

On the Cusp of Great Knowledge: An Investigation of How a Reading Methods Course Supported the Development of Characteristics of Excellent Reading Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings from a qualitative study of thirty-eight preservice teachers of reading. The purpose of this study was to determine if the preservice teachers demonstrated any of the qualities of excellent reading teachers as defined by the International Reading Association (IRA) and to consider the specific structures of a reading methods course that supported the development of those qualities.

Literature Review

In 2001, No Child Left Behind charged schools to provide “highly qualified teachers” for every child; therefore, those who prepare the teachers of tomorrow must be concerned with aspects of their program that support, encourage, and enhance the characteristics of highly qualified teachers. In the field of reading education, the International Reading Association’s (2000) position statement outlines qualities of excellent reading teachers and provides a foundation of knowledge to instill in preservice teachers. The purpose of this study was to determine if preservice teachers demonstrate any of these qualities and to what degree. Additionally, this article describes the specific structures of a reading methods course that supported the development of these qualities.

Thanks to a wealth of research on effective teaching, particularly in the field of literacy, teacher educators can strive to provide experiences in higher education settings that support the development of effective teachers. Exemplary teachers create literacy rich environments, use many types of reading instruction, and seize teachable moments (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999). They coach, model, and scaffold learning rather than simply telling the students the right answer (Roehler & Duffy, 1984; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002). They emphasize higher order thinking (Knapp, 1995) and use small group formats to engage students in targeted instruction (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). Acknowledging the evidence that teachers make a difference rather than programs, IRA (2000) utilized the effective teacher literature to describe six characteristics of excellent reading teachers (See Figure 1). Knowing the characteristics they are striving to produce allows those in teacher preparation to consider how to best support the development of these

characteristics. The most effective teacher educators explain, demonstrate, evaluate, and support these characteristics in their courses. These characteristics then become significant foci for teacher preparation courses.

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Guiding Preservice Teachers to New Understandings

In addition to the effective teacher studies, a significant body of research on teacher preparation also exists. In a recent review of the literature, Risko (2009) offered insights into the common themes across successful teacher preparation studies. These common themes included helping students make personal connections between and among courses and course content, making the links between the university classroom and the field setting explicit, collecting and analyzing student data, and “teaching with explicit guidance” (p. 8). Furthermore, the “learn by doing” approach is closely associated with teacher education. Commeryas, Reinking, Heuback, and Pagnucio (1993) found that preservice teachers identified

- “Excellent reading teachers share several critical qualities of knowledge and practice:
1. They understand reading and writing development, and believe all children can learn to read and write.
 2. They continually assess children’s individual progress and relate reading instruction to children’s previous experiences.
 3. They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instruction program.
 4. They offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
 5. They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
 6. They are good reading “coaches” (that is, they provide help strategically).”

Figure 1: IRA’s (2000) Excellent Reading Teacher Characteristics (p. 1)

field-based experiences as the most helpful and significant factor in helping them feel prepared to teach reading. Similarly, Swafford, Chapman, Rhodes, and Kallus (1996) argued that field experiences allowed preservice teachers opportunities to make decisions about instruction and reflect upon and refine their beliefs about literacy.

While most teacher education programs recognize the important role of field-based experiences, there is another body of literature guiding the work of teacher educators: the literature related to university classroom instruction. Case-based teaching can be used to support teacher reflection (Levin, 1995). Wolf, Carey, and Mieras (1996) acknowledged case-based teaching as important “situated learning” but added another dimension of “guided participation” in which the preservice teachers’ understandings are supported through “explicit modeling, assigned readings, class activities, and written commentary” (p. 152). Kagan (1992) posited that by first providing novice teachers with procedural routines it frees their minds to “turn outward to pupils and what they are learning from academic tasks” (p. 161). In other words, they can teach with divided attention when some instructional procedures become routine. Along with building a core of procedural understandings, Risko’s (2009) review of teacher education studies revealed three common characteristics across teacher preparation studies. First, teacher educators model effective teaching practices through video examples or in-class demonstrations. Second, the use of deliberate and explicit lesson planning emphasizing reading strategies was common across the reviewed studies. Finally, specific feedback on lesson plans and reflections was utilized across the studies. L’Allier (2005) found that preservice teachers were more likely to implement teaching practices that had not only been modeled in the university classroom but also supported in structured field placements as well.

