

# The Reading Professor

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*A Faculty for Social Justice*



## **The Reading Professor**

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A Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association

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# ABOUT THE COVER -

## *A Faculty for Social Justice*

The people on the cover of this issue of *The Reading Professor* represent educators who have not forgotten the essence of our profession—compassion and assistance for those who need our help. The group is the faculty of teacher education at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. In their spirit of caring for students of all ages, they have included a teaching standard which states, in part, [The teacher] “identifies and understands inequities in education opportunity and the way in which inequities affect learning.” In these days of waves of dictates, this standard is an admirable one. It is fitting that the faculty was photographed in the Norman Miller Center for Peace, Justice and Public Understanding on their campus.

Pictured: Front Row: Drs. Christopher Meidl, Reid Riggle, Susan Landt  
Back Row: Drs. Bola Delano-Oriaran, Steve Correia, Scott Kirst, Debbie Faase,  
Bob Osgood (Chair), Tynisha Meidl, Carolyn Schaeffer



Anyone familiar with the history of American education can offer ample evidence to support the statement that schooling is an arena of privilege. Results of the lofty but questionable political declarations such as No Child Left Behind, America 2000, and Goals 2000 do not preclude the reality that those who have economic advantages continue to be more successful in schools—regardless of how success is defined.

There are educational advantages for some financially fortunate students at every turn. A small college offers a literacy tutoring program for a fee with a few scholarships that might be given to “deserving” students. The qualifier “deserving” implies that some economically poor children are not worthy enough to have help with their reading difficulties. There are businesses and professional tutors that, according to a Bloomberg.com report, charge \$800 per hour (or a package deal for \$8,400) for SAT tutoring (Steverman, 2011). A New York City area tutoring firm is mulling over whether or not to offer edTPA prep sessions for a tidy sum.

Some members of IRA have said that a good teacher can make up for economic hardships. I can report, from having taught in low-income schools, that even a top-notch teacher cannot compensate for empty stomachs, untreated illnesses, lack of dental care, violent neighborhoods, or homelessness. Schools are different places from a few decades ago. There are the ever-changing mandates that seem to overlook what takes place in some children's daily lives and what they must face when they leave the school doors.

Fear now permeates what many educators do—fear of a less-than-stellar evaluation from an administrator because of low test scores, fear at the university level at accreditation time or fear of speaking out against standards and practices that education professors know do not have longitudinal evidence to support their worthiness. There seems to be a sense of resignation that nothing can be improved because the self-appointed experts and politicians—often one and the same—have spoken. Some are quick to blame publishers, but publishing is a business whose directors, ever aware of profits for survival, presumably do what the field dictates.

I have been told that IRA is not a political group. Then why do our dues support a director of government relations? Why are some visible members pushing for more standards whose implementation is causing financial stress for low-income school districts that are

lacking in basic instructional materials and habitable schoolrooms? It used to seem like a more socially conscious field. We used to fight for racial integration and the poor. IRA president Dale D. Johnson welcomed Coretta Scott King as the featured speaker at the annual conference. Materials were gathered from publishers after the exhibits closed to be sent to homeless shelters. We used to teach and speak as if it were common sense that economically disadvantaged children do not have the same start in school as children of privilege and therefore need additional resources—especially human resources. We used to acknowledge sets of standards for what they are—guidelines—not the miracle fix just around the corner. We did not hide our knowledge that test results should be used to inform not punish. There has been little push-back on imposed regulations. It cannot be ignorance. Perhaps it is fear of speaking out against “experts” who have not taught or taught decades ago for a year or two in comfortable environments, or fear of losing lucrative publishing offers and speaking gigs for there is money to be made. Whatever it is, it is a sorry state. In 1999 David Imig, an AACTE president asked, “Why can't schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) be valued and loved and respected like other professional schools? What is it about teacher education that makes SCDEs a pariah on so many campuses?” (p. 369). We don't need to look too far or too hard for answers to Imig's questions.

I am honored to be the editor of this edition of *The Reading Professor*. I have been a proud member of PRTE for many fulfilling years. It is the goodness and caring of the members that keep this SIG vibrant. You are those who understand the consequences of sweeping actions on those least able to fight back.

Bonnie Johnson, Ph. D.  
February, 2014

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# Never Too Late To Learn: The Unique Literacy Profile of a Teen with Multiple Disabilities

BEVERLEY BRENNa and ALISON BELL, University of Saskatchewan

## Introduction

While considerable research has explored adolescent literacy instruction for struggling readers (Franzak, 2006), examinations of literacy practices in older teenagers with intellectual disabilities are less evident. Research demonstrates that emphasis on vocational and daily living skills has taken precedence over literacy skills for young adults with intellectual disabilities (Morgan, Moni, & Jobling, 2006), although previous studies have explored the potential of particular practices with older struggling readers, including adults (Pershey & Gilbert, 2002) and adolescents with intellectual disabilities. A review by Joseph and Schisler (2009) suggests that 'corrective' reading programs, particular strategies, and strategy practice protocols, are valuable tools in increasing the literacy levels of adolescents, and their review recommends explicit skill and strategy lessons, provided as a matter of course with younger students and repeated as a review with older learners.

Current models of instruction in English Language Arts offer various vantage points from which to consider educational practice. Reader response, a theory established by Rosenblatt (1968) to address the transaction that occurs between readers and texts, encourages teachers to support their students in making personal connections to what is read. Strategy-based pedagogy delineates particular skills and strategies that can be reinforced with direct instruction and practice (Miller, 2003). For example, children's metacognitive knowledge regarding comprehension strategies has previously been explicitly explored (Baker & Brown, 1984; Brenna, 1995a; Brenna, 1995b; Brown, 1982; Flavell, 1979). More generally, Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, Rintamaa, and Madden (2010) outline that reading comprehension relies on a plethora of skills and strategies that include text-based decoding and lexical skills, domain knowledge, topic knowledge and interest, and cognitive monitoring and strategy use. Contemporary pedagogical models of reading instruction also include critical literacy alongside pragmatic, semantic, and coding competence (Bainbridge, Heydon, & Malicky, 2009; Freebody & Luke, 1990).

In educational pedagogy, traditional cycles of testing are linked to future practice, especially where literacy skills and strategies are concerned. Typical assessment protocols may or may not have value when applied to older readers whose disabilities have influenced patterns of development towards the atypical. According to a study done by Wei, Blackorby, and Schiller (2011), children with disabilities demonstrate a deceleration in reading growth over time, and a faster deceleration of reading growth occurs for students with speech-language impairments—their reading growth trajectories flattening out sharply in high school. In addition to a potential for the Matthew effect (Stanovich, 1986), where capable readers read more often and further boost their

reading abilities, with the converse evident for struggling readers, other factors may relate to slower development. Practices commonly used for typically developing readers may not offer the gamut other practices could provide in supporting readers with exceptionalities.

Research questions driving this study were:

1. What developing reading skills and strategies might a struggling teen reader display within a profile of strengths and weaknesses?
2. What benefits do song lyrics have in their dual role as reading materials for struggling readers as well as performance texts?
3. What effects do interest-based texts have on the independent reading of a reluctant teen reader with multiple disabilities?
4. What lessons related to supporting literacy development might we learn from an older teen reader with multiple disabilities?

## Research Methodology and Methods

Qualitative research methodology was selected on the basis of the study's broad and exploratory research questions (Berg, 2009), and because qualitative research has been cited within discussions of special education as an extremely important way to systematically understand phenomena within a particular context (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Within the qualitative framework, an empirical case study design was used to support action research exploring the research questions. The actualization of the research involved weekly home-tutoring sessions provided by a *Reading Buddy*—a research assistant known to the researcher who, while at the time attending a teacher education program, was also a certified teacher from the United Kingdom with a wealth of experience working with teenagers. The participant in the study was a sixteen-year-old male diagnosed with cerebral palsy and related challenges.

Sixteen-year-old "Jeremiah" was known to the researcher from connections with a local school division, and he had spent a number of years singing with a local choir familiar to the researcher. His previous testing pinpointed intellectual and visual disabilities, speech-language impairments, as well as mild to moderate motor challenges, and in terms of personality he can be described as a warm-hearted and pleasant young man. He had recently been appointed ambassador for a local community camp, and had been enjoying the public attention that role conjured, especially related to speaking engagements for large audiences. At the time of the study it was not known whether Jeremiah would thrive in the world of work following high school, or if he would be able to live independently.

## Data Collection

Data collection was primarily comprised of field notes. These were written by the research assistant in an on-site reflective journal. Collaborative retrospective field texts were created through discussions between the research assistant and the researcher (Brantlinger et al., 2005) during regular meetings scheduled throughout the study period. Discussions held between the researcher and research assistant served to tease out noteworthy themes as well as develop and select ongoing materials to use on site with the participant. Semi-structured questionnaires (see Appendix A) were used with the participant and his parents before, midway through, and following the six month study period. Questions attempted to pinpoint understandings about reading in terms of self, text, and task knowledge (Brenna, 1991), and the researcher compared responses to explore any changes which might have occurred throughout the study.

Weekly reading sessions between the research assistant and the teen participant were 30–45 minutes in duration and involved reading and rereading familiar song lyrics, demonstrating tracking skills and 1:1 word matching. Making and breaking words—Elkonin practice—occurred with individual words using the *Making Words* program (Cunningham & Hall, 1994), and an emphasis was placed on having the participant self-select reading materials about which he was interested. The sessions also involved word games and shared reading as well as researcher read-alouds where strategies could be modelled and practiced. As the study continued, Jeremiah was encouraged to dictate stories and these stories were then used for rereading. The research assistant also cut up some of these stories for Jeremiah to rebuild based on meaning.

### Details Regarding the Study Participant

#### School background

At the time the study began, Jeremiah was attending grade 10 in a congregated (segregated within the structure of a regular secondary school) classroom for students with IQs within the range of mild to moderate disability. Alternate curricula were utilized for students in required subject areas (Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Life Skills, Work Education, Family Studies, and Aesthetics) and, in addition, students were integrated into technical classes such as woodworking, a favourite with Jeremiah. In terms of school instruction in Language Arts, teacher read-alouds took precedence over independent reading, and there was an emphasis on practical reading applicable to recipes and work experiences.

Jeremiah's mother reported that no spelling program was used in his grade 10 classroom, and indicated that minimal school reading was perhaps at the heart of what she saw as a "regression" in Jeremiah's reading skills. This contrasts with his experiences in elementary school, when direct literacy support seemed to underpin a very slow but steady increase in sight word development. Such deviation from literacy instruction follows a general pattern related to lack of literacy training at the senior level for students with intellectual disabilities (Morgan et. al., 2006).

Prior to support with sight words at school, Jeremiah participated in oral reading experiences with a teacher associate classroom helper, using levelled books with large print. Common practice was for him to read aloud and be told words as he required them. Jeremiah has always used a computer at school, as it provided him with the enlarged texts required by his visual disability as well as the opportunity to write with computer assistance—a conventional support for physical challenges associated with cerebral palsy.

#### Family literacy activities

Family time has always included parent read-alouds and shared reading, but at the beginning of the study Jeremiah was demonstrating reluctance for at-home reading of any type and did not read independently for pleasure. Books typically used for shared reading included the *Magic Tree House* series, written at about a grade three level. Jeremiah did not report using the library, either at school or in the community, and he informed the research assistant that there was no classroom library—a statement corroborated by his mother. In terms of public library use, his parents have consistently chosen books for him based on their estimation of his reading level. Strategy emphasis at home had been on sounding out words, although an elementary program based on sight words was attributed to his previous successful literacy development. His parents indicated that Jeremiah's writing has received far less attention at school and home than his reading; his difficulties with blends and vowel combinations, and his speech difficulties, continue to impact his writing, which he generally accomplishes on a computer with the aid of spell-check.

#### Jeremiah's participation and skills

The research assistant reported that during their sessions together, Jeremiah was enthusiastic; his mother emphasized that he really looked forward to the Reading Buddy time and at a point midway through the study, when he was invited to decide to continue or not, Jeremiah wholeheartedly elected to go on. In terms of Jeremiah's ability to spend time on task, about five to seven minutes seemed an optimal time for engagement in a literacy activity. His speech, slow and effortful as a residual effect of his cerebral palsy, was another one of his challenges in addition to visual, motor and intellectual disabilities. Quite possibly his speech issues were connected to his tendency to tire during the Reading Buddy language arts sessions developed for this study.

Informal assessments of Jeremiah's reading ability suggested his instructional level was at grades three and four and somewhat dependent on topic. This instructional level was determined by trial and error using a number of found materials at various levels of difficulty. Jeremiah's bank of sight words included many, but not all, of the Dolch words from grades one to three, although some of the words in these lists were not quickly identified when he came across them in the context of reading material, suggesting that he was sometimes or possibly relying on context and phonemic cues rather than actual sight vocabulary. His listening comprehension rates were higher than his independent reading comprehension, as evidenced by diagnostic teaching strategies. When the research assistant asked Jeremiah to



continue reading aloud from where she left off, Jeremiah sometimes began his oral reading by re-reading something, verbally acknowledging the repetition, and then skimming to the correct starting place.

In terms of specific reading skills, Jeremiah actively used first-letter cues, but demonstrated weaknesses in identifying consonant blends and medial sounds. He was aware that capital letters meant the start of a sentence, and tracked text with his finger, although in May—allergy season—he began to skip whole sentences without awareness of meaning loss—something his mother reported common at that time of the year and possibly related to his allergy medication. He preferentially tended towards reading aloud over silent reading, a habit possibly ingrained from years of oral reading to a teacher associate who supported his elementary schoolwork. His oral reading demonstrated a marked absence of comprehension related to main ideas. Similarly, Jeremiah was unable to give fluent retellings of stories and offered instead brief information in response to literal comprehension questions.

Within Jeremiah's strategy repertoire he exhibited, early in the study, the ability to respond personally when he read topics related to his own experiences, a marked example in the context of Rosenblatt's (1968) reader response theory. For example, a particular story about camping elicited excited connections: "I go camping when I go to Camp XYZ and we camp in the woods and it's really fun. I am the Student Ambassador for Camp XYZ." In this vein, Jeremiah preferred texts that related to his interests, and constantly stopped to discuss those interests even when losing sense of the text at hand—certainly reading for enjoyment rather than for information or even a sense of story. Jeremiah demonstrated strengths in navigating non-fiction books, and knew how to use a table of contents to search out a particular topic or section.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Reading as a Bridge to Personal Experiences**

When given the opportunity to self-select reading materials, Jeremiah demonstrated a strong ability to connect himself to what he was reading. This indicates one purpose of reading—an exploration of self through the mirrors reading might offer (Galda, 1998). Jeremiah would often stop and talk about a topic inspired by a section of text, and even when he was not comprehending the entirety of the book he was exploring, the enjoyment he got from re-living the personal connections was evident. A story about camping inspired his memory of a summer camp he had been attending that was designed for students with special needs. When reading a section aloud from a book chosen because he knew the wife of the book's author, he read enthusiastically. Although not understanding the full storyline, he persevered. When he came to a passage about lightning, he turned to the research assistant and made the following personal connection: "Would you like to be in a tree when it's lightning?"

Jeremiah demonstrated a growing knowledge of task throughout reading endeavours where content connected to personal experiences. In terms of reading for enjoyment, developing relationships with text and sharing these

relationships with others seemed a prime motivator for reading. During writing activities with the Reading Buddy, he presented avid interest in the language experience stories derived from walks in the neighbourhood, appearing to engage with the idea that writing can be both meaningful and personal.

### **Reading as a Pleasurable Activity**

At the close of the study, both Jeremiah and his mother reported a change in how Jeremiah viewed reading. "He is definitely reading more!" said his mother enthusiastically. "Reading was never something he wanted to do before," she continued. "Now he enjoys it." Jeremiah agreed, indicating that in addition to reading particular books, he also liked the word game activities provided by the researcher, and the language experience activities where he wrote about things after they had a walk.

The read-aloud framework in which the research assistant began her work with Jeremiah slowly shifted towards a greater emphasis on Jeremiah's own silent reading instead of solely oral reading. It is important to note that this shift occurred gradually over the six month period, and that it was Jeremiah who initiated when he wanted to take over and read to himself. There is potential in this context to summarize Jeremiah's increase in reading for pleasure as a developing knowledge of self with respect to reading. While at the beginning of the study he expressed little desire to read, by the end of the study Jeremiah was beginning to see himself as a more interested reader and as someone who could read silently to himself for pleasure.

### **Song Lyrics' Context as a Strategy for Abstract Word Work**

Jeremiah's ability to tolerate the abstract nature of word work seemed to increase when the words were taken from song lyrics with which he was familiar. Although the words weren't within his sight vocabulary, he was able to play games with them on cards and otherwise explore parts of them anticipated to be beyond his ability level. For example, he considered the composition of words, with a focus on graphemes, and placed these words into categories of his own devising. He was also able to select cards based on first-letter cues; and he was able to string phrases into meaningful sentences, even without comprehending all of the words involved—syntax getting a workout here—and utilize aspects of print, such as capital letters, to group the phrases into sentences. In addition, Jeremiah tracked consistently well when working with song lyrics, even during allergy season—a time when he tended to miss whole lines of text. Similar activities conducted with other words, such as those in the context of a published kit of word games provided by the research assistant, did not fare as well, and Jeremiah had little patience for them.

### **The Necessity for "Age Appropriate" Reading Materials**

The only negative thing Jeremiah expressed throughout the study was in regards to the age level of particular resources. When exploring the Dolch sight words, he asked pointedly for sight words "for grade eleven." He often requested "a book for kids my age," although he did not discern that picture books were traditionally intended for younger children.



