NOT JUST ANOTHER COURSE: EXPLORING EXEMPLARY LITERACY PRACTICES IN
A STUDY GROUP WITH STUDENT TEACHERS

BY

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Abstract

There is controversy surrounding teacher preparation programs (Long & Pearson, 2013). The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) report targets literacy education, suggesting that teachers have not been adequately prepared to serve the needs of students and are lacking knowledge about key components of literacy instruction cited by the National Reading Panel (2000).

The current structure at Bloomington College requires students to take one literacy methods course. A review of the curriculum of similar New Jersey teacher education programs found that most included at least two courses. Results of a pilot study suggested that after completing the literacy course students have a rather developing knowledge of literacy instruction, connecting with a few modeled strategies.

The research questions addressing this problem of practice were: (1) How do student teachers working in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms participate in a literacy study group focused on best practices? (a) How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction? (b) How do students involved in the literacy study group perform during student teaching?

Methods

This qualitative case study explored the impact of a twelve-week literacy study group intervention on preservice teachers. The sample included six African American student teachers at Bloomington College who were student teaching in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms. Data collection included weekly study group field notes and recordings, student interviews, pre- and

post- PRAXIS Reading Practice Test scores, and pre- and post- student teaching observations of literacy instruction.

Results

Findings indicated that students extended their understanding about literacy best practices through rich discussions and co-construction of knowledge. An overall trend in higher post-test scores on the PRAXIS Reading Practice Test and student teaching evaluations of literacy lessons was found. Additional findings include curriculum constraints, cooperating teacher dynamics, teaching for social justice, and high rates of participation. Participants believed the study group provided them with an opportunity to work together to develop a panoramic view of literacy instruction across grade levels.

Acknowledgements

An inspirational quote on my office wall at the college reminds me that "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." In the field of literacy education, it is well known that the most important foundations for success start at home. I grew up in a household where the message was quite consistent: You're going to college. It is for these reasons I would like to thank my mom and dad, two of the strongest people in my support system. Their encouragement, strength, and care provided me with the strongest possible foundation. Similar messages of positive support extended well into my family and are marked by the legendary memories of two remarkable grandmothers. Grandma Kunz watched me (her first grandson) graduate from college with a degree in Education, passing away near the successful completion of my first year as a teacher. She left this world confident of the career path I chose and knowing that I found Tim, the most caring partner anyone could ask for. As I proceeded into my career and advanced degree in literacy education, Grandma Lusardi remained center in my life. Prior to passing away, she opened her doors to countless evenings of pizza and wine, ready to listen and offer guidance. These are two angels that have lifted me through this learning journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

As this study was introduced, our nation's schools were in the midst of an era of high stakes testing, accountability, and school reform. We still find ourselves dealing with these pressures and many more. In *Reading Today*, Jill Lewis-Spector, President of the International Reading Association (IRA), includes teacher preparation among three hot topics in education policy.   This is because many are looking to higher education to analyze ways in which teachers are being prepared to enter the classroom. One analysis of programs is taking place through IRA's Task Force on Teacher Preparation. Lewis-Spector (2014) notes some of the disparities already being uncovered, including "…little evaluation of student field work vis-à-vis literacy instruction and no specific reading course requirements in several states, to explicit field-work standards for literacy instruction and 12 credit hours in literacy courses" (p. 4). It is understood that these differences in preparation can result in potentially large disparities in students' success with reading and writing.

At the college and university level, schools of education are under pressure, as time and funds are scarce. As a result, many teacher education candidates are forced to take classes in less than ideal ways. For example, students majoring in Education at Bloomington College in New Jersey are required to take *EDC 321: Developing Children's Literacy Across the Grades: Methods and Strategies*. This course is based on theories of emergent reading and writing with attention to the influence of multicultural, second language, and family/community dynamics. Within this foundational framework, students learn about and experience what is involved in assessing and teaching children to read and communicate through writing and speaking from early childhood through high school. Students develop knowledge of and skill in using effective

teaching strategies and methods for developing the reading and writing skills of children in preschool through 12th grade, including methods and strategies for incorporating literacy instruction across all subject area disciplines. The course is based on the National Reading Panel (2000) findings, which suggest that quality comprehensive literacy instruction depends on teachers' knowledge and understanding of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Added to the focus of this class are writing and motivation. Course work includes chapter reflections, an in-class article presentation, a mini-lesson demonstration, an intentional read-aloud, a professional development plan, and an ongoing literacy tutoring project, in which students design research-based lessons and tutor individual students.

Due to the small nature of the Bloomington College Teacher Education program, only one undergraduate section of EDC 321 is offered each semester. Students who enroll in the class declare one of the following concentrations: elementary and early childhood, elementary with subject matter specialization, secondary education with subject matter specialization, or special education and early childhood. While the faculty and administration are committed to strengthening the teacher education program at the college, adding additional course requirements is generally discouraged. This is due to the fact that students already experience a full course load. Adding additional courses to the education program would require taking credits away from students' co-concentrations and core general education requirements, or increasing the number of years it would take them to complete the program beyond four-years. These options are not feasible. As a result, students take part in only one literacy education course prior to becoming a teacher. Due to the complex nature of literacy instruction, the course outline is designed so that students are engaged in a specific area of literacy instruction during

each three hour and forty-five minute class session. A majority of the assignments and topics discussed during this time emphasize the importance of early childhood literacy development and literacy instruction at the elementary school level.

It is my belief that the current structure of the course attempts to cover too many areas of literacy instruction, therefore limiting the amount of time for instruction focused on the individual needs of these preservice teachers. A pilot study conducted during the Fall 2012 semester found that by the end of the course students (1) have a developing, or beginning understanding of literacy instruction, (2) identify with specific teaching strategies modeled during the semester, and (3) are only beginning to conceptualize their philosophies of teaching reading. These findings are problematic in that an overwhelming majority of these preservice teachers choose to teach in urban communities where the need for highly prepared literacy teachers is crucial.

A potential danger exists when underprepared teachers provide instruction in schools where a disproportionate number of students are at-risk. These students especially need teachers who have been provided with ongoing professional development, situated learning opportunities, and a plethora of strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

Following the initial pilot study, an additional pilot study was conducted during the Spring 2013 semester to review information across various teacher education programs in New Jersey. Findings revealed that a majority of programs require that students take at least two, if not more literacy methods courses prior to becoming certified teachers. The Division of Education faculty at Bloomington College acknowledges that research supports the need for exploring options for stronger clinical experiences for preservice teachers. Given the recent

rollouts of new teacher evaluation systems and the Common Core State Standards, the time is right for providing early childhood and elementary preservice teachers with increased opportunities to further develop their understanding of best practices in literacy instruction.

Purpose of the Study

In *Reading Today*, Long & Pearson (2013) reflected on times of controversy that continue to exist, in which teacher education programs across the United States have come under attack. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) report in 2014 suggested that many new teachers have not been adequately prepared to serve the needs of students in the classroom and are lacking knowledge about the five main components of literacy instruction. However, literacy experts countered that the methodology of their findings was questionable, and that the National Reading Panel Report (2000) components are not the "final word" on critical elements for early reading instruction.

While the structure of EDC 321 at Bloomington College is ahead of the curve in that it addresses the foundational components of a comprehensive literacy program, there is evidence to suggest that providing students with one course is not enough. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the impact of a study group intervention on preservice teachers, as they reflected upon and improved their literacy practices. Because so much of the research documents the challenges teachers face when transitioning from student to teacher, I designed a study group, or context for students to voluntarily come together as a community to discuss topics related to curriculum and instruction (Lambson, 2010). The intervention design of this study focused solely on literacy best practices. It was my belief that testing this type of intervention would be one way to make recommendations to the teacher education program, as

Bloomington College is open to the idea of including literacy study groups in the curriculum

aligned with student teaching.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions guided this study:

- How do student teachers working in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms participate in a

  literacy study group focused on best practices?

  o How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content

    knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction?

  o How do students involved in a literacy study group perform during student

    teaching?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Method

In this literature review I explored several questions to provide a rationale for the study and to take a closer look at the professional development necessary for elementary and early childhood teachers to be prepared to teach literacy:

- What are the key elements of quality teacher education?
- What are the key elements of quality literacy teacher education and what are some innovative ways in which teacher education programs are delivering literacy content to preservice teachers?
- What does research suggest about the use of study groups with teachers?
- What information exists in the research on African American teachers?
- What are the implications of quality literacy teacher education for programs preparing elementary and early childhood teachers?
- What is the relationship between the literature reviewed and my research focus?

In the next section, I outlined how articles were chosen for this review of literature and briefly categorize those used in this paper. Furthermore, I described the themes that emerged from this information, and later expanded on their implications for best practices in teacher education programs.

For this limited review of literature, several approaches to article selection were used. Initially, resources were explored from the reference list in *Teaching Reading Well: A Synthesis of the International Reading Association's Research on Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction*. This resource provided information critical to the key elements needed for preparing

outstanding teachers of reading and writing. Key studies focusing on the preparation of teachers to teach reading were collected from *Knowledge to Support the Teaching of Reading: Preparing Teachers for a Changing World.* Additional methods included keyword searches for "quality teacher education," "teacher education and literacy," "teacher education research," and "teacher study groups" within ERIC and EBSCO Host. Multiple keyword searches within Wilson Web and Academic Search Premier were also conducted using all of the aforementioned terms. An advanced search of publications on the International Reading Association webpage also led to additional articles from *Reading Research Quarterly* and *The Reading Teacher*. After conducting these searches, a vast number of peer-reviewed articles, formal published reports, and textbooks published by well-known leaders in the field were identified to frame this research proposal.

What are the key elements of quality teacher education?

Reflecting on the current state of teacher education, Darling-Hammond (2010) explains, "Many schools of education undertook successful transformations—using the standards to redesign their programs; creating stronger clinical practice; strengthening coursework around critical areas like student learning and development, assessment, subject matter pedagogy, and teaching of English language learners and special needs students; and connecting this coursework directly to practice in much more extensive practicum settings" (p. 36). While the level of quality among teacher education programs varies, it is evident that the best programs focus on helping teachers apply what they have learned in their coursework to later classroom practice. This was noted in a study conducted using extensive data collected in a database regarding New York City public school teachers. The study found that the key features of exemplary programs included quality student teaching experiences, student teaching experiences

matched to future employment, classes focused on content and methods of teaching reading and

math, use of clinical tools, a focus on curriculum, capstone projects, and a high number of

fulltime faculty (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Graduates of these types of programs are better

prepared, rated as more effective teachers by their administrators, and contribute more to student

learning (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008).

An additional study of New York City public school teachers found a link between

teacher preparation and students' performance on standardized math and language arts tests.

Darling-Hammond (2010) explains, "A student's achievement was most enhanced by having a

fully certified teacher who had graduated from a university pre-service program, who had a

strong academic background, and who had more than two years of experience. Students'

achievement was hurt most by having an inexperienced teacher on a temporary license - again, a

teaching profile most common in high-minority, low-income schools. In combination,

improvements in these qualifications reduced the gap in achievement between the schools in

deciles serving the poorest and the most affluent student bodies by 25%" (p. 39).

In *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs,* Darling-Hammond

(2006) describes the results of a mixed-methods, multiple case study design, in which data was

collected from seven reputable teacher education programs, representing both public and private

universities from across the United States. Research teams collected descriptive data from each

program by examining program documents, recording teacher candidate information, conducting

interviews with program participants and graduates, observing classroom instruction, and

surveying employers of program graduates. Findings demonstrate that exemplary teacher

education programs focus on conceptualizing knowledge, skills, and practice, and design clinical

experiences that act as the "glue" that brings research, theory, and practice together.

Kennedy (1999) also supports these key ingredients necessary for successful teacher education programs, explaining that "…the content of teacher education programs is more important than their structure" (p. 82). Kennedy pays particular attention to the Teacher Education and Learning to Teach (TELT) study, which was designed to examine teachers' responses and reactions to hypothetical classroom situations. Students from various program structures were given the opportunity to reflect on a variety of prescribed classroom scenarios both before and after participating in a teacher education program. Participants included 100 teachers from nine different teacher preparation programs. Through a literacy analysis task, participants were given a second grade sample of writing and were asked to analyze the writing piece and discuss what they would do if they were the child's teacher. Findings suggest that university-based programs had a great impact on influencing teachers' analysis of scenarios, demonstrating that content is more important than simply placing future teachers in the field without a guided experience. Participants working with students in the field were more likely to offer instructional suggestions based on the most current research in the field of literacy. Kennedy (1999) explains, "The idea of working with practicing teachers rather than preservice teachers is consistent with the received wisdom model of teacher learning, which asserts that the most important phase of teacher learning is that which occurs in the context of practical experience. These programs capitalize on this important phase of learning by working with teachers while they are maintaining full-time teaching practices" (p. 62). Although teacher education programs traditionally limit student teachers to enrolling in the field experience and a course centered on student teaching, findings from this study demonstrate a potential impact on teachers' knowledge and practice when taking advantage of learning opportunities while teaching.

Cochran-Smith & Zeichner (2005) assert that there is much to be learned in regards to how research is used to determine which teacher education programs are of the highest quality: "A critical element needed in future research on teacher education programs is explicit articulation of the vision of teaching that the preparation aims for" (p. 702). While there is great debate about which program structures work the best for preparing teachers, the authors argue that more research is needed before any conclusions can be made. Nonetheless, Zeichner (2010) argues that both traditional and alternative programs can make great improvements by linking what students learn in the classroom to what they actually experience in the field: "The growing contemporary focus on rethinking and redesigning the connection of college and university coursework in pre-service teacher education to the schools and communities for which teachers are being prepared to work is a hopeful sign that the traditional distanced and disconnected model of university-based pre-service teacher education is on its way out" (p. 95).

By studying the impact of early field experiences on performance in coursework, Denton (1982) also found that students who had an opportunity to situate themselves in the field early on performed significantly better in their methods courses at the college. In a mixed methods study, Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, & Roehrig (2014) also noted the importance of getting students into the field early. Researchers studied 89 preservice elementary education teachers enrolled in two sections of an early field experience course at a southeastern university. Findings suggest that a well-focused and guided observation results in increased complexity of student reflections over time. The National Academy of Education (2005) notes that studies have found that programs that interweave clinical field experiences with coursework have a greater impact on the effectiveness of new teachers than programs that are less intentional on connecting theory with practice: "The programs teach teachers to do more than simply implement particular techniques;

they help teachers learn to think pedagogically, reason through dilemmas, investigate problems, and analyze student learning to develop appropriate curriculum for a diverse group of learners (p. 37). While these studies reveal information that may seem disconnected to the focus of this study, it is important to note that students enrolled in the undergraduate program at Bloomington College benefit from a number of early field experiences. Students have an opportunity to observe instruction, while analyzing classroom culture and different instructional activities taking place. This begins in the introductory class and continues in courses related to early childhood and differentiation of instruction. While students in the post-baccalaureate program currently have limited opportunities to be in the field, all students take the literacy methods course, where students reflect on best practices while tutoring individual students. Ultimately, the research supports that all teachers need to be able to reflect on their knowledge about learning and pedagogy, while thoughtfully focusing on how these contextualized classroom performances affect individual learners (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999).

What are the key elements of quality literacy teacher education and what are some innovative ways in which teacher education programs are delivering literacy content to preservice teachers?

Among the many required courses for preservice teachers in the United States are studies that focus on literacy and the English language arts. In *What Matters: Preparing Teachers of Reading*, Helfrich & Bean (2011) investigate ways in which students perceive the various components that best prepare students for teaching literacy, including coursework, field experience, and collaboration. The authors assert, "A theme has emerged from a review of recent research regarding teacher preparation programs, showing that the most valuable elements of such programs for helping teacher candidates to teach literacy are coursework, including

critical content knowledge, an integrated field component, and collaboration among teacher candidates, university instructors, and cooperating teachers" (p. 243). It is these key elements that provide justification for a literacy study group intervention. Studying students enrolled in two different teacher education programs at one university, Helfrich & Bean concluded that coursework and field experiences were what students valued most for preparing them to teach reading, while the majority of collaborations were focused on everyday tasks and not on specific aspects of teaching and learning.

Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell (2006) explain that teacher education programs should also be learner-centered, as this allows opportunity for students to collaborate in more meaningful ways: "To argue that learning about teaching requires an emphasis on working closely with one's peers is thus an exercise in challenging the culture of the school (or university) as an organization. The challenge is clearly a substantial one, but if the norm of teachers collaborating in learning about teaching is ever to change, we contend that the change must begin in the pre-service program" (p. 1033). Researchers looked at the features of effective programs in Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands. Particularly, they believe that learning about teaching requires a shift from the curriculum to the learner: "One way to reframe the situation involves constructing appropriate ways for student teachers to genuinely engage in experiencing the various aspects of teaching in an environment where such engagement is the focus, rather than in an environment where successful teaching and controlling of the students are the dominant concerns" (p. 1029). Shifting to this notion of learning requires teacher education programs to move into the field, rather than simply delivering curriculum. The study group intervention conducted in this research accomplishes this principle of learning, as small group meetings allow preservice teachers to share with one another in the learning process and

also provide an insight for teacher educators, who can then monitor the conversations and provide additional support if necessary to those who need help.

In addition to coursework, field experiences, and collaboration, the International Reading Association (2007) identifies six key elements of effective literacy preparation in *Teaching Reading Well*. Members of this organization argue that content, faculty and teaching, apprenticeships, diversity, assessment, and program vision are the ingredients to teacher education programs that address the challenges related to reading achievement in schools. In terms of content, researchers support a focus on research and theory, word-level instructional strategies, text-level comprehension strategies, reading-writing connections, instructional approaches and materials, and assessment. The report explains, "The research literature demonstrates that teachers in preparation can be taught how to use both the best methods and a range of materials for instruction. They can learn to implement good reading instruction based on the knowledge gained from their preparation programs" (p. 5). Commonly found in such programs are the foundations of literacy instruction, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Aligned with the focus of the literacy study group design is a look at comprehensive literacy instruction linked with the Common Core Standards. Morrow (2015) discusses the importance of designing "exemplary" literacy instruction that includes opportunities for independent reading and writing, explicit vocabulary instruction, reading workshop and read aloud lessons centered on comprehension, literacy work stations for independent practice, small group differentiated instruction, writing workshop, word work, literacy in the content areas, and daily reflection. Offering a glimpse into comprehensive literacy instruction, Morrow shares a day in the life of a first grade classroom.

> Wendy's classroom allows children to have the opportunity to explore and experiment while also receiving explicit instruction. They are expected to complete work assigned to them during small-group instruction or during whole-group lessons. However, they also have choices in the selection of activities a few times during the day. A lot of information is introduced during whole- and small-group lessons, and information is repeated and reviewed all week long. Children's individual needs are met during small-group reading instruction, writing workshop, and center time. Reading and writing are integrated in content-area learning. Children in Wendy's classroom read and write all day long in all of the content areas. Her classroom is arranged so the children have access to varied materials and books. Most importantly, Wendy's children come into the classroom each day ready and excited to learn (xxxvii).

Included in this description are two key elements that are not found in the National Reading Panel findings: writing and motivation. To best prepare teachers for the classroom, these core research-based components are essential.

There are also a number of ways in which teacher education programs are redesigning their curriculum to better prepare teachers of reading and writing. One approach, aligned with general best practices in teacher education, focuses on requiring preservice teachers to provide literacy tutoring to students. Dawkins, Ritz, & Louden (2010) highlight the benefits of an eight-week project in which students volunteered to assess children's literacy needs, design instruction based on data, and teach lessons: "Participation in the tutoring program provided valuable experience in teaching early reading skills and allowed pre-service teachers to work under the mentorship of a reading specialist as they engaged in one-on-one reading instruction. The reading specialist provided ongoing training and feedback to increase their knowledge of literacy concepts and skills, and develop and extend their range of literacy teaching practices" (p. 47). Using a Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS), researchers noted that regardless of their level of experience in the program, all teacher candidates had an opportunity to practice by doing. While these findings provide justification for the embedded literacy tutoring experience

at Bloomington College, this study goes one step further in utilizing the CLOS tool during the student teaching experience.

Sailors, Keehn, Martinez, & Harmon (2005) found that there are also benefits connected to providing all teacher education candidates with extensive field experiences, as students typically attribute their preparation to teach to practical applications and not coursework. By interviewing seventy three first year teachers, researchers found that 90% of the respondents highly valued their field experiences while taking classes at the university. One beginning teacher reflected, "I value…seeing how the strategies were being used and also the opportunity to try them. I liked being able to try them first because I probably wouldn't have used some of them had I not actually tried them" (p. 462). In a follow up study, Sailors, et.al. determined that common features of field experiences included developing reflective teachers, scaffolding structured experiences, pairing students with knowledgeable cooperating teachers, offering a variety of contexts, and one-on-one tutoring. These careful considerations contributed to meaningful field experiences designed to prepare better teachers of reading, while moving beyond simply placing teachers in the field.

In addition to tutoring and field experiences, first year teachers recognize the importance of networking with other literacy professionals. In "Reading Rocks: Creating a Space for Preservice Teachers to Become Responsive Teachers," Assaf & Lopez (2012) examined how fourteen preservice teachers learned to reflect on best practices for meeting the needs of all learners. By participating in a supervised, year-long tutoring experience, preservice teachers gained confidence in their teaching of reading while supporting one another in a community of practice. The authors explain, "As the preservice teachers mentored each other in the program, they collaboratively solved problems related to their tutoring (p. 373). By relying on one

another, students felt confident about designing and implementing literacy instruction tailored to the students' needs in the classroom. Collaborating with peers also shifted the way in which many of the preservice teachers saw themselves as future teachers of reading.

With this in mind, many teacher education programs are exploring how preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward reading might impact their future practice. These views and personal reading habits can have an effect on how teachers carry out reading and writing instruction. Applegate & Applegate (2004) refer to this phenomenon as the "Peter effect," referring to the biblical teaching that one cannot beg for something from someone who lacks what is being asked for. Benevides & Peterson (2010) studied this by surveying 227 preservice teachers about their reading habits and measuring their comprehension using the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. Reading test scores were significantly higher for students who expressed that they enjoyed reading for pleasure at home. The authors explain, "Teacher education courses should further cultivate the positive attitudes and lifelong reading habits that research has shown are desirable for school children and influences the effectiveness of reading instruction" (p. 299).

One way to foster this type of learning is to have preservice teachers connect back to their earliest literacy experiences. Working with first year students in a university teacher education program, Edwards (2009) required that students trace their literacy journeys through an autobiography assignment. This included a demographic/social profile, a written reflection about literacy memories, and a written comparison of students' literacy experiences over the years and how this might impact future teaching. Edwards (2009) explains, "The autobiography assignment and the student discussion surrounding it, provided insights for us about the students and their lives as well as their understandings about language and literacy. These insights assisted our scaffolding of their learning and transition into both university and the teaching

profession" (p. 55). By tapping into students' prior experiences, teacher educators have an opportunity to broaden students' concepts of language and literacy learning as they prepare teachers who will educate the next generation of literacy learners.

Meeting the needs of this new generation of learners will also require cutting edge teacher education programs to embrace digital impacts on literacy learning, as "new literacies" are changing the landscape of teaching and learning. Innovative teacher education programs are finding new ways to get preservice teachers' to think critically about their use of technology to support literacy development. Larson (2013) argues, "To prepare future teachers to use and teach with a wide range of technologies, these tools need to be infused into both content and methods courses" (p. 282). After implementing a study in which forty-nine preservice teachers used ebooks in their practicum experiences, the researcher noted that teachers felt more comfortable exploring the tools and features of the ebook for classroom instruction, as this type of instruction became seamlessly integrated: "In today's classrooms, the integration of technology offers a new vision and dimension for reading instruction as students encounter digital literacies in addition to the more traditional literacies of paper, pencil, and print contexts" (p. 288). Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to practice this integration becomes another necessary component of quality teaching education programs delivering literacy methods and strategies.

What does research suggest about the use of study groups with teachers?

Many educators believe that students learn more effectively and in more meaningful ways when they are working with others, and this thinking can be traced back to 1975, where Lortie pointed out that a feeling of isolation in the field is a "historical byproduct of the one-

room schoolhouse" (as cited in Arnold, 2002, p. 124). Just a few years later, Sugai (1983)

explored how to make a teacher study group work. Darling-Hammond (2009) agrees, "In

practice, teachers spend much of their time alone at the front of a room, rarely joining others in

sustained, reflective inquiry into teaching and learning (as cited in Stanley, 2011, p. 71).

Almost forty years later, this idea is still somewhat alive in today's schools, where

teachers are only now being encouraged to form professional learning communities (PLCs) to

create an impact on student achievement. While PLCs are supposed to bring teachers together to

collectively analyze student work while reflecting on teaching and learning, even this notion is

strongly misinterpreted across school districts, as some teachers are relying less on

interdependence and simply documenting mundane, administrative tasks during group meetings.

Stanley (2011) asserts that PLCs result in forced participation, because "…collaboration is

expected and the focus is directed towards teachers' mastery of certain teaching techniques or

ways of looking at student learning" (p. 72). Arnold (2002) succinctly summarizes the

cornerstone of how study groups differ from professional learning communities, noting that

"Teachers who choose to work collaboratively do so on their time" (p. 125). By conducting a

study with cooperating teachers, Arnold found that providing an opportunity for teachers to

reflect on instructional issues, mentoring issues, and professional issues strongly impacted their

ability to reflect in meaningful ways while thinking about new ideas and more careful planning

of instructional teaching methods.

However, the term "teacher study group" has referred to a wide variety of professional

development approaches that share very little in common except for the overall idea of small

groups of teachers working toward a common goal. Murphy (1992) identified three main

purposes for why teacher study groups exist. She explains, "Study groups help us implement

curricular and instructional innovations, collaboratively plan school improvement, and study

research on teaching and learning" (p. 71). By working together, teachers participate in a culture

of change within the school context. Study groups provide a regular schedule and a norms-

driven environment for teachers of varying backgrounds, knowledge, and skills. Murphy refers

to the case of the Richmond County Public Schools in Augusta, Georgia, where study groups are

now an integral part of the district's professional development model. Since 1987, teachers have

been working together in small groups to learn and reflect on new teaching strategies (Joyce &

Showers, 1995). These study groups remain active today in the district's 54 schools. Foorman

and Moats (2004) also found promising district-level results when focusing on reading

instruction in the Washington, D.C. Public Schools. While they included a multidimensional

approach to professional development, researchers found that including the study groups

enhanced teachers' knowledge about best practices and their ratings of teacher effectiveness.

Englert and Tarrant (1995) found this to be true in their implementation of The Early Literacy

Project, in which researchers from Michigan State University worked alongside special

education teachers in a local school district. The project was designed to remove teachers from

the negative effects of isolation that is typically noted in early research (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Teachers shared a common goal in that they wanted to explore ways to provide the best literacy

instruction to special education students in the primary grades. Teachers were encouraged to

take control of the curriculum rather than passively act as recipients of research. Two important

categories emerged from the study regarding the use of study groups to create collaborative

learning communities. First, they noted that there was variation in the knowledge constructed

within the group: "This variation provided a richness of shared knowledge and complementary

practice" (p. 328). Additionally, teachers learned best in the areas where they had the greatest needs and interests.

Working with music teachers, Stanley discovered that there are key elements to designing a study group that maximizes participants' learning. Research points to six important considerations: the length and quality of participants' commitment to the group, the tension between the goals of improving content-area knowledge and pedagogical skills, the way that teachers with varied goals for development participate and assume different roles within the group, the group's mechanism for honest examination of teaching practices and its structure for conversation, the teaching assignments represented within the group membership, and support for classroom implementation of new ideas and skills (Stanley, 2011, p. 74). When leadership roles are flexible and teachers have an opportunity to share their experiences and expertise, the professional development is more rich and effective. Instead of simply listening to an expert presenter and sharing ideas in a circle, the aforementioned factors must be taken into consideration when designing an effective study group. Saavedra (1996) explains that this learning opportunity has the potential to transform learning, as teachers put themselves at the center of their own learning. She notes that "…socially constructed contexts, such as the teachers' study group, facilitate opportunities for teachers to examine their own situations and the nature of their positions in school and other social systems" (p. 272). While many of these contexts for transformative learning have existed within communities of math teachers, cooperating teachers, and specialized faculty, little, if any, research exists on how study groups might have an impact on reading teachers, and more specifically, novice reading teachers.

Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, & Santoro (2010) however, applied an understanding of this type of professional development by designing a literacy study group for first grade

teachers. A total of eighty-one first grade teachers across three urban districts participated in sixteen interactive learning sessions twice a month from October to mid-June. Teachers spent half of the sessions focusing on vocabulary development and the other half discussing comprehension instruction. Findings indicated that teachers who participated in the study groups gained more knowledge about best practice in these areas and were more likely to implement the practice in their classrooms than those who did not participate.

It is important to note that the study group format also provides opportunities for knowledge to be constructed through extensive discussion. Many studies note the role that discussion in social contexts plays on learning (Ellis, Goodyear, Prosser, & O'Hara, 2006; Howe & Tolmie, 1999). The assumption is that high levels of discussion results in high levels of understanding. However, much of this research focuses on school-aged children taking science and computer classes. Arvaja, Hakkinen, Rasku-Puttonen, & Etelapelto (2002) explain that the effectiveness of authentic social contexts for learning can be quite difficult to attain, as social and contextual features affect the quality of interaction and learning. Tasks need to be structured, communities of learning need to be established in which control is shared, and participants should all have opportunities to share. The researchers note, "…in high level collaboration participants are committed to shared goals and problem solving and also committed to construct a shared meaning with others" (p. 163). Whether the participants are young or adult learners, it is important to recognize that when they have varying degrees of knowledge and understanding, roles may shift within discussion and some participants may find themselves in perceived positions of power (Dillenbourg, 1999).

What information exists in the research on African American teachers?

Although this study is centered on literacy knowledge and practices, this section was included because of the demographics of the study group participants. Often, teachers in the United States represent middle-class white females, and while the student body within the context of this study is diverse, very few studies examine the experiences of solely African American female teachers. This, in turn, provides a new lens through which to explore the impact of the study group intervention.

Milner (2012) found four areas in the research on black teachers and teaching: (1) Black teachers are role models for students; (2) Black teachers develop and explicitly enact and explain their high expectations for students; (3) Black teachers take on the role of 'other parents' for their students; and (4) Black teachers empathize with, not pity, their students. In terms of serving as role models, many studies were conducted both pre- and post-desegregation. Siddle-Walker (2000) synthesized the research on African American teachers working in the South during segregation, finding that exemplary teachers were a key component influencing the communities' perceptions of the schools. Despite the challenges of overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of minority representation, African American teachers stressed urgency for learning with their students. Milner (2012) states, "…many Black teachers operated from the perspective, vantage point, and positioning that they were preparing their students for a world of desegregation" (p. 29). Through this preparation, teachers focused on sharing their diverse histories, fostering culturally relevant teaching long before texts included children from diverse, multicultural backgrounds. In "Concepts of Democracy and Citizenship: Views of African American Teachers," Pang and Gibson (2001) describe the beliefs, experiences, and values of four African American teachers in a southern California school district. Interviews were

conducted using questions from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational

Achievement Civic Education Project, providing valuable information about participants' beliefs

about democracy, civic education, citizenship, and teaching in the United States. Researchers

noted that "…the four teachers continually raised questions about race, culture, and social class

with their students, even if the textbooks they used did not, and they integrated those topics into

their class discussions" (p. 261). Teachers were committed to not only student learning, but also

teaching for social justice. Milner (2012) explains that much of this can be attributed to the fact

that many African American teachers understand where their students come from, and therefore

connect with the learners: "Historically, Black teachers have had a meaningful impact on Black

students' academic and social success because they deeply understood their students' situations

and their needs, both inside and outside of the classroom, in no small part because many of them

lived in the same communities as their students" (p. 30). However, research suggests that

African-American teachers are successful with students of all backgrounds, not just those of

African descent. The teachers "…maintain high expectations for their students from different

racial and ethnic backgrounds" and insist that "…their students reach their full capacity by

making explicit the culture of power, their expectations for success, and what was necessary for

students to understand curriculum-related learning opportunities" (p. 30). While studies have

documented Black teachers' perceptions and instructional practices, few, if any, have examined

how these findings relate to knowledge and practice related to best practices.

What are the implications of quality literacy teacher education for programs preparing

elementary and early childhood teachers?