Given the above body of research, this study was designed to consider the relationship between effective teacher preparation practices and the development of characteristics of excellent teachers of reading in preservice teachers. Specifically, the research questions guiding this study were (a) What qualities of excellent classroom reading teachers (as identified by the International Reading Association, 2000) do preservice teachers enrolled in a reading methods course demonstrate over the course of a semester? and (b) How does the structure of the course enhance or support the development of these qualities?

The Research Context

In the fall of 2007, forty-three preservice teachers were enrolled in two sections of an undergraduate reading methods course at a teaching university in the south. Thirty-nine agreed to participate in the study though all engaged in the same course assignments and experiences. All of the preservice teachers were pursuing a degree in elementary education or special education. All but three were seniors scheduled to student teach the following semester. Both sections were taught by the first author and followed the same syllabus, course calendar, and assignment criteria.

This reading methods course, entitled “Assessment, Design, and Implementation of Elementary Classroom Reading Instruction” was the second of two required courses for all elementary education and special education preservice teachers. The class met twice a week for 1.25 hours. The major objectives of this course included understanding the role of literacy assessments, interpreting the results of those assessments and using them to design and implement reading instruction. In addition to the literature on effective teachers of reading and teacher education, the professor’s teaching philosophy was guided by Clay’s (1991, 1998, 2005) tenets of literacy acquisition and Owocki and Goodman’s (2002) “kidwatching” stance. “Intensely observing and documenting what [children] know and can do” (Owocki & Goodman, p. X) and planning instruction based upon those strengths and needs (Clay, 2005) served as the core mantra for this course. Repeatedly preservice teachers were scaffolded into becoming keen observers of children and were often reminded to focus first on the children’s strengths and then identify their most pressing needs.

Small group and whole group reading approaches were also discussed throughout the semester. A ten-hour practicum allowed the preservice teachers to implement the new learning in a real world setting, making the links between the university classroom and the field explicit (Risko, 2009). The preservice teachers were required to teach one interactive read aloud to the whole class and one guided reading lesson to a small group of students in their practicum settings. These lessons were supervised by the clinical teacher rather than the professor of the course. In their practicum placements, each preservice teacher identified a case study student to follow throughout the semester. Running records, oral reading anecdotal notes, and other general observations were collected on the case study students throughout the clinical placement and were

used to guide the planning of the reading lessons. Early in the semester (4th and 6th weeks) the professor arranged two additional field experiences allowing for direct supervision of the preservice teachers' administration of an Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2005) to kindergarten students at a local school. Two weeks later, the preservice teachers administered the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 2006) to second graders at the same elementary. Given that the school was named Elkwood, these experiences were referred to as "The Elkwood Experience." Throughout the course, the Elkwood Experience served as a catalyst for many class discussions. Experiences with real students helped everyone learn about the developmental stages of literacy, matching books to readers, and making texts accessible through book introductions and careful prompting. Preservice teachers became keenly aware of the range of needs within one classroom so conversations about individualized instruction commonly occurred.

Following the Elkwood Experience, class sessions focused less on assessments and more on methods for reading instruction. Class sessions were devoted to matching books to readers, teaching guided reading and shared reading, teaching for word solving strategies, and supporting comprehension strategies in various reading contexts. Video examples, classroom artifacts, and small group activities (Risko, 2009) were utilized to learn the content in the university classroom setting. Oftentimes, a case-based approach (Levin, 1995) was employed using student assessment data or anecdotal notes to discuss these topics. For instance, when learning about the characteristics of texts that make them easy or hard, the preservice teachers continually referred to the strengths and needs of the kindergarteners and the second graders at Elkwood. Having specific students in mind allowed the preservice teachers to consider the skills and strategies the reader would need to possess in order to process each text. Much like Wolf et al.'s (1996) "guided participation," the preservice teachers learned procedures for various reading approaches and were guided through the entire decision-making process from lesson planning to implementation to reflection and evaluation. Follow-up assignments in their clinical placements then allowed them to apply this knowledge in the real-world classroom (Commerlyas et al., 1993; Swafford et al., 1996). Furthermore, the professor's specific and explicit feedback on lesson plans and reflections (Risko, 2009) enhanced the preservice teachers' understandings.

