs explicit regarding literacy and her role as a future middle school teacher through reflection, dialogic exchanges, and visioning opportunities.

Kim entered *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* unsure of the content and structure of the course, but had strong beliefs regarding literacy instruction stemming from her past home and school experiences. Kim had the opportunity to make her tacit beliefs explicit by writing her literacy narrative. Although Kim expressed her negativity towards reading and writing, she had awareness that literacy was the foundation of all content areas, and expressed an interest in integrating literacy into her future discipline specific classroom.

Kim had dreamed of becoming a teacher since she was a second grader, and her education courses, including *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, were contributing to her visions of being an effective middle school teacher. The dialogic exchanges that Kim engaged in through the electronic journal entries helped further define her positioning as a future middle school teacher, and provided Kim the opportunity to share her viewpoints and learn from her peers.
Kim’s literacy metaphor poster furthered showed an increased clarity in the importance of literacy instruction across all content areas. She shared her belief that literacy could be a bridge to numerous opportunities and a necessary foundation for her students’ success. Kim expressed her desire to provide engaging literacy experiences for her future students and employ the use of a variety of reading materials to motivate her learners. The beliefs that she shared in her electronic poster were further showcased during her microteaching lesson in which Kim successfully planned and taught a science lesson that incorporated both language arts and science content standards, and utilized a variety of strategies that would appeal to middle school students.

The pedagogical structuring of the course contributed to the formation of a classroom community, which enabled Kim to learn more about her beliefs and how her past and current views were contributing to her future curricular and instructional decisions. By the end of the on-campus portion of the course, Kim had a greater understanding of the teacher she needed to be for her future students, and how literacy instruction would be enacted in her upcoming field placement and future middle school classroom.

Field Experience

During the last five weeks of Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education, the preservice teachers no longer met on campus. Instead, each preservice teacher completed a required field experience in a local middle school classroom. Kim was placed in a fourth grade language arts and mathematics classroom in a suburban middle school setting. She entered the field excited to meet her students and plan and teach
lessons under the guidance of her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Reynolds, who had eight years of teaching experience.

The field experience associated with Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education was Kim’s first methods experience. Within her fourth grade field placement, Kim would also be completing requirements for her additional education methods courses: Assessment in Teaching and Learning, Adolescent and Young Adult Literature, and Reading in the Content Area. During the field experience, Kim was required to teach observe, plan, and teach literacy lessons in language arts as well as in mathematics. Additionally, Kim was asked to continue posting in her electronic journal, and to write a vision statement at the culmination of the experience.

In the past semesters of the course, once the preservice teachers entered the field, there was little to no communication between the instructor and the preservice teachers, and the preservice teachers and their peers. This was a common complaint amongst the preservice teachers in the past who often felt disconnected from the university during their field experiences with placements scattered across Northeast Ohio. Therefore, continuing the dialogic exchanges in the electronic journals was a significant change in the pedagogical structuring of the course, which promoted communication and collaboration among the preservice teachers and sought to maintain the classroom community which had formed throughout the on-campus portion of the course.

The pedagogical restructuring of the course provided the preservice teachers with opportunities to continue reflecting, dialoguing, and visioning while observing and teaching in local middle school classrooms. In addition to the planning and teaching of
literacy lessons, the preservice teachers continued posting in their electronic journals and wrote a final vision statement of the semester. The third round interviews were also an opportunity to discuss each of my participants’ field experiences in-depth and further elaborate on topics shared in the electronic journal postings and final vision statements of the semester.

**Electronic journals.** As the course instructor, I wanted the preservice teachers to continue to have a forum in which they could honestly discuss their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs as they began observing and instructing middle school students in authentic classroom settings. The electronic journal entries completed in the field occurred during the eleventh, thirteenth, and fifteenth weeks of the semester. The preservice teachers were guided by specific journal prompts (see Appendix G).

After approximately a week and a half in their field placements, the preservice teachers were asked to provide a brief overview of their field experiences and their initial observations about the literacy instruction that was occurring in their classrooms in their fourth journal posting.

Kim’s first impressions of her field placement were quite positive. Kim spent her first few weeks observing both language arts and math classes, and spent some time visiting the school library. Kim also had the opportunity to ask her cooperating teacher to share her beliefs on literacy instruction. Mrs. Reynolds “shared with me her belief of literacy as a foundation” (electronic journal entry, November 12, 2012). Mrs. Reynolds employed such activities as a “Poem of the Week,” a “Parent Read,” and weekly visits to the school library to provide increased opportunities for her student to be engaged in
reading. The math lessons that Kim had observed at this point also included the incorporation of several literacy strategies such as KWL charts and the writing of math journals. These positive first impressions helped Kim more clearly see her future classroom. She shared, “Her [cooperating teacher’s] classroom is the perfect mix of a language arts and math community. It makes me so excited for my own classroom and the kind of community I will create in a math and science classroom” (electronic journal, November 12, 2012).

Greg, a member of Kim’s electronic community of learners, was also completing his field experience at the same school as Kim, but in a fifth grade language arts and mathematics class. Therefore, Kim and Greg engaged in a dialogic exchange that discussed the similarities and differences between their experiences in the same middle school setting. Greg also discussed his positive first impressions and the integration of literacy in math classes that he had witnessed thus far in his placement. Greg shared, “Although this is a math classroom, my teacher has been putting an emphasis on saving all kinds of mathematics books that spark students’ interests. They are a great resource for students to look at and read” (electronic journal, November 16, 2012).

Kim and Greg’s cooperating teachers spent the majority of their classroom time teaching math to different sections of middle school students. Therefore, the preservice teachers were only able to observe one language arts class a day. Kim and Greg also learned through observations and conversations with their respective cooperating teachers the challenge to cover the curriculum, and the difficulty the teachers often experienced integrating literacy strategies into their content areas due to curricular pressures. Kim
shared in her response to Greg’s post, “My cooperating teacher told me the other day that it’s very hard to change the math curriculum and add different literacy aspects to it because the parents paid for the workbooks and the set curriculum is so strict” (electronic journal response, November 18, 2012).

Kim and Greg were learning early in their field experiences the realities of teaching. Many districts have rather prescribed curriculums, and teachers face enormous pressures to cover the curriculum to meet the content standards and prepare their students for standardized testing. However, Kim and Greg were both able to see how literacy instruction could be integrated seamlessly through careful and creative planning that would enhance required lessons and additionally engage students in the literacy of the discipline of mathematics.

The fifth journal posting of the semester required the preservice teachers to share one particular literacy lesson that had been recently taught in their field experiences. The preservice teachers were to not only provide an overview of the lesson, but also reflect on the successes and challenges of the lesson and changes that could be made to strengthen the lesson for the future.

Kim described for the members of her electronic community of learners a recent lesson she had taught that integrated mathematics and literacy instruction. Kim planned a lesson for her fourth grade students to review mathematics vocabulary terms that incorporated the use of technology. She shared, “We used Linoit.com which is set up like a word sort. The students were able to come up to the SMART board as a team, and correctly sort vocab words with their definitions, examples, and pictures” (electronic
Although Kim experienced a few technological glitches during the lesson which she planned to remedy in the future, Kim felt the lesson was very successful. The middle school students had the opportunity to work as teams, engage in friendly competition, use technology, and review their math vocabulary terms. Additionally, Kim concluded the lesson with a writing activity to reinforce the vocabulary that had been reviewed during the lesson. She stated, “I ended the lesson by having the students write a short paragraph including five of the vocabulary words. It was my mini version of Story Impressions” (electronic journal, November 20, 2012).

Kim’s journal posting showcased her ability to effectively plan and teach lessons that integrated literacy into content area instruction. Kim was using the knowledge she had gained in class which included the discussion of several literacy strategies, including word sorts and “Story Impressions” and learning to make them her own. The preservice teachers had learned throughout class the importance of selecting and modifying strategies to fit the needs of the students and the lesson, and Kim was reflecting this understanding in her described lesson. Additionally, Kim was mindful of the cognitive and social-emotional needs of her middle school students. Her lesson was planned for students to work cooperatively in teams, physically move around the classroom, and use technology. Kim kept her students engaged and provided an opportunity to review their math content in an engaged manner.

The final journal prompt of the semester asked the preservice teachers to reflect and share their beliefs regarding the teaching literacy across the curriculum. At this point, the preservice teachers had completed both the on-campus portion of the course, as
well as field experiences in local middle school classrooms. I was interested in learning if their beliefs had been challenged by their experiences in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*.

During the concurring week of the semester, Kim shared in her final posting that her field experiences in a middle childhood classroom supported her beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Kim described in her electronic journal a recent lesson she had taught on adding and subtracting decimals in which she incorporated the use of the picture book, *You Can’t Buy a Dinosaur with a Dime*, by H. Ziefert. She explained,

This story got the students to add and subtract money (which is really only decimals) while reading. I think reading this book to them was a break from that they’ve been doing. For the first time, I was able to read a children’s book to an actual group of students, and see the light bulbs when they understood the math content (electronic journal, December 3, 2012).

Due to the classroom schedule, Kim had spent the majority of her time in the field observing and teaching in mathematics classes. She witnessed many literacy strategies incorporated by her cooperating teacher, although many of the strategies were not explicitly explained to the students in regards to their literacy connection. As Kim had shared earlier in the semester, incorporating literacy into the mathematics content was often quite challenging for her cooperating teacher. Kim stated,

My teacher does have many children’s books with math content, but she told me that it was hard to incorporate literacy all the time because the curriculum is so strict and there is such a short school day. Even though literacy isn’t spread
through the curriculum in an obvious way to the students, I can see it. I think that’s what really supports my belief in literacy across the curriculum (electronic journal, December 3, 2012).

Greg, who completed his field placement in a similar setting, also had comparable experiences and witnessed the successful integration of literacy in his mathematics classes. Greg had incorporated a variety of literacy strategies into his math lessons during his time in the field, and found that teaching literacy across the curriculum did not have to be taught as separate entities. He shared,

Thanks to the many math books that aligned with my lessons and standards, I was able to find efficient methods to teach the students effectively without wasting time and adding to the math work. This was a great way to give the students a little different approach to their math, and I am glad they enjoyed it (electronic journal response, December 4, 2012).

The electronic journal assignment provided Kim with the opportunity to continue sharing her thoughts regarding her role as a future teacher and her beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Kim’s placement in a fourth grade language arts and mathematics classroom enabled her to see the integration of literacy in a content area classroom. Kim engaged in dialogic exchanges with her peers, specifically Greg, who was also completing a field experience in a lower level middle school language arts and mathematics classroom. Kim shared the positive literacy practiced she witnessed in action, and was able to more clearly understand the challenges content area teachers have trying to cover the required content. However, Kim gained valuable insight from her
cooperating teacher on how to overcome this challenge, and continued to envision a classroom where she would be instrumental in making literacy instruction an integral component of her future mathematics and science lessons.

**Vision statement.** Kim’s final vision statement completed at the end of the semester showed growth in the development of her professional identity, and her increased understanding of the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum. Although Kim had commented earlier in the semester that she often envisioned her future classroom, Kim had a clearer picture of the physical and social-emotional environment she would provide for her future middle school students. In addition to brightly colored walls and posters adorning the classroom, Kim planned to include a variety of books that would span different content areas and reading levels. She also wanted to incorporate technology in her lessons, and provide opportunities for students to explore and learn in digital formats. Moreover, Kim stressed the importance of creating a positive learning environment. Kim stated, “I also feel the class community that will be formed. I feel the bond of trust and togetherness as the students work and share with one another” (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Kim wanted to be seen as a role model by her future middle school students. She shared, “I want my students to not only look at me for instruction, but to look for me for advice and as a resource” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Kim did not want to be a teacher who stood in front of the classroom and lectured all day. Instead, she wanted to provide her students with engaging educational opportunities in which she and her students would learn from one another. Kim stated, “I want to be the teacher that my
teachers were for me this semester” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Kim also envisioned a classroom in which her students took responsibility for their learning by posing and finding answers to questions that interested them.

Kim also stressed the importance of showing her enthusiasm for language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies classes. Although Kim still expressed a desire to instruct students in her teaching fields of mathematics and science, Kim had gained a greater appreciation for all content areas, specifically literacy instruction. Kim shared during our third round interview her change in beliefs. She shared, “I always told myself, I’m never going to teach language arts, and now I wouldn’t even care if that’s where I got my first job. I love it” (transcript, December 6, 2012). Kim had begun to realize that her beliefs towards teaching the content areas could influence her middle school students’ excitement and passion for the curriculum.

Kim had learned throughout the on-campus portion of the course and in the field the realities of teaching a prescribed curriculum. However, Kim envisioned finding ways to supplement the traditional content area textbooks with literature books and informational texts to enhance the topics being taught, and further engage her middle school learners. One of Kim’s biggest revelations throughout the semester was her changing belief in the importance of literacy instruction. She shared,

I walked into my literacy course this year not thinking I would ever have to teach about a book, or even have my students open a literature book. I was wrong. My time in [Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education] has opened my eyes to a whole new perspective on literacy instruction. I grew up never caring about
reading and didn’t expect my students to care much either. But ten weeks spent in this course changed what seemed like a life of dislike towards literacy. I now believe that literacy plays the biggest part in planning and implementing the curriculum. Literacy is the foundation of education (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Kim also expressed a greater desire to work towards common goals within the school community with a direct connection to literacy instruction. She believed in a whole school literacy model which would be supported by teachers, parents, and administrators. Kim wanted her students to feel enthusiasm for literacy from all stakeholders in their education and for her future middle school students to receive effective literacy instruction in all content area courses.

Using visioning as a conceptual tool throughout the semester aided in Kim’s changing beliefs and provided her direction in her future educational practices. Kim stated,

My vision of teaching has improved greatly. Never would I have said I would read picture books or math literature books to my classroom. I now cannot vision my classroom or my school without literacy as the major component of all lessons. I don’t see myself as a teacher without having literacy as the base of my teaching. From this course, I have a new professional identity (vision statement, December 10, 2012).
Field Experience Summary

The field experience component of the course, in conjunction with the on-campus portion of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, positively contributed to Kim’s growth as a young professional. At the beginning of the semester, Kim wanted to be a fun, energetic teacher who put on a daily performance for her students in mathematics and science classes. However, by the end of the course, Kim envisioned herself as a true role model for her students who would be responsible for planning and teaching lessons that would engage her learners, as well as provide them an environment for collaboration and critical thinking skills within a supportive classroom community.

Kim’s field placement in a language arts and mathematics classroom enabled her to gain greater clarity into the challenges of integrating literacy instruction across the curriculum due to strict curriculum mandates present in many districts. However, Kim had begun to place more value on literacy instruction throughout the course, and realized that literacy truly undergirded all content area classes. After having opportunities to observe and teach integrated lessons during her field experience, Kim could not envision her future classroom without a specific emphasis on literacy.