In fact, he demonstrated avid reading of particular picture books that contained subject matter of interest to him, as well as humour. One of the favourite texts Jeremiah listed from study was the picture book *Chester* (Watt, 2007), a comical story with a large cat as its narrator. “Where did you find this?” he eagerly asked the research assistant after they perused it for the first time. He appeared unaware that many other texts like this one were available at the public library, albeit in the children’s section.

Jeremiah’s mother expressed frustration with some of the reading expectations for school, particularly school content that was contextualized in life/work skills. “The food safety material—a lot of it is way over his head. So when he’s reading it, he skips over words and misses the content. When his father or I would sit down and study with him, we’d get him to read a portion and discuss...but there were a lot of words he didn’t know, and some words I didn’t know...so we’d stop and explain and figure it out. The food safety book was all text, supplemented by a few cartoons that Jeremiah couldn’t read because of the quality of the print.” Both clarity and size of text reportedly made cartoons difficult for him to decode and comprehend.

Jeremiah’s mother also responded that she had discussed other reading materials with the teacher in the special program he attended. At that time the teacher had said, “There really aren’t that many books in the library that are suitable for Jeremiah.” When her son took some books from home to school, his mother was glad to find a temporary solution to the absence of appropriate reading material, but commented that “he’s in a special program for a reason.... why aren’t his needs being addressed?” The classroom teacher had confirmed that Jeremiah wasn’t finding material interesting to him at in the classroom: “The books in the program... are more girly books,” she had told Jeremiah’s mother.

When asked about library visits, Jeremiah’s mother sighed. “We go to the library and Jeremiah wants to go to the adult section. He can’t read those books. He is not comfortable anymore going to that primary area and picking out a book. He’s changing into an adult. He’s sixteen...he’s got his own ideas about self respect.” This comment elaborates on earlier evidence suggesting that the family selected books on Jeremiah’s behalf, and offers a rationale for why Jeremiah is not an independent library user.

A knowledge of himself as a reader was clearly important to Jeremiah’s book selection strategies. He wanted to read books that were age-appropriate and, in his mother’s words, he wanted to select from adult sections of the library because of his own “self respect.”

### Shifts in Participant’s Understandings about Reading

Prior to the study, Jeremiah reported that not knowing some of the words was his greatest problem in terms of comprehension. Midway through the study, he indicated that not knowing what some of the words *mean* was his greatest problem. While perhaps not evident in the product of his reading, this subtle shift indicates that Jeremiah was beginning to pay attention to the meanings of words as important to his overall comprehension. An increase in task

knowledge here—understanding that reading should be meaningful—is important when one considers how critical this idea is to comprehension.

In early May, the fifth month of the six-month research period, Jeremiah was reading orally and stopped, looked at the research assistant, and said, “That doesn’t make sense.” This is the first time she had noticed him independently questioning the text, although they had discussed this strategy many times. A knowledge of text—that it should make sense—was coupled here with the idea that the reading task can be manipulated in order to achieve sense, key understandings in readers who read for meaning. That Jeremiah would stop and acknowledge difficulty comprehending, and then question the research assistant, was a breakthrough for him in his concept of what reading really was—an act of meaning-making.

### Reading Materials Jeremiah Best Comprehended

What made reading easy for Jeremiah was context. Reading songs with which he was familiar, and reading his personally generated language experience stories, allowed him to present fluent reading, experiencing the kind of comprehension expected from ability-appropriate reading tasks. Similarly, reading particular picture books that interested him made reading comprehensible. Fluent reading here contradicted much of his past oral and silent reading, where disfluency and lack of comprehension were hallmarks of his reading product.

The idea that experiences could be translated into writing, and writing could be read, seemed to be very motivating for Jeremiah and he began to ask the research assistant whether they could include this series of activities in future sessions. The following is a language experience story dictated by Jeremiah:

We walked to my old school. And then we went inside to see some of my old teachers. We saw my Grade 8 graduation photo. And then we walked by the little kids’ part of school. We walked by the After School Club and the Infant Room.

*We walked through the park and we saw moms and kids playing. Then we walked by the paddling pool and then to the mall to buy licorice. Then we came home.*

*(Jeremiah, language experience story, May 19, 2011)*

One important aspect of this language experience story is Jeremiah’s ability to learn and apply new vocabulary. During their walk prior to the story’s dictation, the research assistant had used the term “Infant Room,” drawing on her own experiences in the United Kingdom. Jeremiah had internalized this phrasing and applied it in his own writing. His deliberate use of language that was new to him supports the use of modelling to nudge Jeremiah forward in other vocabulary usage. A learning target at this time in the study one was to temper the consistent “and then” he used as a bridge word in his experience stories.

### Potential Relationship Between Technology Supports and Current Reading Challenges

Jeremiah’s particular difficulties with medial sounds and

consonant blends in words bear consideration. In connection with the idea that such phonics knowledge is a consequence of reading and spelling (Foorman, Jenkins, & Francis, 1993), it can be conjectured that Jeremiah's elementary reading experiences at school may have been limited to online texts as well as shared reading experiences that did not contain much trial and error. In addition, his independent writing was structured within the bounds of a computer equipped with spell-check, and invented spelling was not a stage Jeremiah had experienced. As Bainbridge and Heydon (2013) state, "Learners' early spellings can be thought of as approximations or experimentations with the sounds, patterns, and meanings of words" (p. 421). Perhaps the supports Jeremiah received for some of his challenges inadvertently created an absence of language play and independent problem solving that connects to current phonics difficulties.

It is unknown whether older readers, through practice with invented spelling, might increase their application of phonics knowledge in reading situations. There is research to suggest that young children encouraged to use invented spelling improve in phonic knowledge and application in reading as well as writing (Clarke, 1988). Pershey and Gilbert's (2002) study with Christine, an adult with developmental disabilities, offered results indicating that an older non-reader can move from holistic recognition of print to an ability to respond to instruction about analysis of some features of print, gaining insights into decoding and spelling from whole to part. It is clear that much is to be learned about reading development in older populations, especially where disabilities have prevented typical development of early emergent literacy skills.

### **Implications**

#### **Continued Growth for Older Struggling Readers**

While less literacy instruction may currently be offered to teen readers with disabilities who engage in work experience programming than what is offered to their typical peers, it is possible that shifts in the literacy development of older students can still occur through concerted encouragement. Teaching at this stage is thus still important. Critical to note is that these shifts may not be evident through traditional standardized testing procedures that focus on the product rather than the process of reading. While acknowledging previous testing that indicates reading growth may plateau over time (Wei et al., 2011) research is needed to further delineate the challenges and successes in supporting continued literacy development in older students with intellectual disabilities. In particular, tracing back to aspects of the child's own strengths, challenges, and school programs might offer the opportunity for refined programming tailored to the student's individual needs.

In the course of this study, Jeremiah demonstrated subtle shifts in his knowledge of self, task, and text. He became a more interested reader and advocated for himself in terms of reading age-appropriate texts. He increased the connections he shared between book topics and personal experiences, perhaps facilitating a developing strength in aesthetic reading that will further encourage independent reading for pleasure. He also exhibited self-monitoring for meaning in addition to

consistent tracking of lines of highly motivating text. Added to this is what seemed to be an enhanced understanding that text should make sense.

#### **Possible Negative Influences of School Support**

In Jeremiah's case, because of the visual impairment and physical disabilities related to cerebral palsy, computer technology was acquired for him early in his school career to assist with expressive language production as well as enlarge texts to support his receptive language development. Such computer use relied on spell-check and may have prevented him from particular aspects of spelling production including invented spelling—an activity known to support phonics development. In addition, the supports he received related to reading instruction—in particular the emphasis on fluent oral reading—may have replaced the supports other children were receiving that emphasized trial and error and aesthetic enjoyment. The absence of independent problem-solving in his early reading activities may have inhibited the development of active meaning making strategies still remain as weak areas in his reading profile. As educators consider literacy development strategies in young children, an examination of the rich body of work related to emergent reading may be especially pertinent when applied to children with special needs whose contingent supports may be inhibiting some avenues of development while facilitating other avenues of growth.

#### **The Importance of Meaningful Texts**

Utilizing materials with which students are familiar, be these television commercials, popular songs, or, in the case of this participant, texts from known song lyrics, may reduce the abstractions placed on learners as they engage in the necessary word work to increase phonic skills. Similarly, utilizing personalized texts, such as those composed by the student through language experience activities, can provide a comprehensible context in which fluent reading can take place. Such fluent reading is important as it models what we strive for as readers—the opportunity to produce something we understand—and works against situations where students' difficulties with reading promote word calling rather than comprehensible meaning making.

For individual readers, whatever their age, familiar subjects may assist them in developing a similarly supportive reading context. Another recommendation arising from this study, that addresses a goal of increased comprehension, is to continue to seek books written at, or slightly below, a reader's independent reading comprehension level. Jeremiah needs further experiences with meaningful reading, to reinforce the idea that reading should make *sense* in terms of the larger main ideas, rather than the idea that reading is simply getting one word right after another—his original definition of what good reading would entail, and a definition that shifted through the course of this study towards reading as meaning making.

#### **Considerate Content for Classroom Libraries**

Classroom libraries that contain a variety of ability-appropriate texts are thus very worthy of consideration as supports for all students. In particular, the position of

picture books in libraries for older struggling readers is something to ponder. These books allow exploration of print and meaning within a time frame supportive for students with memory difficulties. Books such as Watt's *Chester* and Donaldson's *The Gruffalo* were motivating for Jeremiah, and did not contain flags, such as childish human protagonists, suggestive of reader age. Supportive visuals, large print, and spare sentences increase the accessibility of these texts to struggling readers as well as readers with a variety of disabilities, and further exploration with other case studies is recommended to support the availability of picture book materials for older readers in diverse classrooms and communities.

An important question to ask related to age appropriateness of texts seems to be, *How is something defined to be at one's own age level?* While the response used to be *form*, in that picture books were designed to be read and enjoyed only by young children, this response has changed due to an influx of modern picture books suitable for enjoyment by various ages. An additional response to this question might simply be, *availability*. If intergenerational picture books are made available to adults and young adults, in a public section of the library rather than a *children's* section, these particular texts might then be seen as age appropriate. Sections of the library labelled *Quick Reads*, in conjunction with previously existing areas where magazines are housed, may serve to respectfully widen the resources available to adult readers of various abilities. Various websites are available suggesting picture book titles for adult audiences, and these can be located by Googling *picture books and adults*.

While not geared toward successful measurement on traditional testing protocols, the subtle changes that occurred in Jeremiah's literacy development support the idea that it is never too late to learn literacy strategies. Although classroom programs for students with intellectual disabilities may be shifting towards vocational and life-skills contexts, a continued focus on literacy, particularly recreational literacy, is an important target as it applies to lifelong learning. Further research in this area is necessary to delineate strategies and services that schools, homes, and communities should consider in order to provide the best possible supports for literacy development including supports for young adults and adults with special needs

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## Appendix A

### Study Questionnaire: Young Adult's Version (Pre/Midway/Post) (adapted from Burke, 1980)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions are to find out more about how you read.

1. How do you understand what you read?
2. What causes you the greatest problem understanding what you read?
3. What could you do to be better at understanding what you read?
4. What do you do when you come to a word whose meaning you do not know?
5. What kinds of reading materials are the easiest

for you to understand?

6. What kinds of reading materials are the hardest for you to understand?
  7. Do you ever say in your own words what you are reading?
  8. Do you ever reread something when it does not make sense?
  9. Do you ever ask yourself questions when you read?
  10. Is there anything that you need to know in order to be a better reader?
  11. What makes you a good writer?
  12. What gives you problems when you are writing?
- \*\*\*Additional questions used post study:
13. What do you think you have learned to do better as a reader during the time the Reading Buddy has worked with you?
  14. How have your reading interests or habits changed?

### Study Questionnaire: Parents' Version (Pre/Midway/Post) (adapted from Burke, 1980)

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions are to find out more about how your child reads.

1. Please tell me any relevant background about how your child learned to read.
2. How do you rate your child's reading now? What skills and strategies are used to read?
3. What causes your child the greatest problem in reading?
4. What could your child do to be better at understanding what he or she reads?
5. What does your child do when he or she comes to a word whose meaning is unknown?

6. What kinds of reading materials are the easiest for your child to understand?
7. What kinds of reading materials are the hardest for your child to understand?
8. Does your child ever say in his or her own words what he/she is reading?
9. Does your child ever reread something when it does not make sense?
10. Does your child ever ask himself or herself questions when he/she reads?
11. Is there anything that your child needs to know in order to be a better reader?
12. What kinds of writing does your child find easier to do?
13. What gives your child problems when he or she is writing?
14. Please summarize your child's journey as a reader and writer, listing particular stumbling blocks or helpful resources along the way.

**\*\*Additional Question used post study:**

15. How have your child's reading attitudes, habits, skills, and/or strategies changed (if they have) during the time he has worked with the Reading Buddy? Please be as detailed as you can with the info provided.

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# **Evolving Beliefs of an Aspiring Reading Teacher as Shaped through Multiple Experiences in a University-Based Reading Clinic**

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It is essential to provide future reading teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to make sound programmatic and curriculum decisions on the basis of evidence-based practices. To this end, several comprehensive large-scale reviews have been completed in the last two decades (International Reading Association, 2007; Rand Reading Study Group, 2002), identifying components of effective reading and writing instruction. University-based reading practicums can assist these students acquire such critical knowledge and apply it to practice.

Over thirty years of research confirm that learners who experience reading difficulties benefit from participating in tutoring sessions (Fitzgerald, 2001; Roe & Vukelich, 2001; Woolley & Hay, 2007), demonstrating improved decoding, word attack, reading fluency and comprehension. Tutoring also can be an enjoyable and beneficial experience for tutors, providing them with opportunities to 'give back' to the community, make meaningful differences in learners' lives, and develop meaningful relationships (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Jones, Stallings, & Malone, 2004; Leal, Johanson, Toth, & Huang, 2004).

For those who aspire to be educators, tutoring also provides the opportunity to apply theory to practice (Alsup, Conrad-Salvo, & Peters, 2008; Hart & King, 2007; Rogers-Haverback & Parault, 2008). Specifically, tutoring allows teacher candidates to implement relevant instructional strategies, as well as plan and problem solve independently (Gallagher, Woloshyn, & Elliott, 2009; Morgan, Timmons, & Shaheen, 2006). Tutors also can develop increased knowledge and confidence in using different formats of reading instruction and identifying learners' strengths and areas of need (Morgan et al., 2006). In this way, tutoring experiences can contribute positively to future teachers' sense of teaching self-efficacy (Rogers-Haverback & Parault, 2008; Wasserman, 2009). Practicing teachers who demonstrate high self-efficacy are more likely to demonstrate instructional sensitivity when working with students who struggle as well as embrace innovative instructional techniques relative to their peers with low self-efficacy (Graham, Harris, Fink, & MacArthur, 2011; Nierstheimer, Hopkins, & Dillon, 2000; Wasserman, 2009). Woolley and Hay (2007) caution, however, that in order for tutoring practicums to be successful and promote teaching efficacy, tutors must receive minimal levels of training as well as be supervised and supported in their efforts.

Participating in a university-based reading practicum can provide future teachers with such a structured and supportive learning environment. This is especially true when such programs are interwoven with coursework (Massey & Lewis, 2011), as providing learners with opportunities to transfer course concepts into practice can promote their meaningfulness and relevancy (Ness, 2011). Carefully designed practicums allow for the integration of theory, practice, and self-reflection (Fitzgerald, 2001), encourage

teacher candidates to explore their personal beliefs about learning, and experience learning events that are different from their own while developing relationships with tutees (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Leal et al., 2004). In other words, such practicum experiences can facilitate changes in future educators' knowledge, self-efficacy, beliefs, and pedagogy (Risko, Roller, Cummins, Bean, Collins Block, Anders, & Flood, 2008).

Like others (Coffey, 2010; Henry, Bruland, & Omizo, 2008), we believe that providing senior undergraduate and graduate students with university-based peer tutor and/or mentor roles (e.g., teaching assistants, reading program coordinators) will promote their sense of teaching self-efficacy and prepare them to become knowledgeable and supportive associate teachers (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Lu, 2010). We also agree with Falk (2011) that not all practicing teachers possess such knowledge, skills and attributes and efforts should be made to promote such capacities at every level of teacher training.

In this study, we describe the experiences of the first author, hereafter referred to as Caitlin, as she participated in various facets of a university-based reading support program. We begin by reflecting on and exploring Caitlin's undergraduate experiences in context of completing a reading practicum. We then elaborate on insights gained by Caitlin as a graduate student as she assumed additional roles associated with the practicum including seminar leader and program coordinator. We document the ways in which these experiences worked to promote her sense of self-efficacy and preparedness as a reading teacher, as well as a peer mentor for other aspiring teachers.

## **Theoretical framework**

This study was conducted within the theoretical framework of social constructivism where relevant social interactions assist individuals to derive meaning from experience (Vygotsky, 1986; Wink & Putney, 2002). We also draw upon the concept of teacher self-efficacy as derived from Bandura's (1986, 1997) theory of social cognitive theory that situates learners as capable of regulating their behaviours and thoughts. Accordingly, teachers develop self-efficacy through their interpretations and emotional responses to prior teaching experiences as well as through the vicarious experiences and verbal feedback of critical others (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, & Hoy, 1998). In context of the university-based tutoring program described here, tutoring interactions were intended to promote undergraduate tutors' teaching efficacy. The extended reading clinic instructional experiences provided to the first author were intended to further promote her sense of teaching efficacy, in part, through opportunities to mentor and support junior peers.