Data Collection and Analysis

Four data sources were analyzed for this study: 1) Elkwood note cards; 2) Elkwood Experience Surveys; 3) K-2 Assessment Reflections, and 4) the Final Case Study Assignment. A description of each follows.

During the class session following the administration of the Observation Survey (Clay, 2005) to the kindergartener students the preservice teachers responded to two prompts on a note card: a) What did you learn from administering the assessments at Elkwood? and b) Record five strengths and two needs of your Elkwood student. Two weeks after administering the Developmental Reading Assessment to the second graders at Elkwood,

preservice teachers were asked to complete the Elkwood Experience Survey in class. The questions for this survey included:

1. Write about your feelings about practicing the assessments with real children.
2. What did you learn when administering the assessments?
3. What role, if any, will these assessments play in your own classroom? Do you envision using any of them? If so, how?
4. Would you recommend keeping or eliminating these experiences in future sections of this course? Why or why not?
5. Additional comments/suggestions.

Following the administration of the *Observation Survey* (Clay, 2005) to the kindergarteners, the preservice teachers also submitted the K-2 Assessment Reflection assignment. This assignment consisted of four sections. Preservice teachers identified the strengths and needs of the kindergarten student they tested in a) letter identification, b) concepts about print, and c) hearing and recording sounds in words. The final section of the assignment required the preservice teacher to identify instructional supports addressing the student's needs while building upon his/her strengths.

The culminating project for this course was the final case study assignment. This paper required the preservice teachers to introduce the case study student in a section entitled "Meet My Student." Next, the preservice teacher identified the case study students' strengths and needs related to literacy, followed by a reflection on the instruction provided by the preservice teacher (interactive read aloud and guided reading lessons). The preservice teachers then suggested future plans for instruction for the case study student. The final component of this assignment was a personal reflection on the case study project.

Data were first converted to a digital format and shared electronically with the research team of three tenure track faculty, one adjunct instructor, and one graduate student. The individual Elkwood Note Cards were typed into one word document so responses from all 39 participants could be viewed together. Line numbers were added to allow for easier discussion during data analysis meetings. A similar process occurred for the Elkwood Experience Surveys. The team analyzed the Elkwood Experience data and two researchers continued with data analysis of the six case studies. Each researcher read through the initial data set (Elkwood Note Cards) independently, highlighted key phrases, and named them. The team then met to decide on the tentative codes: general observations, varying levels of students, student's content knowledge related to literacy, observations/realizations related to administering the assessments, what it means for teaching, using assessment to inform instruction, and reading as a developmental process. Employing Fonteyn, Vettese, Lancaster, and Bauer-Wu's (2008) model for group analysis, the team created a codebook with definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and exemplary transcript units for each code. The same codes were then applied to the Elkwood Experience Surveys. Each team member wrote

summary statements about each data set and then looked for similarities and differences between the two.

To allow for more in-depth analysis, six preservice teachers were purposively sampled (Patton, 2001) as separate cases. Using the final grade, class participation, and the level of reflectiveness on the initial Elkwood Experience note cards, criterion sampling allowed the research team to identify participants that represented the range of abilities in the course. The K-2 assessment reflection assignment and the final case study assignment were analyzed by the first two authors and member checking helped guard against researcher bias.

The Elkwood Experience codes were then compared to the IRA (2000) characteristics of excellent reading teachers. All of the Elkwood Experience codes fell under three of the IRA characteristics: “understand reading and writing development (RWD), continually assess children’s individual progress (ASSESS), and use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students (II)” (p. 1). The codes of “varying levels,” “student’s content knowledge related to literacy,” and “reading as a developmental process” fell under the understanding reading and writing development code (RWD). The code “observations/realizations related to administering the assessments” closely aligned with IRA’s code “continually assess children’s individual progress” (ASSESS) while what it means for teaching and using assessment to inform instruction aligned with IRA’s code “use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students”(II) (See Figure 2).

The IRA codes (including the above converged Elkwood Experience codes) were then applied to two additional course assignments - the K-2 assessment reflection and the final case study.