Given what we know through the research about teacher education and literacy

instruction, it is important to think about the topic in terms of implications for preparing future

elementary and early childhood teachers. Based on the studies reviewed in this literature

synthesis, it is important for teacher education programs to move beyond a course-only approach

to studying literacy research and theory. In addition to coursework, preservice teachers need to

participate in carefully planned practicum, or field experiences, in which they are given an

opportunity to work with students to apply the literacy methods and strategies learned in the

classroom. As demonstrated in numerous studies, these field experiences are beneficial to

students at all levels within a teacher education program. Rather than waiting until student

teaching, programs centered on best practice provide first through fourth year students with

continued access to field placements and extended opportunities for learning in a variety of

formats. These combined traditional and non-traditional contexts become critical for further

developing students' knowledge and understanding about best literacy practices for all learners.

From a sociocultural perspective, preservice teachers co-construct shared beliefs about

literacy instruction by collaborating in communities of practice. Teacher education programs

can include study groups, professional learning communities (PLCs), and student-centered

forums for reflecting on literacy learning. High quality programs encourage students to critically

reflect on their own literacy backgrounds and determine how ready students are to model reading

and writing instruction in the classroom. These key ingredients emphasized by the International

Reading Association are necessary in order for students to be taught by well-prepared teachers in

today's classroom.

Theory: Shifting from Preservice to Novice

Prior to becoming certified to teach the foundations of literacy instruction, there is a key

shift in which teachers move from being preservice teachers involved in coursework to becoming

practicing novices in the classroom during student teaching. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) distinguish five levels of "increasing progressive differentiation roughly coordinated with five points in the teacher's career progression: preservice, apprentice, novice, experienced, and master teacher" (p. 6). The authors' focus on theory asserts that an earlier, or more traditional view of teachers leaving programs ready to teach places far too much accountability on a student teacher's education program and fails to recognize what we know about adult development, human learning, and the ways in which adults acquire knowledge. For example, when a preservice teacher is enrolled in a literacy course, a significant amount of the course is likely to focus on declarative knowledge, meaning that most of the course is focused on literacy learning that evolves from class lectures, books, in-class discussions, and modeled instructional strategies. Although this approach provides a foundation for literacy learning, declarative knowledge becomes less important as the teacher transitions toward the role of apprentice or novice. Consider three points during a teacher's career (Figure 1). As teachers begin to take control of classrooms on their own, they rely on increased situated, stable, expert, and reflective knowledge. Pea & Brown argue that "…human minds develop in social situations, and they use the tools and representational media that culture provides to support, extend, and reorganize mental functioning (as cited in Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 11). This becomes the very center of situated learning theory, in which adult learners must take what they have learned and begin to apply it to practice. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) further support this idea by noting that it is "…a commonplace observation that declarative knowledge is an inadequate basis for good practice. Having successfully answered a test question about what to do when one's car starts to skid does not ensure that we avoid slamming on the breaks and remember to steer into the skid the first time we hit black ice at sixty miles an hour" (p. 8).
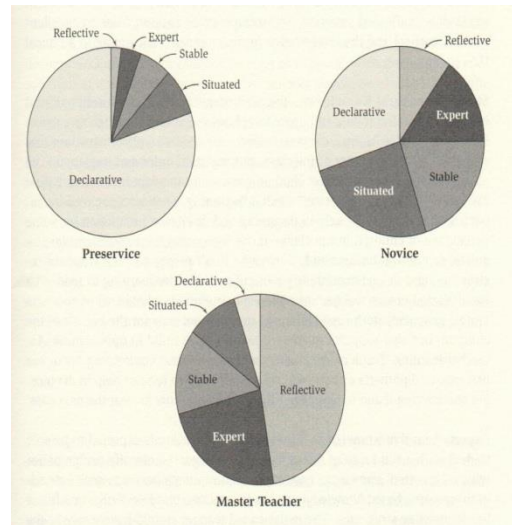
Figure 1: Knowledge Representation at Three Points of a Teacher's Career

The same can be said of a teacher who recognizes the key components of a comprehensive

literacy program, but steers short of implementing best practices in the classroom. As a teacher

transitions into becoming a novice, situated learning plays a large role in the teacher's

development prior to gaining more experience in the field over time. In order to effectively

function in the classroom, new teachers will also combine declarative and situated knowledge

with stable procedural knowledge. This is where the student teacher begins to design reading

instruction and work within the realms of "normal practice" as he or she transitions into

becoming a first year teacher. However, this can only be fully realized if the teacher has a "well-

structured, reliable set of supports" (p. 8). Grounded in sociocultural learning theory, a focus on

study groups utilizes a community of practice perspective (Wenger, 1998) to explore novice

teachers' experiences through the framework of progressing through the stages of preservice to

novice. Wenger explains that participating in a community of practice, or study group-context

allows individuals to organize their lives while developing shared practices about a particular

subject (p. 6). Actively participating in this type of setting encourages participants to learn from

others while learning and reflecting on their individual needs. Through this perspective of learning, the learner attains a particular skill while actively engaging in a social practice focused on learning specific skills. In the context of teaching, this type of practice becomes especially important, as the teaching profession has historically been organized around teacher separation and isolation (Lortie, 1975). Failure to provide a social context for teachers to co-construct knowledge around best practices results in a "more of the same" approach to teaching and learning in which teacher transformation of knowledge is limited (Miller, 1990).

It is my belief that providing student teachers with a study group while they are situated in the student teaching classrooms will not only build on their declarative knowledge provided during coursework, but will also enhance their practice. Through social interaction and enhanced opportunities to rely more on a situated context and less on declarative knowledge, student teachers will enhance their knowledge about literacy best practices while continuing to grow their professional practice.

What is the relationship between the literature reviewed and my research focus?

Although this literature synthesis demonstrates how much we have learned about teacher education and preparing literacy teachers over the years, there are still areas that are in need of future research that might provide a pathway for the Bloomington College Teacher Education Program. There are many questions that teacher educators have regarding the preparation of teachers of reading, and research encompassing these areas is strengthening programs and redesigning course offerings in new and exciting ways. For example, research studying a study group type of intervention will further improve our understanding of teacher education related to literacy instruction and how college and university programs can best meet the needs of future

teachers. Testing this type of intervention will also serve as a way to make recommendations to the Bloomington College Teacher Education Program. The following research questions are not all-inclusive in nature, but the areas which they encompass lend themselves to even further research in teacher education, which is crucial to our understanding of professional development and the preparation of future teachers:

- How do student teachers working in early childhood and elementary classrooms participate in a literacy study group focused on best practices?
    - How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction?
    - How do students involved in a literacy study group perform during student teaching?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design Overview

This qualitative case study analyzed the impact of a study group on preparing

undergraduate preservice teachers for teaching reading and writing at the early childhood and

elementary grade levels. In addition, this case study examined what occurs in a study group, as

student teachers met in a small group setting to discuss core literacy best practices. Merriam

(2009) explains, "A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" and

that…"the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object

of the study, the case" (p. 40). The study group operated within a "bounded system" over the

course of one semester, functioning as one particular study group within one particular teacher

education program.

During the spring semester, students met on a weekly basis immediately following their

student teaching seminar to delve further into discussion about each of the individual

components of a comprehensive, core literacy program. Table 1 highlights the schedule for the

study group with the topics that were discussed:

Table 1

Literacy Study Group Schedule

Timeframe (12 weeks during the Spring 2014 semester)	Literacy Study Group Topic
Getting Started	▪Recruitment in EDC 401/402 ▪Study Group Overview
Week 1	▪Introduction to "Literacy Study Buddies" ▪The "Exemplary Day" Schedule ▪Common Core Standards for English-Language Arts (ELA)
Week 2	▪Assessment in Early Literacy
Week 3	▪Best Practices in Phonics/Phonemic Awareness/Fluency Instruction
Week 4	▪Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction

Week 5	▪Reading Aloud/Fiction Comprehension
Week 6	▪Reading Aloud/Nonfiction Comprehension
Week 7	▪Reading Workshop (Mini-Lesson and Independent/Partner Practice)
Week 8	▪Storytelling and Oral Language
Week 9	▪Literacy Work Stations (Literacy Centers)
Week 10	▪Guided Reading/Small Group Instruction
Week 11	▪Writing Workshop
Week 12	▪Interdisciplinary Literacy/Literacy in the Content Areas

In addition to the topics listed above, a recurring discussion about student motivation and engagement was included as an important underlying component of high quality literacy instruction. Each study group session lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour throughout the duration of the spring semester. Following the criteria for successful study groups, I encouraged the participants to self-select topics to present and further explore with the group. The study group was designed to provide opportunities for students to collaborate and have a natural discussion about the topic as they relate to the overall student teaching experience. In addition, I encouraged students to share their learning and determine next steps for implementation of practice. In this way, participants shared ownership of the literacy study group forum.

Context

The study took place at the Division of Education at Bloomington College in northeastern New Jersey. Bloomington College is a small, private liberal arts college that serves approximately 2,000 students. Bloomington's programs are accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and approved by the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education. The teacher education program is accredited by the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). Among its many academic programs, Bloomington College offers a Bachelor

of Arts degree in Education to undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students. Students who

choose to major in education can select from the following options: (1) Elementary Education

and Early Childhood, (2) Elementary with Subject Matter Specialization, (3) Secondary

Education with Subject Matter Specialization, and (4) Special Education and Early Childhood.

Regardless of program, all education students are required to take EDC 321 Developing

Children's Literacy Across the Grades: Methods and Strategies. This is the only literacy course

offered in the teacher education program at Bloomington College. The study group intervention,

or "Literacy Study Buddies," intentionally expanded opportunities in literacy learning for

participating early childhood, elementary, and special education majors. What differentiates this

from simply adding another course requirement is that preservice teachers had an opportunity to

continue their professional development based on interest in a particular field or subject matter,

moving beyond the typical required course units or program tracks.

Gaining Access

As a fulltime Instructor, and now Assistant Professor of Teacher Education at

Bloomington College, I am granted open-access to conducting research at the college. This

research is supported by Dr. Nora Krieger, Chairperson of the Education Division, in addition to

the faculty of the Education Division and administration at Bloomington College.

Documentation regarding IRB approval for using Bloomington College students was completed

by expedited review through IRB at both Bloomington College and Scarlet University.

Research Participants

Selection Criteria

Using criterion-based selection, six students in EDC 400 Student Teaching Seminar

received a recruitment letter (See Appendix A) at the beginning of the study and had an

opportunity to opt-in if interested in joining the literacy study group. Merriam (2009) instructs,

"In criterion-based selection you 'create the list of the attributes essential' to your study and then

'proceed to find or locate a unit matching the list'" (p. 77). The following criteria guided

purposeful sampling: (1) participants must be undergraduate or post-baccalaureate students

completing student teaching in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms during the duration of the study,

and (2) participants must be early childhood/elementary, elementary with subject matter

specialization, or early childhood/special education majors.   Because the study group took place

immediately following the seminar course, students choosing not to participate were under no

pressure to do so. However, the design of the study group was such that a convenience sample

had an opportunity to consider whether to join or not based on time, location, and availability.

All participants who agreed to take part in the study were selected and received an informed

consent letter (See Appendix B).

Recruitment Plan

Recruitment took place within one course section of EDC 401/402 Student Teaching

Seminar during the first week of class. Students who met the participant selection criteria had an

opportunity to opt-in if interested and began meeting as a study group during the second week of

the semester. Information provided to students emphasized that participation in the study group

was strictly voluntary, and would have no impact on students' course credits or ability to

complete student teaching or the student teaching seminar (EDC 401/402). In addition to

literacy materials provided during the study group, participants received a gift card in the amount

of $300.00 to Amazon® as a form of compensation.

Literacy Study Buddies

After receiving information about the study, all six participants agreed to join "Literacy Study Buddies." A total of seven students were student teaching during the Spring semester; however, one did not qualify to participate because she was student teaching in a secondary English classroom. Four students were in the traditional undergraduate program and two were post-baccalaureate students returning to college to earn teaching certifications. All except one student completed the literacy methods course (EDC 321) at Bloomington College. One distinguishing characteristic of the study group is that all participants are African American females. While race is not the focus of this particular study, this unique sampling demographic is particularly worth noting because Pre-K-sixth grade teachers in the United States are often middle-class white females. Further information about information that exists in the research on African American female teachers is included in the literature review. The participants' identities were kept confidential and pseudonyms reflecting the demographics of the group were used at all times during analysis and in the reporting of the findings. The following section briefly introduces each of the study group participants. This information was acquired through my interaction with the students at the college and through data collected during the launching of Literacy Study Buddies during week one.

Sharonda. Sharonda is a traditional undergraduate student majoring in early childhood/special education. At the time in which she was admitted to the college, the literacy methods course (EDC 321) was not a requirement outlined in the course catalog. Although this requirement was changed under the new Director of Special Education, Sharonda missed an opportunity to study the foundations of literacy instruction or to delve further into discussions related to literacy strategies and skills. Born and raised in an urban city in New Jersey, Sharonda

is excited about student teaching in a special education resource room. She states, "I am from Paterson, which is why I'm interested in doing my observations and student teaching there…I want to give back to my city."

Christine. Christine is a traditional undergraduate student majoring in elementary education with subject matter specialization in English. Christine is student teaching in a sixth grade classroom at a suburban middle school in New Jersey. Similar to Sharonda, she is teaching where she grew up, however Christine is student teaching at the same middle school she once attended. She states, "I went to that middle school, so I'm a little bit familiar with the school."

Corrina. Corrina is an adult undergraduate student, returning to Bloomington College to receive her P-3 certification after spending a number of years teaching young children in private early childhood centers and working as a substitute teacher. She is student teaching in a Kindergarten classroom at an upper-middle class elementary school in New Jersey. Corrina is also very familiar with her placement because her children went through the school system and it is located in the suburban community where she resides.

Trina. Trina is a traditional undergraduate student majoring in early childhood/special education. She is student teaching in Bloomington Public Schools at an elementary school, serving special needs students in grades one through five while working alongside a resource room teacher.

Jennie. Jennie is a post-baccalaureate student, returning to school after many years to obtain her P-3 Certification. While Jennie is the oldest of the students receiving certification as a teacher, her energy and warm commitment to the development of young children is contagious. Jennie is completing her student teaching in an urban Pre-K classroom in New Jersey. This

location is quite familiar to Jennie because it is where she spent many years working as a

classroom aide.

      Phyllis. Phyllis is a post-baccalaureate student receiving certification in early childhood

and special education. During the semester her student teaching experience is split, as she

spends half of the semester in a mainstream third grade classroom and the other half of the

semester in a self-contained special education third grade classroom. Phyllis is student teaching

in a suburban community where her son attends school. She states, "My son went to McDivitt

Elementary School, so I'm familiar with the school, teachers, secretaries, and everyone…so

they're excited." Like Jennie, Phyllis has extensive experience working as a classroom aide in

an urban school district not far from the college.

Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

      Table 2 illustrates how the research questions in this study are linked to data collection

strategies:

Table 2

Data Collection

Research Question/Sub-Questions	Data sources that would generate this information…
How do student teachers working in Pre-K to 6th grade classrooms participate in a literacy study group focused on best practices?	▪Field Notes (Taken during weekly study group sessions) ▪Student interviews
How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction?	▪PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Scores (Pre-Test and Post-Test) ▪Field Notes (Taken during weekly study group sessions) ▪Student interviews
How do students involved in a literacy study group perform during student teaching?	▪Student Teaching Observations (Observation Feedback Form and End of Semester Clinical Competency Inventory) ▪ Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS)

Beginning in late January, the participants described earlier met for one hour a week with their "Literacy Study Buddies" study group. In order to collect baseline data regarding participants' literacy content knowledge, all participants completed a 24 question, multiple-choice PRAXIS practice test for language and literacy. These questions were developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) and included in their official Early Childhood: Content Knowledge study guide, aligned with the testing required of early childhood and elementary teachers in New Jersey (See Appendix C).

During each study group session, I took highly descriptive field notes in order to carefully observe the physical setting of the activity, the participants, activities and interactions, conversation, and subtle factors. Adapted from Merriam's criteria for careful qualitative observation, I used an observation template to collect field notes that capture these elements in addition to discussions centered on literacy content knowledge and connections to classroom practice (See Appendix D). As a participant-observer, I looked to see how students engaged in various topics related to best practices in literacy instruction. At the beginning of the study, I provided students with an overview of an exemplary day schedule and the core literacy components. We spent a brief session reviewing these components, which provided the participants with a framework for discussion throughout the twelve week study. Study group norms were also discussed at the first meeting. For example, participants were informed that ownership of study group rested among the participants and not with the facilitator. Participants were encouraged to sign up as "group leaders" according to the schedule of topics and their interest in further exploring specific topics. As a participant-observer, I attended the weekly study group sessions to take field notes and jot down ideas related to participation and student teachers' development of knowledge about literacy best practices. Suggestions about readings

and activities were only provided if and when students asked for my assistance. Most often, I would re-direct participants' questions by asking, "What does the group think?"

While test scores and field notes provided data related to students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction, I was also interested in what impact the study group would potentially have on students' practice, or application of literacy instruction during student teaching. Participants' student teaching supervisors were required to complete a total of seven classroom observations during the semester as part of the Division's data collection. Using the Observation Feedback Form (See Appendix E), supervisors rated the performance of the student teachers according to the eleven New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers (NJPST). Because student teachers are generally required to teach multiple subjects, not all observations occur during reading. This is why, for the purposes of this study only, the first and final observations focused specifically on reading or language arts lessons. In addition to the Observation Feedback Form, supervisors used the revised Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS) during these two scheduled visits to observe five dimensions of literacy instruction (See Appendix F). This data provided information about student teachers' knowledge and delivery of literacy instruction, and how, if at all, this might develop over the course of the semester. A final summative evaluation of each student teacher's performance was recorded on the end of semester Clinical Competency Inventory (CCI). This performance-based assessment instrument also measures competencies aligned with the NJPST and provides an opportunity for both the supervisor and student teacher to reflect on the candidate's overall competencies (See Appendix G).

At the conclusion of the study, all participants took part in an interview focused on their experience in the literacy study group (See Appendix H). Merriam (2009) states, "In qualitative

research, interviewing is often the major source of the qualitative data needed for understanding

the phenomenon under study" (p. 114). Using a semi-structured interview format allowed me to

collect specific information desired from all the respondents, but in an open-ended format that

allowed for further discussion related to students' literacy study group experiences. These

interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for data analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

Merriam (2009) notes, "Some system for organizing and managing data needs to be

devised early in your study" (p. 173). With this in mind, I created a "Literacy Study Buddies"

study binder as soon as I began to work on the study in which to organize IRB consent forms,

test data, field notes, student teaching observations, and attendance records for the duration of

the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants (as stated earlier) and recorded on the

attendance record for later reference when transcribing and reviewing data.

Merriam (2009) emphasizes the importance of beginning data analysis during data

collection: "Simultaneous data collection and analysis occurs both in and out of the field. That is,

you can be doing some rudimentary analysis while you are in the process of collecting data, as

well as between data collection…" (p. 171). Writing notes and memos in a research journal and

immediately reading and rereading data allowed me to capture reflections or hunches related to

the research questions. Field notes, student interviews, and recorded observations were

immediately coded upon recording. Coffey & Atkinson (1996) explain, "It is worth stressing

here that codes are organizing principles that are not set in stone. They are our own creations, in

that we identify and select them ourselves. They are tools to think with" (p. 32). Although

tentative categories emerged during early data collection, later categories were systematically

formed by referring back to the purpose of the study, the research questions, theoretical

framework, and the larger body of literature on teacher education and literacy instruction. These

categories evolved through the use of a codebook in which items related to literacy knowledge

and classroom practices were separated. Definitions related to each code were reviewed and

discussed with a voluntary co-coder, who serves as an Associate Professor in the Division of

Education at the College.

Ensuring Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure validity and reliability, participants were debriefed (See Appendix I)

and member checks were conducted to guarantee accuracy among participants' responses. In

addition, I triangulated data sources by reviewing field notes, transcribed student interviews,

student teaching observations, and PRAXIS practice test scores. Cross verification among these

sources enabled me to avoid any biases, as throughout the study it is evident that multiple

pathways led to the same result.

Pilot testing of the literacy observation form and PRAXIS practice test questions during

the fall 2013 semester contributed to the trustworthiness of data collection. Training of the

student teacher supervisors in the use of the literacy observation tool and discussions for

effective implementation of the tool during the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters also

increased reliability.

In terms of evaluating student teachers, Bloomington College Division of Education uses

a summative evaluation instrument known as the Clinical Competency Inventory (CCI) and a

formative evaluation instrument called the Observation Feedback Form. The CCI was developed

with the New Jersey Teacher Assessment Consortium (NJTAC), which represents an extensive

group of teacher education programs across the state of New Jersey. The CCI was developed

based on NJ Professional Standards of Teaching (NJPST). The Observation Feedback Form was

initially developed in conjunction with Caldwell College, and later modified with input from

Bloomington College supervisors based on the Consortium's CCI and the NJPST. Every

semester supervisors attend training sessions that provide an overview of these tools and

instructions on how to properly administer them.   Supervisors also participate in a protocol

observation activity to ensure inter-rater reliability.

Confidence is increased in that all data collected during study group sessions was

facilitated by the same instructor. Prolonged time in the field (approximately 12 weeks)

increases confidence in the research design and analysis.

To ensure reliability regarding the coded study group transcriptions, I worked with a co-

coder to review the purpose of the study, research questions, and definitions in the codebook.

Working alongside a co-coder assisted in the development of categories responsive to the

purpose of the research that emerged from the data. Digitally coded transcripts with notes about

emerging findings, questions, and detailed accounts were shared between two coders. Merriam

(2009) explains, "Strategies that a qualitative researcher can use to ensure for consistency and

dependability or reliability are triangulation, peer examination, investigator's position, and the

audit trail" (p. 222). Through peer examination and cross-checks with the data there is

confidence that the results of the study are consistent and dependable.

Ethical Issues

Because I am a fulltime instructor in the Bloomington College Division of Education, I

could potentially be perceived in a position of power, notably because I teach all sections of

EDC 321, a literacy course students complete prior to student teaching. However, this research

study was designed based on my interest in how to best prepare preservice teachers for the

literacy demands of today's early childhood and elementary classrooms. The goal of this study

was to examine the intervention of the literacy study group. Student teachers were under no

obligation to participate in the study, and those who joined were reminded that they could drop

out and/or rejoin at any time. None of the components of this study were in any way connected

to the student teaching experience (EDC 401/402) or with how students earned their course

credits for student teaching.

Limitations

Because this research study is context-specific and based on a small purposeful sample, it

is important to note that these findings are not generalizable to all teacher education programs,

but nonetheless contribute to what we know about teacher preparation as it relates to the field of

literacy. Findings from this study could potentially have an impact on how teacher educators

think about program design and curriculum that meets the needs of teachers who are preparing to

teach reading in early childhood and elementary settings.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

In this study, I began with the assumption that participating in a literacy study group could be one way to impact preservice teachers' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction while enriching the student teaching experience. This assumption was based on personal observations over the course of three years teaching in the teacher education program. Students would take one literacy course just prior to student teaching and be expected to understand strategies and methods for teaching reading appropriate to students in Pre-K through twelfth grade. While I would emphasize the importance of lifelong learning and continued professional development, it was my belief that this one course provided students with more of a literacy appetizer, only whetting their palates for topics included thoroughly in a more comprehensive, balanced model. This research grew out of a desire to understand more about how student teachers working in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms might participate in a literacy study group based on best practices. Furthermore, I hoped to better understand what changes, if any, might occur related to students' content knowledge about literacy instruction and practice in the field.

Though the college classroom can be a context for deep and engaging discussions related to the field of literacy, theory supports that preservice teachers rely less and less on declarative knowledge as they transition into becoming novice teachers (Snow, Griffin, Burns, 2005). The knowledge to support the teaching of reading therefore must be combined with situated learning experiences in which the candidate has an opportunity to act as more of a reflective practitioner. Research has documented that study groups provide one forum in which teachers can accomplish just that. Instead of teaching reading isolated from peers during student teaching, this study, grounded in sociocultural learning theory, considers how a community of practice perspective might

have an impact on students' knowledge and practice without simply adding another course requirement (Wenger, 1998).

In the sections that follow I first discuss findings related to students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction. I then describe how preservice teachers involved in the study participated in the study group and how they performed during student teaching.

How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction?

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test

Guided by the results of data previously analyzed from a pilot study, I began this study with strong evidence that taking one literacy course does not provide preservice teachers with comprehensive knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction. At the beginning of the semester, all participants were given a PRAXIS Reading Practice Test in order for me to have concrete and measurable data related to students' knowledge about literacy instruction. This baseline information provided insight about the types of questions students were able to answer correctly in addition to the types of questions asked within the test.

The topic areas addressed on the 24-question multiple choice test include: phonemic awareness, phonics, writing, comprehension, content area literacy, vocabulary, and concepts of print. Table 3 shows the total number of each type of question for each literacy topic. Because of the nature of early literacy development, great emphasis is placed on knowledge of phonics, or spelling and decoding, and comprehension, as understanding is the ultimate goal of reading instruction. This test also strongly emphasizes the importance of writing in terms of language

Table 3

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Makeup Analysis

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Makeup Analysis	
Types of Questions by Topic Area	Total # of Each Type of Question
Phonemic Awareness	2
Phonics	7
Writing	4
Comprehension	5
Content Area Literacy	1
Vocabulary	3
Concepts of Print	1
Fluency	1

and literacy development. Pre-test scores indicate that these areas were also where common incorrect answers were chosen. Errors related to questions about phonics, comprehension, and writing was noted consistently among the participants. However, vocabulary was another area in which participants had a difficult time choosing the correct answer. Only three questions related to vocabulary are included on the practice test.

Participants' performance on the pre- and –post tests are included in Table 4. The highest pre-test scores were achieved by Corrina and Trina, two students who are enrolled in the Honors Program at the college. They were followed by Sharonda, Phyllis, and Christine. The lowest pre-test score of 8% was attained by Jennie. Post-test results remained generally the same among the highest scorers. For example, Corrina received one additional question correct, while Trina had two additional incorrect choices. However, Trina's score of 92% on the pre-test

Table 4

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Scores

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Scores							
Student's Name	Pre-Test Number of Questions Correct (out of 24)	Pre-Test Score Percentage	Post-Test Number of Questions Correct (out of 24)	Post-Test Score Percentage	Change (# of questions correct)	Absolute Change in Score Percentage	Relative Change in Score Percentage
Sharonda	14	58%	13	54%	-1	-4%	-6.9%
Christine	11	46%	17	71%	+6	+25%	+54.3%
Corrina	19	79%	20	83%	+1	+4%	+5.1%
Trina	22	92%	20	83%	-2	-9%	-9.8%
Jennie	8	33%	12	50%	+4	+17%	+51.5%
Phyllis	13	54%	16	67%	+3	+13%	+24.1%

demonstrated her already thorough knowledge of literacy instruction, as Corrina achieved the

next highest score of 79%. Researchers often refer to this as the ceiling effect, where in this case

the highest possible score attained would be 100%. Overall, there was a trend in higher post-test

scores on the PRAXIS Reading Practice Test. Phyllis answered three additional questions

correctly and Jennie answered four additional questions correctly. Christine experienced the

largest growth by answering an additional six questions correctly. Sharonda, however, scored

relatively similar to the pre-test. Perhaps this result could be related to the fact that she had

never taken a literacy course before and missed two study group sessions. Having never taken a

literacy course, Sharonda had limited declarative background knowledge related to literacy in

which she could rely on. Despite the small sample size and the qualitative nature of the overall

study, important conclusions can still be drawn about participants' individual performance

through brief quantitative analysis. The average test score improved pre-study group to post-

study group with the largest gains utilized by those with the lowest pre-study group test scores.

In the next section I will highlight findings related to participants' knowledge of best practices in literacy instruction by study group topics addressed throughout the semester.

Setting a Focus for Learning in the Literacy Study Group

During the first study group meeting, participants reviewed the schedule of topics, shared information about placements, and signed up to serve as "group leaders" to present specific core topics in literacy instruction according to the devised schedule. During this initial study group meeting, the participants set a path for learning during the semester. The following sessions explored the components of a comprehensive literacy program, with students seeking to pay particular attention to assessment, differentiation, and motivation and engagement.

Exploring Topics Through the Literacy Study Group

Assessment in Literacy.

Corrina became the group leader to facilitate discussions with the study group about assessment in literacy. Participants shared knowledge related to the following areas: (1) D.I.B.E.L.S. as an early literacy assessment, (2) literacy assessments in the upper-grades, (3) literacy assessments in special education classrooms, and (3) current political issues with assessment.

Through demonstration, Corrina began by using alphabet flashcards to assess ways in which each individual models letter sounds. She explained, "I'm going to show you a card, and I don't want you to tell me the letter. I want you to give me the sound the letter makes." During this demonstration many of the students added extra sounds to the letters. Corrina immediately identified that Jennie and Sharonda needed additional support with isolating just the letter sounds and debriefed the activity with the group.

It stands for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, and the D.I.B.E.L.S. is an assessment…and it really measures and incorporates fluency and the ability to rapidly process information. And the reason why I did this little exercise with you is because it's based upon five principles for prerequisites for early reading…Some of you did really well, and some of you do what a lot of teachers do. They add a vowel to the letter. They don't sound out the letter; they're adding a vowel. Like when you say 'b' some teachers add the letter a like 'bah.'

The study group participants noted their incorrect modeling of letter sounds and how this might affect a young reader's ability to successfully demonstrate mastery of the assessment. Jennie explained, "It's interesting because you look at 'l' and the picture of the leaf and you want to enunciate 'lee' because you're thinking of leaves." Sharonda also connected the modeled activity to prior experiences in early childhood classrooms: "I've seen this done before too, now that I think about it. I've seen a teacher open their mouth for consonants and model it incorrectly." After the group reflected on the assessment tool itself and how teachers must be mindful of the explicit instruction they provide, Corrina shared final thoughts related to the activity and reflected on the importance of providing high quality instruction.

How many kids did I mislead by the way I instructed them? For me, it was sort of like a real wakeup call on how we go into the classrooms and what we're instructing them on. We just need to be really careful on things like this because it's these little things that make a big difference in certain children learning to read.

In addition to discussing a relevant assessment tool in early childhood classrooms, students had an opportunity to consider the use of literacy assessments in the upper grades. Christine explained, "My teachers are doing comprehension assessments. It's mainly reading comprehension with multiple choice. Read the story and then answer the multiple choice questions." While a majority of the participants successfully conducted a tutoring project and assessed readers while taking EDC 321, no connections were made to previous coursework. As a participant observer, I explained that they might consider using various assessment tools in the

classroom, specifically those with which they were familiar in McKenna and Stahl's *Assessment for Reading Instruction*. Students asked that I share digital copies of running records to use with K-six students. Christine added, "I was going to ask you all why you think they don't do running records at the middle school. Wouldn't you think from their comprehension that maybe there's something wrong with their reading?"

A unique assessment shared with the group involved Sharonda's observation of a trial and error assessment in a special education classroom. While the assessments she shared are not literacy specific, the areas they encompass involve instruction related to environmental print. Sharonda explained, "One girl will be asked what her phone number is. The teacher will ask her multiple times through trials. He will give her a paper with first few numbers of the phone number and then the rest are covered with post-its." Because of Sharonda's placement, the group wanted to know if assessments are used with students who are not yet reading on their own. Sharonda further explained, "The girl I'm talking about right now is on the lowest level. She can do sight words and days of the week…So with spelling she still has to work on patterns and everything." Discussing how to differentiate literacy instruction for special needs students also led the group to reflect on the current era of accountability and assessment. Group members collectively agreed that there are issues with testing and Individual Education Programs (IEPs). Mainly, the group shared their dismay. Sharonda stated, "I can't believe they have to take the NJASK when they don't even get a lot of help. These kids are all autistic and the teacher tells me the only thing she can do is read them the questions." Reflecting on her own experiences raising a child with an IEP, Corrina questioned why her daughter even has to take the test if it has no effect on promoting a child to the next grade level.

> Why do they need to take it? You know what I mean? Because my daughter has taken
> every one of these exams, and, what do they say, she's partially proficient? That's the

nice way they say it. Yeah, they don't say she's failing. But, yet, she's moving on so I question it.

Discussing current issues in education led the group to consider how political factors in education affect assessment in literacy. Participants explored the use of formative assessment tools, but reminded one another about how summative assessments are being used to evaluate teacher effectiveness. Finally, Sharonda and Jennie planned to be discussion directors for sharing information about best practices in phonics and fluency.

Phonics.

During week three of the study group, participants divided the discussion to address phonics and fluency. Participants addressed the following areas related to phonics instruction: (1) engaging learners in early literacy classrooms, (2) using direct instruction, (3) employing a variety of hands-on materials for instruction, and (4) word sorting with students.

