



EDITED BY  
Sinéad Harmey and Bobbie Kabuto

# Teaching Literacies in Diverse Contexts

UCLPRESS



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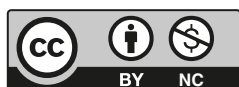
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*Dedicated to the memory of Paul Harmey  
Always one to recommend a good book to read*





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## Glossary

**Adult Learning Tutor** A literacy tutor who may or may not have professional qualifications in literacy teaching and who works with adults.

**Asynchronous Teaching** An online teaching mode that does not use live teaching and where learners engage in learning tasks on their own time.

**CAEP** Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation in the United States.

**Candidate** An accreditation term used to describe students in teacher preparation programs.

**Clinical Experiences** Clinical experiences are opportunities where candidates work in educational settings, or with community-based organizations, to engage in the pedagogical work of the profession. Clinical experiences may include but are not limited to field experience placements, student teaching, and practica.

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** Professional development for qualified teachers.

**Literacy Coach** A literacy coach is ‘responsible for improving classroom instruction by supporting teacher learning and facilitating literacy programme efforts’ (International Literacy Association, 2015: 1). Literacy coaches collaborate with and provide professional development for teachers individually, across different year groups and for an entire school. Literacy coaches are generally a member of staff and may also have responsibility for literacy assessment and teaching themselves.

**Literacy Coordinator** A literacy coordinator is ‘primarily responsible for developing, leading, and/or evaluating the school or district literacy programme. Works with other educators in the school, district, and community to lead efforts to improve literacy teaching and learning’

(International Literacy Association, 2015: 1). This position is similar to a literacy lead in the UK context.

**Literacy Teacher** A teacher who teaches literacy who may or may not have a specialist qualification.

**Literacy Practicum** An internship type context in which a student is provided with opportunities to practice literacy instruction with students in a supervised setting – within school or in the community. These contexts involve coursework and supervision. This is similar to teaching practice but only involves literacy teaching.

**Literacy Professional Preparation** Any programme that provides certification as a literacy specialist, coach, teacher, or coordinator.

**Literacy Specialist** A literacy specialist is ‘primarily responsible for planning, teaching, and evaluating instruction for students having difficulty with reading or writing’ (International Literacy Association, 2015: 1). Literacy specialists may also collaborate with class teachers to identify children who need literacy support or provide support for specific students in the classroom setting.

**Preservice Teachers** Preservice teachers are candidates who do not have prior experience as a classroom teacher.

**Reading Clinic** In the USA, a reading clinic is generally a non-profit centre or site within a university where candidates engage in literacy practicum or supervised practice with students.

**Specialised Literacy Professional** Specialised literacy professionals are reading and/or literacy specialists or teachers, literacy coaches, and literacy coordinators or supervisors or literacy leads.

**Students** Any person who is in the position of learner (adults/children) in the tutoring relationship.

**Synchronous Teaching** Live teaching that occurs online through a remote platform.

**Teacher Certification** A term used in the US to designate an agreement between candidates and US states that confirms that candidates have fulfilled requirements issued by the state to work as a teacher in an educational setting.

**Teacher Educator** An educator who supports and prepares candidates to become certified as teachers in educational settings.

**University-based educators** Teacher educators who teach within university systems at the undergraduate or graduate level.

**Voluntary Pre-K** In the US, voluntary pre-K is publicly funded education for 3-, 4- or 5-year-olds (depending on the state) that is provided before formal schooling.

## Reference

International Literacy Association (2015). *Position statement: The multiple roles of school-based literacy professionals*. Newark, DE: International Literacy Association. Accessed 13 October 2022. <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/literacy-professionals-position-statement.pdf>



# Introduction: towards diverse clinical practices within literacy professional preparation programmes

Sinéad Harmey and Bobbie Kabuto

We (Sinéad and Bobbie) began to envision this book in 2017 when we worked together to restructure the clinical experiences in a university-based professional literacy preparation programme located in a large urban university system in New York. Candidates graduated from the programme with both a graduate degree and New York State Certification as a Literacy Teacher for early childhood and childhood classroom settings. In rethinking the clinical experiences in the programme, we reviewed the literature on literacy teacher preparation and looked for models of clinical experiences that would provide candidates with the ability to link theory into practice. In our search, we were struck by how the literature on the preparation of literacy educators was focused on traditional school-based classroom settings (e.g., Sailors and Manning, 2020; Zenkov and Pytash, 2018). Zenkov and Pytash, for instance, discuss in detail how policy proposals and research by a variety of accrediting bodies, such as the Council for the Accreditation of the Educator Preparation (CAEP) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Preparation (AACTE), advocate for ‘the need to put clinical experiences, typically occurring in Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 classrooms, at the centre of our teacher education endeavours’ (Zenkov and Pytash, 2018: 2).

While we do not argue with or challenge the need to place the training and support of future and current literacy educators alongside veteran teachers and university-based educators, we wondered about all the other ways that literacy teaching occurs. The need for literacy support can occur in many spaces and times across the lifespan, not just for children in schools. For example, in this book contexts for literacy include

hospital settings, as illustrated by Bragg in [Chapter 9](#); community-based organisations as described by Kabuto et al. in [Chapter 8](#); and non-profit organisations and NGOs as discussed by Albers and Seely Flint in [Chapter 6](#). Well-documented research not only argues for the need for diverse opportunities for practitioners to embed practices in contexts that include schools (Hoffman, et al., 2019), communities (Abrego et al., 2006; Barbosa and Wang, 2020), and families (Abrego et al., 2006; Mancenido and Pello, 2020) to support the pedagogical content knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to becoming literacy professionals (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005), but also to prepare them to view literacy teaching and education through a justice-oriented lens (Sailors and Manning, 2020).

In 2019, we brought a group of literacy researchers together to explore the issues and challenges of preparing literacy professionals for a global society (Kabuto and Harmey, 2019). In the special issue in *Global Education Review Literacy in a Global Context: Educational Policy, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education*, we examined literacy as social and cultural practices that draw upon a range of issues relating to social justice, equity, identity, ideologies, power, and the imagination. Through these perspectives, literacy is more than the sum of reading and writing events; it is a process that employs diverse symbolic tools (i.e., reading, writing, drawing, etc.) for social and global transformation. The collection of articles challenged the standardisation of teaching reading and writing, as well as the problematic way that those terms are conflated with the socio-cultural, historical construct of *literacy*. The collection also illustrated how the standardisation of literacy teacher education privileges Western knowledge and cultural practices, often ignoring the local knowledge of families and communities. To take an asset-based and justice-oriented approach to preparing literacy professionals and the teaching of literacy requires that teacher educators, community organisers, policymakers, lawmakers, and school leaders embrace and move towards diverse approaches, frameworks, models, and perspectives to literacy professional preparation.

This edited volume continues the conversation on supporting literacy professionals, future and current, across diverse teaching contexts that include both higher education ([chapters 1, 3, 4, 11, and 12](#)), alternative educational settings ([chapters 2, 8, 9, and 10](#)) and with school or further education settings ([chapters 5, 6, 7, and 13](#)). The collection of chapters focuses on educators – defined broadly to include specialised literacy professionals, classroom teachers, teaching assistants, community organisers, family members, and adult learning tutors – who



support literacy learning in a variety of contexts with criticality and diversity across the life span. In this introduction, we will use the general term *literacy professionals* to include this range of educators who received preparation in literacy and teaching and assessing reading and writing. Underpinning these chapters is the premise that preparing educators, teaching reading and writing, and advancing justice-oriented approaches to literacy must be culturally relevant (see Braden, Myers and Compton-Lilly's in-depth discussion of this in the [first chapter](#)) and appropriate to the learners' needs and interests. The question that we kept in the back of our minds as we put this volume together is: Who are our literacy learners?

## Teaching literacy professionals in the cracks of educational policy

Why is this so important? Approaching literacy education with the broad definition of literacy we have described and from a justice-oriented stance does not come without challenges. Education policy often dictates how to teach literacy by reducing literacy to a narrow range of skills (Coles, 2013; Harmey, 2021) which has implications for what and how literacy is taught. There is no better example of the impacts of educational policy on the teaching of reading than in the United States with the authorisation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001. Drawing from the work of the National Reading Panel, NCLB was based on a narrow view of reading that framed reading around word-level analysis, with an emphasis on phonemic awareness and decoding skills (Coles, 2013). The National Reading Panel went so far as to describe the types of reading instruction teachers should teach in its report. As Coles described, 'a teacher emphasising meaning-making, teaching according to constructivist principles, promoting critical literacy, or criticizing reading textbooks is likely to be censured by administrative superiors or worse' (p. 345). Furthermore, NCLB increased the amount and level of high-stakes testing and attempted to link student test scores with teacher performance and ratings.

While NCLB was repealed, it was replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which attempted to right many impacts of high-stakes testing, teacher performance measures and other school accountability measures. Although it has been heralded as a landmark change in education policy in the United States, a report by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)'s Standing Committee on Literacy

Assessment (2019) on policy representatives across the United States found that it continued to privilege commercial, for-profit state-level assessments centred around the Common Core Standards. Researchers have tracked how both the development of the Common Core Standards and commercial assessments are closely interwoven to support for-profit, large corporations (Cody, 2014; Spring, 2014).

Continuing the limited narrative of ‘scientifically-based reading instruction’, the science of reading (SOR), which interestingly draws from language reminiscent of the National Reading Panel, has become a political force on reading instruction and supported by media voices (see for example Hanford, 2019). The large-scale impact of the science of reading on literacy instruction resulted in *Reading Research Quarterly* (RRQ), the flagship academic journal of the International Literacy Association, dedicating two special issues to the topic in 2020 and 2021. The two-volume collection of articles debunks the narrow way in which the science of reading is portrayed in the media and aims to provide ‘a broad conceptualization of the SOR to unite what science conveys about literacy’ (Goodwin and Jiménez, 2020: 9) by including the roles of language comprehension, writing, content and background knowledge, and instruction. Arguing for a more expansive view of readers, researchers provide social justice and equity-oriented lenses needed when considering the SOR to contend that ‘who builds knowledge, what counts as knowledge, and why knowledge is constructed’ (Milner, 2020: 249) needs to be considered in literacy reading assessment and instruction. Without such a position, the education of linguistically diverse students and students with differing abilities are taught with ‘skills-heavy, scripted, publisher-directed pedagogy’ that ‘has had nothing to do with evidence’ (Coles, 2013: 360).

Policymakers dictating how literacy should be taught is not a phenomenon that is isolated to the United States. In fact, in 2021 the Department for Education in England introduced *The Reading Framework*. The framework aligns the teaching of reading with the Simple View of Reading as the theoretical framework of choice. The authors go so far as to state that children should only read decodable books that match the child’s phonics ‘knowledge’ – for example ‘a book that includes the word “play” should be placed so that children are not asked to read it until the digraph “ay” has been taught’ (Department for Education, 2021a: 51). This prescription of systematic synthetic phonics as the de facto method of phonics teaching permeates government policy on reading to the extent that government set up a validation process for ‘approved’ programmes (Department for Education, 2021b). While not

statutory, schools can avail of funding to purchase validated schemes only. Indeed, more recently the move to create a National Professional Qualification in Leading Literacy, while promising in terms of establishing a professional qualification in literacy, appears to maintain a narrow focus on a phonics ‘first, fast and only’ approach. For example, in a description of the proposed course content, the guidelines state that literacy leaders should ‘read aloud accurately books that are consistent with developing their phonic knowledge and that do not require them to use other strategies to work out words’ (Department for Education, 2021c: 12). In [Chapter 2](#), Harmey and Moss outline how this drive to focus on phonics in literacy pedagogy made its way to adult education.

The policy mandates described in this section, in both the US and UK, challenge educators in a number of ways. First, in both countries the policies frame literacy as a narrow range of cognitive skills. This has implications for what gets taught and, indeed, assessed. Second, it influences how educators are prepared to teach literacy. Third, it generally frames difficulties from a deficit perspective – focusing on what the learner cannot do rather than focusing on what they bring to learning, including their social and cultural funds of knowledge. Finally, they perpetuate the myth that literacy development is unidimensional and similar across the lifespan.

