

Investigating Changes in Literacy Methods Courses to Prepare Preservice Teachers to Create Culturally Sustaining Curriculum

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Abstract

Given the importance of culturally sustaining curriculum, coursework in teacher education must support preservice teachers (PSTs) to learn how to design curriculum grounded in students' lives, communities, and cultural practices. This study investigates how changes in an elementary literacy methods course supported PSTs' creation of equity-based, culturally sustaining unit plans for urban elementary classrooms. Fifty-six unit plans from across three years are analyzed, with findings showing that course changes—including core texts, unit plan requirements, and pedagogical practices—led to PSTs' creating unit plans that were more embedded within students' communities and lived experiences and more focused on student activism and voice. Implications include the power of teacher educators engaging in their work as reflective practitioners to optimally scaffold PSTs' learning around creating culturally sustaining curriculum.

Keywords: preservice teachers, teacher education, culturally responsive and sustaining instruction, literacy methods

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Introduction

Longstanding inequities exist in United States public schools, as minoritized youth—such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students, emergent bilinguals, and students from low-income backgrounds—are persistently underserved (Love, 2019). Curriculum is one aspect of schooling that contributes to these inequities, in part because minoritized youth often do not see themselves represented in the curriculum, and the curriculum tends to not be culturally responsive or sustaining for them (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers know how to design and enact culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy so they can promote equity in their classrooms (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). As such, teacher educators must facilitate preservice teachers' (PSTs) learning about how to create culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum while in their teacher education programs so PSTs are prepared to enact culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy in their future classrooms (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Elementary literacy instruction, in particular, is a critical subject for PSTs to learn how to teach in culturally responsive and sustaining ways given the importance of literacy learning for students' lives as well as the frequent scriptedness of literacy curriculum in many classrooms serving minoritized youth (Milner, 2013). Here, I focus on how teacher educators can support PSTs in learning how to design equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining elementary literacy curriculum through literacy methods courses. I report on a study that investigated how coursework changes over three years, such as core texts, assignment requirements, and pedagogical practices, led to PSTs creating elementary literacy curriculum that was more grounded in students' communities and lived experiences and more centered on student activism and voice—both key aspects of equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum.

Literature Review

One of the ways teacher educators can support PSTs in learning about teaching literacy in equity-based and culturally responsive and sustaining ways is through practice-based coursework and assignments (Adams & Kaczmarczyk, 2023; Ahmed, 2019, 2025; Ahmed & Ali, 2020; Barnes, 2006; Hill, 2012; Johnson, 2012; Kindle & Schmidt, 2011; Machado & Gonzalez, 2021; Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejía, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Wolfe, 2010). For example, in an effort to prepare bilingual teachers to support students to draw on their full

linguistic repertoire through translanguaging, Machado and Gonzalez (2021) engaged PSTs in a “teacher-as-writer assignment,” where PSTs utilized translanguaging practices in their own writing. PSTs reflected that this assignment “was foundational to their commitment to enact translanguaging pedagogies in their future writing classrooms” (Machado & Gonzalez, 2021, p. 15); having experienced the benefits of translanguaging themselves, PSTs were better prepared to engage in this culturally and linguistically responsive practice. To better support PSTs’ use of culturally responsive texts for interactive read-alouds that taught reading skills and addressed social issues, Adams and Kaczmarek (2023) created an assignment spanning two courses in their teacher education program. In analyzing this “cross-pollinated” assignment, Adams and Kaczmarek (2023) found that the majority of PSTs’ work showed “understanding of culturally responsive reading instruction” (p. 37) and noted that by engaging in interdisciplinary work as PSTs, they could see the benefits for their future classrooms. As these studies show, assignments within PSTs’ courses can be a key lever in supporting PSTs to teach literacy for equity in culturally responsive and sustaining ways.

Though assignments have the potential to orient PSTs toward equity and cultural responsiveness, scholars also have found that PSTs’ work often falls short of teacher educators’ goals. For instance, Rodriguez et al. (2020) found many “missed opportunities” within PSTs’ micro-teaching and unit planning assignments in literacy methods courses, as PSTs tended not to demonstrate deep understandings of social justice-based practices on these assessments. Ahmed and Ali (2020) similarly reflect on missed opportunities in methods courses and the possibilities of grounding equity-based assignments for PSTs in children’s literature. In Adams and Kaczmarek’s (2023) cross-course assignment described above, they also noted many PSTs’ discussion of culture and social issues was superficial and did not demonstrate the depth with which they were hoping PSTs would approach the assignment. Overall, though research has shown many promising practices for teacher education coursework to support PSTs to learn to teach literacy for equity in culturally responsive and sustaining ways, more studies of assignments and their impact on PSTs’ learning are necessary given the complexity of these topics and the inconsistent findings from across investigations.

In this study, I expand upon this research (e.g., Adams & Kaczmarek, 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2020) and investigate the evolution of a unit plan assignment over three years. The extant literature focuses primarily on assignments with one group of PSTs, most of

whom were engaged in one semester-long course (Ahmed, 2025; Barnes, 2006; Hill, 2012; Kindle & Schmidt, 2011; Machado & Gonzalez, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020)—with the exception of one year-long course (Wolfe, 2010), one multi-year seminar (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejía, 2003), and one cross-course assignment (Adams & Kaczmarczyk, 2023). The current study is unique in that I analyze the same unit planning assignment—the culminating course assessment—from one literacy methods course over three different years. As such, I consider the following research question: In what ways do coursework changes, such as core texts, assignment requirements, and pedagogical practices, impact PSTs' equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining literacy unit plans for urban elementary classrooms?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). These frameworks aim to create optimal learning environments and experiences for all students, and particularly for minoritized youth who frequently face myriad schooling inequities (Love, 2019). Culturally responsive and sustaining approaches maintain high academic expectations for and aim to change the persistent underserving of minoritized youth in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). One important aspect of these approaches is they center students' lived experiences—their daily cultural and linguistic practices—in the curriculum and in classroom instruction. This includes viewing students, families, and communities from an asset-based perspective and building on students' strengths and community funds of knowledge to facilitate new learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). Another important aspect of these pedagogies is supporting students to critically reflect on and take action to change inequities in classrooms, schools, and society (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies thereby disrupt the status quo in schools by maintaining high academic expectations for minoritized youth while centering their lived experiences and supporting them to enact change (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies permeated multiple aspects of this study. First, the literacy methods course in which the unit plan assignment was embedded was centered on these approaches. Second, data analysis utilized these theories as a framework, which supported identifying patterns and themes across PSTs' assign-

ments over time. Third, sensemaking around findings and attendant implications were embedded in these approaches. More details about how culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies were drawn upon in each of these aspects of the study are presented subsequently.