Because of Jennie's placement in a Pre-Kindergarten setting, she decided to present on the topic of phonics, explaining how it naturally fits into the exemplary day and engages young learners. She explains, "When we transition from one activity to another it's fun to use letters and sounds. We really start with their names." Jennie's further description of the types of activities that take place in the classroom led participants to agree about how exhausting it must be to teach phonics in a Pre-K classroom.

> We might give the kids a bag with letters in them and sing, "Can you find the letter A? Can you find the letter A?" Then the kids go in the bag and try to pull out and find the letter. They will find it and start waving it in the air. We try to incorporate phonics and phonemic awareness in all of our activities from the time they come in until it's time to go home. Even at the end of the day we might say, "Oh, if your name starts with the letter A it's time to go to your cubby and put your jacket on!" We also encourage the students to find words in the room that start with certain letters. They can find it or point to it.

Trina provided perspectives from a special education background, noting how direct

instruction benefits readers. Particularly, she broadened the group's understanding of phonics by

extending this type of instruction to include the use of decodable readers, materials that are often

readily available in early literacy classrooms.

> With my first grader, last week we were arranging letters of the alphabet. We are
> still working on letter sounds. So we might ask, "What letter is this?" and he'll
> say "O, ah, octopus." He will do that for almost every letter that we ask him
> about. So what we're doing now is simple readings; two page readings with lots
> of repetition. "I see the rooster. It is on the roof."

Sharonda related to phonics by describing the limited way in which teachers often rely on

worksheets and workbook pages to review skills. Using the whiteboard in the study group

conference room, she demonstrated what these pages consist of (See Figure 2).

> For phonics, the students from the high functioning class were working on
> worksheets dealing with blends. They had a certain chunk of letters that make a
> sound and then they had all the words that you could make with the chunks. So,
> when a student was doing –ake, there would be the picture of a cake, and you'd
> have to write the word underneath.

To build on this understanding of phonics, Phyllis suggested a schedule in which words

are introduced at the beginning of the week and sorted by endings or sounds.

> …with phonics on Mondays we usually introduce the words. Then the students
> group them by endings. Then they have to sound them out, so if a word has 'ou'
> they will sound out 'thought.' They have to break up the words and make sure
> that they put them in the right area.
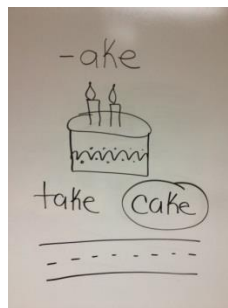
Figure 2: Students' Demonstration of Phonics Instruction with Worksheets

Phyllis's emphasis on an interactive hands-on approach to phonics instruction included

suggestions for a weekly schedule of activities including putting words in alphabetical order,

writing sentences, and also having students visually identify spelling patterns. She explains,

"…in the classroom we have a poem where they have to listen to the sound and use two different

crayons. The "ou" sound in "cousin" would be highlighted with one color and the "ou" that

sounds like "thought" would be highlighted with the other color. Then they also have this *Word*

Works book that they work from." Phyllis explained to the group that the delivery of literacy

instruction is important, and that if phonics lessons are engaging and involve the students then

the students will take ownership of their learning and feel successful in having learned new

skills. She also brought an example of the classroom resource *Word Works* to share with the

study group (See Figure 3).
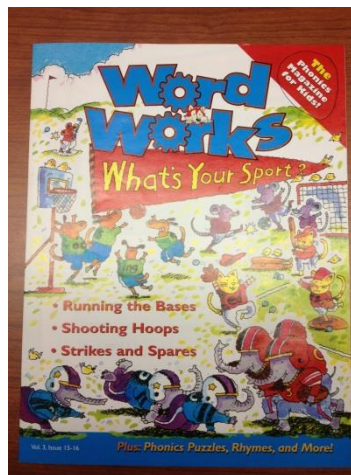
Figure 3: Sample Phonics Classroom Resource

After hearing about engaging types of lessons, Corrina shared feelings of confusion and

resentment about the emphasis of skill and drill instruction. Holding a massive stack of phonics

worksheets, Corrina vented, "I see phonics and I'm betwixt and between. I like what I'm

hearing from everyone, especially with Pre-K. But then there seems to be a really big jump

when you get to Kindergarten, because in my class I'm seeing a lot of this…a lot of worksheets

and a lot of worksheets, and a lot of worksheets." The group expressed a shared dismay at how

phonics is being implemented in her classroom and agreed that a hands-on approach would

benefit young learners, especially considering that many of the students in Corrina's classroom

never attended Pre-K. Reflecting on the importance of lesson design, Corrina concluded her

thoughts with the group.

> Yes, it's very dry! It's very dry! And then they're telling me in this nice little
> book what the anticipatory set should be. …for me there is no differentiation.
> There is no change. It's sort of robotic to me."

Fluency.

Through their discussion of fluency, participants gained knowledge about the following

areas: (1) using repeated readings to build fluency, (2) reading aloud with expression, and (3)

engaging reluctant readers using a variety of strategies.

Sharonda began by focusing on the type of fluency instruction she observed in her special

education classroom. As the lead discussant for this topic, she described how she was able to

work with an individual student in her practicum to further develop his reading fluency.

> I took out my phone to time him and marked off how many words were incorrect.
> I started without him even knowing that I was timing him. I would just ask,
> "Could you read this to me?" I really want to see if it increases throughout the
> times that I work with him.

Combining her knowledge of best practices in fluency with situated activities in the special

education classroom, Sharonda informed the group about the importance of repeated readings.

In addition, she reflected on the underlying importance of having instruction that motivates and

engages young learners.

> I'm working on fluency and finding ways to make it exciting because you don't
> just want to tell students "read faster." I just ask, "Do you want to see how fast

> you can read this?" They say, "Yeah!" It's like we make it a game so they don't
> feel too much pressure.

In *Reading More, Reading Better,* Hiebert (2009) explains, "…within special education settings

students were more often provided whole-group instruction with little individualization or

differentiation, while remedial reading teachers spent more time on individual instruction (p.

212). While Sharonda understands the importance of opportunities for individualized instruction

in the classroom, it is important to note that her discussion about fluency focuses on speed,

leaving out discussion of automaticity, accuracy, and expression. This singular focus on speed is

perhaps why in the 2014 "What's Hot" issue of *Reading Today*, at least 75% of experts in the

field believe that fluency is not hot and more than 50% of respondents agreed that it should not

be hot.

Jennie, however, added to Sharonda's knowledge of fluency by emphasizing the

importance of expression. When explaining how fluency is modeled constantly in the Pre-

Kindergarten classroom, Jennie made connections to instruction that takes place during read

aloud. She added, "Today I read a story, so you know I'm doing my expressions and trying to

make it flow for them to understand." Trina also discussed how reading with expression can

make a story come alive for students. She shared an anecdote of a third grade teacher who used

a whole class novel to conduct round robin reading.

> Her tone was so monotonous. It was the most boring read aloud ever. The class
> was so cold, literally cold, dry, and then one of the students with a behavioral
> issue was asked to sit on a chair separate from the children on the carpet. She
> would say, "Who wants to read next?"

The group found enjoyment, laughing at how Trina sarcastically explained the lack of excitement

in the learning environment.

> Some children would be like, "Ooh, ooh, me!" Then she picked on the child that
> she told to go sit on the chair. He said, "I don't want to do this!" She said, "Well,

> you have to do it." Then he said, "Well, I'm not!" Then she turned to the class and said, "So who wants to read?" And he got away with not doing it, and it was so boring.

Discussing practices that are not based on scientific reading research led to some clarifying questions from Sharonda, who empathized with the young boy who was disinterested in round robin reading.

> I was going to ask you all, because I'm not a person who likes to read out loud… I don't like to. I like to read. I just don't like to talk out loud. When I was in school the kids in class would always say something about the person who was reading, so I'd rather not read. You know? I'm just going to sit there and be quiet. So, I would just be quiet and I'm wondering if there is another way you would involve me? I don't like reading out loud and I wouldn't want you to call on me if I don't have my hand up.

The group agreed that round robin reading would not be a way to further develop students' reading fluency and suggested other options for engaging reluctant readers. For example, the group liked how in choral reading everybody has one voice and no one is stressed and counting ahead to determine what paragraph they might be called on to read. Sharonda explained, "I would do that too! I would read it like six times just to make sure it was perfect! I wouldn't even be listening to anyone else reading." Phyllis further suggested that the teacher monitor students' comprehension if round-robin reading were to be employed in the classroom. She recommended, "I would make sure that they're actually following along, so I ask them questions within that page. A lot of times they raise their hands." Some clarifications were needed in terms of whether or not choral reading might disengage readers who are not able to keep up with the class. Although the students added that choral reading is a safe space because individual readers are not heard, Christine questioned the use of such a strategy with her sixth graders. She mentioned, "If I do choral reading they might say, 'Man, that's babyish!' I'm wondering if I should play the story on tape.

Vocabulary.

Discussions about vocabulary instruction further developed participants' knowledge in the following areas: (1) motivating adolescent learners, (2) using hands-on approaches for instruction, (3) making instruction relevant and meaningful to students' lives, (4) explicitly choosing words to teach, (5) differentiating instruction for all learners, (6) creating a print-rich environment, and (7) developing vocabulary through oral language.

As the lead group presenter for the topic of vocabulary, Christine began the study group by dismissing the ineffective practice of having students simply look up words in a dictionary and copy their definitions. She explained to the group how in her sixth grade placement each grade level has a supervisor that creates a list of vocabulary words for each class to focus on as a word of the day. She described, "Each class will get the same vocabulary word of the day with the definition and basically what happens is for about 10-15 minutes they copy down the vocabulary word and the definition. …At the end of the month they study all of the vocabulary words and they have a vocabulary test. It's not differentiated at all." Through this conversation, Christine emphasized that vocabulary instruction must motivate adolescent learners. She noted how many students in the class fail to complete the assignment because they are not interested and engaged during the activity time. Instead, Christine pronounced her plan for a more interactive approach to word learning.

> One of the things that I'm doing is…Because I'm doing inferencing, I'm having them do a biography on Anne Frank. Some of the words are a little bit about their grade level, so I'm actually going to have each student either have the word or the definition. They're going to go around the room to try to find their match. That's one of the things I'd like to do.

Other group members expressed interest in this type of instruction and provided support for Christine's ideas. Sharonda noted, "That's great that you're going to give them the words and

the definitions and see who can come up with a match. I heard you saying this and I thought, 'Oh, that's great.'" Shortly thereafter, Christine encouraged the study group participants to share more ideas for best practices in vocabulary instruction, while noting how there are curriculum constraints and testing pressures that contribute to her student teaching environment.

> And I understand that they're trying to get them ready for the test in April, so that's where a lot of the words come from. But they could have the same words in the same language arts class. Some of the words seem more like SAT words. The teachers have to do it, so it's required. I actually wanted to ask you guys what kinds of ideas you have.

Trina agreed with Christine about how the "Go look it up in a dictionary" approach is cumbersome and often confusing for young learners, adding that during one class she observed the students using a dictionary and sounding out words and having trouble finding them.

Context also played an important role during the study group meeting, as Corrina shared information about using context clues to determine unfamiliar vocabulary with Kindergarteners. Supporting the other participants' ideas, Corrina confirmed that this can be taught in a relevant and authentic way. She then modeled for the group the type of teacher language she used in a recently taught vocabulary lesson.

> What is the context that the word is used in? Like "naughty…" And I have them actually do movements with it [Corrina shakes her finger at the group]. The mother cat said, "You naughty kittens!" Look at the context. What's going on? And they say, "Bad?" So they know the context and can pretty much read it to understand what's going on and then come up with that word.

Corrina further added how authentic and relevant instruction must relate to the students. She explained, "I know there are no naughty kids in Mrs. Smith's class. And they reply, 'No, Mrs. C., no bad kids…' So it makes it memorable for them and if they ever come across the word they will know 'Oh, Mrs. C. said naughty is bad.'"

In addition to emphasizing engaging types of activities, Phyllis discussed the importance of explicitly and intentionally choosing the right words to teach. Because her third grade class conducts a significant amount of novel studies, many of the students come across difficult words that need additional instruction.

> The students have the vocabulary words and sometimes, because I read it ahead, I see some words that I think they do not know. What I have them do is while we're reading that word you see we go over it first. We go over the words, but not the meanings of them. …And while we're reading, I tell them to jot that word down and to listen to the sentence and write their definition for what they think the definition of it is. And then when we're done, because at the same time we're going over it, I'm asking questions and they're sort of putting two and two together.

Additionally, she noted how vocabulary instruction must be differentiated for different types of learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs). Phyllis defined some accommodations benefiting a young child from Puerto Rico in her third grade classroom.

> On Friday, before the storm, I told him "You're going to do it because I believe in you. You can do it. You're very smart." I told him to just do five sentences with the vocabulary words. The kids all had to do ten. I told him just focus on the five and every day we will add to it until you have all twenty like all of the rest of the kids. Today I asked him if I could see the notebook and he was so excited. He did it. It happens slowly, but you have to differentiate. If you want that child to succeed, they will first have to succeed on a different level.

While Sharonda never completed the literacy methods course in her education program, she explained that her main takeaway with vocabulary instruction involved seeing a vocabulary word wall while observing in one particular teacher's classroom. She stated, "I was observing at McKinley and she had this whole juicy word wall. Her juicy word was 'welcome' in Pre-K." Many of the participants were intrigued by the idea of having a juicy word wall in the classroom, noting that during most observations and practicum experiences they had only seen word walls dedicated for the instruction of sight words, or typically misspelled words in the upper grades. Jennie offered to purchase display boards and bring them to the next study group session so that

the study group participants could take time to create and design their own vocabulary word

walls together (See Figures 4 and 5).
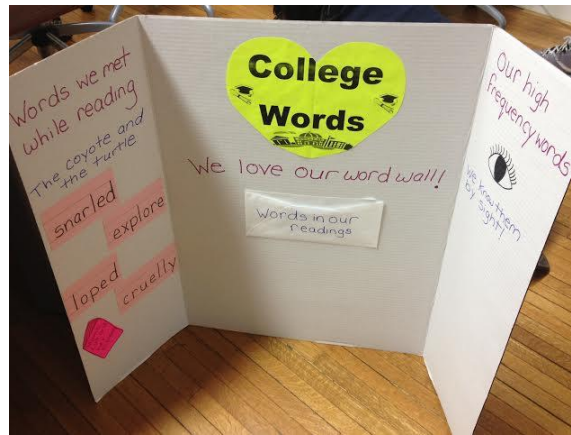
Figure 4: Vocabulary Word Wall Example
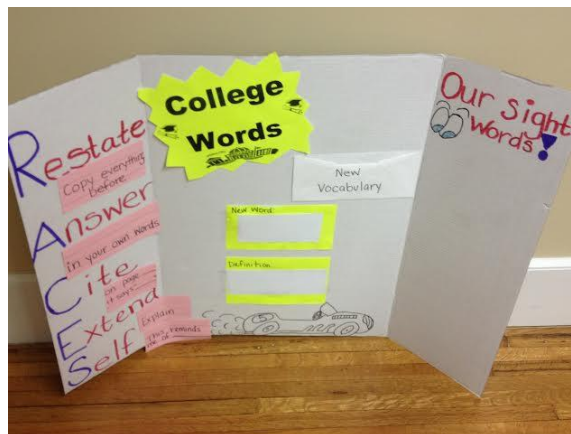
Figure 5: Vocabulary Word Wall Example with RACES Strategy

Finally, participants made connections to the importance of oral language for vocabulary

development, using a list of ideas for differentiating instruction from *Word Nerds* as a basis for

discussion. Trina explained, "One of the most important things about vocabulary is how you

integrate it. Words can be used in conversations." Phyllis supported this thinking, reflecting on

her own prior experiences as a mother raising a young boy.

> Like when my son was little I never used that "gaga-goo-goo" talk. I talked to
> him like I would talk to anybody else. I didn't lower my voice and have that baby
> talk, and I think that's how he ended up speaking. His vocabulary is so good

because of the fact that I talked to him the way I talk. If he didn't understand what I said I would explain to him what the definition is, or whatever, and then he would understand it. I think that's the same thing even within the classroom.

Comprehension and Fiction.

Because the new Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of balancing 50% fiction and nonfiction instruction in classrooms, two study group sessions were designated for best practices in comprehension. Study group participants decided that because a variety of approaches were being used in each of their placements, each would bring instructional ideas and artifacts to the fifth meeting to share. Participants' addressed the following areas related to comprehension and fiction: (1) deepening students' understanding of the text through action comprehension, (2) using readers' theater to motivate and engage learners, (3) supporting students with special needs, (4) using pictures and visuals with before and after reading activities, (5) teaching thematically, (6) creating print-rich environments, (7) using metacognitive approaches, and (8) exposing students to a variety of rich and diverse, high-quality texts.

Immediately, participants explored the idea of action comprehension, or collaborative ways in which teachers can deepen students' understanding of the text. The first example of action comprehension involved the implementation of reader's theater in the classroom. Because Sharonda was unfamiliar with the topic, Trina described a way in which a teacher might use this type of activity to further develop students' understanding of fiction texts.

> It's theater with a book basically. It's acting out the book, so you have a script. A good thing to do with the script is to create the script with the students. So, it's comprehension…it's fluency…it's everything all in one. Say for instance you have a book or a concept that you want students to learn. You can make a script by yourself or with the students. And you basically act it out.

Furthermore, Trina explained why this type of instruction is beneficial for young learners and offered practical suggestions for implementation..

> …that's a good way to help with socio-emotional development because the students will be interacting with each other. You can meet in small groups or meet in front of the school, or even for other classrooms. You can have your class go to other classrooms and do it. There are so many different ways to do reader's theater.

Phyllis added how using reader's theater motivates and engages all types of learners as well.

Using her experiences as a paraprofessional, she explained what it is like for kids who get

involved in this type of learning.

> I know last year in the third grade in our class another teacher pulled some of our kids out for resource. They would take the story we were reading and act it out in a theater script. When we were finished reading the book the students came in and they acted it out. They had their clothes on and everything. And you know, they were so into it.

Hearing how special needs students were engaged with the text reminded Trina about how action

comprehension can support special needs students specifically. She stated, "The good thing

about it is that students who are even emergent readers, or who are not reading can participate.

They might only have one or two lines, but they're involved in it with whatever they're doing."

In addition to reader's theater, the group explored other possibilities for making

comprehension come alive through action. After asking the group for suggestions for activities

with autistic learners, Sharonda learned about using hand signals to teach comprehension, and

how to engage the students in a hands-on approach when sequencing story events. Corrina

suggested, "You could tell the story through pictures and ask them to put them in order. That

way you can see if they are comprehending the story."

This led to other avenues for accommodating students, including the use of an

instructional technique designed for special needs students. Additional uses for pictures and

visuals were discussed as students explored different ideas related to before and after reading

activities. For example, Jennie included how in the Pre-Kindergarten classroom the students

practice the skill of retelling using props. She explained, "We did that with *The Hungry Caterpillar*. We'll have all the students holding the things that he ate. Then they come and stick them on the felt board and get involved." Corrina added how this type of action involves all learners and motivates their desire to read and understand stories.

> Yes, this past week I did a lesson on positions like in, on, over, and under. I did it with stuffed animals on the box and in the box. Then after I had them come up to the board and would give them a picture. They would tell me where the cat was…where the bird was…and put it in either in, on, over, or under.

Reflecting on the lesson, Corrina noted how students were successfully grasping the concepts taught.

> They all got it. The kids are saying, "I like this kind of lesson," as opposed to…And I'm getting feedback from them and seeing how they're enjoying doing rather than just the paper.

Corrina added how the use of visuals can grab the attention of the students during before reading activities as well. She stated, "Show them something to perk their interest. If it's a story about cats I might start with a rhyme to get them involved with it. And then after doing a little play back and forth where they have their interest perked, then I would call them over to the rug and allow them to do the walkthrough." Connecting again to the novel study approach in her practicum, Phyllis mentioned how a thematic approach to teaching comprehension can also actively engage students.

> Even with the story that I did with *The Chocolate Touch* the kids are excited that we're finished reading it, but now we're going to decorate the door (See Figure 6). And we had students write one favorite part from the story. We did a class vote to select one of them. Now that's the theme for our door. …They're so excited because it's like another step instead of just reading it and answering the questions. Now they have something else to do, and it's a door theme where everyone can see it.

Figure 6: Decorated Classroom Door

The use of visuals in the learning environment also emerged from discussions about

Christine's placement in a sixth grade classroom. She explained, "I've been using these anchor

charts and I have to say they really like it. I use it with theme and everything. And it's

something that can be up on the board or around the room that they can always refer back to."

Christine displayed examples of anchor charts (See Figures 7 and 8) and discussed how

important it is to access students' prior knowledge.

> With middle school students I feel like they connect more with the comprehension
> from the text when they can relate it to their own lives. So I try to connect their
> background knowledge with what's in the text so they can understand. We've
> been doing making inferences, so I just want to show you guys. So with making
> inferences we'll read a story and I'll have them make inferences as they listen to
> the recording of it. Basically they connect their prior knowledge with information
> from the text. We've been doing this with character traits.
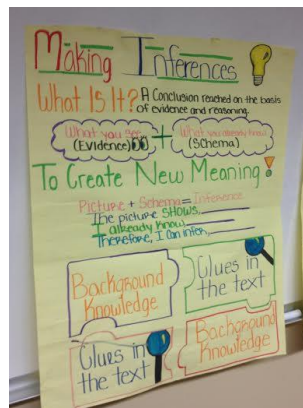
Figure 7: Anchor Chart Example
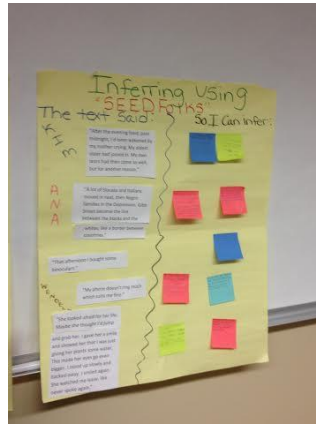
Figure 8: Anchor Chart Example

By discussing anchor charts, study group participants also gained new insights about the importance of creating a literacy-rich classroom for, and in front of the students. Trina argued, "You know, I think some teachers just have the wrong idea. I mean, they should be aware of best practices, but I know one teacher who prefers to buy everything online."

In addition to using visuals to enhance students' comprehension, the group also noticed how accountable talk plays a role. Focusing on the language of comprehension, Phyllis advocated for a classroom atmosphere where students do more of the talking than teachers during instruction.

> You want to hear what's on their mind and how they're making sense of it. If they don't understand it, maybe the person who's next to them can help them. Then you're getting it from their thoughts. You don't want to just put your thoughts into them. You want to hear how they understand the story and how they understood it in their language.

However, students also recognized that at times teachers must use a metacognitive approach to make their thinking visible for students. Describing her implementation of a lesson on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Black History Month, Corrina noted how "thought and speech bubbles" could transform the design of her lesson. She noted, "I'm going to have thought bubbles on a little paper towel holder and begin the story by using it to tell the students what my

dream was when I was younger. Then I'm going to use a speaking bubble to tell them the things

I did to accomplish my dream."

Finally, the study group participants discussed how in order to teach comprehension

effectively teachers must expose students to a variety of rich, high-quality texts. Some

participants found that the basal reading programs implemented in their schools were motivating,

engaging, and addressing diverse topics. Sharonda stated, "In my classroom I really like the

lessons that are taught in some of the stories. So like today we had Lesson 4-1. The story will

continue tomorrow, and I'm kind of anxious to see what will happen next." Christine also

enjoyed the stories used in her sixth grade classroom, primarily because they relate to the

students at the school. She added, "Yeah, I guess I can say the same thing because the stories

now are definitely more diverse. I remember when I was in school it was always like Sally who

lives in the suburbs. Now it's like a little bit more diverse."

However, not all participants felt as though the curriculum was representative of all

students. Particularly, Corrina reflected on some curriculum constraints that can face teachers

when districts adopt pre-packaged, or in many cases, scripted reading programs.

> Well, there's no Black History lessons…I think I mentioned that. When I asked
> my teacher why she said, "Well, we really don't have a lot of time." But she said,
> "You can do one." So I'm doing my next observation lesson on Martin Luther
> King.

Comprehension and Nonfiction.

Seeking advice from the group facilitator, participants elected to spend the first half of

the study group session viewing a Doug Fischer and Nancy Frey video related to close reading

with nonfiction texts. Debriefing the video led to discussions focused on enhancing knowledge

of best practices with nonfiction texts, including: (1) teaching higher-order critical thinking

skills, (2) asking questions, and (3) motivating and engaging learners using hands-on approaches.

Aligned with the latest information in the Common Core State Standards, Corrina explained that there should be a balance between fiction and nonfiction texts in the classroom.

> Since I've been reading with my Kindergarten class, I've read nonfiction and I've read fiction. I would say there's a fifty-fifty balance because it's embedded in the Treasures book. As you go through the daily plans, you see the nonfiction and the fiction. Today I read a folktale and yesterday I read a nonfiction text. So it is embedded in there fifty-fifty.

Connecting to how her school uses the same reading program, Trina added how teaching students how to compare and contrast within the text is a higher order critical thinking skill. She explained, "The fourth grade class that I push into for resource is going well. She's a really good teacher. She has the students do activities related to Bloom's Taxonomy where they compare and contrast when reading."

In addition to compare and contrast, knowledge about asking questions when interacting with nonfiction texts was discussed. Phyllis described how nonfiction instruction lends itself to various topics addressed in science and social studies. She began by discussing *Fossils*, an informational text used in her third grade practicum setting.

> We did this with the kids and read the story to them. They learned about the dinosaurs and we encouraged them to ask questions, and we asked them if any of them had ever been to a museum. Then we brought in actual fossils for them to look at. Even in social studies we have a lot of nonfiction. Like today we read the story about Connecticut…how it came about, George Washington, and all of that. So, there's a balance.

Finally, participants shared ideas related to a brief Scholastic Article entitled "Six Reasons for Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades." Initially, the article facilitated discussions about how instruction must motivate and engage learners. Corrina explained that not all forms of nonfiction are the same and that teachers need a variety of texts that are interesting to the students.

> When I was growing up I really connected with fiction. For some reason when I think of nonfiction I think of historical books. And growing up I was not a big history lover, so I didn't really delve into those types of books. But if it was informational, like reading a cookbook or something where I could get something out of enjoying the topic, then I could deal with it.

To address Trina's concerns about making nonfiction accessible to special needs children, Corrina suggested a hands-on approach in which students conduct science experiments within a text. Sharonda added, "If you can make it hands-on, then it won't just be about your student reading. Have you ever heard of ice cream in a bag?" Participants discussed how using nonfiction with procedural steps could motivate and engage students with learning disabilities. Connections were also made to writing, in which Sharonda recommended creating a nonfiction "How-To" book infused with the explicit teaching of scientific vocabulary while conducting experiments. Noting that not all teachers have access to these types of materials, Phyllis suggested integrating technology in nonfiction lessons to avoid roadblocks. She noted, "If you come across this problem, one thing you might want to do is try YouTube. Lots of teachers are posting the lessons that they do in their classrooms online. You might be able to find something based on nonfiction that you can use."

Reading Workshop.

During the seventh week of the study group, participants met to discuss the elements of reading workshop. The following areas were addressed during this week's study group: (1) understanding the components of the workshop model, (2) modeling instruction through the use of mini-lessons, (3) providing opportunities for independent practice, (4) providing choice in reading materials, (5) creating a print-rich literacy environment, (6) setting a focus for learning, and (7) conferencing with students to ensure accountability.

Immediately, participants clarified the components of the workshop model and discussed

whether or not these practices were taking place in their field placements. Trina connected with

the way in which teachers explicitly teach a lesson, send kids off to independently practice the

skills and strategies taught, and later share learning with the whole group.

> The fourth grade teacher I observed has a chart in her classroom that she uses to
> get students annotating when they read. For example, they might put a question
> mark for something they don't understand or an exclamation mark next to
> something surprising. They use post-it notes and go off and read on their own.
> Then when they later come together, she will ask certain students to share.

However, throughout the study group session it became apparent that Trina's observation was

the only true example of the workshop model being implemented in the practicum setting.

Comparing their own understanding of best practices to observations in the field placement

allowed the participants to deepen their understanding of how the reading workshop components

can be implemented to impact students' reading development. Corrina reflected, "When

thinking about the workshop model I know the only thing that comes close in my school is the

format for guided reading." Nonetheless, other participants were able to see how the proposed

structure of the workshop model is designed in a way to scaffold instruction that supports student

learning. Christine noted that not all teachers take the time to gradually release responsibility to

students when teaching literacy skills and strategies. She explained, "In my school I see a lot of

I-do, you-do. There's really not a lot of modeling." She later went on to discuss how she is

making changes to the ways in which these lessons are taught with sixth graders.

In addition to the mini-lesson, participants uncovered ideas for independent practice.

Trina explained how her fourth grade teacher uses literature circles to motivate students while

providing choice for the completion of literacy tasks.

> She puts them in reading groups and allows students to choose jobs to complete.
> Someone will find new words to define from the reading. She has a connector

who would have to connect the book to what he or she has experiences through text to text, text to self, and text to world. She had a questioner who would use the Bloom's Taxonomy questioning methods to ask open-ended questions about the chapter. She also had a summarizer for the chapter. She does some amazing things in that classroom. And she's an older teacher so that kind of surprised me.

While Trina's discussion centered on the implementation of literacy circles, some participants explained opportunities for independent practice linked to the former ways in which teachers would have students simply "Drop Everything and Read." Phyllis explained, "Sometimes we go through assessments as students are reading after lunch. That's when they have time to do independent reading. They come back in and we give them five or ten minutes to read before starting the lesson." In addition to the practice missing an explicit teaching of a skill or strategy, Phyllis described a classroom where the component of conferencing is missing. Corrina also exposed the limitations of a DEAR-approach to independent practice.

I wish there was more choice in what students read. Even when we do DEAR time, the students come up to us and we just hand them a book to read. They don't have a choice. When I see a student look into the basket and point to a book and ask, "How about that one?" I'll give it to them.

Phyllis agreed about the power of choice to motivate young readers, adding "Let them pick their own choice. You can have a variety. Instead of you giving them books you can have them go pick out what they want." The same approach made a difference with Phyllis's son, who was once a reluctant reader.

I noticed that with my son when he was growing up. It was such a struggle getting him to read. Finally, I took him to Barnes and Noble and said "You pick out what you want to read." He would pick out his own books and he'd read it.

Particularly, participants noted that a well-designed literacy environment will motivate students to read while offering a variety of choices for independent practice. After participants described environments in which books are haphazardly tossed into bins, Trina noted, "I would never go back to the library after that." Jennie explained how in her classroom it is the library that keeps

students coming back for more and more. However, there are only so many teachers available to

read with the emergent and early readers.

> In Pre-K we have the book area and we have the bins and they make their own
> choices. The only problem with Pre-K is that they all want us to read to them.
> So, I read about four books today. Two other kids also wanted me to read to
> them, but I just didn't have the time.

Another component of the reading workshop discussed was setting a focus and

conferencing to hold students accountable for their learning. Christine noted how independent

practice can quickly turn into a classroom free-for-all in the upper grades if an accountability

piece is missing.

> A lot of times there are classroom management issues because the students won't
> want to read and will just start talking. Trying to deal with that and conducting
> conferences is hard. Then the kids who are reading can't even read because
> everyone else is talking. Before there was nothing for them to do. Now my
> cooperating teacher tries to hold them accountable by having them write
> summaries of the pages that they've read.

Corrina explained how one of the best systems for accountability in the early childhood

classroom is setting a focus for learning. She added, "If there's no focus the kids think it's time

to just relax. Sometimes the books are on their heads. Sometimes they're just looking at

covers." Although the participants only initially mentioned the component of share time,

opportunities were provided overall for enhancing individuals' knowledge of most of the

workshop components and the importance of designing a classroom environment that fosters

motivation and engagement while promoting urgency for learning.

Storytelling and Oral Language.

Topics during the eighth week of the literacy study group focused on storytelling and oral

language, a popular topic with the group due to the nature of how this type of instruction

motivates and engages all learners. Knowledge was shared related to the following areas: (1)

motivating all learners, (2) creating a community of learners, (3) assisting with students' oral

language and vocabulary development, (4) teaching explicit skills and strategies, (5) immersing

students in multiple genres, and (6) providing links to writing instruction.