We, unfortunately, do not have enough space in this introduction to fully discuss the ways education policy has impacted literacy professionals both in their preparation and teaching (see Moss, 2004 for a discussion about the politics of literacy policy in England). Our argument, however, is that literacy professionals and those who prepare them to enter into a field are often confronted with the restrictive top-down mandates of political forces. These policies dictate what ought to be taught and, very often, ignore students’ experiences of reading and writing authentic texts within social practices embedded in families and communities. Because of the challenges that these mandates pose for literacy professionals, not only do literacy professionals, but also those who support their preparation, find themselves teaching and learning in the cracks of education policy that limit professional knowledge and growth.

## **The importance of thoughtful professional support for literacy educators**

With the move towards scripted and commercial curricula and assessment filling classrooms, there has been a growing divide between

university-based preparation and the realities faced by literacy educators both in classrooms and in alternative learning settings (like adult education settings). As we described in the opening of this chapter, this divide has led researchers to rethink the preparation of literacy professionals in both placement and approach. Zenkov and Pytash (2018) emphasise the importance of critical project-based clinical experiences. Clinical experiences are framed in various ways and include fieldwork embedded into university-based courses, stand-alone practicum or practical experiences, or student teaching. Critical project-based clinical experiences can occur at any point in a programme and are intensive, short-term experiences that focus on justice-oriented approaches (see Zenkov and Pytash, 2018 for a detailed description and examples of these experiences). Similarly, Goia et al. (2019: 13) discuss hybrid spaces for developing teaching practices that are ‘typically outside of the traditional classroom but engaging with new ways of working in schools’. These spaces create a bridge between classroom practice and university-based knowledge. As Goia et al. (2019: 13) described,

In fact, research has indicated that these hybrid spaces enhanced beginning teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and impacted their roles and beliefs about teaching. They were also spaces where pre-service teachers learned to build and value relationships with children and families and reject deficit ideas about children.

Researchers (e.g., O’Neil and Chambers, 2013), in particular, have argued that there is little research on how university-based programmes prepare literacy professionals as literacy coaches who learn to take on the multiple roles and responsibilities (MacPhee and Jewett, 2017). MacPhee and Jewett (2017) write of United States educational policy, that ‘given the urgency with which literacy coaching came to be a common professional development practice in schools across the nation, little time has been devoted to examining the process of becoming a literacy coach’ (p. 409). With the majority of studies on the preparation of literacy professionals as coaches within school-based settings, research has suggested that literacy coaches do not always find themselves prepared to negotiate the power and politics associated with the role (Hargreaves and Skelton, 2012; MacPhee and Jewett, 2017). Kabuto, Wagner and Vasudevan (Chapter 8) and Bates and Malloy (Chapter 13), in this volume, address the need to consider how literacy coaches are supported.

Literacy professionals preparing to be literacy coaches are unique; they completed previous university-based education programmes and

are taking advanced coursework in the area of literacy coaching. When entering into a preparation programme to become literacy professionals, these literacy professionals bring with them their structured in-service preparation and the unstructured professional knowledge that they have learned working as classroom teachers (Oliveira et al., 2019). University-based preparation programmes, therefore, must find ways to meet candidates where they are in their skills and dispositions towards teaching and assessment reading and writing, rather than assuming that candidates come to the experience with little knowledge of reading and writing support in classroom settings.

These types of pedagogies for preparing future literacy professionals are in stark contrast to professional development and learning contexts that treat developing literacy professionals as consumers of curricula and assessments (Wixson, 2017). Albers and Seely Flint, in Chapter 6, describe the ‘train the trainer’ model, which is connected to professional development related to teaching scripted curricula. This model, as Albers et al. (2019) and Goia et al. (2019) describe, occurs in many parts of the world and marginalises the need to include justice-oriented approaches to preparation of literacy professionals that include dialogues about important issues like racism, inequality, and differences, as well as how literacy professionals are not limited to teaching and learning in classroom settings. In this book, we have collected writings by literacy leaders in multiple settings and multiple roles to shed light on the new ways we might begin thinking about the preparation of literacy educators in and out of school settings. In a sense, it is our hope that these chapters address the question *‘what is possible when you adopt an asset-based and justice-oriented approach to preparing literacy professionals to adopt diverse approaches, frameworks, models, and perspectives to literacy professional preparation?’*.

## The ethos that guides this collection

To address the ways that we prepare future specialised literacy professionals to teach in diverse contexts both in and out of schools, we present a collection of chapters that cover a diverse range of contexts – both in terms of the settings in which the practical experiences took place and the professional backgrounds of the literacy providers, volunteers and families involved in the experiences. In bringing such a collection together, one challenge that we faced was trying to connect the diverse set of chapters while allowing each to maintain its own identity. We argue, however,

that the uniqueness of the chapters reflects exactly the reality of who and how diverse literacies are being taught in a global context.

We have arranged this edited collection in three parts, each within its own introduction. The first part titled '*Strategies for supporting literacy educators*' considers broad strategies for supporting literacy educators and tussles with issues of cultural relevance, restrictive policy mandates, and supporting responsive teaching across the spectrum of undergraduate, graduate and CPD contexts. The second part is titled '*Teaching literacies in diverse settings with diverse populations*' and moves the focus to supporting literacy educators in 'non-traditional settings'. In this part, the authors describe projects that were framed by a common principle – that quality support for literacy educators with a justice-oriented perspective can occur outside of formal school settings. The third and final part of this book is titled '*Supporting literacy educators from a distance*'. The three chapters in this part consider how literacy education can move into a virtual space and yet maintain a focus on authentic literacy practices.

Taken together, we suggest that all the chapters are connected by the following threads:

1. **A sense of inquiry.** Each set of authors was driven by or pursued a question or challenge in supporting literacy learners. The chapters focus on what they understood, what they currently understand, and what is left to be explored. The chapters demonstrate that being prepared to teach reading requires much more than being able to teach to a script. Put simply, a script does not prepare teacher candidates for the reality of the classroom. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that to teach literacy in today's global society, all educators (parents and community organisations included) need to be prepared to 'pivot' away from the way things have all been done. Perhaps the pivot begins with a sense of inquiry about what matters or about what the core non-negotiables of authentic literacy practice are. We suggest that building in opportunities to intentionally foster experiences that are as authentic as possible is the best preparation for this. This may be in and out of school settings for pre-service and graduate candidates. These opportunities provide contexts for the candidate to reflect on and question what really matters for this child at this point in time. For teacher educators, this requires, as Albers and Seely Flint suggest in [Chapter 6](#), a sense of vulnerability and an ability to be prepared for the unexpected and may lead them to rethink the ways they have always approached their work. Throughout the chapters,

we noted how the authors pushed those they work with to constantly question. These questions revolved around issues of pedagogy, policy, as well as social justice. Criticality allows those who teach literacy to reshape and reframe restrictive policies, as Harmey and Moss argued, while keeping the learner at the centre.

2. **A sense of respect for those who provide literacy support and an appreciation for the importance of relationships.** Regardless of whether the educators were parents, volunteers, undergraduate students or experienced teachers, the authors celebrate and respect their experiences and contextual knowledge. Throughout the chapters, the importance of establishing trusting relationships between tutor and tutee, between teacher educator and teacher candidate, and within and between families and communities was paramount. The ethos of safety described by Millar and colleagues in [Chapter 10](#) seems to be a fundamental aspect of all the relationships described in this collection. Above all we noted the ethos of collaboration and community within the models proposed. In a sense, this bodes well for the diverse contexts within which literacy educators, be they traditional teachers, parents or volunteer tutors, work. Literacy, we argue, is complex, and to provide the best literacy learning opportunities requires a community effort and a concerted effort to build on and respect community resources.
3. **A sense of appreciation for the complexities of context and literacy learning.** The projects and studies in these chapters are not presented as ‘off the shelf’ strategies that will work with any learner or in any context. They challenge the ‘one-size-fits-all/what works/programmatic’ approach to literacy teaching and learning. In all the chapters there is a deep appreciation for how context is complicated and needs to impact the design of the systems that support the literacy educator and learner. Throughout this book literacy is defined as a broad and complex phenomenon.

## Conclusion

It is our hope that this book will be a useful resource for preparing literacy educators to teach in today’s classrooms and community settings where policy ebbs and flows in terms of how best to teach reading and writing to diverse student bodies. The book comprises chapters by leading researchers and practitioners in the field to consider how best to support literacy educators in traditional and non-traditional settings with

diversity in mind. We would like to acknowledge the commitment and passion of the authors in this book to supporting literacy learners and for contributing to this book. This edited collection was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we know that, for everyone, life at this time has been messy and complicated. Despite this we were able to bring together a stellar group of people whose commitment to literacy is evident in every chapter of this book.

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# Part I: strategies for supporting literacy educators

This opening part highlights chapters that outline strategies for supporting literacy educators and address cultural relevance, restrictive policy mandates, and supporting responsive teaching in teacher education settings. This part begins the conversation on providing future specialised literacy professionals with a more expansive conceptualisation of literacy and how it can be taught. We argue that there needs to be more focus on the meaning-making and semiotic aspects of literacy and language processes, critical literacies, and literacy as participatory action research and citizenship.

The theme of critical inquiry into classroom strategies runs through these chapters. Through critical inquiry, the authors of these chapters challenge educational policies that promote commercial and scripted curriculum and large-scale, standardised assessments that focus on a subskills model of reading and writing, the levelling of readers, and the ranking and sorting of students based on socioeconomic status, race, language, and gender (Broussard, 2014). Policy, particularly around large-scale assessment and accountability does more to perpetuate the inequalities in society than to redress them. People cannot be fixed; only the systems and structures that deny access to learning and the local and community knowledge of people. Literacy professionals ought to be supported in critically evaluating research and policy to support a diverse student population with whom they will engage within authentic literacy practices.

In [Chapter 1](#), Braden, Myers and Compton-Lilly set the stage by describing the need to address issues of equity in any literacy educator preparation. They describe how they combined pre-service literacy education courses with a focus on developing antiracist teacher experiences. The authors speak to how university-based educators ought to observe and challenge their own practices when preparing future literacy professionals, highlighting the need to value the knowledge and experiences

of not only the future literacy professionals, but also those who assist in their preparation. In particular, they highlight the role of culturally sustaining pedagogies in literacy development, which adopt an asset-based orientation to diversity. Braden, Myers, and Compton-Lilly continue the discussion to illustrate how teacher educators need to not only teach content but also create safe spaces and set high expectations with community-based experiences offering support to candidates to learn how to build relationships, develop cultural competence and understand whose voices may be heard and silenced in classrooms.

Through the lens of phonics and phonemic awareness educational policy, Harmey and Moss ([Chapter 2](#)) and Michael Luna and Silvester ([Chapter 3](#)) take a closer look at how educational policy restricts how literacy and reading are defined. Harmey and Moss examine the case of how organisations that engage in professional development for literacy educators can address and reframe restrictive policies in context rather than isolation. They describe how one research team endeavoured to address the space between research, policy and practice to address a policy mandate to teach phonics to adults. They report on how, rather than seeking to voice direction to the policy itself they reframed the policy to create a resource for literacy educators that was research and practitioner informed as well as learner centred.

Luna and Silvester extend the discussion to early childhood classrooms to provide an illustrative example of how phonics can be taught and assessed through play. Their chapter also exemplifies how opportunities for authentic assessments in field placements can benefit the training of future literacy professionals. In their work with pre-service teachers, they highlight the power of placement opportunities within communities to learn not only the ‘what’ but also the ‘how’ of literacy teaching and learning. Luna and Silvester suggest that these opportunities also build critical consciousness into the learning opportunities. For example, candidates developed understandings about how social and emotional development and economic deprivation moderated opportunities to learn content.