Context and Methods

I conducted this study within a graduate childhood teacher education program in a public college in an urban metropolis in the Northeast United States over three years. This study was approved by the institution's IRB, protocol 2022-0554. Each year, a different cohort of PSTs was enrolled in their first year of a two-year clinically rich MEd program. PSTs across the three years were typically recent college graduates without prior teaching experience, though many had worked as camp counselors or participated in youth-focused community service activities while in college. Each year, one to two PSTs were slightly older and were changing careers. Demographically, PSTs were similar across each of the three years of this study. Table 1 shows PSTs' race and gender identities across the three years. Though the majority of PSTs in each cohort were white, PSTs were more demographically diverse than in the average teacher education program, where 71% are white (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 2022).

The cohort structure of the graduate program meant PSTs took almost all their classes together and in the same sequence each year. The clinically rich aspect of the program placed PSTs in an urban elementary classroom two days per week for the first three semesters before full-time student teaching in the final semester of the program. In their first year of the program, PSTs took a two-semester literacy methods course series. I was the instructor of both courses. The courses emphasized culturally responsive and sustaining literacy instruction (España & Herrera, 2020; Muhammad, 2020) and the importance of teaching literacy with an equity lens (Souto-Manning, 2020; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). This paper focuses on the second course in the sequence, Advanced Elementary Literacy Methods. Though course topics

Table 1

Summary of PST Demographic Information, in Percentages

<i>Year</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Latine</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Nonbinary</i>
2019	68	21	10	0	79	21	0
2021	50	30	20	0	95	5	0
2022	64	24	5	5	76	18	5

Note: Percentages do not always add up to 100 given the total number of PSTs in some cohorts.

and texts centered cultural responsiveness and equity every year, as a reflective practitioner, each year I considered how to improve the course, with the goal of better supporting PSTs to create elementary literacy curriculum grounded in these tenets. Below, I describe changes I made to the unit plan requirements, the course curriculum, and my pedagogical practices; these changes are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Course Changes

<i>Year</i>	<i>Unit Plan Emphasis</i>	<i>Core Texts</i>	<i>Pedagogical Practices</i>
2019	Interdisciplinary – Literacy and Social Studies or Science	<i>Strategies that Work</i> (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017) <i>Using Understanding by Design in the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classroom</i> (Heineke & McTighe, 2018)	Small-group brainstorming time early in the semester Limited modeling (one completed example shared)
2021	Current Challenging or Controversial Topic	<i>Cultivating Genius</i> (Muhammad, 2020) <i>In the Pursuit of Justice: Students' Right to Read and Write</i> (Souto-Manning, 2020)	Increased small-group workshopping time throughout the semester Limited modeling (one completed example shared)
2022	Culturally Sustaining, Accessible, and Focused on Equity	<i>Cultivating Genius</i> (Muhammad 2020) <i>In the Pursuit of Justice: Students' Right to Read and Write</i> (Souto-Manning, 2020)	Increased small-group workshopping time throughout the semester More in-depth modeling throughout the semester, focused on the thinking process behind different aspects of the unit plan

Unit Plan Requirements Changes

Data presented here are from the culminating assessment in the Advanced Elementary Literacy Methods course from the spring semester in 2019, 2021, and 2022. I did not teach the course in 2020. Though the assignment evolved over the years, prompting this investigation, it always involved PSTs creating a unit plan designed for the urban elementary classroom where they were interning. Each year, the assignment required crafting a rationale; creating a unit map, including learning goals and assessments; writing detailed lesson plans for two lessons; teaching one of the lessons; and reflecting on teaching. The assignment also included selecting at least four pieces of children's literature or other multimodal texts to use as mentor texts throughout the unit. I altered the assignment requirements each year as I reflected on my practice and strove to make it more explicitly focused on equity, justice, and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Below, I describe the changes and what led to them. For each year's assignment instructions, see Appendices A, B, and C.

I taught the Advanced Elementary Literacy Methods course for the first time in 2019, and the final assignment was designated a "key assessment" for the childhood education program, meaning PSTs' rubric scores were collected as part of the program's accreditation process. I therefore thought I could not change the assignment. I later learned I could change the assignment but not the rubric. In 2019, the assignment was closely modeled after edTPA (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2016), the teaching performance assessment required for certification at the time. It included designing two consecutive reading or writing lessons and answering a series of prompts about planning; similar to edTPA prompts, they focused on students' prior experience with the lessons' skills and strategies. Since I thought I could not change this assignment, instead I changed other assignments. Specifically, I had PSTs embed these two consecutive lessons into a larger unit so they were contextualized within a 4-6 week unit plan. I utilized the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework (Heineke & McTighe, 2018), so PSTs enacted backwards planning focused on end goals before writing individual lesson plans. Additionally, when I took over this course, it centered on disciplinary literacy, so the unit plans were interdisciplinary: literacy paired with social studies or science.

By 2021, the course no longer had a key assessment, so I was free to overhaul the unit plan assignment; the changes were based on multiple factors I considered as a reflective practitioner. First, I observed that unit plans from 2019 did not consistently center equity

and cultural responsiveness in robust ways. Second, the interdisciplinary units often focused more on social studies or science than literacy. Third, I engaged in reflective discussions with a PST from 2019 about missed opportunities in that course, particularly around using children's literature to support engaging elementary students in difficult conversations (Ahmed & Ali, 2020). Fourth, a lot happened in the U.S. between 2019 and 2021—in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd's murder and resulting uprisings. These factors led me to change the focus of the unit plans to address a "current challenging or controversial topic," in an effort to support PSTs to prepare for complex conversations with students. PSTs chose their topics and therefore defined challenging or controversial for themselves. I also eliminated the edTPA-based prompts, so PSTs' rationales could be more grounded in our readings around cultural responsiveness; the lesson plans were now one reading and one writing lesson, and they did not need to be consecutive. Though PSTs still engaged in backwards design following UbD principles (Heineke & McTighe, 2018), they also drew upon Muhammad's (2020) historically responsive literacy (HRL) framework to guide their planning. I discuss the introduction of this text subsequently.

In 2022, I kept most of the assignment requirements the same, except the unit plan no longer needed to address a controversial topic but instead had to be "culturally sustaining, accessible to all learners, and focused on equity." In some ways, this broadened the scope of topics PSTs might focus on in their units. At the same time, I felt this requirement needed to be explicit, due to what I again found to be missed opportunities in 2021 units. For instance, not all units focused on issues of equity and justice. I also observed that many PSTs often chose topics that were of interest to themselves, without specific consideration of their students. Although the course topics were largely the same in that they focused on equity and cultural responsiveness, PSTs in 2021 were inconsistently weaving these principles throughout their unit plans, hence the more explicit requirements in 2022.