As the lead presenter for this topic, Trina began by engaging the group in a real

storytelling using the story of the Little Red Hen as an example. She informed the group that it

"…was oral tradition to tell that story before it was written in the 19th Century." She continued,

"There are many benefits to storytelling. You can share some benefits that you have and I will

share some with you now that I wrote down." By opening the floor for discussion within the

study group, participants were able to co-construct knowledge about storytelling and oral

language, as six key areas prominently emerged.

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that storytelling is the type of instruction that

motivates all learners, including readers who are reluctant or struggling in the classroom.

Reflecting on using *The Little Red Hen* with a special education student, Trina noted how this

type of instruction benefited his literacy development.

> I thought to myself, this is good! This is a student whose comprehension suffers
> because he doesn't read. He has trouble reading the words. So for him, in order
> to be able to respond in that way, it shows that he was comprehending. That's
> one of the benefits of oral language. He was able to retell the entire story, even
> though it was a book that was read to him.

Later, Trina informed the group about how this same student wanted to keep the story props

related to another lesson that she designed based on a folk tale.

> My students really love the props. For the lesson that I did I made a cat prop and
> a Little Red Hen. He loved that. He asked, "Can I keep this? I let him keep it,
> and I could see how it was helping with motivation.

To deepen participants' understanding of this type of instruction, Trina shared an example of

storytelling relating to that of a traditional campfire. She explained, "It's like there's an

opportunity for a classroom campfire. You know how you tell stories around a campfire? That's

what it's like." Making connections once again to her experiences as a mother, Phyllis provided

an example of how storytelling instruction is also valuable prior to when students have an

opportunity to gather with a teacher at school.

> I know when my son was younger he used to love it when I would tell him stories.
> And even if I was reading from the book, I would do it with expression and even
> my nieces and nephews would say, "Oh, we want Auntie to read to us!" When
> they were younger I used to read to them every night. Even when they got to a
> certain age where they could read on their own they would say, "But I want you!"
> And I would say, "But you're nine!"

While this motivation for reading was fostered during the emergent and early stages of literacy

development, the experience had a lasting effect on the children. In addition to gathering

children to hear stories being told, Corrina added that what also motivates young readers is oral

language development. Particularly, she demonstrated that when differentiating curricular

materials, teachers can embed anticipatory sets related to song to hook readers.

> Somewhere out there there's always a song that matches something. So, I don't
> always take it from the Treasures book, even though they do have them.
> Sometimes they match and sometimes they don't. So that to me gets them
> motivated. You can open up any story with a little rhyme or song.

Using this type of instruction fostered a special relationship between Corrina and many of the

students in her class, including one student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

> …when I came out to get the kids, there was one child who has an I.E.P. standing
> next to his grandmother. He goes, "That's Mrs. C.! She tells us the stories!" So,
> there's an excitement about it that you cannot get from just anything else. It
> really engages them.

Jennie experienced similar successes in her Pre-Kindergarten classroom, reflecting on a lesson

that went well with hand puppets. She noted, "They'll ask, 'Can you bring back Mary, Mary?

Can she come back and visit us?' They love it." While some might believe that storytelling and

oral language opportunities exist only in the early elementary grades, listening to participants

share their ideas sparked a new idea and interest for Christine's sixth grade classroom.

> I would like to do digital stories with my class, but it's something I would have to
> do. I'd have to show it to them. They do have computer lab time. We have
> computers in the classroom, but we don't even have a SMART board. It's
> terrible. I think it would make it more interactive. They'd actually be able to see
> the story.

Despite the material and resource constraints present in her placement, Christine connected with

the overall understanding about just how engaging and motivating storytelling can be.

The next key area that emerged from the study group conversation addressed how

storytelling can assist with students' language and vocabulary development. During her

introduction with *The Little Red Hen*, Trina discussed additional benefits to using storytelling for

instruction. Particularly, she reflected on how one of her struggling readers interacted with the

lesson. She stated, "It furthers language development, comprehension, and vocabulary. When

you listen to the story, there are words like 'thresh' and he didn't know what that meant. But

based on the context and listening to the story he could pick up on what he thought it meant."

Noting the importance of vocabulary development through storytelling encouraged

participants to think about ways in which to explicitly address literacy skills and strategies when

planning, particularly with reading comprehension. Corrina described that she referred to as the

"art to telling stories."

> You also have to think about the right moments when storytelling. At what
> moment are you going to stop and ask that question? You know the moment
> when they're ready. You've given them enough, they can make a prediction
> about it, and now they really want to know what's going to happen next.

This example of teaching as an "art" demonstrated Corrina's understanding of the pedagogy

behind teaching, as reflective practitioners explicitly, intentionally, and critically think about

lesson design. Adding to this concept, Trina suggested that storytelling be used to teach students how to visualize.

> You could create pictures in your head. This once again helps with comprehension. It provides a framework for thinking. This is especially important in early childhood. And of course, folktales allow students to make connections with heritage or cultural connections.

By including the topic of folktales in the discussion, participants began to explore how storytelling immerses students in multiple genres where they can gain a better understanding of world cultures and diversity. Trina noted how many of the stories told are traditionally passed down from generation to generation.

> I also talked about folktales this week in my lessons with some of my students and I shared with them folktales from Jamaica because it's something that's a part of all of our traditions. Folktales are a part of every culture. If you think about it, they exist for a reason. They're definitely very significant. Oral tradition. Language development. I grew up with these stories being told to me.

Corrina reflected on how one unique feature of folktales is that they generally teach students a life lesson. She explained, "Well, they all teach you a story. …And from *The Little Red Hen* you are taught that it's about what you put in. You have to work towards something in order to reap the benefits of it." Trina agreed, noting that storytelling with folktales teaches students socially significant life lessons. She added, "There's a lesson or a moral. So basically it really helps children to learn their place in the world. It builds social skills." From a Pre-K perspective, Jennie included how these stories can help teachers with self-regulation in the classroom. She stated, "Also, there's working together. You know, there was teamwork." Aligned with the Common Core State Standards, participants overall found value in introducing folktales through the art of storytelling, recognizing it as one effective way of exposing students to multiple varieties of genres and texts.

In addition to variety, another finding that emerged involved how oral language can be developed through increased opportunities for students to talk in the classroom. Corrina summarized the benefits of storytelling and oral language in her Kindergarten placement.

> Storytelling is great because it gets the kids to talk more. It gets boring if I have to hear myself over and over again. So, I like to open it up to give them the opportunity. I think because they have not had the ability to do a lot of talking, they're really engaged more and I'm seeing lots of hands of kids who want to answer the questions. And when I see there are so many people and I want to get back in the story, I have them do a turn and talk or a think-pair-share.

Christine agreed about the importance of oral language in the classroom, particularly because teachers often spend too much time talking.

> In my class we do a lot of talking. I like the think-pair-share, think-alouds, and brainstorming. I have them talking throughout the majority of the class. Even if I have a PowerPoint I want them to read it aloud and tell me what they think it means. I like it when they start the conversation. Even with groups I like them to explain what they think they have to do. My students are always talking.

Resonating throughout the study group was a belief that in order to fully develop students' oral language, teachers must let the students talk. Many of these instructional tips and research based best practices were also included in the *Literacy Development in the Early Years* handout that participants reviewed. The group had previously explored the resource at a glance through the lens of motivation.

Finally, the study group discussion led Trina to uncover a connection between storytelling and writing instruction. Linking back to motivation, Trina mentioned that if students are motivated and engaged when listening to the teacher tell stories, this will likely carry over into writing instruction.

> …it lets the children think. "Hmm, maybe I can tell a story too. She's doing it. I can do it too." Eventually if they are telling stories they will probably want to write stories.

Literacy Work Stations.

Although independent practice and literacy work stations are included as part of the exemplary day schedule, discussion around this topic was limited, but nonetheless increased participants' knowledge about the following areas: (1) early literacy classroom design, (2) tasks, (3) motivation and engagement, (4) language development, (5) modeling, and (6) accountability.

While the findings regarding work stations are discussed in this section, it is important to note that a majority of the discussion centered on curriculum constraints and cooperating teacher dynamics. While these findings are included later in this chapter in a broader discussion about reflecting on practice, perhaps the findings from this study group session veered in this direction because a majority of the participants were not observing the implementation of high quality literacy stations in their field placements.

As the discussion leader, Jennie immediately shared information related to literacy workstations in the Pre-K classroom. First, Jennie addressed the terminologies used for the practice. She explained, "Some people call them work stations or centers, but we call them areas, because with the High Scope curriculum the children are just roaming to the different areas all day." To make this practice work, participants explored the importance of carefully designing spaces and places within the classroom. Jennie noted a total of ten different areas in the room designed to allow students to practice skills independently: "You have the computer area, writing area, art area, toy area, house area, music area, book area, sand and water table area, listening area, and quiet area. And it's their choice, you know, but we plan." Jennie went on to describe a variety of materials included in each of the work areas and a variety of tasks that students complete. She explained, "…in all of the areas there's a paper and pen, or crayons…some kind of writing tool. In the house area we have menus along with the paper and

the pen because one day we were at a restaurant dining and they would pretend to be waitresses and take orders. It's so cute, but they're learning!" Although many of the tasks in the Pre-K classroom are centered on play and social learning, Phyllis made connections to her experience working in upper elementary classrooms.

> I'm noticing differences between what they do in different districts. In Old Bridge we have a writing station and in the station they have different topics for the month that they can write about. In East Orange stations were really more about just putting the kids on the computer, but when they were on the computer they had to go on Study Island. Today when I visited East Orange I realized that the teachers are afraid to have stations because they're worried about the kids going off and doing work independently.

In addition to teacher expectations, Phyllis also shared observations about the power of choice, as students are motivated and engaged more than ever when this element is included in the station design. While the tasks in East Orange are limited in that students can only access one website, students in her student teaching placement in Old Bridge complete a variety of tasks included in a controlled-choice list. Reflecting on teachers in her previous school district, she added, "To them, they feel like the less time the kids are out of their seats, better for us." Nonetheless, the group agreed that designing classroom spaces where students can interact and complete engaging tasks is what stations are all about. Jennie indicated, "They need to explore and have interaction."

Another key finding was that participants paid close attention to how including work stations in the classroom can further enhance students' language development. Connecting to the "house area" designed as a restaurant, Jennie demonstrated how her young learners socially developed language and vocabulary.

> They'll look at the menu and say "Pizza! And someone will write out pizza on the paper. Then I will ask, "Can I have my bill? Because I'm finished. How much do I owe? So, we're getting language in every area of the room. We're

> getting language and writing samples and anecdotes all day long. That's all we
> do.

Participants agreed that social interaction is important, adding that teachers are ultimately

responsible for designing a learning environment that facilitates implementation of this type of

independent practice.

Later, study group participants concluded by focusing on modeling expected behaviors

and holding students accountable for the work completed during work station time. In the Pre-K

classroom, accountability was evident because students had to draw and write a play-plan prior

to visiting areas in the classroom. Jennie introduced the group to how students were sent off to

work on their own, in addition to how students were encouraged to think about the work they

completed during a share time.

> We gave them each individual boards and they had to draw and label what area
> they were going to work in. They were looking up at the big board with the
> names and labels for help. Once they brought it to us we'd say, "Tell me what
> you're going to do in that area. Who are you going to work with?" So that was
> really cute. They liked that. And when we did recall, because recall is after we
> put everything away, I would hold up their plan and ask, "Did you stick to your
> plan?"

In this way, effective implementation of literacy work stations includes opportunities for

teaching students appropriate social behaviors, while encouraging students to think not only

about what tasks they will engage in, but also how successful they were at completing those

tasks. Understanding that not all teachers believe that work stations can be successfully

implemented in the classroom, Phyllis offered suggestions about modeling and holding students

accountable from the very beginning of the school year.

> I think centers can function perfectly if you let the kids get out of their seats to do
> different things. The room would not be chaos. If they're used to getting out of
> their seats and doing different things, when that time comes, because they're used
> to it from day one in September, they'll know how to act because you'll
> implement the classroom rules. This is what you do when it's time for centers.

While research suggests that independent practice opportunities reinforce skills and strategies previously taught to students, Phyllis added a classroom management component, advocating for the gradual release of responsibility to the students.

Guided Reading and Small Group Instruction.

Like many of the study group sessions, embedded throughout the discussion about guided reading and small group instruction were reminders about how instruction must be designed to motivate and engage learners. The following areas were discussed: (1) designing instruction to motivate and engage learners, (2) limiting time spent on pre-reading activities, (3) utilizing a variety of materials and strategies for monitoring students' comprehension, (4) planning thematically, and (5) modifying instruction for students with special needs.

As the lead presenter for this topic, Corrina introduced guided reading by asking the study group participants to imagine themselves as Kindergarteners taking on the role of astronauts. She exclaimed, "Blast off, with Mrs. C.'s guided reading group!" She created an illustration with a rocket ship on the whiteboard in the meeting room and explained how the lesson would unfold with the group. This began with a modeled strategy for classroom management. Corrina explained, "Now we know that when we're blasting off, we are astronauts and we are in our spaceship. So I need everyone sitting nice and tall because if you lean over and you accidentally hit one of the controls, who knows what will happen to our ship."

Next, Corrina guided the group through a book walk, noting that before-reading activities, or pre-reading activities, should be brief and focused.

> I'm going to pass out the books to you and I want everyone to take a quick picture walk in the book. Let's make it a quick picture walk so we have time to get into outer space. I will know you are ready when you are done because your books will be closed, your hands will be folded, and you'll be looking at me with a smile on your face. Because all great astronauts know how to smile.

Corrina's emphasis on limiting the amount of time spent on pre-reading connects with discussions that researchers have been engaging in about guided reading and how the practice has evolved. For example, in "The Common Core Ate Your Baby and Other Urban Legends," Shanahan (2013) explains that there is no ban on pre-reading in the Common Core State Standards, but educators should carefully consider how to send children off into the text, rather than simply unpacking all of the knowledge.

In addition to limiting the book walk to discussions about the illustrations and the title of the text, Corrina actively engaged the participants by having everyone choose a Popsicle stick with a task on it. When she provided these materials, participants actively monitored their comprehension while reading the text. Later, group members were asked to tell about the title, describe the cover, make connections, and discuss the genre of the text. Participants were encouraged to use evidence from the text when responding to the prompts. For example, when Sharonda's attention was drawn to an illustration, Corrina asked, "What do you see that makes you know they are working in the garden? What's in that picture?" This continued throughout the lesson, in which all participants answered questions and relied on the illustrations to support their answers.

The guided reading lesson also provided the study group participants with an opportunity to consider how sight word practice might be infused within the small group meeting time. When using pointers to read repetitive lines, students were asked to identify specific sight words from the text. Corrina mixed up words, providing each member of the group with a word from the sentence "We are washing for you." Next she explained the directions for the after-reading activity.

They're a little out of order. These words come from a sentence in the book. Put your cards on the table. It's like a puzzle. Let's see if we can match a sentence from the story.

Once the lesson was completed, all of the participants began to congratulate Corrina on a lesson well done, while browsing through the interactive guided reading materials supplied to the group (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Interactive Guided Reading Materials

Recognizing that there are benefits to thematic planning for guided reading instruction, Phyllis shared that teachers can take students from different leveled groups, provide instruction on their individual levels, but connect the class by using a theme.

This week we are reading about sharks. So I get an H book about sharks and a C book about sharks. Both my students are reading the same thing, but on different levels. The vocabulary and everything is different. I just incorporate it that way because that's the only way I can see them understand it.

While Phyllis observed this type of instruction being used with special education classrooms, Sharonda noted that guided reading was not implemented at all in her placement. Jennie responded, "You would think those kids need it the most." The group agreed that guided reading should be on students' instructional levels and that assessments can provide teachers with this important information. Additionally, there was consensus around the idea that teachers of children with special needs could modify activities suitable to the needs of individual students.

Phyllis stated, "Special education students need a lot of hands-on and visual activities in order for it to stick and connect to them. And they need repetition. This is why we stay on the same thing for the whole week." Although all of the participants agreed that guided reading is the heart of a balanced, comprehensive literacy program, this topic also led to deeper conversations about curriculum constraints and cooperating teacher dynamics, which are shared later in this chapter.

Writing.

During week eleven the literacy study group met to explore how writing fits into the exemplary day schedule as a core component. The following topics were addressed: (1) designing authentic instruction, (2) building students' background knowledge, (3) modeling with the use of exemplar and mentor texts, (4) scaffolding instruction, and (5) creating a print-rich literacy environment that supports young writers.

Initially, participants shared observations from their practicum in which teachers are focusing on traditional approaches of getting students to write a minimum number of sentences or paragraphs depending upon the grade level. Phyllis shared, "We don't stress them out about writing, but we do want them to write at least two to three sentences every day." Participants also referenced the typical five paragraph essay format, and shared similar struggles related to getting students to record their ideas on paper.

Regardless, the participants soon uncovered ideas related to the art of teaching writing, beginning with the importance of making writing instruction authentic. As the lead presenter for the topic, Phyllis decided to share one way in which writing was taught authentically in her third grade placement.

> In that class students would write a piece regarding the Summer Olympics. Some of the third graders had never watched the Summer Olympics. During that time

> with student teaching the Winter Olympics were on. So, what we ended up doing in the classroom was we watched the Winter Olympics with them.

In this way, Phyllis recognized how writers can only write about what they know, and that in many circumstances teachers must take the time to build students' background knowledge. Additionally, teachers can use exemplars, or outstanding writing pieces, to demonstrate what good writers do.

> We talked about the medals…we talked about placing…we talked about all different sports besides hockey. So then for the writing piece we decided to pull up a writing piece and read it to them. We explained to them that when you start writing you have to have an introduction…you have to have a middle, or body…you have to have a conclusion.

While exemplars can be examples of student writing or writing produced by the teacher, Phyllis shared how teachers can find mentor texts to read aloud during writing instruction. Particularly, she shared a nonfiction text with the study group and began to read about beach volleyball. She shared information about the details of the sport, visualization, and math numbers related to the game. She also emphasized transition words used in the text. This modeled read aloud led to a discussion about how instruction can be modeled. Phyllis discussed a pre-writing strategy, in which students were able to use graphic organizers to brainstorm information prior to writing. She explained, "So then each of the students received one of these graphic organizers to find out about the rules, equipment used, location where it takes place, the people involved, the training, and the roles." In addition to modeling, teachers must also provide students with an opportunity to research, or collect ideas related to their topics.

> We went over this with them and told them about different websites to use. We showed them how to look up information on Google and we allowed them to use Wikipedia. However, we did stress to them that as they get older Wikipedia is not always a reliable source. But we also showed them how to go on olympic.org and timeforkids.com.

Phyllis continued to discuss how modeling, or scaffolding of instruction, can take place throughout all of the steps of the writing process. She stated, "We walked them through it, modeling everything." Students were engaged in the prewriting process and had opportunities to conference with the teacher both during and prior to moving onto the later steps of the writing process. Much of this engagement was due to the fact that students were motivated by choice. Phyllis noted, "We actually gave them about ten different sports and they got to choose any one of them. So we didn't say, 'Okay, you're doing beach volleyball' or 'You're doing hockey.' What we did first was ask them about what kinds of sports they liked."

After Phyllis shared ideas related to the components of writing included in the third grade classroom, participants began to share some challenges related to getting students to write. Trina reflected on how this can be quite a challenge for special education teachers, who want to honor students' ideas for writing without over-scaffolding and taking over the writing piece itself.

> That's something that I find very difficult. I'm often times tempted to guide them to say something, because some of the students will just sit there. And I'm trying to pull it out and it won't come out, so I start talking to them and feeding it to them. I know that's not right. I don't know how to have them put their ideas on paper.

In a supportive way, participants discussed how drawing prior to writing can help students, despite the fact that not all teachers allow this in their classrooms. Corrina shared, "With my kids they can draw but they have to write first. Some of the students want to draw first…" This conversation led participants to think about the research on writing and information gained from professional development. Jennie argued, "In the workshop that we went to they said that you should draw…the drawing represents the words!" While students made connections to the research and professional development received at a state literacy conference, issues related to

cooperating teacher dynamics once again emerged. As stated earlier, this significant finding is discussed later in the chapter.

Finally, information was shared about how a print-rich literacy environment can support the teaching of writing, as teachers can use anchor charts to hold students to the lessons being taught. Trina once again connected ideas related to observations made in a fourth grade classroom with an exemplary literacy teacher.

> I always talk about the fourth grade teacher and how amazing she is. On the wall in her classroom she has a huge wall chart that says "Hook Your Reader with a Whale of an Opening." She has suggestions like begin with a question or quote. She has different examples. Usually when she has them write she gives them examples of what not to do and what to do.

By including anchor charts in the discussion, participants were able to see how modeling can take shape in many forms, as teachers motivate students to share their ideas through writing.

Interdisciplinary Literacy.

The final study group session took place during week twelve and focused on the topic of interdisciplinary literacy, or literacy across the content areas. The following areas emerged from the group discussion: (1) teaching literacy across multiple subject areas, (2) integrating vocabulary across subject areas, (3) providing opportunities for co-planning and teacher collaboration, (4) making connections for deeper understanding, and (5) using read alouds for thematic instruction.

Shared amongst the group was a belief that all subject matter teachers are responsible for teaching literacy. These sentiments are echoed in the Common Core State Standards, in which a literacy thread is included for specific subject areas, including science and social studies. This was supported by Christine, the lead presenter who began by defining what interdisciplinary literacy is all about.

> There is no reading teacher. Reading happens within multiple subjects. So in social studies or science your students are going to be reading informational texts. It's important to use literacy instruction to help the students read about different topics that they're learning.

Jennie confirmed, "Every subject involves reading." An example of this was shared in relation to observations made in Christine's sixth grade placement.

> In my school we have a word of the day that students do every day. The word of the day will not just be taught in the English class. What happens is teachers will incorporate the word somewhere in their lesson plans. The word will be used across math, language arts, science…

Considering this example provided the study group participants with a basic understanding of how vocabulary can be integrated across subject areas. This topic is especially important because the latest standards encourage teachers to integrate academic vocabulary in their lessons, as many of these Tier Two words appear in higher, more critical levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, in addition to newly designed standardized tests.

However, participants also noted that this type of instruction is only effective when teachers have opportunities to plan or collaborate with one another. Phyllis advocated for teachers to reach out to one another and to ask questions in order to gain a better understanding of what instruction is happening in different classrooms. She explained, "Basically if you're in social studies or science or math, what are you teaching? Maybe we can make a connection and bring everything together." These connections are crucial, as they provide students with a thorough curriculum that cultivates deeper learning. Corrina agreed that lessons that take place across subject areas not only provide opportunities to extend students' thinking, but also further develop language.

> Also, when all the lessons are tied together like that students have an opportunity to develop language. When I taught a lesson on recycling once, the health teacher came in and furthered my lesson with her own discussion about recycling. When

you have lessons tied together across disciplines, there's more of an impact on the students. They can connect what they're learning. It's really important.

In addition to collaboration, participants uncovered how read alouds can be used in the content areas, especially if teachers put in the time to explicitly choose quality texts related to the subject matter being taught. Trina explained how this type of planning had an impact on her teaching of mathematics, sharing a resource that she found particularly helpful.

> Stuart J. Murphy writes a lot of books that are about math. So I read one about shapes. The children loved that, and I actually based a center on that book. *Inch by Inch* is another good book. So, I found out that children really love when you start with read alouds. That's why I loved incorporating that into math. Most of the children loved the books.

Adding to the discussion about motivating and engaging learners through content-specific read alouds, Corrina explained how reading throughout the day broadens students' learning of literacy skills and strategies.

> Reading to them throughout the instructional day gives them the opportunity to see pictures, to engage in the learning of different literacy skills. They're able to speak with you and ask and answer questions. I think if that was not a part of the math or science lesson…if I didn't read…they'd be missing a key component to literacy.

While participants agreed that collaboration and planning make this type of instruction possible, not all participants believed that thematic instruction could take place in their schools due to curriculum constraints. Although this finding is discussed later in the chapter, participants were concerned about Jennie's example of how thematic teaching no longer exists in her district's Pre-Kindergarten classroom, as instruction is designed based on the interests of individual children, not thematic topics.

How do student teachers working in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms participate in a literacy study group focused on best practices?

While the previous sections discuss what students learned in the study group, it is important to recognize the cross-cutting themes that address the overarching question of "how" the student teachers participated in the study group. The sections that follow discuss activities that occurred again and again as students participated in the study group and how these activities supported student learning.

Sharing Concerns and Seeking Assistance

Starting from day one, participants began to discuss concerns related to teaching literacy during student teaching. Throughout all of the study group sessions, participants turned to one another for support. Stanley (2011) explains, "Veiled conflict can be brought to the surface in gentle ways, enabling members to toggle between the positive feelings of connection, support, and learning, and productive dialogue" (p. 74). A common theme emerging from this early discussion involved students' concerns about reliably collecting assessment information about the students in their classrooms and using this information to meet students developmentally where they are. These concerns are important, as research shows that students who have teachers with strong content knowledge test more than one full grade level above their peers who are not assigned to such teachers (Snow, Griffin, Burns, 2005). For example, when reflecting on her upcoming Kindergarten placement, Corrina shared concerns with the group related to programs and assessments mentioned by her cooperating teacher.

> She told me she uses Orton-Gillingham and D.I.B.E.L.S. in addition to sign language. She does a lot. And she said, you know, if you really want to know more when you come in next week we could talk about that, but the first thing that struck me was…What's that? What's D.I.B.E.L.S.? What's Orton-Gillingham? So I'm concerned that with going in…am I familiar enough with all of the curriculum that they will be using to instruct students in a manner in which they are accustomed to learning?

Sharonda added concerns about a general need for knowing more about literacy instruction,

particularly related to differentiating instruction appropriately for students in the special

education classroom.

> With literacy I need to get a lot more information so I can have a better understanding of
> how to teach my kids. And my main concern, since I'm doing special-ed, is the levels
> that the students are going to be on. And everyone's not going to be on the same level.
> So, I just want to know how to differentiate with the different levels that the students will
> be on.

Although Corrina had experience assessing an individual learner through a tutoring project in

EDC 321, not all literacy programs and assessment tools were explored due to the condensed

nature of the course. Jennie also expressed a sense of urgency about this missing gap in her

background.

> My concern is the levels also. There are some children that come in reading and knowing
> their letters, and there are others that don't. Like right now we're in January and there
> are still some that don't know the letters in their name. You can tell the difference
> between the students that…you know, the parents work with them at home…and then the
> ones that don't. So how do you bring them up? You know it's hard when you have
> fifteen children and some are here and some are there. I need to know, how do I help
> them?

> Trina's concerns, however, combine knowledge of instruction with specific grade levels.

While Trina feels connected to the early childhood classroom, receiving a special education

certification allows her to teach as high as sixth grade. Therefore, her placement spans grades

one through five. Meeting the literacy needs of students in the upper grades is on her mind as

she gets started with teaching.

> My biggest concern is in regards to the older students in grades four and five. Will I be
> equipped with the knowledge required to meet the needs of those older students in terms
> of teaching them literacy? They should be at a particular reading level by grades four and
> five, so what if they're not?

Because Christine once attended the middle school where she was assigned to teach, her concerns were focused more on connecting the lessons with adolescent readers. She explained, "My main thing is motivating the students to want to read, not just during classroom time, but also in their leisure time. I want to know how to make it fun and exciting."

Asking and Answering Clarifying Questions

In addition to sharing concerns and seeking advice from one another, participants used the study group context as an opportunity for asking clarifying questions. Through dialogue and conversation, participants introduced new ideas that were unique to their situated contexts. Their diverse student teaching contexts led to new insights about curriculum and instruction. During multiple sessions, clarifying questions were asked about different topics. Patterns in the data demonstrated that most clarifying questions were asked of each week's lead group presenter. A strong example of this was when the group explored the topic of fluency. As the group discussed fluency, focusing primarily on the concept of accuracy, Christine asked a clarifying question of Sharonda, the lead group presenter: "Do you think choral reading stressed out kids who read too slow?" While the group confirmed that choral reading is recognized as a best practice for building fluency, questions remained about how this might be implemented in Christine's sixth grade classroom. She asked, "…what can I do? If I do choral reading they might say, 'Man, that's babyish!' I'm wondering if I should play the story on tape, or maybe that's wrong." By asking questions of the lead group presenter and her peers, Christine was able to share her opinions, ask questions, and receive feedback in a safe atmosphere free of judgment (Stanley, 2011).

At times, participants also relied on the group facilitator to clarify questions or concerns. Although I emphasized that the ownership of the study group was among the participants and

topic leaders, there were times when participants became "stuck" on a topic and had nowhere to

turn. During the first session, participants were introduced to the topics that would be addressed

throughout the semester. Students recognized the importance of having something meaningful

for students to complete upon entering the classroom, but wondered about some of the options.

Everyone in the group knew of examples related to independent reading and reviewing

previously taught skills, but questions remained about allowing students to partner write as a Do-

Now type of activity. Trina asked, "What might partner writing look like?" After a long silence,

participants turned to me to help answer the question at hand. My response was succinct, but

allowed the group to move on with their discussion: "It could be two kids writing a story

together, or writing what we learned about spiders together. It's motivating. It could also be

writing in your journal about what you did over the weekend, or something like that." Although

the primary focus of the study group was on shared leadership and learning through social

collaboration among peers, opportunities can exist for facilitators to mediate and scaffold the

participation of all of the learners in the group (Lambson, 2010; Saavedra, 1996). Numerous

studies have demonstrated how facilitators can get involved in study groups in a variety of ways;

however I shared experience, knowledge, and expertise only when asked by the group as a whole

on a few occasions, maintaining my primary role as participant-observer.

Artifacts

When looking at the broader definition of communities of practice, participants can

engage in learning experiences by sharing artifacts, or items related to the topics of discussion.

Wenger (1998) explains, "…we organize our lives in habitual ways with one another, developing

particular shared practices, routines, rituals, artifacts, symbols, conventions, histories, stories,

and histories" (as cited in Lambson, 2010, p. 1661). In this study participants shared artifacts on

their own. These included pictures of their literacy-rich environments, curriculum materials

from their student teaching placements, and self-created and adapted materials for literacy

instruction. While these figures are included throughout the study, it is important to reflect on

how they contributed to the design of the study group. For example, at the beginning of the

study, Christine shared concerns with the group about motivating and engaging her adolescent

readers. As the group leader for the topic of comprehension and fiction, Christine brought in a

variety of anchor charts to share with the group. Christine discussed the impact these artifacts

were having on her classroom instruction and students' comprehension. Although this type of

participation facilitated discussion about the various literacy topics, few studies examine how

sharing artifacts contributes to the overall design and function of study groups. Participants

noted that the study group was the only opportunity they had to share materials from student

teaching with one another. From the very beginning, artifact sharing became a natural part of the

cycle in which the group reflected on teaching practices.

Modeling and Discussing Instructional Strategies

Due to the time limit of the study group, participants often modeled strategies for

instruction in mini-lesson formats lasting no longer than twenty minutes. Strategies were

modeled in great detail for assessment, storytelling and oral language, and guided reading. As

mentioned earlier, Corrina modeled ways in which teachers can assess students' understanding

of letter and sound relationships. Holding up cards with consonants and vowels, Corrina helped

the group understand how teachers must be careful when modeling the sounds that letters

represent. She explained, "So just keep that in mind to just very slightly open your mouth when

you're sounding out a letter, and for vowels it's open mouth." Engaging with one another in

discussions about these modeled strategies provided participants with a shared experience and

knowledge tied to literacy best practices and their classroom experiences (Gersten, et. al., 2010; Lambson, 2010; Stanley, 2011). Although thoroughly modeled lessons were only included in three of the twelve sessions, participants made references to instructional strategies and discussed them across all sessions. Through these discussions, participants gained different perspectives about the benefits and uses of various instructional strategies in the classroom (Saavedra, 1996).

Connecting to Previous Coursework

Because most of the research conducted on teacher study groups involves novice teachers already working in school districts, new findings were generated from this study in that student teachers had an opportunity to connect back to their training provided through undergraduate and post-baccalaureate coursework in the teacher education program. The study group provided an opportunity for students to engage in focused discussions, resulting in learning that extended far beyond their initial training (Stanley, 2011). In this study, connections were made to the literacy methods course and courses in the special education program. When discussing ways to further develop students' comprehension of fiction texts, Trina asked Shardona if she remembered a strategy learned in their special education course: "PECS. Do you remember that? You should try it." Connecting back to her previous coursework, Trina described the step by step use of PECS for the group.

> It's a special-ed technique called Picture-Exchange-Communication-System. It helps to gradually increase students' comprehension using pictures basically. So, for nonverbal students they can tap on pictures or simply move the pictures. It's good to use for comprehension if their verbal skills aren't there.