## **Method**



## Research design

Case study involves the in-depth exploration of an activity, event, process, or individual based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2011; Yin, 2009) and is undertaken when researchers want to understand a particular phenomenon that is unique or unusual. In this study, case study methodology was adopted to gain insights into Caitlin's evolving beliefs and experiences as shaped through her collective experiences within the reading clinic.

## Instructional context: researchers, reading course and practicum

We are two educators who share common interests in reading instruction. At the time of this study, Caitlin completed a five-year teacher education program and was in the final stages of completing her Master of Education degree. Her decision to earn a graduate degree was influenced by the lack of available teaching positions (67% of first-year teachers in Ontario report being unemployed or underemployed with similar concerns reported by those graduating within the past five years: McIntyre, 2012; Ontario College of Teachers, 2012) and her continued desire to engage in the profession. Vera was a professor whose research interests and scholarship included developing and implementing strategic instruction and associated teacher professional development. Vera initially came to know Caitlin as an undergraduate student completing her reading course. Later, Caitlin worked with Vera as a course seminar leader and program coordinator in the reading clinic where Vera was the director.

The reading course that Caitlin completed was required for undergraduates completing a 5-year education program (junior-intermediate division), with the majority of undergraduates completing this course in their third year of studies. The course was intended to serve as a precursor to a fifth-year language arts course, familiarizing undergraduates with the reading process and evidence-based reading instruction. Over the 12-week term, undergraduates participated in weekly, two-hour lectures and one-hour seminars.

The course also provided undergraduates with the opportunity to complete a 10-week reading practicum at the university's reading clinic. The practicum required students to apply course concepts in context of working with a school-aged client with reading difficulties. Several program coordinators (mostly graduate students) and a faculty director supervised the practicum. They provided undergraduates with formative feedback with respect to their instructional programming, modeled evidence-based practices, and coordinated scheduling, resources and communications among stakeholders.

## Data collection and data analysis

Throughout each of her various roles and capacities, Caitlin communicated regularly with Vera with respect to her duties and responsibilities and interests in reading instruction. Caitlin maintained systematic documentation related to her experiences in the reading course and associated practicum. Data collection also included documentation of Caitlin's experiences as seminar leader and practicum coordinator

including formative feedback provided to undergraduates. Finally, Caitlin participated in a series of 90-120 minute open-ended, reflective interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis, with these reflections continuing throughout the writing of this article.

Data analysis consisted of reading and re-reading the course and seminar materials, program coordinator notes and interview transcriptions in order to develop a holistic understanding with respect to the Caitlin's evolving beliefs and experiences (Creswell, 2011; Yin, 2009). After reviewing the data independently, the researchers met to present their interpretations and arrive at a shared understanding of the themes and associated conclusions. Four themes emerged from the data including (1) evolving beliefs about learning and reading (2) realizing the value of the reading practicum (3) developing as a mentor, and (4), developing as a reading teacher.

## Findings

Caitlin experienced several revelations about herself as a learner and the nature of reading throughout her journey from undergraduate tutor to program coordinator. She also honed pedagogical skills related to providing effective instruction and formative feedback as well as communicating with educational stakeholders.

### Evolving beliefs about learning and reading

When first asked to describe herself as a learner, Caitlin indicated a need to put forth continuous effort and time in order to succeed, "Learning wasn't easy . . . I could do well . . . but I had to work extremely hard". Completing the reading course and practicum provided Caitlin with a unique opportunity to "try" many of the reading strategies and learning processes advocated for younger readers.

A lot of the particular strategies that we would be learning, I would try them on myself. Not all of them worked, but some of them did . . . and it was amazing to realize I could be applying them to my own learning.

Through this process of trial and error, Caitlin came to view the use of such strategic processes as critical to her academic success and time management.

Realizing that I understand how I learned and I can work on my strengths, and I can work on my weaknesses, that I can be successful if I just apply these approaches. I've been successful before, but now I can be successful quicker or successful in a way that I will remember it [content] after. . . . I learned a lot about how students learn and how to help students, but I also learned a lot about how to help myself.

Seemingly inconsistent with her overall reflections of herself as a learner, Caitlin also identified herself as a competent reader who enjoyed engaging with text. She equated her reading successes to her ability to decode print materials across a variety of subjects and content areas while undermining the importance of comprehension.

I think of the different courses I took in university whether it be in math or history, or geography, I could read these texts with no problem . . . so it was almost as if I didn't see comprehension as being part of reading. Because for me,

I thought, well, I'm an excellent reader. You can give me anything, and I can read it.

Like many other beginning and aspiring teachers, Caitlin demonstrated a vague understanding about the nature of reading (Fang & Ashley, 2004) and she needed to be provided with contradictory information in order to dispel inconsistencies in her beliefs. For instance, she was encouraged to consider the connection between her reflections of self-as-learner versus self-as-reader. Through these discussions, Caitlin came to consider comprehension as part of the reading process and connected it with her perceived learning struggles.

It takes me a long time to read things. For example, if I have to sit down and read an article, I probably have to read it twice, then I have to highlight it, and then I have to go back, and then I have to make notes . . . whereas some of my friends, it [understanding] always came so quickly for them.

This new realization also increased her understanding and empathy for clients at the reading clinic, "I think it helped me a lot when I was tutoring because I realized that I understood that for a lot of students, sometimes it takes longer."

I think one of the biggest changes for me was actually thinking about comprehension as part of reading. . . . that's one thing I've definitely come across a lot in the reading clinic with different students is that they can read; say they can read really quickly or they can get through all the words, but then you ask them after, 'what was it about?' . . . they don't remember any of that.

As program coordinator, Caitlin discovered that some parents held similar beliefs about reading – assuming that their children's difficulties were decoding ones exclusively and that these difficulties could be "remediated" over the course of several sessions. It was Caitlin's responsibility to provide them with a broader definition and understanding of reading.

Some of these parents don't understand we're working on comprehension as well as decoding . . . they have that understanding that reading is simply decoding. . . . They just need someone to explain that this is a gradual process.

Participating in the reading practicum increased Caitlin's understanding of the complexities of reading including the importance of comprehension as well as decoding. This is an important realization in context of previous findings (Fang & Ashley, 2004) indicating that teacher candidates as well as beginning teachers often overemphasize the importance of decoding and word attack processes over comprehension, especially when working with students who experience reading difficulties. Such practices and beliefs can be resistant to change in the absence of contradictory experiences and supported reflection (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Osipova, Prichard, Boardman, Kiely, & Carroll, 2011; Linek, Sampson, Laverne-Raine, Klakamp, & Smith, 2006). Completing the reading course and associated practicum also provided Caitlin with insights about herself as a learner. These insights, in turn, promoted a sense of connectedness when working with clients at the reading clinic, consistent with earlier observations that shared struggles can create a sense of

shared learning between tutoring dyads (Jacobson, Thorpe, Fisher, Lapp, Frey, & Flood, 2001; Juel, 1996; Paterson & Elliott, 2006). Collectively, these metacognitive realizations and genuine experiences promoted a sense of 'know how' that enhanced Caitlin's efficacy as a reading teacher (Rogers-Haverback & Parault, 2008; Wasserman, 2009).

### **Valuing of reading practicum**

**Theory to practice bridge.** Caitlin admitted that as an undergraduate student, the practicum brought with it a combined sense of excitement and anxiety. While she was excited about the opportunity to gain experience in the field, she worried about her abilities to meet the needs of her client and be accountable to parents.

I was extremely excited about it, and I still remember that my friends were really excited about it, and I think we were nervous too . . . I started thinking, 'I'm actually going to learn. I'm actually going to learn how to teach, how to do it and work with a student' . . . but I also have this sense that I am representing the university and think, 'What if I don't know enough?'

Participating in the tutoring practicum promoted a shift from student to teacher (Alsup et al., 2008). Specifically, it represented a shift from practicing literacy instruction in the context of hypothetical cases to real-world application – a component that seemingly was missing in some of Caitlin's other courses. This experience, in turn, provided her with increased passion and confidence as a reading teacher.

I felt as if I didn't have that passion about it [other courses] because I was planning a hypothetical unit that I wasn't actually being able to use . . . it was difficult to plan without actually having a student or having a class to plan for.

I liked having research and the application. I have confidence using it [instructional technique] knowing it's been researched. . . . I know I understand something when I am able to apply it . . . once I was able to take what I learned in class and apply it to my lessons with a student, that's when I knew I understood it.

Finally, Caitlin reported feeling well supported during the practicum. Beyond access to instructional ideas and resources, she was appreciative of the formative feedback that she received. She spoke highly of approachable seminar leaders and program coordinators, confirming the importance of training and supervision in the delivery of such practicums (Wasik, 1998) as well as the need to minimize negative emotions such as anxiety and stress while promoting positive ones in order to promote self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

I think what stood out to me about it being part of the university was I knew that we would be well supported . . . if you didn't know what you were doing, right away there'd be someone you could go to. There was someone that would help. . . we knew there were support people in the clinic and the reading clinic had resources . . . everything was there.

**Learning about children and families.** Throughout her varied roles, Caitlin had many opportunities to work directly with the families enrolled in the reading clinic. These experiences prompted Caitlin to be cognizant of a variety of family structures as well as how to communicate effectively

with parents and other caregivers. As program coordinator, she became aware of “how busy children’s lives are,” including the multitude of after-school and extra-curricular activities that many children attended and the sense of fatigue and stress that sometimes followed.

I still remember one mother I talked to about how stressed out her daughter was about not being able to read . . . her daughter had woken up in the morning and she had a bald spot on her head. It was because she had been ripping her hair out because she was stressed.

Caitlin especially was struck by how some of these families differed from her own—insights that she believed were also new to many of the other undergraduates participating in the practicum.

I come from a family setting where my mom stayed at home and she was there with us and made sure we did our schoolwork. . . . For them [undergraduates] it’s gaining understanding about the different types of families . . . understanding the role that grandparents have in the children’s education . . . or even sometimes an older brother or sister. I remember them [undergraduates] talking to me about that. . . it was a different family structure that they grew up in.

Caitlin came to understand parents’ deep concerns for the well-being of their children, their need to talk to others, and their sense of “helplessness” with respect to their children’s reading skills. In this way Caitlin became more aware of the importance of understanding the whole child, including his or her home life, school life and interests (Carr, 2003).

It’s interesting how much they [parents] tell you, and I think maybe some of them just need someone to listen to them . . . they don’t know what to do . . . how much the parents worry. . . . They hurt over the fact that their child is struggling and they have tried things, and they can’t change it themselves . . . for a lot of them that was heartbreaking . . . being able to discuss that with them, that was definitely a new experience.

Caitlin drew upon these insights when dialoging with friends and peers who had secured positions (usually as supply teachers) in the school system, challenging their assumptions about what they perceived to be “dysfunctional families” and/or “unconcerned” parents.

She [peer] ranted, ‘That’s your child. How do you not care? How do you not do that?’ I had to stop her and tell her there’s far more factors than we know. ‘Maybe that parent doesn’t have the time. Maybe that parent can’t necessarily help them. Maybe the parent doesn’t understand how.’

The reading clinic practicum served as a forum for bridging theory to practice (Alsup et al., 2008; Rogers-Haverback & Parault, 2008; Hart & King, 2007), with Caitlin’s comments underscoring the value of providing such opportunities to aspiring teachers early in their teacher training programs. The supportive environment provided by the reading clinic worked to promote positive tutoring experiences and reduce anxiety associated with first-time teaching, thus promoting Caitlin’s teacher self-efficacy (Coffey, 2010; Wasserman, 2009). The extended experiences of serving as a program coordinator provided further insights

about the nature of students and their families (Carr, 2003) which in turn, inspired Caitlin to assume the role of family advocate or at least challenge her peers’ beliefs and tendencies to “blame the parents” when students misbehaved or struggled at school (Niersheimer et al., 2000; Rohr & He, 2010; Sutterby, Rubin, & Abrego, 2007).

### **Developing as a mentor**

Caitlin was enthusiastic to use the insights that she had gained while completing the reading course and practicum in her role as a seminar leader. She believed that the competitive nature of the academic program might leave many undergraduates reluctant to experiment with the evidence-based strategies and/or share their learning and tutoring experiences with peers, “it is so competitive and everyone wants to be the best of the best.” Caitlin committed to sharing her personal learning struggles and experiences as a seminar leader. She believed that sharing such narratives would further convince undergraduates about the effectiveness of evidence-based practices and provide them with encouragement to apply them when working with clients or when reading independently.

At first, I was embarrassed to tell them [undergraduates] about using the strategies myself . . . but it was something that I came to emphasize in seminar. . . . ‘You’d be amazed at how many of these things may work for you . . . whether it’s mind mapping or whether it’s highlighting or skimming’ . . . I told them [undergraduates] that because I had actually had that experience of using it, I was able to share that experience genuinely when I working with young students.

Caitlin believed that by modeling reading instructional practices, the undergraduates would be willing to participate actively in seminar and would be more likely to succeed in the practicum. In her own experience, the opportunity to try strategies in seminar and ask questions without judgment increased her confidence as a tutor and she wanted to the same opportunity for those in her seminar group.

I was demonstrating various resources, whether it was the reader’s theater or whether it was reading-by-analogy, or being a word detective. And when I was showing them [undergraduates] the resource, I’d ask how can we apply it for the students that you’re working with?

In order for tutors to collaborate with others (Hart & King, 2007) and to learn and grow as professionals (Morgan et al., 2006), it is essential to create a sense of safety and community. To this end, Caitlin recognized that many undergraduates possessed relevant experiences working with children outside of the classroom and encouraged them to consider how they could adopt these experiences to course content and the practicum. Caitlin also became aware that she needed to provide the undergraduate tutors with guidance about classroom management and student motivation – areas that she had not considered as part of reading instruction in the past.

They [undergraduates] would say, ‘Here is my lesson, my client won’t do it.’ So I would say, ‘Well, switch it up. Try using the volleyballs and writing words on there. Or try doing a scavenger hunt’ . . . Once they switched it up and



made it active, they were able to complete the lesson. They understood what they should be doing with the client. It was just having that experience. . . I think a lot of the times those behavioral issues can be fixed.

Providing formative and nonjudgmental feedback was also an important component of these roles, especially when working with undergraduate tutors who were struggling and/or seemingly disengaged. Caitlin often left lesson ideas for individual tutors and offered to co-tutor, emphasizing that the offer was a supportive effort versus a punitive or evaluative one.

I would like to offer to teach the first 20-25 minutes of your session . . . to see if I can develop some strategies and suggestions to help your client get focused and on task . . . don't worry about losing marks. . . This is just to help out since you have a challenging situation. I look forward to tutoring with you.

Assuming the roles of seminar leader and program coordinator reinforced Caitlin's understandings of reading and reading instruction, reinforcing that personal learning is improved through teaching and mentoring others (Deaton & Deaton, 2012; Henry et al., 2008). Equally important, these roles provided Caitlin with the opportunity to provide emotional and social support to other inspiring teachers – skills and attributes that are consistent with effective mentors/associated teachers (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Licklider, 1995).

### **Developing as a reading teacher**

Participating in the reading practicum also extended Caitlin's knowledge and skills related to being a classroom educator and reading teacher. When reflecting on her final year in the teacher education program, Caitlin acknowledged that she and her peers who had completed the third-year reading practicum engaged in their language arts course differently relative to those who had not participated in the practicum. Specifically, she believed that she and her colleagues were more confident in their abilities to lesson plan for an entire classroom while simultaneously responding to the needs of individual students through differentiated instruction. Her responses endorse previous findings that well-structured reading practicums can promote teaching self-efficacy and positively effect teacher candidates' instructional practices (Gallagher et al., 2009; Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2005).

Absolutely every single person in that program would say they were prepared to teach reading and the language arts . . . or at least feel more prepared . . . because they had that background [practicum]. . . For us, it was more about differentiated instruction and how to meet the needs of all your students because we had worked one-on-one, and we had seen that there were students that may be really great at decoding but struggled with comprehension or had other needs, so we were looking more to those aspects. I guess we held a different perspective.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study confirm and extend the value of the reading practicum as a valuable complement to undergraduate reading courses (Dawkins, Ritz, & Loudon,

2009; Jones et al., 2004) and teacher preparation (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Fang & Ashley, 2004; Leal et al., 2004; Massey & Lewis, 2011). The practicum provided Caitlin with the opportunity to bridge the theory-practice gap by developing a refined understanding of the reading process (Massey & Lewis, 2011), gain confidence using evidence-based pedagogical practices (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010), and provide individualized instruction (Alsup et al., 2008). While most teacher candidates participate in some form of teaching practicum as part of their final year, we believe that the gains associated with the reading practicum described here were especially meaningful in that they occurred relatively early in Caitlin's initial teacher education studies. Early experiences using evidence-based practices can reinforce individuals' motivation for the teaching profession (Atkinson & Colby, 2006), as well as their empathy for those who struggle with the reading process (Juel, 1996). Such early experiences also can prompt future educators to critique and challenge their existing beliefs about reading and reading instruction, working to dispel misconceptions that otherwise would likely impede the implementation of effective reading programming (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Linek et al., 2006). Collectively, these experiences worked to promote Caitlin's sense of teaching efficacy and are consistent with Bandura's (1997) recommendation that teacher self-efficacy be developed in the early stages of teaching.