Curricular Changes

I also made a few curricular changes to the course, the most notable being the core texts. In 2019, the main texts were Harvey and Goudvis's (2017) *Strategies that Work* and Heineke and McTighe's (2018) *Using Understanding by Design in the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classroom*. In updating the course to reflect more current and equity-focused literature, in 2021 and 2022, the core texts were Muhammad's (2020) *Cultivating Genius* and Souto-Manning's (2020) edit-

ed volume *In the Pursuit of Justice: Students' Right to Read and Write*. We still read chapters from Harvey and Goudvis (2017) and drew on the UbD framework (Heineke & McTighe, 2018), but changes in PSTs' unit plans reflected the new texts.

Course topics remained largely the same from 2019 to 2021, with a few exceptions. In 2021, given the inclusion of Muhammad's (2020) text, we spent one class session focused on introducing the HRL framework. To account for one new topic, I combined three classes on reading, writing, and language demands in science and social studies into two. I also moved up a week on differentiation so it was closer to content on unit goals, assessments, and lesson plans. In 2022, I made additional changes. Due to PSTs' requests, I added a week where we reviewed students' literacy learning progression. I also increased a focus on supporting students with disabilities by adding content on Universal Design for Learning (UDL; CAST, 2018), and instead of one class on differentiation, I had two classes on supporting students with language-based learning disabilities, including dyslexia. To make room for new sessions, I combined classes on defining unit goals and designing assessments and cut out a disciplinary literacy overview class. I also moved up a session called "Deepening and Expanding Our Thinking about Unit Plans" and renamed the lesson planning class, "Culturally Responsive Lesson Planning." Overall, the largest curricular change was the new texts, but altering class sessions also impacted PSTs.

Pedagogical Changes

There were two notable differences in my pedagogy across the three years. After reflecting on PSTs' unit plans from 2019, I posited that PSTs would benefit from more in-class scaffolding. As such, I incorporated more small-group workshopping time and more explicit modeling. In 2019, PSTs spent approximately 110 minutes brainstorming and sharing ideas with small groups in weeks three through six in the 15-week semester. Since these sessions were early in the semester, they primarily consisted of open-ended brainstorming guided by the UbD framework (Heineke & McTighe, 2018). In reflecting, I thought this small-group time could be better spent if it were more structured and spaced throughout the semester. Therefore, in 2021 and 2022, I devoted more class time to PSTs intentionally workshopping their projects in small groups; groups met for a total of 170 minutes in weeks four, five, seven, eight, and nine. This gave PSTs the opportunity to thoroughly think through their topic with peers, receive feedback, and share ideas at different stages of the planning process. During these

sessions, I provided PSTs with more scaffolded prompts than I had in 2019, based on our readings for the week. I was able to provide PSTs more targeted support in 2021 and 2022 because the workshopping time was more structured and PSTs were further along in developing their units.

The second pedagogical change concerned modeling the creation of a unit plan. In week six of 2019, I provided an example of an interdisciplinary literacy and social studies unit that included the three UbD planning stages: identify desired results, determine acceptable evidence, plan learning experiences and instruction (Heineke & McTighe, 2018). I shared this same example with PSTs in 2021 in week four. Though the unit plan overview was thorough in its application of the UbD framework (Heineke & McTighe, 2018), it was a completed example; I did not actively model my thinking behind the process. Upon reflection, I realized this example did not provide enough support for PSTs. It also did not include the HRL learning pursuits (Muhammad, 2020), which had become important framing for the course.

In 2022 I made a concerted effort to rethink both the type and amount of modeling I did. Though I still shared the same completed example in week four in 2022, I included more intentional modeling in weeks five, eight, and nine. In these weeks, I created a new unit plan: an author study focused on Jacqueline Woodson and poetic craft. In week five, I shared Stage 1 UbD goals (Heineke & McTighe, 2018) and HRL learning pursuits (Muhammad, 2020). In week eight, I modeled how I mapped out my unit, including assessments, key experiences, and layered mentor texts (Muhammad, 2020) that served as anchors for the unit. I thought aloud about mapping out the six-week unit into three two-week sections, sharing the back-and-forth nature between thinking about where students will end up and where the unit needed to start. I intentionally shared an incomplete draft of my unit map so PSTs could better see my thought process. In week nine, I followed a similar process focused on designing a lesson plan; I also shared the specific language I would use within each part of the lesson. The modeling in 2022 was much more in depth and explicit than in previous years and included more aspects of the unit plan, thereby providing PSTs with considerably more scaffolding than in 2019 or 2021.

I enacted these changes in assignment requirements, curriculum, and pedagogy as a natural part of my work as a reflective practitioner who attempts to refine my courses each year. However, I wanted to dig more deeply and methodically into PSTs' assignments over these three years. Did the changes in assignment requirements, curriculum, and pedagogical practices lead to unit plans for urban elementary class-

rooms that were, in fact, more focused on equity and more grounded in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy? If so, in what ways did this manifest in PSTs' unit plans? I embarked on this study to investigate these questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

To explore whether and how these changes led to unit plans that were more grounded in equity and culturally responsive and sustaining practices, and in what ways, I utilized the constant-comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to analyze PSTs' assignments. I gathered PSTs' final assignment from the three years, for a total of 56 unit plans: 19 from 2019, 20 from 2021, and 17 from 2022. I first analyzed the assignments from each year separately, coding inductively and re-organizing codes and categories over multiple rounds of coding while writing analytic memos to facilitate sense-making (Saldaña, 2013). After identifying patterns within each year of assignments, I looked across years and wrote analytic memos to identify similarities, differences, and patterns. For example, three broad categories, with attendant subcodes, emerged across all three years: *instructional choices*, such as incorporating field trips, small group work, and student choice throughout the unit; *knowledge of students*, such as building on students' interests, skills, and lived experiences; and *equity issues and cultural responsiveness*, such as describing how the unit addresses injustice or leverages students' linguistic and/or cultural practices. From these categories, two main themes emerged, demonstrating changes in PSTs' work over time. See Table 3 for coding examples. I discuss the two main themes in the Findings section below.

In addition to these qualitative themes, I also rated each unit plan on a scale of 0-2, representing low, medium, and high degrees of equity-based and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy within each unit plan as another way to see patterns of change across the cohorts. Units rated 0 had little to no incorporation of equity or cultural responsiveness, utilizing predominantly generic and/or neutral language and topics. Units rated 1 had some evidence of considering equity and/or cultural responsiveness, such as connecting with students' interests, though there was room for these units to go deeper in terms of focusing on equity and/or being more grounded in cultural responsiveness. A rating of 2 meant that the units demonstrated robust understandings and enactments of both equity-based and culturally responsive and sustaining literacy pedagogy that were evident throughout all aspects of the unit plan, such as building on students'

Table 3
Coding Categories

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Subcodes</i>	<i>Example</i>
From Tenuous Connections to Embedded in Community and Lived Experience	Knowledge of Students	Interests	[Students] are interested in comics and graphic novels. They have been creating comic strips and distributing them among each other recently.
		Background	The students come from a variety backgrounds and language practices: African American, Latinx, and Afro-Caribbean.
		Community	Most...students...walk to school or take...public transportation. The students know a lot about their own neighborhood and the resources available to them living in a city. Recently, the class went on a trip to an urban farm.
From Writing About Others to Promoting Activism and Voice	Equity Issues and Cultural Responsiveness	Historic Events/Movements	Students will understand that different groups of people did not have equal rights. They will also understand the reasons why the Civil War took place and what role New York played in it.
		Perspective Taking	The focus...will be highlighting how different narrators' viewpoints influence how they describe the same events...[J]ust because you hear or read something from one side, it does not mean it is the whole truth of what occurred.
		Personal Connections and Commitments	[S]tudents will create poems about topics they are passionate about and explore more difficult topics like social and political issues...[S]tudents may use their voice to write about whatever they would like to.

funds of knowledge to facilitate new learning and taking actions toward social justice.