These types of reflections were consistent across Trina's contributions to various literacy topics, including the week the group discussed ideas related to best practices in vocabulary. Trina used this opportunity to connect back to her previous coursework in the literacy methods course and

provided an example of a hands-on approach to teaching new vocabulary words. She described, "Last year in 321 one of the most memorable classes was when we did vocabulary. We had the definitions on a paper with illustrations and then we shared the definitions." Arnold (2011) argues, "Successful teacher education programs include prolonged internships with adequate support from university-based and school-based practitioners alike, concrete connections between coursework and practice, and performance-based assessments" (p. 125). The context of the study group provided a context where participants had a real opportunity to make these types of concrete connections between previous coursework and their experiences practicing in the field while student teaching.

Study Group Participation Rates

In order to gain a more complete understanding of the study group's participation, data regarding attendance and active participation through discussion were analyzed. Overall, participants' attendance throughout the semester in which the study group met was high. (See Table 5). Participants showed a great commitment to the schedule of core literacy topics, however, occasional sessions were missed due to illness or conflicting scheduled events such as Back to School Night.

Table 5

Study Group Attendance

Student's Name	# of Study Group Sessions Attended (out of 12 sessions)
Sharonda	10
Christine	11
Corrina	12
Trina	12
Jennie	11
Phyllis	10

Through field notes and study group transcriptions, it became evident that the participants' level of discussion varied during each of the sessions. Although this information was not necessarily central to the research questions of the study, quantitative data was analyzed to determine how often each of the participants actively contributed to topic discussions (See Figure 10). Each participant's individual contributions were tallied across the twelve study groups sessions and divided out proportionally. Corrina (33%) and Phyllis (20%) spent the largest amount of time contributing to study group discussions, while Jennie (14%) and Trina (14%) equally contributed to discussions. The two participants who spoke the least during study group sessions were Sharonda (12%) and Christine (7%). It is important to note, however, that participation can be defined to encompass more than just how often participants spoke. Some examples of active participation extending beyond just speaking include attending the sessions, modeling strategies, and sharing artifacts.

While the theory of situated learning explains the way in which participants are situated in a student teaching practicum setting while attending the study group, the study group itself is also a situated context. Through the lens of situated learning one can understand how the human mind develops in social situations. While Christine spoke the least during group discussions, her relative change in scores on the PRAXIS test was the highest of all participants. Jennie also significantly increased her score on the test, despite having contributed to only 14% of the study group discussions. While situated learning theory notes how participants can gain knowledge and extend their thinking through social contexts, legitimate peripheral participation further explains how learners participate in communities of practice with varied levels of observed engagement. Lave & Wenger (1991) explain, "…legitimate peripherality is a complex notion implicated in social structures involving relations of power. As a place in which one moves

toward more-intensive participation, peripherality is an empowering position" (p. 36). Although full participation was not evident across study group sessions, both Christine and Jennie gained access to knowledge about literacy best practices while remaining on the "periphery" of the social context.
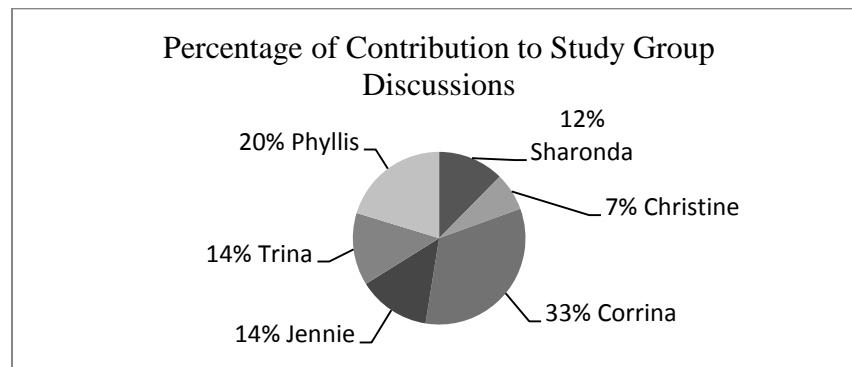
Figure 10: Participants' Contribution to Study Group Discussions

Additional Findings Related to Participation

While the focus of this study analyzed students' participation, knowledge, and performance related to literacy best practices, a number of additional findings emerged from the data including cooperating teacher dynamics, curriculum constraints, teaching for social justice, and some overall pros and cons of the study group design, as provided through individual post-study group interviews. These findings are discussed in the sections that follow.

"…**I'm betwixt and between"**

Throughout the course of the study group sessions, every participant shared concerns related to curriculum constraints experienced in their field placements at least once. Constraints related to the curriculum were noted in seven out of the twelve study group meetings. Participants spoke of observing missing components of literacy best practices, a general lack of differentiated lessons to motivate and engage learners, a lack of flexibility in certain districts using packaged reading programs, and an overemphasis on test preparation.

Beginning in the very first study group session, participants reflected on how certain research-based best practices were missing from classrooms. Phyllis vented, "…we don't do centers, nor do we do guided reading. We do read aloud." Later, Phyllis noted the absence of independent reading. She explained, "The only time the students read is when they're on KidBiz or Study Island and I have them read with me if they need help." This discussion also resurfaced weeks later when the group explored the reading workshop model, as Phyllis reflected on how opportunities for independent reading need to include more than just silent reading to keep students busy or occupied.

> D.E.A.R. time really becomes more of a gathering time before the actual lesson begins. There's no instruction linked to it. And of course, some of the kids want to go to the bathroom during that time. It's more like, "Okay, let's re-group. D.E.A.R. time is over…time to start the lesson. Put the books away." That's it. …I have to accept that that's just how it is."

Christine and Phyllis also realized that storytelling was not a mode of instruction being implemented in their classrooms. Nonetheless, energy for change existed as they both considered how they might include folktales in the curriculum and connect them to themes being studied.

In addition to missing components of best practice, participants expressed concerns about the lack of differentiation taking place in classrooms. Corrina shared, "I see phonics and I'm betwixt and between because I like what I'm hearing from everyone, especially with Pre-K, but then there seems to be a really big jump when you get to Kindergarten, because in my class I'm seeing a lot of this...a lot of worksheets, and a lot of worksheets, and a lot of worksheets." Holding up a massive stack of worksheets, Corrina worried about the lack of meaningful interaction with reading taking place in her classroom. She continued, "And that's where I'm betwixt and between, because for me there is no differentiation. There is no change. It's sort of

robotic to me." This concern also emerged weeks later during the study group session centered

on comprehension with fiction texts. Corrina stated, "Unfortunately there are still a lot of stacks

of papers." Phyllis encountered a similar problem when trying to teach an integrated social

studies lesson. Holding a worksheet in her hand, she lamented to the group about how more

interactive approaches are needed.

> I agree with what you're saying because I know I get observed in two weeks I'm
> going to be doing Social Studies. So when I was speaking to the teacher I asked,
> "Do you think maybe I can find something hands-on?" Because all we do during
> Social Studies with the students is writing, writing, writing…So I thought maybe
> for my next observation we could do a small project with the students and do
> hands-on. This is what she gives me!

Participants recognized that a variety of instructional strategies must be employed when

teaching, because when all learners' needs are not met, mastery of literacy skills and strategies is

not evident. However, they also agreed that teachers are under a lot of pressure to have students

complete paper and pencil type of activities so there is documentation to support that students are

learning.

Building on the idea of problems related to a "one size fits all" approach being utilized in

some classrooms, participants argued that a lack of flexibility exists when districts adopt

packaged reading programs or over-rely on a basal reading approach. Discussing a phonics

lesson in her classroom, Corrina noted, "…then they're telling me in this nice little book what

the anticipatory set should be." This focus on a more scripted type of instruction also led

participants to note differences that exist between different school districts. For example, when

Corrina expressed concerns about her district, Sharonda noted how all districts are not the same:

"I think it depends on where you are, because some schools don't allow you do to any of that

kind of stuff anymore." During the study group session on comprehension and nonfiction,

Phyllis further proved this point, noting that her school does not encourage teachers to follow

scripted lessons: "Even though a lot of the schools seem to be using packaged reading programs, my school doesn't like to rely on it too much because they say it's very limited. My teachers argued with their principal and she agreed to let them choose their own resources as long as they're addressing the standards." Up until the final study group session, participants were still sharing problems related to teacher autonomy when lesson planning. The group was especially concerned about Jennie's mention of no thematic teaching in her district's Pre-Kindergarten classrooms.

> …we have the High Scope curriculum, so everything is based on the child's interests. At breakfast Larry made a triangle with his straw. That gives me the opportunity to teach about shapes. On the lesson plan it asks you, "How did you come up with this?" Then you have to put the anecdote for the child. So I would write, "At breakfast, L made a shape with his straw." We can't just say, "Okay, I'm teaching this." Everything has to be based on the child's interests.

Perhaps the most humorous advice about how to achieve the teaching of literacy best practices was provided by Sharonda: "You'll have to see depending on where you are whether you can do that or just close the door and cover the window with construction paper so that nobody sees and do a fun lesson."

While the current era of accountability and standards promotes a culture of test focused anxiety, in one example Phyllis questioned how disregarding small group instruction in her classroom could lead to students doing well on high-stakes testing. Particularly, Phyllis wondered how her teacher could leave out this form of instruction and replace it with computerized test prep programs. She noted, "…she must be doing something right because their scores are improving, not deteriorating. I have everything on my desk for guided reading and it's just collecting dust." Christine shared a similar concern about focusing on standardized testing during a session related to vocabulary instruction. However, her example involved a word of the day activity in a sixth grade classroom.

> I understand that they're trying to get them ready for the test in April, so that's where a lot of the words come from. But they could have the same words in the same language arts class. Some of the words seem more like SAT words. The teachers have to do it, so it's required.

Cooperating Teacher Dynamics

In addition to curriculum constraints, in many instances participants discussed how their cooperating teachers were familiarizing them with grade level and district literacy curriculum. While working alongside and observing their teachers, some participants realized that not all core literacy components are included during daily instruction. Initially, Corrina believed that her teacher was committed to orchestrating a variety of strategies to teach students. She explained, "I think with literacy it's a very diverse, eclectic form of different things that the teacher that I will be working with uses and I was very glad to hear that." However, throughout the course of the semester, Corrina had a difficult time understanding her cooperating teacher's more traditional approach to teaching, as this often became a topic of discussion in the study group. Phyllis, on the other hand, noted a disconnect between her beliefs about small group, guided reading instruction and her cooperating teacher's beliefs almost immediately. She stated, "…she said it takes too long, so we totally have not done it. We've only done it maybe the very first two weeks in September. We haven't touched it, and we do not do centers."

Cooperating teachers also had a significant effect on participants' sharing of ideas and strategies in the study group. At the very beginning, Corrina was the first participant to present by starting with the topic of assessment. Having known very little about the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment, her cooperating teacher suggested that she use a piece of the assessment with the participants. Corrina began, "Thank you for playing along with me. Actually, my cooperating teacher said this will be a great way to introduce the DIBELS." Because she provided background information about the assessment and its purpose,

it was evident that the cooperating teacher had had an impact on Corrina's knowledge about best practices in assessment by teaching her how to use the tool and what it measures. The cooperating teacher also demonstrated the importance of professional development and lifelong learning by explaining how she came to understand the assessment. Corrina concluded, "It's not something that, you know, all teachers are aware of. She went to training to do DIBELS, so she brought it back into the school and lots of the teachers were not proficient in just sounding out the letters."

Some struggles were also evident, as cooperating teachers often made changes to lesson plans that the student teachers were not particularly agreeable to. In many instances, elements of differentiation were removed from lesson plans because cooperating teachers believed they were time consuming. Corrina shared, "Anything for differentiation she took out of my lesson plan because there's one IEP. She said we don't differentiate for him because the whole class is still not above. They're not beyond." Corrina firmly believed that her teacher was committed to providing the same type of instruction for all students, without any modifications. Most student teachers were praised about time management instead of delivering deeper instruction with student modifications. These dynamics were generally dismissed as differences in teaching "styles." For example, when discussing her teacher's overemphasis on using worksheets, Corrina questioned how a teacher could consider this type of instruction effective: "…I couldn't just go into the classroom and be a paper and pencil person. I just couldn't do that. I also wonder how that's going to play out when I get into my own classroom because that's not my style at all." During a discussion about storytelling and oral language, participants uncovered similar struggles with allowing students to talk in the classroom. Phyllis noted some of the difficulties that exist when teaching philosophies are not aligned: "…the teacher usually sets the

tone of the classroom from September and now you're coming in. It's impossible to change

something that's already been set." Just a few weeks later she echoed similar sentiments: "I

think teachers sometimes get stuck in their one way. It's like after you've been teaching for so

many years you have to say to yourself, okay, it's time to change. Imagine doing the same thing

over and over again." Nonetheless, all of the student teachers complied with their cooperating

teachers' beliefs because their cooperating teachers were in perceived positions of power.

Participants shared experiences with their cooperating teachers in the study group freely, but

avoided conflict in the practicum experience for fear of receiving negative evaluations.

Cooperating teacher dynamics also led some participants to draw comparisons between

teachers' implementation of literacy best practices. In some instances, participants found

teachers relying on methods of instruction that were not research-based. This occurred because

two participants (Phyllis and Trina) split their time between inclusion and self-contained special

education classrooms, a program requirement for students seeking dual certification in general

education and special education. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Trina noticed big

differences between two first grade teachers. She began by supporting Corrina's teaching style

and later went on to explain that teachers are all different: "I swear to you that they're both

really good teachers, but they have different teaching styles." While Trina and Phyllis were able

to make comparisons, Sharonda remained in a special education classroom for the duration of the

semester. Her requirements were fulfilled because some students had Individualized Educational

Plans (IEPs) in the classroom and other students did not.

Teaching for Social Justice

Although it was not the focus of the study, a general consensus existed among

participants' beliefs in equality and excellence in education for all students. When participants

introduced themselves during the first study group session, many noted experiences with their

own children and wanting to ensure that all children have access to high quality instruction and

great teachers. Corrina emphasized the importance of having a diverse teaching staff, explaining

that it was important for even her own girls to see "someone that looks like them." In addition,

participants connecting their role as teachers to that of change agents in the community.

Sharonda talked about giving back to the city where she grew up. Phyllis saw her practicum

experience in a high performing suburban district as a way of learning and later giving back to

students in urban communities in New Jersey. Reflecting on her experiences in urban education,

Jennie shared that not all children have the same advantages when attending school. Particularly,

not all students can afford tutoring or enrichment programs, and have to rely on the quality of

their classroom teachers.

Participant Feedback about the Study Group

As discussed in the methodology section, participants were debriefed at the conclusion of

the study and interviewed. During the follow-up interview, participants were asked to reflect on

their experiences participating in the study group. I was particularly interested in gaining insight

about individuals' perceptions about what aspects of the study group were beneficial, lacking, or

helpful. Participants were asked to provide additional information about what might be helpful

when developing future literacy study groups. The additional findings matched the theoretical

design of the study group, as social learning and co-construction of knowledge occurred

throughout the twelve week study.

For Sharonda, participating in the literacy study group filled a void in terms of lacking

knowledge about literacy practices, as she had never taken a literacy methods course before. She

mentioned, "…we covered a lot of good topics, but those topics also brought up different topics

that we talked about throughout the sessions. So, it was very educational and I really liked it because I didn't have a literacy course. …this filled me in on stuff that I did not know." All participants agreed that they gained additional knowledge, but represented changes in different ways. For example, Christine honed in on the importance of providing students with one on one support during literacy instruction. She credited the study group with enhancing this knowledge: "It taught me things I should and shouldn't do…like meeting with the students during silent reading time and conferencing with them." Christine also believed that her learning was the result of socially interacting with others in the group (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). She explained, "I wouldn't have had such a strong view on it if I hadn't had the group to go to, to express some of the things we were able to do. Being able to bounce some ideas off of other teachers…that was kind of interesting." Corrina also valued the opportunity to socially construct knowledge, noting the development of a strong bond with another participant.

> Trina and I have become closer, and I will call Trina at the drop of a dime if I have to bounce something off of her…One thing I learned is you don't go into the classroom on your own and close the doors…You all work together…You all work together as a unit and I think that helps a lot.

Working together provided participants with a panoramic view of literacy instruction across multiple grade levels. Christine added, "I learned some things that I can use. A lot of the participants in the study group are from Early Childhood. So, a lot of the things I learned from them I can modify and use within my sixth grade class." Trina also spoke of modifying lessons demonstrated by her peers: "…I learned from the other students what they had to share." Building knowledge with peers gave participants like Corrina, Christine, and Trina the confidence to try out new ideas in the classroom and to take risks without the fear of getting a "bad grade" in a course. Corrina distinguished the study group from that of a typical course when reflecting on her learning.

> I think when you worry about a grade your thought process is different. You are really looking at everything you say and everything you do because it's going to affect the grade. When you do a study group and you don't have to worry about a grade…you will say what is on your mind. You will be true…you will be honest…

In addition to learning from one another, participants demonstrated the powerful nature of situated learning, a theory that asserts that learning when located within a specific context can transform one's learning (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Trina stated, "The literacy study group basically helped me to remember things that I should have remembered going into the student teacher process. I forgot some of the best practices that we did…I guess it was in the back of my head, but this was a good refresher…" Phyllis later reflected on the importance of learning in a situated context as well.

> I didn't know what best practice was...I mean, because you know, you're going into the classroom and you're teaching literacy. You're doing everything, but if you've never taught a literacy class, it's like you're going in fresh. So everything is being learned for the first time…So I had a vague idea, but did I actually know how to go into the classroom and actually be a teacher and teach this? It's totally different.

Although students developed declarative knowledge while taking coursework at the college, they recognized that the study group and student teaching context provided opportunities for connecting back to this knowledge while building upon it. In this manner, students relied less on declarative knowledge and more on situated and stable knowledge. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) explain, "The well prepared first-year teacher should have a level of declarative and procedural knowledge stable enough to support functioning under 'normal circumstances.'-she or he can plan instruction that will work for the majority of the class, can maintain order and implement the planned instruction, can assess child progress, and can adapt instruction within the limits of 'normal practice.'" In the literacy methods course, students participate in class discussions, conduct observations, and complete one on one tutoring. However, findings suggest

that the complexities of the student teaching experience required participants to rely more on

how to teach reading and writing. By participating in the study group, declarative knowledge

was not lost, but rather expanded upon as the student teachers assumed more responsibilities in

their roles as classroom teachers.

The study group also provided an opportunity for the student teachers to take ownership

of their learning, as leadership of the study group sessions remained flexible throughout the

course of the twelve weeks (Stanley, 2011). Participants enjoyed the design of the group, in

which different people in a small group presented on different topics and remained central to

their own learning (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Saavedra, 1996). A common belief was that

"centrality" was achieved due to the small nature of the group, as demonstrated in Sharonda's

considerations about future study groups.

> I like how there was food of course. I liked the environment. You don't want it
> to be too large of a group because it would be overwhelming and everybody
> would want to talk and you would be there for like four hours. So, it should stay
> like a little, small, compact group.

Corrina added, "I think that for future groups it should be kept small, because I think that with

the small numbers it's more intimate and it draws everyone into the conversation." However,

not all participants felt this way. For instance, Jennie admitted feeling as though the small nature

of the group limited her ability to share ideas with other teachers, as she was the only Pre-K

teacher represented in the group. She shared, "…maybe if there were more preschool teachers in

the group I would've felt better about that…like sharing information…I felt sometimes outta

place."

When asked to reflect on what they would have liked to learn more about, participants

differed in their responses. Literacy work stations, comprehension strategies, the use of leveled

readers, writing, and Pre-K curriculum were all topics of interest. Trina suggested that "the

persons participating in the group could suggest what they want to learn about one particular week" and that "maybe a pre-survey" could determine who is interested in what topics. Despite the predetermined study group topics, all participants believed that the study group enhanced their knowledge of literacy best practices and encouraged them to try new ideas in the classroom. Participants felt best prepared to model comprehension, read aloud, vocabulary, and guided reading. Phyllis concluded, "The atmosphere was pleasant, everyone got along, everyone had different ideas, brought it to the table, we piggy-backed off each other…so it's like getting bits and pieces from everyone made it great…"

How do students involved in a literacy study group perform during student teaching?

Student Teaching Observations

When setting the focus for this study, it was important to note that knowledge and practice are significantly different, especially when examining teachers' understanding and implementation of literacy best practices. While the first research question aimed to determine how participating in the literacy study group impacted students' content knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction, this section will discuss how the student teachers performed during student teaching. Findings emerged from classroom literacy observations conducted by supervisors, in which an early and final teaching of a literacy lesson was conducted with each student teacher. Additional information about these methods of data collection are included in Chapter Three, however, overall findings from the Observation Feedback Forms (OFF), Classroom Literacy Observation Schedules (CLOS), and end of semester Clinical Competency Inventory (CCI) are included for each study group participant.

Sharonda.

During her first lesson, Sharonda taught a lesson to students in her inclusion classroom focused on comprehension of text. Using the CLOS tool, her supervisor rated all of her literacy practices with a score of 2, meaning that the practices were somewhat in place and observed at least once during the semester. The supervisor noted that the lesson was well prepared, taught in a logical sequence, and appropriate for the students' age and needs

> Sharonda is in a unique situation teaching reading to children with special needs. She appears to have a good foundation. She is patient while working with difficult students. Her follow-up questions to the students reinforce the reading lesson and comprehension.

The supervisor also noted that Sharonda used discrete trial as a method for assessing students, as she kept charts for each student to monitor their progress.

At the end of the semester, Sharonda earned a 3 in all areas of the CLOS, except for item number fifteen which addresses independence. Because of the students in her class, the supervisor felt as though not all students were physically or cognitively able to take full responsibility for their literacy learning. Sharonda was observed taking over the entire reading portion of the class during her final observation. The supervisor praised, "Sharonda has done a monumental job in getting literacy to these Autistic children. Each is a completely different personality with different degrees of Autism. Sharonda works diligently with them." Sharonda engaged the students in a lesson with materials prepared well in advance, including index cards with Tier Two vocabulary words, and phonics cards to review long and short vowel sounds. Relevant questions were asked related to the story and students were encouraged to use the text as a basis for their responses. By asking students to elaborate on their responses, it was noted that the entire class was engaged and on task.

Similar feedback was provided by Sharonda's cooperating teacher.

> Ms. B. was truly an asset to our class. She developed a rapport with the students that most newcomers are incapable of. She delivered lessons and tracked individual progress toward outcomes. My students and I will truly miss her.

Overall, a positive relationship between Sharonda and her cooperating teacher was noted, and growth was made in all areas in terms of literacy best practices. By the end of the semester, Sharonda was considered an integral part of the classroom and school community and recognized as a lifelong learner by her supervisor. In her final lesson, she orchestrated an entire literacy block embedding the components of vocabulary, phonics, and comprehension.

Christine.

According to the CLOS tool, a majority of the literacy dimensions received a score of 2, noting that the practices were somewhat in place or observed at least once at the beginning of the semester. Christine received a score of 1 in two areas including item #7 knowledge-explanation sentence, and item #27 differentiation-connection. Although item #7 addresses the importance of teachers clearly explaining grammatical concepts related to literacy, this type of instruction is not typically focused on in sixth grade classrooms. Item #27 demonstrated that there was a need for Christine to better connect with the students in her classroom. However, her supervisor provided positive feedback regarding her teaching of reading and writing.

> Christine has created a very warm, supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable in oral reading, responding to questions, sharing opinions on their reading, and in written activities. A section of each lesson every day is devoted to both oral and silent reading activities as well as defining and placing in context a new word of the day.

By the end of the semester, Christine received a 3 on all areas of the CLOS except for item #7, which received a score of 2. The supervisor noted, "Overall, Christine has done an excellent job applying the learnings of her literacy group into her classroom." Her most notable areas of improvement included meeting the needs of diverse learners through implementation of

cooperative learning activities. Additionally, her supervisor noted improvement in the area of

communication.

> The one word I would use to best describe Christine's student teaching experience
> is "GROWTH." She came to the middle school in January a bit shy, reserved,
> nervous, and uncomfortable in her teaching role. She is leaving fifteen weeks
> later a very confident, comfortable, secure, and what I would like to call a more
> "seasoned teacher" than the novice she was in January.

Additionally, Christine's supervisor noted how she integrated language arts into the

content areas. He explained, "During her student teaching, Christine had the opportunity to work

cooperatively with a social studies teacher in a Holocaust project that utilized an interdisciplinary

approach to language arts teaching." Similar sentiments were echoed by her cooperating teacher:

"Ms. B. prepares well for her lessons and has a calm demeanor which will serve her well during

her teaching career."

Corrina.

At the beginning of the semester, Corrina's supervisor gave her a 3 in a majority of the

literacy dimensions included on the CLOS form. Items #6, 8, 9, 25, and 27 received a score of 2.

This shows that additional emphasis could be placed on explaining word, letter, or sound

strategies, textual strategies or concepts, and providing students with the language of literacy

concepts. It was also recommended that Corrina work on promoting higher order critical

thinking and make stronger connections to the class. An interesting finding involves the fact that

Corrina received a score of 1 in relation to differentiating instruction, as Corrina often shared

curriculum constraints and issues of her cooperating teacher removing differentiation from her

lessons. These additional findings are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Nonetheless, engagement was evident in Corrina's Kindergarten classroom.

> Corrina successfully got and held her students' attention, beginning the lesson by
> waving around her mittened hands and fearlessly singing the Three Little Kittens

song to them. The lesson proceeded seamlessly through teaching them to sing the song, reading the nursery rhyme aloud, and challenging the students to identify and sign high-frequency words.

This first lesson was recognized for the engaging way in which Corrina taught the students to identify and recognize high frequency words.

By the end of the semester Corrina received a score of 3 in all of the literacy dimensions on the CLOS tool. Her supervisor reflected on the successes of the lesson, in which the skill of sequencing was reinforced: "Using a picture book as a tool, sequencing was discussed and modeled, while rhyme, word families, reading from left to right, forming letters from the top down, distribution of seeds in nature, and fiction vs. nonfiction were reviewed. A critical thinking question on the SMART Board had students imagining, verbally composing, and discussing their responses." Her supervisor continued to reflect on Corrina's "with-it-ness," specifically noting how her positive classroom culture moves the reading lesson along. She explained, "Corrina showed awareness of necessary wait-time for students to formulate answers and gave ample opportunities for students to elaborate on their responses. These concepts were all framed in a classroom climate of respect, caring, support, and JOY." Despite differences in teaching style evident in findings discussed previously, Corrina's cooperating teacher noted how effective she was at offering a supplemental and enriched curriculum to a diverse group of Kindergarten students. She concluded, "Mrs. C. was a wonderful asset to our classroom and her professionalism will be missed!"

Trina.

Trina's first lesson involved teaching special needs students how to write Haiku poems. Trina received a score of 2 in all dimensions of the CLOS, except in regards to items #9 and 15. The supervisor recognized that Trina provided ample opportunity for the students to develop

language by talking about and exemplifying literacy concepts, and promoting independence

while encouraging students to take ownership of their literacy learning.

At the end of the semester, Trina received a score of 3 in all dimensions of the CLOS.

The supervisor felt as though outstanding attention was paid to promoting independence with the

special needs students, that opportunities were provided for students to develop oral language

through choral reading, and that feedback was very positive in nature. Summarizing her lesson,

he noted, "Nice combination of literacy and science with ladybugs." In this final lesson, Trina

encouraged the students to think about the difference between fiction and nonfiction, while

relevantly connection the lesson to students' lives. On the Clinical Competency Inventory

(CCI), the supervisor noted some ways in which Trina showed growth during the semester.

> Her performance in the classroom setting advanced nicely throughout the
> semester. Her lesson plans were creative and well detailed. She communicated
> well with her students and developed a positive rapport. At the same time her
> classroom management style made for an effective learning environment. She
> especially worked well with students on a one to one basis.

In addition to having an overall positive experience, Trina's cooperating teacher noted growth in

the areas of teaching literacy, specifically related to her helping two individual students with

special needs. She added, "She was able to teach the first grade student how to spell and read

sight words. She also came up with creative ways to teach the third grade student how to build

vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension skills."

Jennie.

Because Jennie had a vast array of scores on the CLOS at the beginning of the semester,

all data related to her strengths and areas of needed improvement are shown (See Table 6).

Table 6

Jennie's Initial CLOS Scores

Literacy Dimension	Criteria	Initial Score	Final Score	Description
Respect	1. Rapport	3	3	The teacher creates a warm, positive and inviting classroom where relationships with children encourage literacy learning (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Snow et.al., 1998; Brophy & Good, 1986; DfEE, 2000; Hattie, 2003; Pianta, 2006)
	2. Credibility	3	3	Children's respect for the teacher enables him/her to maintain order and lesson flow (Brophy & Good, 1986; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; DfEE, 2000; Hattie, 2003)
	3. Citizenship	3	3	The teacher promotes equality, tolerance, exclusivity and awareness of the needs of others (Education Queensland, 2002)
Knowledge	4. Purpose	2	3	Children's responses indicate tacit or explicit understanding of the purpose of the literacy task (Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Wray et.al., 2000)
	5. Substance	2	3	The teacher provides a lesson/task that leads to substantial literacy engagement, not busy-work (Education Queensland, 2002; Hattie, 2003)
	6. Explanation word	1	3	The teacher clearly explains specific word, letter or sound strategies or concepts (Ehri & Roberts, 2006; Juel, 2006; Byrne & Fielding Barnsley, 1991)
	7. Explanation sentence	1	3	The teacher clearly explains specific grammatical strategies or concepts (Snow et.al., 1998; Wray et.al.,2000; Rego & Bryant, 1993; Tunmer & Hoover, 1992)
	8. Explanation text	1	3	The teacher clearly explains specific textual strategies or concepts (Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; NRP, 2000; Snow et.al., 1998; Duffy, 2003; Duke & Pearson, 2002)
	9. Metalanguage	2	3	The teacher provides children with language for talking about and exemplifying literacy concepts (Olson, 1994; Education Queensland, 2002; Morrison, Connor & Bachman, 2006)
	10. Oral language	2	3	The teacher focuses on the development of children's oral language (Snow et.al., 1998; Senechal, Ouellette & Rodney, 2006; McKeown & Beck, 2006)
	11. Oral/written language	2	3	The teacher makes logical connections between oral and written language (Dickinson, 2001; Dickinson, et.al., 2006; McKeown & Beck, 2006)
Orchestration	12. Awareness	2	3	The teacher has a high level of awareness of literacy activities and participation by children (Hattie, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998)
	13. Environment	2	3	The teacher uses the literate physical environment as a resource (Hattie, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998; Wray et.al., 2000)
	14. Structure	2	3	The teacher manages a predictable environment in which children understand consistent literacy routines (Brophy & Good, 1986; DfEE, 2000; Hill et.al., 1998; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997)
	15. Independence	2	3	Children take some responsibility for their own literacy learning (Education Queensland, 2002; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998)
	16. Pace	2	3	The teacher provides strong forward momentum in literacy lessons (Brophy & Good, 1986; Wray, et.al., 2000)
	17. Transition	2	3	The teacher spends minimal time changing activities or uses this time productively (Bloom, 1976; DfEE, 2000; Strickland, 2001)
	18. Attention	2	3	The teacher ensures that children are focused on the literacy task (Rowe & Rowe, 1999; Wray et.al., 2000)

	19. Stimulation	2	3	The teacher motivates interest in literacy through the creation of a pleasurable, enthusiastic and energetic classroom (Brophy & Good, 1986; Hattie, 2003; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Snow et.al., 1998)
Support	20. Assessment	1	3	The teacher uses fine-grained knowledge of children's literacy performance in planning and teaching (Hill & Crevola, 1999; Louden et.al., 2000; Wray et.al., 2000)
	21. Scaffolding	2	3	The teacher extends literacy learning through reinforcement, modification, or modeling (Bloom, 1976; Brophy & Good, 1986; Taylor et.al., 2000; Snow et.al., 1998' Wray et.al., 2000)
	22. Feedback	2	3	The teacher intervenes in timely, focused, tactful and explicit ways that support children's literacy learning (Bloom, 1976; Hattie, 2003; Strickland, 2002)
	23. Responsiveness	2	3	The teacher is flexible in sharing and building on children's literacy contributions (Brophy & Good, 1986; Hattie, 2003; DfEE, 2000)
	24. Persistence	2	3	The teacher provides many opportunities to practice and master new literacy learning (Brophy & Good, 1986; Snow et.al., 1998)
Differentiation	25. Challenge	1	3	The teacher extends and promotes higher levels of thinking in literacy learning (Brophy & Good, 1986; DfEE, 2000; Education Queensland, 2002; Hattie, 2003)
	26. Inclusion	2	3	The teacher differentiates literacy instruction to recognize individual needs (Education Queensland, 2002; Hill et.al., 1998; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998; Taylor et.al., 2000; Wray et.al., 2000)
	27. Connection	2	3	The teacher makes connections between class or community literacy-related knowledge for individuals or groups (Education Queensland, 2002; Hill et.al., 1998; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003)

Most of the areas of needed improvement were in the dimension of literacy knowledge. For

example, Jennie needed to work on clearly explaining word, letter, or sound strategies.