Conclusion

The pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* had a significant impact on Kim’s developing professional identity and her beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Throughout the course, Kim benefitted from opportunities to reflect, acknowledge, and share her personal and professional tensions and beliefs as a past student and current preservice teacher. Making her tacitly
held beliefs explicit enabled Kim to understand the influence of her beliefs on her future instructional practices, and helped her define her positioning as a middle school teacher. Kim’s professional identity continued to develop during her field experience in which she saw first-hand the challenges and benefits of integrating literacy across the curriculum in the middle school setting. By the end of the course, Kim had a clearer vision of her role and the role literacy would play in her future middle school mathematics and science classrooms.

Kim began the fall 2012 semester with a self-described aversion to literacy. She had not had many positive experiences with reading and writing at home or throughout her own schooling. As a future middle school teacher, Kim knew the importance of literacy instruction in all content areas, but had not fully considered the integration of literacy practices in her future middle school mathematics and science classes. However, Kim’s beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum changed significantly throughout the semester. Participating in both the on-campus learning opportunities and field experience helped Kim understand that literacy was truly an integral component of all content area courses. Kim’s newfound appreciation for literacy was contributing to her vision of teaching mathematics and science lessons which would additionally focus on the literacies of her disciplines.

Kim and I have maintained our professional relationship that began during the fall 2012 semester. Kim enrolled in another literacy course that I instructed during the spring 2013 semester. I was always pleased to hear Kim share with her peers in class how her beliefs towards literacy had changed during the previous semester. Although I did not
instruct Kim in any other courses during her teacher education program, we kept in
contact during the summer and throughout the fall 2013 semester. Kim frequently
stopped by my office on her way to and from classes, and we met periodically for coffee,
lunch, or dinner to catch up with one another.

Kim completed her clinical practice experience in a sixth grade mathematics and
science classroom in a local suburban school district during the spring 2014 semester.
During that time, I had the opportunity to serve as one of Kim’s university supervisors. I
was pleased to see the confident, young professional Kim had become as she successfully
interacted with and instructed her middle school students. Additionally, Kim integrated a
variety of resources and strategies which helped her adolescent learners become more
literate in their content areas.

Kim graduated from the university in May 2014, and I continued mentoring her
throughout the summer by providing advice and suggestions related to her job search.
Kim accepted an offer to teach fourth grade language arts and mathematics at a local
suburban middle school for the 2014-2015 academic year. Kim, who once stated she
“hated reading and writing,” was now looking forward to sharing her new beliefs
regarding literacy instruction with her middle school students as a language arts and
mathematics teacher.
Cross-Case Analysis

The three individual case studies were analyzed to provide a greater understanding of how Sean, Sawyer, and Kim’s participation in a pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed to their developing professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The cross-case analysis was necessary in determining the similarities and differences among the individual cases, and was completed in order to better understand the influence of the course on the preservice teachers’ beliefs. The cross-case analysis resulted in the identification of specific findings which answered the two research questions guiding this study. These findings are discussed by individual research question below.

Research Question 1

How does the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities?

Awareness

The pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course provided a forum for Sean, Sawyer, and Kim to explore their past and present educational beliefs throughout the semester, and the tensions they were experiencing as future middle school teachers. The opportunities that were provided for the preservice teachers to participate in guided inquiry through reflection, dialogic engagement, and visioning aided
in Sean, Sawyer, and Kim’s awareness that their past educational experiences were influencing their current beliefs and visions of future practice.

Awareness is defined as “the state or condition of being aware, having knowledge, and consciousness. Awareness enables an individual to draw inferences from what one experiences.” The learning opportunities that the preservice teachers engaged in throughout the semester helped Sean, Sawyer, and Kim give voice to their beliefs. Like many preservice teachers, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim had specific views on teaching at the middle school level stemming from their own apprenticeships of observation. However, through our numerous conversations during the semester, it became apparent that the preservice teachers had not had many opportunities to share their beliefs in previous teacher education courses. Therefore, the preservice teachers had not truly made connections to how their past and present beliefs would influence their future practice.

By making their tacitly held beliefs explicit throughout the course, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim gained a greater awareness of how their developing professional identities were being influenced by their past beliefs. All three preservice teachers had experienced tensions related to their middle school experiences, in general, and specifically with literacy. The preservice teachers believed that the educational practices they had participated in during their middle and high school years had resulted in a lack of motivation. Kim shared, “I believe I was never taught literacy in an enthusiastic way. When I was ‘forced’ to read a certain book, I didn’t want to read it” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). Sawyer described the required textbooks used in his middle and
high school courses as bland which did little to promote “imaginative thinking” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Sean found literacy practices as a middle and high school student overwhelming. He attributed his inability to focus on his diagnosis of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) as a middle school student. Sean’s educational experiences had lacked any type of differentiation which contributed to his academic struggles and lack of motivation towards school. It was only after enrolling in college courses that Sean realized he was actually a good student who had just not been given enough options and choices to help him succeed as an adolescent learner (transcript, September, 28, 2012).

The lack of motivation and differentiation in middle and high school impacted the preservice teachers in different ways. Despite several negative educational experiences, Sawyer and Kim were able to maintain high grades and excelled in the majority of their courses, while Sean struggled throughout most of his schooling and required summer school in order to graduate high school. The beliefs Sean, Sawyer, and Kim held based on their past educational experiences were affecting their becoming future middle school teachers and the instructional practices that would be employed in their classrooms. All three preservice teachers hoped to teach in ways that were contrary to the majority of their past experiences in order to provide a learning environment in which their future middle school students would thrive socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

The preservice teachers’ beliefs were articulated in their discussions and assignments throughout the semester, and influenced the decision-making practices that took place in the planning and implementation of lessons with their future middle school
students. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim firmly believed in providing their students with a voice in their learning. They planned to offer students a variety of choices to help motivate their adolescent learners. As an aspiring middle school language arts teacher, Sawyer wanted to provide his students with input in the selection of novels that would be read, as well as ways lessons would be presented (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sawyer recalled how many activities were forced upon him as a middle school student that did not seem relevant to him as an adolescent. Therefore, he planned to explain the relevancy of specific assignments, such as using graphic organizers as a prewriting strategy, and selecting materials that would appeal to his students’ interests (literacy metaphor poster reflection, October 3, 2012).

Kim identified the need to consider her students’ opinions and provide learning opportunities that would “grasp their attention” (reflexive essay, October 24, 2012). Similar to Sean and Sawyer, the majority of Kim’s educational experiences had lacked variety and enthusiasm. Therefore, she aspired to find different ways to teach mathematics and science to her middle school learners. Kim stated, “I leaned the material the same way each year, and as a teacher, I would change the way the topic is presented and add different texts and materials. I know that as a teacher, I can make these subjects more enjoyable for my students” (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Although Sean had enjoyed school during the primary grades, the middle school years had been a turning point in his educational experience. He stated, “Unfortunately, once I began middle school, my experiences were much different. I felt that school was a boring machine with boring teachers, and I had to make it through” (literacy narrative,
September 5, 2012). As a parent, Sean had observed examples of his sons’ positive learning experiences throughout the years, and ascribed to implement many of those strategies as a future middle school teacher. Sean shared, “I have seen my sons’ teachers successfully get them to enjoy reading by giving them choices and doing activities that encourage critical thinking, not memorization” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). By continuously reflecting on his past literacy experiences, Sean became increasingly aware of the influence of his beliefs on his pedagogical choices. He shared, “My past literacy experiences influence every lesson plan I have designed thus far because of my personal belief that without addressing differentiated learning and modalities, many students will struggle in the classroom” (reflexive essay, October 22, 2012). This belief aided in the planning of lessons that offered a variety of choices which would appeal to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners while taking into consideration the differentiation of the content, process, and products of learning.

Sean, Sawyer, and Kim also developed an increased awareness of the critical role the teacher plays in motivating middle school students to learn in all content areas. The three preservice teachers acknowledged the importance of showing their own enthusiasm for the material they were teaching. Sawyer planned to share his “secret passion” as a reader and writer to spark his students’ love of literacy, and vowed to be energetic even when he was presenting material through a lecturing format (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sean also believed in being honest with his students and admitting when concepts had been challenging for him as a former student (transcript, December 10, 2012). Additionally, Kim shared her belief that the manner in which a teacher presents
information could greatly impact the learning that takes place in the middle school classroom (electronic journal, October 14, 2012).

Participating in a pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed to the preservice teachers’ awareness of the impact of their past beliefs on the pedagogical decisions that would be made in their future middle school classrooms. The preservice teachers gained awareness, or consciousness, of their beliefs by being immersed in a learning environment that invited the preservice teachers to give voice to their tensions and beliefs through guided inquiry experiences. The awareness that the preservice teachers gained throughout the course helped Sean, Sawyer, and Kim make greater connections between their past educational experiences and their intended instructional practices. The awareness of their beliefs was an integral step in understanding the influence of their beliefs on future actions.

The majority of Sean, Sawyer, and Kim’s middle and high school experiences had provided limited choices and irrelevant learning opportunities which had resulted in a loss of motivation towards many subject areas, including literacy. Therefore, the three preservice teachers expressed a desire to plan and teach lessons that would provide their middle school learners with an increased voice in their learning. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim realized that their passion and enthusiasm for teaching would be critical in motivating their future middle school learners, and a key factor in the pedagogical decisions that would be made in their future classrooms.
Insight

The pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* contributed to the preservice teachers’ insight, or a clearer perception and deeper understanding, of their positioning as future middle school teachers. The learning opportunities that were provided for the preservice teachers throughout the course balanced the cognitive and affective domains of learning, and became a model the preservice teachers hoped in emulate in their future middle school classrooms. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim learned the content and pedagogical knowledge required of effective literacy educators, but additionally learned more about themselves as developing young professionals within a community of learners. The course not only focused on the future students Sean, Sawyer, and Kim would instruct, but on the beliefs, tensions, and values the preservice teachers held at this point in their teacher education program.

The middle school level has often been referred to as “the finding place” as adolescent learners are provided with opportunities to discover more about themselves. The exploratory nature of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* became the “finding place” for Sean, Sawyer, and Kim to discover who they were becoming as developing professionals, and the importance and influence of their role as future middle school teachers. Although the three preservice teachers had unique home and school learning experiences in the past, they all entered the course with a strong desire to become future middle school teachers. However, opportunities for reflection, dialogic exchanges, and visioning throughout the on-campus and field portions of the course
helped Sean, Sawyer, and Kim gain more confidence and self-efficacy which resulted in a reaffirmation of their beliefs.

Sean, Sawyer, and Kim more clearly defined their desired roles as future middle school teachers throughout the semester. At the beginning of the semester, Kim envisioned herself as a “performer” and “entertainer” who needed to make assignments “fun” for her middle school students (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012). Sean and Sawyer, on the other hand, wanted to be seen as “strict enforcers” of the rules. They initially wanted to be viewed by their students as serious teachers with high expectations. Sean even questioned how his background in the military would translate into the classroom. He stated, “It’s going to be hard for me to take my rigid military style and convert it to my classroom” (transcript, November 5, 2012).

The learning opportunities provided for the preservice teachers throughout the semester helped Sean, Sawyer, and Kim more clearly understand the importance of their role in the middle school classroom. Each of the preservice teachers wanted to become role models for their students. They wanted to be viewed by their adolescent learners as more than teachers, but as individuals who would guide their students’ learning. As role models, the preservice teachers were ready to accept the challenge to meet not only their students’ cognitive needs, but their social-emotional needs, as well. Sean stated, “I believe that children and adolescents look up to adults who walk the talk. I want to be able to teach my students both academic and real life skills” (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Additionally, Sawyer identified the need to conduct himself responsibly inside and outside of the classroom in order to be seen as a respectable teacher (vision
statement, December 10, 2012). Kim also realized that she needed to be more than a “fun” teacher. Kim learned, along with Sean and Sawyer, the importance of setting high expectations, and utilizing a variety of methods to make lessons engaging and interactive for her students that were based on specific content standards.

The preservice teachers believed in the importance of forming a classroom community in their future classrooms. The freedom to learn in a relaxed atmosphere throughout the on-campus portion of the course had contributed to this belief and a desire to mirror the close knit community the preservice teachers had experienced in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*. Sawyer shared, “I think you gave us a little bit of freedom. I feel like if you can allow that, it creates a buddy-type system that sort of brings people together” (transcript, November 8, 2012). Sawyer shared that one of his greatest successes in the field was his ability to “generate a calmer class atmosphere” with his seventh grade students. He stated, “Kind of like we had in class. I allowed them to be a little bit more themselves” (transcript, December 13, 2012).

Sean also acknowledged the difference between a forced classroom community in another methods course in which he was always asked to “turn and talk” to the preservice teacher sitting next to him and the authentic classroom community that had developed in our course. Sean learned from the participation in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* the importance of the teacher, whether at the middle school or college level, achieving a “balance” between establishing guidelines and expectations in the classroom, and allowing students to openly share their opinions and have a voice in their learning (transcript, November 5, 2012). Kim also benefitted from the support of
her peers throughout the course, and sought to achieve a similar atmosphere in her future middle school classroom.

The preservice teachers ended the course with a strong desire to teach in student-centered classrooms. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim understood the need to teach the content accurately and meet the standards that were guiding their disciplines. However, they learned that being teachers was more than lecturing and dispensing knowledge. They wanted students “to be the center of the learning process”, and knew that their pedagogical decision-making could provide collaborative experiences and opportunities in which students would learn as much from their peers, as well as the instructor (Sean, vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sean, Sawyer, and Kim had a desire to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning. They wanted to provide students with effective content knowledge while also taking their students’ social-emotional needs into account. They sought to engage their students in inquiry learning in which the students’ own questions would help to guide the instruction. They were proponents of providing choices in assignments and reading materials, making reading and writing experiences relevant to their middle school students’ lives, incorporating technology, and differentiating instruction to help ensure their students’ successes. The preservice teachers understood that maintaining mutual respect would be necessary in order for their student-centered classrooms to grow and thrive (Sean, vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Engaging in learning opportunities on-campus and in the field, which focused on belief exploration, helped reiterate the preservice teachers’ aspirations of becoming future
middle school teachers. Kim and Sawyer had grown up wanting to be teachers, while Sean entered the teaching profession as a second career after serving in the military for over a decade. Although their past experiences may have varied, all three preservice teachers entered the course with a strong desire to teach at the middle school level. However, each expressed anxiety and trepidation with some aspects of teaching upon entering their field placements. Though, the opportunities to observe and teach in authentic middle school classrooms and bridge theory to practice helped reaffirm that Sean, Sawyer, and Kim made the right career choice.