Findings

Over the three years, data showed that PSTs' unit plans became more culturally sustaining and equity focused. In the overall ratings on a scale of 0-2, or low, medium, and high degrees of equity-based and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, the findings were as follows. In 2019, I categorized 5 units as 0, 13 units as 1, and 1 unit as 2. Units from 2021 included 1 rated 0, 11 rated 1, and 8 rated 2, showing increased equity-centered and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. In 2022, I rated 1 unit plan as 0, 4 as 1, and 12 as 2, demonstrating that most PSTs' unit plans had robust instantiations of equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining literacy pedagogy.

Within these shifts, PSTs' unit plans became more culturally sustaining and equity focused in two specific ways, as revealed through themes that emerged via qualitative coding. One change, which grew out of the knowledge of students coding category, was that PSTs' unit plans moved from discussing students in primarily superficial and skills-based ways to being more deeply embedded in students' communities and lived experiences. A second change, derived from the equity issues and cultural responsiveness coding category, was that PSTs' unit plans evolved to emphasize student voice and activism. There were also exceptions to these trends, which I address after discussing the themes.

From Tenuous Connections to Embedded in Community and Lived Experiences

One difference relates to how PSTs discussed and planned around students and their lives. In 2019, PSTs tended to discuss students primarily in terms of their prior knowledge about the lessons' content. Other mentions of students were superficial or tangential. In 2021, PSTs made more concerted efforts to connect unit content to students' lives, though this was typically done in a top-down way, with PSTs selecting the topic and then finding connections to students. In 2022, PSTs tended to build their units from their knowledge of students. As such, the 2022 units were more deeply embedded within students' communities and lived experiences. I expand on these patterns below.

In PSTs' interdisciplinary units from 2019, many referenced students' interests but did not weave them into their plans. Overall, their unit plans seemed somewhat disconnected from students' lives or PSTs' deeper knowledge about students. For instance, Manuel (all names are pseudonyms), listed activities his fifth-grade students enjoyed, such

as video games, football, and basketball, demonstrating he knew a bit about students' lives outside of school; yet, Manuel's knowledge of his students was not incorporated into his unit. His unit centered on a social studies standard focused on issues specific to the Western Hemisphere and included comparing and contrasting the Trail of Tears with present-day "migrant caravans" heading to the U.S. from Mexico and Central America. Manuel did not discuss students' potential connections to these topics beyond a vague reference to "some students [being] immigrants." It was unclear whether Manuel knew about his students' immigration histories or if he assumed some were immigrants. It seems as if this unit had the potential to connect more deeply with students' lives, but Manuel did not leverage these experiences to facilitate learning.

Jonah, another PST from 2019, created a third-grade interdisciplinary unit based on social studies content about communities around the world, focusing on China. When designing the unit, Jonah seemed to rely almost solely on social studies and literacy standards, as opposed to knowledge of students. When he did discuss students, he focused on their previous work with the standards, such as identifying main idea and details, though he briefly mentioned students' affinity for video games. Despite a focus on communities around the world, the unit started and ended with China, leaving potential opportunities for connections to students' lives and cultures untapped. When prompted to explain how the unit was culturally responsive, Jonah wrote, "As this [unit] is focused on a specific culture and time period, there will not be many culturally relevant materials..." This statement is concerning, as Jonah abdicated his responsibility to make content culturally responsive. Jonah's and Manuel's unit plans were representative of others from 2019 in that PSTs' references to student interests tended to be fairly superficial, and the unit plans most often were not built around students' lived experiences.

In 2021, when PSTs created units around a "current challenging or controversial topic," many units connected current events to students' lives, knowledge, and experiences. For instance, Victoria's fifth-grade unit was inspired by the contemporary removal of Confederate-era statues. Upon investigating, Victoria learned that her fieldwork school was named after Confederate sympathizers. Thus, she designed a unit titled, "Naming and Renaming Our Community," which began with students' own names and their importance, thereby grounding the unit in students' identities and joy (Muhammad, 2020). From there, students examined the name of their school and critically analyzed sources that discussed the school's namesake. Victoria then planned for stu-

dents to connect their knowledge of their school's namesake "to current events of confederate statues being removed" as well as to "think about possible ways the school can respond to this issue."

Similarly, Andrea designed a fourth-grade unit around gentrification, focused on the neighborhood where she and her students lived. Andrea wrote, "My goal is to tap into parts of their identity as [neighborhood] residents to build skills, intellect, criticality, and love," and cited Muhammad (2020) to ground her thinking. It was important to Andrea that the unit began with "the experts"—students and their families—and their experiences in the neighborhood before discussing the potentially controversial topic of gentrification. In Victoria and Andrea's units, like many in 2021, the instruction made meaningful connections to students' lives and communities. However, and likely due to the assignment's framing, PSTs started with a topic they thought might be challenging or controversial, and worked backwards to connect the topic to students' lives.

In 2022, when the assignment's scope was broadened to designing a unit that was "culturally sustaining, accessible to all learners, and focused on equity," PSTs tended to develop units that were more embedded in students' lives and communities (Ahmed, 2025). In particular, PSTs more often started unit planning with knowledge of students and built the literacy content from there. For instance, Kristine created a fourth-grade unit on poetic craft and messaging for change, utilizing Jean-Michel Basquiat as a mentor author/artist. In Kristine's rationale, they wrote that in the school's neighborhood, "there exists a rich legacy of street art... Students...are well-versed in reading this environment, and in [our] class especially, students have cultivated a deep knowledge and love of street art. Within this neighborhood, famed artist Jean-Michel Basquiat got his start..." Notably, Kristine focused on street art because they had heard their students discuss the art adorning their school's neighborhood. Additionally, Kristine chose a mentor author/artist who was grounded in the students' community and lived experiences in their neighborhood, thereby facilitating students seeing themselves more fully in the curriculum (Muhammad, 2020).

Similarly, Kiara considered several aspects of students' lives when planning a unit for fourth and fifth graders. She wrote:

...[M]any of [my students] are from low-income communities and families. I think it is important for them to learn about their communities and what resources are available to them... I also know that many of them...enjoy creating and imagining things... [M]y school has a rooftop garden... [S]tudents... expressed how much they enjoyed planting...