Caitlin's learning gains also were extended and intensified through additional opportunities to participate in the practicum as a graduate student. Assuming the responsibilities of seminar leader and practicum coordinator provided her with an extended experience to model evidence-based practices by serving as a facilitator and guide for undergraduate tutors. Coordinating the practicum provided Caitlin with insights and sensitivities related to the needs and concerns of undergraduate tutors as well as the opportunity to participate in the creation of a safe and nonjudgmental learning environment. The creation of such learning environments are important for the success of university-based reading clinics as tutors respond positively to supervisors who possess similar and relevant reading instruction experiences and who were willing to provide ongoing, formative feedback (Fitzgerald, 2001; Johnson, 2010; Roe & Vukelich, 2001). We believe that participation in these learning environments is also important for ongoing teacher development and may provide salient experiences for their future roles as mentors and associate teachers (Henry et al., 2008).

For these reasons, we advocate for continued learning experiences within structured, university-based reading practicums that extend beyond the role of tutoring whenever possible. We believe that by providing undergraduate and graduate students with comprehensive experiences like those described here, they will develop into well-prepared educators who are able to meet the needs of multiple learners and educational stakeholders.

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# Using “TRIMS” to Promote Pre-Service Teachers’ Active Engagement with Assigned Readings

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## The Effect of a Reader Response Format, *TRIMS*, Upon Pre-Service Teachers’ Comprehension of Their Course Texts

It’s a Thursday morning at 8:30 AM and the junior level pre-service teachers are slowly meandering into the classroom for their literacy methods course. Within minutes they are all actively involved in the class that is conducted in a workshop format. Students are working together in partners or small groups, participating in discussion of the Power Point presentation, watching media presentations, using the Smartboard in their demonstration lessons, practicing interactive read alouds, and writing about what they learned. The classroom is abuzz with discussion and learning. Then it’s time to discuss the text or journal article readings assigned prior to the class session, and...silence ensues. It is a problem long confronted by professors in all disciplines. In fact, “Much recent research indicates that college students are not reading their textbooks” (Ryan, 2006, p. 135). How do we motivate students to read what has been assigned so that they are better prepared?

Much time and effort goes into selecting texts that will supplement the class discussions, PowerPoint presentations and collaborative activities. The texts are chosen to be a balance of research-based practices that will be useful to these students in their teaching, with the discussion of the theories and research that support those practices. Texts such as Debbie Miller’s, *Reading with Meaning*, Gail Tompkins’s, *Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, and Patricia Cunningham’s, *Phonics They Use*, all offer valuable strategies and background that every beginning teacher of reading should know. The students in the class often remark that the texts they have for our class are some of the same ones their Supervising Practitioners in the field are referring to when planning.

We discuss the value of reading the texts and the fact that there is not enough class time in the semester to cover everything there is to know. Completing the assigned readings prior to class gives students the background knowledge they need to participate in class discussions, a chance to form questions, and time to think critically about the content. In addition, reading the texts is like “filling in the blanks” from the material that we do not get to complete in class. Also, these pre-service teachers take a licensure exam in our state of Massachusetts called Foundations of Reading, and the information from class, supplemented by the text readings, is invaluable to passing that exam.

Despite knowing and understanding this rationale, some students still do not complete the readings. Research has shown that college students often do not read the textbooks for various reasons (Lei, Bartlett, Gorney, & Herschbach,

2010; Berry, Cook, Hill, & Stevens, 2011). One reason, the same one cited by my students, was the lack of time, given all the other assignments and requirements placed upon them by a full load of classes. As one of my students put it, “Given all of the assignments in our methods courses, if something has to be eliminated, it’s usually the readings.” Another student remarked, “I really like the texts for this class because they are practical and have creative ideas to try, but I usually only skim the pages, because of time.” For other students, it was underestimating the importance of the texts and relying solely on the information covered by the professor in class.

In thinking about how to best solve this dilemma, I conducted a literature review on the topic of engaging students in higher education to read their texts, and spoke with senior, experienced professors. Through these methods, I found that several approaches to motivating students to read the texts were consistently suggested. One approach is the use of random or weekly quizzes that relate to the assigned readings (Gurung & Martin, 2011; Fernald, 2004). While I recognized that this extrinsic motivation (grades) might work, administering weekly quizzes was not a match for my teaching style. I wondered if the information would be learned only for short term purposes and not assimilated into their teaching. A second approach was the use of reader response journals. I really like this idea as it is also something I teach them to use with their own students. It highlights the reading and writing connection and allows some choice in their responses. I implemented this approach for two semesters. I told the students that I would randomly decide when I wanted to collect and read the journals and that they would get feedback from me in the form of comments on their journal responses.

Much to my disappointment, some students, both semesters, simply chose not to keep up with the journal (probably because they were not reading). Others had entries that were weak and really did not show a deep or critical processing of the material. Many times a quotation was extracted with a page number listed by it, with no reflection of the value or application of the quotation to their experiences. It was hard to decipher if students were really reading the material, or simply skimming and writing superficial journal responses. In other words, this approach wasn’t working either.

Reflecting on what it was I wanted my students to do, it occurred to me that it wasn’t simply reading, but **engaging** with the texts. I wanted them to learn the content and concepts in the texts, but also to use those strategies we know are critical in our literacy work with children. I needed them to relate the readings to our class discussion, find main ideas, learn new terminology and make connections to the text. I was asking them to do what we know research says is effective practice while reading. After all, this wasn’t simply information



they needed to learn to pass a test; it was material they needed to know in order to be effective literacy teachers. My desire was for them to be intrinsically motivated and value reading the texts as contributing to their learning and skills-base for their teaching profession.

This article describes one solution I discovered as a reader response strategy and used with pre-service teachers. The results of an action research project using this model will also be shared.

### **The Dynamic Act of Reading**

In Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory, comprehending is seen as a dynamic act. It is an interaction between the reader and the text that creates what she called, "the poem." It was exactly this theory that I wanted to uphold in choosing a reader response strategy to use in my course. Along the same lines of the Transactional Theory, Dorn and Soffos (2005) discuss four types of knowledge that good readers use to expand their comprehension: generic, text, strategic, and reflective. Dorn and Soffos (2005) state, "Deep comprehension depends on the dynamic interplay between the four sources of knowledge" (p. 15). Generic knowledge consists of the reader factors such as background knowledge, cultural influences, experiences and beliefs. Text knowledge consists of text factors such as the text structure, content, and vocabulary. Strategic knowledge is problem solving strategies, "...including cognitive strategies for sustaining and expanding the meanings of a text" (p. 16). The final component is reflective knowledge. For pre-service teachers this is one of the most critical knowledge types. "Self-reflection requires both a deep understanding of the content itself and the motivation to relate this information to personal goals" (Dorn and Soffos, 2005, p. 16).

Given this theory, I implemented a reader response strategy titled, TRIMS. It required that my pre-service teachers use all four knowledge types, as described above, for deep processing of the text material.

### **The Survey Routine-TRIMS**

The Survey Routine instructional strategy was originally intended for high school students and was developed by researchers at the University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning. "The purpose of the routine is to make students aware of the main ideas associated with the reading passage and to help students focus on the most important information in the passage as they eventually read it" (Deschler, Schumaker, & McKnight, 1997, p. 2). When engaged in this strategy, students preview the text, make predictions about the content, form relationships to previously read material and prior knowledge, identify the text structure, name the main parts, summarize, and generate questions. The Survey Routine is based on three critical components, but for my own purposes with the pre-service teachers, I used only one component, the Trims Learning Sheet (TRIMS). The Trims Learning Sheet is a visual organizer that allows students to record important information from the text. It uses the acronym TRIMS to remind students to trim the reading passage. As Deschler and colleagues note, "When we trim something, we reduce it--for example, we trim the fat off a piece of meat so we are left with the best part" (Deschler, et al., 1997, p.

29). The components have been slightly adapted for use in the literacy methods course (see Appendix A). The adapted components of TRIMS for this research include: activating prior knowledge, learning new vocabulary, determining main ideas, summarizing, and making connections. In order to validate the inclusion of each of these components in the TRIMS learning sheet, a brief overview focusing on these individual areas will be discussed.

### **T-Title; R- Relationships**

The first components of the TRIMS Learning Sheet are designed to activate students' prior knowledge. Researchers have long validated the importance of building or activating prior knowledge (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007; Miller, 2012; Cooper & Kiger, 2009). There is a relationship between prior knowledge and comprehension that is not to be underestimated. Cooper and Kiger (2009) state, "Prior knowledge affects construction of meaning for everyone--emergent reader as well as competent reader" (p. 77). The pre-service teachers are no different from the elementary students they will teach, in that using their prior knowledge as they read helps "link" new information to existing information so that it is better understood, remembered, and assimilated.

In the *T* step of TRIMS, students record the title of the chapter(s). In the *R* component (Relationships) students consider the following questions: What do I already know about this topic? How does this reading relate to our class discussions on this topic? What new information was added to my prior knowledge after reading this content? How does the information presented in this reading relate to previous readings and upcoming topics on the syllabus? For example, in reading about phonics instruction students often state the relationship between phonemic awareness, that they read about previously, and its relationship as a precursor to phonics.

Another piece of the Relationships component is thinking about how the material applies to state and national standards. Depending on the reading's topic, students may relate the readings to content standards from the Common Core State Standards (2009), or if the reading addresses more pedagogy or even professional dispositions, students often make the relationship to the Massachusetts Professional Teaching Standards (2012) or professional organization standards such as those from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) and the International Reading Association (IRA, 2010). This helps the pre-service teachers become more familiar with the standards and also conveys the importance of how the content they are learning applies to their role as teachers.

### **I-Important Terms**

After the Title and Relationships, students then complete the *I* portion of the TRIMS learning sheet. The *I* stands for Important Terms from the readings. In completing this section, students are asked to list and define vocabulary from the readings that they were previously unfamiliar with and deem important to understanding the content. Depending on their individual background knowledge, some students have many words selected and others only a few from the same readings. Morrow and Gambrell (2011) write, "Studies that focus on self-

selection of vocabulary suggest that when students choose words that they need to learn, they learn the word meanings more successfully and retain the meanings longer than when a teacher chooses the words” (p. 230).

Graves (2009) suggests that the vocabulary a person uses influences others’ judgments of their competence. In Education, like any other profession or discipline, we have terminology or jargon that is specific to what we do. Knowing these terms is vital to pre-service teachers being able to speak knowledgeably on a topic, prepare for job interviews, collaborate with colleagues, pass licensure exams, and succeed in furthering their Education degrees. When reading on the topic of word study, students define terms such as phonics, high frequency words, morphology, affixes, suffixes, digraphs, word roots, etc. In our discussion of vocabulary instruction for the classroom, it is emphasized that children must be actively involved in learning new vocabulary and that the definitions need to be in their own words (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). The pre-service teachers are asked to do the same. It’s expected they will write the definitions in their own words or with examples provided, not simply copy them from the text. This contextualized vocabulary learning is important to the understanding of the content. After all, “Words are the currency of education” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011, p. 225).

### **M-Main Ideas**

As Cooper and Kiger (2009) note, “Strategic readers identify the important information in what they read” (p. 145). The M component of the TRIMS learning sheet is designed to get students reading strategically and thinking about the main ideas. Just as we discuss the comprehension strategy of determining importance and how to help our young readers achieve this goal, we connect it to the importance of the pre-service teachers’ readings as well. The material for the course readings is content-laden and as such the students are, “...called upon to extract factual information from the text and to do so in the most efficient way possible” (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007, p. 218).

Students often use bullet points to list the main ideas of the readings. They are told not to write everything they read about, but to address those main ideas that are new to them. In this way they are constantly relating what they read to their prior knowledge, and if it is new information that is deemed to be important to the content, they list it as part of their Main Ideas section.

### **S-Student Connections**

One of the most important components of the TRIMS sheets is this last piece, where students are asked to think beyond the text. Dorn and Soffos (2005) write about two levels of comprehension: surface and deep. At the surface level students recall information from the text. “The deep level of comprehension is a conceptual level of understanding that results from the reader’s ability to think beyond the text, thus integrating the author’s intentions with the reader’s point of view” (Dorn & Soffos, 2005, p. 14). The student connections section helps move the pre-service teachers toward deeper comprehension. In explaining this section of the TRIMS we discuss how strategic readers are always analyzing and synthesizing the text as they read, while integrating it with

their background knowledge. In the student connections section they can write freely about their personal connections to the material, share anecdotes from the field experiences, or contribute opinions on the topic. Often students generate questions in this component that come up as they read, or use their critical literacy skills to reflect on the content.

In our discussion of comprehension strategy instruction with elementary students, we discuss the three types of connections: Text- to-Self, Text-to-Text and Text-To-World (Miller, 2012). As they learn about these connections, the pre-service teachers note that they often use these same types of connections in completing their TRIMS sheets. This is invaluable to their understanding of how to best think aloud and model this strategy for their own students someday. It is truly applying what they are learning.

This S (Student Connection) component is also important to me as the instructor. It is in reading their perspectives on the content and their experiences that I learn more about my students. I learn what they value, what their own school literacy experiences were like, how their home situations contributed to their own literacy development and often students will write about literacy instruction they are seeing in their field placements and how it relates to the content of the readings. It is there that they might write, “I saw an example of shared reading in my field placement last week” and go on to share how helpful it was to now put a label with the type of instruction they witnessed. It is also here that they question what they are seeing in their field placement if it doesn’t match what they are reading. This provides me the opportunity to bring up some of these issues in class and the students contribute to the conversation, because it focuses on issues they divulged in their TRIMS.

### **Action Research**

#### **Question**

After using the TRIMS for a few semesters, I felt compelled to complete an action research study that would help determine if my students were more successful using this strategy rather than other reader response strategies. I posed the question: Will students who use the TRIMS as a reader response strategy score higher on a textbook content quiz than those who use a different reader response strategy? In addition, I wanted to know how students perceived completing reader responses in general and then specifically examine their thoughts on using the TRIMS strategy.

#### **Participants**

The semester I conducted this action research study, I had 18 students enrolled in a literacy methods course at a state university. Seventeen of the students were traditional undergraduate Early Childhood coordinate majors in their second semester junior year or first semester senior year. They followed as a cohort through the Education course sequence and had all had the same prior education courses. One student was a non-traditional student earning her post-baccalaureate teaching license in early childhood education. It should be noted that the literacy methods course at our institution is six credits, covered in two courses. All of these student participants in the research project had previously

taken the first course with me and were required to use the TRIMS format in that course. For the purposes of this study, the students were in the second literacy methods course, with me again as their instructor.

## Methodology

The 18 students were randomly assigned to either of two groups: the TRIMS group or the Choice group. The first group was required to respond to the readings using the TRIMS format and the second group was also required to respond in writing to the same readings but had choice as to the format of their responses. All of the students had taken the prerequisite literacy course with the same professor. All students passed the first Massachusetts Test of Educator Licensure (MTEL) called Communication and Literacy Skills and all had a minimum grade point average of 2.8. The students were asked to read and respond to the textbook chapters or journal articles assigned on the syllabus each week. The responses were collected twice during the semester and two tests were given that contained questions taken directly from the textbook test bank.

## Results

In reviewing the average scores on the two content textbook tests, a comparison of the two groups shows those students who were assigned the TRIMS reader response format scored slightly higher than the Choice reader response group (see Table 1). It should also be noted that only 14 students out of the 18 are represented in this comparison data, because 4 students did not complete the reader response assignments. Of these four students, two had originally been assigned to the TRIMS group and two had been assigned to the Choice group. These four students still took the tests and their average scores are compared to the other two groups in Table 2. These particular students scored significantly lower than the other two groups on both tests. This is most likely a result of not completing the assigned readings.

**Table 1**

*Mean Test Score Comparison for TRIMS and Choice Groups*

Group	Mean Score (%) Test #1	Mean Score (%) Test #2
TRIMS Group	86	80
Choice Group	82	77

**Table 2**

*Mean Test Score Comparison Including Group Who Chose No Reader Response*

Group	Mean Score (%) Test #1	Mean Score (%) Test #2
TRIMS Group	86	80
Choice Group	82	77
No Reader Response Group	79	53

Although the average results between the TRIMS group and the Choice group differ only by 4 and 3 points respectively, it is important to point out the reader response options that were used by the Choice group. This group could choose to respond in writing using any format preferred. Three of the seven chose to use a format very similar to TRIMS, in that they recorded terminology, main ideas and connections. These students had used TRIMS in their prior methods class with this professor and felt as though it worked best for them. These particular students outperformed their peers in the same Choice group (see Table 3). Other options utilized by the Choice group were basic outlines and narrative summaries.

**Table 3**

*Choice Group: Individual Scores Comparison*

Students	Test #1 Score (%)	Test#2 Score (%)
1 *	92	76
2	76	74
3 *	90	76
4 *	90	80
5	70	70
6	80	82
7	76	78

Note: A \* indicates student who chose the TRIMS format as the reader response option

The students in both groups were also asked to write a brief comment (anonymously, identified only as TRIMS group or Choice group) on an index card, about the reader response options. Several of their responses are mentioned here. One student from the TRIMS group commented, "They (TRIMS) allowed me to force myself to read all of the reading assignments for the class and take away the most important topics and vocabulary I needed to learn." Another student from the TRIMS group wrote, "I used TRIMS! I felt like they (TRIMS) were more structured and gave me a better understanding of what to look for when I was reading. I really loved the reader response assignment because it gave me use of the course books, which other classes did not do." Of the Choice group, one student wrote, "I chose to do TRIMS this semester. I did this because I found myself looking much deeper into the text and connecting information back to myself while writing the TRIMS. They (TRIMS) were helpful and informative and I have been using them as we go along to study for the MTEL (MA Test of Educator Licensure)." Another student from the Choice group noted that she used her own version of the TRIMS in that she recorded only main ideas. Another student in the Choice group wrote, "I did not use TRIMS and found it easier. When I would do the TRIMS last semester I would have to cut down the amount of information from the text. I noticed that I learn better and comprehend easier when I type out exactly what I highlighted while reading." Two students wrote that completing reader responses is simply, "busy work" and this instructor assumes these would be two of the four students who did not complete the assignments. These two responses were the only ones not favorable toward reader response, regardless of method used to respond.