Kim’s confidence was bolstered in her field experience by her cooperating teacher who referred to Kim as a second teacher in the classroom, and encouraged the students to treat Kim with the same respect the cooperating teacher received (transcript, December 6, 2012). By the end of the course, Kim expressed her longing to continue pursuing her dream occupation. She stated, “This is definitely the career for me. My [field] hours are completed, but I don’t ever want to leave. I love it” (transcript, December 6, 2012).

Sawyer shared on several occasions throughout the semester his fear of merely presenting information to his students instead of truly teaching the content. This fear remained with him as he entered the field towards the end of the semester. He stated, “I was so scared going into this” (transcript, December 13, 2012). Although Sawyer had reservations about his abilities as a teacher prior to entering the field, Sawyer found much success during his methods field experience. Sawyer felt that the field experience helped reinforce his desire to teach at the middle school level. He shared, “I’ve always said that seventh grade was my favorite, and this confirmed it” (transcript, December 13, 2012).
Moreover, Sawyer understood that he was capable of standing on his own and planning and teaching lessons that would take into account the needs of his adolescent learners. Sawyer summarized his experiences by stating, “I really, really enjoyed it. And, it kind of like calms me a little bit now. I know I have a talent in me somewhere, that I can teach” (transcript, December 13, 2012).

The experience Sean had throughout the semester also confirmed that he made the right decision to become a teacher at the middle school level. Sean knew from his own academic struggles, and working with students in the field, the importance of an effective teacher in the lives of his/her students. Sean expressed his desire early in the semester to make a “difference and change the ways my students view education, school, and learning” (vision statement, September 10, 2012). By the end of the semester, Sean was closer to accomplishing his goal. He shared, “I think if you waved a magic wand, and I was teaching in my own classroom, I would be very, very happy. I think that’s good because it means I want to stay in the career” (transcript, November 5, 2012). “This [course] kind of reaffirmed that I’m serious. This definitely confirmed that I made an awesome choice” (transcript, December 10, 2012).

The preservice teachers’ professional identities continued to develop throughout the middle childhood education literacy methods course. The experiences Sean, Sawyer, and Kim engaged in throughout the course, their interactions with their peers, and their field placements in authentic middle school settings contributed to the beliefs, practices, and values that were guiding their actions inside and outside of the classroom. All three preservice teachers gained insight, or a deeper understanding and clearer perception of
their role as educators, and thus more clearly defined their positioning as future middle school teachers. By gaining insight, the preservice teachers developed a greater sense of self-efficacy knowing they had the abilities to create learning environments that would balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning for their future middle school students.

**Conclusion**

Participation in the pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed to the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities as future middle school teachers. Opportunities to reflect on past experiences and articulate their present beliefs within a course focused on guided inquiry experiences enabled Sean, Sawyer, and Kim to become increasingly aware, or conscious, of the influence of their past beliefs on current and future practices. The awareness of the power of beliefs on instructional-decision making thereby enabled Sean, Sawyer, and Kim to become more insightful as to the actions they would take in order to enact their beliefs at the middle school level. Deeper understandings developed as the preservice teachers continued to explore their tensions and beliefs in the on-campus portion of the course and in their field experiences which resulted in more clearly defined roles and actions as future middle school teachers.

**Research Question 2**

*How does the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contribute, if at all, to preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum?*
Clearsightedness

Sean, Sawyer, and Kim’s apprenticeships of observation had strongly contributed to their literacy beliefs as current preservice teachers and future middle school instructors. Sean and Kim had identified their past home and school literacy experiences as negative. Therefore, literacy was not an important aspect of their lives at the beginning of the semester. As future content area teachers, Sean and Kim had not specifically considered the role literacy would play in the disciplines they were preparing to teach. Although Sawyer was an avid reader and writer which stemmed from positive home and middle school language arts experiences, he also expressed negativity with reading and writing practices in content area courses, and had not initially focused on the teaching of literacy practices in his future social studies classroom (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012).

Using visioning as a conceptual tool throughout Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education, enabled Sean, Sawyer, and Kim gain clearsightedness, or greater clarity, in the importance of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The three preservice teachers realized they each had a literate identity that was part of their developing professional identity. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim developed a clearer understanding that their attitudes and beliefs towards teaching literacy in their future content area classrooms could influence the beliefs of their middle school students. Therefore, Kim acknowledged the need to engage herself in literacy practices in order to model effective instruction for her middle school students (electronic journal, October 14, 2012). Sawyer realized that sharing his love of reading and writing could help spark his students’
interests and could be a motivating factor in encouraging middle school students to engage in literacy practices in any discipline (transcript, December 13, 2012).

The course provided the preservice teachers with a greater understanding that the adoption of the Common Core State Standards by the state of Ohio in 2010 had placed the responsibility for literacy instruction on all content area teachers. Therefore, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim discovered the need to effectively plan and teach lessons in which literacy was integrated across subject areas. Although the main focus of the class was on general literacy instruction, the preservice teachers were always encouraged to apply the concepts being learned to their own future teaching fields in an effort to make the course content relevant and meaningful. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim learned that literacy did not need to be taught as a separate subject within their content area classrooms, but rather could be integrated within the content of their disciplines. The three preservice teachers found success in planning and implementing lessons that were based on the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts, as well as discipline-specific standards.

Sawyer specifically gained awareness that literacy and text could be defined in different ways, and that each discipline had its own literacy (transcript, December 13, 2012).

Sean and Kim both described their experiences in Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education as an “awakening” (transcript, November 5, 2012). Both had entered the course with resistance and uncertainty of the course’s value based on their desire to be future content area teachers (transcript, November 5, 2012). Even Sawyer, who loved to read and write, had not truly considered the role literacy would play in his future social studies classroom (transcript, September 26, 2012). However, by the end of
the on-campus portion of the course, the preservice teachers had expressed through various assignments and discussions the necessity of literacy instruction in all discipline, an increased acceptance of their responsibility, and a desire to teach literacy across the curriculum.

The field experience component of the course, which comprised the last five weeks of the semester, greatly reinforced the concepts learned in class and contributed to strengthening the beliefs and visions of the preservice teachers. Sean and Kim completed their field experiences in fourth grade classrooms in which their cooperating teachers taught language arts as well as an additional content area. These experiences helped bridge the theory learned in class to authentic classroom practices. Sean observed his cooperating teacher seamlessly integrating language arts and social studies lessons. Many historical novels were used to connect the two disciplines, and the fourth graders easily transitioned between the subjects without a clear delineation between the two disciplines (transcript, December 10, 2012). Sean saw first-hand the wide range in reading levels among his students which reinforced his vision of providing differentiated instruction to meet all his students’ needs. He realized that without literacy skills, his students would continue to struggle with language arts and social studies content (vision statement, December 10, 2012).

Sean further shared his beliefs in his response to my member check regarding his views on teaching literacy across the curriculum. He stated,

I did not see the importance of literacy across the curriculum in my early stages of the teaching program. This changed once I started my advanced EDU classes and
my methods. As we have spoken about many times, I am a firm believer of the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum, and I intend on integrating this as much as possible in my future classrooms (member check, August 16, 2012).

Kim observed the integration of literacy throughout her field placement in a language arts and mathematics classroom. Kim’s belief that literacy was the “foundation” of all learning was reinforced by her cooperating teacher. Her cooperating teacher reiterated the need for students to have effective literacy skills in order to be successful learners in all disciplines (electronic journal, November 12, 2012). Kim also learned the realities of the daily schedule and mandated curriculum which is often a contributing factor to the resistance of literacy instruction in discipline-specific classrooms by content area teachers. However, even with limited class time and the pressure to cover the required content, Kim still found ways to enhance traditional math lessons by incorporating the use of picture books and technology. The successes that Kim and her students experienced in the classroom helped reinforce her literacy beliefs and visions. She shared, “Incorporating literacy into math classes was like a breath of fresh air for the students” (transcript, December 6, 2012).

In response to a summary of my findings emailed to the preservice teachers as a member check, Kayla shared, Through exploring myself and understanding the type of curriculum I want to provide for my students, I have gained a sharper focus regarding the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum. Math and science are my two
content areas, in which one would say, “Reading and writing have no importance to these subjects.” As I’ve grown, I can now say that without literacy, mastering of these subjects cannot be attained. I have gained from this course wisdom in the ability to continue the use of literacy in all lesson plans (member check, July 30, 2013).

Sawyer’s field experience was completed in a seventh grade language arts classroom, which did not specifically provide him the opportunity to witness the integration of literacy across the curriculum. However, the field experience positively contributed to his beliefs in teaching in all disciplines. Sawyer observed many best practices in action in his seventh grade language arts classroom which could be transferred to other content area classes. The middle school students were constantly engaged in reading and writing. Journal writing, independent reading time, conferencing with the cooperating teacher, explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction, and access to the classroom library were several of the instructional strategies that Sawyer experienced and incorporated into his literacy lessons (transcript, December 13, 2012).

The modeling of best practices in literacy instruction by his cooperating teacher helped Sawyer bridge theory to practice, and he realized that middle school students could be engaged and motivated learners in all subject areas (transcript, December 13, 2012). The positive electronic journal entries shared by Sawyer’s peers who had completed field experiences in multidisciplinary classrooms helped to reinforce his belief that literacy instruction was a necessary component of all disciplines. Sawyer had initially expressed reservation with integrating literacy in his social studies classroom,
however, by the end of the semester he shared, “I feel like reading and social studies kind of coexist with one another” (transcript, December 13, 2012). Sawyer had a clearer view of the importance of integrating literacy in his future classrooms, and the instructional strategies which could guide and motivate his adolescent learners.

Sawyer summarized his beliefs regarding the importance of teaching literacy across the curriculum in response to my member check. He stated,

The class helped me to understand the importance of stressing literacy across the curriculum and helping students realize literacy is not unique to just English. My future students not only need to realize this, but I do as well. This is something I hope to make a clearer understanding of to my students. I understood the importance of literacy and being literate, but, until this class, I did not understand of its importance across the curriculum (member check, July 22, 2012).

Participation in the pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course helped the preservice teachers gain clear-sightedness, or greater clarity and a sharper focus, in their beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum. Based upon their own past experiences, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim knew that literacy instruction was important. However, the on-campus portion of the course and related field experience provided the preservice teachers with a greater understanding and rationale for teaching literacy across the curriculum. By the end of the course, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim placed more value on literacy instruction, and each believed that literacy was truly the foundation of all subject areas. Kim shared, “It [literacy] plays such an important role. I really do believe it is the base of everything” (transcript, December 6, 2012).
The course assignments encouraged the preservice teachers to reflect, share their beliefs and envision the role of literacy in their specific teaching fields. Therefore, the preservice teachers were continuously making connections between effective literacy practices and the pedagogical decisions that would guide their instruction as future content area teachers. The field experience and continuous discussions with peers throughout their time in authentic middle childhood classrooms reinforced the need to integrate literacy in all disciplines in order to foster middle school students’ personal and academic successes.

**Farsightedness**

The pedagogical structuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course had introduced the preservice teachers to the conceptual tool of visioning. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim engaged throughout the semester in guided inquiry learning opportunities which encouraged them to concretely envision multiple aspects of becoming future middle school teachers. Although the preservice teachers were continuously reflecting upon their past and present educational experiences and articulating their beliefs, they were simultaneously engaged in the process of becoming forward thinkers by continuously looking towards the enactment of their beliefs on future practice. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim were asked to envision their roles as classroom teachers, the roles of their students in their learning, curricular and instructional practices including the role literacy would play in their future content area courses, and the connection the preservice teachers’ classrooms would have to the greater school community. Visioning helped the preservice teachers gain farsightedness, or the ability
to see their future, as they created visual roadmaps of their beliefs, and identified initial steps to help them achieve their goals.

Many preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with preconceived notions of the role of the classroom teacher and instructional decision-making practices based upon their own apprenticeships of observation. However, those views are based upon visions of classroom practice seen through the eyes of a student rather than through the lens of a future classroom teacher. Therefore, preservice teachers’ visions of classroom practice are often limited and somewhat unrealistic, but seldom discussed during teacher education programs. By engaging in visioning throughout the semester, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim developed a clearer view of the complexities of teaching at the middle school level, and more specifically defined the focus, range, and distance of their visions.

The focus, or central interest, of the preservice teachers’ visions of teaching became more concrete throughout the semester. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim’s initial visions were clearly based on their own educational experiences with a specific emphasis on their middle and high school years. These visions were combinations of creating physical spaces and emotionally-safe environments that were the opposite from what they had experienced as students. Additionally, their visions were based on individuals who had had positive influences on the preservice teachers’ views. Sawyer’s visions were highly influenced by his mother and former middle school language arts teacher. At the beginning of the semester, Sawyer envisioned all aspects of his teaching to mirror his mother’s physical classroom and instructional practices (transcript, September 26, 2012).
Although Sean and Kim did not have visions as clear as Sawyer’s, they both identified a specific teacher who had made an impact on them, and were guiding their visions. Sean identified with a former cooperating teacher he connected with during a field experience observation who had a teaching style that balanced structure with freedom (transcript, September 24, 2012). Kim also recalled her high school English teacher who often worked individually with students on their writing skills. Kim hoped to emulate a close connection with her students as this teacher had done with her (transcript, September 27, 2012).

The preservice teachers’ visions continued to become clearer as the semester progressed. All three preservice teachers initially discussed the importance of colorful, decorated classrooms. These visions developed into the importance of forming classroom communities in which all their middle school students would belong and feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and beliefs. Sean saw his classroom as a “second home” for his students (vision statement, December 10, 2012). Sean, Sawyer, and Kim had identified their visions of their classes comprised of actively engaged learners from the onset. By the end of the semester, this vision had expanded to include an emphasis on student-centered learning in which shared decision-making would take place between students and teachers. The preservice teachers’ individually envisioned roles also changed. Kim had initially envisioned being a “performer” and “entertainer” and making everything “fun” (literacy narrative, September 5, 2012); while Sean and Sawyer were looking to be “strict enforcers” who were also approachable (vision statements, September 10, 2012). All three were able to more clearly define their future positioning.
They became more insightful and longed to become teachers who would guide their students and work hard to meet their middle school students’ cognitive and affective needs.