Considering these observations, Kiara developed a persuasive writing unit that began with a visit to the community gardens in the school's neighborhood. Kiara reflected, "Listening to students' interests was... pivotal" in her unit design. Kiara's unit, similar to Kristine's and others from 2022, began with her knowledge of students' lives and built from there. Overall, units tended to progress from having nonexistent or tenuous connections to students' lives in 2019, to more substantive, if top-down, connections in 2021, to being more fully embedded in students' lives and communities in 2022.

From Writing About Others to Promoting Student Activism and Voice

Another change in PSTs' units centered on student activism and voice. In 2019, PSTs tended to have students create projects about historical topics, without space to take their own stances on issues of equity. In 2021, some PSTs gave students more choice and opportunities to engage in promoting equity, though this was inconsistent. In 2022, PSTs consistently had students focus on developing their voices and striving for equity on their own terms.

In 2019, PSTs' interdisciplinary units often involved learning about a historical topic, with a culminating assessment situated in the past. For example, Sahar created a fourth-grade social studies and literacy unit about New York's role in the Civil War. Much of the unit centered on abolitionists in New York, with a literacy focus on generating questions based on nonfiction texts and conducting research. The culminating assessment involved students writing a research report on a New York abolitionist of their choice and presenting their research in different formats, such as a video or poster. Though focused on a crucial fight for freedom, Sahar's unit remained in the past, not making connections to present-day New York and the evolution of abolition in various realms today. Ultimately, there were not opportunities for students to cultivate their own stances against injustice and consider how they might take lessons learned from the fight of Civil War-era abolitionists and apply them to their lives.

Similarly, Rebecca created an interdisciplinary fifth-grade unit around the Women's Suffrage movement. Students engaged with primary sources, analyzed multiple perspectives, and conducted research. For the unit's culminating project, Rebecca planned for students to "take on the role of a potential advertising firm... represent[ing] either a pro- or anti-suffrage organization..." Occasionally within the unit's lessons, Rebecca asked students to consider "the experience of being told you cannot do something and feeling frustrated," and "think

about a time when [you] learned something that changed the way [you] looked at it.” Rebecca considered these questions important “hooks” into the lessons on women’s suffrage. Yet, these experiences were not expanded on or connected more deeply to the content. The culminating advertising campaigns maintained the focus on Women’s Suffrage; students did not have the opportunity to consider present-day fights for equity for minoritized groups.

In 2021, PSTs’ unit plans inconsistently promoted student activism and voice. This unevenness was seen most clearly when PSTs approached similar topics differently. For example, several PSTs created units on climate change for their challenging or controversial topic. Many units focused in part on what students could do to help combat climate change, yet some units more directly promoted student activism around issues of equity related to climate change, while others did not. On the one hand, Monica’s fourth-grade climate change unit centered issues of inequities. Students studied “how climate change affects different communities in different ways; poorer, less developed nations are facing harder challenges...” The final project involved students “creat[ing] an activism or personal responsibility project attempting to fight climate change...” On the other hand, Carolyn’s climate change unit for fourth graders took a more neutral approach, with no content on inequities related to climate change. It did, however, include students learning about and presenting on what they can do to help combat climate change and writing a persuasive letter to a person of their choosing. In these ways, Carolyn’s unit supported students to take action within their own lives and advocate for climate protections, yet her unit did not look critically at climate change. Monica and Carolyn’s units on the same topic were reflective of uneven approaches to equity-based issues in PSTs’ work from 2021.

Additionally, some units from 2021 provided opportunities for student activism but limited students’ voice by pre-selecting topics and arguments. For example, Cindy designed a unit around incarceration that “highlights the disproportionate impact of incarceration on communities of color...” Students learned about a state bill that would “allow for those on parole for non-violent offenses to not be incarcerated,” and the culminating assignment was to write a persuasive letter to the governor “in support of passing” this bill. Though Cindy included activism through writing to an elected official, students’ voices and opinions were constrained, as they did not choose what they were advocating for in their letters. Overall, though some units in 2021 promoted student activism and voice around issues of equity and justice, there were inconsistencies.

In 2022, with assignment requirements explicitly focused on eq-

uity and culturally responsive and sustaining practices, PSTs' units consistently incorporated student activism and voice. Many units involved writing persuasive letters to an elected official, though student activism and voice were foregrounded in other genres as well. Susan, for instance, designed her unit around persuasive writing, emphasizing how to craft an argument and support reasons with evidence. Using other young people who "have used their voices persuasively to fight for things that matter" as mentor authors, Susan designed the unit for fifth graders to choose their own topics. She wrote, "Students will become activists about topics they care about, with a culminating project...to create a persuasive speech or write a letter to an elected official." Other PSTs included a persuasive letter as a culminating assignment in their equity-based unit focused on a particular topic but provided choice within that topic. Matthew, for example, designed a fifth-grade unit around housing justice and community, and students wrote letters to elected officials based on a housing justice issue that was important to them. Kiara's unit, described previously, involved students writing to their city councilmember to advocate for a community need they identified throughout the unit. Promoting student activism, particularly through writing persuasive letters, was a common theme across 2022 units.

Student voice was also promoted in different genres. Anna's first-grade unit on storytelling, for instance, began through studying local street art mosaics, as she aimed for students to realize that stories can be told in different ways. In creating original artwork and writing personal narratives, Anna's goal was for students to "tell the stories of [their] own lives through both art and their own written narratives." Similarly, Aaron designed a unit for first graders that culminated in an expository text about their neighborhood. The unit started with an exploration of neighborhood environmental print, and Aaron emphasized, "This unit does not specify what environmental text students are to engage with, but rather allows students to document what they find meaningful." As students chose what to write about for their final project, Aaron supported them to "find parts of the neighborhood that spark emotion"—places that matter to them.

Other PSTs in 2022 used poetry to promote student voice. Liv designed her poetry unit around "poets using their voice... to share their stories or talk about something they are passionate about." She recognized that the fifth graders in her classroom were "becoming more aware and knowledgeable about the different social issues going on in the world... [which] can be a scary and hard thing for them." She wanted the unit "to show students how poetry can be used as an outlet

to express their feelings and ideas.” Similarly, Kristine’s unit focused on Basquiat as a mentor author/artist ended with a Community Art Night, where students showcased an original creative piece that drew upon the craft elements studied in Basquiat’s work and utilized “art/poetry as a way to advocate for a better, more equitable world.” Overall, in 2022, PSTs consistently promoted student activism and voice across grade levels, genres, and topics.