The Elkwood Experience: Making it Real for Preservice Teachers

At the beginning of the semester, data indicated the preservice teachers were surprised by the varying levels of students’ literacy understandings within one grade level. Though field experiences were part of the previous reading course and other elementary or special education courses, before the Elkwood Experience, these preservice teachers had not considered the range of abilities children within one classroom. Ellen wrote, “I learned that students are going to be at a lot of different reading levels when they come to school and it may take some students longer than others to catch up to where they should be.” General observations about student behavior and personality such as this statement by Kasey, “I learned that kindergarteners get easily distracted. They may need breaks during the testing to talk about the pictures in a book or share a story” were commonly noted in these beginning data sources. Since administering these assessments for the first time, a common theme at this point in the semester was characterized by realizations and observations about administering the assessments. After administering the *Observation Survey* (Clay, 2005), Brittany wrote, “Doing this series of tests also requires you to be a multi-tasker.” The format of the Elkwood Note Card encouraged the preservice teachers to comment on the Elkwood students’ content knowledge related to literacy. Sometimes the comments were statements about the students as a group and other times the comments specifically described an individual student’s content knowledge related to literacy. “Kindergarteners tend to look at pictures instead of words” and “My student didn’t know the computerized g and a” exemplified this category. The language the preservice teachers used to describe the strengths and needs of the Elkwood students were coded as positive, negative, or neutral. Some of the

IRA Code	Understanding Reading and Writing Development (RWD)	Continually Assess Individual Student Progress (ASSESS)	Know a Variety of Ways to Teach Reading (TR)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varying levels • General observations • Content knowledge related to literacy • Understanding reading and writing development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations/realizations related to administering the assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared reading • Guided reading • Independent reading • Reading aloud • Reading workshop • Literature Circles
IRA Code	Offer a Variety of Texts and Materials for Children to Read (TXTS)	Use Flexible Grouping Strategies to Tailor Instruction to Individual Students (II)	Provide Help Strategically / Good Reading “Coaches” (STRAT)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big books • Guided reading books • Various genres • Word wall and other resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What it means for instruction • Assessment to inform instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling • Guided practice • Any use of reading strategies

Figure 2: Initial codes converged with IRA’s Characteristics of Excellent Reading Teachers

comments were categorized as positive because the preservice teacher focused on the student's strengths or at least identified the needs as a normal part of the developmental process. Other preservice wrote about the students' needs in a tone that implied a negative attitude towards the student's lack of ability; for example, "The exclamation mark and quotations were not recognized at all."

Two weeks and four class sessions later, the preservice teachers' responses on the Elkwood Experience Surveys were influenced by in-class discussions related to analyzing literacy assessments, understanding reading and writing as developmental processes, and instructional practices that support emergent and early readers and writers. The theme of how to administer the assessments was still dominant but there were fewer comments about managing student behavior and more comments about the value of hands-on learning experiences in teacher preparation courses. Comments about varying levels of learners were still prevalent but there was an increase in the awareness of characteristics of students at those various levels. Darla noted, "Students at different reading levels have different characteristics or attributes that stand out." The most important difference between these two data sets was the marked increase in understanding how to use assessment to inform instruction (II) from only four occurrences in the Elkwood Note Cards to 34 instances on the Elkwood Surveys. Preservice teachers identified five uses for these assessments: a) to determine the student's reading level; b) to identify the student's strengths and needs; c) to know where to begin instruction; d) to form guided reading groups; and e) to monitor growth (See Figure 3). These findings prompted further data analysis in which the initial themes were compared to IRA's characteristics of excellent reading teachers. Studying the descriptions of IRA's six characteristics, (See Figure 1) indicated the struc-

tures of the Elkwood Experience (the process of learning how to administer assessments in the university setting, administering them to real children in the field, debriefing the process, discussing how the results could be analyzed, and finally considering what the results meant for instruction) supported the development of three of the six IRA characteristics in the preservice teachers. Following these experiences, the preservice teachers articulated understandings about reading and writing development, the role of assessment, and individualized instruction.

Meaningful Assignments: Supporting the Development of Effective Reading Teachers

Analysis of the other data sources (i.e. the course assignments) revealed that the remaining IRA characteristics – those dealing with instruction had been supported in other portions of the course.