The final two chapters of this part focus on reflection to support literacy educator preparation. In [Chapter 4](#) Harmey and Kabuto, as teacher educators, use video analysis to reflect on how they prepare future literacy specialists. They argue that university-based teacher educators should explore how unexamined theories can impact how future literacy professionals approach their work with students. In their work with graduate literacy candidates, they challenge the assumption that candidates come with no knowledge; rather they suggest that educators

‘must find ways to meet candidates where they are in their skills and dispositions towards the teaching and assessment of reading and writing’ (p. 61). They describe how they analysed discourse interactions of video observations to consider differences between teachers’ stated aims and actual practice. They advocate the use of video as opportunities for teacher educators to understand what candidates bring to the practicum experience and how that interacts with what they are learning.

Morris, in [Chapter 5](#), concludes this part to examine embedding reflective enquiry into practice settings when supporting more experienced professionals working with children with literacy difficulties. Using the case of Reading Recovery teachers, Morris promotes the use of reflection in providing the opportunity to examine practice because ‘the juxtaposition of theory and practice within CPD, and how that challenges teachers to critique their own thinking and decision-making, is ‘essential to developing reflective inquiry’ (p. 90). She describes how expert teachers need to develop adaptive expertise in order to respond to the needs of those experiencing literacy difficulties and how practical experiences, even for expert teachers, provide contexts to question assumptions about learning.

Taken together, these chapters provide practical examples of how university-based literacy teacher educators used inquiry and reflection to prepare future literacy specialists to teach and assess through the cracks of packaged curriculum, levelled assessments, and educational policy that narrowly define literacy as a set of skills.

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1

# Culturally relevant, culturally sustaining, and antiracist practices through an embedded literacy methods course

Eliza G. Braden, Michele Myers, Catherine Compton-Lilly

This chapter explores the affordances of combining preservice teacher literacy education courses with an intentional and committed focus on developing antiracist teacher experiences. We situate this work within recent conversations that have pushed educators to lovingly implement culturally relevant pedagogies (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1994) as they engage in culturally sustaining practices (CSP) (Paris and Alim, 2014) and employ antiracist practices (Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019).

Our unique approach – combining embedded preservice teacher education coursework, including literacy methods courses – in local schools with an intentional focus on equity serves as a signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) across our programme and partner classrooms. Our shared understandings and commitment to equity-based teacher education defines – for us – ‘what counts as knowledge . . . how things become known’, and ‘how knowledge is analysed, critiqued, accepted, or discarded’ (Shulman, 2005: 54). While we are excited about this work and honour the 30-year history of our Professional Development School network that has enabled us to establish long-term relationships with teachers and schools, we recognise that these efforts are eternally ongoing. Given the historical and institutionalised inequities that accompany schooling, we are constantly reminded that equity has always been elusive and requires ongoing effort. While this chapter focuses on the

embedded literacy methods courses, our mathematics methods and science methods classes are also embedded in elementary schools and involve weekly classroom visits.

## Our ongoing theoretical journey

The past 30 years have been an exciting time for scholars engaged in equity-based and antiracist pedagogies. While educators continue to struggle with making schools and classrooms equitable spaces, theoretically scholars have made impressive gains. Each of the three authors of this chapter entered academia when CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1994) was emerging as an important frame for realising and implementing practices to serve children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Since then, new insights, critiques and possibilities have informed our work.

### Culturally relevant pedagogies

As Ladson-Billings (2017: 142) explains, culturally relevant pedagogies (CRP) highlight student learning – particularly ‘intellectual growth’. CRP requires learning on the part of teachers – who must appreciate the cultures and experiences of their students – while developing multicultural competence and critical consciousness. Teachers must create opportunities to engage students in experiences that reflect the cultures of their families and communities and engage in critique and action to address inequities. The need for these experiences was clearly described in Chapter 7 (Bodman). However, as Ladson-Billings and Dixson (2021: 126) report, ‘notions of culturally relevant pedagogy have been distorted, co-opted, and corrupted’ when simplified and operationalised as checklists and activities, limiting their power and effect.

### Culturally sustaining pedagogies

We are also drawn to culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) (Paris, 2012). CSP are intentionally designed to ‘perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of schooling’ (Paris, 2012: 93), with the explicit goal of creating ‘a pluralist present and future’ (Paris and Alim, 2014: 90). CSP recognises the evolving nature of culture and cultural practices alongside historically informed and enduring efforts to challenge and address dominant and inequitable



practices. Paris (2012: 93) argues that CSP challenge ‘current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society’.

CSP focuses on the assets that all children bring to classrooms and the continuous negotiation and recreation of equity-oriented learning opportunities. Alim and Paris (2017: 1) argue for ‘dynamic cultural dexterity’ and maintain that culture cannot be treated as static and/or monolithic. They highlight the potential of any cultural practice to contribute to the marginalisation of people. Thus, teachers must help students to analyse practices, texts and language to expose and address racial, ethnic, linguistic and gender biases. Similarly, teacher educators must help teacher candidates recognise and confront inequities as they work to make schools more equitable.

### Antiracist, anti-blackness, and abolitionist pedagogies

As we continue our equity journey, we are continuously sensitised to the complexities of race. Along with teacher co-conspirators, we appreciate the intentional and agential possibilities of antiracist, anti-blackness, and abolitionist approaches. While a full discussion of these approaches would exceed the limits of this chapter, we present critical components that inform our work with preservice teachers. We recognise that not being racist is not the same as being antiracist (Kendi, 2019: 54). Love (2019: 54) describes antiracist and abolitionist approaches as involving ‘solidarity created through shared struggle’. As she reports, ‘Antiracist teaching is not just about acknowledging that racism exists but about consciously committing to the struggle of fighting for racial justice’ (Love, 2019: 54). Love (2019: 10) highlights the need for intentionally engaging with the struggle for social justice and recognising a human obligation to ‘refuse oppression and refuse to oppress others’. Acting as abolitionist/antiracist teachers requires all educators to operate as co-conspirators by creating safe spaces in classrooms, setting high expectations for children, and engaging in political protest.

We are also inspired by recent discussions of anti-blackness. Dumas and Ross (2016) challenge educators to recognise and challenge dehumanising depictions and positionings of Black people. They name an ‘antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not a person for herself or himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and White’ (Dumas and Ross, 2016: 416–17). Johnson and his colleagues (2019: 51) ‘lovingly invite educators to reflect deeply and critically

examine how intentional and/or unintentional enactments of violence are harmful to the bodies, hearts and minds of Black youth’.

Together, these practices inspire our work with practicing teachers and help us to ‘leverage approximations of practices in purposeful, ideologically conscious ways that create opportunities to rehearse . . . new, and more liberatory dispositions’ (Dominguez, 2017: 240). Across this chapter, we move among these labels, not because we believe that they are interchangeable, but because they all inspire our practices and drive our work.

## Embedded work with children

Zeichner and Bier (2012: 165) note that ‘providing high quality clinical experiences to teacher candidates is a key element to providing effective teacher preparation’. Clinical experiences occur in schools and involve children. They might be practicum experiences where students work in a particular classroom across a semester or time spent in classrooms as part of methods courses. At the University of South Carolina (USC), we have refined a set of clinical experiences that embed teaching opportunities into methods courses. Through these embedded experiences, we work side-by-side with classroom teachers who share our commitment to preparing equity-oriented, antiracist teachers.

Embedded clinical experiences entail not only work with children, but also mentored reflection and collaborative analysis of teaching. Darling-Hammond (2014: 550) highlights the importance of ‘extensive and intensely supervised coursework’ that invites preservice teachers to learn from experts who successfully serve diverse students. Through embedded experiences, preservice teachers focus on children, analyse their practices, and apply what they are learning in university classes to their teaching. Zeichner and Bier (2012: 164) argue that excellent clinical experiences ‘disrupt teacher candidates’ lower expectations for the learning of students in high-need urban schools’. Similarly, they note the potential of community-based experiences to help teacher candidates ‘become more interculturally competent and teach in culturally responsive ways’ (Zeichner and Bier, 2012: 164).

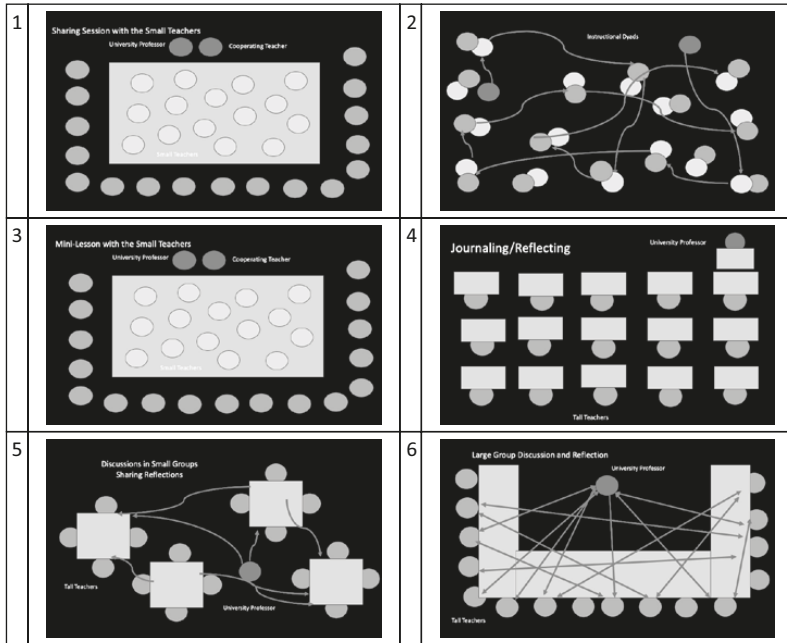
While supporting embedded experiences with preservice teachers, Darling-Hammond (2014: 554) warns that merely placing candidates in schools serving historically underserved students can ‘be counterproductive’. She notes the importance of guidance from teacher

educators and highly skilled teachers who share a commitment to equity. Placements without careful guidance harm Black and Brown children by reproducing white-saviour mentalities among preservice candidates. Thus, the quality of the classrooms within which preservice teachers work and accompanying opportunities to make sense of their embedded experiences are essential.

## **Our signature pedagogy: equity-based embedded preservice teaching**

At the University of South Carolina, we believe that teacher education cannot be separated from the rich cultural, linguistic, and literacy experiences that children bring to classrooms. While this chapter focuses on the embedded courses related to CRP/CSP and literacy methods, our math methods and science methods classes are also embedded in elementary schools and involve weekly classroom visits, CRP/CSP practices, and collaboration with practicing teachers. During embedded classes, each preservice teacher partners with a child for the entire semester. The children are referred to as ‘Small Teachers’ because they provide our preservice teachers with valuable lessons about kid-watching, cultural competence and building relationships. To honour the instruction they provide, we refer to our preservice teachers as ‘Tall Teachers’.

An early course in our programme focuses on CRP/CSP. Following this introductory course, our students take two embedded literacy courses. During both the CRP/CSP and literacy classes, the preservice teachers visit a classroom for one hour each week. During this time, the course instructor and/or the classroom teacher model a reading or writing mini-lesson with the children (Figure 1.1, Frame 1). The Small Teachers and the Tall Teachers then work together to implement the modelled strategy with their assigned student (Figure 1.1, Frame 2). The course instructor and the classroom teacher circulate among the Small and Tall Teachers observing, taking notes, modelling, and providing feedback. At the close of each embedded session, the Small and Tall Teachers briefly share their experiences (Figure 1.1, Frame 3). Then, the Tall Teachers leave the children’s classroom to journal (Figure 1.1, Frame 4) and discuss their experiences in small groups and as a class (Figure 1.1, Frames 5 and 6). Immediately after each session, course instructors invite preservice teachers to consider linguistic and cultural differences and how children’s knowledge and experiences might inform future learning.



**Figure 1.1** Embedded activities in elementary classes.  
Source: author.

## Three teachers and their classrooms

To illustrate this work, we present three scenarios from classrooms that regularly host our Tall Teachers.