Exceptions from 2019 Unit Plans

Though the trend across most assignments from 2019, 2021, and 2022 reflected the examples described above, it is important to note exceptions. Specifically, four out of 19 units from 2019 were embedded in students’ lives and communities and three promoted student activism and voice, one of which was also embedded in students’ communities. For instance, Lindsay noticed that many of the first graders in her classroom “write about their cousins and families...[and] their parents are very involved.” Building off this observation, and in conjunction with state standards, Lindsay’s interdisciplinary unit plan focused on narrative writing and how families change over time. The unit included students interviewing two family members, creating a picture book about their family’s traditions and how they have changed over time, giving a presentation about their family history and why it is important, and making connections between their family history and their family today. Lindsay’s unit started from her observations of students who were eager to share about their families, and the literacy and social studies learnings were grounded in students’ and families’ lives.

Similarly, Sarah was interning in a third-grade classroom whose social studies content focused on communities around the world, just as Jonah’s did. Though Sarah was directed by her cooperating teacher to focus on Nigeria, she worked to make her unit culturally responsive by leveraging students’ knowledge of their own cultural practices to learn about a country and cultures that were unfamiliar to them. Sarah described her summative assessment as follows:

[E]ach student will create a poster... on the ways in which communities around the globe are both similar to, and different from, the communities that they align with. Students will not only be encouraged to discuss where they are currently living... but will be invited to draw connections to any community that they personally align with (perhaps their family heritage, or the community they were raised in before moving to [city]). This provides students the opportunity to make an authentic and genuine connection between the content learned about Nigeria... and their own cultural experiences. This al-

lows students to gain a deeper understanding of these cross-cultural connections...

Though Sarah's interdisciplinary unit included social studies content that was new to students, she grounded this new learning about Nigeria in students' lives by supporting them to learn more about their own cultural practices and compare and contrast them with others' cultural practices.

Another notable exception from 2019 was Brooke's second-grade unit. Brooke's unit focused on principles of democracy, particularly voting, and writing opinion pieces. Like many units from 2022, the culminating assessment for Brooke's unit was for students to write a letter to an elected official about a change they want to see in their community. The unit also included many opportunities for students to ask questions and conduct research. In sharing her thinking behind her planning, Brooke wrote, "I do not know a lot about my students' home lives... By allowing students to ask their own questions, I am gauging students' interests... [and] they are seeking information that interests them. This can also help students to feel more control and independence in their learning." Through writing to an elected official about a topic of their choice and being provided the freedom to explore their own questions, Brooke's unit promoted student activism and voice.

These exceptions from 2019 suggest that knowledge and resources from the Literacy Methods coursework was available to PSTs to draw on to create culturally responsive unit plans. At the same time, the exceptions show that some PSTs, due perhaps to personal commitments and/or prior experiences, were more able to take up this course content and build their unit plans around principles of equity and cultural responsiveness than others. The assignment requirements, course texts, and limited in-class modeling and workshopping time likely encumbered more PSTs from designing units that were embedded in students' lives and communities and promoted student activism and voice. I address the importance of explicit scaffolding in assignment requirements, instructor modeling, and peer support in the Discussion.

Discussion

Findings from analyzing PSTs' unit plans over three years showed that course assignments can be a key lever in preparing PSTs to design equity-based literacy curriculum grounded in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Though the course content centered cultural responsiveness and equity all three years, changes in assignment requirements and course texts, coupled with more intentional

modeling and targeted, semester-long small-group work, contributed to units that were more embedded in students' lives and communities and that promoted student activism and voice. Continually reflecting on and revising these aspects of the course ultimately supported PSTs to consistently create equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining literacy unit plans.

In many ways, the exceptions from the overall trends in 2019 support the importance of continually refining courses to increase scaffolding for PSTs' curriculum development. In 2019, though course readings and class work focused on equity and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, important scaffolding was missing. The language in the unit plan assignment requirements was neutral, asking PSTs to create an interdisciplinary unit but not specifying the unit center equity and cultural responsiveness. Similarly, the UbD framework (Heineke & McTighe, 2018) is not, on its own, grounded in equity and cultural responsiveness. Though some assignments focused on equity, like Sahar's on abolitionists and Rebecca's on Women's Suffrage, not all PSTs embraced the opportunity to create a culturally responsive, equity-based unit plan. Indeed, the 2019 assignments that focused on equity likely did so due to the PSTs themselves and their personal commitments. Notably, even the unit plans on fights for civil rights fell short on making connections to students' lives and communities and supporting students to fight for equity on their own terms. These and other 2019 assignments, such as Manuel's, which made connections between the Trail of Tears and contemporary "migrant caravans" but did not center culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, reflect other studies where PSTs demonstrated superficial understandings or otherwise missed opportunities to engage in robust enactments of equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining practices (e.g., Adams & Kaczmarczyk, 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Perhaps most telling of the assignment's potential but insufficiently supportive scaffolding in 2019 can be seen by contrasting Jonah's and Sarah's unit plans. Both designed a third-grade, interdisciplinary, literacy and social studies unit related to communities around the world. Whereas Jonah stated that since his unit focused on a particular country (China), it was not going to be culturally responsive, Sarah worked to embed students' learning about her classroom's focal country (Nigeria) into their own lives and cultural practices. The neutral wording of the assignment requirements did not provide Jonah with the scaffolding he needed to ground his unit in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Instead, it allowed him to relinquish his responsibility to center students' lived experiences and leverage them to

facilitate new learning. Similarly, the UbD framework (Heineke & McTighe, 2018), unlike the HRL framework (Muhammad, 2020), does not specify that plans must attend to students' identities. Sarah, however, ensured that students made sense of the unfamiliar content about Nigeria through the lens of their own lives, ultimately strengthening their understandings of not only information about Nigeria but also cross-cultural connections. Sarah's unit demonstrates that culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy was an integral part of the course, as she drew upon course content to frame her unit and justify her decisions. Jonah's unit, however, shows that course content alone was not enough to ensure that all PSTs grounded their units in culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. These two cases demonstrate that other factors outside of the course likely led to different outcomes, such as individual PSTs' ideologies and commitments as well as their lived experiences, cooperating teacher mentorship, and so on. As PSTs enter teacher education in different places, the assignment itself needed to require equity and cultural responsiveness explicitly, and additional scaffolding was necessary.

In contrast, the unit plans from 2022 all centered equity, due in part to a reframing of the assignment. Having an equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining unit was required, so it was not possible to skirt the issue and still meet the assignment's expectations. This explicitness served to even out the inconsistencies seen in the assignments from 2021, where some units addressed a challenging or controversial topic but did not center issues of equity or start from students' lived experiences. In addition to revised assignment requirements, the use of a new course text that was not available in 2019, Muhammad's (2020) *Cultivating Genius*, also served as an important resource and scaffold for PSTs, as they used Muhammad's framework to organize their ideas in 2021 and 2022. Since Muhammad's (2020) HRL framework is explicitly grounded in equity and cultural responsiveness, PSTs were much more likely to create units centered on equity and cultural responsiveness through using this framework as a tool, and specifically address how their units would advance students' understandings of identity, skills, intellectualism, criticality, and joy (Muhammad, 2020). Though in some ways the assignment was broader in scope in 2022, it left more room for PSTs to build equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining unit plans from the ground up—starting with students' interests, strengths, lived experiences, and daily cultural and linguistic practices.