K-2 Assessment

The six case cases that were selected to analyze further, Crystal, Annmarie, Jessica, Abigail, Nicole, and Kasey represented the preservice teachers' range of reflectiveness on the initial Elkwood note cards. Like the majority of the preservice teachers (24 out of 38) Kasey, Abigail, Jessica, and Crystal used language that was less sophisticated in terms of describing their student's strengths and needs and tended to frame the needs as weaknesses or deficits. For example, Jessica wrote, "He needs a lot of work on letters and he needs a lot of work on concepts about print." Nicole's initial comments were coded as moderately reflective. She balanced statements of needs ("He only knew five letters.") with observations of his strengths that were not directly related to the concepts being tested ("He listened and asked question about the story. He commented on what was going on in the story.") Annmarie's comments

September 27		September-October		October 9	
First Elmhurst Experience – Administering Observation Survey to kindergarteners		Class topics following first Elmhurst Experience:		Second Elmhurst Experience – Administering DRA to 2nd graders	
Patterns of Responses:	Notes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzing Observation Survey results Instructional approaches to support emergent and early readers Learning to administer to DRA 		Patterns of Responses:	Notes:
General observations about children	No IRA code			How to administer assessments	Refining ASSESS code
Managing children during assessments	Emerging ASSESS code			Value of hands-on-learning experiences for confidence	Risko (2009); Commeryas, et al., (1993)
Surprised by varying levels	No IRA code			Noticing varying levels again but increased awareness of characteristics at each level	Developing RWD code
Some observations about students' strengths and needs, though little analysis beyond scores	Emerging awareness of RWD			Using assessment to inform instruction	Refining ASSESS code and emerging II code
	Emerging awareness of RWD	More observations about students' strengths and needs, though little analysis beyond scores	Developing awareness of RWD		

Figure 3: Pattern of Growth of All Preservice Teachers

were classified as neutral with her simply stating the scores and engaging in minimal reflection or interpretation of the strengths and needs. She focused more on item knowledge (“He knew forty-two letters” and “He didn’t know the exclamation mark”).

Three other codes became apparent during the K-2 Assessment analysis: a) teaching reading strategies (STRAT); b) a variety of ways to teach reading; and c) offering a variety of texts (TXTS). Jessica reflected on the power of using children’s names to teach emergent readers the names and sounds of letters. She wrote, “These students value their names and ‘their’ letters as well. Using [children’s] names in the classroom to teach letters would be beneficial” (TR). To support Jeffrey’s developing one-to-one matching of voice to print, Abigail suggested encouraging him to be point to the words during shared reading (STRAT/TR). And to support emergent reader, Amelia, Kasey suggested using big books, alphabet books, and repetitive books (TXTS).

Examples of Understanding Reading Writing Development, Assessment, and Individualized Instruction continued to be coded. An additional layer of analysis was added to consider the appropriateness of the statements. For instance, when Crystal suggested that her student’s most pressing concept about print was punctuation when he did not yet control one-to-one matching, it was coded as RWD (-) to indicate that her understanding of reading and writing development was lacking. When Kasey wrote that her student was “very attentive to the pictures and had a sense of story as demonstrated by her comments about the book throughout the reading,” it was coded as RWD (+) to indicate that she understood the developmental nature of the concepts about print task.

When analyzing the K-2 Assessment Reflections, an assignment that was submitted one week after administering the assessments at Elkwood, Crystal’s and Annmarie’s application or articulation of the characteristics of exemplary reading teachers were similar. Crystal described eleven instances of specific literacy knowledge demonstrated by her Elkwood student and all were characterized as having a positive tone. There was one instance of valuing partially correct responses “Although Jack missed a few letters, the ones that he did miss were very similar or close to the one that he said. For example, U/V, n/h, i/l, etc...” However, Crystal made several comments that indicated that she did not yet understand the developmental nature of reading and writing. She wrote, “Based upon this assessment, I feel that if Jack were to slow down and take his time, he would perform much better!” She did not yet understand that it was not a simple matter of paying more attention but that her student was not yet developmentally ready to attend to all aspects of print that she expected of him. Similarly, Kirsten’s understanding of the developmental stages of writing was not yet refined. Her statements implied that the student “just was not trying hard enough” rather than understanding he was only hearing the dominant sounds in words.