## Discussion and Implications

The results of this action research study reinforced my belief that reader response is important to include in the course and is effective at assisting students to comprehend material that is covered in the texts. It also creates improved class discussion when students have read the material and can offer their own thoughts and connections. Although not intended, the fact that four students chose not to do any reader response actually added valuable data to the study, because these students' scores were significantly lower than the other two groups. This verified that writing in response to the reading, regardless of the format used, is better than no written reader response at all.

In this study, the TRIMS group did outperform the Choice group, but only slightly. However, because some of the Choice group students voluntarily chose to use TRIMS, the difference may have actually been greater than what was shown if they had used alternative response options. The qualitative feedback from students, via their written comments, verified that the majority of the students saw value in using the TRIMS, or a similar reader response option, in learning the course material.

Going forward, I will continue to introduce the TRIMS format and require it during the first course, but will probably allow students choice in whether to use it as is, or adapt it to better match their needs during the second course. Either way, the emphasis will continue to be on having the pre-service teachers engage with the text and journal readings, while going beyond surface comprehension, into deeper connections.

## Summary

It is apparent from this action research that reading the texts and journal articles, and writing in response to the readings, contribute to the successful preparation of pre-service teachers in a literacy methods course. The key was using a structure, the TRIMS, which allowed the pre-service teachers to engage with the text and use multiple reading strategies. Now, when the discussion of the readings begins in class, it's often difficult to get them to stop. But this professor considers that a good problem to have!

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## Appendix A

(Adapted TRIMS Format)

### Title of Article or Chapter

#### **Relationships:**

In this section you will write a brief paragraph about how this particular reading relates to one or more of the following: the course content, the MA Professional Teaching Standards, the MA Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy, learning theories, or class discussions.

#### **Important Terms:**

List and define any important or new terms discussed in this text. Remember that this will be a study tool for you in the future, so include terminology you will need to review.

#### **Main Ideas:**

Using a bulleted list, highlight the main ideas covered in this reading.

#### **Student Connections:**

In this section, write briefly about any personal connections, text-to-text, or text-to-world connections you made while reading. This is where you can also apply what you have read, to what you are witnessing or doing in the field experiences.

Form created by M. Correia and adapted from Deschler, D., Schumaker, J., & McKnight, P. (1997). *The survey routine*. The University of Kansas.

## Appendix B

(Student TRIMS Sample)

#### **Titles:**

Chapter 1 in Miller: Guiding Principles; Chapter 7 in Tompkins: Expanding Students' Knowledge of Words

#### **Relationship:**

The vocabulary section of this reading most closely relates to the MA Professional Standard 2a: plans curriculum and instruction. Vocabulary lessons are most effective when taught explicitly. Since reading comprehension is directly related to vocabulary, it would be important to teach vocabulary regularly and explicitly. We have also been discussing fluency, and expanding a student's vocabulary will help him to become a more fluent reader.

#### **Important Terms:**

*Gradual release of responsibility:* scaffolding from teacher directed to assisted to student independence

*Guided practice:* gradually giving children more responsibility for using different strategies in a variety of authentic situations

*Independent practice:* when children begin to apply strategies in their own reading

*Word sorts:* a vocabulary activity that uses lists of words for students to sort by a specific principle

*Word wall:* an alphabetized chart posted in the classroom listing words the students are learning

*Think-aloud:* when teachers stop while reading and think out loud to model for students how to use context clues or another strategy to determine the meaning of something unknown

*Quick write:* an activity done by students to explore a topic through writing

#### **Main Ideas:**

Structure a reading mini-lesson to occur during a large block of time so that you can model thinking aloud and demonstrate different strategies for reading the text.

- Interacting with the text, drawing inferences and determining the important parts of a text are all signs of being a proficient reader.
- 4 stages guide children to independent reading:
  - Teacher modeling and explanation of a strategy
  - Guided practice and scaffolding
  - Independent practice along with feedback
  - Application of the strategy in real reading situations
- Genuine relationships with your students that are built upon trust help build a good, working literate environment.
- Showing children is always more effective than just telling children something.
- There are 4 levels of word recognition:
  - Unknown word: children don't recognize the word
  - Initial recognition: students have seen or heard the word before or can pronounce it, but do not know its meaning
  - Partial word knowledge: students know one meaning of a word and can use it in a sentence
  - Full word recognition: students know more than one meaning of a word and can use it in several ways
- Students learn words incidentally all the time (through independent reading and sustained silent reading, SSR).
- Students with larger vocabularies are more capable readers, and they know more strategies for figuring out unknown words than less capable readers do.

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- Word studies, word walls and word sorts are all fun and interactive ways to work with new or troublesome vocabulary words/lists.

**Student Connection:**

I remember in first grade that we had a lot of posters on our classroom walls that were centered on words. We had posters of trees and they were full of words with the same rime. They were our word family trees. As I moved up in elementary school our word posters became more complex, however, they were always on the wall for a reference. Having them always around was helpful and soon I was familiar enough with the posters that I could visualize the poster and not need to find the actual poster when I struggled with a word.

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# The Benefits of Using a Professional Learning Community Simulation in a Pre-Service Education Language Arts Classroom

KRISTEN FERGUSON, Nipissing University

## Introduction

In a Professional Learning Community (PLC), teachers, principals, and other education professionals meet and work collaboratively in order to improve student achievement. DuFour (2004) explains that during a PLC, “teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement” (p. 9). The concept a PLC is familiar to most educators, and the term is now common in education. A quick Google search yields over 76 million hits for “professional learning communities in education,” with websites listed from ministries/departments of education and other educational organizations from Canada, the United States, and other countries. Despite their popularity, however, there appear to be no actual numbers published regarding the prevalence of PLCs or how many schools are actually implementing PLCs.

In Ontario, the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) model is endorsed and encouraged by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry has published various documents and resources for schools to support the implementation of PLCs. PLCs are now a common context for professional development in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario, and Ontario’s educators are actively engaging in PLCs. While on practicum, pre-service students in Ontario are likely to observe or participate in a PLC. Although the theory of PLCs can be taught, it is difficult to teach student teachers the collaboration and teamwork that occurs during an actual PLC.

In order to address the topic of PLCs in my undergraduate pre-service elementary Language Arts course, I have integrated a “mock” PLC into my course before a long practicum block. My intention for the simulation was that the students would benefit from the simulated PLCs on placement (and also later in their careers), since they will be familiar with the purpose of PLCs and common PLC activities. I conducted a small research study following up with my pre-service students regarding the PLC simulation to investigate whether the simulation achieved its purpose. Thus, the guiding question of this research is: would a PLC simulation be a learning experience that would benefit pre-service teachers while on placement?

## Background on Professional Learning Communities

According to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat of Ontario (2007), a PLC:

- represents a collective effort to enhance student learning
- promotes and sustains the learning of all professionals in the school
- builds knowledge through inquiry

- analyzes and uses data for reflection and improvement (p.1 )

A PLC meeting can include (but is not limited to) a variety of collaborative activities such as: planning, analyzing, and revising next steps for teaching and learning; group analysis of assessment practices; reflective inquiry on professional readings; and setting and reviewing achievement targets for individual students.

Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways (TLCPs) are one of the most common activities that occur during PLCs in Ontario’s schools. According to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, a TLCP is “is a promising model used to organize actions for teaching and student learning” (Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2008, p. 1). In the first step in the TLCP model, teachers select a focus for instruction and then collaboratively create a pretest and rubric based on the focus area. The pretest is usually one written response to a single question on the focus area. For instance, if teachers decide that the TLCP will focus on inferencing, teachers would select one text to use with all of their classes, and then collaboratively write one question to serve as the pretest that asks students to make an inference based on the text. Teachers also would collaboratively create the rubric used to assess the pretest question. Teachers then conduct the pretest with their classes, and then at a follow up PLC, teachers will collaboratively assess student work together and make plans for student instruction. Teachers will then each teach a unit on the TLCP focus topic to their classes for several weeks. At the end of the unit, the teachers will conduct a posttest on the focus area to assess student achievement. Using the same format as the pretest, the teachers will have collaboratively written both the posttest question and the rubric to mark it. Then at another PLC, the teachers will collaboratively assess the student posttests. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2008) recommends that the length of a TLCP be approximately six weeks from pretest to posttest.

PLCs are a current popular form of teacher professional development in Ontario. It has been well documented in the research that the traditional model of professional development, where experts present workshops and teachers then return to their classrooms to implement what they have learned, is ineffective. In fact, Joyce and Showers (1996) report that only ten percent of participants actually implement what they have learned during staff development sessions. Research suggests that this traditional professional development model is ineffective because it is not integrated into the real life teaching context of the classroom (Fullan, 1995) and that teachers need time to discuss, collaborate, and consolidate their learning with colleagues (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Wildman and Niles (1987) list three conditions that are essential for professional development. Teachers must have autonomy, a sense of control over their

learning, and the opportunity to collaborate with a supportive group. Hawley and Valli (2000) write that effective professional development is school-based, on-going, collaborative, and focused on increasing student achievement.

The coming together of teachers to share, discuss, and collaborate with the goal of increasing student achievement is the ultimate purpose of a PLC. The design of PLCs meets the criteria outlined in the research for effective professional development. Where the traditional form of professional development has teachers as passive participants, during PLCs, teachers are able to break the isolating confines of the classroom and work together to reflect on teaching practices to improve student learning. PLCs are also an on-going and sustained initiative, unlike traditional professional development workshops which are usually a one-time event.

Not only is the design of PLCs supported in the research, the research literature acknowledges PLCs as effective practice. For instance, Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, and Towner (2004) report that teachers who participated in PLCs over the two-year period of the study demonstrated enthusiasm to share classroom practices, openly engaged in reflection during PLCs, and collaborated to develop new instructional approaches. District-mandated standardized test scores also increased, and Hollins et al. state that the PLCs model has potential for positive learning outcomes for students. In their work with Ontario teachers, Grierson and Woloshyn (2005) researched the PLC model over a span of two years as a method of supporting teachers as teachers adopted a new literacy assessment initiative. The new initiative was successful, and teachers reported that PLCs were pivotal in the implementation of the initiative.

### **Simulations in Pre-Service Teacher Education**

A simulation is an “instructional technique that attempts to recreate certain aspects of reality for the purpose of gaining information, clarifying values, understanding other cultures, or developing a skill” (Cruz & Patterson, 2005, p. 43). Research on simulations in elementary and secondary school classrooms indicates that simulations are not necessarily more effective in increasing student achievement outcomes than other methods of instruction (Cruickshank & Telfer, 2001; Randel, Morris, Douglas Wetzel, & Whitehill, 1992). However, a meta analysis of the research literature conducted by Randel et al. (1992) finds that simulations and games result in greater student retention of knowledge and greater student interest than conventional classroom instruction.

Simulations are also used in *tertiary* education. During simulations, students “learn by doing, feeling, analyzing, and reflecting” and, thus, simulations have the potential to be powerful teaching tool in the pre-service teaching classroom (Cruz & Patterson, 2005). The use of simulations has a long history in some professional training programs such as medicine, yet it is infrequently used in pre-service education programs (Clapper, 2010). Cruickshank (1988) explains that a number of factors impact the use and implementation (or lack thereof) of simulations in pre-service education. First, many pre-service teacher educators are focused on curriculum specific content in their subject specialization and, therefore, may be more focused on specific content knowledge than pedagogy. Cruickshank also notes that many pre-service

educators may be unfamiliar with simulations as an instructional technique, and, thus, may not feel comfortable in using them. In addition, Cruickshank points out that most pre-service education classes take place in regular college or university classrooms, and these classrooms may not have the space or technical requirements for simulations; moreover, pre-service educators also “float from classroom to classroom” and this “work lifestyle” likely limits teaching techniques in pre-service education. Finally, Cruickshank states that the quality and cost of some simulations, particularly technology-enhanced simulations or laboratory simulations, may limit the use of simulations in the pre-service classroom. By 1980, Cruickshank notes that microcomputers became the preferred choice for simulations. And, indeed, decades later, technology has introduced the possibilities of using online teaching simulations and education simulation software, and there is now an emerging body of research investigating these types of virtual simulations in the pre-service classroom (Girod & Girod, 2008; McPherson, Tyler-Wood, McEnturff Ellison, & Peak, 2011). Overall, however, the research on using simulations in pre-service education is limited, and very few studies address using simulations in pre-service Language Arts courses.

## **Methodology**

### **The Simulation**

I created a PLC simulation for three of my primary-junior (elementary level) pre-service Language Arts classes. To recreate a PLC, teacher candidates worked in small groups of approximately seven students over the period of a two-hour class. Prior to the PLC, each group was assigned a different chapter based on a comprehension strategy from Miller’s (2002) *Reading with Meaning*. Once in small groups, students spent approximately 20 minutes discussing the chapter in a literature circle format (Daniels, 1994). After the literature circle, I distributed a picture book to each group. Groups were asked to use the picture book and their comprehension strategy from Miller’s book to create one well-planned higher-level thinking question that asked elementary students to apply the comprehension strategy. The groups were also asked to create a rubric to evaluate the student responses and an anchor chart displaying possible responses. Students had the remainder of the class to work cooperatively to create their question, rubric, and anchor chart. The work produced in groups was to be handed in to me after class for assessment as part of their grade for the course.

The simulation activity was designed to be closely aligned to the current PLC structure being implemented in Ontario schools. Literature circles and professional readings are a common activity during elementary grade PLCs in Ontario. Also, at the time of the simulation, Miller’s *Reading with Meaning* was a popular text used for professional development in Ontario. Schools often would focus on one of Miller’s comprehension strategies (e.g., schema, inferring, asking questions), with whole schools concentrating on a particular comprehension strategy each month and each teacher teaching the same strategy at the same time.

The second component of the simulated PLC (question and rubric writing and creating anchor charts) was based on the current Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) model

in Ontario. To reiterate, for a TLCP, educators at a PLC select a focus area and create a student pretest on that area of focus. Teachers then return to their classrooms, give the pretest and teach a unit on the focus area to their students. At another PLC, teachers create a posttest to assess student learning. At the end of the unit, teachers give the posttest to evaluate student work. TLCPs are usually done collaboratively by the teachers in a grade team or a division team. Thus, in the simulation in my pre-service Language Arts class, the pre-service teachers were acting as if they were a grade team or division, setting up for a TLCP focusing on their assigned comprehension strategy. They were creating the pretest question and rubric, as well as an anchor chart to support student learning during the teaching of the unit.

During the PLC simulation, I informally observed groups as they participated in the literature circles and discussed, planned, and collaboratively wrote their question, rubric, and anchor chart. Based on my previous research and knowledge of the PLC model in Ontario schools, the pre-service teachers were able to recreate the reality of teachers working collaboratively during a PLC. All students appeared actively engaged in the simulation activity.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

The simulation occurred the week before a six-week block of practicum placement. A few weeks after the completed practicum, pre-service teachers were asked to complete a voluntary, anonymous, and confidential open-ended reflection question that asked if the simulation experience was beneficial for them on placement and why or why not. Since I was their professor, and there was a potential for a power imbalance, a faculty member from outside of the Education faculty distributed and collected the student reflections. The faculty member from outside of Education withheld the completed anonymous reflections from me until after the course was completed and the time for student appeals of grades had passed. Ninety-eight out of 113 students completed the reflection.

The responses to the yes or no question, "Did participating in our in-class Professional Learning Community benefit you while on placement?" were tabulated. The student reflections based on the prompt, "Please explain how you benefited from the experience while on placement or why you did not" were typed into Microsoft Word. I read through compiled qualitative data several times, making notes, connections, and identifying themes and patterns that emerged (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Data were then grouped and sorted into themes using Microsoft Word. During this sorting process, I employed a constant comparative method, continually comparing data and considering different interpretations (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

#### Results

For a yes or no question that asked pre-service teachers if participating in the in-class PLC benefitted students on placement, 78 respondents (80%) responded "yes," while 20 respondents (20%) responded "no." However, the qualitative responses presented more complex results than a simple yes or no answer. Of the 20 pre-service teachers who responded there was no benefit to placement, 15 pre-service teachers

felt that there might be a potential future benefit from the PLC simulation. As the yes/no quantitative question did not provide a full picture of the feelings and responses of the participants, the results presented in the following section represent the qualitative portion of the student reflection. This section asked the pre-service teachers to "Please explain how you benefited from the experience while on placement or why you did not." The results are thus organized into three categories: the simulation was beneficial, the simulation will likely be of benefit in the future, and the simulation was not beneficial.

#### The Simulation was Beneficial

Seventy-eight pre-service teachers (80%) explained in the qualitative portion of the student reflection that the simulation benefited them while on placement. The three major themes that emerged as benefits of the PLC simulation for practicum were: an understanding of the language and processes of PLCs, being active and confident PLC participants on practicum, and preparing for collaboration with their associate teachers. In addition, an unexpected theme emerged from the data. A significant number of pre-service teachers used the study as an opportunity to reflect on their learning in general, commenting on how the PLC simulation was a valuable class activity.