Changes in pedagogical practices, including more in-depth modeling and more targeted small-group work spread across the semester in 2022, also likely played a role in providing additional, necessary

scaffolding for PSTs. The in-depth modeling of different aspects of the unit plan throughout the semester gave PSTs a window into the thinking behind decisions within the planning process and provided tangible examples of how equity and cultural responsiveness were centered throughout a unit. Other studies have emphasized the importance of teacher educator modeling as well (Ahmed, 2019; Akiba, 2011; Kondo, 2022). Similarly, the more targeted small-group workshopping time throughout the semester supported PSTs in different phases of their unit planning process. These changes worked in concert with one another. For instance, the revised assignment requirements and the use of Muhammad's (2020) HRL framework served as key points of reference for PSTs as they worked in their small groups. It is unlikely that any one change in isolation from the others would have led to the differences in PSTs' unit plans over the three years and the increased grounding in students' lives and communities and promotion of student activism and voice seen in 2022. It is also possible that other factors not analyzed in this study, such as PSTs' dispositions, prior knowledge, and experiences as well as other teacher education coursework and fieldwork played a role in the changes over time. However, findings demonstrate that an instructor's commitment to equity and cultural responsiveness and class work are not necessarily enough to prepare PSTs to create equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining literacy curriculum. Rather, the depth of and consistent demonstration of equity and cultural responsiveness in the 2022-unit plans suggest that all facets of a course, including assignment requirements, course texts, and pedagogical practices, play an integral and integrated role in shaping PSTs' learning.

Conclusion

As teacher educators, it is imperative to continually reflect upon and refine all aspects of our courses. Findings from this study show that changes in assignment requirements, course texts and curriculum, and pedagogical practices contributed to PSTs consistently creating equity-based, culturally responsive and sustaining literacy unit plans. Preparing PSTs to develop curriculum grounded in students' strengths, lives, and daily cultural practices is crucial, especially given the power of meaningful and authentic literacy instruction (Muhammad, 2020). Additionally, with the current press to utilize scripted curriculum, particularly in urban schools serving minoritized youth (Milner, 2013), supporting PSTs in developing curriculum grounded in cultural responsiveness and equity is of utmost importance. As such,

it is necessary for all aspects of teacher education courses to intentionally scaffold PSTs' learning, not merely hope PSTs will ground their work in equity and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy because the topics are addressed in class.

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Appendix A: 2019 Assignment Requirements

Understanding by Design (UbD) Planning Template

You will create an outline of an interdisciplinary unit plan—literacy and science or social studies—utilizing Heineke and McTighe’s (2018) UbD template. You will engage in “backwards” planning, starting with Stage 1, where you will consider the unit’s key understandings, essential questions, standards-based learning goals, and transfer goals. (We will read about and discuss these terms.) Stage 2 will consist of assessments used to determine students’ progress toward the learning goals. Stage 3 involves thinking about learning experiences for your students. You will also include two additional elements as an extension of Stage 3:

(1) Select 3-4 mentor texts that you can use multiple times across the unit. These might be picture books, articles, poems, chapter books, etc. Include an explanation of each text and why you chose it for this particular unit/for the mini-lessons in which you will use it.

(2) Create a unit map where you outline the series of lessons you will teach related to the strategies and content connected to your learning goals. In your map, write the focus of the lesson on each day and list accompanying materials (e.g., mentor texts). It should be clear how the lessons build upon each other. You might spend multiple days with the same objective; you can leave up to one day per week as a “placeholder” where you will respond to students’ emerging needs. This map will serve as the outline for the two detailed lesson plans you will create for the Curriculum and Teaching Project.

Curriculum and Teaching Project – Key Assessment

This assignment gives you the opportunity to use the information gained from participating weekly with learners in your fieldwork classroom to create two consecutive lessons. These lessons are intended for the learners in your fieldwork setting. You will teach a literacy strategy for reading or writing nonfiction/informational texts. These two lessons should scaffold students’ learning of this particular strategy, eventually leading them toward independent use of the strategy. Likewise, these two lessons should be narrowly focused on a strategy for either reading or writing (and not both), however the use of reading and writing should be evidenced in all lessons. These lessons cannot focus on the teaching of discrete skills, such as spelling, vocabulary, word analysis, etc. After writing these two lesson plans and BEFORE you teach one of them, your first step is to write a rationale for your planning decisions, using a series of provided prompts. You will select ONE of these lessons to teach. You will video record and analyze your teaching of this lesson.

PART 1: Planning Two Consecutive Lessons

STEP 1: Revisit fieldwork notes and decide on literacy focus. Cull through anecdotal and observational notes recorded in your fieldwork classroom. Select a singular teaching focus for your two consecutive lessons. This focus should

be an overarching topic that connects each of the lessons to one another (e.g., main idea). This focus should help learners develop a strategy for reading or writing, (e.g., identifying the main idea in nonfiction texts). As you identify your literacy strategy, identify any related skills students will be required to use while developing this literacy strategy (e.g., decoding, recognizing letter-sound relationships). Answer the following questions as a pre-organizer for your Curriculum and Teaching Project:

1. The focus for my two consecutive lesson plans will be:
2. The objectives I will address are:
3. The Common Core Standards that inform these lessons are:
4. The strategy that students will develop within these lessons is:
5. The skills required to develop this strategy are:
6. The purpose for using language within these lessons is:
7. The language demands these lessons place on learners are:

STEP 2: Plan two lessons. Write a plan for each lesson. Your plans include enough detail so that someone else might be able to use them. Use the Childhood Education Lesson Plan template for planning your lessons. Create original instructional materials and original assessment materials to accompany each lesson plan.

STEP 3: Rationalize your planning choices. Justify your planning choices by writing a rationale for the teaching of your lesson plans to these particular learners in your fieldwork classroom. Respond to these prompts:

1. Teaching Focus

- (a) What is the teaching focus for the two consecutive lessons?
- (b) How does this focus meet the CCSS?
- (c) What are the objectives for these lessons? How are these objectives linked to the curricular goals for learners at this level?
- (d) How do the lessons foster the independent use of a literacy strategy and literacy skills? What connections between reading and writing are evidenced in the lessons?
- (e) How do your plans build on each other, helping students to use skills in order to deepen their use of a strategy for reading or writing texts?

2. Knowledge of Learners

- (a) What do you know about learners with respect to the teaching focus? What can

- (b) they do independently with regards to this focus? What are they learning to do
- (c) with regards to this focus?
- (d) What do you know about learners' everyday lives and experiences, cultural
- (e) backgrounds, practices, and interests?