Sawyer was the only preservice teacher of the three, who had specifically discussed the importance of teaching according to the identified standards and curriculum of the district earlier in the semester (vision statement, September 10, 2012). However, the opportunities for the preservice teachers to plan lessons based on the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts and their additional content areas led to a greater understanding of the standards’ role in their teaching. Kim learned firsthand the challenges her cooperating teachers had experienced with a scripted curriculum during the field experience (transcript, December 8, 2012). By the end of the semester, the preservice teachers realized that the Common Core State Standards were not a prescribed curriculum but rather a road map to guide their instruction. Therefore, they began to envision curricular and instructional practices that would meet the standards while also providing students choices in their learning through the use of numerous resources and texts. The preservice teachers’ visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum also became more clearly focused. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim all knew that literacy was important for success in all subject areas from the beginning of the course. However, by the end of the semester they had a stronger belief in its role as the “foundation” of all content area courses, and their influence on providing experiences that would integrate literacy skills within their specific disciplines.
The focus of the preservice teachers’ visions moved from generalized thoughts to more specific views. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim realized that the teacher was truly the heart of all aspects of their visions. The curricular and instructional practices that will occur in their future classrooms, including the teaching of literacy across the curriculum, the community that will be formed, and the learning opportunities that will be provided to their future adolescent learners, will all be based on their beliefs and decision-making practices as future middle school teachers.

The range or scope of focus of the preservice teacher’s visions shifted slightly throughout the semester. At the beginning of the course, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim were focused primarily on their individual development as future middle school teachers. They did not specifically consider their roles as collective members of the teaching profession. However, opportunities for dialogic engagement with their peers and instructor, as well as field experiences in authentic middle school classrooms, helped the preservice teachers’ more clearly see the complexities of classroom teaching, the differing views and beliefs of their peers regarding teaching practices and roles, and the interactions that occur among professionals in the field. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim realized that effective teachers do not work in isolation, rather they are integral members of teams who work together to meet their students’ needs. Sawyer specifically articulated his desire to collaborate with his future colleagues in order to plan and implement lessons that would be cross-curricular in nature (vision statement, December 10, 2012). All three preservice teachers envisioned classrooms that would work to support the visions of the
school community, while maintaining unique and special individual classroom experiences.

The distance or relation of the preservice teachers’ visions to their future practice narrowed throughout the semester. Kim expressed at the beginning of the semester that she continuously thought about her future classroom, and had begun making greater connections between her course content and future instructional practices (transcript, September 25, 2012). Sean and Sawyer, on the other hand, had not explicitly envisioned their future classrooms to the extent of Kim. Sean expressed just prior to entering the field that he felt “so far from his goal” (transcript, November 5, 2012). However, opportunities to articulate and share their visions helped all three preservice teachers more clearly understand that within a few semesters, they would be student teachers and then first-year teachers with responsibilities for their own classrooms.

By the end of the semester, all three preservice teachers expressed they “could not wait” to become teachers. They had seen the realities of teaching in middle school classrooms through their field experiences. Sawyer knew that his field experience in a seventh grade classroom of high achieving and motivated language arts students was not the norm. Therefore, he began envisioning how he would teach inclusion students who would be a part of his future classroom (transcript, December 13, 2012). Sean saw first-hand the need to differentiate instruction to accommodate all his learners (transcript, December 10, 2012), and Kim was an eye-witness to tight schedules and scripted curriculums which can often stifle the creativity of teachers and learners (transcript, December 8, 2012). Sean and Kim began envisioning ways to overcome these obstacles.
Sean, Sawyer, and Kim were not deterred rather they were “excited” to have their own classrooms, accepted the realities of teaching at the middle school level, and always kept sight of their end goal.

Using visioning as a conceptual tool helped Sean, Sawyer, and Kim create an internal compass that could guide them throughout their future educational careers. The visioning that occurred throughout the semester was initially expressed throughout generalities or as idealistic notions. However, by continuously linking visioning to the content and pedagogical knowledge that was being taught and learned in the course, the preservice teachers were able to create more concrete visions of the multifaceted dimensions of teaching. Becoming an effective middle school teacher can be quite challenging and fraught with numerous roadblocks along the way. However, developing a vision of who the preservice teachers wanted to be and where they wanted to go during their teacher education program was an initial step in guiding Sean, Sawyer, and Kim as they continue their professional journey, hold firm to their beliefs, make decisions that will benefit their students and community, and achieve their goals. Visioning became the bridge between the preservice teachers’ beliefs and their future goals.

Conclusion

The use of visioning as a conceptual tool enabled the preservice teachers participating in Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education to make connections between their past and present beliefs and the enactment of their goals as future teaching professionals. The visioning that occurred throughout the on-campus and field experience component of the course helped the preservice teachers gain farsightedness as
they began to more concretely focus on the multiple aspects of teaching at the middle school level. A key component of the preservice teachers’ visions focused on the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. Although the three preservice teachers entered the course with their own unique literate identities, they gained clear-sightedness, or greater clarity, throughout the semester as they continued to make connections between their literacy beliefs and future instructional practices.

**Researcher’s Role**

During the research study, I engaged in the process of epistemological reflexivity to critically reflect on the decisions that were being made throughout the research. After several semesters of teaching *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*, and conducting a pilot study of preservice teachers’ beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum, I realized the tension I was experiencing in regards to the structure of the course. The tension that the course was failing to adequately address the developing professional identities of the preservice teachers as future middle school content area instructors propelled me to take action. I decided to pedagogically restructure the course to provide learning opportunities that would balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning through guided inquiry experiences.

An exploration of the preservice teachers’ beliefs undergirded all of the learning opportunities that were designed and redesigned for the course. These opportunities created new tensions and enabled the preservice teachers to engage in the processes of reflecting on their beliefs, making their tacitly held beliefs explicit through dialogues with peers and myself, and creating visions of their ideal classroom practices. Coupled
with field experiences in authentic middle school classrooms, the course became a “finding place” for the preservice teachers. I wanted the preservice teachers to discover themselves as developing professionals, articulate their values and beliefs, and gain a greater understanding of the influence of their beliefs on future decision-making practices. By the end of the semester, all the preservice teachers had a greater sense of their positioning as middle school teachers and the future students they would instruct.

Teacher education programs have long been considered the weak middle link between students’ past educational experiences and the induction phase of teaching. However, the pedagogically restructuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course proved how powerful teacher education programs, especially methods courses, can be. Designing a course that focused explicitly on the preservice teachers, as well as their future students did not short-change the content and pedagogical knowledge the preservice gained in literacy instruction. Rather, it enhanced the educational experiences and personal self-discovery which resulted in the preservice teachers gaining greater senses of self-efficacy and feelings of enactment. The preservice teachers gained more confidence and believed they were capable of being effective middle school teachers who had the abilities to put their visions into action.

Redesigning a course to focus on the cognitive and affective domains of learning initially challenged me as the course instructor and researcher. However, the positive contributions of the course on the preservice teachers’ professional development and their understanding of the need for literacy instruction across the curriculum made me realize the importance of the study and changed the way I teach at the university level. Now, all
of my courses are designed to equally focus on the needs of the preservice teachers, as well as the future students I am guiding them to instruct.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the individual case studies and cross-case analysis of three preservice teachers, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim, who participated in a middle childhood education literacy methods course that was pedagogically structured to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning. Throughout the on-campus and field components of the course, the preservice teachers were provided learning opportunities which focused on reflection, dialogic engagement, and visioning based on an exploration of their beliefs through guided inquiry experiences.

Sean, Sawyer, and Kim entered the course with differing backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs towards becoming future middle school teachers and the role literacy would play in their future classrooms. The course not only enabled the preservice teachers to make their beliefs more explicit, it created increased tensions through the learning opportunities provided. These tensions led to the preservice teachers’ expanded understandings of the what, why, and how of teaching at the middle school level. By navigating their tensions, the preservice teachers stretched their thinking and opened themselves to new possibilities of enacting curricular and instructional practices based on their belief systems.

The course contributed to the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and helped them gain greater awareness of their beliefs and the influence of their beliefs on the decision-making practices that would take place in their classrooms.
Increased consciousness of the power of their beliefs enabled Sean, Sawyer, and Kim to gain insight, or a deeper understanding, of their positioning as future middle school teachers and the enactment of their beliefs. By the end of the course, Sean, Sawyer, and Kim had a deeper understanding of the teachers they wanted to become, and the importance of their actions inside and outside of the classroom. They realized that teaching their desired content areas would be a main component of their positions; however, they did not consider it to be the most important aspect of their future jobs. The preservice teachers aspired to be role models and guides for their students, and planned to create classroom communities in which their middle school students would grow cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim each had a greater sense of self by the end of the course and hoped to similarly structure their classrooms as “finding places” for their students.

Bridging the preservice teachers’ beliefs and future goals was aided by the use of visioning throughout the semester. Sean and Kim entered the course as self-described nonreaders and had not seriously considered the role literacy would play in their future content area classrooms. Although Sawyer described himself as an avid reader and writer throughout the course, he questioned the role of literacy in his future social studies classroom at the beginning of the semester. However, by the end of the course, all three preservice teachers gained clearsightedness, or greater clarity, in the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. They more strongly believed that literacy was the foundation of all disciplines and hoped to integrate literacy practices into their future classrooms by
providing learning opportunities which would be motivating and relevant to the lives of their adolescent learners.

Visioning also enabled the preservice teachers to create concrete images of additional components of teaching at the middle school level. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim gained farsightedness, or the ability to become forward-thinkers, by using visioning as a conceptual tool throughout the semester. The preservice teachers were continuously asked to envision many aspects of classroom life and considered the curricular and instructional practices that would be enacted in their future classrooms. The preservice teachers learned that having concrete visions of middle school teaching could serve as roadmaps and guides in making their goals a reality.

The beliefs a preservice teacher brings to a teacher education program are often quite strong, and changing an individual’s beliefs does not easily occur throughout a single education course. However, designing a literacy methods course that is pedagogically structured to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning, and focuses on the development of the preservice teachers in addition to their future middle school students, can contribute to an increased awareness of preservice teachers’ beliefs and a greater understanding of how a system of beliefs can be put into action. A course that focuses on the exploration of beliefs and tensions within guided inquiry experiences has the potential to strengthen, challenge, and even change beliefs leading to positive results for preservice teachers as they continue on their journeys as individual and collective members of the teaching profession.
CHAPTER V  
FUTURE IMPLICATIONS 

Introduction 

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how the pedagogical structuring of a middle childhood education literacy methods course contributed, if at all, to preservice teachers’ emerging professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The course was restructured from previous semesters to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning within guided inquiry experiences in order for the preservice teachers to explore their emerging professional identities based upon their past and present literacy beliefs, as well as their visions of teaching literacy in future middle school classrooms. This chapter provides an overview of the findings, practical implications for the restructuring of middle childhood education literacy courses, and recommendations for the redesigning of content area literacy instruction.

The findings of my research study can help other teacher education programs who are considering changes in the restructuring of their own specific courses or programs at large. When methods courses are restructured to balance the cognitive and affective domains of learning, are undergirded by structural principles of pedagogy, and designed to mirror the curricular and instructional aims of effective school classrooms, the contributions can be beneficial to both preservice teachers and their future students. Teacher education programs, and specifically methods courses, must educate and prepare
young professionals who are ready to meet the realities of today’s classrooms and are able to envision their future as educational professionals. Preservice teachers who have greater senses of self are more efficacious, and have increased desires to take action through decision-making processes. The restructuring of specific courses or programs can be instrumental in teacher education being viewed as the strong middle link between preservice teachers’ educational backgrounds and their first teaching positions.

Overview of the Study

Throughout the semester long course, the participants were encouraged to explore their developing professional identities as individual and collective members of the teaching profession. The exploratory nature of the course enabled the participants to gain awareness, or knowledge and consciousness, of their beliefs and tensions as assignments and discussions enabled the preservice teachers to reflect and make explicit their tacitly held past and present literacy beliefs.

Professional Identity

Beginning the class with a literacy narrative assignment enabled the participants to reflect on their past literacy experiences at home and school. Sawyer recalled positive literacy experiences at home in which reading and writing were valued activities in the home environment. He had a wide access to books, visited libraries frequently, and was encouraged to read and write while growing up. However, Sean and Kim described their home literacy experiences as negative. Neither of these preservice teachers witnessed their parents involved in literacy activities, and they were not overly encouraged to engage in literacy practices while growing up. An exploration of school literacy practices
revealed more variation in the preservice teachers’ experiences. Although Sawyer recalled positive literacy experiences in his language arts classes taught by his mother, all three preservice teachers recounted stories in which they became discouraged from reading and writing due to negative experiences at school, particularly at the middle school level. Unsupportive teachers, lack of choice in reading materials, and a disconnection between literacy practices and content area reading expectations resulted in all the participants feeling indifferent or negative towards literacy specifically related to content area instruction.

Furthermore, the experiences that the participants had in their past years were influencing their current attitudes towards teaching literacy across the curriculum in future middle school classrooms. Sawyer’s positive literacy experiences at home and school in language arts classes contributed to his positive beliefs towards literacy instruction during his teacher education program and resulted in his selection of language arts as one of his middle childhood education teaching fields. On the other hand, participants who expressed negativity or indifference towards reading and writing in the past entered the class with consistent indifferent or negative beliefs towards the role literacy would play in their future middle school content area classrooms. Kim and Sean, preservice teachers pursuing the teaching fields of mathematics/science and science/social studies respectively, had each questioned their enrollment in the required course expressing their reservations in taking a literacy course when they were going to be future content area teachers.
Reading and discussing the preservice teachers’ literacy beliefs enabled me, as the instructor of the course, to gain access to the attitudes, thoughts, and values the participants held at the beginning of the course. Without an opportunity to express their beliefs and tensions honestly, the preservice teachers may have just gone through the motions of the course, learned a variety of literacy strategies, but ultimately dismissed their relevancy and importance upon entering field experiences.

The participants not only became aware of their past and present beliefs regarding literacy instruction, but became cognizant of how their beliefs were influencing the pedagogical decisions that were being made in the planning of literacy lessons for their future students. Participating in microteaching opportunities coupled with pedagogical discussions based on reflective essays enabled the preservice teachers to reflect on the influences of past literacy experiences, on-campus experiences, and in-field experiences on their decision-making practices in lesson planning and implementation. Sean, Sawyer, and Kim were able to more clearly articulate throughout the semester their desire to integrate literacy across the curriculum regardless of the disciplines they would teach. They realized that their beliefs were powerful contributing factors to the instructional methods that would be implored in their future classrooms and the importance that would be placed on literacy instruction at the middle school level.