#### An understanding of the language and processes of PLCs.

Many pre-service teachers explained how participating in the PLC provided them with the opportunity to acquire a deep understanding of the PLC process. For example, some pre-service teachers felt the simulation made them feel "more prepared for placement" and that the simulation "extended learning and understanding of the concept" or helped them "gain a deep understanding and knowledge of a PLC." Many pre-service teachers believed that they had a better idea of "what teachers and principals were talking about" and that they understood the education lingo better from participating in the PLC simulation. For instance, one pre-service teacher explained, "I found that the experience helped me to understand and comprehend the buzz words that teachers use while participating in PLCs." Another pre-service teacher stated, "I feel that participating in the in-class PLC was beneficial as I felt more comfortable with the terms and language while on placement." By participating in a PLC simulation, pre-service teachers felt more informed and comfortable during PLCs while on placement. As one pre-service teacher stated, "I knew what was happening and what others were talking about, even with the acronyms being used. I felt that I didn't need to rely on others." Another pre-service teacher reflected, "Without learning and participating in a PLC in class, I would have felt so lost in the school PLC I was in." Feeling prepared for placement was important to the pre-service teachers and helped to solidify their identities as teachers. As one pre-service teacher reflected:

I found that it [the simulation] was helpful because often times placement, I think that the staff and our associate teachers do not feel that we really know what is going on in schools. Therefore, when we go into placement and know what a TLCP is, we seem like legitimate teachers.



### **Active and confident PLC participants on practicum.**

Understanding the language, terminology, and processes of PLCs enabled pre-service teachers to actively engage in PLCs while on placement. For instance, one student stated, "It [the simulation] helped me understand the language and process of PLCs, which allowed me to participate in meaningful way." Another pre-service teacher reflected, "I participated in a PLC at my school, and it was nice to know and be able to keep up with the meeting participants, and to be able to understand what they were talking about." Confidence and comfort were reoccurring words in the pre-service teachers' reflections and many pre-service teachers cited the simulation as increasing their confidence while on placement. One pre-service teacher shared, "I had several PLCs during my first placement but had no clue what was really going on. At my second placement, after doing the class activity, I felt confident during the PLCs." Another pre-service teacher explained, "It [the PLC simulation], made me feel comfortable doing it with my colleagues before doing it in the schools. I felt comfortable speaking up in front of the experienced teachers in the school." Another student shared:

I was involved in one [a PLC] on placement and it was nice to have some background knowledge going into it. I was able/felt comfortable offering up ideas and sharing opinions at my placement. I felt this task was very useful as a pre-service teacher.

Feeling "confident enough to contribute" was important to the pre-service teachers because as one student wrote, being actively involved in the PLCs "made me feel like I was a part of the staff team."

### **Collaboration with teachers on practicum.**

Pre-service teachers also indicated that the simulation experience helped prepare them for the collaboration and team approach being used in their placement schools. One pre-service teacher stated, "I benefited from the experience while on placement because it prepared me well for collaborating with my associate teachers for literacy approaches and lessons." Working with others to plan literacy units and assessments was viewed as a valuable experience: "It showed me how to work collaboratively. It's not about just what I think." During the simulation, pre-service teachers had to work through the challenges of working collaboratively, just as they would during a real PLC. One pre-service teacher reflected that the simulation "gave all of us the opportunity to see how teachers have differing opinions and how they work through their differences." Using a simulation also helped capture group dynamics in a way perhaps not possible through traditional instruction: "I do not think the discussion/disagreements could be captured in a lecture about PLCs. Experiencing the collaboration of pre-service teachers and obstacles of a PLC prepared me for potentially more discussion/disagreement when I am in a PLC with teachers."

### **Reflection on learning.**

Pre-service teachers took the reflection opportunity to explain not only if and how the simulation experience benefited them on placement, but also how it benefited them as learners. Many reflected that that they learned

more with the simulation than they would have through other pedagogical styles. These pre-service teachers commented on how the simulation was "hands on" and they learned and retained more using this style of teaching and learning than they would have through a lecture. For instance, one pre-service teacher reflected, "I find that through lecture style, teaching with new terms, they go over my head. Actually moving through the motions of a PLC was very good." Another pre-service teacher stated, "Actually doing rather than just listening was much more beneficial and allowed me to understand and grasp what was involved when teaching." This type of hands-on learning made an impression for one student:

The activity we did in class did benefit me in my placement. Going through the process in class made it a lot easier to understand instead of just talking about it. It made the experience really stick, and when it came up in placement, I knew what I was doing. I feel I completely understand the entire process and was able to use it on placement.

A number of pre-service teachers also used the reflection to inform me of the value of the activity to the course. They stated it was "a very worthwhile assignment, "and "very valuable." A few pre-service teachers urged me to continue the activity in future years. For instance, one pre-service teacher wrote, "Please continue to do such things in the future as it does provide good insight and a higher degree of understanding."

### **The Simulation Will Likely Be of Benefit in the Future**

Fifteen students indicated that they did not participate in a PLC on placement and, therefore, the simulation was not a direct benefit to the practicum experience. However, these 15 pre-service students thought the simulation experience would likely benefit them in the future. For example, one pre-service teacher stated:

I didn't have an opportunity to see a PLC taking place, so it wasn't relevant to this placement. However, I did appreciate taking part in it because in the future it will prove to be beneficial. I found it a valuable way to explore PLCs and helped me better understand all that is involved.

Another student explained, "I wish it did [benefit me]! I'm sure the experience from the in-class lesson will eventually be beneficial but I unfortunately did not see any PLCs while on placement." Other students wrote more general statements about the future benefits of the simulation, such as "the potential future benefit is very large" and "I am more informed and it will help me later on."

### **The Simulation Was Not Beneficial**

The qualitative results indicate that five pre-service teachers found no benefit to the PLC simulation. Two students explained they did not benefit because the PLCs they participated in while on placement differed procedurally from the in-class simulation activity. One of these students explained, "The meetings I attended on practicum were not like the one we did in class at all." The third student who indicated no benefit to the PLC simulation explained that he/she was already familiar with the PLC format from a previous practicum experience. The fourth student who did not find

any benefit for the simulation simply stated that he/she did not see or participate in a PLC on placement. Finally the fifth student who indicated no benefit from the PLC simulation wrote that he/she did not realize that the activity was a mock PLC and thought it was only an in-class activity.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The in-class simulation had an immediate benefit for 80% of the pre-service education students in the study, indicating that participation in the simulated PLC enhanced their practicum experience and their learning. Pre-service teachers believed that the simulation gave them the required knowledge of the structure and language of PLCs, helped them be active and confident during PLCs on placement, and prepared them for collaborating with teachers while on practicum. The simulation also had the unexpected benefit of providing students with a chance to reflect on their own learning during their pre-service teacher education program. To this end, the simulation was successful in that the students learned by “by doing, feeling, analyzing, and reflecting” (Cruz & Patterson, 2005, p. 43). The simulation also successfully recreated the reality of a PLC, and students were able to gain information, clarify values, understand other cultures, or develop a skill (Cruz & Patterson, 2005). In addition, the PLC simulation had a potential future benefit for an additional 15% of pre-service teachers in the study. While these pre-service teachers did not benefit from the simulation on their next placement, they believed that there would be a future benefit later in their careers resulting from the in-class simulation experience. Therefore, overall, 95% of the pre-service teachers felt the PLC simulation was a benefit or that they likely to benefit from the experience in the future.

I believe that one of the reasons this simulation was successful was due to the fact that possible barriers to simulations in the pre-service classroom as outlined by Cruickshank (1988) were mitigated. First, I was familiar and comfortable with simulations as a teaching strategy. The simulation was also content focused in Language Arts and specific to the Ontario Language Arts curriculum and, thus, I perceived and still perceive the simulation as valuable component to my course. The simulation was also easy to implement, required no special equipment, technology, or classroom space, and it cost nothing.

Based on the results of the study, I offer to professors of literacy education the following suggestions when implementing simulations in the pre-service education literacy classroom.

#### **Suggestion #1: The Simulation Should Be Context Specific, Authentic, and Timely**

I believe that the perceived success and benefits of the PLC simulation hinged on the fact that pre-service teachers saw a direct application between the in-class activity and their placement experience. Pre-service teachers were able to make clear connections between their teacher education and the real teaching world. In order for this to occur, I suggest that simulations be carefully planned to be context specific, authentic, and timely.

First, simulations need to be context specific to suit

the literacy initiatives that are being implemented in the locale where students are on practicum. For instance, this simulation on PLCs was specific to the Ontario context and initiatives being mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education. This simulation would likely need to be adapted to match local initiatives if implemented by other professors of literacy education in different states or provinces.

Second, simulations need to be as authentic as possible. What is being simulated in pre-service literacy education classes needs to be a close representation to what is being currently done in school settings. While each school within a board or district may have variations with the implementation of literacy initiatives, the simulation should broadly represent what pre-service teachers can expect while on placement.

Finally, simulations will likely need to change every year or so and eventually some simulations may become obsolete. When I conducted this simulation, TLCPs and Miller's (2002) comprehension strategies were common topics for PLCs in Ontario's schools. As time goes on and literacy initiatives and trends in education change, simulations need to change as well.

#### **Suggestion #2: Debrief After the Simulation**

A debriefing session after a practicum placement will allow the students to share with their classmates, and with you, their reflections on the simulation and their teaching placement. Some of the pre-service teachers in my study who felt that the simulation did not benefit them commented that the PLC they participated in on placement was different from the one simulated in class. This was perhaps a lost teachable moment. A class debriefing might have helped pre-service teachers make connections between the simulated PLC and the PLC they saw on placement. As Cruz and Patterson (2005) state, a debrief is “crucial so that misunderstandings are avoided and specific concepts can be clarified” (p. 43). A class debrief or discussion would have also informed me as an instructor of the variations and evolution of the PLCs in various settings, and thus I could possibly make changes and improvements to the simulation for the following year.

#### **Concluding Thoughts**

This study is limited by the fact that the pre-service teachers were students in my Language Arts classes and they were a convenience sample. The pre-service teachers also handed in their PLC outputs (i.e., a question, rubric, and anchor chart) for assessment as an assignment for my course, and this may have impacted how they participated in the simulation. Data for the study are limited in that the study relies on a one-time self-report of pre-service teachers. No other qualitative or quantitative data regarding students participating PLCs on placement were collected.

There is still additional research needed pertaining to the use of simulations in pre-service education. Possible future studies could observe pre-service teachers while on practicum to research whether students transfer knowledge, skills, and attitudes from simulation experiences to the practicum classroom. Further, more research about quality literacy-based simulations that are inexpensive and easy to implement and examples thereof would assist professors of

literacy education in integrating simulations into their classes.

As a professor of pre-service literacy education, it is my personal goal to guide pre-service teachers in becoming prepared, knowledgeable, collaborative, and reflective literacy educators. It is, therefore, rewarding to hear that not only did students appreciate the simulation, but also that the simulation helped increase their confidence and knowledge on placement, allowed them to be active participants in collaborative professional development, and that the simulation directly related to what the students experienced in the “real world” on placement. I believe that the simulation experience taught my pre-service Language Arts students in ways that lectures, class discussion, and demonstrations could not.

In sum, this research provides insight into the benefits of using simulations in pre-service literacy education as well as practical suggestions for those literacy education professors looking to implement simulations into their classes. With the vast majority of participants in this study indicating that the simulation was a beneficial experience or that it will likely be of benefit in the future, using simulations is clearly a pedagogical technique that deserves more attention and use in pre-service teacher education programs.

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# Where Does the Time Go? Reading for Pleasure and Preservice Teachers

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## Introduction

Teacher educators have been charged with bestowing upon preservice teachers opportunities and models that encourage their engagement in reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). In this vein, every semester I ask my students who among them has read a book for pleasure over our break, and few students raise their hands. Due to the fact that these preservice teachers are slated to be elementary school teachers who will teach reading within two years, it is important that they read for pleasure. The notion is troubling that preservice teachers of reading avoid pleasure reading. Having an elementary school teacher who does not read is akin to having a mechanic who does not drive. Thus, each semester I question why these preservice teachers are not reading books for pleasure.

An engaged reader reads with enthusiasm and often (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999). However, many college students are not demonstrating criteria within the definition of an engaged reader. In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) found that there were steep declines in the amount of literature, poetry, and fiction that young adults were reading. Simultaneously, reading comprehension is deteriorating with the United States ranking only 15 out of 31 industrialized nations regarding students' reading scores (NEA, 2004). Readers of literature are more likely to volunteer, play sports, and attend cultural events than their non-reading counterparts (NEA, 2004). With such a decline in reading for pleasure, educators and educational researchers may question what undergraduate students are doing with their time if they are not reading.

While many college students read through Web 2.0 (blogs, social media, etc.), text messages, or assigned text for class, how many read literature for pleasure? Rosenblatt (1978) believed that readers had two modes within which they experienced text, the efferent and aesthetic. When readers are responding to text in the efferent stance, they are reading to obtain information. On the other hand, when readers are reading in the aesthetic stance, they are immersed in the text and primarily reading for enjoyment. Thus, different types of reading create different experiences. In the case of 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers, reading Web 2.0 or text messages for information differs from having the experience of reading literature for enjoyment.

Reading literature for pleasure, with regard to this study, is defined as the reading of novels, short stories, plays, or poetry in one's spare time that is not for school or work purposes (NEA, 2004). It should be noted that all contemporary books were included in this definition, and there was not a distinction made with regard to the differences in the quality of literature, as readers' tastes differ. Likewise, such readings that take place in a magazine, e-reader, or online also are included. Thus, if literature is read for pleasure, it is included in this definition. This study investigated how undergraduate

college students reported spending their time. Specifically, preservice teachers were asked to log the minutes they spent engaged in various activities.

## Literature Review

Aliteracy is defined as a "lack of reading habit especially in capable readers who choose not to read" (Scott, 1996). Aliteracy has become a concern for many college professors with regard to their students, including preservice teachers. This is important because reading motivation has been found to be fostered in classrooms where the teacher is a reading model to his or her students (Gambrell, 1996). Therefore, it seems of particular importance that those who will teach and motivate youngsters to read should be readers. In fact, Turner, Applegate, and Applegate (2009) recently stated that one of the qualities they feel is crucial for teachers who are becoming literacy leaders is a "profound love and respect for the printed word" (p. 254).

## Reading and Preservice Teachers

Contrasting with the notion that preservice teachers should have a love of reading, recent research shows a different picture. Today nearly half of all Americans, ages 18-24, read zero books for pleasure. This is concerning when one considers that a reported 65% of college freshman read for pleasure an hour or less a week (NEA, 2004). At the same time, 75% of college freshman reported socializing, and 30% reported using online social networks for over five hours a week (Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, & Pryor, 2010.) These findings coincide with the findings from the United States Department of Labor (2011) that reported full-time college students spent 3.6 hours a day on leisure and sports activities, which did not include reading. Thus, one may question why reading is not a part of those three and a half hours.

While Burgess and Jones (2010) found that college students would read when it came to coursework, it was uncommon for them to read for leisure. A study about college students' reading habits and the Internet revealed that college students enjoy spending time on the Internet more than reading for recreation (Mokhtari, Reichard & Gardner, 2009). This is despite the fact Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) recently found self-selected pleasure reading to positively impact Japanese L2 college students' reading ability. The more books the participants read, the more their reading ability improved. Moreover, research on college students' reading habits revealed that reading for pleasure was correlated with creativity (Kelly & Kneipp, 2009), a result that is especially interesting for preservice teachers for whom creativity is a desired trait.

Even more troubling is that education majors were found to read for pleasure less than other college students (Chen, 2007). Applegate and Applegate (2004) found that undergraduate education majors were unenthusiastic about

reading, a trend they named “The Peter Effect.” This term was coined after the biblical story of the Apostle Peter, who stated that he could not give what he did not have. Benevides and Peterson (2010) found that preservice teachers’ reading habits and attitudes about reading correlated with participants’ literacy scores. Thus, a teacher who does not take pleasure in reading literature may not be able to demonstrate literacy skills as well as a teacher who does read literature for pleasure.

### **The Importance of Teachers Reading For Pleasure**

The Peter Effect has been found to impact preservice and inservice teachers alike (Nathanson, Pruslow, & Levitt, 2008). Having a teacher who is a reader is important because students are influenced by such models (Gambrell, 1996; Rogoff, 1990). Having a reading model within the classroom can be especially important to today’s children, who are growing up immersed in media (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). The Kaiser Family Foundation found that even children as young as zero to six years old use screen media for a total of 1:58 minutes a day, with most of this time spent watching television or videos. This time is compared to the 39 minutes a day these children spent reading or being read to. Thus, when these students enter school, they will benefit from being read to by a teacher and having a teacher who can introduce new books for the child to read.

Research has shown that teachers who read for pleasure have been found to be more likely to implement positive literacy practices in their classroom when compared to those who do not read for pleasure (Morrison, Jacobs, & Swinyard, 1999.) Such literacy practices are increasingly important in today’s high stakes and diverse classrooms, where the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has increased teacher requirements to improve children’s testable reading achievements (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Such testing is of concern since some young students enter the classroom with little or no early literacy knowledge.

Allington (1984) stated that children who lack experiences with books and reading usually do not perform well on kindergarten assessments. Thus, a kindergartener who begins school without having books at home or adults to read with may be starting at a disadvantage. However, Allington (1984) also feels that access to effective teachers is what matters the most. Emergent literacy includes the skills, information, and attitudes that come before formal reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Some children enter the classroom with emergent literacy skills such as knowledge of letters and sounds (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). However, some students do not have these skills. This is worrisome as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Childhood Research Network (NICHD, 2005) found that emergent literacy skills, specifically oral language skills, in 4.5 year old children predicted the ability to decode words in first grade and comprehend text in third grade. Likewise, Adams (1995) stated that the acquisition of reading can be fostered by a number of preliterate skills that materialize in the preschool years.