1. Ali's kindergarten classroom at Prairieland Elementary School is visited regularly by Michele Myers and the students in her CRP/CSP course.
2. Sara's third grade classroom at Prairieland Elementary is also visited regularly by Michele Myers and the students in her CRP/CSP course.
3. Valenté's fifth grade classroom is visited regularly by Eliza Braden and the students in her literacy methods course at Hyland Park Elementary.

Based on numerous observations, conversations and visits, we recognise the classroom teachers as exceptional, culturally responsive pedagogues. They recognise and honour the cultures, racial backgrounds, gender positionings, abilities, languages, and religions of their students. We are impressed by their commitment to CRP/CSP and antiracist approaches.

Because of this work, they play an integral and essential role in our preparation of preservice teachers.

### Introducing Ali

Ali is a biracial, monolingual kindergarten teacher who has taught for about five years. Ali intentionally uses children's literature to challenge biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. She explained that her *'passion lies in helping young children and adults recognise, accept, and celebrate the differences that make us great'*. Ali recognises the importance of CRP/CSP for young children. She knows that kindergarteners are already cognizant of differences in language, colour, gender and physical abilities. By age two, children typically begin to use physical characteristics, including skin colour, to describe themselves and others. By ages three and four, they begin to make positive and negative associations with skin colour (York, 2016). By kindergarten many children access stereotypes and use racialised insults during disagreements. This awareness fuels Ali's passion for doing anti-bias work with young children.

### Introducing Sara

Sara is a white, middle-class, monolingual teacher who has been teaching for a little over a decade. Sara teaches third grade at the same ethnically diverse elementary school as Ali. They collaborate on projects, often having their kindergarteners and third graders work together with culturally relevant children's books. Sara knows the importance of making heart-to-heart connections with students before she can begin to make head-to-head connections. She demonstrates *caring for* and *caring about* ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010) and honours students' humanity – 'holding them in high esteem' and expecting 'high performance for them' (Gay, 2010: 48). Sara knows the importance of knowing her students and their families – both individually and collectively. Sara learns from families and communities and uses that information to create curriculum with and for her students. She honours the social, cultural and linguistic strengths of her students and carefully observes their unique physical, affective and cognitive differences. As Sara explains, *'To me, being a culturally responsive teacher means that I need to not only acknowledge, but also validate and celebrate the cultural diversity in my classroom . . . [it] is a pervasive, intentional undercurrent in my planning and execution of classroom experiences.'* Sara's beliefs are apparent in her intentional efforts as she arranges the classroom, plans engagements, and selects resources.

## Introducing Valenté

Valenté is an African American, bilingual male fifth grade teacher. Valenté is in his third year as a classroom teacher and is a veteran of our teacher education programme. He focuses on the brilliance of Black students and their families and is intentional in his work as an antiracist pedagogue. Valenté continuously offers his students opportunities to participate in civic-minded activities. On any given day, our preservice teachers observe Valenté seamlessly integrating Black history and current events into his lessons, including historical references to Jim Crow era and contemporary connections to #BlackLivesMatter. Valenté does not hesitate to address difficult issues. Like Ali and Sara, Valenté recognises that children are constantly bombarded with messages about race, gender, ethnicity and language through media outlets, social media platforms, friends, family and acquaintances. Valenté's goal is to foster safe spaces where children can talk about inequities and engage in activism.

## Becoming antiracist: pivotal moments of criticality

As we recognise the important roles Ali, Sara and Valenté play in our teacher education programme, we consider their journeys towards becoming culturally relevant and critical teachers. Each teacher has described a pivotal moment of critical consciousness related to privilege and marginalisation. These moments have shaped their personal and professional lives and actions.

### Ali's pivotal moment

Ali's pivotal moment occurred during an undergraduate literacy course. Ali was one of four Students of Colour in the class. Her white female professor generally read culturally diverse children's books to the class. A white student asked the professor, 'Why are you always reading about *those people*? When are you going to read about people that look like me?' The professor responded, 'You've read about people like you all your life, and you will continue to read about people like you. We must have classrooms that include People of Colour'. Upon hearing the professor's response, Ali felt validated and recognised the importance of books that reflected students' experiences. She no longer felt like an outsider and was empowered to address racial voids in curricula. Since then, Ali has continued to seek CRP/CSP courses and opportunities in order to

develop the knowledge and practices needed for being a caring, competent and effective teacher.

### Sara's pivotal moment

Sara's pivotal moment occurred at a grocery store seafood counter when an African American woman ordered four pounds of crab legs. The clerk handed the African American woman her order and asked Sara to wait while she alerted a store associate who followed the African American woman to the cashier's station. When the clerk returned to take Sara's order, she too ordered crab legs. When the clerk handed her the crab legs, Sara waited for the clerk to make the same phone call. The clerk did not. When Sara asked if she needed to wait, the clerk responded, '*No, you are fine*'.

Sara was surprised and described it as a 'critical eye-opener'. Given that the only overt difference between her and the woman was skin colour, it revealed the racialised assumption made about the African American woman and inspired Sara to examine her own white privilege. When she subsequently examined her classroom, she realised that her curriculum and instructional methods also privileged middle-class, Eurocentric views of the world. The books in her classroom reflected white histories, experiences and characters. Her curriculum presented colonised views of history, and the holidays she observed were Christian. These practices denied the diverse backgrounds and experiences of her students. Sara immediately made changes and intentionally committed herself to CRP/CSP practices.

### Valenté's pivotal moments

Valenté identified two pivotal moments that shaped his critical consciousness and commitment to antiracist teaching. The first occurred when Valenté was in high school. Valenté recalled being stopped by police while driving in his rural community. Although his parents had prepared him for when, as a Black male, he was likely to be singled out at school, in the community, or while driving, Valenté had not anticipated the emotions and angst that accompanied this experience.

The second pivotal moment occurred during an undergraduate literacy course taught by Eliza. Valenté recalled a lecture on the legitimacy of African American Language (AAL) in which Eliza described AAL as a rule-governed language with roots in Africa, a continent whose Peoples have made significant contributions to the world. Learning about the

phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatic nature of AAL intrigued Valenté. When Eliza explained that stress patterns and the deletion of certain sounds reflected West African roots, Valenté immediately recalled the embarrassment he felt regarding his pronunciation of certain words. He told the class, *'I say dog a different way than others'*. Eliza validated his use of AAL and named prolific writers who used AAL. She explained that AAL has been co-opted by mainstream media and corporations and encouraged her students to *'pay attention to commercials, billboards, ads, songs – AAL is everywhere'*. Valenté now teaches his fifth graders about the legitimacy of AAL. He highlights connections to West Africa and uses children's literature, songs and poems to explore AAL and compare it with other forms of English.

Ali, Sara and Valenté experienced pivotal moments that enabled them to see race and inequity. For Sara, it increased her sensitivity to white privilege and the need to revisit her instructional practices. For Ali, it was the critical role teachers played in making sure that students saw themselves in curriculum. For Valenté, it was affirming the language and cultural heritage of Black children: *'My entire life as a teacher from college to now has been to make sure that every child has a liberating education'*. As a result of these critical moments, all three teachers share a commitment to the thoughtful selection of texts, the need for honest and safe discussion, interrogation of classroom decorations, strategic attention to the need to reframe and refocus student discussions, and an awareness of whose voices are heard and silenced. These teachers recognise the work as ongoing and the importance of continuous learning about themselves and their students.

## **Embedded teacher education in Ali's, Sara's and Valenté's classrooms**

While we celebrate the work that Ali, Sara and Valenté do with their students, we are particularly inspired by the contributions they make to our teacher education programme. In the sections below, we visit their embedded teacher education classrooms.

### Embedded teacher education in Ali's and Sara's classrooms

During each class session of her CRP/CSP course, Michele's students are involved in four activities. They hear a lecture related to CRP/CSP theory, visit Ali's or Sara's classrooms to watch theory in action, participate in



group discussions and activities, and explore implications of these experiences for their future classrooms.

Throughout the year Ali and Sara pair their kindergarten and third grade students as reading buddies. The reading buddies typically meet once a week for 30 to 40 minutes to read, write and discuss books. On days when Michele's preservice teachers are at the school, the Tall Teachers observe and take notes as Michele, Sara and/or Ali teach the Small Teachers. Then the Tall Teachers work one-on-one with their assigned reading buddies.

Recently, Sara and Ali created a unit titled, *'It Don't Matter if You're Black or White'* in response to when two of Ali's white, male students informed a Black, male student on the playground that he could not play with them because he was Black. This statement and the #BlackLivesMatter movement inspired Ali and Sara to work together to actively engage their classes in critical conversations related to race and racism. During this unit, both teachers read books that addressed racism, engaged their students in Socratic Seminars, and researched historic and contemporary activists dedicated to dismantling racism. Books included: *The Skin You Live In* (Tyler, 2005); *Let's Talk About Race* (Lester, 2008); *The Colour of Us* (Katz, 2002); and *Black is Brown is Tan* (Adoff, 2004). To open the unit, Sara and Ali displayed a chart with four smiley faces coloured in different colours: pink, yellow, light brown, and dark brown. When they asked the students to discuss the faces, the children made more positive comments about the light-coloured faces and more negative for the darker-coloured faces. The children commented that the pink face was 'nice' and could be an engineer or race car driver. In contrast, they described the dark brown face as 'bad' and 'ugly', noting that it might belong to someone 'who would rob other people'. After several weeks of antiracist teaching, both Sara and Ali noticed shifts in their students' perceptions of the smiley faces. Comments made about the dark smiley face were significantly more positive. But more importantly, the three boys who inspired the unit agreed that friends could be different colours as long as they were nice to each other.

As the Tall Teachers observed these lessons, Michele helped them to view race as socially constructed and racism as a form of oppression. She encouraged her students to recognise how biases and prejudices result in actions that marginalise and oppress others. The Tall Teachers read and discussed books by African American scholars (e.g., Delgado and Stefancic, 2017; Kendi, 2019; Oluo, 2019) and completed assignments and reflections related to the unit. One assignment required Tall Teachers to interview two people whose racial identity was different from

their own. They were asked to uncover how race privileged or oppressed interviewees during their P–12 schooling experiences. A second assignment required students to record many overt and covert messages that they observed in their daily lives and to consider the sources of those messages. The Tall Teachers then worked together to share their analyses.

Just as Sara and Ali noticed shifts with the Small Teachers, Michele also noticed changes. Prior to the unit, many Tall Teachers maintained a colour-blind stance arguing that colour did not matter. Following the unit, many of the same students recognised that colour-blindness was dangerous because it did not acknowledge how Children of Colour experienced schools. Before observing the Small Teachers, many Tall Teachers were hesitant to discuss race and racism with children. They worried that the Small Teachers could not handle discussions and that the discussions might cause harm. By the end of the unit, most of the tall teachers agreed that young children could handle critical conversations with the guidance and support of CRP/CSP and antiracist teachers.

### Embedded teacher education in Valenté’s classroom

Valenté’s classroom also served as a site for Tall Teachers to observe CRP/CSP and antiracist pedagogies. Eliza and Valenté collaborated to host Tall Teachers for both CRP/CSP and literacy methods courses. Prior to each embedded session, Eliza discussed theoretical considerations and practical strategies that could be used with the Small Teachers and previewed the lesson that they would observe. As the Tall Teachers enter Valenté’s classroom, they are greeted by images of Malcolm X, Dr Martin Luther King, and shelves of books highlighting Black joy, brilliance, and the ‘plain ole everyday beauty’ of being Black. Valenté’s students sit eagerly at their desks ready to work with their Tall Teachers.