The participants additionally gained insight, or a clearer understanding, of their reasons for becoming future middle school teachers, the influences to pursue this profession, and their changing identities from college students to future teachers. An exploration of the preservice teachers’ literate identities was just one aspect that
composed their overall professional identities. Through the literacy narratives, electronic journal entries, and interviews, the preservice teachers were able to explore several aspects of their professional identities. Belief exploration revealed that Sawyer who had had positive experiences in his own middle school language arts classrooms in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades was hoping to emulate many of his teacher’s effective practices. However, those preservice teachers, such as Sean and Kim who were disengaged as middle school students hoped to find different ways to make a difference in their future students’ lives.

An exploration of the beliefs that society places on teachers in general, and middle school teachers specifically, also led to thoughtful, productive conversations both in class and online. Although Sean initially expressed unfair pressures to teach content and also life skills, Sawyer and Kim, truly believed that their role was to support their future middle school students in all aspects of their cognitive and social-emotional growth. Engaging in productive dialogues with his peers enabled Sean to see a different perspective, and by the end of the course he was also realizing the importance of meeting the various needs of all of his future students.

Further conversations with the participants resulted in greater insight into their beliefs about their identities at this point in their educational program. Quite understandably, the preservice teachers felt as if they were straddling a fine line between being college students and classroom teachers. On several occasions, Kim and Sawyer could clearly envision their future classrooms and their positioning as middle school teachers. However, at several times during the on-campus portion of the course Sean felt
that the realities of becoming a classroom teacher were at a distant view. It was through
the field experience component of the course that the preservice teachers were able to
make greater connections between theory and practice, and also their positioning from
students to teachers. The attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs that were shared among the
preservice teachers and me took place in a classroom community that honored and
supported the participants in their belief exploration.

Moreover, by the end of the course the participants had a deeper understanding of
the professional roles they would ascribe to in their future middle school classrooms.
Field experiences in a variety of settings enabled the participants to see first-hand the
realities of teaching at the middle school level. The preservice teachers shared how they
were viewed by their cooperating teachers as co-teachers in the classroom, thus making
them feel a truer part of the classroom community. Through continued electronic journal
entries and interviews, the preservice teachers shared who they wanted to become as
teachers and the impact they would be able to make in their future middle school
students’ lives through the enactment of their beliefs.

Visioning

Throughout the course, the preservice teachers used the conceptual tool of
visioning to create ideal images of future classroom practice. The preservice teachers
were asked to envision multiple aspects of teaching at the middle school level including
the physical environment of their classrooms, their roles as future middle school teachers,
their students’ roles in the classroom, the curricular and instructional practices which
would take place in the classrooms, the role of literacy in their future content area
courses, and the connections which would be made between their classes and the greater community.

Visioning aided the preservice teachers in gaining clear-sightedness, or a sharper focus, regarding the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum. The preservice teachers grappled with their own tensions regarding their literate identities throughout the course. Initially, Sean and Kim questioned their enrollment in the course as future middle school mathematics, science, and social studies teachers. Sawyer also failed to see how literacy practices would be employed in this future social studies classroom. However, through the participation in the pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course, the preservice teachers began to alter their initial beliefs which resulted in clearer visions of the role of literacy in their future content area classrooms.

Writing literacy narratives and vision statements, and creating literacy metaphor posters that were accompanied by written reflections enabled the preservice teachers to share their beliefs and visions of the role literacy would play in their future classrooms. The images, quotes, and text selected for the posters represented a variety of beliefs and visions, as the preservice teachers began to more clearly define the importance of literacy not only in middle school language arts classrooms but in content areas classes, as well. Participating in field experiences in local middle school classrooms also contributed to the preservice teachers’ beliefs regarding the realities of teaching literacy across the curriculum and helped enhance their visions of future instructional practices.
Visioning enabled Sean, Sawyer, and Kim to make additional connections between their past and present beliefs and future roles and practices in their ideal middle childhood classrooms. Visioning was a component of all learning experiences that took place during the on-campus portion of the course and throughout the field experiences. Visioning was also discussed during all three rounds of interviews. Engaging in visioning enabled the preservice teachers to gain farsightedness, or the ability to see into the future and become forward-thinkers as they began to navigate the demands of the teaching profession.

The preservice teachers’ visions became clearer and more concrete throughout the semester. Although Sean, Sawyer, and Kim entered the course focused on the content areas they would instruct to their future middle school students, they ended the course with a strong desire to mirror the balanced domains of learning that structured the middle childhood education literacy methods course. Although each participant had a more focused vision of instructional practices including the importance of literacy instruction across the curriculum, the participants equally saw the importance of developing a safe and supportive classroom community in which their future middle school students would be valued as individual learners and engaged in educational experiences relevant to their students’ lives. The participants believed in not only being knowledgeable instructors, but also role models, supporters, and guides in the lives of their students. The participants envisioned future classrooms where the cognitive and affective domains would receive equal importance in the planning and instruction of their courses, and began identifying initial steps in turning their beliefs into actions.
Alignment to Curricular and Instructional Practices of Middle School Education

The Association for Middle Level Education’s (AMLE), *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (2010), addresses integral characteristics of middle school education. In designing the middle childhood education literacy methods course, characteristics related to the curriculum and instruction of middle school students were used to undergird the course in which the preservice teachers were participants. The preservice teachers benefited from a course that aligned to key aspects of curriculum and instructional practices that should inform the foundation of their future classrooms, thus making the participants a true part of the middle school experience that addressed both the cognitive and affective domains of learning.

Instructors of middle childhood education literacy methods courses should consider restructuring their classes to mirror the curriculum and instructional practices outlined by the Association for Middle Level Education (2010). The AMLE (2010) states that the middle school curriculum must be relevant, integrative, challenging, and exploratory to its learners. This entails providing learning experiences that are meaningful, offering choices in students’ learning, enabling students to guide their own instruction, and addressing an awareness of the hidden curriculum that often goes unnoticed, yet can have a profound effect on students at any grade level, especially during the middle school years. Courses that are structured to meet the cognitive and affective needs of future middle school teachers honors and respects all aspects of a preservice teacher’s learning, understanding, and becoming.
Relevant

Educating preservice teachers cognitively and affectively must be one of the main goals of a middle childhood education literacy methods course. The pedagogical structuring of the middle childhood education literacy methods course that focuses on the cognitive and affective domains of learning enables preservice teachers to make connections between their own literacy beliefs and the literacy needs of their future middle school students. Preservice teachers must be encouraged to explore ways to make literacy across the curriculum a reality by questioning, planning, and teaching lessons in language arts, mathematics, science, and/or social studies classrooms. Preservice teachers should be positively persuaded to see new possibilities and expand their visions of what it means to teach in today’s middle school classrooms as they prepare to educate 21st century literacy learners.

Integrative

The experiences provided in a middle childhood education literacy methods course must empower the participants by allowing them to share in the decision-making processes of their learning. Although general guidelines and criteria can be set for specific course assignments, preservice teachers must be given the freedom to complete requirements in their own unique ways. Preservice teachers should be encouraged to use various genres and resources, including technology, to express themselves, ask and answer their own questions regarding literacy instruction through face-to-face and electronic dialogues, and design units of study that can be successfully implemented in future content area classrooms. Additionally, preservice teachers must be encouraged to
be reflexive, or critically reflective, of their experiences, shifting beliefs, and progress in their learning and understanding.

**Challenging**

The middle childhood education literacy methods course must be based on high expectations for all preservice teachers. The course should challenge the preservice teachers to learn not only the methodology of teaching literacy, but also the reasons and understanding of its importance and impact in future middle school classrooms. “For these issues to come alive, teachers must help students examine values, assumptions, basic principles, and alternative points of view, addressing why things happen instead of how” (AMLE, 2010, p. 18). Moving beyond covering basic content, preservice teachers need to become critical thinkers who use a variety of resources, including technology, to communicate with their peers, as well as enhance their literacy lessons. Preservice teachers must also learn the importance of working cooperatively with their classmates in order to accomplish collaborative goals.

**Exploratory**

Preservice teachers need opportunities to explore not only various topics related to literacy, but also their emerging professional identities. The middle school has been called “the finding place” in which young adolescents learn to understand who they are, as well as who they want to become. The middle childhood education literacy methods course can also become “the finding place” for preservice teachers. The physical structure of the classroom must provide the participants with a warm, inviting learning environment in which a close classroom community can be created and maintained.
throughout the semester and beyond. The cognitive structuring of the curriculum and instructional methods should enable the preservice teachers to actively participate in activities important to middle school learners such as literature circles, Readers’ Theatre, journaling, and more. The assignments and activities should enable the preservice teachers to take on the role of middle school students, as well as teachers as they explore ways to plan, discuss, and integrate literacy across the curriculum. Equally important, the preservice teachers must be given the opportunity to explore their own tacitly held literacy beliefs, reasons for choosing middle childhood education as a profession, and the role literacy will play in their future classrooms. In short, they must be provided with a supportive environment, learning experiences, and opportunities to find themselves by reflecting on their past and envisioning their future.

**Visioning in Teacher Education**

“Visioning is a personal stance, a reach to a set of ideal classroom images and practices to which teachers strive.” (Hammerness, 2001, p. 143) Visioning focuses on the choices teachers make and a lifelong sense of becoming (Duffy, 2002). Although visions may be based on teachers’ beliefs and ideas, visioning is not an idealistic notion. It is a concrete sense of purpose which provides teachers with a sense of direction as they work to meet educational goals set for themselves and their students (Kennedy, 2006). The act of visioning requires an educator to continuously reflect on his/her past and present beliefs, values, and understandings in order to create images that can serve as a compass for future decision-making practices.
Researchers agree that the classroom teacher is the most important factor influencing students’ learning (Marzano, 2010). However, traditional teacher education programs have failed to educate preservice teachers holistically. Instead, teacher preparation programs, including methods courses, have focused almost exclusively on the future students the preservice teachers will instruct rather than exploring the beliefs, attitudes, tensions, and values the preservice teachers hold (Zumwalt, 1989). Choosing not to address these additional components can result in preservice teachers not fully prepared to meet the demands of today’s challenging classrooms. The reality shocks of the first years of teaching continue to result in high levels of attrition, with approximately 30% of teachers leaving the profession within the first five years of employment (Hammerness, 2003).

Duffy (2002) states that preservice teachers most often receive a solid foundation in teacher education courses including effective instruction in comprehension skills, teaching strategies, assessments, and pedagogical knowledge. However, courses that focus exclusively on specific methods and materials are not enough to create teachers who are independent thinkers. It is a teacher’s passion for a particular purpose that directs the decision-making processes (Duffy, 2002). Therefore, Duffy (2002) advocates moving beyond the mere teaching of pedagogical knowledge in teacher education courses to the concept of visioning. It is through visioning that preservice teachers can begin to explore their beliefs and gain a sense of direction which can effectively guide them through the numerous issues that will compete for their attention in the classroom (Kennedy, 2006). The goal of visioning is to create teachers who will be independent
thinkers capable of making their own informed decisions and necessary modifications appropriate for their students and classrooms. “The best teachers adjust, modify, adapt and invent; they do not emulate” (Duffy, 2002, p. 333).

All teacher education programs should strive to prepare preservice teachers who possess the four characteristics of outstanding teachers outlined by Duffy (2002). Outstanding teachers are entrepreneurial decision-makers who adapt, invent, and adjust based on their students’ interests and needs. Additionally, outstanding teachers are distinguished from their colleagues by their moral commitment to their students, their resistance to being followers, and a passion to maintain optimism despite frustrations experienced in their classrooms. Visioning in an effective tool that teacher education programs can implement in their courses in order for preservice teachers to explore beliefs and future challenges. Since preservice teachers’ beliefs often predict action, teacher educators must be committed to developing beliefs in a deliberate and ongoing manner (Freedman & Carver, 2007). It is through visioning that effective belief exploration can occur and be used to clarify how personal and professional beliefs can influence instructional practices (Squires & Bliss, 2004).

A teacher’s vision statement traditionally consists of the articulation of five main elements regarding his/her ideal classroom: the sights and sounds of the classroom, the role of the students, the role of the teacher, the curriculum and its relationship to students’ learning, and the classroom relationship to the greater school community or society at large (Hammerness, 1999). Vision statements can be modified to reflect additional components under exploration. For example, in my research with preservice teachers, a
focus on literacy instruction was a key component of their visioning. This aspect of their vision statements encouraged the preservice teachers to move beyond the how and what of literacy instruction, but to include why literacy instruction across the curriculum should be an integral component of their future middle school classrooms.

As teacher educators, including the conceptual tool of visioning in preparation courses for teacher candidates can help preservice teachers develop a clearer sense of purpose for teaching and their commitment as individual and collective members of the teaching profession (Hammerness, 2003). Visioning that begins early in teacher education programs can inform, support, and motivate preservice teachers as they continue to reflect on their understandings in the college classroom as well as in their field experiences where theory becomes practice and practice can result in theory. Visioning throughout the preservice teachers’ preparation program can aid in the exploration of the focus, range, and distance of their visions.

The focus, or central interest, of preservice teachers’ visions may be initially blurry or vague. However, with multiple opportunities to discuss, question, and engage in teaching experiences, the preservice teachers’ images may become more sharply defined. The range or extent of focus, of the preservice teachers’ visions may commence as rather narrow as the preservice teachers envision only their particular classrooms or certain students whom they will instruct. However, extensive visioning can result in a broader scope which may include the entire school system or connections to the community. The distance, or how close or far the vision is to reality, will also vary among preservice teachers depending on their place in the program. Preservice teachers
just beginning their teacher preparation often have a distant view of their ideal images. It is difficult for them to imagine all the complexities of classroom life. However, preservice teachers in methods courses and clinical practice experiences can see the closeness of their visions and define their visions accordingly (Hammerness, 2003).

Visions are supported within the confines of teacher education courses that acknowledge, encourage, and value belief exploration. Through the use of visioning, teacher educators can create a sense of efficacy in their preservice teachers as they discuss the gaps that may exist between the preservice teachers’ hopes and their actual practices in the field. Discussions of the preservice teachers’ concrete images can provide realistic steps that can be taken in order for the preservice teachers to meet their personal and professional goals. Teacher educators can also help preservice teachers develop episodic visioning in which preservice teachers begin to envision lessons before they are taught. “Planning is not a linear process that moves from instructional objectives to instructional strategies but rather a process of envisioning in which teachers ‘see’ what will happen, where students will sit, what displays will be examined, what questions will be asked, and so forth” (Kennedy, 2006, p. 207).

Visioning can be instrumental in providing inner strength, deeper meaning, and the courage needed by preservice teachers to make informed decisions once they begin to experience challenges in field experiences and beyond (Coldron & Smith, 2001). Visioning enabled the participants in my study to maintain their focus even in challenging situations. Although Sean, Sawyer, and Kim described their field
experiences as positive, they witnessed many realities of teaching at the middle school level that could have discouraged them as future educators.