Like Crystal, Annmarie’s understanding of reading and writing development at the beginning of the semester was lacking. She made similar comments about the student needing to slow down and pay more attention. Unlike

Crystal, Annmarie only identified two of her student’s strengths and her comments were brief and lacked depth. She seemed “annoyed” with the developmental level of her kindergarten student. She wrote, “He needs to practice sitting still and slowing down. He needs to work on his spelling skills and when he sounds out the word, write what he is sounding out, not just what he wants to write down.” Annmarie came from a long line of educators and often commented on the way her mother taught before she became a principal so it was of little surprise that her responses related to how to teach reading were traditional in nature and likened to the “drill and kill” approaches that she might have experienced as a student.

Jessica made several general observations about the student’s personality and articulated seven instances of her student’s strengths and needs related to literacy. Like Crystal, Jessica valued partially correct responses and viewed them as reasonable responses given the student’s developmental level. For instance when writing about the concepts about print task, Jessica noted that her student “looked at the pictures rather than paying attention to the text...she pointed to the girl in the picture on the path and followed the path with her finger. This was very interesting because she was responding to my question, ‘Where do I go next?’ but she used the picture to answer my question rather than the text.” Unlike Crystal and Annmarie, Jessica identified five ways to teach reading including using the word wall and name charts to teach letters but she could not seem to let go of the idea of “letter of the week.” These examples provided evidence that her understanding of a variety of ways to teach reading (TR) were emerging.

Abigail’s responses on the K-2 Assessment Reflection were somewhat similar to Jessica’s in that she was able to articulate specific literacy knowledge demonstrated by her Elkwood student. There was some evidence that Abigail was developing an awareness of reading as a developmental process (RWD) because she identified the student’s most pressing need related to concepts about print but had some of the later concepts out of order in their normal developmental scheme. She did, however, demonstrate a basic understanding of writing development. “Based upon this assessment, James’s strengths include hearing a dominant sound in most of the words he wrote. He also wrote straight across the page and then started a new line.” What made Abigail’s reflection different from those discussed so far was that she made two attempts to individualize instruction for James, one of which could be argued as an example of “providing help strategically” or being a good reading “coach” (IRA, 2000, p. 1).

Like their peers, Nicole and Kasey were able to articulate specific literacy knowledge demonstrated by the Elkwood students. It should be noted that Kasey and Nicole tested two of the lowest performing kindergarten students at Elkwood yet they were still able to identify literacy strengths these students possessed even when they knew only 3 out of 54 letters. Both preservice teachers valued partially correct responses. Kasey wrote, “She also recognized that some letters are in her name, as indicated when she pointed to an ‘a’ and said, ‘That’s in my name.’ Then she pointed to a ‘Y’ and said, ‘That’s in my name, too.’” Both of these preservice teachers identified multiple