During one class meeting, Eliza’s students observed a lesson that involved the Small Teachers responding in their reading journals to the book *Brown Boy* (Glenn, 2017). The book tells the story of a third-grade boy who experiences ‘the talk’ on his way to school. In many Black households, ‘the talk’ refers to conversations that provide children with critical information on how to survive in a society where a Black man can lie on the ground pleading for a cop to remove his knee from his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, and where a 12-year-old Tamir Rice becomes a victim of police brutality while playing with a toy gun. On the day the Tall Teachers observed, Valenté followed his reading of *Brown Boy* with having the Small Teachers watch a video of a father and daughter discussing the father’s interactions with police. Next, the Tall Teachers observed the

Small Teachers as they developed discussion questions to pose to their peers in preparation for a book conversation. Finally, the Tall Teachers observed the Small Teachers' discussion.

After returning to their on-site classroom, the Tall Teachers posed questions and Eliza shared insights related to the lesson. Several students were surprised; some were alarmed that Valenté had used *Brown Boy* and invited children to discuss racism. Some Tall Teachers worried that they were 'too young'. However, Eliza knew that several of Valenté's students had dealt with racism, and some had siblings who had been stopped by the police. Eliza discussed the importance of believing Black children's and Black people's accounts of their experiences. In the beginning of the semester, she had introduced them to guidelines for facilitating conversations related to race (Boutte, 2016). These guidelines included being 'willing to tolerate some discomfort while having these conversations' (Boutte, 2016: 41). As Boutte (2016: 41) noted, since many African American students 'experience discomfort for most of their school experiences', it is essential that teachers be willing to be uncomfortable.

## Lessons learned and next steps

As teacher educators and scholars, we recognise that our signature teacher education pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) – centring race and equity through embedded classroom experiences – is a work in progress. We have spent years working with local teachers to support classrooms that foreground culturally relevant, culturally sustaining, and antiracist practices so that we can engage our preservice teachers with children in these spaces. We witness culturally relevant practices as we observe Sara's and Ali's book discussions and consider their careful selection of texts. Following these model discussions, we watch children and preservice teachers discussing books that intentionally address equity, depict characters from a vast range of backgrounds, and foster conversations about bias, race, gender, and belonging. We witness culturally sustaining practices when we observe Sara and Ali using coloured smiley faces to help children – and our preservice teachers – to see and question their biases. Finally, we are pushing ourselves and our teacher colleagues to intentionally engage in antiracist practices that involve coalitions of educators who are willing to name, challenge and change racist practices. We see this in Ali's and Sara's intentional response to a Black student being told he could not play because he was Black, and Valenté's intentional discussion of *the conversation* that Black parents must have with their children.

As we attend to Ali's, Sarah's and Valenté's stories, we note that in two of the three cases, pivotal moments of critical consciousness occurred during their teacher education classes. This is an important lesson for us as teacher educators and points to the power of our work and its potential.

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## 2

# Supporting adult literacy learners: reviewing and reframing the place of phonics in the adult learning sector

Sinéad Harmey and Gemma Moss

A primary purpose of this edited book was to serve as a resource for those who teach literacy in diverse and non-traditional contexts. In the Introduction to the book, Harmey and Kabuto discussed the many challenges of preparing literacy educators to teach a diverse population particularly when educators who define literacy broadly attempt to navigate a policy terrain where literacy is defined narrowly. Harmey and Kabuto envisioned literacy as ‘a process that employs diverse symbolic tools (i.e., reading, writing, and drawing, etc.) for social and global transformation’ (p. 2). This opportunity to achieve social transformation through literacy practices is perhaps strongest for those who work with adults – a group of learners who have already been framed as having failed by some sectors of society. Supporting those who have already experienced the crushing defeat of not being able to read or write and all the social, emotional and economic difficulties related to literacy difficulties is perhaps the most challenging of literacy teaching contexts and requires the type of responsive and progressive ‘teaching-free’ literacy described by Millar, Boyle and Muir in [Chapter 10](#).

Education policy, according to Harmey and Kabuto, often dictates how to teach literacy, by reducing the construct to a narrow range of skills. Some policies make the assumption that one method will work for all (see for example the Early Reading Framework, Department for Education, 2021) or, indeed, that what works for one age group in a certain context will work for another. As such, Harmey and Kabuto wanted

the chapters within this book to serve as a way for literacy educators to reimagine how to work with policy diktats in a manner that both upholds the policy requirements but respects the experience of the literacy tutors while placing the literacy learner's needs, broadly defined, as the prime factor that guides instruction. For many literacy educators it is this tense tightrope of simultaneously honouring policy, respecting the professionalism of tutors and meeting learners' needs, particularly when seemingly in conflict with each other, which can prove the most difficult aspect of literacy teaching and learning. This chapter focuses on how one group of researchers navigated this difficult terrain using the case of mandated phonics teaching with adult literacy learners as the case in fact.

First, we briefly review why and how phonics has become such a charged point of contention in literacy policy, long after a 'balanced view of reading' – that all methods have something to offer learners under particular conditions – became the consensus position amongst scholars. We then report on the processes that led the research team to decide to tangle with policy under difficult conditions, not by seeking to voice direct opposition to the policy turn itself, but rather by getting involved in reshaping the ways the policy was enacted. This meant pursuing a research agenda that would reframe the policy prescriptions and ultimately lead to creating a resource that would be in keeping with an adult literacy ethos, and wider literacy tradition (Moss et al., 2019).

In our discussion, we reflect on the research tactics used in the creation of this Post-16 phonics toolkit and how the team articulated an alternate set of principles underpinning the use of phonics Post-16 that can speak to adult literacy educators (university based and otherwise), adult literacy tutors and which are directly useful to adult literacy learners, taking into account the varied settings in which they work and study.

## **Phonics: controversies and contentions**

How children learn to read has been a topic of intense academic and educational interest for decades. The debate often referred to as 'the reading wars' swings between meaning-based and phonics-based methods (Castles, Rastle and Nation, 2018). Phonics is 'a system for encoding speech sounds into written symbols and for learners to use the relationship between letters and sounds to recognise words' (Mesmer and Griffith, 2005: 6). It has been well established that teaching letter-sound relationships in a systematic manner to children learning to read is a key

component of effective literacy instruction (Castles et al., 2018). Areas of contention remain, however. For instance, whether any one phonics approach is inherently superior to any other; what methods of instruction and materials would best meet the definition of systematic; and whether and how phonics instruction fits with or needs to gain priority over approaches that support other aspects of learning to read, in particular comprehension. It is not yet clear which approach works best for specific populations, especially those experiencing literacy difficulties (see Harmey, 2021). An in-depth discussion of the entire debate is beyond the scope of this chapter. Here we focus on the use of phonics with adults experiencing literacy difficulties.

The National Literacy Trust (2021) report that 7.1 million adults (16.4 per cent of the population) in England have difficulty reading. When literacy is defined narrowly, these difficulties can be framed from a deficit perspective by policymakers with terms like ‘basic vocabulary’, ‘poor literacy skills’ and ‘low literacy levels’ being used to describe the literacy skills of adults. Regardless of the labels used to describe the issue, having difficulties with literacy is associated with social exclusion, poverty, employment, and life expectancy (KPMG Foundation, 2006), and thus the imperative for governments to support adults to develop literacy skills is high.

Supporting adult learners to read is complex. The experience of struggling to read in school may mean that, by adulthood, they may lack in confidence and may associate reading with negativity and failure (Fletcher, Nicholas and Davies, 2010). Some of the root causes of adult reading difficulties, when reading is narrowly defined as a set of skills and strategies, may have been due to issues with learning to decode text. Indeed, Alamprese, MacArthur, Price and Knight (2011) reported that findings from recent large-scale studies of adult learners’ reading skills are suggestive of decoding difficulties, an over-reliance on context, and inefficiency in using letter-sound relationships. Equally, however, difficulties with literacy learning may be due to an underlying issue with language, visual perceptual difficulties, memory, disparities between language of instruction and home language, cultural relevance, poor instruction, or may quite simply have occurred due to lack of opportunity (Harmey, 2021).

What is certain, however, is that by adulthood, any one of these factors may have become entangled in a web of other related issues. For example, initial minor difficulties with decoding may lead to reduced volume of reading material, in turn impacting vocabulary, in turn leading

to difficulty comprehending text read, with no guarantee of appropriate instruction. Focusing on cognitive skills alone, however, leads to a failure to acknowledge that literacy is also a deeply personal act. For example, motivation to read accounts for ‘unique variance in comprehension scores beyond that attributable to conventional cognitive assessments’ (Conradi, Jang and McKenna, 2014: 128). Therefore, while the initial difficulty may have been helped with instruction in some discrete skills early in the learner’s career, for those at a later life stage the solution is not quite as simple as just teaching phonics.

## **Mandating phonics teaching with adults: a brief policy history**

The policy logic for mandating the use of phonics with adults has taken a unique path. The policy history is embedded in the politics of literacy instruction in the early years starting from the publication of the Rose Report (Rose, 2006), itself commissioned by a Labour government in response to political lobbying (see Moss, 2009). Since then, phonics instruction has become an increasingly central part of literacy policy in England. A sequence of policy documents and mandates issued by successive Conservative administrations have emphasised the dominant role phonics instruction is expected to play in the early stages of learning to read (Solity, 2020). Mandates include a phonics screening check, itself less a diagnostic assessment instrument than a teacher accountability measure (Darnell et al., 2017); and an injunction to schools to use programmes linked to decodable texts, limiting the vocabulary to the phoneme-grapheme correspondences that have been explicitly taught (Price-Mohr and Price, 2019).

Championing phonics instruction has become a hallmark of Conservative policy. So much so that in 2018 the Department for Education (2018) revised the subject content for the Functional Skills English curriculum (courses of study for learners who had not reached the standard expected of school leavers at age 16). It specified that ‘the structured teaching of phonics’ should be central to teaching these students (Department for Education, 2018: 3). The outline curriculum stated that students should ‘read correctly words designated’ for each qualification Level, with appendices listing the complete phoneme-grapheme correspondences that students would be expected to accurately decode.



In many respects this is exactly the narrowing of curriculum that Harmey and Kabuto refer to in the Introduction of this book. Policy leaves little room for the kinds of negotiation over learner interests and motivations that the literature on adult literacy has long made central to pedagogy. The emphasis on decoding at the level of the individual word, and the specification of words that represent particular phoneme-grapheme correspondences imagines pedagogy as an act of compliance and learning as an act of rote memorisation.

But there is a gap between policy diktat and actual practice. To exploit that difference, Education and Training Foundation (ETF), an organisation charged with providing continual professional development programmes for the further and vocational education sectors in the United Kingdom, invited organisations to tender for research into

- Effective systems of using phonics with adults.
- Teachers' knowledge and experience of using phonics to teach functional skills learners.
- Interventions that could be used to develop best practice in phonics teaching with adults.

This opened up for review assumptions built into the policy – that a prescriptive list of phonemes and graphemes built into the functional skills curriculum would in itself deliver effective pedagogy. The research team at UCL Institute of Education responded with a proposal to identify principles that could reframe policy prescriptions and be more in keeping with an adult literacy ethos, and wider literacy traditions.

## Reframing the terms of the debate

To explore the principles upon which any approach to using phonics with adult learners should be based, the team decided (a) to examine the efficacy of using phonics with adults by conducting a rapid evidence assessment of the literature; and (b) to explore existing practice in using phonics with adult learners, by conducting an online survey of adult literacy tutors and focus group interviews with adult learners (Moss, Duncan, Harmey and Munoz-Chereau, 2018). In effect this was to adopt a translational approach to research evidence by engaging 'end-users' perspectives from the start (Harmey, Moss and Munoz-Chereau, 2020) and making sure that the voice of practitioners and those with experience

in teaching and learning in diverse contexts would be heard and reflected in any guidance.

## Research evidence on effective approaches to using phonics with adults: a systematic review

Cognisant of the importance of adopting a ‘what works, for whom and in what context’ stance (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), as an alternative to a simple ‘what works’ approach, the project began by reviewing the evidence base underpinning the use of phonics-based approaches with adults. This ensured that the assumption in the policy that the efficacy of phonics instruction for young learners meant that replicating the method would necessarily work for adult learners could be tested.