Additional consideration was also needed in explaining grammatical concepts and strategies or

concepts taught to the students. Assessments were not being used to plan and teach literacy

lessons, and higher level thinking was not evident. Her supervisor reflected on a reading lesson

taught by Jennie, in which students read and discussed the Chinese New Year.

> The book had wonderful illustrations but the text was too small and modifications
> were necessary. Jennie created an abbreviated version. The lesson was to teach
> beginning, middle, and end. Students could have been prepared more prior to the
> reading.

At this point in the semester, it was noted that Jennie needed to improve her knowledge of

subject matter, human growth and development, instructional planning and strategies, and

assessment. In addition, communication and professional development were included as areas of needed improvement.

While an extensive number of considerations were noted at the beginning of the semester, Jennie showed tremendous growth on the CLOS, receiving all scores of 3 after her final literacy observation. Growth was also indicated on the Observation Feedback Form, in which the highest possible scores were obtained. These findings are supported by Jennie's performance on the Practice Reading PRAXIS test, in which Jennie had the second highest relative change in score. Reflecting on her teaching of a reading lesson about planting a garden, her supervisor noted, "There was a great deal of interaction with the book by the children." The supervisor later concluded that Jennie flourished under the support and guidance of an outstanding cooperating teacher. The cooperating teacher agreed, noting that she would recommend Jennie for a teaching position in the school district.

Phyllis.

At the beginning of the semester, Phyllis received a score of 3 in a majority of the literacy dimensions on the CLOS. A score of 2 was provided for items #3, 7, 11, 15, and 24. Her supervisor noted, "This lesson was a perfect example of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching language arts and science. Excellent!" However, a focus was set on improving equity in the classroom, explaining grammatical concepts or strategies, making connections between oral and written language, promoting independence, and providing many opportunities for students to master new literacy learning. During this initial lesson it was summarized that Phyllis's lesson included a strong anticipatory set, differentiated questions, clear objectives, and a warm and friendly learning environment. Her supervisor explained, "In summation, the teacher was

sensitive and supportive of children's needs and their differences in ability. The lesson was relevant, with good use of concrete materials to supplement their understanding of fossils."

Later in the semester, Phyllis completed observation #7 and received all scores of 3 on the CLOS form. Noting the change in her placement, her supervisor explained, "This is a challenging experience for Phyllis, because she was student teaching in a third grade class and now she is in a special education class for Autistic children. She adjusts easily and her performance is very good. I have great hope for her future." While room for improvement was noted in terms of human growth and development and special needs, it is important to understand that the first half of Phyllis's practicum experience was in a general education setting and the second half was in a special education classroom with children with severe learning disabilities. Regardless, her overall student teaching evaluation completed by the supervisor was positive.

> Phyllis's lesson plans are carefully prepared and she uses Madeline Hunter's Seven Step Lesson Plan as a guide. To her credit a variety of teaching techniques are included and at times the students work cooperatively in small groups to share ideas and to learn from one another. Phyllis is encouraged to follow timelines established for each lesson but shows the flexibility to stop and offer assistance when children need additional reinforcement. In this process, her students have her encouragement and know they will review the material again tomorrow.

The cooperating teacher also noted her willingness to learn new ideas and strategies related to meeting the special needs of students. She explained, "She is encouraged to modify work and activities for the many ability and skill levels found in an LLD classroom. She is very open to learning more and is frequently asking questions to better understand the special education setting."

Chapter 5: Journal Article

This chapter is written as a summary of the entire study, including a rationale, summary of theory, and a condensed review of the literature. A methods section is followed by findings and analysis, and a brief discussion related to the benefits of including literacy study groups in teacher education programs. The chapter concludes with implications for practice, future research, and closing remarks. The intended audience for this chapter includes literacy researchers and teacher educators, particularly those responsible for preparing Pre-K to 6th grade teachers of literacy.

Rationale

As this study was introduced, our nation's schools were in the midst of an era of high stakes testing, accountability, and school reform. During this time I transitioned from an early literacy classroom to instructing students in literacy methods at the college level. I was entering the profession at a time where higher education was under the microscope, as many were beginning to look to higher education to analyze ways in which teachers were being prepared to enter the classroom. Four years later not much has changed. In *Reading Today,* an International Reading Association publication for literacy professionals, Long & Pearson (2013) reflected on our current times of controversy, in which teacher education programs across the United States have come under attack. The 2014 National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) report suggests that many teachers have not been adequately prepared to serve the needs of students in the classroom and are lacking knowledge about the five main components of literacy instruction. However, literacy experts argue that the methodology of their findings is questionable (Long & Pearson, 2013), and that the National Reading Panel (2000) report is not the "final word" on critical elements or early reading instruction. Lewis-Spector (2014) noted there are areas of

needed improvement, as some of the disparities uncovered include "…little evaluation of student field work vis-à-vis literacy instruction and no specific reading course requirements in several states, to explicit field-work standards for literacy instruction and 12 credit hours in literacy courses" (p. 4). It is understood that these differences in preparation can result in potentially large disparities in students' success with reading and writing.

Prior to learning about such discrepancies, I was intrigued by the idea of exploring a problem of practice within my program at Bloomington College. Within the program, students are required to take *Developing Children's Literacy Across the Grades: Methods and Strategies.* Although the course is ahead of the curve in that it is based on the National Reading Panel findings and the current focus on comprehensive literacy, it was my belief that one course was not enough and too broad in its focus. A pilot study conducted during the Fall 2012 semester confirmed this problem of practice, finding that by the end of the course students (1) had a developing, or beginning understanding of literacy instruction, (2) identified with specific teaching strategies modeled, and (3) were only beginning to conceptualize their philosophies of teaching reading. Furthermore, a review of program information across teacher education programs in New Jersey revealed that a majority of programs require students to take at least two, if not more literacy methods courses prior to becoming certified teachers.

Adding additional courses to the education program would require taking credits away from students' co-concentrations and core general education requirements, or increasing the time it would take students to graduate. Time and funds are scarce, and many teacher education candidates are taking classes in less than ideal ways. To inform this problem, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of a study group intervention on preservice teachers, as they reflect upon and improve their literacy practices. Testing this type of intervention was

one way to make recommendations to the teacher education program, as this format for learning

is not designed as "just another course." The following research questions guided this study:

- How do student teachers working in Pre-K to 6th grade classrooms participate in a

  literacy study group focused on best practices?

  - How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content

    knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction?

  - How do students involved in a literacy study group perform during student

    teaching?

Theory

This study involved a closer look at the key shift that takes place when preservice

teachers move from coursework at the college level to becoming practicing novices in the

classroom during student teaching. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) distinguish five levels of

"increasing progressive differentiation roughly coordinated with five points in the teacher's

career progression: preservice, apprentice, novice, experienced, and master teacher" (p. 6). From

a theoretical perspective, the authors assert that when teachers graduate having received a

significant amount of coursework training, an emphasis is placed on declarative knowledge.

However, situated learning theory supports that as teachers transition into the classroom, they

rely less on declarative knowledge and more on situated, stable, and reflective knowledge. Pea

and Brown argue that "…human minds develop in social situations, and they use tools and

representational media that culture provides to support, extend, and reorganize mental

functioning (as cited in Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 11). Central to this theory is when the adult

learner takes what he or she has learned and applies it practice. In order to be successful

teachers, preservice teachers must have extensive field experiences in which they are situated in

the classroom and applying the declarative knowledge learned (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

Grounded in sociocultural theory, a focus on study groups also utilizes a community of

practice perspective to explore novice teachers' experiences through the framework of

progressing through the stages of preservice to novice (Wenger, 1998). Wenger explains that

participating in a community of practice, or study group context, allows individuals to organize

their lives, while developing shared practices about a particular subject. In this study, preservice

teachers worked together to co-construct knowledge about best practices in literacy, moving the

learning from an isolated student teaching field placement to a community of practice (Lortie,

1975). It appeared that through social interaction and enhanced opportunities to rely more on a

situated context and less on declarative knowledge, student teachers could enhance their

knowledge about literacy best practices while continuing to grow their professional practice.

Literature Review

To inform the design and scope of the study, I conducted a literature review to explore

several areas of research. These areas helped to provide a rationale for the study, while offering

information critical to the types of professional development necessary for Pre-K to 6th grade

teachers to be prepared to teach literacy. In the next section I describe the themes that emerged

from these areas and expand on their implications for best practices in teacher education

programs.

Key Elements of Quality Teacher Education

While the level of quality among teacher education programs varies, studies suggest that

the best programs focus on helping teachers apply what they have learned in their coursework to

later classroom practice. Darling-Hammond (2010) explains, "Many schools of education

undertook successful transformations−using the standards to redesign their programs; creating

stronger clinical practice; strengthening coursework around critical areas like student learning

and development, assessment, subject matter pedagogy, and teaching of English language

learners and special needs students; and connecting this coursework directly to practice in much

more extensive practicum settings" (p. 36). A key feature of such exemplary programs includes

a high quality student teaching experience that prepares students to enter the field ready to

positively impact student learning (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008;

Darling-Hammond, 2010). These high quality clinical experiences act as the "glue" that brings

research, theory, and practice together (Darling-Hammond, 2006). These three elements

combined produce more highly qualified teachers and directly impact student achievement.

In addition to extensive field experiences, studies have found that the content of teacher

education programs is also a key ingredient to preparing highly qualified teachers. As preservice

teachers work alongside students in the field, deeper connections are made to the content, which

goes well beyond those made when future teachers are placed in the field without guidance

(Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, & Roehrig, 2014; Denton, 1982; Kennedy, 1999; National

Academy of Education, 2005).

However, there is still much to be learned in regards to how research is used to determine

which teacher education programs are of the highest quality. A promising element is for

programs to have a clear vision of what they are aiming for and to go beyond disconnected forms

of learning, where colleges and universities provide stand-alone content-driven instruction

(Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Zeichner, 2010). Current trends in the research highlight the

benefits of "rethinking and redesigning" collaborations between teacher education programs and

local schools. Ultimately, teachers need to be able to reflect on their knowledge about learning

and pedagogy, while thoughtfully focusing on how these contextualized classroom performances

affect individual learners (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999).

Key Elements of Quality Literacy Teacher Education

Aligned with the research on high quality teacher education in general, studies in the field

of literacy teacher education demonstrate the power of thoughtfully combining coursework and

literacy content with field experiences (Helfrich & Bean, 2011). The most valuable elements of

such programs for helping teacher candidates to teach literacy are coursework, including critical

content knowledge, an integrated field component, and collaboration among teacher candidates,

university instructors, and cooperating teachers. Many studies reveal that coursework and field

experiences are what students value most when it comes to preparing to teach reading (Helfrich

& Bean, 2011; Sailors, Keehn, Martinez, & Harmon, 2005). Common features of these field

experiences include developing reflective teachers, scaffolding structured learning experiences,

pairing students with knowledgeable cooperating teachers, offering a variety of contexts, and

one-on-one tutoring.

Embedded in these learning experiences should be learner-centered approaches that allow

for students to collaborate and socially network in more meaningful ways (Assaf & Lopez, 2012;

Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). Looking at the features of effective programs in

Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands, researchers found that learning about teaching requires a shift from the curriculum to the learner. For example, providing a small group context for preservice teachers to meet was enough to facilitate collaboration focused on monitoring conversations and offering support (Joyce & Showers, 1995).

In addition to coursework, field experiences, and collaboration, the International Reading Association (2007) identified six key elements of effective literacy preparation that include content, faculty and teaching, apprenticeships, diversity, assessment, and program vision. Commonly found in such programs are the foundations of literacy instruction, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Added to these building blocks are writing, motivation, and the integrated comprehensive nature of literacy instruction aligned with the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This "exemplary" schedule for literacy instruction includes opportunities for independent reading and writing, explicit vocabulary instruction, reading workshop and read aloud lessons centered on comprehension, literacy workstations for independent practice, small group differentiated instruction, writing workshop, word work, literacy in the content areas, and daily reflection (Morrow, 2015). To best prepare teachers for the classroom, these core research-based components are essential.

Innovative ideas are also being studied, as programs consider ways in which they can be redesigned to teach literacy. Common in programs is having preservice teachers tutor students in reading and writing (Dawkins, Ritz, & Louden, 2010). In their study of an eight-week tutoring project, Dawkins, Ritz, & Louden (2010) noted the benefits of utilizing a Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule, or CLOS tool to assess preservice teachers' literacy knowledge and practice. Students received ongoing training and feedback that helped to increase their

knowledge of literacy concepts and skills and develop and extend their range of literacy practices. While these findings provide justification for the embedded literacy tutoring experience already included in the methods course at Bloomington College, this study goes one step further in utilizing the CLOS tool during the student teaching experience.

Using Study Groups with Teachers

Students learn more effectively and in more meaningful ways when they are working with others. However, all too often teaching has been characterized by isolation and failed opportunities for collaboration among teachers (Arnold, 2002; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Sugai, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 2009). While a current trend focuses on arranging teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), researchers agree that these structures result in forced participation, because "…collaboration is expected and the focus is directed towards teachers' mastery of certain teaching techniques or ways of looking at student learning" (Stanley, 2011). What makes the study group unique is that teachers work together during their free time because they choose to do so. Through the context of a study group, teachers reflect on instructional issues, mentoring issues, professional issues, and plan accordingly. Teachers take control of the curriculum rather than passively acting as recipients of research (Arnold, 2002; Murphy, 1992; Rosenholtz, 1989). Many studies have noted district-level success when encouraging such contexts for learning (Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Foorman & Moats, 2004; Murphy, 1992). A significant contributor to this success is that study groups provide opportunities for knowledge to be constructed through extensive discussion (Arvaja, Hakkinen, Etelapelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2002; Light, et. al., 1994; Howe & Tolmie, 1999; van Boxten et. al., 2002).

The effectiveness of study groups depends upon certain considerations, including …

"the length and quality of participants' commitment to the group, the tension between the goals

of improving content-area knowledge and pedagogical skills, the way that teachers with varied

goals for development participate and assume different roles within the group, the group's

mechanism for honest examination of teaching practices and its structure for conversation, the

teaching assignments represented within the group membership, and support for classroom

implementation of new ideas and skills (Stanley, 2011, p. 74). Shared leadership and structured

tasks in the community of learners results in teachers being more likely to implement what they

have learned (Dillenbourg, 1999; Gersten, Dimino, Jaynthi, Kim, & Santoro, 2010; Saavedra,

1996; Stanley, 2011).

Research on African American Teachers

Although the parameters of this study are centered on literacy knowledge and practices,

this section was included because of the demographics of the study group participants. Few

studies examine the experiences of solely African American female teachers. Milner (2012)

found four areas in the research on black teachers and teaching: (1) Black teachers are role

models for students; (2) Black teachers develop and explicitly enact and explain their high

expectations for students; (3) Black teachers take on the role of 'other parents' for their students;

and (4) Black teachers empathize with, not pity, their students. Additionally, African American

teachers stress urgency for learning with their students, as noted in studies conducted in

classrooms during the challenging times of the segregated South (Siddle-Walker, 2000).

Through teaching, African American teachers often stress the importance of addressing social

justice issues related to race, equity, social class, and culture (Milner, 2012; Pang & Gibson,

2001). While studies have documented African American teachers' perceptions and instructional

practices, few, if any, have examined how these findings relate to knowledge and practice related to literacy.

Research Implications for this Study

Based on the studies reviewed in the literature, it is important for teacher education programs to move beyond a coursework-only approach to studying literacy research and theory. Preservice teachers also need to participate in carefully planned field experiences in which they are given an opportunity to work with students to apply the literacy methods and strategies learned in the classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, preservice teachers can co-construct shared beliefs about literacy instruction by collaborating in communities of practice. While the research demonstrates how much we have learned about teacher education and preparing literacy teachers over the years, there are still areas of research that might provide pathways for programs, including the one discussed in this article. By researching the use of study group interventions we will further improve our understanding of teacher education related to literacy and how college and university programs can best meet the needs of future teachers.

Methods

Research Design Overview

This qualitative case study analyzed the impact of a study group on preparing undergraduate preservice teachers for teaching reading and writing at the early childhood and elementary grade levels. Merriam (2009) explains, "A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" and that…"the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study, the case" (p. 40). The study group operated within a "bounded system" over the course of one semester. During the semester, students met

on a weekly basis immediately following their student teaching seminar to discuss the

components of a comprehensive, core literacy program. Table 7 highlights the schedule for the

study group with the topics that were discussed.

Table 7

Literacy Study Group Schedule

Timeframe (Approximately 12 weeks during the Spring 2014 semester)	Literacy Study Group Topic
Getting Started	▪Recruitment in the student teaching seminar ▪Study Group Overview-including group norms
Week 1	▪Introduction to "Literacy Study Buddies" ▪The "Exemplary Day" Schedule ▪Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English-Language Arts (ELA) ▪Sharing Concerns About Student Teaching Related to Literacy
Week 2	▪Assessment in Early Literacy
Week 3	▪Best Practices in Phonemic Awarness/Phonics/Fluency Instruction
Week 4	▪Best Practices in Vocabulary Instruction
Week 5	▪Reading Aloud/Fiction Comprehension
Week 6	▪Reading Aloud/Nonfiction Comprehension
Week 7	▪Reading Workshop (Mini-Lesson and Independent/Partner Practice)
Week 8	▪Storytelling and Oral Language
Week 9	▪Literacy Work Stations (Literacy Centers)
Week 10	▪Guided Reading/Small Group Differentiated Instruction
Week 11	▪Writing Workshop
Week 12	▪Interdisciplinary Literacy/Literacy in the Content Areas
°Note: Student motivation and engagement was included across all study group sessions.	

Each study group session lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour throughout the duration of

one spring semester. Participants self-selected topics to present and further explore with the

group. Group norms promoted collaboration, shared ownership, and natural discussions about

the topics and how they relate to the overall student teaching experience.

Context

The study took place at the Division of Education at Bloomington College in northeastern

New Jersey. Bloomington College is a small, private liberal arts college that serves

approximately 2,000 students. Among its many accredited academic programs, Bloomington

College offers the following majors in education: (1) Elementary Education and Early

Childhood, (2) Elementary with Subject Matter Specialization, (3) Secondary Education with

Subject Matter Specialization, and (4) Special Education and Early Childhood. One literacy

course is offered in the teacher education program. The study group intervention, which quickly

became known as "Literacy Study Buddies," intentionally expanded opportunities in literacy

learning for participating early childhood, elementary, and special education majors. Preservice

teachers had an opportunity to continue their professional development based on interest in a

particular field or subject matter, moving beyond the typical required course units or program

tracks.

Research Participants

Selection Criteria

Using criterion-based selection, six students in the student teaching seminar course

received a recruitment letter at the beginning of the study and had an opportunity to opt-in if

interested in joining the literacy study group. The following criteria guided purposeful sampling:

(1) participants had to be undergraduate or post-baccalaureate students completing their student

teaching in Pre-K to sixth grade classrooms during the duration of the study and (2) participants

had to be early childhood/elementary, elementary with subject matter specialization, or early

childhood/special education majors. All recruited participants agreed to take part in the study

and received an informed consent letter. Four students were in the traditional undergraduate

program and two were post-baccalaureate students returning to college to earn teaching

certifications. One distinguishing characteristic of the study group is that all participants were

African American females. Table 8 introduces each of the study group participants.

Table 8

Study Group Participants

Participant	Program Enrollment	Major	Student Teaching Placement	Previously Completed a Literacy Methods Course? (Yes or No)
Sharonda	Traditional Undergraduate	Early Childhood/Special Education	Special Education Resource Room	No
Christine	Traditional Undergraduate	Elementary Education/Subject Matter Specialization in English	Sixth Grade Classroom	Yes
Corrina	Adult Undergraduate	Elementary/Early Childhood (P-3 Certification)	Kindergarten Classroom	Yes
Trina	Traditional Undergraduate	Early Childhood/Special Education	Special Education Resource Room	Yes

Jennie	Post-Baccalaureate	Elementary/Early Childhood (P-3 Certification)	Pre-Kindergarten Classroom	Yes
Phyllis	Post-Baccalaureate	Early Childhood/Special Education	Split Placement Between a Third Grade Classroom and Special Education Self-Contained	Yes

Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

In order to collect baseline data regarding participants' literacy content knowledge, all participants completed a 24 question, multiple-choice PRAXIS practice test for language and literacy. These questions were developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) and included in their official Early Childhood: Content Knowledge study guide, aligned with the testing required of early childhood and elementary teachers in New Jersey. Descriptive field notes were collected in order to describe the physical setting of the activity, the participants, activities and interactions, conversations, and subtle factors. Adapted from Merriam's criteria for careful qualitative observations, an observation template was used to collect field notes. Participants' student teaching supervisors used an Observation Feedback Form (OFF) to rate the performance of the student teachers according to the eleven New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers (NJPST). Supervisors also used a revised version of the Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule (CLOS) during two scheduled visits to observe five dimensions of literacy instruction. The first and final observations were of participants teaching literacy lessons in their student teaching classrooms. Observation data provided information about participants' knowledge and delivery of literacy instruction, and how, if at all, this might develop over the course of the

semester. A final summative evaluation of each participant's performance was recorded on the

end of semester Clinical Competency Inventory (CCI), a form completed by each supervisor and

cooperating teacher. At the conclusion of the study, all participants took part in an interview

focused on their experience in the literacy study group. Using a semi-structured interview

format allowed collection of specific information desired from all the respondents, but in an

open-ended format that allowed for further discussion related to participants' literacy study

group experiences. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for data analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

Merriam (2009) emphasizes the importance of beginning data analysis during data

collection. In addition to writing notes and memos in a research journal, field notes, student

interviews, and recorded observations and study group conversations were immediately

transcribed and coded. Although tentative categories emerged during early data collection, later

categories were systematically formed by referring back to the purpose of the study, the research

questions, theoretical framework, and the literature on teacher education and literacy instruction.

These categories were recorded in a codebook. Definitions related to each code were reviewed

and discussed with a voluntary co-coder, who serves as an Associate Professor in the Division of

Education at the College.

Ensuring Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure validity and reliability, participants were debriefed and member checks

were conducted to guarantee accuracy among participants' responses. Data sources were

triangulated through review of field notes, transcribed conversations and student interviews,

student teaching observations, and PRAXIS practice test scores. Pilot testing of the literacy

observation form and PRAXIS practice test questions during the fall 2013 semester contributed

to the trustworthiness of data collection. Training of the student teaching supervisors in the use

of the literacy observation tool and discussions for effective implementation of the tool during

the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters also increased reliability. Confidence is also increased

in that all data collected during study group sessions was facilitated by the same instructor.

Prolonged time in the field (12 weeks) increases confidence in the research design and analysis.

Limitations

Because this research study is context-specific and based on a small purposeful sample, it

is important to note that these findings are not generalizable to all teacher education programs,

but nonetheless contribute to what we know about teacher preparation as it relates to the field of

literacy. Findings from this study could potentially have an impact on how teacher educators

think about program design and curriculum that meets the needs of teachers who are preparing to

teach reading in early childhood and elementary settings.

Findings and Analysis

In the section that follows I first discuss findings related to students' content knowledge

about best practices in literacy instruction. I then describe how preservice teachers involved in

the study group performed during student teaching.

How does participating in the literacy study group impact students' content knowledge

about best practices in literacy instruction?

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test

At the beginning of the study, all participants were given a PRAXIS Reading Practice

Test in order for me to have concrete and measurable data related to students' knowledge about

literacy instruction. Baseline test score information provided insight about the types of questions

students were able to answer correctly in addition to the types of questions asked within the test.

The test places great emphasis on knowledge of phonics, comprehension, and writing. Errors on

the pre-test related to questions about phonics, comprehension, and writing were noted

consistently among participants. Participants' performance on the pre- and –post tests are

included in Table 9.

Table 9

Participants' PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Scores

PRAXIS Reading Practice Test Scores							
Student's Name	Pre-Test Number of Questions Correct (out of 24)	Pre-Test Score Percentage	Post-Test Number of Questions Correct (out of 24)	Post-Test Score Percentage	Change (# of questions correct)	Absolute Change in Score Percentage	Relative Change in Score Percentage
Sharonda	14	58%	13	54%	-1	-4%	-6.9%
Christine	11	46%	17	71%	+6	+25%	+54.3%
Corrina	19	79%	20	83%	+1	+4%	+5.1%
Trina	22	92%	20	83%	-2	-9%	-9.8%
Jennie	8	33%	12	50%	+4	+17%	+51.5%
Phyllis	13	54%	16	67%	+3	+13%	+24.1%

Overall, there was a trend in higher post-test scores on the PRAXIS Reading Practice Test. Four

of the participants had an increased relative change in score. Despite the small sample size and

the qualitative measure of the study, important conclusions can be drawn about participants'

individual performance. The average test score improved pre-study group to post-study group

with the largest gains utilized by those with the lowest pre- study group test scores.

Setting a Focus for Learning in the Literacy Study Group

Students' Concerns About Content Knowledge.

A common theme emerging from an early discussion about student teaching involved

students' concerns about reliably collecting assessment information about the students in their

classrooms. Furthermore, students expressed concerns about effectively differentiating

instruction to meet students at their development levels, especially those with special needs.

Because Christine was placed in a sixth grade classroom, her concerns were focused more on

connecting lessons with adolescent readers. She explained, "My main thing is motivating the

students to want to read, not just during classroom time, but also in their leisure time. I want to

know how to make it fun and exciting." As participants set a path for navigating the components

of a comprehensive literacy program during the semester, this discussion led to agreement about

paying particular attention to assessment, differentiation, and motivation and engagement.

Exploring Topics through the Literacy Study Group

Assessment in Literacy.

The first study group session began with a demonstration by Corrina, who used alphabet

flashcards to assess ways in which different individuals model letter sounds when teaching.

Previously concerned about assessment tools, Corrina introduced the group to the Dynamic

Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (D.I.B.E.L.S.) assessment. Through reflection,

participants realized that not all teachers model instruction correctly, particularly when it comes

to letter sounds, and that we must be mindful of the explicit instruction we provide our students:

> How many kids did I mislead by the way I instructed them? For me, it was sort of like a
> real wakeup call on how we go into classrooms and what we're instructing them on. We
> just need to be really careful on things like this because it's these little things that make a
> big difference in certain children learning to read.

In addition to discussing an assessment tool used in early childhood classrooms, participants had

an opportunity to consider the use of literacy assessments in the upper grades, seeking

opportunities for assessment beyond simple multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank tests. Special

attention was also paid to assessments in special education classrooms, which led the group to

reflect on the current era of accountability and assessment. Discussing current issues in

education led the group to consider how political factors in education affect assessment in

literacy.

Phonics.

During week three of the study group, participants explored how phonics naturally fits

into the exemplary day schedule and engages young readers. Jennie shared examples from the

Pre-K class and everyone noted how direct instruction in phonics is necessary. Providing

perspectives from a special education background, Trina broadened the group's understanding of

phonics by extending this type of instruction to include the use of decodable readers. Phyllis

also suggested a schedule in which words can be introduced at the beginning of the week,

sharing a classroom resource that allows students to continuously sort words by endings or

sounds. The group agreed that a hands-on approach is engaging and allows students to take

ownership of their learning and feel successful in the learning of new skills. However,

participants also noted the limited way in which teachers often rely on worksheets and workbook

pages to review skills. Holding a massive stack of phonics worksheets, one participant vented:

"I see phonics and I'm betwixt and between. I like what I'm hearing from everyone, especially

with Pre-K. But then there seems to be a really big jump when you get to Kindergarten, because

in my class I'm seeing a lot of this…a lot of worksheets and a lot of worksheets, and a lot of

worksheets."

Fluency.

As the lead discussant for this topic, Sharonda described how she was able to work with

an individual student in her practicum to further develop his reading fluency through the use of

repeated readings.

> I took out my phone to time him and marked off how many words were incorrect.
> I started without him even knowing that I was timing him. I would just ask,
> "Could you read this to me?" I really want to see if it increases throughout the
> times that I work with him.

Hiebert (2009) explains, "…within special education settings students were more often provided

whole-group instruction with little individualization or differentiation, while remedial reading

teachers spent more time on individual instruction (p. 212). Although Sharonda encouraged

students to break this cycle and individualize instruction, she also focused solely on speed in her

discussion about fluency, leaving out automaticity, accuracy, and expression. Nonetheless,

participants added that expression is important because it can make a story come alive for

students. One participant shared an anecdote of a "monotonous" third grade teacher using a read

aloud to conduct round robin reading, explaining that effective fluency instruction results in

excitement in the learning environment for all readers. The group agreed that round robin

reading would not be a way to further develop students' reading fluency and suggested other

options for engaging reluctant readers, including the use of choral reading in the classroom.

Vocabulary.

Participants immediately dismissed the ineffective practice of having students simply look up words in a dictionary and copy their definitions. One student noted that in the upper-grades students receive lists of words to define and study: "At the end of the month they study all of the vocabulary words and they have a vocabulary test. It's not differentiated at all." Through conversation, it was noted that vocabulary instruction should motivate students to be independent word learners. One student suggested a matching game where students interact in the classroom to find their match using words from a class novel study. Another described an activity where students could create vocabulary expert word cards with personalized definitions and illustrations. Context also played an important role during the study group meeting, as participants shared information about using context clues to determine vocabulary. The group agreed that instruction must be authentic, relevant, and related to the students in a meaningful way. Another significant finding was how the group uncovered that words must be explicitly and intentionally chosen to be taught. Rich conversations about print-rich environments resulted in participants recognizing that during most observations and practicum experiences they had only seen word walls dedicated for the instruction of sight words. Jennie offered to purchase display boards and bring them to the next study group session so that the participants could take time to create and design their own vocabulary word walls together (See Figure 11).
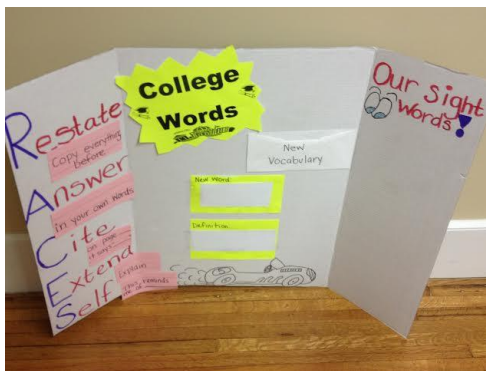
Figure 11: Vocabulary Word Wall Example

Finally, participants made connections to the importance of oral language for vocabulary development, using a list of ideas for differentiating instruction from *Word Nerds* as a basis for discussion.

Comprehension and Fiction.

Through discussions about comprehension and reading aloud with fiction texts, participants advocated for (1) using action comprehension or collaborative ways where teachers can deepen students' understanding of the text, (2) using visuals to make comprehension come alive, (3) accommodating special needs students with specific techniques, (4) balancing accountable talk with making thinking visible through metacognitive approaches, and (5) exposing students to a variety of rich, high-quality texts that are representative of all students. Participants often connected back to previous coursework, while deepening their understanding of various before, during, and after reading activities. As the leader of the group discussion, Christine reflected on her sixth grade placement: "I've been using these anchor charts and I have to say they really like it. I use it with theme and everything. And it's something that can be up on the board or around the room that they can always refer back to." Christine displayed examples of anchor charts (See Figure 12) and discussed how important it is to access students'

prior knowledge. New insights were gained about the importance of creating a literacy-rich
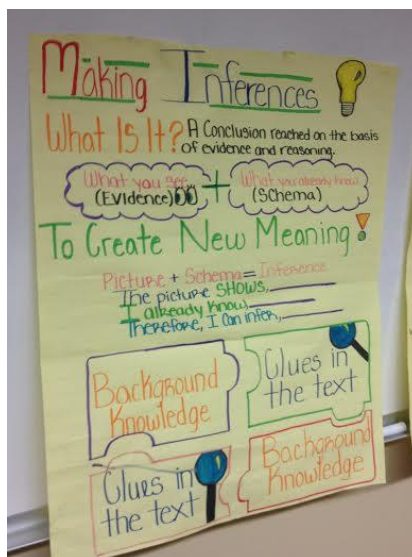
classroom for, and in front of the students.

