

## **Context and Implications Document for: Teaching English language arts methods in the United States: a review of the research**

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### **Author's Introduction**

Much of the conversation regarding English Teacher Education (ETE) and its methods of instruction comes to the discipline from a vision of what should be, not necessarily what is, occurring in ETE. The comprehensive studies that dominate ETE's understanding of how English is taught in middle/secondary schools in the USA are almost two decades old (Applebee, 1993; Nystrand et al., 1997), as is the last comprehensive study of English methods courses (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). Since those studies were conducted, programmes and coursework have developed in contextually dependent ways that are often driven by institutional, economic, social and political considerations, circumstances often out of the control of English teacher educators and the teachers they educate. The English education professional organisations create and disseminate position papers on important issues that affect the profession, but a review of the current research in the teaching of the English language arts methods course reveals that many of the situations that affect the teaching of English are either not addressed or are addressed unevenly in the scholarship. Therefore, it is meaningful to consider what the research published in the main journals in the field indicates about how English methods courses are changing in order to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. This goal is the focus of this literature review.

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## **Implications for Policy**

### *Standards and Assessments*

Current teacher candidates are the first generation to be schooled in a high-stakes testing environment, an environment in which the teaching of English often becomes mere test preparation in anticipation of the frequent assessments in reading and mathematics that school districts are now required to do under US law. If English Teacher Education programmes are to address the realities of the K-12 classrooms that teacher candidates are entering, then English teacher educators need to teach pre-service teachers to understand and use standards and assessments in ways that will engage K-12 students meaningfully in the core concepts of the English language arts.

### *Evaluation of Teacher and Pre-service Teacher Effectiveness*

External pressures push teacher education programmes in the USA to devise and/or adopt assessments to measure the impact of their teacher candidates on student achievement, both during their training and in employment as an educator. While questioning how short-term guests in an inservice teacher's classroom can affect learning, English teacher education programmes need to identify valid evidence for claims of effectiveness.

### *Increased Participation in the Teacher Quality Conversation*

English language arts professionals need to be part of the larger conversation regarding the quality of teacher education in the twenty-first century, a conversation repeatedly usurped by entrepreneurial forces that do not have appropriate expertise in education studies. Therefore, research findings need to be communicated to a larger audience in both more and less traditional venues. Public scholarship regarding standards and assessments and teacher candidate and teacher evaluation would certainly make researchers and teachers' concerns more visible and accessible to policy makers and the general public.

## **Implications for Practice**

### *Preparing English Teachers to be Teachers of Literacy*

With state standards focusing on the teaching of reading and writing as opposed to the content of the English language arts (such as the study of literature), teacher education programmes may need to incorporate more practical instruction in disciplinary literacy. However, this must be done in such a way as to maintain disciplinary strengths in literary reading and expressive writing. English teacher educators should provide pre-service English teachers with a clear understanding of the kinds of struggles faced by students in English classes and specific instructional tools to improve students' comprehension and writing skills. Such conceptual and practical

information should also include recognition that literacy skills needed in English classes are both unique to the discipline of English and vary by genres.

### *Technology Integration*

Understanding effective technology integration in the teaching of the English language arts (ELA) will change not only the content of the ELA but also may affect what we understand as effective instructional practices in both face-to-face and online delivery.

### *English Language Learners and Culturally Responsive Teaching*

Students in K-12 classrooms are becoming more and more linguistically and culturally diverse. Their needs will not only affect the preparation of pre-service teachers but the professional development of inservice teachers as well.

### *Field Experiences*

Understanding the explicit connections between the methods course and accompanying field experiences would inform the field of English education of the nature of theory/practice connections. This may require more direct involvement between university and K-12 schoolteachers and administrators.

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