Furthermore, in many classrooms, children may be coming to school from homes which are not plentiful with literature or readers. Allington (1984) found children as young

as the first grade already beginning to show major differences in their vocabulary abilities, as well as the texts to which they are exposed. Moreover, Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) showed that reading acquisition in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade is linked to reading ability 10 years later. The Matthew Effect was a term used by Walberg and Tsai (1983) with regard to education and the cumulative advantage occurring in students who have a strong academic background. In other words, the Matthew Effect states that those who are rich get richer. With regard to reading, those who have greater vocabulary and more experience in reading grow quickly as readers, while their counterparts who are less successful in reading do not grow as much (Allington, 1984). In an article that specifically investigated how the Matthew Effect impacted reading, Stanovich (1986) stated that instruction may be a possible mediator for the Matthew Effect.

With the combined knowledge that preservice teachers are not reading for pleasure often, despite the fact such reading is correlated with positive practices, and that students need teachers in the classroom who read for pleasure, one may question why preservice teachers are not reading. Interestingly, Nathanson and colleagues (2008) found that the decline in reading could partly be blamed on a deficit in passion for reading. But, what is to blame for this lack of passion? Dewey (1915) believed that learning should center on children by providing activities and direction. This statement rings true for educators of college students, too. However, it is difficult for college professors to determine what weight activities, such as reading for pleasure, should have in an undergraduate program. Perhaps if teacher educators understand how preservice teachers spend their time, it would help them to better understand how to mediate natural selection of activities on the part of students with instructor-directed activities.

### **Purpose**

This study differs from previous research as it aims to fill the gaps in the literature by focusing on how college students are spending their time when they are not completing coursework. Specifically, this research investigated whether or not preservice teachers read for pleasure, and what they do during their leisure time. The questions that guided this research were:

1. How much leisure time do preservice teachers spend reading literature for pleasure?
2. On what leisure activities do preservice teachers spend their time?
3. Is there a significant difference between the amount of time preservice teachers read literature and engage in other activities?

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants in this study included 63 university students enrolled in a language development and reading acquisition course at a large, mid-Atlantic university. The course focuses on young children’s language development and the relationship between language and reading acquisition. In this course, students learned concepts

essential to language development; language achievement appropriate at various ages; concepts of emergent literacy; models of reading acquisition and skilled reading; and major components of reading such as phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. This course is required for Early Childhood and Elementary Education majors. The demographics of the participants were consistent with elementary education majors as 93 percent were female.

### Reading Log Procedures

Participants completed a reading log, in which they were asked to report the amount of minutes they spent on given activities over the course of a week. In addition to logging these minutes, participants recorded the amount of time they engaged in other pleasurable activities. Participants were to keep the reading logs with them during the day, which enabled them to record events as they occurred; this procedure was put in place to help the preservice teachers create an accurate log of the activities as they took place. Likewise, participants were better able to document an accurate time allotment for the activity. If a participant only completed a portion of the reading log, that log was excluded from the study. Due to the many requirements of the course, as well as the participants' other courses, reading logs were used only for one week. Data from the Reading Logs were collected at two different time points during the semester. For one group of participants, data were collected in the beginning of the second week of classes. This week was chosen, as participants felt this was the time in the semester that they had a substantial amount of free time in which to participate in leisure activities. For another group of participants, the week in which these activities were recorded was in the middle of the semester (between midterms and finals) during a time when classes were in session. This week was chosen, as participants were in the middle of their semester.

As a class, the participants brainstormed the pleasurable activities they pursue most often during a week. Then, participants were asked to record on a daily basis how many minutes they pursued the following pleasurable activities: read literature (this includes novels, short stories, plays, and poetry); read magazines or newspapers; use email, Facebook, Twitter, or search the Internet; talk on the telephone; text; watch television; and watch movies. In addition, participants had the opportunity to record any additional reading activities in which they participated. Preservice teacher participants did not record reading activities that were associated with work or school, as the focus of this study was to hone in on the minutes participants spent exclusively reading for pleasure. At the end of the week, participants added up the total amount of minutes they spent on each of these activities.

### Results

To answer question one, "How much leisure time do preservice teachers spend reading literature for pleasure?" the reading log responses of preservice teachers were read and analyzed. Preservice teachers reported that daily they spent an average of 67.79 minutes reading literature for pleasure. However, 44% of the participants reported reading zero minutes, and 78% reported reading one hour or less.

For question two, "On what leisure activities do preservice

teachers spend their time?"

preservice teachers reported spending their time on various other activities, of which the following were most reported: texting, watching television, using Facebook, searching the Internet, and talking on the telephone. The activity that took most of the preservice teachers' time was texting. In fact, participants reported texting for an average of 540.49 minutes, and only two participants reported they did not text. Watching television or movies (463.12 minutes) and using Facebook or other social networking (361.57 minutes) were the second and third most popular sources of activity. The fourth and fifth most reported activities were talking on the telephone with friends and family (199.55 minutes) and searching the Internet for pleasure (176.57 minutes). Refer to Figure 1 for a summary of activities.

To answer question three, "Is there a significant difference between the amount of time preservice teachers read literature and engage in other activities?" paired sample t-tests compared the minutes spent reading literature for pleasure and various other activities. Results indicate that there is a significant difference between the amount of time spent reading literature and engaging in other activities, such as texting  $t(63) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .000$ ; using Facebook or social networking  $t(63) = 5.78$ ,  $p < .000$ ; talking on the telephone  $t(63) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and surfing the Internet  $t(63) = 2.96$ ,  $p < .004$ . A Bonferroni adjusted alpha for conceptually grouped outcomes to control Type I error was used. These findings revealed that the preservice teachers spent a significantly greater amount of time engaging in various activities rather than reading literature.

### Limitations

Before discussing the implications of this study, it is important to acknowledge the factors that limit the findings. First, the participants in this research attended the same university and were enrolled in a reading and language course with the same instructor. Therefore, the ability to generalize this research may be limited. Also, the data collection took place for a week during the semester. Perhaps the results would vary if data were collected during participants' summer or winter break from college. Lastly, the information from the reading logs is based on self-reports. The participants were responsible for reporting an accurate account of the activities in which they participated, and the precise time they spent on the activities.

### Discussion

While Rosenblatt (1938) conjectured that it was the job of teachers to help human beings realize that literature can be a source of pleasure, many preservice teachers do not read for pleasure themselves. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the amount of time preservice teachers spend reading literature for pleasure. Further, this research aimed to identify how preservice teachers spend their time in terms of reading literature for pleasure and other activities. The findings have significant implications for teacher educators and educational researchers alike.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of these findings is the fact that so many participants reported that they



did not read or read very little literature for pleasure. This absence of reading literature is of concern, especially when the participants consist of preservice elementary school teachers who are enrolled in a reading methods class. In fact, within two years, the majority of these participants will begin teaching reading to children who are in kindergarten through fifth grade. The lack of time they spend reading books may potentially impact their ability to teach reading.

First, one's ability to teach reading may be affected by one's lack of being a model of reading. Rogoff (1990) stated that modeling was one factor that encouraged reading behaviors in young emergent readers. The implication of this statement is that one who does not model reading is limited in ability to help another learn to read. For example, if a teacher is reading a book for pleasure and comes upon a passage he/she does not understand, he/she will use strategies to help him/her discern the exact meaning of the passage. By doing this, the teacher will have used the metacognitive reading strategy of comprehension monitoring (Baker & Brown, 1984). Not only will this teacher understand this strategy, but he/she will have had an experience with this metacognitive strategy to share with the students. Thus, this teacher will be able to better explain the metacognitive strategy he/she used when reading while teaching the student. Also, the teacher most likely will have more reading strategies in his/her repertoire due to the fact that he/she uses them when reading, which the teacher can then share with the student. This knowledge and modeling of reading strategies is important to both the teacher and those who are learning to read.

Second, preservice teachers who are reading models will motivate their elementary school students to read (Gambrell, 1996). Motivating youngsters to read could be difficult to do if the teacher does not enjoy reading. While many teachers are likely to gravitate toward teaching in the same manner in which they were taught (Kagan, 1992), a teacher who is a reader may have a greater range of motivating experiences from which to teach reading. For instance, teachers who truly love reading will be more likely to identify with their students as a reader. Not only will they be able to guide the elementary school students in the process of learning to read, but they also will be able to share their experiences with text. Thus, teachers can share stories of their favorite books, places they like to read, reasons they like to read, and characters with which they identify. This motivation will further their students' excitement for reading.

Third, while it is a concern that there was a significant difference in the amount of time preservice teachers spent reading for pleasure compared to other activities, another interesting finding was how the participants were using their time. Specifically, the substantial amount of time participants spent texting, on the telephone, and using Facebook is of consequence. While other activities may lend themselves to indirect reading (i.e., searching the Internet or blogging), texting, talking on the telephone, and using Facebook are all aspects of socializing that may not lend themselves to incidental reading or learning.

With regard to the great amount of time spent socializing through technology, the findings in this study are in line with

those of Ruiz, Sharkness, Kelly, DeAngelo, & Pryor (2010). In this study, the preservice teachers spent a lot of time texting or using Facebook. This is notable, as this is the current way in which college students are socializing. However, during these times, they are effectively alone but attempting to connect with others they may not even know. Perhaps they could achieve the same level of fulfillment by interacting with a character from a new book or reconnecting with a "friend" from a book they read years before. Additionally, socializing also could take place in conjunction with reading through book clubs or literature circles.

Teacher educators can introduce and incorporate literature into preservice teachers' lives through new technology to create social situations, like Facebook, e-readers, and blogs. By using these technologies, preservice teachers may feel more technologically savvy and enjoy a social aspect that technology provides while reading. In turn, this may enhance their desire to read. Another way socializing can be introduced to preservice teachers is through literature circles or book clubs, whether in person or online. These reading groups are one way to have students experience reading for pleasure. Through such groups, preservice teachers will have the opportunity to engage in literature by discussing character development, plot, and other aspects of the book with other preservice teachers. In the end, if students have fingertip access to literature and are given opportunities to be social, as they currently have when text messaging, perhaps they will choose to read more literature.

### Conclusion

Technology is evolving every day. Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook have been introduced to our culture, and college students are allocating much of their time to these new activities. The findings of this study show that college students are not spending time reading literature. Applegate and Applegate (2004) stated that one way to recreate reading enthusiasm is through college courses. Perhaps as educators, we can leverage Dewey's (1915) ideas and work more socialization into reading activities in the classroom through technology.

This study is significant to professors and educational researchers as it begins to shed light upon the activities on which undergraduate students are spending their time. Future research should focus on expanding this study and investigating why preservice teachers are choosing other leisure activities over reading. Further, educational researchers need to explore how to engage preservice teachers in reading activities that will motivate them to use their time to read books for pleasure as past research has shown that such reading has been linked to positive teaching practices and creativity. Finally, teacher educators must continue to delve into ways in which reading can be incorporated into the busy and technologically savvy lives of our undergraduate preservice teachers.

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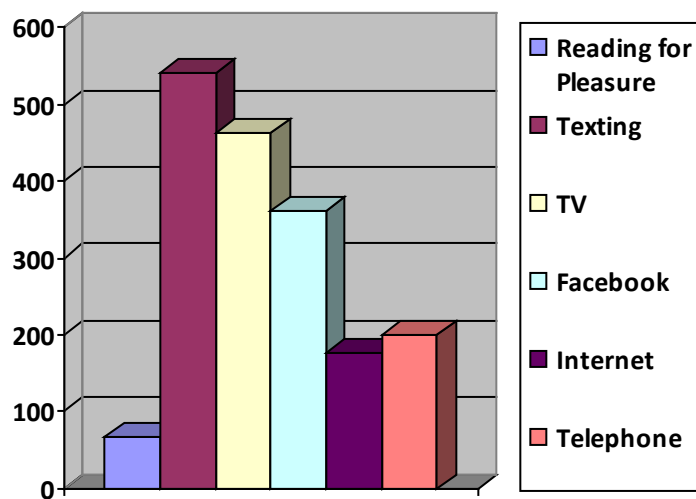
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**Figure 1.** Number of Minutes in a Week Preservice Teachers Spent on Leisure Activities

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# A PD for Teri: Professional Development for a Middle School Teacher in Her Own Classroom with Her Own Students

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## Introduction

During the beginning of her second year of teaching, Teri (pseudonym), one of my former undergraduate students, invited me to serve as a guest reader for her middle grade students in a rural, east Tennessee school. At the end of the same school year, she again contacted me—this time in regards to an idea for her own professional growth for the upcoming school year. She exclaimed, “My students just aren’t doing well. I need help” (personal conversation).

## Review of the literature

After reviewing the literature regarding professional development, I discovered that “...intensive and sustained efforts over a period of time are more likely to be effective in improving instruction than intermittent workshops with no follow up mechanisms...” (Wei, R.C., Darling-Hammonds, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S., 2009, p. 58). Furthermore, a position statement issued by the National Middle School Association (NMSA, 2004) suggests a “...link between staff development and increased student achievement” and that effective PDs gave teachers the “...opportunities for discussion, reflection, and follow up.” Although not unexpected, no studies were found that involved explicitly modeling for teachers pre-selected reading and writing strategies with their own students and in their own classrooms over an extended period of time.

## Identification of the focus for the PD

Before discussing what areas Teri wanted to address in her PD, I reviewed the position statements from the International Reading Association (IRA). Specifically, IRA suggests that “[T]eachers and administrators must...evaluate methods and programs through the lens of their particular school and classroom settings. They must determine if the instructional strategies and routines that are central to the materials are a good match for the children they teach” ([www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)). With this in mind, I decided to empower Teri to direct her own PD and, as a result, based on her students’ standardized test scores and the School Improvement Plan (SPI), Teri targeted two areas for growth—the teaching of vocabulary and reading comprehension—via reading and writing strategies. Having provided her with a list of strategies targeting vocabulary and reading comprehension, Teri then decided upon six of these for me to target when developing her PD. These targeted areas included strategies involving think alouds, graphic organizers, self-selection of words, word walls, dramatization of words, and word sorts (Roe, Smith, & Burns, 2011). After each model lesson concluded, with at least one of the previously listed strategies included, Teri was then responsible for using the strategy with her students across content areas.

## Questions

Throughout the implementation of the study, the following

three questions guided the research and the design of the PD: (1) How will modeling for specific comprehension strategies influence teaching? (2) How will modeling specific literacy strategies affect student learning? and (3) How will scaffolding for the teacher affect student attitude toward reading?

## The Plan for intervention

Having served as Teri’s instructor in a reading methods course, I recognized our potential to work together toward a common literacy goal. I was, therefore, persuaded to try something “radical” in the world of professional development. Over a period of approximately 9 months—September to May—I would apply what I learned about professional development from the literature review, and I would model for Teri the teaching of pre-selected literacy strategies with her own students in her designated classroom. Ultimately, I would visit her classroom between one and three hours on at least one Friday each month, and the number of visits would depend on weather-related school closings, the school calendar, and our own schedules. After each visit, we would follow up with one another by phone or, whenever possible, through face-to-face meetings during lunch or her planning time. We also e-mailed and/or talked with each other on the phone during the time between my visits. While I, too, conveyed my desire for Teri to keep a reflective journal, she insisted that she simply did not have time for professional journaling. However, she assured me that she understood the importance of reflective practices and pointed out that our telephone conversations and e-mails between visits would provide her with avenues for reflection.

During the implementation of the PD, I would also collect data including pre-surveys, post surveys, and interviews with the teacher and students, student work, as well as student assessments already in place. The data collection would help determine the success of the intervention.

## Strategy modeling

In the first PD lessons I taught, I modeled using think alouds as well as a Venn diagram. Because Teri cautioned that any reading or writing activity was a difficult sell with her students, I also modeled using picture books, hoping to motivate Teri’s middle school students. Murphy (2009) lends support for this type of endeavor by suggesting that “Picture books are effective teaching tools in middle level classrooms... They appeal to early adolescent students because of their interesting artwork, accessible language, and brief text, which stimulate enjoyment” (p. 24). Also, as Yopp and Yopp (2007) pointed out, “Research by Haynes and Ahrens revealed that printed texts—including children’s books—contained more rare words than language used in adult and children’s television programs and adult conversations” (p. 157). Because of the vocabulary, humor, and differing points of view featured, I chose the following books—*The Wolf’s Story* (Forward, 2007), *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad*

*Pig* (Trivizas, 1997), and *The True Story of the Big, Bad Wolf* (Scieszka, 1989). I later used the picture books *Voices in the Park* (Brown, 1998) and *The Empty Pot* (Demi, 1990) to model the teaching of vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. I, too, introduced her students to the following novels: *The Teacher's Funeral* (Peck, 2004), *Al Capone Does My Shirts* (Choldenko, 2004), *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1971), *Walk Two Moons* (Creech, 1994), and *Love That Dog* (Creech, 2001).

Although Teri had not previously used novels with her students, with her consent, I provided the class with multiple copies of the previously mentioned novels via my personal library and a used bookstore. At different times throughout the study, I introduced novels through the teaching of one or more of the pre-selected strategies.

When introducing one of the first novels, *The Teacher's Funeral*, I pre-taught vocabulary which allowed me to model the strategy of self-selecting words. I modeled choosing words that intrigued me or words that I thought the students might now know. For example, to pre-teach the word "manicotti" from *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, I introduced a word wall and a second graphic organizer, adopted from the Frayer model (Frayer, D., Frederick, W. C., and Klausmeier, H. J., 1969). I provided students with several copies of the graphic organizer and encouraged them to self-select vocabulary from any of their readings and to record the words on the sheet. To deepen comprehension, students also created character maps similar to those found at [www.ReadWriteThink.org](http://www.ReadWriteThink.org) (2013).