We used the categorisation of phonics pedagogy suggested by Mesmer and Griffith (2005) to distinguish between phonics taught explicitly, implicitly or embedded within broader instruction; and as systematic, following a pre-defined sequence or ad hoc. This enabled the review to include studies when phonics instruction might be subsumed within instruction about morphology, orthography, alphabetic or word study (Curtis and Kruidenier, 2005; McShane, 2005). To examine the efficacy of these approaches, the review took three phases (see Moss et al., 2018, for a full discussion). First, we conducted a search of the literature. Of the 305 papers retrieved, 49 were kept for secondary review and 29 for a weight of evidence (WOE) review as suggested by Cordingley in Basma and Savage (2017). WOE reviews rank studies according to their internal consistency, appropriacy of the design, and relevance to the review question. Of these 29 studies, we rated one study as high quality, five as medium quality and 13 as low quality and excluded the remaining 10 studies (see Table 2.1 for a summary of the high- and medium-quality studies).

Our overall summary of the findings from the studies that met our quality criteria were that:

1. There was limited evidence demonstrating that phonics was more effective than other approaches in addressing adult learners’ needs.
2. There was limited evidence that phonics instruction on its own was effective for adults.
3. There was some evidence that studies where systematic instruction was integrated into broader reading and writing activities with age-appropriate themes could usefully be replicated to clarify findings.

**Table 2.1** Studies on phonics with adults that were high or medium quality

	<b>WOE A</b> <b>Did the reported findings in the study answer the study question and was it internally consistent?</b>	<b>WOE B</b> <b>Is the research design appropriate for the review questions?</b>	<b>WOE C</b> <b>Was the focus of the study relevant to the review question</b>	<b>Overall Rating</b>
Condelli, Cronen, Bos, Tseng and Altuna (2011)	High	High	High	High
Sabatini, Shore, Holtzmann and Scarborough (2011)	High	High	High	Medium
Scarborough, Sabatini and Shore et al. (2013)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Greenberg et al. (2011)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Alamprese, MacArthur, Price and Knight* (2011)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Vanderberg, Pierce and Disney (2011)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium

We were aware that the weaknesses in the evidence base were in part due to high attrition rates in many studies. Yet this may well be a reflection of the circumstances in which adult literacy classes function – high absences and drop-out rates are likely to be typical in informal learning settings where attendance is not compulsory or if the texts and strategies are not deemed appropriate or engaging by the participants. In this light the review concluded that ‘strengthening tutor professional knowledge and expertise may play a bigger role in developing systematic and effective approaches to the use of phonics with adult literacy learners than implementing any particular programme’ (Moss et al., 2018: 12).

This left unresolved how to achieve this aim given the narrow conceptualisation of phonics pedagogy embedded in the policy specification.

### Building in tutor and learner perspectives

To explore the extent to which phonics approaches were already being used with adult learners, we conducted an online survey of adult literacy tutors ( $n = 120$ ) and ran focus groups with adult learners and tutors (3 adult literacy classes). Both survey and focus groups examined extant levels of knowledge about phonics approaches, practitioners' priorities in their work with adult learners, and the enablers and barriers to using phonics approaches perceived by both tutors and learners (See Moss et al., 2018 for further details).

The survey findings showed that practitioners were acutely aware of the difficulty facing adult learners. Their priorities lay in finding out what the learner needs: they were pragmatic in terms of method, using whatever they perceived to work best for that learner. In terms of phonics, they tended to use embedded approaches and taught word-level decoding as and when needed or on a 'need to know' basis to fill gaps. Many tutors made bespoke resources that would not be perceived as childish by the adults they worked with. This was a priority. As one respondent stated:

*'My students (16–19s) would not like a programme that they would consider "childish". Also, their knowledge is very patchy, but they don't like being taught anything they already know. So, I tried to find the gaps'.*

The focus group interview data suggested that adult literacy tutors navigated a complex terrain with a population of learners who had diverse needs. Whilst both tutors and learners often understood the potential benefits of a systematic phonics approach, in practice phonics instruction most often sat alongside a range of other strategies adopted to meet learner needs. There was a clear message from respondents that a 'one size fits all' approach would not suffice. As one tutor stated:

*I feel that, while it can be touched on, it would be detrimental to the learner and the tutor to have a centralised phonics programme. This is an important aspect for lower-level learners but should not be focused on entirely. There is more to their literacy needs than just phonics.*

The emotional risk that comes with difficulties in reading, and the importance of creating a safe space to learn was spoken about in the focus groups. One of the adult learners described working on reading as hard and that one knows *‘the words and meaning but just the spelling or how to read it’*.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the motivation of learners and the need for authentic learning opportunities was a recurring theme in both the focus groups and the survey. As the final report stated, ‘learners commented favourably on their interest in reading books they could relate to, especially if they captured something of their own lives and where they could bring their knowledge to bear on the text’ (Moss et al., 2018: 29). In some contexts, giving priority to learner interests left little room for a systematic approach to teaching phonics. Yet one classroom-based focus group were using a highly systematic approach to phonics instruction with a clear emphasis on teaching decoding skills, integrated into meaningful reading and writing tasks pitched around the group’s interests and experiences and with plenty of opportunities for pairs and small groups to apply their growing phonics knowledge. As Millar et al. discuss in [Chapter 10](#), it is possible to build in an ethos of safety and respect for individual experience when working with adult learners on their decoding skills. It is certainly important to do so.

The final report for the funder identified several key messages, underlining that phonics instruction might indeed have a place in adult literacy tutors’ repertoire. The report also found that the functional skills curriculum, as envisaged in the policy document, would need to be transformed and translated for this successfully to happen, based on the following. That:

- ‘The principles of sequence and pace that will prove most efficacious for adult learners need fuller exploration.
- Adult literacy tutors should have access to appropriate training on how to choose appropriate phonics approaches to support diverse learners, and to understand and use this knowledge as one of many strategies that form part of a fuller teaching programme.
- Taking an existing phonics scheme designed for use in primary schools and importing it into the adult context is unlikely to be effective. Adult learners do not study under the same conditions as children. They also have clear preferences for materials that are aimed at them and make reference to adult life’ (Moss et al., 2018: 37–8).

We hoped these insights from research would create space for the meaningful translation and transformation of the policy into an adult-appropriate pedagogy that would work for tutors and learners.

## Translating phonics into a Post-16 teaching resource

The report to the funder (Moss et al., 2018) was favourably received and helped inform their next step: a tender to develop a toolkit of resources offering support to tutors implementing the new curriculum. We bid for and were awarded the contract based on our explicit intention to reframe how adult literacy tutors might approach the task of adopting phonics-based instruction. To make the toolkit we built in a strong partnership with sector practitioners and a wider group of adult literacy experts with long experience of providing dedicated in-service support to the Post-16 sector (those who work with adult learners outside of higher education – for example in an apprenticeship setting) (See Moss et al., 2019). This theme of valuing those who work with learners – regardless of their ‘training’ – is a critical issue when responding to literacy learning needs outside the traditional school context. This is reiterated in many chapters across this edited collection.

The fact that researchers worked alongside practitioner partners in the project and listened to one another’s points of view, opened up possibilities that would not have been the case if the researchers or practitioners had been working on the toolkit design alone. The resulting toolkit substantially redirected attention away from the long list of letter-sound correspondences that tutors might otherwise imagine they had to teach as a feat of memory through mindless drill. Instead, it reframed teacher and learner as co-partners in exploring the vagaries of the English spelling-system together, giving tutors enough knowledge to be able to work with their students with phoneme-grapheme correspondences as their lens. This included adopting some of the approaches set out in [Chapter 10](#) that afford adult learners’ dignity and respect as they build their knowledge of phoneme-graphemes.

The approach we took also kept in play key questions about the role of phonics in adult literacy learning for both researchers and practitioners. The materials were piloted at education centres and further education colleges. The Post-16 phonics toolkit is now part of a wider programme to support learners that has been developed in collaboration with practitioners working with adult learners. The ETF has provided continuing professional development for practitioners that encourages

them to adopt, test and adjust the approaches advocated in the toolkit (ETF, 2021) in the light of their learners' needs. In all these ways the dynamics to the *what* and *how* of knowledge-making in a cramped policy space were substantially reshaped.

## Reframing the space afforded by knowledge-making under contract: what can research do?

In this account, it is abundantly clear that the policy tools in place in English education, and indeed in global contexts described by the other authors in this volume, enable coercion from above in anticipation of compliance below, just as policy studies would predict. However, by adopting the shape-shifting lenses that the concepts of transfer, translation and transformation create, it is possible to find alternative spaces where things can still morph as they move. At the very least rejecting the simplistic question of 'what works' and insisting that it has to be tempered by the questions: 'for whom, in what contexts, and to what end?' opens up more possibilities for action than a fixed focus on the policy tools would allow.

The curriculum specification appendix, listing all the letter/sounds correspondences adult learners at each skills level are expected to know and on which they will be tested, stretches to over 30 pages. Setting out the curriculum in this way narrows the pedagogic imagination and shows little regard for practitioner knowledge. It neither respects the research literature, nor invites any proper scrutiny of the propositions the policy embeds. By contrast, ETF's tender specifications politely made clear that phonics pedagogy could not replicate primary school approaches and that further research was needed into phonics in the adult sector.

'There is an array of different schemes for teaching phonics for young children and DfE offers information and guidance to help schools select an effective phonics programme. However, using phonics strategies for adults is under-researched' (ETF, 2018)

The call for more research opened up the space for a different kind of conversation between researchers and practitioners about the efficacy of using phonics with adults, and what phonics in the adult sector might really need to look like if it were to work for the benefit of adult learners and tutors alike. We accepted that the act of transfer of phonics into the Post-16 sector could not be unmade but looked for space in the arena of

‘translation’ that might lead to reimagining the role that phonics could play in this setting. In so doing we cast phonics as a boundary object capable of being refashioned in the light of different interests. What marks out the resulting toolkit, as described by the ETF (2021), is that it:

Is created specifically for adult learners, explains how to put post-16 phonics approaches into practice in different settings, and explores how to adjust pace and sequence. The final section of the toolkit considers how phonics approaches fit more broadly within a rich post-16 literacy curriculum. It directly addresses the diversity of learners’ needs, knowledge and prior experience.

Such a description sits well with an asset-based and justice-oriented approach to literacy learning described by Harmey and Kabuto. It also challenges many of the principles upon which the current literacy curriculum in England is built. Indeed, a key facet of the toolkit are the opportunities for self-reflection, critical evaluation as well as the development of content knowledge that it affords. This echoes the types of learner-centred professional development described by the other authors in this edited volume (see for example Wagner, Chapter 11) and acknowledges the power dynamics of the tutor-tutee relationship (see Albers and Seely Flint, Chapter 6). We suggest that the processes of negotiation between researchers and funders that we describe in this case provide a set of principles to steer by in remaking the relationship between research and policy. They combine objective reviews of the research evidence with listening to the voices of practitioners and learners alike, making these essential starting points in identifying ‘what works, for whom, and why’.

The research contract enabled fruitful exchanges between all parties involved: the agency charged with supporting the policy, the researchers undertaking the investigation and the practitioners expected ultimately to make the policy work. These interactions stretched out the policy space, creating room to reconsider what might not work in translating phonics into adult literacy teaching as well as what would.