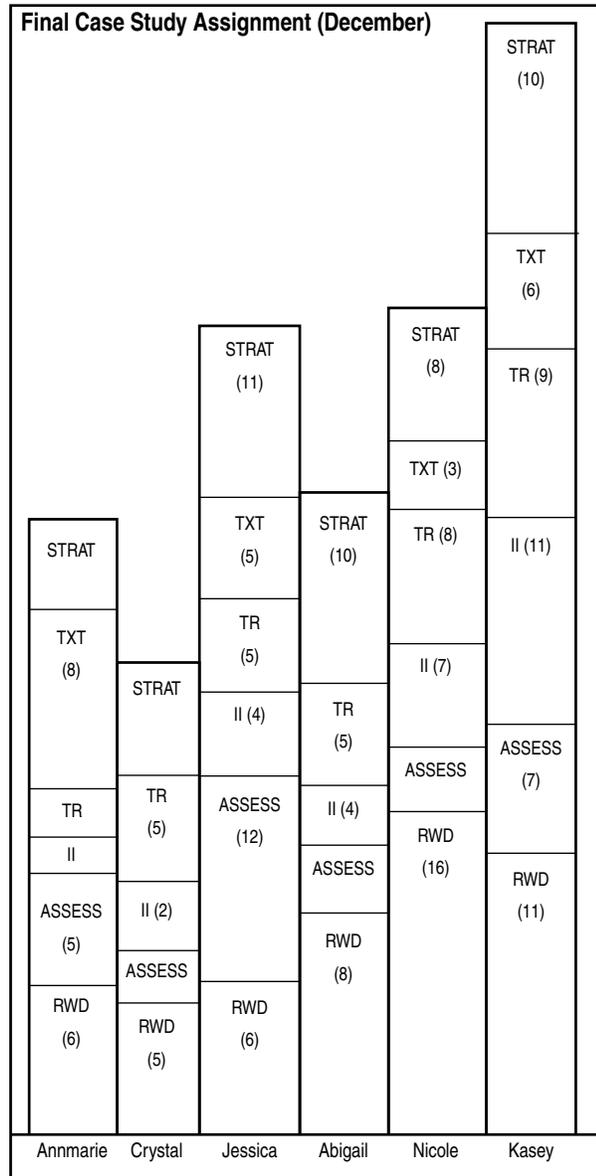
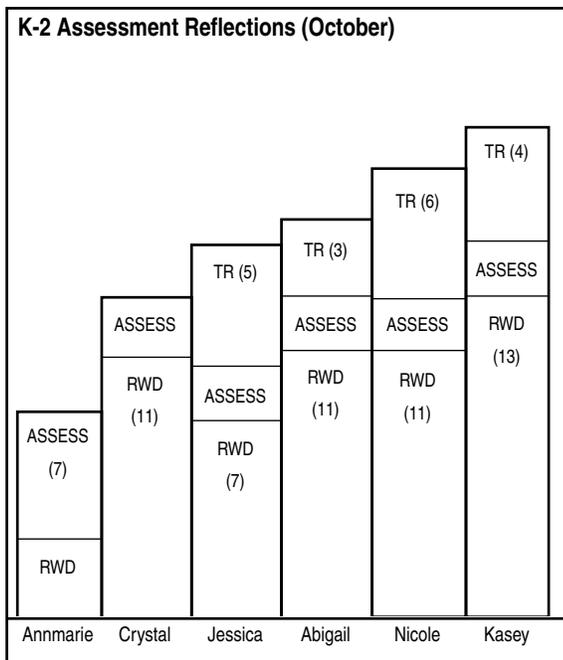


Figure 4: Pattern of Growth of Six Preservice Teachers

ways to teach reading (TR) and how to specifically support their students' individual needs (II). They also understood reading and writing as developmental processes (RWD). Nicole noted, "Amelia's needs include directional behaviors, such as knowing where to start reading, which way to go, and the return sweep. AFTER, Amelia can successfully control these concepts about print; attention should then be turned to her visual scanning behaviors." Kasey demonstrated the most sophisticated level of analysis on this assignment because she was beginning to interpret the assessment; moving beyond the simple skill to an interpretation of what that behavior means. She wrote, "She is also very attentive to the pictures and has a sense of story as demonstrated by her comments about the book throughout the reading."

Based upon these data, two preservice teachers (Crystal and Annmarie) were only moderately affected by

the Elkwood Experience. Following the Elkwood Experience, they demonstrated two IRA characteristics effectively - the need to assess children continually (ASSESS) and understanding reading and writing development (RWD). They could administer, score, and analyze assessments and could use those assessments to identify where the child was in his/her reading and writing development though they were of an unclear about where to go next and how to proceed with instruction. There was evidence that Crystal was also becoming aware of what to notice and thereby developing an emerging understanding of reading and writing development (RWD). She was refining her observational skills. Furthermore, the language they used to talk about children was neutral or negative. These two students adopted a deficit stance rather than the stance espoused by Clay (2005) "to build upon the child's foundation whether it is rich or meager" (p. 10).