Sean was quite honest in describing how his lack of content knowledge in particular areas of social studies had initially caused him trepidation in the field. However, Sean’s vision to be a role model and guide in the lives of his adolescent learners kept him on his path. He made a conscious effort to relearn and review content that was unclear to him each evening as he prepared for his upcoming lessons. He also honestly discussed his shortcomings with his cooperating teacher, and found ways to gain more knowledge. Sean was also unprepared for the varying ability levels he witnessed in his classroom. However, he continued to design lessons that differentiated instruction in order to truly meet the needs of all of his learners.

Sawyer completed his field experience in a well-managed seventh grade language arts classroom in which most of his students’ excelled academically and actively participated in literacy activities. Sawyer quickly realized that although ideal, this setting was not the norm in most middle schools. Through visioning, Sawyer began to see the need and possibilities of preparing for future middle school classes that would vary in ability levels and motivation.

Kim completed her field experience in a fourth grade language arts and mathematics classroom which was primarily focused on mathematics instruction. She saw firsthand the difficulties of teaching a scripted math curriculum and working within the confines of a shortened school day. Although Kim’s cooperating teacher valued literacy instruction and believed it was the foundation of all subject areas, she often
taught mathematics as a separate subject and failed to focus on the literacy of the discipline due to time and curricular constraints. Witnessing the realities of the middle school classroom could have deterred Kim and resulted in beliefs that teaching literacy across the curriculum could not be successful. However, Kim’s visions of her future classroom and her desire to teach an integrated curriculum enabled Kim to plan effective literacy and mathematics lessons that benefitted and motivated her fourth grade students.

Visioning benefits preservice teachers by helping to distinguish between their values and beliefs and the habits and routines they may develop once in authentic classroom settings. Visioning was instrumental in guiding Sean, Sawyer, and Kim as they created a bridge between their beliefs and actions. Visioning provided the preservice teachers with an internal compass to continue towards their goals. Since visioning aids in the process of becoming and an increased understanding of individual identity (Squires & Bliss, 2004), it merits increased consideration in courses which will prepare our next generation of teachers.

**Restructuring Literacy Methods Courses**

The restructuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* from previous semesters to the fall 2012 semester was the result of identifying tensions that existed regarding how the course content was being taught to middle childhood education preservice teachers minoring in the teaching fields of language arts, mathematics, science, and/or social studies. Prior to the fall 2012 semester, the course was teacher-centered in which I spent the majority of class time introducing preservice teachers to best practices of literacy instruction primarily geared to the middle school language arts
classroom. The preservice teachers learned a variety of literacy strategies and were encouraged to utilize these strategies in their future content area classrooms. The course was centered on the cognitive domain of learning, and remained focused on the future middle school students the preservice teachers would instruct.

After conducting a small pilot study with four middle childhood education preservice teachers enrolled in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* during the fall 2011 semester regarding their beliefs in teaching literacy across the curriculum, I discovered the tensions those preservice teachers were experiencing as future middle school teachers. Their current beliefs were clearly based on their past experiences which in turn were contributing to their views of future practice. I realized that I was doing a disservice to my preservice teachers by failing to recognize their tensions and address their developing professional identities.

Therefore, I began the process of restructuring the course based upon structural principles of pedagogy which included designing student-centered learning opportunities which balanced the cognitive and affective learning domains. The preservice teachers were immersed in assignments and activities that were based upon guided inquiry experiences. As the instructor of the course, I provided many guiding questions and prompts to elicit the preservice teachers’ thinking about what it meant to be future middle school teachers and the role literacy would play in their future content area classrooms. The general literacy strategies were replaced with more specific content area strategies, and a greater connection was made to the integration of literacy across the curriculum. The preservice teachers were continuously engaged in reflection, dialogic engagement,
and visioning as the course focused as much on the developing preservice teachers as the future middle school students they would instruct.

The learning opportunities provided throughout the restructured course positively contributed to the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and visions of future practice. However, upon further reflection, I realized my initial restructuring was still operating within the same paradigm of beliefs. My goal in the initial restructuring remained on how the specific course content was being taught to preservice teachers. The use of guided inquiry practices in which I posed the questions for discussion, reflection, and visioning provided deeper experiences and understandings, but could be further refined to provide preservice teachers with richer experiences.

My proposed changes for future iterations of the course involves making a shift across paradigms in order to determine how preservice teachers enrolled in *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* can make greater connections between course content and their positioning as future middle school teachers. In this stance, the preservice teachers and I will be involved in collaborative inquiry in which both parties will be responsible for problem-posing and problem-solving practices relevant to middle childhood education. In this restructuring, the curriculum will become negotiated with students instead of built from students (Short, 2009), and center on essential questions related to the teaching, learning, and beliefs of future middle school teachers. A greater connection will be made between content area literacy strategies and disciplinary literacy practices as preservice teachers learn how to redefine the terms text and literacy related to their own content area classrooms. Preservice teachers will also have increased
opportunities to engage in collaborative opportunities with peers and witness the collaboration between literacy instructors and content area teachers (see Figure 8).

**Redefining Content Area Literacy Instruction**

In traditional “Reading in the Content Area” courses taught in teacher education programs, literacy tasks are viewed as similar across content areas (Brozo, et al., 2013; Johnson & Watson, 2011; Moss, 2005; O’Brien & Stewart, 1992). Preservice teachers generally compile a “tool-box” of literacy strategies and skills that can be utilized across disciplines (Hynd-Shanahan, 2013). However, the generalized literacy strategies taught in teacher education programs have had a limited impact on the beliefs of preservice teachers towards literacy instruction across the curriculum (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Negative or indifferent attitudes preservice and inservice teachers have towards teaching literacy across the curriculum often stems from receiving limited instruction in how to adapt general literacy strategies to specific content area classrooms (Draper & Siebert, 2010). Content area teachers often shy away from integrating literacy instruction across the curriculum due to their own limited understanding and lack of preparation in teacher education courses, or a perceived disconnection between general literacy strategies and the goals of their content area classrooms (Conley, 2008).

However, content area literacy instruction is necessary to meet the needs of adolescent learners who frequently enter content area classrooms at the middle school level unprepared to read and write the complex print associated with a specific discipline (Draper, et al., 2010; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). According to the National Council of Teachers of English Adolescent Literacy Policy Research Brief (2007), adolescents
How is *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* taught to preservice teachers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designed as a teacher-centered course</th>
<th>Designed as a student-centered course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused on the future middle school students the preservice teachers would instruct</td>
<td>Focused on the professional identities of the preservice teachers, as well as the future middle school students the preservice teachers would instruct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum based on best practices of literacy instruction in the middle school language arts classroom</td>
<td>Curriculum based on the integration of literacy instruction across the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduced preservice teachers to general literacy strategies</td>
<td>Introduced preservice teachers to more specific content area literacy strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasized the cognitive domain of learning</td>
<td>Balanced the cognitive and affective domains of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on the coverage of course material</td>
<td>Focused on guided inquiry learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can preservice teachers make greater connections between course content and their positioning as future middle school content area teachers?

- Base course on essential questions generated by preservice teachers (i.e. What does it mean to be a middle school teacher? How can I teach literacy in my discipline specific classroom? How can I create meaningful literacy experiences for my future middle school students?)
- Introduce preservice teachers to disciplinary literacy
- Continue to explore preservice teachers’ beliefs
- Help preservice teachers redefine text and literacy
- Collaborate with other content area methods instructors

*Figure 8.* Future changes in the pedagogical structuring of *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education*
need explicit instruction in discipline specific literacies in order to be successful readers and writers at the secondary level. Therefore, in order for a shift to occur in the beliefs and instruction of literacy across the curriculum, a reimaging of content area literacy instruction is needed, with a focus on disciplinary literacy.

Disciplinary literacy “emphasizes the differences among the disciplines. The differences lie in what is important to pay attention to, what counts as evidence for an argument, what level of confidence the field has in the knowledge it produces, how texts are organized, how sentences are constructed, and so on” (Hynd-Shanahan, 2013, p. 94). A shift in focus in content area literacy instruction involves the examination of literacy instructors’ and content area teachers’ beliefs regarding literacy practices, a redefining of the terms text and literacy, and collaboration between experts in their relative fields (Draper, et al., 2010).

**Examining Beliefs**

Conflicts continue to exist between literacy and content area teachers regarding their beliefs and the role of literacy instruction. Traditionally, literacy teachers have advocated for the use of multiple literacies by adolescents in order for them to function fluently within various literacies in today’s society. They most often have a strong understanding of adolescent learners and work to design lessons that support middle and high school students in their literacy skills inside and outside the classroom. Content area teachers are most often viewed as experts in their discipline specific classrooms and tend to focus on the content knowledge and skills that adolescents will need to successfully perform in specialized areas (Draper & Siebert, 2010). Due to conflicting beliefs and
differing areas of focus, content area teachers often feel that the literacy strategies advocated by literacy instructors are only focused on meeting literacy goals and fail to address content area aims. These perceptions have led literacy teachers to view content area teachers as uncooperative, resistant, and unmotivated in meeting their students’ literacy needs (O’Brien & Stewart, 1992).

Instead of emphasizing the differences between literacy instructors and content area teachers, both sides should focus on the strengths that each party brings to the table as they work together to meet the needs of their adolescent learners. Therefore, Draper and Seibert (2010) recommend a reimagining of content area literacy instruction based on a shared purpose between literacy instructors and content area teachers. Instruction should not be viewed as either literacy-based or content-area driven. Instead, both groups should develop shared instructional goals for adolescent learners based on mutual beliefs. Content area teachers should no longer be pushed to “teach” reading and writing in their classrooms, but instead to “use” literacy as a way to teach discipline-specific content to their students (Fisher & Ivey, 2005).

The reimagining of content area literacy instruction should not be relegated to inservice literacy instructors and content area teachers. Instead, it must begin in teacher education programs. Instructors of literacy methods courses and content area reading classes can redesign their teacher preparation courses to provide preservice teachers with an understanding of how literacy can be effectively integrated in their future discipline-specific classrooms. Many preservice teachers who plan to instruct middle and high school students in content area classrooms fail to understand their enrollment and
participation in required literacy courses. Traditional mindsets still persist in which many preservice teachers believe that literacy instruction should remain the responsibility of language arts teachers in today’s classrooms.

Additionally, many preservice teachers pursuing content area teaching fields such as mathematics, science, and social studies do not identify themselves as strong readers or writers, or place the same value on literacy as preservice teachers intending to teach language arts. Therefore, it is imperative to begin reimagining content area literacy instruction with an exploration of preservice teachers’ beliefs towards literacy instruction across the curriculum. The writing of literacy narratives, journal entries, and frank discussions of preservice teachers’ beliefs provides an opportunity to voice their tacitly held views and provides the instructor with a window into their attitudes and values regarding literacy instruction. Belief exploration must be given due consideration since teachers’ beliefs about language and students can either constrain or open up future possibilities for the study of literacy (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

Redefining Text and Literacy

Traditional views of the terms text and literacy have contributed to the differing mindsets and beliefs between literacy instructors and content area teachers. The term text has been customarily defined as written words, sentences, and paragraphs which connotates images of textbooks, worksheets, and trade books. The term literacy has been conventionally defined as an individual’s ability to read and write printed material composed of words, sentences, and paragraphs (Draper & Siebert, 2010). Viewing text and literacy in such a narrow way can perpetuate the opposing views between literacy
instructors and content area teachers. Literacy instructors who ascribe to the traditional views of text and literacy may fail to see the literacy events that are present in a discipline-specific classroom that do not require students to read and write in customary ways such as interpreting graphs in a middle school mathematics classroom, making inferences while observing artifacts in a social studies classroom, or recording observations during a science experiment. Similarly, content area teachers who understand text and literacy as primarily reading textbooks and completing worksheets can fail to see the literacy processes that are imperative to their students’ success in a specific discipline.

Redefining what constitutes text and literacy is not a new phenomenon. Leland and Harste (1994) discussed the power of providing students with opportunities for “multiple ways of knowing” grounded in semiotic theory. Semiotics is the study of signs, and the interpretation of signs as symbols, icons, and indexes by individuals (Crawford & Hade, 2000; Suhor, 1991). Multiple ways of knowing exist for students across disciplines as they learn to interpret the sign systems of various content areas including art, music, math, drama, and language. Through the process of transmediation, students move between and among sign systems and create meaning as new interpretations are formed. When students are provided increased opportunities to expand their understanding of text and literacy through the interpretation of various sign systems, they can create new identities and develop stronger voices in their learning (Leland & Harste, 1994).
Therefore, the work of literacy instructors and content area teachers must begin with exploring the sign systems of specific content area and encouraging multiple ways of knowing within disciplines. The term text can be redefined as “any representational resource or object that people intentionally imbue with meaning in the way they either create or attend to the object to achieve a particular purpose” (Draper & Siebert, 2010, p. 28). Therefore, the term text should recognize nonprint materials such as pictures, audio, and video content that comprise the literate practices of today’s adolescents both in and out of the classroom (Bean, Bean, & Bean, 2001). Literacy instructors who fail to recognize nonprint materials as a valuable component of a particular discipline often lose credibility with their content area colleagues (Nokes, 2010).

The term literacy must also be expanded from the mere ability of an individual to read and write or to possess knowledge in a certain domain to “the ability to negotiate (e.g., read, view, listen, taste, smell, critique) and create (e.g., write, produce, sing, act, speak) texts in discipline-appropriate ways or in ways that other members of a discipline (e.g., mathematicians, historians, artists) would recognize as ‘correct’ and ‘viable’” (Draper & Siebert, 2010, p. 30). However, in order for this reimagining to occur, both literacy instructors and content area teachers must learn to define the literacy practices of their specific disciplines. For example, history teachers frequently rely on lecturing and using a textbook to present information to their students. This often results in passive middle and high school students who learn to memorize or accept the content as truth rather than learning to think like a historian, and construct meaning through multiple texts (Nokes, 2010).
Preservice teachers need to understand that literacy experiences are multimodal. “Reading and writing are not mere message transmission but complex response processes in which reading and writing cooperate in creating meanings” (Suhor, 1991, p. 3). A writing experience, for example, may involve reading about a topic, drawing ideas to organize thoughts, sharing writing in various formats, and listening to others read their writing (Leland & Harste, 1994). Opportunities for preservice teachers to experience the multimodal aspects of literacy can help them understand the literacies of the content areas they plan to teach, since working in a multiple sign system expands what constitutes literacy. Unlike traditional views of literacy experiences, there are no right answers to a literacy experience that is based upon multiple ways of knowing. Instead, the emotional and motivational aspects of learning are increasingly recognized resulting in an expanded view of education and a different value for reading among students (Berghoff, 1998).