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### 3

## Assessing phonological awareness in early childhood: scaffolding pre-service teachers' play-based authentic assessments in field placements

Sara Michael Luna and Jody Silvester

Phonological awareness (PA) is the ability to hear and manipulate parts of words such as onset-rhyme, syllables and phonemes (Gillon, 2018) and is a primary focus of pre-kindergarten (four-year-old) literacy education. Children's PA development is best supported through oral, play-based activities including read-alouds, songs, chants and oral word games (Moats, 2020). Authentic classroom-based interactions, such as reading stories to children, not only provide opportunities for children to develop their oral language skills, but also provide an opportunity for skilled teachers to authentically assess children's PA levels (Michael Luna, 2021). Unfortunately, required kindergarten readiness assessments and pre-kindergarten curricula fall short of the recommended best practices. Readiness assessments tend towards deficit-oriented, standardised, norm-referenced and artificial outcomes-based tests (Riley et al., 2016), which are given only once or twice per year. Additionally, packaged curriculum does not align with research on learner phonological development and presents too many PA skills at a time (Brown et al., 2021). Because of the individual nature of PA development, one-size-fits-all curriculum packages do not meet the needs of all students in a group, leaving teachers to fill in the gaps. Unfortunately, many early childhood teachers do not have the PA pedagogic content knowledge (Shulman, 1986; Van Driel

and Berry, 2012) to identify or authentically assess oral language development (Carson, 2017; Moats, 2020; Stark et al., 2016). Studies indicate in-service teachers and pre-service teachers struggle with metalinguistic or PA content knowledge (Carson and Bayetto, 2018; Martinussen et al., 2015). To address the gap in teachers' PA knowledge, we describe how a field-based pre-service teacher literacy course at a university in Florida, USA, prepared undergraduate early childhood pre-service teachers to learn to identify and assess PA abilities of four-year-olds using children's literature and play-based practices.

Our project was developed as a part of the literacy and language methods requirements for teacher certification. In the second semester of the certification programme, the Early Reading, Writing and Language Arts course was the first field placement class and required pre-service teachers be placed in a Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) classroom for 8 to 10 weeks. VPK classes are state-sponsored, free for all four-year-olds. Although all VPK classrooms are state-funded and are required to use the same state language assessments, curriculum and teacher qualifications vary. The field placement VPK classrooms were located in both public and private community-based schools. Through our work with the schools, we noted a tension among curriculum, assessments, and developmentally appropriate practice (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Several of our field placement VPK sites focused on phonics and sight words rather than PA. Therefore, our challenge was to prepare our undergraduate pre-service teachers to be effective practitioners in meeting not only the needs of students, but also to perform in a larger system of varying regulations, standards and expectations.

In this chapter, we start by describing literacy, phonological awareness, and how they are taught. That is, we outline what (content) and how (pedagogy) (Bocko, 2004; Griffith et al., 2015) of the pedagogic content (Shulman, 1986) of PA. Second, we describe our professional training practice using transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997): (1) scaffolding participant-observation; (2) co-creating and scaffolding authentic assessments scripts for PA using children's literature; (3) independent practice of assessment with one four-year-old; and (4) group-based and individual reflection on the assessment experience. Then, we unpack our challenges and lessons learned, including helping pre-service teachers to: (1) understand the role social-emotional development plays in authentic literacy assessment; (2) explore the inconsistent outcomes of a four-year-old authentic assessment; and (3) navigate the tensions between state-required assessments and developmentally appropriate practice.

## Literacy and early childhood teacher education

Literacy is not only a set of skills needed to decode and comprehend text (Stark et al., 2016). It is also the socially constructed, community-based ways of reading the world and the word in order to participate in different Discourses (Gee, 2014). Pre-service teachers, who have already learned how to decode and comprehend texts, are learning to talk, interact and understand the world through the eyes and words of other teachers. Specifically, they are learning the pedagogic content (Shulman, 1986) related to PA and about developmentally appropriate practices (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). For teachers in Florida, emergent literacy standards include:

- Shows motivation for and appreciation of reading
- Shows age-appropriate phonological awareness
- Shows alphabetic and print knowledge
- Demonstrates comprehension of books read aloud (Office of Early Learning, 2020)

While each of these standards and the content that informs them were a part of our undergraduates' preparation, as faculty we found that PA was the least familiar to our pre-service teachers and the most challenging for them to master.

What is phonological awareness?

Phonological awareness is a metalinguistic skill that includes the *oral* ability to hear, discriminate, remember, and break down words into small units, such as onset-rhyme, syllables, phonemes, and then orally manipulate those units (Gillon, 2018). Table 3.1 outlines the full list of PA components. PA is the foundation for phonics, but unlike phonics, does not rely on written letters or words. Generally, PA development is sequential, with each ability reliant on previously acquired abilities (Moats, 2020).

How is phonological awareness 'taught' to young children?

To the untrained eye, teaching young children PA can be invisible in early childhood classrooms. Children's development is reliant on environmental exposure (Gillon, 2018; Moats, 2020). In other words, teachers must be trained to understand that the more children hear and play with language, such as poems, songs and rhyming stories, the faster a child

will develop PA skills. Pre-service teachers may see assessment of young children's abilities (see [Table 3.1](#)) as connected to literacy; however, they may not see the everyday classroom activities such as reading stories as contributing to children's development of PA or *an ear for language*. Four-year-old kindergarten curriculum highlights activities that ask teachers to model and scaffold oral word play. For example, within the /-at/ word family teachers model and scaffold the following: rhyme generation (cat, sat, mat, hat); manipulating first sound (cat with a /p/ at the beginning is pat); hearing and identifying first sounds (/c/, /p/ and /f/ all create different words when at the front of -at); and even phoneme blending (asking children what word the sounds /c/-/a/-/t/ create) (see Gillon, 2018: 176–211). Given the oral/aural nature of PA work, it might appear that children are only playing and not working on literacy, and this is the underlying challenge to pre-service teacher training.

## Description of the practice

In this section, we unpack the authentic assessment activity we developed to prepare our pre-service teachers to identify and assess children's PA abilities using children's literature and play in an educational environment. University Institutional Review Board/ Ethical permission was sought and approved (UCF STUDY00001753).

### Context

The programme was bound by two contexts: First, a university-based teacher education programme that prepares undergraduate students to work with young children (four to eight years) as state certified early childhood (ages four to eight years) teachers. The teacher education programme resides in a large public university, which serves more than 60,000 undergraduate students in the following categories designated by the University: 46.3 per cent white, 27.5 per cent Latinx, 10.3 per cent Black, 6.4 per cent Asian, and 4.3 per cent Multiracial. Racially, our programme reflects the university, and the majority of our pre-service teachers are female. The study took place during a one-semester early literacy course which included an 8-week field placement component. Eighty-four pre-service teachers participated in the project over a three-semester period. The field placements were in VPK classrooms. Our partner schools serve primarily Black (between 60 and 90 per cent) and Latinx (less than 10 per cent) four-year-olds. Nearly 100 per cent of the children qualified for free or reduced lunch.

**Table 3.1** Phonological development graph (adapted from Kilpatrick, 2016)

Level	Skill	Definition	Teacher Prompt	Child Production	Age
Word	Concept of word	Child can hear (& count) individual words in a sentence.	Teacher says 3–5-word sentence and asks child to count words they hear.	Child can raise a finger for each individual word they hear.	4 years
Rhyme	Rhyme recognition	Child can distinguish if two words rhyme or do not rhyme.	Teacher says two words and asks the child if they rhyme.	Child says yes if the words rhyme or no if the words do not rhyme.	4 years
Onset & Rhyme	Rhyme completion	Child listens to sentence and provides the correct rhyming word.	Teacher reads a sentence but does not say the last word of the sentence.	Child provides the rhyming word that fits the context of the sentence.	4–5 years
Onset & Rhyme	Rhyme production	Child produces a rhyming word (nonsense or real).	Teacher says a word and asks for a word that rhymes.	Child provides a rhyming word (nonsense or real).	5 years
Syllable	Syllable blending	Child hears syllable part and blends them together to state the word.	Teacher says two or more syllable parts.	Child blends and states the word the syllable parts create.	4–5 years

(continued)

**Table 3.1** (Cont.)

<b>Level</b>	<b>Skill</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Teacher Prompt</b>	<b>Child Production</b>	<b>Age</b>
Syllable	Syllable segmentation	Child hears a word and claps out each syllable part.	Teacher says a word (two, three, four syllable).	Child claps out the syllables of a given word (two, three, four syllables).	5 years
Syllable	Syllable deletion	Child can state the remaining part(s) of a word after deleting a syllable.	Teacher says a word and asks child to say the word without a syllable.	Child states the remaining part of the word once a syllable is deleted.	5 years
Phoneme	Phoneme isolation: initial sound	Child can state the sound (not the letter) heard at the beginning of a word.	Teacher asks child to say the beginning sound of a given word.	Child produces the sound (not the letter name) for the initial sound.	5 years
Phoneme	Phoneme isolation: final sound	Child can state the sound (not the letter) heard at the end of a word.	Teacher asks child to say the final sound of a given word.	Child produces the sound (not the letter name) for the final sound.	5–6 years
Phoneme	Phoneme blending	Child hears given phonemes and blends them together to state a word.	Teacher produces sounds (2 to 5 individual sounds).	Child hears, blends sounds (2 to 5 individual sounds) and states the word.	6 years



Phoneme segmentation	Child hears a whole word and can produce each individual sound of the word.	Teacher states a word with 2 to 5 sounds (not letters).	Child states each of the individual sounds within a given word (2 to 5 sounds [not letters]).	6 years
Phoneme deletion of initial sound	Child can state the remaining part of the word once the initial sound is deleted.	Teacher asks child to say a word without the initial sound.	Child states the remaining part of the word without the initial sound.	6 years
Phoneme deletion of final sound	Child can state the remaining part of the word once the final sound is deleted.	Teacher asks child to say a word without the final sound.	Child states the remaining part of the word without the final sound.	6 years
Phoneme deletion of first sound in consonant blend	Child can state the remaining part of the word once the initial sound of the consonant blend is deleted.	Teacher asks child to say a word without the initial sound of the consonant blend.	Child states the remaining part of the word without the initial sound of the consonant blend.	6–7 years
Phoneme substitution	Child can change a sound for another sound making a new word (initial, medial, final).	Teacher states a word and asks the child to change a sound in the word for another sound.	Child changes the sound in a word and states the new word.	6 years

## Data collection and analysis

In order to accurately portray the programme, this chapter includes ethnographic field notes and pre-service teacher documents such as assessments, lesson plans and lesson plan reflections, reflective journals, and created materials. The data was collected over one Fall and two Spring semesters in five early literacy courses sections. Field placements met weekly for a 2 hour and 50-minute period for 8 weeks at local VPK classrooms. All names in participant data and fieldnotes are pseudonyms.

The data were coded for patterns (Saldaña, 2021) to closely examine (1) roles of tools, systems, and context (specifically focusing on PA, assessments, and the participant-created manipulatives); and (2) characteristic ways of valuing, feeling, interacting, knowing, and believing (Gee, 2014: 58). The data was laid out on a timeline, cross-compared, and aligned. All data were coded and triangulated to contribute to a larger collective case study (Stake, 2010). To address subjectivity and the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the data was triangulated (researcher fieldnotes, participant reflections, and policy documents, such as state literacy standards) within and across cases over time (Stake, 2010), and created a systematic process for coding (Saldaña, 2021) and thick description (Geertz, 1973).

## Training pre-service teachers to assess phonological awareness

Our practice included three stages: (1) pre-field placement university-based course work, which resembles traditional literacy teacher education including lectures, reading and discussions on language and literacy development birth-to-age five; (2) field placement experience; and (3) university-based debriefing of field placement work. This chapter highlights the field placement.

Field placements met weekly for a 2 hour and 50-minute period for 8–10 weeks and was located in the collaborating partner school. The 170-minute experience was divided into three parts: 40-minute pre-service teacher meeting in which we set up the experience and answered questions; 90-minute observation or work with young children; 40-minute pre-service teacher meeting which would be used to review PA content, field questions, and prepare for the next experience. Our field-placement experience is segmented into seven parts:

- Week 1: Observation Protocol 1 (Visual Environmental Assessment)
- Week 2: Observation Protocol 2 (Aural Environmental Assessment)

- Week 3: Observation Protocol 3 (Focal Child Observation and Read Aloud)
- Week 4: Assessment 1 and 2: Concept of a Word and Rhyme Recognition
- Week 5: Assessments 3 and 4: Rhyme completion and Rhyme Production
- Week 6: Assessments 5–9: Syllable blending, syllable segmentation, syllable deletion (phoneme isolation of initial sound, phoneme isolation of final sound). Note: Most of the four-year old children have not mastered the abilities of phoneme isolation or higher; however, this material is still covered in the programme.
- Weeks 7–10, not reported on here, were designed for pre-service teachers to apply the PA abilities by creating and teaching four PA lesson plans (including a read aloud, drawing/writing, song/poem, and play-based centre activity).