With the novels, I also specifically modeled dramatizing words such as "rigor mortis" and engaged students in physically acting out words to help better understand word meanings. I, too, introduced word sorts, both open and closed, to pre-teach vocabulary as well as to examine word structures and definitions.

In addition, I provided students with a graphic organizer, namely a predict-o-gram (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2002). This graphic organizer not only encouraged students to make predictions about a story, specifically *The Empty Pot*, it also engaged the tactile learners because they were required, after writing given word on a separate slip of paper, to physically place the words in the appropriate area of the chart. The use of the graphic organizer also provided for social interaction because students worked on their chart in pairs, defending their predictions or placement of the words both before and after the reading of the story.

Another graphic organizer I modeled was the anticipation guide that requires students to provide evidence from the story to support their responses. I adapted one from [www.ReadWriteThink.org](http://www.ReadWriteThink.org) to specifically use with the picture book, *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1993). For students who were reluctant to share their thinking out loud, this provided another avenue for students to prepare or organize their thoughts before sharing.

With Teri continuing to point out that her students were reluctant writers, I decided to introduce them to the writing of poetry. We began with *Love That Dog* and, as I had suspected, several of the students said they identified with the main character's dislike of poetry. The class then participated in a grand conversation where we discussed the pros and cons

of reading and writing poetry.

In my next classroom visit, Teri and I performed a poem for two voices, and her students were hooked! They took turns reading from *Joyful Noise* and *I Am Phoenix*, both by Paul Fleischman (1998, 1999).

Later, in science class, I modeled reading a non-fiction text about owls, as well as identifying text features and key points, in an online source, *The Owl Pages* (<http://www.owlpages.com/articles.php?section=owl+physiology&title=digestion>). I also modeled asking questions to assess student reading comprehension: Students identified the main idea of the article and made inferences regarding owl behaviors. In addition, I modeled using context clues to decode what the author meant by "regurgitation" as well as "prey" and, in pairs, we even dissected owl pellets. Then, I pulled out *Joyful Noise* once more and shared that, as a class, we were going to write a poem for two voices, focusing on owls. From there, students, on their own and in pairs, began writing poems for two voices during class time and outside of class time.

On still another day, I modeled writing a poem using George Ella Lyon's (1999) *Where I'm From* format. After listening to the podcast of the author reading her poem, *Where I'm From*, students talked about how they related to the poem: They shared that all but one had grown up in the Appalachian area just as George Ella Lyon. With unanticipated enthusiasm, students worked on their own poems, using the format for *Where I'm From* and an *I Am* format found on an interactive website (<http://ettcweb.lrk12.nj.us/forms/iampoem.htm>). Some students even opted to share their poems out loud. When reading the following poems, Teri's own enthusiasm and pride for her students was evident in her question: "My students wrote these?"

### **I Am From**

I'm from family reunions and playing guitars

I'm from moving and cookouts

And from shooting guns

I'm from "Thunder is God bowling" and "Sleep tight don't let the bed bugs bite," and "Pain is weakness leaving the body."

I'm from bluegrass music playing.

I'm from [East Tennessee] and [I'm] part Cherokee.

I'm from chicken and banana puddin'...

### **I Am From**

I am from the cell phone, a big screen TV, and dirty dishes.

I am from comfortable rooms, good smells. I am from the rose in the garden and the [big] oak tree.

I am from having fun and hazel eyes, from [Nona and Kathleen].

I'm from partying and cleaning and from hanging out.

I'm from *don't drink* and *don't do drugs* and *If You're Happy and You Know It*.

I'm from Christmas dinner and East Tennessee, cherry pie, and cotton candy...

Later in the year we took our writing to another level while engaging in a small multi-genre report centering on the nonfiction story *Mailing May* (Tunnell, 2000). As a class we made a word wall for the book and talked about possible genres to use in telling the nonfiction story from different perspectives.

While discussing multi-genre reports, students soon realized that in order to successfully write the multi-genre pieces, they needed to know more about the era in which May lived, train transportation, and even what she might have seen or experienced on her journey to her grandmother's home. As a result, students conducted research and wrote pieces from the perspective of many of the characters in *Mailing May*. For example, students wrote personal letters from the perspective of May and her grandmother as well as a telegram from the perspective of May's father. One student even wrote an essay comparing the type of locomotive in the story to the magnetic trains used in Japan.

### Reflective practice

After my classroom visits, Teri and I discussed aspects of my lessons that unfolded smoothly as well as those that did not go as planned. We also discussed follow up lessons that Teri had implemented or would provide as well as ideas to promote student use of the modeled strategies. Teri specifically talked about using the modeled strategies across the curriculum and shared, after the completion of the PD, that it was these times of reflection and discussing specific lessons and results with another person she would miss the most.

### Findings

*Question One: How will modeling for the classroom teacher specific comprehension strategies influence her teaching?*

First, according to Teri, she now uses vocabulary strategies more often and across content areas. In an informal conversation, she shared that talking with her students about connections with the text, especially those involving vocabulary, are now part of their routine. Evidence collected in field notes supports her claim: "During her lunch break, the teacher talks about how she now plans to use the strategies not only in her language arts classes, but also in social studies and science classes" (field notes). At another time, Teri shared that she instructed students in history to use Venn diagrams to compare the Old Stone Age to the New Stone Age (field notes).

Second, Teri credits the modeling of vocabulary instruction with the fact that she and her students are reading more and that she is using an increased number of instructional strategies. For example, at the beginning of the intervention she reflects, "Since [she] began working with my students, we have put up a word wall. The students really like the word wall...[and] are now looking for words that they do not know" (personal correspondence). In the post-survey she identifies the word wall as a previously unused strategy: "I did not have one [word wall] before. In addition, I am having the students write down words in stories that they do not know... and...[create] semantic map[s]" (teacher survey).

Third, Teri shares that she has plans to use specific

strategies where before she did not: In the middle of modeling word sorts, the teacher commented that she planned to use this same strategy with their spelling words later in the week (field notes). She also stated her intention to use multi-genre reports in an upcoming language arts unit (personal conversation).

Fourth, Teri shares some specific effects of having vocabulary strategies modeled for her with her students:

[Her]....research was a great opportunity for me to observe how to model for my students. Not only was it a great review of strategies, I also learned some new strategies. One of the most important benefits for me was it brought back my love for teaching reading and teaching it in the correct manner. Since I teach all subjects for three grade levels, my days are overflowing. I have to rush and cut corners when and where I can. Sometimes, it has been "read this story and do the exercise at the end." That is a terrible way to teach reading! [Her] research was a gentle reminder of the importance of teaching reading" (personal correspondence).

Along with using more and different literacy strategies, Teri, too, acknowledges that

"This has renewed my love for teaching...and reading" (personal correspondence). She also mentions that she became more aware of reflecting on her teaching practices because she knew I was likely to question her about any newly acquired insights. She, too, states that I provided a much-appreciated sounding board: "I'm so excited to have somebody to talk to about all of this" (personal correspondence). In one of her last e-mails regarding the project, Teri additionally shares that her "main research goal, the effectiveness of modeling reading strategies for teachers, was very successful. I am now using more strategies, I am modeling for my students, and I love teaching reading again" (personal correspondence).

*Question Two: How will modeling specific literacy strategies influence student literacy outcomes?*

Teri reflected in an e-mail that students were positively impacted by the modeling of specific literacy strategies: "My students want to read more novels...Also, students [who] would never ask me for a definition of a word, are doing so" (personal correspondence). In addition, Teri said that some students were using the strategies without her first mentioning them. For example, she shared that one student volunteered to record words, from the readings that he and his peers did not know. She, too, pointed out that another student complained when specific words had not yet been added to the word wall and that she had overheard students referring to the word wall as they completed writing assignments (field notes). Moreover, in a student interview, one student indicated that she now applied what she did in class to authentic reading experiences: "I compare things... like we did with those Venn diagrams. What's in the shampoo and conditioner...?"

Additional evidence from field notes suggests that students are now taking more ownership of their learning.



For example one student commented, "We need to put these words on the word wall" (field notes). Comparison of the student pre- and post-surveys also provide evidence: In the pre-test, one student out of seven said that she wrote down a word that she did not know, but in the post survey four out of seven said that they now use this technique. Also, in the beginning only three out of seven said they looked up word meanings and now all seven out of seven students indicate they use the computer to find word definitions (student survey).

*Question Three: How will scaffolding for the teacher affect students' attitudes toward reading and writing?*

In the following statement, Teri reflected on her students' attitudes toward unknown words: "They are now looking for words that they do not know. I believe they want to plaster our classroom walls with words!" She also recalled, when no one knew the definition of "initiative," some students looked up the definition of the word and shared it with the class while another student explained that "...the girl [in the book] took initiative by trying to get a job at the department store." Teri said that still another student suggested that the class place the word "initiative" on the word wall (field notes).

With this type of student participation in mind, Teri insisted that her students' attitudes toward learning improved. For example, she said that "...[I]t [modeling of strategies] has infused my students with interest..." (personal correspondence). Some students, however, were reluctant to acknowledge change in their attitude toward reading. In an exit interview, five students said they read more after the intervention, but only three students said that they like reading more and one student said he read less than before. Another student, even while acknowledging that she read more, qualified her answer: "I like reading a little bit more than I used to. I said a *bit* more."

Amidst a general reluctance in acknowledging the enjoyment of reading, some students admitted that they had discovered unexpected pleasure in reading and/or writing. Specifically, one student commented that she had discovered this year that she "kind of liked" poetry and said "I read everything now...like cereal boxes...shampoo bottles..." (student interview). The same student also revealed, after finding "a little kid's book" on the bus, she read it several times to herself and then read it to her younger neighbor. She specifically added that she read it aloud in different voices "like you did in class" (student interview).

Another student talked about how he currently relates to books: "Now I really think about the facts...what the character does. How he feels throughout the story...who he talks to... who he hangs out with..." (field notes). He also shared his depth of feeling as he connected to characters in a story: "You know, it's like everything that's happened to that character happened to me" (student interview). Still another student talked about reading a book from a series that he chose to read on his own (student interview).

One of the students commented that his attitude toward reading had "changed" and that he read "[m]ore, of course... It's [now] more of a force of habit...you taught me to make connections." He also said he liked to read if... "there is

anything in that subject I can relate to" and that he liked "comparing my life to the book." Another simply said she "relates to books more" (student interview).

Through his actions, still another student indicated that he was now more interested in reading. For example, at one point a student asked if I owned any other books, like *Mailing May*, in which people had been mailed. When I provided him with a copy of *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007), Teri and I were both pleasantly surprised when he asked if he could not only keep the book to read but also use the computer to find out more information on his own.

Another rewarding moment came when a student talked about going online to locate information for a bio-poem about Johnny Cash, his hero. After reading *Mailing May*, he also spoke about searching the Internet to learn more about trains and his discovery of magnetic trains in Japan (field notes).

Teri and I took notice when one student volunteered to read aloud a letter she created for a class multi-genre report (field notes). Teri later recalled that this was the first time she remembered the student ever volunteering to share information in class.

On the whole, students commented that they read more often and that they read a greater variety of genres than did before the intervention. Teri also shared that "[M]y students had their self-esteem and their reading levels boosted to a higher level" (personal correspondence).

## Conclusions

Findings from this study suggest that the influence of this particular professional development, through the modeling of specific reading strategies targeting vocabulary and comprehension, was a positive experience for Teri and her students. Specifically, evidence from field notes and Teri's own comments indicates that she now uses researched based strategies more often and across content areas. In addition, students' test scores in reading as well as in writing were overall higher and that, on the whole, students perceived reading and writing more positively. According to Cohen and Hill (2000), these results may not be unexpected: They explain that "... studies suggest that when educational improvement is focused on learning and teaching academic content, and when curriculum for improving teaching overlaps with curriculum and assessment for students, teaching practice and student performance are likely to improve" (p. 330).

While additional research is needed to examine the effectiveness of a one-on-one PD design, based on information gathered, this study contributes to the literature in that it offers possible correlations between Teri's PD and teacher use of strategies, the PD and student attitude toward reading, as well as the PD and student academic progress. Perhaps, Teri's final comments best reflect the findings regarding Teri's PD: "...not only are my students learning, I am learning as well. This has renewed my love for teaching... and reading, and it has infused my students with interest. This in itself is a BIG accomplishment."

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## BOOK REVIEW:

# Closer Readings of the Common Core: Asking Big Questions about the English/Language Arts Standards (2013)

**Authors:** Albers, P., Bomer, R., Compton-Lilly, C., Dudley-Marling, C., Jaegar, E., Orellana, M.J., Roderiguez, G., Stewart, K., Wilde, S., & Wilson, M.

**Editor:** Patrick Shannon

**Publisher:** New York: Heinemann **ISBN:** 03255048765

**Reviewer:** Mary-Jo Morse

### About the Authors:

Patrick Shannon is a Professor of Education and coordinator of the Reading Specialist certification program at Penn State University. He is the author and editor of sixteen books connected with issues of literacy teaching and learning. Many of his books provide critical, counter viewpoints to the current educational thoughts and policies of the day.

The ten contributing authors, ( Peggy Albers, Randy Bomer, Catherine Compton-Lilly, Curt Dudley-Marling, Elizabeth Jaeger, Marjorie Orellana, Sandra Wilde, Maja Wilson, Gloria-Beatriz Rodriguez, and Kristopher Stewart), have written essays concerning the consequences of implementing the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. Brief biographies for each contributing author are provided in the text.

### The Common Core – A Closer, More Critical Look

Patrick Shannon's edited volume, *Closer Readings of the Common Core: Asking Big Questions about the English/Language Arts Standards*, comes at a critical time for K-12 educators, as well as teacher educators preparing teacher candidates to teach to and with the Common Core State Standards, as this 2013-2014 academic year issues in the full implementation of the CCSS nationwide. During the last eighteen months, a multitude of texts have been published to support in-service teachers as well as pre-service teacher candidates in understanding and implementing the CCSS. Most of these texts provide not only necessary background knowledge about the Common Core Standards but additionally present the reader with research-based strategies with which to engage learners while meeting the mandates of the standards. More importantly, however, these "other texts" have nary a word to say about the hazards to teachers, the curriculum, and most importantly, our learners, if the Common Core State Standards are implemented without forethought as to what is and who are privileged in the CCSS framework. Shannon's text differs in this regard; it is indeed a "horse of a different color."

From the beginning to end, Foreword and nine chapters, this relatively short text of 101 pages enlightens the reader, novice and expert teacher alike, about the Common Core State Standards from their "humble beginnings" through to their adoption by the states. Along the way, the authors of each chapter illuminate important points and raise critical questions concerning how the Common Core State

Standards privilege specific types of knowledge—particular ways of knowing and learning. Additionally, Shannon and his colleagues explain that the development of the CCSS and the Anchor Standards have delineated, defined and positioned students as the Common Core State Standards lay out what it means to be a "successful student" at each grade level along the path to high school graduation. The authors raise critical questions for the reader to consider, such as: Which members, or groups, in our society are positioned to benefit from the Common Core State Standards, and alternatively which members will be disadvantaged by their implementation? Whose ideologies are propagated, and whose are silenced? How does, or doesn't the CCSS accommodate for the vast differences in the funds of knowledge that students bring into the classroom? Do the CCSS Anchor Standards represent what is truly needed for young adults leaving high school and entering into a future where advances in technology are ever-changing the landscape of what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century?

Randy Bomer states, "To critique the CCSS is not to be unfriendly, complaining, or curmudgeonly. It is to be critical- to recognize that political artifacts, such as standards for public schools, always encode relations of power. Being critical means exposing who wins and loses in those relations, and insisting that there are alternatives. It is important to critique the standards because, by their nature, they standardize; they narrow the possible practices and identities available to students" (p. 26). Although, some of the criticisms and concerns have been expressed elsewhere, what makes "*Closer Readings...*" a "horse of a different color" is the research that each author supplies to support their concerns and positions, as well as the upfront acknowledgement that there is much that is good about the CCSS. Case in point: In Chapter 2, "Common Core Children," Bomer acknowledges that the CCSS establishes the "positive identities" of students as : capable, intellectually able and equal to peers, thoughtful, responsive readers capable of independent thinking, as well as writers and authors able to compose a complete text" (pp. 24-26). These are positions that have not been previously afforded to all students, and establish a very positive benefit to each and every child in the educational system.

Having read and utilized similar texts (Calkins et al., 2012 ; Morrow et al., 2012; Neuman & Gambrell, 2013) in my teaching of undergraduate literacy courses, I find Shannon's "*Closer Readings of the Common Core: Asking Big*



*Questions about the English/Language Arts Standards* to be an excellent counter-balance, indeed raising the big questions and illuminating significant concerns for those in-service and pre-service teachers charged with implementing the CCSS this year and into the future. I would highly recommend that veteran teachers, new teachers and pre-service teachers alike take the opportunity to read "*Closer Readings*" because once having read this text, it will be almost impossible for educators to thoughtlessly implement the CCSS without understanding the consequences of following the CCSS without forethought and planning. Shannon's goal for this text is to make teachers, parents, and the community aware that they can be active agents of change in the ongoing development and implementation of educational reform, and specifically how the CCSS is implemented in schools and classrooms nationwide. However, to be effective as agents of change, one needs to understand both sides of the story. We have heard one-side loud and clear, now it is time to hear and understand the other.

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