3. Supporting Learners

- (a) How did your understandings of your learners' prior academic learning and everyday lives and experiences guide your selection of tasks and materials?
- (b) Why are your instructional strategies and supports (e.g., modifications for individual or group needs) appropriate for this class of learners? What are your instructional strategies and supports for learners (or groups of learners) with specific learning needs?
- (c) What misconceptions might learners have about your teaching focus? How will you address these?

4. Assessing Learning

- (a) How do your assessments (formal and informal, formative and summative) offer evidence that learners can use the literacy strategy and skills to comprehend or compose texts?

PART 2: Teaching ONE of Your Lessons and Analyzing Your Teaching

STEP 1: Select one lesson to teach in your fieldwork classroom. This lesson should be one in which you are formally observed. Video record your teaching of this lesson.

STEP 2: Watch your video recording. Identify 5-7 minutes in which you believe you are most effectively helping students meet the lesson's objectives. You will upload this clip to our course's Google Classroom page.

STEP 3: Watch your 5-7-minute video clip again. This time make notes on your teaching and how you are supporting students in accomplishing the lesson's objectives. Then, write a reflective analysis of your teaching. Include the following:

1. How does your instruction engage learners in developing and using a literacy strategy?
2. How do you elicit and build on learner responses to promote thinking and apply the literacy strategy? How do you demonstrate the literacy strategy and support learners as they practice and apply it?
3. What changes would you make to your instruction to better sup-

port learning of the teaching focus? Why do you think these changes would improve learning? Support your explanation with evidence from learners (i.e., your assessment information) and course readings.

Appendix B: 2021 Assignment Requirements

Current and Challenging Topics Literacy Unit Plan

Plan a 4-6-week unit focused on using literacy to address a current (i.e., not historical) challenging topic. You will choose a topic that you think might be difficult or uncomfortable for you to teach but one that children have likely heard about and/or experienced. The topic might be considered “controversial” by some people, but remember that children live in the world and often hear about and/or experience more than we might originally think. And, what is “controversial” to some might be a simple fact of life for others. Your unit will include texts and experiences around this topic, though the individual lessons you write will focus on the *literacy strategies* needed to comprehend and/or compose texts, not on content-area instruction. The unit plan will have five components:

1. Introductory Rationale. Why do you select this topic? Why do you think this would be a challenging topic to address with elementary students? What age group is this unit designed for? Why do students of this age/grade need these strategies and content? How does this unit take your students’ experiences, interests, strengths, and needs into account? Why have you chosen the pedagogical approaches that you have? Make sure you are specific about what you will be doing and why, and make sure to *refer to our course readings and discussions* in your rationale. The rationale should be 2-4 pages.

2. Unit Outline/Map. Using the resources we’ve read about in class (UbD, HRL), you will create an outline for the unit, including essential questions, goals, and assessments. You will also create a map of learning engagements and experiences for the unit. In a 4-week time period, you and your students have 20 days to work (in 6 weeks, you have 30). Each day, you will model a particular strategy using a mentor text that exemplifies your focus, etc. *In your map, write the focus of the lesson on each day and list the accompanying materials.* It should be clear how the lessons build upon each other. You might spend multiple days with the same objective, and you can leave up to three days as “placeholders” where you will respond to students’ emerging needs with an appropriate lesson. (You do not need to fully flesh out all of the lessons—see below re: “lessons.”)

3 Layered mentor texts. Find *at least 4 texts* that you can use multiple times across the unit within the mini-lessons. These might be picture books, short articles, poems, chapter books, speeches, videos, etc. Include an explanation of each text you chose and why you chose it for this particular unit/for the mini-lessons in which you will use it as a mentor text – be sure to list the title and the author(s).

4, Lessons. Choose 2 lessons—*1 reading and 1 writing*—from your unit map and write out detailed plans for these two lessons. (I will provide a lesson plan template.) These 2 lessons are the only ones of your unit that need to be fully fleshed out with all of the necessary components. On your map, be sure to indicate which lessons have prepared lessons attached.

5. Teaching and Reflecting. The final step is actually teaching one of your lessons to students and reflecting on the process. After you teach the lesson, you will write an analytical reflection (approximately 3-5 pages) on how it went—what went well and why, what you'd do differently and why, how you felt teaching about the topic, what students said/how they responded, the learnings students took away from the lesson, and so forth. *Draw on course readings and discussions to support the claims you make in your analytical reflection.*

Appendix C: 2022 Assignment Requirements

Culturally Responsive, Accessible, and Equity-focused Literacy Unit Plan
Plan a 4-6 week literacy (reading and writing) unit that is culturally sustaining, accessible to all learners, and focused on equity in some way(s). You might design a genre study, an author study, an interdisciplinary unit, and/or a strategy-focused unit. Your unit will include texts and experiences around your topic, though the individual lessons you write will focus on the *literacy strategies* needed to comprehend and/or compose texts, not on content-area instruction. The unit plan will have five components:

1. Introductory Rationale. Why did you select this topic? What age group is this unit designed for? Why do students of this age/grade need these strategies and content? How is this topic culturally responsive, accessible, and focused on equity? How does this unit take your students' experiences, interests, strengths, and needs into account? Why have you chosen the pedagogical approaches that you have? Make sure you are specific about what you will be doing and why, and make sure to *refer to our course readings and discussions* in your rationale. The rationale should be 4-6 pages.

2. Layered mentor texts. Find *at least 4 texts* that you can use multiple times across the unit within the lessons. These might be picture books, short articles, poems, chapter books, speeches, videos, etc. Include an explanation of each text you chose and why you chose it for this particular unit/for the lessons in which you will use it as a mentor text—be sure to list the title and the author(s).

3. Unit Outline/Map. Using the resources we've read about in class (HRL, UbD, UDL), you will create an outline for the unit, including essential questions, goals, and assessments. You will also create a map of learning engagements and experiences for the unit. In a 4-week time period, you and your students have 20 days to work (in 6 weeks, you have 30). Many days, you will model a particular strategy using a mentor text that exemplifies your focus,

etc. *In your map, write the focus of the lessons on each day and list the accompanying materials.* It should be clear how the lessons build upon each other. You might spend multiple days with the same objective, and you can leave up to three days in a 4-week unit (or five days in a 6-week unit) as “placeholders” where you will respond to students’ emerging needs with a responsive lesson. (You *do not* need to fully flesh out all the lessons – see next item below.)

4. Lessons. Choose 2 lesson—*1 reading and 1 writing*—from your unit map and write out detailed plans for these two lessons. (I will provide a lesson plan template.) These 2 lessons are the only ones of your unit that need to be fully fleshed out with all of the necessary components. Resubmit your unit map, indicating which lessons you’ve prepared.

5. Teaching and Reflecting. The final step is actually teaching one of your lessons to students and reflecting on the process. After you teach the lesson, you will write an analytical reflection (approximately 5 pages) on how it went—what went well and why, what you’d differently and why, how you felt teaching the lesson, what students said/how they responded, the learnings students took away from the lesson, and so forth. Draw on course readings and discussions to support the claims you make in your analytical reflection.