Beginning of the course	End of the course
<p>Annmarie: <i>As a whole, my child was familiar with most of the words. He also knew all of the letters but two. However, he was not familiar with punctuation. Also, he struggled a lot and did not want to complete the Hearing and recording Sounds in Words.</i></p>	<p>Annmarie: <i>I would provide Kathryn with a variety of different types of literature to read. During silent reading time, I would make sure to give Kathryn either a newspaper or magazine article and ask her to read it or even ask her to read a nonfiction book and then write a little paragraph for me telling me what it is about. This will pose a slight challenge for her, but it will introduce her to different types of texts as well as expose her to more useful and important information.</i></p>
<p>Kasey: <i>I learned that kindergarteners get easily distracted. They may need breaks during the testing to talk about the pictures in a book or share a story.</i></p>	<p>Kasey: <i>Luke's most pressing need is comprehension. Because he reads at a level much higher than his grade level, he often does not possess the necessary background knowledge needed to understand the text.... I found that Luke benefitted from discussing the text with his classmates. One classmate, Kayla, had great comprehension and offered amazing insight for a fourth grader. She really made Luke think as she brought up things she noticed about the text, many of which were related to meanings, details, and descriptions. She forced Luke to delve deeper into the text in order to keep the conversation moving.</i></p>

Figure 5: Comparison of beginning of the semester and end of the semester responses

In comparison, Jessica, Abigail, Kasey, and Nicole demonstrated three of the six IRA characteristics following the Elkwood Experience. These preservice teachers demonstrated understandings of reading and writing development (RWD), the value of continually assessing students, (ASSESS), and could articulate a variety of ways to teach reading (TR).

Final Case Study Assignments

The final case study assignment was analyzed in the same manner as the K-2 Assessment reflection and the results were then compared. Overall, the preservice teachers used the language of knowledgeable teachers of reading. By the end of the semester, they were more keen observers of children and were able to interpret the reading behaviors in terms of strengths and needs. They had a deeper understanding, or in some cases, a more accurate understanding of reading and writing development. They could articulate a variety of ways to teach reading and specifically addressed strategies, engagement, and a variety of texts as important aspects of reading instruction (See Figure 4). Over the course of the semester, Annmarie's comments shifted from general observations that lacked in-depth analysis to ones that indicated that she was able to use informal assessments to guide instruction. She could now identify a variety of ways to teach reading (TR) and provide appropriate suggestions for individualizing instruction (II) through careful text selection (TXTS) and by providing support strategically (STRAT) (See Figure 5). Like Annmarie, Kasey began the semester unsure of what to notice as she observed her student at Elkwood. As the semester progressed, she was not only able to identify the her case study student's specific strengths and needs in literacy (RWD) but was also able to suggest and even engage in a variety of ways to individualize instruction (II)

and support reading strategically (STRAT).

What This Means for Teacher Educators: Implications for Practice

Findings from this study indicate that preservice teachers are not naturally inclined to develop excellent reading teacher characteristics independently; therefore thoughtfully structuring teacher education courses is of utmost importance. The preservice teachers in this study demonstrated beginning qualities of excellent reading teachers when provided with the right kind of scaffolding in two settings: the university classroom and field-based experiences. In this study, preservice teachers were introduced to the procedural aspects of two literacy assessments; allowed to administer those assessments in the field; and guiding through the process of analyzing the results to determine students' strengths and needs (Risko, 2009). As they gained confidence with the assessment procedures and their behaviors became routine (Kagan, 1992), they were able to turn their attention to kidwatching (Owocoki & Goodman, 2002) and decision making (Swafford et al., 1996). The common supervised field experience gave the entire class including the professor a point of reference throughout the entire course. This "teaching with explicit guidance" (Risko, p. 8) can be equated to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development in that they continually received feedback during class discussions, on written assignments, in lesson planning, and in the supervised field experience at Elkwood.

Though still developing at the end of the course, all 39 preservice teachers exhibited each of the six IRA (2000) characteristics of excellent reading teachers to varying degrees. This finding is encouraging as teacher preparation programs come under fire to prove their effectiveness. Teacher educators are giving preservice teachers

the knowledge they need when they leave the university setting while acknowledging that they have not yet “arrived” excellent reading teacher status, as deemed by RA. These preservice teachers possessed declarative knowledge (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983) of these key characteristics as well as procedural knowledge of informal literacy assessments, using a variety of texts, and describing a variety of ways to teach reading. To some degree, these preservice teachers also demonstrated conditional knowledge related to teaching for strategies and individualizing instruction during the case study.

While it remains to be seen if these preservice teachers continued to develop and refine these characteristics once they left the teacher preparation program and entered the field, the foundational knowledge upon which they can grow as professionals was clearly evident when they left the university classroom. These beginning teachers were on the cusp of great knowledge. ■

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