Figure 12: Anchor Chart Example

Comprehension and Nonfiction.

Participants elected to spend the first half of the study group session viewing a Doug

Fischer and Nancy Frey video related to close reading with nonfiction texts. Debriefing the

video led to discussions about (1) balancing the use of fiction and nonfiction texts in the

classroom, (2) teaching students higher order critical thinking skills such as compare and

contrast, (3) encouraging students to ask and answer questions, and (4) finding a variety of texts

that are interesting to the students. Participants shared ideas related to a brief Scholastic Article

entitled "Six Reasons for Using Informational Texts in the Primary Grades." Discussions about

motivation and engagement led Corrina to reflect on her experiences as a young reader.

> When I was growing up I really connected with fiction. For some reason when I
> think of nonfiction I think of historical books. And growing up I was not a big
> history lover, so I didn't really delve into those types of books. But if it was

informational, like reading a cookbook or something where I could get something out of enjoying the topic, then I could deal with it.

This broadened perspectives about what constitutes nonfiction and that not all forms of nonfiction are the same.

Reading Workshop.

During the seventh week of the study group, participants clarified the components of the workshop model and identified whether or not these practices were taking place in their field placements. Only one student witnessed the use of teaching a mini-lesson, sending students off to independently practice the skills and strategies being taught, and sharing learning with the whole group. One participant noted, "In my school I see a lot of I-do, you do. There's really not a lot of modeling." Participants uncovered ideas for independent practice but also noted some missing elements including (1) independent practice linked to what is being taught, (2) a focus on the explicit teaching of specific skills and strategies, (3) conferencing with students to encourage accountability, and (4) providing choice when reading. Particularly, participants noted that a well-designed literacy environment will motivate students to read while offering a variety of choices for independent practice. One participant noted that one of the best systems for accountability is setting a focus for learning: "If there's no focus the kids think it's time to just relax. Sometimes the books are on their heads. Sometimes they're just looking at covers."

Storytelling and Oral Language.

Storytelling and oral language was quite a popular topic with the group due to the nature of how this type of instruction motivates and engages all learners. Trina began by sharing the many benefits to storytelling and engaging the group in a real storytelling using *The Little Red Hen*. Participants were able to co-construct knowledge about storytelling and oral language, as

six key areas prominently emerged: (1) storytelling motivates all learners, (2) storytelling

creates a community of learners, (3) storytelling assists with students' oral language and

vocabulary development, (4) explicit skills and strategies can be taught, (5) storytelling immerses

students in multiple genres where they can gain a better understanding of world cultures and

diversity, and (6) storytelling can link to writing instruction. Trina noted how stories told are

traditionally passed down from generation to generation and expanded on how this type of

instruction impacted her student teaching experience.

> I also talked about folktales this week in my lessons with some of my students
> and I shared with them folktales from Jamaica because it's something that's a part
> of all of our traditions. Folktales are a part of every culture. If you think about it,
> they exist for a reason. They're definitely very significant. Oral tradition.
> Language development. I grew up with these stories being told to me.

Literacy Work Stations.

Although independent practice and literacy work stations are included as part of the

exemplary day schedule, discussion around this topic was limited, but nonetheless increased

participants' knowledge about the following areas: (1) early literacy classroom design, (2)

designing tasks, (3) motivation and engagement, (4) language development, (5) modeling, and

(6) accountability. It is important to note that a majority of the discussion centered on

curriculum constraints and cooperating teacher dynamics. While these findings are included

later in this article, perhaps the findings from this study group session veered in this direction

because a majority of the participants were not observing the implementation of high quality

literacy stations in their field placements. Jennie shared experiences from the Pre-K classroom

that led participants to consider how work stations include opportunities for students to learn

appropriate social behaviors, think about the tasks they will engaged in, and reflect on how

successful they were at completing those tasks. Understanding that not all teachers believe that

work stations can be successfully implemented in the classroom, Phyllis offered suggestions

about modeling and holding students accountable from the very beginning of the school year.

> I think centers can function perfectly if you let the kids get out of their seats to do different things. The room would not be chaos. If they're used to getting out of their seats and doing different things, when that time comes, because they're used to it from day one in September, they'll know how to act because you'll implement the classroom rules. This is what you do when it's time for centers.

While research suggests that independent practice opportunities reinforce skills and strategies

previously taught to students, Phyllis added a classroom management component, advocating for

the gradual release of responsibility to the students.

Guided Reading and Small Group Instruction.

Corrina introduced guided reading by asking the group to imagine themselves as

Kindergarteners taking on the role of astronauts to "blast off with guided reading." She began by

modeling a strategy for classroom management and engaging the participants in a simulated

book walk, noting that before-reading activities, or pre-reading activities, should be brief and

focused (Shanahan, 2013). Materials were used to encourage active participation and monitoring

of comprehension throughout the text (See Figure 13). Participants were asked to tell about the

title, describe the cover, make connections, discuss the genre of the text, and use evidence from

the text when responding to the prompts. The guided reading lesson also provided the study

Figure 13: Interactive Guided Reading Materials

group participants with an opportunity to consider how sight word practice might be infused

within the small group meeting time. Recognizing that there are benefits to thematic planning

for guided reading instruction, Phyllis shared that teachers can take students from different

leveled groups, provide instruction on their individual levels, but connect the class by using a

theme.

> This week we are reading about sharks. So I get an H book about sharks and a C book about sharks. Both my students are reading the same thing, but on different levels. The vocabulary and everything is different. I just incorporate it that way because that's the only way I can see them understand it.

The group agreed that guided reading should be on students' instructional levels, interactive,

scaffolded, and informed through the use of assessments. Although all of the participants agreed

that guided reading is the heart of a balanced, comprehensive literacy program, this topic also led

to deeper conversations about curriculum constraints and cooperating teacher dynamics.

Writing.

Initially, participants shared information from their practicum in which teachers were

focusing on traditional approaches of getting students to write a minimum number of sentences

or paragraphs depending upon the grade level. Questioning these dated techniques, participants

advocated for (1) authentic instruction, (2) building students' background knowledge, (3)

modeling with the use of exemplar and mentor texts, (4) scaffolding instruction, and (5) creating

a print-rich literacy environment that supports young writers. Phyllis described a writing project

in her third grade classroom, where students were writing about the Olympic Games. She stated,

"We walked them through it, modeling everything" and "We actually gave them about ten

different sports and they got to choose any one of them." Participants were able to see how

instruction can take shape in many forms, as teachers motivate students to share their ideas through writing.

Interdisciplinary Literacy.

The final study group session focused on the topic of interdisciplinary literacy, or literacy across the content areas. Shared amongst the group was a belief that all subject matter teachers are responsible for teaching literacy. These sentiments are echoed in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), in which a literacy thread is included for specific subject areas, including science and social studies. This was supported by Christine, the lead presenter who began by defining what interdisciplinary literacy is all about.

> There is no reading teacher. Reading happens within multiple subjects. So in social studies or science your students are going to be reading informational texts. It's important to use literacy instruction to help the students read about different topics that they're learning.

Participants noted how every subject involves reading and that it is necessary to integrate vocabulary instruction and read-alouds across multiple subject areas. However, it was also discussed that this type of instruction is only effective when teachers have opportunities to plan or collaborate with one another. These connections are crucial, as they provide students with a thorough curriculum that cultivates deeper learning.

How do students involved in a literacy study group perform during student teaching?

Student Teaching Observations

When setting the focus for this study, it was important to note that knowledge and practice are significantly different, especially when examining teachers' understanding and implementation of literacy best practices. While the first research question aimed to determine

how participating in the literacy study group impacted students' content knowledge about best

practices in literacy instruction, this section shows how the student teachers performed during

student teaching. Findings emerged from classroom literacy observations conducted by

supervisors, in which an early and final teaching of a literacy lesson were conducted with each

student teacher. Findings from the Observation Feedback Forms (OFF), Classroom Literacy

Observation Schedules (CLOS), and end of semester Clinical Competency Inventory (CCI) are

included for each study group participant in Table 10.

Table 10

Student Teaching Observations

Participant	Observations of Initial Literacy Lesson	Observations of Final Literacy Lesson	Additional Findings Related to Student Teaching
Sharonda	▪Earned a 2 on the CLOS (all literacy practices were somewhat in place and observed at least once during the semester) in all areas. ▪Well prepared, taught in a logical sequence appropriate for students' age and needs	▪Earned a 3 (all literacy practices observed often) on the CLOS in all areas, except for item #15 (Student Independence), which received a score of 2. ▪Observed taking over all of the reading instruction ▪Orchestrated an entire literacy block embedded the components of vocabulary, phonics, and comprehension.	▪Supervisor noted that she worked diligently with the special needs students, engaging them in lessons with materials prepared well in advance. ▪Supervisor noted that the score of 2 for item #15 was due to the makeup of the class. ▪Cooperating teacher noted that she was an asset to the class and developed a great rapport with the students.

Christine	▪A majority of the literacy dimensions received a score of 2. ▪A score of 1 (practice not in place) was noted for item #7 (Knowledge-using an explanation sentence) and item #27 (Differentiation-Connecting with students). ▪Supervisor noted a warm, supportive learning environment where students felt comfortable participating.	▪Received a score of 3 in most areas of the CLOS, except for item #7, which received a score of 2.	▪Supervisor noted that she (1) improved greatly in meeting the needs of diverse learners through the implementation of cooperative learning activities and (2) began student teaching shy and a bit uncomfortable and left confident, comfortable, and secure. ▪Cooperating teacher noted that she was well-prepared and exhibited a calm demeanor.
Corrina	▪Received a 3 (practices observed often) in most areas of the CLOS. ▪The following areas received a score of 2: item #6 (Explaining word, letter, or sound strategies), item #8 (textual strategies and concepts), item #9 (providing students with the language of literacy concepts), item #25 (promoted higher order critical thinking), and item #27 (connecting with the class). ▪Received a score of 1 in differentiated instruction. ▪Engaged the students in the lesson	▪Received a 3 in all areas of the CLOS. ▪Sequencing was discussed and modeled. ▪Supervisor noted her "with-it-ness," as her positive classroom culture kept the lesson moving.	▪Although an initial score of 1 was noted for differentiated instruction, Corrina often expressed issues about including differentiation in her lesson plans, as the cooperating teacher would remove these elements. ▪Supervisor noted a classroom climate of respect, caring, support, and joy. ▪Cooperating teacher noted professionalism and effectiveness in offering a supplemental and enriched curriculum to a diverse group of students.
Trina	▪Taught special needs students how to write Haiku poems. ▪Received a score of 2 in most areas of the CLOS. ▪Received a score of 3 for item #9 (Provided ample opportunity for the students to use language to talk about literacy concepts) and item #15 (Promoted independence).	▪Received a score of 3 in all areas of the CLOS. ▪Supervisor noted that outstanding attention was paid to promoting independence with the special needs students and that opportunities were provided for students to develop oral language through choral reading. The feedback Trina provided to the students was positive in nature. ▪Combined literacy and science through the study of ladybugs.	▪Supervisor noted that her lessons were creative, detailed, and authentic. She communicated well with her students and developed a positive rapport. Classroom management style was effective, making for a more effective learning environment. ▪Cooperating teacher noted growth in the area of literacy, specifically because Trina helped two students learn how to spell and read sight words. Strengths were noted with vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension.

Jennie	▪Most areas included a score of 2 and 3 on the CLOS. ▪A score of 1 was given to item #6 (Letter and word strategies), item #7 (Clearly explaining concepts taught), item #8 (Clearly explaining textual strategies), item #20 (Assessment), item #25 (Challenging students through higher order critical thinking) ▪Students read and discussed the Chinese New Year. ▪Modifications were need, but not included.	▪Received a score of 3 in all areas on the CLOS form. ▪Taught a lesson about planting a garden that included a great deal of interaction among students.	▪Supervisor noted that she flourished under the support and guidance of an outstanding cooperating teacher. ▪Cooperating teacher mentioned that she would recommend Jennie for a teaching position in the school district.
Phyllis	▪Received a score of 2 in a majority of the literacy dimensions on the CLOS. ▪A score of 2 was provided for item #3 (Equity in the classroom), item #7 (Explaining grammatical concepts or strategies), item #11 (Making connections between oral and written language), item #15 (Promoting independence), and item #24 (Providing many opportunities for students to master new learning). ▪Taught an interdisciplinary lesson linking science (fossils) and literacy. ▪Included a strong anticipatory set, differentiated questions, clear objectives, and a warm and friendly learning environment.	▪Received a score of 3 in all areas on the CLOS. ▪Supervisor noted that a change in her placement made for a challenging experience because Phyllis began in a general-education third grade classroom and transitioned into a special education class for Autistic children.	▪Supervisor noted that Phyllis had carefully planned lessons, used a variety of instructional techniques, showed flexibility, and offered assistance when needed by students. ▪Cooperating teacher noted a willingness to learn new ideas and strategies for special needs students, while asking questions to improve teaching.

Additional Findings

While the focus of this study involved the study group participants' knowledge and

performance related to literacy best practices, a number of additional findings emerged from the

data including cooperating teacher dynamics, curriculum constraints, study group participation

rates, themes of teaching for social justice, and some overall pros and cons of the study group

design, as provided through individual post-study group interviews. Throughout the course of

the study group sessions, every participant shared concerns related to working with their

cooperating teachers and curriculum constraints at least once. Participants spoke of observing

missing components of literacy best practices, a general lack of differentiated lessons to motivate

and engage learners in their assigned classrooms, a lack of flexibility in certain districts using

prepackaged reading programs, and an overemphasis on test preparation. Participation and

contribution rates were high, demonstrating a strong commitment among participants to the

study group (See Tables 11 and Figure 14). Additionally, a general consensus existed among

participants' beliefs in equality and excellence in education for all students. Feedback from the

participants is included later in implications for practice.

Table 11

Study Group Attendance

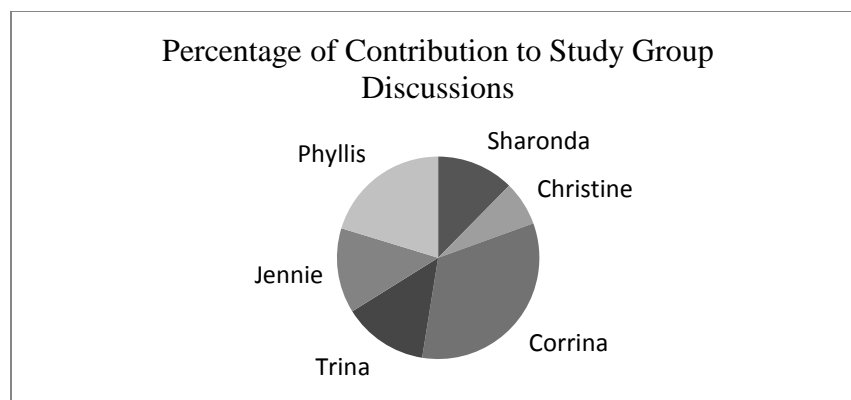| Student's Name	# of Study Group Sessions Attended (out of 12 sessions)
Sharonda	10
Christine	11
Corrina	12
Trina	12
Jennie	11
Phyllis	10

Figure 14: Participants' Contribution to Study Group Discussions

Discussion

As seen with the data collected for this study, the participants explored and shared their knowledge and practices related to literacy in a variety of ways. Knowledge was co-constructed through conversation about topics, allowing participants to deepen their understanding of research-based best practices, while addressing misconceptions among group members. Participants had an opportunity to articulate their philosophies of what comprehensive literacy instruction should include while troubleshooting issues related to the student teaching experience.

The follow-up interview conducted at the conclusion of the study sheds further light on the many successes of the study group. It was noted that participating in the literacy study group filled a void in terms of lacking knowledge about literacy practices, particularly with Sharonda, who had never taken a literacy methods course before. All participants agreed that they gained additional knowledge, but represented changes in different ways. For example, Christine honed in on the importance of providing students with one on one support during literacy instruction. She accredited the study group with enhancing this knowledge. Christine also believed that her

learning was the result of socially interacting with others in the group, as she was able to bounce

ideas off of her peers (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). These additional findings matched the

theoretical design of the study group, as social learning and co-construction of knowledge

occurred throughout the twelve week study. Corrina also valued the opportunity to socially

construct knowledge, noting the development of a strong bond with another participant.

Working together provided participants with a panoramic view of literacy instruction

across multiple grade levels. Building knowledge with peers gave participants the confidence to

try out new ideas in the classroom and to take risks without the fear of getting a "bad grade" in a

course.

In addition to learning from one another, participants demonstrated the powerful nature

of situated learning, a theory that asserts how learning when located within a specific context can

transform one's learning (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Although students developed

declarative knowledge while taking coursework at the college, they recognized that the study

group and student teaching context provided opportunities for connecting back to this knowledge

while building upon it. In this manner, students relied less on declarative knowledge and more

on situated and stable knowledge. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) explain, "The well prepared

first-year teacher should have a level of declarative and procedural knowledge stable enough to

support functioning under 'normal circumstances.'-she or he can plan instruction that will work

for the majority of the class, can maintain order and implement the planned instruction, can

assess child progress, and can adapt instruction within the limits of 'normal practice.'" In the

literacy methods course, students participate in class discussions, conduct observations, and

complete one on one tutoring. However, findings suggest that the complexities of the student

teaching experience required participants to rely more on how to teach reading and writing. By

participating in the study group, declarative knowledge was not lost, but rather expanded upon as the student teachers assumed more responsibilities in their roles as classroom teachers.

The study group also provided an opportunity for the student teachers to take ownership of their learning, as leadership of the study group sessions remained flexible throughout the course of the twelve weeks (Stanley, 2011). Participants enjoyed the design of the group, in which different people presented on different topics and remained central to their own learning (Saavedra, 1996). A common belief was that "centrality" was achieved due to the small nature of the group.

However, it is important to note that the topics discussed in this study and the time assigned for each was not perfect. When asked to reflect on what they would have liked to learn more about, participants differed in their responses. Literacy work stations, comprehension strategies, the use of leveled readers, writing, and Pre-K curriculum were all topics of interest that participants would have liked to have more time exploring. Despite the predetermined study group topics, all participants believed that the study group enhanced their knowledge of literacy best practices and encouraged them to try new ideas in the classroom. Participants felt best prepared to model comprehension, read aloud, vocabulary, and guided reading. The implementation of the study group was promising overall in that it expanded participants' knowledge about best practices in literacy, extending this learning far beyond traditional required coursework, and at a time, perhaps, when they were situated and needing it the most.

Implications for Practice

Teacher education programs can learn from this study that learning opportunities can take shape in many forms. Extensive opportunities for learning need to be provided that extend beyond the classroom. As students prepare for and engage in field experiences, they should have

an opportunity to collaborate and share ideas and concerns through discussion. In this particular study, participants found it exciting to take ownership of the study group and explore the topics in greater depth. Instructors must allow students ample time to develop group norms and provide a context for focusing on literacy.

While the participants in this study were provided with a list of core literacy topics, the areas which they encompass connected back to the literacy methods course offered through the College. By exploring the list of topics included in the methodology courses, instructors can help students design various study groups that explore how these topics are being addressed in the field placements. Providing this opportunity also encourages students to "hold-onto" their philosophical beliefs about high quality instruction when it is not being observed in their assigned classrooms.

Keeping the group small provides ample time for everyone to have a chance to discuss the topics at hand, while sharing artifacts and ideas from student teaching. Having students share their concerns at the beginning of the student teaching experience provides a pathway for co-constructing knowledge together. However, flexibility should also remain at the center of the study group, as ownership lies within the group. In this study, students explicitly decided to focus on student engagement and motivation early on, as this was a missing component almost immediately observed in their field placements. Some of the core topics included in the list may need more or less time, depending upon the needs of the participants in the group. While a study group might choose to focus on one specific topic, participants in this study showed great gains in knowledge about literacy best practices from a broader perspective, enriching the overall student teaching experience.

Finally, schools of education must be committed to supporting various structures of learning that benefit students. Perhaps the traditional idea of learning due to "seat-time" in courses could be re-examined across different programs. Through continued program evaluation and the study of new interventions, we can remain committed to ensuring that our future teachers are well prepared to serve the needs of young readers and writers in today's classroom.

Future Research

This study was not an attempt to make generalizations about literacy study groups as they relate to teacher education programs. It was an attempt to address a problem of practice identified in one specific teacher education program. For future research, this study could be repeated with different or larger populations of preservice teachers. While this study was qualitative in nature, additional studies might consider a quantitative look at study groups to help teacher education programs understand the broader benefits. This might also contribute to a better understanding about the type of literacy instruction occurring in different school settings and the wide-ranging experiences of student teachers. Additionally, future research could explore the design and structure of implementing different types of literacy study groups, and study groups for preservice teachers in general. For example, in this study participants engaged in a literacy study group over the course of one semester. Perhaps extending the time could lead to different results. Because we continue to learn more about research based best practices in literacy, the field is constantly evolving. Therefore, so might the topics considered for comprehensive literacy instruction. Implementing a study group focused on these core topics with more seasoned or veteran teachers might also shed light on new avenues for research. Studies might also expand study groups to address the needs of teachers who are working with adolescent or adult learners. Finally, because this study group intervention added a new way for

preservice teachers to deepen their understanding of literacy best practices, perhaps other modalities could be explored, including the use of online learning communities.

Closing Remarks

I began this study with the assumption that a study group intervention focused on an exemplary day schedule with the implementation of core literacy practices could enhance students' knowledge and practices related to literacy. It was my belief that a context for social learning in a study group outside of being situated in classrooms would positively impact preservice teachers' learning, leading to more opportunities for trying out new ideas with young readers and writers. The findings from this study yielded far greater results than I ever could have anticipated. Preparing effective teachers of reading and writing goes far beyond simply having students complete a literacy methods course and pass a PRAXIS exam. A commitment to learning beyond courses needs to prevail. With so much emphasis on accountability and accreditation in higher education, opportunities can be lost for focusing on deepening students' declarative knowledge about subjects once they are placed to student teach. As policymakers continue to look for ways to link student achievement and effective instructional practices to teacher knowledge and preparation, the time is now for programs to stay ahead of the curve in preparing the best teachers for a changing world. Children deserve an exemplary literacy teacher in every classroom. We may have to think beyond just adding more courses.

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Appendix A

Attention Student Teachers!

Are you currently student teaching in a Pre-K to sixth grade classroom? Are you majoring in early childhood/elementary, elementary with subject matter specialization, or early childhood/special education? Would you like to learn more about literacy instruction to improve your knowledge and practice while student teaching?

If you answered yes to all of the questions above, **Literacy Study Buddies might be for you**!

This study is being conducted by Kenneth Kunz . If you answered yes to all of the questions above, you are eligible to participate in this study.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the impact of a literacy study group intervention on preservice teachers, as they reflect upon and improve their literacy practice. In addition to learning more about best practices in literacy and exploring new materials for student teaching, participants will receive a $300.00 Amazon gift card by May 15, 2014 at the completion of the study if all sessions are attended. Participants who opt-out or miss study group sessions will receive a gift card based on the same rate ($20 per day) times the number of sessions attended by May 15, 2014.

It is important to know that this letter is not to tell you to join this study. It is your decision. Your participation is voluntary. Whether or not you participate in this study will have no effect on your relationship with the Division of Education and will have no impact on your student teaching performance.

1. If you would like to learn more about this study, please check box #1 on the enclosed form and return it to Kenneth Kunz, Office #304.

Otherwise, you will no longer be contacted or asked to participate in the study. Our first study group introduction will take place on Thursday, January 23rd immediately following the student teaching seminar course. The location of the meeting will be emailed to you.

If you would like to talk to me directly, I can be reached at 908-294-0362.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Kunz
Instructor of Teacher Education

OPT-IN FORM

Literacy Study Buddies: Exploring Exemplary Literacy Practices with Student Teachers

Please complete this form and return it to Kenneth Kunz, Office #304.

1. ☐ I am interested in learning more about this study. Please contact me using the following
    information:

     Name: _____

     Email: _____@_____

     Cell Phone:_____   Home Phone:_____

     Major(s):_____

     Current Student Teaching Grade Level:_____

               Assigned School:_____

         Cooperating Teacher's Name:_____

       Student Teaching Supervisor's Name:_____

Appendix B

Consent Form

Literacy Study Buddies: Exploring Exemplary Literacy Practices with Student Teachers

You are being asked to take part in a research study of what happens when student teachers working in early childhood and elementary classrooms participate in a literacy study group focused on best practices. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of a literacy study group intervention on preservice teachers, as they reflect upon and improve their literacy practices while student teaching. Participants must meet the following criteria in order to participate in this study:

> ▪You must be currently enrolled in student teaching.
> ▪You must be an early childhood/elementary, elementary/subject matter specialization, or early childhood/special education major.

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will be collecting data through the use of field notes, pre-and-post literacy practice tests, student teaching observations, and audio-recorded student interviews. During the spring semester, we will meet once a week for approximately 1 hour immediately following your seminar course, to discuss topics in literacy education. Participants will engage in content-focused discussions, collaborate with peers to deepen their understanding of the content, and share ideas for implementation in the classroom.

Risks and benefits:

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. None of the data collected in this study is connected to course credit or your grade for student teaching. Two observations of your teaching of a reading/language arts lesson take place within the regularly scheduled visits by your supervisor. No addition observations take place. Your participation in this study will allow our college to explore how to best meet the needs of students preparing to teach in early childhood/elementary classrooms. In addition to exploring new materials for literacy instruction, you will be compensated for your time and commitment to attending the weekly sessions.

Compensation: Participants will receive a $300.00 Amazon gift card by May 15, 2014 at the completion of the study. Participants who opt-out or miss study group sessions will receive a gift card based on the same rate ($20 per day) times the number of sessions attended by May 15, 2014.

Initials ____

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I make public I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file and on a password protected laptop computer; only I will have access to the records. In addition, audiotaped-interviews will be destroyed once transcribed (within approximately 1 month after being recorded).

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the parts, it will not affect your current or future relationship with the College. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Kenneth Kunz. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Kenneth Kunz at kunz.kenneth@gmail.com or at 908-294-0362. Because the primary investigator in this study is completing doctoral coursework at Rutgers University, any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study can be directed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Rutgers University at 848-932-0150. You can access their website at http://orsp.rutgers.edu/.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the student interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on October 30, 2013.

Initials _____

Appendix C

Early Childhood: Content Knowledge PRAXIS Practice Test

Language and Literacy

Name_____   **Date**_____

Directions: Please circle the best answer for each multiple choice question below.

1. Which of the following would be most effective in helping young children develop phonological awareness?
   a. singing songs with simple rhymes
   b. singing the alphabet song
   c. printing letters, using large markers
   d. looking for environmental print
2. A first grade student, Kyle, has drawn an elaborate picture of a garden in his journal and has written: "I LK RD FLRS." Kyle's sentence suggests that an appropriate next step as Kyle's development as a writer would be learning to
   a. print lowercase letters
   b. use medial vowel sounds
   c. blend consonant sounds
   d. recognize common sight words
3. Which of the following activities can offer students the greatest opportunity to practice using phonics?
   a. Students scan the text of their favorite picture books and find words that are challenging to pronounce.
   b. Students write descriptions of pictures and take turns identifying the pictures from one another's descriptions.
   c. Students sort pictures of objects by matching the initial sounds of the names of the objects with letters.
   d. Students create cloze passages and have their classmates predict the missing words.
4. Research shows that children who are encouraged to invent spelling are likely to
   a. be reluctant readers and writers
   b. have difficulty mastering spelling rules
   c. wait for someone else to spell words for them
   d. strengthen their sense of phonemic awareness
5. Marie's kindergarten teacher showed her a book open to the middle of a story and asked, "Where on this page should I begin reading?" It is most likely that the teacher was attempting to evaluate Marie's
   a. ability to draw inferences from text
   b. phonological knowledge
   c. concepts about print
   d. understanding of syntax

6. A teacher gives each student a list containing the words "whale," "three," "ship," and "chew." Then the teacher says, "Put a circle around the two letters in a word that go together to make the new sounds we have been learning." The exercise described can most appropriately be used to assess the students' ability to recognize which of the following?
   a. Consonant blends
   b. Double vowel sounds
   c. Short vowel sounds
   d. Consonant digraphs

7. Learning to differentiate among words having common roots by looking at the modifications that result when prefixes or suffixes (such as pre-, un-, dis-, -tive, -tion, and –ment) are added to known roots is accomplished through the use of
   a. morphological analysis
   b. configuration cues
   c. contextual clues
   d. phonemic analysis

8. Parents can most effectively help children in kindergarten and first-grade develop phonological awareness needed for later success in reading by
   a. illustrating the most commonly used words
   b. reading aloud rhyming stories and poems
   c. teaching letter names and their sounds
   d. providing access to computer learning games

9. Which of the following is the most appropriate time to encourage young children to start writing?
   a. As soon as they can hold a crayon or marker
   b. When they first recognize the speech-print relationship
   c. After they have learned left-to-right orientation
   d. When they show they can follow instructions

10. Which of the following is a major characteristic of interactive writing?
    a. Children correct each other's conventional errors.
    b. Children and teachers jointly compose and write text.
    c. Children take less time to complete simple writing assignments.
    d. Children and teachers explore the organization of nonfiction text.

11. A teacher notices that one of the children has written the words "goed" and "breaked" in a story. Which of the following best describes what the child is doing?
    a. The child is reverting to a previously learned rule.
    b. The child is using a compound predicate.
    c. The child is using suffixes in a novel way.
    d. The child is over-applying a recently learned rule.

12. A class is reading a story about a donkey named Sylvester who has a serious problem—he has turned into a rock. Which of the following activities is most likely to encourage the students to think ahead and generate solutions collaboratively to Sylvester's dilemma?
    a. Categorize the characters in the book into groups of major and minor importance
    b. Having students independently make a list of five possible solutions
    c. Showing the students a video version of the story
    d. Having students work in small groups to role-play possible solutions

13. Third-grade students are creating a story map as they read about the donkey Sylvester, who has turned into a rock. The most important benefit of the story-mapping activity is that it will help the students
    a. improve their comprehension of the story by organizing and sequencing events
    b. make connections to other characters who have solved a problem
    c. develop a vocabulary they can use in writing their own stories
    d. understand the essential features of a problem and its solution

14. A teacher is most likely to encourage students' development of metacognitive skills by doing which of the following?
    a. Capturing students' prior knowledge in a KWL chart
    b. Modeling how to check for understanding while reading
    c. Teaching new vocabulary words before reading
    d. Encouraging students to write literal comprehension questions for each other

15. Which of the following classroom activities is most likely to frustrate a child who is a slow and nonfluent reader?
    a. Listening to the teacher read with intonation and stress
    b. Reading along with a taped or recorded book
    c. Timed reading sessions designed to increase the number of words read per minute
    d. Repeated choral readings of the class's favorite poems and funny stories

16. Although Jean was willing to stay out and build another snowman, Jimmy was <u>reluctant</u> because he was so cold. Which type of context clue is given in the sentence above to help decode the underlined word?
    a. Definition
    b. Synonym
    c. Contrast
    d. Experience

17. A teacher is informally assessing second-grade students' listening comprehension skills after reading aloud Aesop's fable "The Lion and the Mouse." Which of the following prompts requires the children to drawn an inference from the fable?
    a. Who are the characters in the fable?
    b. What lesson does the fable teach us?
    c. How does the mouse help the lion?
    d. Can mice and lions really talk?

18. To encourage children to develop as writers, schools should have children write
    a. every other day, so they do not find it tedious
    b. at home, for as many minutes as they write in schools
    c. in groups, in order to develop collaborative skills
    d. at the same time each school day

Month	September	November	January
Child's spelling of "boat"	bt	bot	bote

19. Based on the information in the chart above, it can be inferred that the child
    a. has limited knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds
    b. has not yet learned about long vowel sounds

      c.   is not using the classroom word wall appropriately

      d.   is applying a growing knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds

20. A teacher records students' responses to a story on chart paper. The students suggest what the teacher should write down next and watch as the teacher records their words. A mini-lesson on concepts of print follows. Which of the following ways to link oral and written language is described above?

      a.   The writing process

      b.   Phonics

      c.   Language experience approach

      d.   Readers theater

21. Which of the following best explains why it is necessary to teach unfamiliar, academic vocabulary to students who are English-language learners before they are asked to read a passage in a nonfiction text?

      a.   Such vocabulary is likely to be concrete and easy to illustrate.

      b.   Such vocabulary is appealing to visual and kinesthetic learners.

      c.   Such vocabulary is likely to be similar to words in the students' first languages.

      d.   Such vocabulary is not often used during informal conversations.