Teacher educators can be instrumental in helping their preservice teachers expand their views of literacy experiences. The participants in my study began the middle childhood education literacy methods course with a rather limited view of what constitutes text and literacy. Many preservice teachers defined text in a traditional way by citing textbooks, trade books, articles, and handouts as the texts that middle school students would use in their classrooms. The term literacy was also viewed as the conventional ability of an individual to read and write with an emphasis on learning these skills in a language arts classroom. Although the aforementioned examples still pervade typical middle school classrooms and many middle school students receive their primary literacy instruction in language arts classrooms, it was only though dialogues and
discussions about the integration of literacy across the curriculum that the preservice teachers began to understand the expansion of the terms.

Several of the literacy metaphor posters the preservice teachers created contained images and explanations of the language of mathematics, the inclusion of videos and music to enhance lessons, and the integration of technology to capture the interests of their future middle school students. Through continuous discussions throughout the on-campus portion of the course, as well as in the field, the preservice teachers gained a deeper understanding of what constitutes text and literacy and how important their role will be in integrating literacy instruction across the curriculum. Preservice teachers must understand the powerful role they have in providing effective literacy experiences for their future students. “The classroom culture set by the teacher influences not only how well students understand texts, but how they conceptualize the very acts of reading and writing” (Suhor, 1991, p. 3).

Furthermore, teacher educators must also make a greater connection between general literacy strategies and those that would enhance a specific content area. The transferability of general literacy strategies learned in teacher education courses to future content classrooms has remained quite limited since many preservice teachers have failed to see the relevance of particular strategies in their future discipline-specific classrooms (Hynd-Shanahan, 2013). Therefore, teacher educators should move beyond the discussion of general literacy strategies to include how the particular strategy could be effectively used or altered to meet the needs of a content area classroom through implicit or explicit strategy instruction (Brozo, et al., 2013; Nokes, 2010).
For example, many preservice teachers are introduced to the K-W-L strategy (What Do I Know? W-What do I Want to Know? L-What did I Learn?) (Ogle, 1986) in which students are first directed to record in columns what they know and want to know about a particular concept. Then, after a unit of study is completed, students are directed to return to their K-W-L charts to record what they have learned. This strategy has been effectively used in many classrooms throughout the past decades; however it was enhanced by one group of secondary mathematics teachers in order to make the strategy more meaningful to their students. The strategy was renamed K-W-S, (K-What do I know about the problem situation based on given information? W-What do I need to know in order to answer the questions stated in the problem? S-What strategies might I use to answer the problem?) and was used to guide students as they solved a mathematical word problem (Siebert & Hendrikson, 2010).

The literacy strategies that were introduced to the preservice teachers in my study were not taught in generic ways. Instead discussions ensued on the relevancy of certain strategies for particular content areas. The preservice teachers were encouraged to plan lessons that included strategies that would align to their content areas. The microteaching and pedagogical discussions that took place in our classroom enabled the participants to voice the effectiveness of the strategies that were selected. They were able to see what worked well, and what strategies did not meet their learning objectives. Preservice teachers who are provided with instruction on which strategies would most effectively meet the needs of their future content area students, as well as opportunities to explore
variations and alterations in strategies, can result in inservice teachers more able and willing to utilize specific strategies within their discipline-specific classrooms.

Collaboration

The key to truly redefining content area literacy instruction in teacher education programs will require the collaboration between literacy instructors and content area teachers. Most literacy instructors do not have sufficient backgrounds in specific disciplines to understand the literacies of mathematics, science, social studies, art, music, and other content areas. Additionally, most content area instructors do not focus on what constitutes the literacies of their subjects which most often results in limited connections between literacy instruction and the content learned in discipline-specific classrooms. Siebert and Hendrikson (2010) suggest that literacy instructors initiate the collaborations with their colleagues since quite often content area teachers in certain disciplines, including mathematics, do not even recognize the various texts that are being used in their classrooms. Therefore, literacy instructors can help their colleagues in mathematics classrooms identify what constitutes mathematical texts, and suggest strategies that will enable students to develop fluency in reading and writing equations and proofs, interpreting calculator displays and graphs, and displaying manipulatives (Siebert & Hendrikson, 2010).

Literacy instructors can also suggest to social studies teachers primary sources that could be used to supplement the traditional textbook, and recommend strategies that would work effectively to enhance students’ understanding of particular concept being studied (Nokes, 2010). However, without conversations with their history colleagues,
many literacy teachers would be unable to identify historical literacy practices such as sourcing, collaboration, and contextualization that comprise the literacies of the discipline (Nokes, 2010). Therefore, both parties are integral to the collaborative process.

Although literacy is my area of expertise, I was fortunate to have taught mathematics at the middle school level for twelve years, and also had a social studies concentration during my undergraduate years in my teacher preparation program. Therefore, I was able to provide my preservice teachers with some guidance as they prepared lessons that integrated mathematics and social studies for their future middle school students. However, my knowledge in the other content areas was limited, and my teaching would have been enhanced by collaborating with my colleagues in the Division of Education who taught middle childhood education mathematics, science, and social studies methods courses.

The collaboration between literacy and content area instructors in teacher education programs may take various forms but can often result in an increased understanding of the literacy needs of adolescent learners. The Carnegie Corporation (2008) funded a study of preservice teacher education programs that explored the differences in elementary and middle school literacy instruction. Using a team approach, two disciplinary experts, two teacher educators, two high school teachers, and two literacy experts met to study the literacy practices in the teaching fields of history, mathematics, and chemistry. The researchers identified how literacy was used in each specific discipline, the challenges their students faced in the areas of comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and writing, and reflected and shared their own reading processes
used to understand their specific discipline. The in-depth study enabled the group to not only identify the text and literacy practices that were essential to each discipline, but also provided insight into the selection of appropriate literacy strategies to meet their students’ needs.

Collaboration between literacy and content area instructors in teacher education programs can be viewed as a three step process that provides each party with a voice in the integration of literacy instruction across the curriculum. The process should begin with an invitation for faculty across disciplines and meet and voice their opinions, beliefs, and concerns. Literacy instructors can share the importance of middle school students being well-versed in the discipline of a specific content area to meet the needs of their future students, as well as the demands of the Common Core State Standards. Content area teachers can express their beliefs and even reservations about their role in the integration of literacy instruction across the curriculum. Both groups can share their visions of effective classrooms at the university level, as well as their views on effective middle school classes. Open conversation is the first step in both parties realizing that preservice teachers must be provided with sound instruction in all disciplines if they are truly to be effective teachers of middle childhood students.

The second step in the collaborative process should involve the observation of the teacher educators’ classes. When literacy instructors visit their colleagues’ classrooms, they can be eye-witnesses to the academic language of a particular discipline. They can also see the traditional and nontraditional texts in use, the students’ responses to using these texts, and the multiple literacies that comprise a content area classroom.
Observations of literacy instructors by content area teachers can help the latter see literacy in action. The content area teachers can gain a greater understanding of the need for middle school students to be strong in comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and writing skills not only in the language arts classroom, but in all courses. The content area teachers can also learn about effective note-taking, summarization strategies, and study skills that are often a component of literacy courses, and begin to envision how certain literacy skills can be adapted for their content area classrooms. Debriefing sessions between literacy instructors and content area teachers can also help in understanding what was observed, why preservice teachers were engaged in specific activities, and how they can make a more concerted effort to address the literacy needs of their students. Draper’s (2008) participation in a Content-Area Literacy Study Group with instructors in music, theatre, and mathematics provided greater understanding of other fields of studies and resulted in changes in teacher education courses to help preservice teachers consider their role as future literacy teachers.

The third step in the collaborative process between literacy instructors and content area teachers is the co-planning and co-teaching of lessons for preservice teachers. Although time constraints and tight schedules can be obstacles in making this step a reality, the benefits for the instructors and preservice teachers would certainly warrant consideration. Literacy and content area instructors can develop lessons that effectively incorporate literacy in a particular content area. Specific texts and literacy strategies can be discussed and selected to match the learning objectives of a lesson. Throughout the teaching of the lesson, the literacy instructors and content area teachers can “think-aloud”
with their preservice teachers and share the rationale behind the concepts, text, literacies, and strategies that were used. The instructors and preservice teachers would gain greater insight into the fact that both parties bring different but complementary areas of expertise to the lesson (Nokes, 2010). Additionally, the preservice teachers would benefit from seeing their instructors plan and teach collaboratively, thus making the concept of integrating literacy across the curriculum more concrete, and perhaps altering the beliefs of some content area preservice teachers in realizing that literacy is truly the responsibility of all educators.

**Summary**

The shifting literacy demands of elementary level students to the middle and high school years requires teachers to be knowledgeable of their students’ changing requirements and the curricular and instructional approaches that can most effectively meet the literacy needs of their adolescent learners. Effective literacy instructors at the middle and high school level share several positive attributes which have been outlined by the National Council of Teachers of English (2007). These qualities include teachers who promote critical thinking skills, foster independent learning, provide scaffolded instruction, give specific feedback, and offer a variety of student choice in literacy activities. Perhaps, one of the most important attributes of a successful literacy instructor is the teacher’s knowledge and understanding of literacy and his/her commitment to literacy instruction in multiple disciplines (NCTE Adolescent Literacy Policy Research Brief, 2007).
Becoming an effective literacy instructor at the middle school level does not happen automatically. Middle school teachers are increasingly viewed as content area specialists in their respective fields, which often results in literacy instruction being relegated to language arts teachers and not widely taught or promoted in discipline specific classrooms. Two of the main roadblocks to literacy instruction across the curriculum continue to be the failure of content area teachers to understand the discipline specific literacy needs of their adolescent learners and their own beliefs about the importance of literacy instruction in all facets of their students’ lives.

Since teachers’ beliefs highly influence what is taught and how well it is taught in the classroom, belief exploration should be an integral component in the preparation of preservice teachers, especially in the area of literacy instruction. The Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education course, which served as the case under exploration, provided a context for me as the instructor and researcher to understand the preservice teachers’ literacy beliefs throughout the semester. This methods course, typically taken in the junior year, is one of the literacy courses that comprise the preservice teachers’ twelve hour reading core. The course is often one of the first methods courses taken by preservice teachers, therefore, it served as a first step in exploring the preservice teachers’ beliefs towards becoming middle childhood education teachers and the role literacy would play in their future classrooms.

Unlike basic teacher training programs, teacher education is a complex process that requires teacher educators to pedagogically structure courses and programs to focus on both the cognitive and affective domains of teaching and learning. Preservice teachers
must be afforded opportunities to make explicit the tensions they are experiencing and
the beliefs they hold regarding their roles as future educators and the instructional
practices which will take place in their future classrooms. These tensions and beliefs are
powerful contributing factors in preservice teachers’ developing professional identities
and visions of teaching at the middle school level since recognizing tensions and
exploring beliefs can be instrumental in creating new learning experiences (Short &

Providing the preservice teachers with opportunities to focus on both the
cognitive and affective learning domains based on guided inquiry experiences required a
restructuring of the course from previous semesters. However, increasing the focus on
the affective domain of learning did not diminish the content knowledge that the
preservice teachers needed to effectively instruct students at the middle school level. The
preservice teachers were taught theoretical knowledge and practical applications as they
designed lesson plans aligned to the Common Core State Standards, learned how to adapt
strategies to aid students in their fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills
across disciplines, gathered resources and texts that would motivate middle school
learners, and began to differentiate instruction by content, process, and product to meet
the needs of all students in their future classrooms.

Moreover, the pedagogical structuring of the course provided the preservice
teachers with an exploration of their own literacy beliefs and tensions. Many of the
preservice teachers had never had the opportunity to make their tacit beliefs explicit in
their teacher education program. Lack of belief exploration in previous semesters had
resulted in preservice teachers going through the motions of learning numerous generic literacy strategies in order to complete the requirements of the course, yet abandoning the learned literacy strategies in subsequent methods classes and student teaching experiences due to their own personal beliefs that they would never teach literacy as a future mathematics, science, or social studies teacher, or failing to see a direct correlation between class content and future instruction.

Therefore, the assignments completed throughout the semester enabled the preservice teachers to grow in their understanding of becoming future middle school teachers with a specific focus on the teaching of literacy across the curriculum and aligned with several levels of the Affective Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 1965). The literacy narratives and electronic journal entries aligned with the second level of the affective learning domain. At the second level, responding, students actively participate in their learning. By completing a literacy narrative at the beginning of the semester the preservice teachers had the opportunity to become active participants in the course material from the start. They reflected on past literacy experiences at home and school, identified present beliefs, and began envisioning their future middle school literacy practices. Writing and sharing journal entries within an electronic community of learners also enabled the preservice teachers to actively engage with their peers and discuss tensions they were experiencing, share thoughts on their views of teaching middle school, and reflect on the importance of literacy instruction for all adolescent learners.

The literacy metaphor poster and reflexive essay assignments aligned with valuing, the third level of the Affective Taxonomy. At this level, students begin to attach
a value to the knowledge they are learning. The reflective papers that accompanied the literacy metaphor posters showed evidence of the value the preservice teachers began to place on teaching literacy across the curriculum. The preservice teachers gained clarity on the literacies of their content areas and the language of their teaching fields. Additionally, writing reflexive essays that served as a the foundation of the pedagogical discussions that took place after the microteaching lessons further showcased the value that the preservice teachers were placing on literacy instruction. The preservice teachers were able to articulate the decision-making processes that were made in their lesson plans and provide a rationale for the use of specific instructional strategies.

Participating in the pedagogically structured literacy methods course ultimately resulted in the fourth level of learning in the Affective Domain, organizing. At the organizing level, students are able to combine values and beliefs by comparing and elaborating on information that has been learned. The vision statements that were completed, particularly at the end of the semester, indicated that the preservice teachers were able to bring together many components of the course in order to truly envision themselves at future middle school teachers with a clearer view of their role in teaching literacy across the curriculum and the identification of initial steps of enactment.

The redesigning of teacher education programs, and specifically literacy methods courses, may ultimately lead to preservice teachers reaching the final level of the Affective Domain, characterizing. The highest level of attainment, characterizing, occurs when a specific belief or value begins to influence behavior. Although I cannot definitively state that the participants in my study reached this highest level of the
affective learning domain, I am confident that Sean, Sawyer, and Kim altered their initial beliefs regarding the teaching of literacy across the curriculum and their positioning as future middle school teachers. Further research with the participants would be warranted to understand how their values and beliefs, defined and redefined throughout the course, continued to influence their practice. Moreover, redesigning content area literacy instruction during teacher education programs can result in preservice teachers having a stronger understanding of the disciplinary literacy practices of their specific content area, and the collaboration that needs to occur between literacy instructors and content area teachers in order to effectively meet the literacy needs of their adolescent students.