22. A kindergarten class is preparing to learn about spiders. The students brainstorm ideas about spiders and make a web of relationships. Which of the following is a way to best integrate math into the lessons?

      a.   Illustrate the life cycle of spiders

      b.   Describing the geometry of a spider's web

      c.   Comparing and contrasting spiders and bees

      d.   Guessing the number of spiderlings in an egg sac

23. The "ake" in the words "bake" and "snake" is an example of which of the following?

      a.   A phoneme-grapheme relationship

      b.   A long-vowel /a/ digraph

      c.   A morpheme

      d.   A rime

24. Teacher: Look at this picture [pointing to an illustration in a picture book]! The rabbit is wearing a disguise so that no one knows who he is.

Student: He's wearing a mask to hide his face. The mask is his disguise.

Teacher: Yes, the mask is his disguise. You wore a disguise when you dressed up as a firefighter last week. A costume is like a disguise. No one knew who you were at first!

In the conversation above, what oral language system is the teacher helping the student to develop?

      a.   Syntax

      b.   Morphology

      c.   Phonology

      d.   Semantics

Appendix D

Observation Template for Study Group Field Notes
Adapted from Merriam's Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation

Meeting Date_____

Physical Setting

▪What is the physical environment like?

▪What is the context?

▪How is space allocated?

▪What objects, resources, or technologies are in the setting?

The Participants

▪Who is participating in the study group?

▪How many people are participating, and what are their roles?

▪What are the ways in which the people in the study group organize themselves?

Activities and Interactions

▪What is happening during the study group session components?

▪During the mini-lesson?

▪During collaboration (whole group/independent/partner time)?

▪During share time?

Conversation

▪What is the content of conversations in this study group session?

Conversations related to literacy content knowledge	Conversations related to application of instruction in student teaching

Subtle Factors

▪Informal and Unplanned Activities

▪Symbolic, or connotative meaning of words

▪Nonverbal Communication

Observer's Behavior

▪How is my role affecting the scene I am observing?

▪What am I saying and doing during this study group session?

Appendix E

OBSERVATION FEEDBACK FORM OF STUDENT TEACHER

Division of Education

Date:	
Student Teacher	
Grade:	
Subject:	
School:	
District:	

- **Evaluation of Personnel may be based on the evidence from observation, input from other supervisors, documentation, discussions, and the effectiveness of the staff person in implementing the state standards.**
  Total absences to date _____

  % of load student is teaching as of this observation _____

1. Subject Matter Knowledge – Makes effective use of explanations and connections to prior learning, engages in activities that promote problem solving, CCCS knowledge, meaningful content	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Connects concepts to prior learning and relevancy of everyday life
- Introduces new vocabulary
- Vocabulary is tied to content and is accurate
- Relates lessons to and demonstrates knowledge of NJCCCS
- Extends and uses content beyond teacher's manuals/traditional text
- Lesson plans reflect logical, sequenced instruction

Comments:

2. HUMAN GROWTH &DEVELOPMENT-Addresses diverse learning styles, appropriate differentiated instruction observed	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Presents developmentally appropriate lessons
- Asks questions reflecting various cognitive levels
- Differentiates instruction with grouping and/or modifications
- Uses instructional activities that demonstrate that all children can learn
- Addresses diverse learning styles
- Incorporates opportunities to make connections between new topics and life experiences

Comments:					

	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
3. DIVERSE LEARNERS-Individual differences are respected & individual needs are met. Uses appropriate teaching materials that provide an equitable portrayal of diversity					

- Uses instructional strategies and materials that accommodate diverse learning styles
- Engages in activities which create an awareness of diversity in which individual differences are respected and needs are met
- Engages in activities that address students' diversity, their families and communities
- Uses culturally sensitive language
- Supports ELL students with vocabulary reinforcement and/or modifications
- Provides a caring, respectful environment for all cultures

Comments:

	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
4. INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING & STRATEGIES- Effective lesson design, appropriate instruction, develop critical thinking, problem solving ability, interdisciplinary learning experiences provided, subject matter meaningful to students, variety of materials and resources					

- States clearly the purpose of the lesson
- Creates thorough lesson plans which reflect NJCCCS
- Incorporates opportunities to make connections between instructional materials and life experiences
- Uses a variety of instructional strategies, materials, and other resources to achieve the lesson's objectives
- Asks critical thinking questions
- Lesson is appropriate for students' strengths and needs
- Lesson implements interdisciplinary learning experiences
- Encourages students to question information and ideas to promote divergent thinking
- Lesson develops students' critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving skills
- Lesson fosters active learning (e.g. facilitating open-ended questions, problem solving, collaborating…)
- Strategies used make subject matter meaningful to students
- Uses educational technology as a tool to foster individual and collective inquiry
- Uses educational technology as a tool to foster collaborative learning
- Usage of hands-on experiences
- Engages students in cooperative learning
- Provides closure at the end of the lesson
- At the end of a lesson, objectives and outcomes of the lesson are achieved

Comments:

	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
5. ASSESSMENT-Assignments aligned with objectives, assessment data used, student feedback provided, formal & informal techniques observed, authentic assessment used					

- Aligns assignments with objectives
- Uses oral and written assessments throughout the lesson
- Uses authentic assessments as one measure of student learning (e.g. rubric, portfolio)
- Provides meaningful, consistent, and specific feedback to students on their learning

- Collects data on learning outcomes to measure lesson objectives
- Uses continuous assessment strategies to adjust and improve instruction

Comments:

6. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT-Student participation, positive peer relationships, warmß & caring, student management, time management, students engaged in learning	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Exhibits rapport with students
- Uses effective behavior management techniques to achieve learning outcomes
- Uses time management to achieve learning outcomes
- Encourages appropriate participation from all students
- Demonstrates caring and respect towards students through verbal and nonverbal communication
- Creates and monitors a learning community in which students participate in decision-making and work collaboratively/independently and are responsible for themselves and others
- Uses effective listening and group facilitation skills to model respectful and caring behavior
- Creates a positive climate in which students are socially, emotionally, and physically safe.
- Layout of the classroom facilitates instruction

Comments:

7. SPECIAL NEEDS-IEP &504 considered, adaptations &accommodations to tasks, assessment of learning needs, G & T needs addressed	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Considers IEP & 504 needs/ gifted and talented needs in lesson planning
- Demonstrates, through verbal interactions and teaching, that special needs students can learn and achieve
- Makes appropriate adaptations or modifications to instructional tasks to accommodate special learning needs
- Makes appropriate adaptations or modifications for assessing student learning (such as, additional time to complete assignments)

Comments:

8. COMMUNICATION- Appropriate oral expression, written expression, modeling of questioning techniques, promote oral & written language development, technology for communication	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Implements activities that promote and value the development of oral language and written language
- Uses age-appropriate vocabulary and correct, standard grammar
- Asks open-ended questions and encourages elaboration
- Uses technology as a communication tool
- Models effective communication and questioning techniques to facilitate student learning
- Interacts with students in an appropriate manner with a sensitivity to developmental cultural, linguistic and social differences
- Provides positive feedback to student responses

Comments:

9. Collaboration and Partnerships – Utilizes diverse community resources, effective communication with parents/guardians, evidence of family involvement, uses technology to promote collaboration	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Maintains professional relationships with members of the school community
- Attends school events, meetings, conferences, and workshops; participates in school activities
- Participates in communication with parents/guardians
- Promotes meaningful family involvement
- Uses technology to promote collaboration and partnerships with families and community
- Employs community resources

Comments:

10. Professional Development – Evidence of reflection, accurate student records, offers assistance voluntarily, exhibits personal & professional demeanor, uses constructive suggestions, effective reading, writing, mathematics & technology skills.	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Demonstrates effective reading and writing skills needed to perform as a professional
- Takes initiative to participate and assist in classroom planning, routines, and activities
- Implements constructive suggestions to enhance the teaching and learning process
- Attends in-service training and uses available resources to maintain and expand knowledge of current trends and professional activities in education
- Observe other classroom teachers when and if possible during the student teaching experience
- Establishes open and appropriate lines of communication with colleagues
- Reflects on own strengths and weaknesses
- Is motivated to continue professional learning

Comments:

11. Professional Responsibilities – Teachers shall act in accordance with legal and ethical responsibilities and shall use integrity and fairness to promote the success of all students	Not Observed ☐	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

- Exhibits personal and professional demeanor (e.g. appropriate dress, language and interaction with school personnel, peers and students)
- Consistently adheres to school and district policies
- Demonstrates reliability and punctuality
- Puts forth maximum effort to support the success of all students
- Maintains a classroom environment which protects students
- Keeps accurate student records
- Meets deadlines
- Knowledge of the school's professional code of conduct
- Knowledge of professional responsibility

Comments:

Supervisor/Cooperating Teacher Signature _____ Date _____

Student Teacher's Signature _____ Date _____

Instructions and Overview

Introduction

This observational instrument has been designed to provide feedback on the progress of individual teaching candidates who are completing their student teaching experience in their teacher preparation program. This performance-based assessment instrument measures key competencies aligned to the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers (NJPST), standards that are required of all teaching candidates prior to being recommended for certification. This standards-based observational instrument specifies the defining set of competencies that preservice teachers should demonstrate before being recommended for certification in the State of New Jersey.

The instrument is divided into 11 sections, each representing a composite of indicators under the 11 NJPST. The numbering of the sections mirrors the NJPST, however, the numbering of the indicators in each section does not correlate to the specific indicators of the NJPST. The indicators have been condensed into a manageable number and reflect significant competencies that the teaching candidates need to master.

Rating of the Form

The following rating scale will be used to score each candidate:

Level 4– Demonstrates competency, consistency and confidence in providing evidence in all standards based on the NJPST and is ready for recommendation for NJ State certification. Shows exemplary practice in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Level 3 – Consistently provides evidence in all standards based on the NJPST that this candidate is ready for recommendation for NJ State certification. Shows basic competence in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Level 2– Provides evidence in some areas to denote competency in a standard, based on the NJPST. Shows limited competence in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children. (Getting 2's or better 50% of the time)

Level 1– Provides little evidence to denote competency in a standard, based on the NJPST. Candidate exhibits difficulty in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Not Observed – This rating should not be used on the final assessment. If you do not observe a competency during the duration of all observations, please have the candidate provide additional evidence through artifacts in the professional portfolio, or through additional documentation that the candidate must provide. *It is important that we document that candidates have proficiency in all of the indicators on the form.*

Level 4:

Candidates get an average of at least 3.5 for each standard with no indicator getting a 2, with an overall average of 3.5 - 4.0 for all 10 standards.

Level 3:

Candidates get an average of at least a 2.75- 3.49 for each standard with no indicator getting a 1, with a 3.0 – 3.49 average for all 10 standards.

Level 2:

Candidates do not get any 1's and get an average of 2.0-2.74 for each standard, with an overall average between 2.0-2.74. If a candidate receives this rating he/she will receive an Incomplete in the clinical experience and be advised to have additional clinical field experiences, coursework and mentoring before being recommended for certification.

Level 1:

Candidates have an average below 2.0 for each standard, with an overall average below 2.0. If a candidate receives this rating he/she will receive an Incomplete in the clinical experience and be advised to have extensive clinical field experience time, coursework and mentoring before being recommended for certification.

Appendix F

Classroom Literacy Observation Schedule-Revised (Louden & Rohl, 2008)

Student Teacher_____ College Supervisor_____

Grade Level_____

Scoring	Explanation
3	A score of 3 means the practice is in place and observed often during the semester.
2	A score of 2 means the practice is somewhat in place and observed at least once during the semester.
1	A score of 1 means the practice is not in place and not observed during the semester.

Literacy Dimension	Criteria	Initial Score	Final Score	Description
Respect	1. Rapport			The teacher creates a warm, positive and inviting classroom where relationships with children encourage literacy learning (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Snow et.al., 1998; Brophy & Good, 1986; DfEE, 2000; Hattie, 2003; Pianta, 2006)
	2. Credibility			Children's respect for the teacher enables him/her to maintain order and lesson flow (Brophy & Good, 1986; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; DfEE, 2000; Hattie, 2003)
	3. Citizenship			The teacher promotes equality, tolerance, exclusivity and awareness of the needs of others (Education Queensland, 2002)
Knowledge	4. Purpose			Children's responses indicate tacit or explicit understanding of the purpose of the literacy task (Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Wray et.al., 2000)
	5. Substance			The teacher provides a lesson/task that leads to substantial literacy engagement, not busy-work (Education Queensland, 2002; Hattie, 2003)
	6. Explanation word			The teacher clearly explains specific word, letter or sound strategies or concepts (Ehri & Roberts, 2006; Juel, 2006; Byrne & Fielding Barnsley, 1991)
	7. Explanation sentence			The teacher clearly explains specific grammatical strategies or concepts (Snow et.al., 1998; Wray et.al.,2000; Rego & Bryant, 1993; Tunmer & Hoover, 1992)
	8. Explanation text			The teacher clearly explains specific textual strategies or concepts (Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; NRP, 2000; Snow et.al., 1998; Duffy, 2003; Duke & Pearson, 2002)
	9. Metalanguage			The teacher provides children with language for talking about and exemplifying literacy concepts (Olson, 1994; Education Queensland, 2002; Morrison, Connor & Bachman, 2006)
	10. Oral language			The teacher focuses on the development of children's oral language (Snow et.al., 1998; Senechal, Ouellette & Rodney, 2006; McKeown & Beck, 2006)
	11. Oral/written language			The teacher makes logical connections between oral and written language (Dickinson, 2001; Dickinson, et.al., 2006; McKeown & Beck, 2006)
	12. Awareness			The teacher has a high level of awareness of literacy activities and participation by children (Hattie, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998)

Orchestration	13. Environment			The teacher uses the literate physical environment as a resource (Hattie, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998; Wray et.al., 2000)
	14. Structure			The teacher manages a predictable environment in which children understand consistent literacy routines (Brophy & Good, 1986; DfEE, 2000; Hill et.al., 1998; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997)
	15. Independence			Children take some responsibility for their own literacy learning (Education Queensland, 2002; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998)
	16. Pace			The teacher provides strong forward momentum in literacy lessons (Brophy & Good, 1986; Wray, et.al., 2000)
	17. Transition			The teacher spends minimal time changing activities or uses this time productively (Bloom, 1976; DfEE, 2000; Strickland, 2001)
	18. Attention			The teacher ensures that children are focused on the literacy task (Rowe & Rowe, 1999; Wray et.al., 2000)
	19. Stimulation			The teacher motivates interest in literacy through the creation of a pleasurable, enthusiastic and energetic classroom (Brophy & Good, 1986; Hattie, 2003; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Snow et.al., 1998)
Support	20. Assessment			The teacher uses fine-grained knowledge of children's literacy performance in planning and teaching (Hill & Crevola, 1999; Louden et.al., 2000; Wray et.al., 2000)
	21. Scaffolding			The teacher extends literacy learning through reinforcement, modification, or modeling (Bloom, 1976; Brophy & Good, 1986; Taylor et.al., 2000; Snow et.al., 1998' Wray et.al., 2000)
	22. Feedback			The teacher intervenes in timely, focused, tactful and explicit ways that support children's literacy learning (Bloom, 1976; Hattie, 2003; Strickland, 2002)
	23. Responsiveness			The teacher is flexible in sharing and building on children's literacy contributions (Brophy & Good, 1986; Hattie, 2003; DfEE, 2000)
	24. Persistence			The teacher provides many opportunities to practice and master new literacy learning (Brophy & Good, 1986; Snow et.al., 1998)
Differentiation	25. Challenge			The teacher extends and promotes higher levels of thinking in literacy learning (Brophy & Good, 1986; DfEE, 2000; Education Queensland, 2002; Hattie, 2003)
	26. Inclusion			The teacher differentiates literacy instruction to recognize individual needs (Education Queensland, 2002; Hill et.al., 1998; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003; Snow et.al., 1998; Taylor et.al., 2000; Wray et.al., 2000)
	27. Connection			The teacher makes connections between class or community literacy-related knowledge for individuals or groups (Education Queensland, 2002; Hill et.al., 1998; Mazzoli & Gambrell, 2003)

Comments:

Appendix G

Clinical Competency Inventory (CCI) for Teaching Candidates

Instructions and Overview

Introduction

This observational instrument has been designed to provide feedback on the progress of individual teaching candidates who are completing their student teaching experience in their teacher preparation program. This performance-based assessment instrument measures key competencies aligned to the New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers (NJPST), standards that are required of all teaching candidates prior to being recommended for certification. This standards-based observational instrument specifies the defining set of competencies that preservice teachers should demonstrate before being recommended for certification in the State of New Jersey.

The instrument is divided into 11 sections, each representing a composite of indicators under the 11 NJPST. The numbering of the sections mirrors the NJPST, however, the numbering of the indicators in each section does not correlate to the specific indicators of the NJPST. The indicators have been condensed into a manageable number and reflect significant competencies that the teaching candidates need to master.

There are two different types of indicators on this form: 1) those that are clearly observable in the classroom over a period of several observations. The clearly observable indicators are those competencies that the candidate will use to implement effective instruction in the classroom; 2) those that might not be observable and will need more probing through a conference and/or presentation of evidence by the candidate at the time of a conference. Each indicator that is not clearly observable and might need more probing has been indicated with ** next to it. Some indicators that are not observable refer to lesson planning; these indicators start with the phrase, "Designs lesson plans" or "Designs instruction." Other indicators that might not be observable start with the phrase, "Provides evidence of" and it is expected that the candidate will bring evidence of these competencies to a conference. It is the teaching candidate's responsibility to bring a professional portfolio and additional artifacts to the final assessment conference.

The form is to be used as a summative assessment at the completion of the student teaching experience, during the last observation. It should be used in conjunction with a more qualitative form that is aligned with the CCI and focuses on the quality of the specific lesson being observed. The CCI is meant to be a cumulative assessment of competencies that the supervisor and cooperating teacher have observed throughout the clinical experience. The form should be introduced at the beginning of the clinical experience to guide the development of the teaching candidate and to provide feedback on the candidate's strengths and areas of improvement.

The procedure for using the CCI is as follows:

1) At the first visit, the supervisor will review the Observation Form and the CCI with the cooperating teacher.
2) Before the mid-term, the cooperating teacher and the supervisor observe the candidate together and fill out the Observation Form independently. They will discuss what behaviors they observed, discuss each of the 11 standards and specify areas of strength and areas that need improvement.
3) At mid-term, the supervisor and cooperating teacher fill in the CCI independently.
4) The supervisor will hold a mid-point conference with the teaching candidate to go over the CCI. The cooperating teacher will join this conference to discuss mid-point assessment.
5) The supervisor and cooperating teacher should do at least one more common observation together prior to the final session and fill in the Observation Form independently.
6) At the completion of the field placement, the supervisor and cooperating teacher fill in the CCI independently and enter the final assessment.
7) At the completion of the field placement, the teaching candidate will do a self-assessment and fill in the CCI.

Rating of the Form

The following rating scale will be used to score each candidate:

Level 4– Demonstrates competency, consistency and confidence in providing evidence in all standards based on the NJPST and is ready for recommendation for NJ State certification. Shows exemplary practice in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Level 3 – Consistently provides evidence in all standards based on the NJPST that this candidate is ready for recommendation for NJ State certification. Shows basic competence in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Level 2– Provides evidence in some areas to denote competency in a standard, based on the NJPST. Shows limited competence in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children. (Getting 2's or better 50% of the time)

Level 1– Provides little evidence to denote competency in a standard, based on the NJPST. Candidate exhibits difficulty in: 1) integrating content knowledge with application; 2) lesson planning and implementation of daily instruction; 3) organizational and classroom management skills; 4) using assessment to inform instruction; and 5) adapting instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Not Observed – <u>This rating should not be used on the final assessment</u>. If you do not observe a competency during the duration of all observations, please have the candidate provide additional evidence through artifacts in the professional portfolio, or through additional documentation that the candidate must provide. *<u>It is important that we document that candidates have proficiency in all of the indicators on the form.</u>*

<u>Level 4:</u>

Candidates get an average of at least 3.5 for each standard with no indicator getting a 2, with an overall average of 3.5 - 4.0 for all 10 standards.

<u>Level 3</u>:

Candidates get an average of at least a 2.75- 3.49 for each standard with no indicator getting a 1, with a 3.0 – 3.49 average for all 10 standards.

<u>Level 2</u>:

Candidates do not get any 1's and get an average of 2.0-2.74 for each standard, with an overall average between 2.0-2.74. If a candidate receives this rating he/she will receive an Incomplete in the clinical experience and be advised to have additional clinical field experiences, coursework and mentoring before being recommended for certification.

<u>Level 1:</u>

Candidates have an average below 2.0 for each standard, with an overall average below 2.0. If a candidate receives this rating he/she will receive an Incomplete in the clinical experience and be advised to have extensive clinical field experience time, coursework and mentoring before being recommended for certification.

END SEMESTER SUMMATIVE STUDENT TEACHER EVALUATION

Education Division

Date:	
Student Teacher:	
Grade:	
Subject:	
School:	
District:	

- **Evaluation of personnel may be based on the evidence from observation, input from other supervisors, documentation, discussions, and the effectiveness of the staff person in implementing the state standards.**

Due Date: _____

*Note: Those indicators marked with ** may not be observable and should be discussed with the intern.*

Standard #1: Subject Matter Knowledge Teachers shall understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry, structures of the discipline, especially as they relate to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS), and design developmentally appropriate learning experiences making the subject matter accessible and meaningful to all students.				
The teaching candidate:				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
**1.1 Designs instruction that demonstrates knowledge and command of the subject matter	①	②	③	④
1.2 Makes effective use of explanations of disciplinary concepts that capture key ideas	①	②	③	④
1.3 Implements lessons that demonstrate knowledge and command of the subject matter	①	②	③	④
1.4 Makes connections and relates content to prior learning and relevancy of everyday life	①	②	③	④
1.5 Engages in activities that promote the development of critical thinking, problem solving and decision making within the content area	①	②	③	④
1.6 Demonstrates knowledge of appropriate NJCCCS (New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards) for the discipline	①	②	③	④
Comments:				

Standard #2: Human Growth and Development Teachers shall understand how children and adolescents develop and learn in a variety of school, family and community contexts and provide opportunities that support their intellectual, social, emotional and physical development.				
The teaching candidate:				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
**2.1 Designs lesson plans that are developmentally appropriate	①	②	③	④
**2.2 Designs instruction appropriate to students' learning styles, strengths and needs	①	②	③	④
**2.3 Designs instruction that accommodates differences in student achievement levels	①	②	③	④
2.4 Incorporates differentiated instruction appropriately into classroom activities	①	②	③	④
2.5 Implements lesson plans that are developmentally appropriate so that all children can learn	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard #3: Diverse Learners Teachers shall understand the practice of culturally responsive teaching.				
The teaching candidate:				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
**3.1 Designs instruction that accommodates students whose first language is not English	①	②	③	④
**3.2 Designs instruction that demonstrates knowledge of diverse students and their lives	①	②	③	④
**3.3 Provides evidence of incorporating multicultural content and perspectives into the lesson	①	②	③	④
3.4 Creates a learning community where individual differences are respected and individual needs are met	①	②	③	④
3.5 Engages in classroom activities that help students learn about diversity, their families and their communities	①	②	③	④
3.6 Engages in strategies to support the learning of students whose first language is not English	①	②	③	④
3.7 Engages in activities in the classroom that demonstrate knowledge of diverse students and their lives	①	②	③	④
3.8 Uses appropriate teaching and curriculum materials that provide an equitable portrayal of diversity	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard #4: Instructional Planning and Strategies

Teachers shall understand instructional planning, design long and short term plans based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, community, and curriculum goals, and shall employ a variety of developmentally appropriate strategies in order to promote critical thinking, problem solving and the performance skills of all learners.

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
**4.1 Designs effective lessons by organizing the instructional activities to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the lesson	①	②	③	④
**4.2 Designs instruction that develops students' critical thinking and problem solving capabilities	①	②	③	④
**4.3 Designs unit and lesson plans that incorporate interdisciplinary learning experiences that allow students to integrate knowledge from different subject areas	①	②	③	④
4.4 Implements instructional activities that achieve the objectives and outcomes of the lesson	①	②	③	④
4.5 Implements lessons that develop students' critical thinking and problem solving capabilities	①	②	③	④
4.6 Uses strategies to make the subject matter meaningful to students	①	②	③	④
4.7 Uses a variety of appropriate instructional materials and resources to achieve the objectives of the lesson	①	②	③	④
4.8 Implements interdisciplinary learning experiences that allow students to integrate knowledge from several subject areas	①	②	③	④
4.9 Integrates technology into the lesson plan to promote effective learning for all students	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard 5: Assessment

Teachers shall understand and use multiple assessment strategies and interpret resul to evaluate and promote student learning and to modify instruction in order to foster the continuous development of students.

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
**5.1 Designs appropriate assessments that are aligned with learning objectives	①	②	③	④
**5.2 Provides evidence of using formative and summative assessment data to adjust and improve instructional planning	①	②	③	④
5.3 Collects data on learning outcomes to measure lesson objectives	①	②	③	④
5.4 Implements continuous assessment strategies throughout the lesson to immediately adjust and improve instruction to foster student growth	①	②	③	④

	1	2	3	4
5.5 Provides meaningful and specific feedback to students on their learning	①	②	③	④
5.6 Uses authentic assessments as one measure of student learning	①	②	③	④
5.7 Provides opportunities for students to monitor their own progress and conduct self-assessments	①	②	③	④
5.8 Uses technology to support assessment and monitoring of student progress	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard # 6: Learning Environment

Teachers shall understand individual and group motivation and behavior and shall create a supportive, safe and respectful learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning and self-motivation.

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
6.1 Encourages appropriate student participation	①	②	③	④
6.2 Encourages positive peer relationships through classroom activities	①	②	③	④
6.3 Demonstrates general warmth, caring and respect towards students through verbal/nonverbal communication	①	②	③	④
6.4 Uses effective classroom management techniques including classroom procedures, rules and management of instructional groups	①	②	③	④
6.5 Manages student behavior through effective disciplinary strategies	①	②	③	④
**6.6 Considers physical space and resources that optimizes learning activities for all students	①	②	③	④
6.7 Maintains a learning community in which students participate in decision-making, work collaboratively/independently, and assume responsibility for themselves and one another	①	②	③	④
6.8 Creates a classroom environment in which students are engaged in learning	①	②	③	④
6.9 Uses instructional time effectively to achieve learning outcomes	①	②	③	④
6.10 Prepares students for and monitors independent and group work that allows for full and varied participation of all students	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard #7: Special Needs

Teachers shall adapt and modify instruction to accommodate the special learning needs of all students.

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
**7.1 Considers IEPs and section 504 plans for learners with special needs in lesson planning	①	②	③	④
**7.2 Designs activities for students with special learning needs in lesson plans	①	②	③	④
7.3 Demonstrates through verbal interactions and teaching practices that students with special needs can learn and achieve	①	②	③	④
7.4 Makes appropriate adaptations or modifications to instructional tasks and/ or learning environment to accommodate the learning needs of all students (e.g. Gifted and talented, English language learners, etc.)	①	②	③	④
7.5 Makes appropriate adaptations of modifications for assessing student learning (such as additional time to complete assessment)	①	②	③	④
7.6 Uses technology to support students who have special needs	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard #8: Communication

Teachers shall use knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal and written communication techniques and the tools of information literacy to foster the use of inquiry, collaboration and supportive interactions.

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
8.1 Communicates effectively in English using appropriate oral expression	①	②	③	④
8.2 Communicates effectively in English using appropriate written expression	①	②	③	④
8.3 Models effective communication and questioning techniques to facilitate student learning	①	②	③	④
8.4 Interacts with students in an appropriate manner with sensitivity to developmental, cultural, linguistic and social differences	①	②	③	④
8.5 Engages students in activities that promote and value the development of oral language (Listening and Speaking)	①	②	③	④
8.6 Engages students in activities that promote and value the development of written language (Reading and Writing)	①	②	③	④
8.7 Engages students in activities the promote and value the development of numeracy	①	②	③	④
8.8 Promotes communication through the use of technology	①	②	③	④

Comments:

Standard 9: Collaboration and Partnership

Teachers shall build relationships with parents, guardians, families and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
**9.1 Provides evidence of demonstrating professional relationships with all members of the school community	①	②	③	④
**9.2 Provides evidence of effective communication with parents and guardians	①	②	③	④
**9.3 Provides evidence of family involvement to strengthen the teaching and learning environment	①	②	③	④
9.4 Uses technology to promote collaboration and partnerships with families and the community	①	②	③	④
Comments:				

Standard #10: Professional Development **Teachers shall participate as active, responsible members of the professional community, engaging in a wide range of reflective practices, pursuing opportunities to grow professionally and establishing collegial relationships to enhance the teaching and learning process.**				
The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
**10.1 Provides evidence of reflection on improvement of professional practice in content area(s) and pedagogy	①	②	③	④
**10.2 Provides evidence of reflection on how assessment and instructional practices demonstrate caring and address the needs of all students and the school community	①	②	③	④
**10.3 Provides evidence of maintaining accurate student records	①	②	③	④
**10.4 Provides evidence of contributing to school and/or district by offering assistance voluntarily: participates in school district events, projects, extra-curricular activities	①	②	③	④
10.5 Exhibits appropriate personal and professional demeanor (e.g. Appropriate dress, language and interaction with school personnel, peers and students)	①	②	③	④
10.6 Reflects upon and uses constructive suggestions to enhance the teaching and learning process	①	②	③	④
10.7 Demonstrates effective, reading, writing, mathematics, and technology skills to perform as a professional	①	②	③	④
Comments:				

Standard 11: Professional Responsibility **Teachers shall act in accordance with legal and ethical responsibilities and shall use integrity and fairness to promote the success of all students.**	

The teaching candidate:	1	2	3	4
**11.1 Demonstrates knowledge of the school's professional code of conduct	①	②	③	④
**11.2 Demonstrates basic knowledge of professional responsibilities as stated in school board policies for students and teachers.	①	②	③	④
**11.3 Maintains professional relationships with students and colleagues	①	②	③	④
**11.4 Fosters and maintains a classroom environment which protects students from sexually, physically, verbally, or emotionally harassing behavior by acting in a sound and professionally responsible manner	①	②	③	④
11.5 Consistently adheres to school and district policies (e.g., school hours, responsibilities, etc.)	①	②	③	④
Comments:				

**Designates an item that might need probing during a conference and may require evidence from the candidate to determine rating

(Circle One) Supervisor / Cooperating Teacher

Signature _____   Date _____

Student Teacher's Signature _____   Date _____

General Comments by Evaluator (Field Supervisor, Cooperating Teacher, Intern):

Self-Reflection of Intern:

Appendix H

Literacy Study Group Interview Protocol

1. Please take a moment to introduce yourself and state what teacher education program you are currently enrolled in at the College. (i.e., elementary, early childhood, special education)

2. Tell me about your experience participating in the "Literacy Study Buddies" study group.

3. In what ways did participating in the study group enhance your knowledge about best practices in literacy instruction?

4. What is your philosophy of literacy instruction in early childhood/elementary classrooms?

5. What, if anything, would you have liked to learn more about?

6. How were you able to incorporate what you were learning in your student teaching practicum?

7. What strategies or teaching techniques were most helpful to you?

8. After participating in the study group, what area(s) of reading do you feel best prepared to teach?

9. Is there anything else you feel would be helpful for consideration in further developing the literacy study group?

Appendix I

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this research on *Literacy Study Buddies: Exploring Exemplary Literacy Practices with Student Teachers.* The goal of the study was to explore the impact of a literacy study group intervention on preservice teachers while they were student teaching. It was hypothesized that not enough time was being spent on early reading and literacy instruction and that opportunities to discuss best practices with peers would better meet the needs of students.

Current research has found that in order to produce teachers that teach reading well, teacher education programs must focus on content, teaching, field experiences, diversity, assessment, and a vision of high quality reading instruction for all. Your participation was important in helping me understand how to effectively meet the needs of teachers preparing to teach in early childhood/elementary contexts.

Please review your responses for accuracy and validity. If there are any discrepancies they will be corrected prior to submitting my final report. Final results will be available from me in late June 2014. You may contact me at 908-294-0362 or kunz.kenneth@gmail.com to receive an email copy of the final report. Your participation, including your name and responses, will remain absolutely confidential, even if the report is published.

If you have any additional questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Kunz
Instructor of Teacher Education