The pedagogically structured middle childhood education literacy methods course positively contributed to the preservice teachers’ developing professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum. The class became the “finding place” for the preservice teachers to understand themselves as individual and collective members of the teaching profession. The dialogic engagement and reflective practices that undergirded all aspects of the course were key components in exploring the preservice teachers’ beliefs within a community of learners and gave voice to their beliefs. Additionally, the preservice teachers learned how visioning could be used as a conceptual tool to serve as an internal compass throughout their teacher education programs and future teaching positions. The preservice teachers realized that many challenges may be encountered along their professional journey. However, a clear vision that defines preservice teachers’ values and beliefs in various aspects of teaching can be instrumental in the characterization of their beliefs into practice.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Preservice Teacher Questionnaire

Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Name: ___________________________________ Date: __________

Areas of Concentration in Middle Childhood Education:
______________________________________________________________

1. What are your current beliefs regarding the role of literacy in a middle childhood education classroom?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

2. What has contributed to these literacy beliefs?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

3. Would you be interested in participating in a research study during the fall 2012 semester in conjunction with your Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education course?

__________ yes ___________ no

If you answered yes to question #3, please respond to questions #4-7.

If you answered no to question #3, please answer question #8.

4. Please rate your interest in participating in this research study (1=lowest; 5=highest)

1 2 3 4 5
5. Why would you like to explore and discuss your views regarding the integration of literacy across the curriculum?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

6. What would you hope to gain from participating in this research study?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

7. What are your responsibilities outside of your coursework this fall?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

a. Which days and times are you available outside of class?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

b. What are your thoughts regarding making a commitment to this research project?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

8. If you are not interested in participating in this research study, why did you make this decision?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Study Title: Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Principal Investigator: Ms. Rochelle Berndt

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information about the research project, the requirements, and the associated risks and benefits of the study. Your participation in the research is voluntary. Please note that participation in the study will have no effect on your grade or standing in the Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education course. Please read the consent form carefully, and ask any questions prior to your decision to participate in the research. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to understand how experiences in a middle childhood education literacy methods course inform preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum.

I am particularly interested in researching:
(a) How do preservice teachers’ past literacy experiences inform their visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum?
(b) How do experiences in a middle childhood literacy methods course, in class and in the field, define or redefine preservice teachers’ professional identities and contribute, if at all, to their visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum?

Procedures
If you chose to participate in this research, you will be asked to submit samples of your in-class reflective writings and questionnaire responses. Responses from the questionnaires will be used to purposefully select participants for the research study; not all students will be selected.
to participate. Observations of the selected participants will occur during the first ten weeks of the fall semester in the college classroom setting. Observations of the participants’ gestures, social interactions, and the physical environment of the classroom will be noted in the researcher’s journal. You will also be asked to participate in three (3) audio-recorded interviews throughout the fall 2012 semester to understand how the strategies, discussions, and assignments, in class and in the field, helped define or redefine your professional identity and informed your vision of teaching literacy in your future middle childhood content area classroom. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

Audio-Recordings
The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. You may choose to receive a copy of the recording and transcription.

Benefits
This study will enable the principal researcher to learn about the perceived impact of a pedagogically designed literacy methods course on the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities and visions of teaching literacy across the curriculum.

Risks and Discomforts
The only discomfort in this study is the pressure students/participants may feel to participate in the research since the principal investigator is also the instructor of the Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education course.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Your confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in all written products of the research. Audio-recordings will not be made available to anyone. The recordings and transcriptions will remain in a locked cabinet in the office of Dr. William Bintz, the dissertation director of the principal investigator, at Kent State University.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or may discontinue your participation in the study at any time. You will also be informed of any additional information which may affect your willingness to participate in the study.

Contact Information
If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact Ms. Rochelle Berndt at 440-826-3464 or rberndt@kent.edu. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, please contact the IRB at 330-672-2704.
Consent Statement and Signature
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have questions answered satisfactorily regarding this study. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of the consent form will be provided to me for future reference.

_________________________________________  _____________________________
Participant’s Signature                                           Date

_________________________________________
Participant’s Name (printed)
APPENDIX C

LITERACY NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT
Appendix C

Literacy Narrative Assignment

Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education: Literacy Narrative

Assignment: Please reflect on your past experiences as a reader and writer both at home and at school. How have those experiences influenced your decision to become a teacher of middle childhood education? What are your current views on teaching literacy in your chosen content areas? How would you describe your vision of teaching literacy in your future middle school classroom?
APPENDIX D

LITERACY METAPHOR POSTER ASSIGNMENT
Appendix D

Literacy Metaphor Poster Assignment

Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education: Literacy Metaphor Poster

Assignment: Your task is to work individually to create a Literacy Metaphor Poster that depicts images of what literacy represents to you as a future middle school teacher. The electronic poster, or glog, will be created using Glogster. Begin by reflecting on what teaching literacy across the curriculum means to you. What images or metaphors come to your mind? Do you perceive literacy as the foundation of all other subjects? Then, perhaps, an image of a house and its foundation may be an appropriate metaphor to use. Or, maybe you see literacy as a ladder with a series of steps that students must reach in order to be successful. There is no right or wrong answer. Your job is to identify and incorporate a minimum of three images in your glog that are personally meaningful.

Glogster: Glogster is software that enables educators and students to create electronic posters, or glogs, on any topic. The glogs can contain images, videos, sound, and text. The numerous templates provided by Glogster enable the designer to use his/her creativity skills to create an attractive and informative representation of a topic of choice. Creativity: You are encouraged to be creative as you design your glog. After you select the images that you wish to portray, consider adding titles, quotes, text, videos, and sounds. Glogster also makes it easy to select a background for your glog and change fonts and colors. The numerous tutorials provided on the site make it fairly easy to navigate the features.
Reflection: After you create your glog, please reflect on the images you selected and your rationale and thought processes. Write a reflection, in any genre, that explains your images and choices. The reflection does not have to be in a traditional narrative format, so you may consider using poetry, writing song lyrics, etc. The following questions should be used to guide your thinking. (Questions are based on the work of Janet Alsup, 2006.)

- What do my selected images represent?
- Why should literacy instruction be a component of the disciplines I will teach?
- Why is it important for my future middle school students to be successful readers and writers?
- How might I explain the importance of literacy to middle school students?
- What is my role in teaching literacy across the curriculum?

Presentation: You will have the opportunity to share your glog with our community of learners on the assigned due date. The presentation will be an informal sharing of the images you selected and feedback about using Glogster for this assignment. The reflective writing will also be due on the established due date along with a printed copy of your glog.
APPENDIX E

PEDAGOGICAL DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIVE ESSAY ASSIGNMENT
Appendix E

Pedagogical Discussion and Reflective Essay Assignment

Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education: Pedagogical Discussion and Reflective Essay

Assignment: Select one lesson plan from your larger unit plan and post the lesson plan to Blackboard for the other members of your electronic learning community to review. On the assigned date, present the lesson plan to your learning community using a microteaching format. After the microteaching experience, write a reflective essay (minimum two pages) that addresses the pedagogical decisions that were made in your lesson plan. At the next class session, lead a small group discussion on the pedagogical choices made in the plan using a summary of your reflective essay as a guide. (Questions are based on the work of Janet Alsup, 2006.)

Reflective Essay

Use the following questions to guide your essay:

- How has the theory or research you have learned thus far in the course informed the pedagogical decisions that are reflected in your lesson plan?
- How has your past literacy experiences informed the pedagogical decisions that are reflected in your lesson plan?
- How have your current beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum informed the pedagogical decisions that are reflected in your lesson plan?
Pedagogical Discussion

Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- Do you agree with the pedagogical choices that I made in this lesson? Why or why not?
- What ideas or changes might you suggest to strengthen this lesson?
- What past literacy experiences do you have that are similar or different than mine?
APPENDIX F

VISION STATEMENT ASSIGNMENT
Appendix F

Vision Statement Assignment

*Finding Themselves in the ‘Finding Place’*: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum

**Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education: Vision Statements**

**Assignment:** Create a vision statement that addresses where you are headed as a future middle school teacher and the role and value that will be placed on literacy instruction in your discipline specific classrooms. Use the following questions to elicit images of your ideal classroom as you envision the curriculum, teacher’s role, students’ roles, and the greater connections to the school community based on the emerging professional identities and knowledge that are developing during this course. (Questions are based on the work of Karen Hammerness, 2006.)

- What do you see, hear, and feel when you explore your ideal middle school classroom?
- What is your role in your ideal classroom? Why do you envision yourself in this position?
- What are your students doing in this ideal middle school classroom? What role do your students play in their learning? Why?
- What are your students learning in your ideal middle school classroom? What topics and texts are they exploring? Why are these themes/materials important?
- What role does literacy play in the planning and implementation of the curriculum? How are your students being engaged and supported in their literacy learning in your middle school classroom?
- What is the relationship between what is occurring in your classroom and the visions of the school community? What role will you, your students, and your curriculum and instruction, play in enacting this vision?
- What changes, if any, occurred in your visioning as a result of your field experience? (final vision statement only)
APPENDIX G

ELECTRONIC JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT
Appendix G

Electronic Journal Assignment

*Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum*

*Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education: Electronic Journals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electronic Learning Community: Group A</th>
<th>Electronic Learning Community: Group B</th>
<th>Electronic Learning Community: Group C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lyla</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Greg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>Mallory</td>
<td>Kim</td>
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<td>Ellie</td>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
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<td>Keith</td>
<td>Sawyer</td>
<td>Sean</td>
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*All postings and responses are due by 8:00am on the assigned due date.

**Journal Prompt #1**

The beginning of the new academic year often evokes feelings of stress and anxiety as students struggle with numerous assignments and expectations. What personal and professional tensions are you negotiating at this point in the semester? How are these challenges influencing the learning that is taking place in your classes, particularly in your methods courses? What would help you balance these tensions?

- Post your response by Monday, September 10
- Read your group member’s responses by Friday, September 14
- Respond to at least one group member’s posting by Monday, September 17
Journal Prompt #2

Our society has many expectations about what it means to be a teacher and what should be taught in the classroom. What expectations do you believe society has placed on teachers at the middle school level? Do these expectations vary by content area? Do you feel these expectations are realistic?

- Post your response by Monday, September 24
- Read your group member’s responses by Friday, September 28
- Respond to at least one group member’s posting by Monday, October 1

Journal Prompt #3

Learning about literacy instruction in the college classroom can be quite different from teaching literacy lessons in an authentic middle school classroom. As you prepare to enter the field in a few weeks, in what areas of literacy instruction do you feel most confident? What areas concern you? How will you address these concerns?

- Post your response by Monday, October 15
- Read your group member’s responses by Friday, October 19
- Respond to at least one group member’s posting by Monday, October 22

Journal Prompt #4

Provide a brief overview of your field experience placement (i.e. setting, grade level, instructional materials). What is one observation you have made regarding the literacy instruction that is taking place in the classroom? What has surprised you about the expectations that the school or teacher has regarding literacy instruction?

- Post your response by Friday, November 9
- Read your group member’s responses by Wednesday, November 14
- Respond to at least one group member’s posting by Friday, November 16

Journal Prompt #5

Describe a literacy lesson or activity that you have recently taught in your field placement. What successes did you have teaching this lesson? What challenges, if any, occurred during this lesson? If you could teach this lesson again, what specific components would you change? Why?
Post your response by Tuesday, November 20
Read your group member’s responses by Monday, November 26
Respond to at least one group member’s posting by Tuesday, November 27

Journal Prompt #6

How has your experience in an authentic middle childhood classroom supported or challenged your beliefs towards teaching literacy across the curriculum? What specifically contributed to these beliefs?

Post your response by Wednesday, December 5
Read your group member’s responses by Friday, December 7
Respond to at least one group member’s posting by Monday, December 10
APPENDIX H

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix H

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

*Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum*

**Interview #1 (Week 5)**

1. How would you describe your overall beliefs towards literacy when you entered the *Reading Instruction in Middle Childhood Education* course this fall semester? What contributed to those beliefs?

2. How have your past experiences with literacy, at home and/or school, contributed to your positive or negative beliefs?

3. Why did you choose your two areas of concentration as a middle childhood education major? If reading/language arts is not one of your teaching fields, why is this the case?

4. How do you define yourself at this point in your teacher education program? What roles or identities do you enact?

5. What vision do you have of your future classroom?

6. What additional question(s) would you have liked me to ask during this session? Tell me more.

**Interview #2 (Week 10)**

1. What tensions, if any, regarding your personal and professional identities are you navigating at this point in your teacher education program?
2. What specific aspects of the course have challenged your thinking about your future position as a teacher of middle childhood education?

3. How have your visions of teaching and the role of literacy in your future classroom begun to change or become further defined throughout the course?

4. What specific aspects of the course have contributed to these beliefs?

5. What, if any, challenges do you face as you prepare to enter the field component of this course?

6. What additional question(s) would you have liked me to ask during this session?

Tell me more.

**Interview #3 (Week 15)**

1. How would you describe the field component of this course? What specifically made this experience positive or negative for you?

2. How did your vision of teaching literacy across the curriculum become defined or redefined by working in an authentic classroom setting?

3. How were you able to bridge the theory and pedagogy learned in the on-campus portion of the class to the actual practice in the middle childhood classroom? What contributed to your successes or challenges?

4. What do you see as the role of literacy in your future classroom?

5. How do you define your teacher identity? How did this becoming take place?

6. What additional question(s) would you have liked me to ask during this session?

Tell me more.
APPENDIX I

AUDIO-RECORDING CONSENT FORM
Appendix I

Audio-Recording Consent Form

*Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum*

I agree to be audio-recorded for the research project described above. The researcher may use the audio-recordings for the research and any report or publications that are produced from the research.

I have been told that I have the right to a copy of the audio-recording before it is used. I have decided that:

__________ I do want a copy of the recording.

Please send the recording via: (check one)

_____ e-mail

e-mail address

_____ U.S. mail

street address
city, state, zip

__________ I do not want a copy of the recording.

__________________________________________  ________________
Participant’s Signature                          Date
Appendix J

Sean’s Literacy Metaphor Poster

Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum
APPENDIX K

SAWYER'S LITERACY METAPHOR POSTER
Appendix K

Sawyer’s Literacy Metaphor Poster

*Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum*

Created by Sawyer
APPENDIX L

Kim’s Literacy Metaphor Poster
Appendix L

Kim’s Literacy Metaphor Poster

*Finding Themselves in the “Finding Place”: Exploring Preservice Teachers’ Professional Identities and Visions of Teaching Literacy across the Curriculum*
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