Participant-observation: making the invisible visible to pre-service teachers

Because PA development is an oral/aural ability, there are no letters to point at or words to sound out. Our first goal was to scaffold our pre-service teachers' identification of PA content in a four-year-old class. However, before designing our authentic play-based PA assessment activity, we considered the skills and comfort levels of our pre-service teachers with young children and phonologic awareness. Most of our pre-service teachers had some experiences working with young children, but these experiences were primarily on personal relationships (such as an aunt or babysitter). We quickly realised that our pre-service teachers would not only need to learn the PA levels, but they would also need to learn to 'perform the role' of teacher (Gee, 2014).

In order to facilitate our pre-service teachers' introduction to the classrooms, we placed them as observers in the classrooms for three weeks. We used 40 minutes before the observations to guide the pre-service teachers through the protocol prompts as well as given general overviews of language development and PA. The 40 minutes after the observations are used to talk through what the pre-service teachers learned. The observations lasted approximately 90 minutes. All observations are written and submitted for review after full class discussions.

Observation protocol 1: visual environmental assessment

The pre-service teachers were asked to map out and photograph literacy-focused areas of the classroom (without children due to the need for

privacy). They were asked to take special note of play-based centres, such as the kitchen, block and dress-up centres. During the post-observation class discussions, faculty asked the pre-service teachers to share their photographs and classroom maps in order to discuss the connections to literacy and oral language development. For example, one pre-service teacher, Marissa, pointed out the baby dolls in the corner of the kitchen centre and noted that two girls were quietly singing *The Itsy-bitsy Spider* to the dolls. Marissa continued her observation, ‘...at first, I thought they were just playing, and it didn’t matter. They were just being four. But now that we talked about how important rhyming is to language development, I can see by singing those songs, they were working on their phonemic awareness’. The visual connections to classroom activities prompted the pre-service teachers to make connections between space use, centres, play and language development.

### Observation protocol 2: aural environmental assessment

We asked the pre-service teachers to focus on listening to class interactions, with prompting questions such as:

- What songs, chants or stories does the teacher use with the children?
- How does the teacher talk to the children during morning meeting?
- How does the teacher read a story to the children? What questions does she ask? How does she get their attention before she begins the story?
- What evidence of PA development is visible in the classroom? Are there pictures of rhyming words or rhyming books?

The second observation was conducted after the pre-service teachers are introduced to concepts related to PA, and they were asked to listen for evidence during classroom interactions. Janet, a pre-service teacher, pointed out: ‘I didn’t realize it the first day, but the chants that Ms. Kim does with her children were working on syllables. The kids loved it. You could hear the energy. *I say pan, you say cake. Pan (children: cake) Pan (children: cake).*’

### Observation protocol 3: focal child observation and read aloud

The pre-service teachers were asked to get to know one young child (learn their likes, dislikes and preferences). The pre-service teachers were

encouraged to select a children's picture book(s) based on the child's preferences. For example, *Frozen 2* books were very popular with the young girls. Reading the book with the young children helped the pre-service teacher not only provide an opportunity to play with language, but also helped the pre-service teachers gain knowledge on four-year-old self-regulation, attention, ability to follow simple instructions, express awareness of feelings in self and others, anger/frustration management and listening to others (Johnston, 2018).

### Co-constructing an authentic assessment with children's literature and play

After the three weeks of participant observation, we introduced each of the PA abilities (see Table 3.1) with examples from books, songs or poems. For example, for Rhyme Recognition, we defined the concept of rhyme as when the end of the word sounds the same (see Table 3.1). We pointed out that children may not know the word *rhyme* and encouraged the pre-service teachers to define the word every time they say it.

We scaffolded pre-service teacher identification of PA skills and development in the classroom. For example, for Rhyme Recognition, we highlighted several rhyming books, such as *Good Night Moon* (Brown, 1984) or songs, such as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. In each text, we asked pre-service teachers to find rhymes or evidence of the PA concept we were working on. We also examined texts that do not have a lot of rhyming words but are very popular with children, such as *Batman and Batgirl Unite!* (Dahl, 2021) or *Frozen 2 Little Golden Book* (Cote, 2019) and walked the pre-service teachers through creating their own rhyming pairs from or related to the texts. For example, Batman gave us two obvious word families: -at and -an (bat-cat-sat-mat or man-can-ran-hand). Finally, we demonstrated how the Rhyme Recognition can be incorporated into play. We also introduced rhyming toys or manipulatives into a free play area and offered playdough, paint or markers to create visual representations of rhymes from a story. We emphasised pictographs and oral representation (not a word spelled out).

Next, we asked our pre-service teachers to connect the concept of rhyme recognition to their experience observing in the classroom and reading a story with their focal child. One of the pre-service teachers, Tiffany, and her four-year-old focal child, Liz, read *Do Princesses wear hiking boots?* (Coyle, 2003) because Liz loved all things princess. After our discussion and examples of rhyme recognition, Tiffany noted that her text

had some challenging vocabulary rhymes such as ‘Do princesses have a favourite vegetable? They find them all delectable’ (Coyle, 2003: 21–2). As a class, we discussed how or if the rhyme vegetable-delectable should be included. We also modelled how the PA ability might be assessed using a text or play. After modelling both the instructions and the assessment prompt several times, we asked the pre-service teachers to work in pairs to identify places in the children’s books that allowed for the integration of PA assessment. A challenge our pre-service teachers uncovered in this paired work was that not all children’s books have rhymes or multi-syllable words. We supported the pre-service teachers to develop a list of words that were related in theme, but not necessarily written in the children’s book.

We asked the pre-service teachers to create word games for each level of PA ability (see Table 3.1) using the children’s book text and theme. As homework (or in pairs in class), we asked the students to *write a script* of the PA word game explaining what they expected the child to do. Here is an example of Mary’s sample script:

**Teacher:** Hello Jasmine. Remember the book we read last week on *Frozen*? What was your favourite part?

**Jasmine:** (I expect the child find part in book.)

**Teacher:** I liked that part too. You know what my favourite part was? (Turn to page 10.) I liked it when Olaf falls down in the leaves. Olaf isn’t very tall, and he certainly does fall. Do you hear how fall and tall sound alike at the end? Do you know how we call it when two words sound alike at the end?

**Jasmine:** Rhyme! (I think she knows this word because I heard her teacher say it.)

**Teacher:** They rhyme! I am wondering if we can play a game about rhyming. I am going to say two words and I want you to say ‘yes’ if they rhyme. If they do not rhyme, I want you to say ‘no.’

**Teacher:** Let’s try a test ‘snow and man’ do they sound alike at the end? Do they rhyme?

Mary also provided a list of eight pairs of rhyming and non-rhyming words.

Next, in paired work, we asked the pre-service teachers to practice their scripts with a partner, pretending that the partner was their focal child. We encouraged the partner to ‘channel their inner four-year-old’ while practising the script. The pairs shared back with the whole group any trouble they ran into, such as unexpected rhyme families. For

example, children may intentionally or unintentionally produce rhyming words that are inappropriate for the school content, such as words in the -it family. We monitored the groups and gave written or verbal feedback on the following areas:

- Clarity of instruction and definition of concept.
- Meaningful connections for the child.
- Ways to respond to potential confusion or distraction.

Finally, the scripts were shared back with the full group in order to evaluate their effectiveness and developmental appropriateness with young children.

Independent practice for assessments, activities and play with one four-year-old

Each pre-service teacher worked with one focal child spending 90 minutes in the classroom. The PA assessment took 3–10 minutes (or approximately the time it takes to read aloud a story to the child). The remaining time in the classroom was used to interact with the students and support literacy development by creating a language-rich environment through narration and questions, drawing, singing, reading a book and playing with the child. The pre-service teachers were asked to take notes on their interactions.

Feedback loop: group and individual reflection

We found that the most powerful part of our practice was in the feedback loops where students experienced transformative learning through experience (Mezirow, 1997). While feedback was woven throughout our process, the depth of reflection and engagement with the content was evident in the 40 minutes we reserved at the end of the session and after practising the assessment with the child. The pre-service teacher discussions tended to be about how literacy learning, and specifically PA development, was part of the holistic development of a child. For example, Jen described her frustration with the inconsistency in her young children's assessment performance: 'Juan was rhyming last week. I swear. We were playing with words and saying bat-hat-mat-cat. And then today, nothing!' Michelle voiced her surprise at her young child's unwillingness to read a story: 'She just wanted to play in the kitchen. So, I decided not to read the book. I picked up a mug that was in the kitchen centre and used it to make rhyming words for Nisha. It worked, but my whole plan was out the window!'

After the group discussion, we also asked each pre-service teacher to write a reflection (usually at home) on their experience giving the assessment and working with their focal child. These written reflections were included in an assignment sheet that was turned into the instructor. The assignment sheet required the student to provide (1) the PA level (definition and description); (2) the script used to assess the child; (3) a list of any additional words used (such as rhyming pairs); and (4) a reflection on the experience. Instructors gave feedback on these one-page assignments and reflections before they were included in a final 'focal child literacy portfolio' (which includes the observations, assessment and lesson plans).

## Lessons learned: learning to be flexible

Pre-service literacy instruction can take the form of lectures, readings, peer interactions, and field placement or practicum experiences (Zeichner and McDonald, 2007). Scaffolded application of explicitly taught content with real children promotes pre-service teacher learning, but the pre-service teachers must be supported in pedagogic content (Shulman, 1985), in this case PA. In [Chapter 4](#), Harmey and Kabuto provide another example of how video analysis can support pre-service literacy professionals' pedagogic content knowledge in teaching reading.

Developing collaborative relationships with local school districts (classroom teachers), Head Start centres, and community-based pre-schools by the teaching faculty within a programme was a challenge. VPK classrooms held inconsistent practices as they used different packaged curriculum and interpreted the state guidelines in different ways. While cooperating teachers usually employed research-based pedagogy, there were several instances where the state-endorsed curriculum presented flawed understandings of phonological awareness or content (such as mis-categorisation of a science concept). We used these tensions to support pre-service teacher critical thinking by asking our students to think about the flaws in the curriculum and strategise how they may address the challenge. Kabuto and colleagues ([Chapter 8](#)) provide additional challenges in situating teacher preparation clinical experiences within community-based organisations. Many of the VPK classrooms we vetted did not focus on PA development and play-based curriculum, but instead asked four-year-olds to learn phonics and sight words. Many of the four-year-old classrooms look like 1st- and 2nd-grade classrooms from 10 years ago. The tensions between the assessment regimen/content pushdown



and developmentally appropriate practice (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009) is palpable and must be critiqued with the pre-service teachers during discussions. Braden and colleagues (Chapter 1) remind us of the importance of building critical consciousness into teacher education classes that focus on the local knowledge of schools, communities, and families. Another obstacle is lack of mentor teachers for pre-service teacher placement due to the limited number of certified, qualified mentor teachers and the increasing pressure teachers experience to meet current academic demands for their students.

Our pre-service teachers learned that four-year-old children do not act the way a textbook, or even a video, might suggest. The teachers came to see that social and emotional development played a role in the literacy development of four-year-old children who struggle with executive functioning skills such as self-regulation, focus, inhibitory control, and working memory (Johnston, 2018). Other contextual factors, such as food insecurity and instability of housing, can also directly influence a child's ability to engage in school. Our pre-service teachers came to see that giving an assessment tells them what that child could do in that moment. Formative assessments, such as the one we described in this chapter, need to be given frequently and over time in order to get a full understanding of the child's abilities.

As early childhood literacy educators, we have come to believe that presenting our pre-service teachers not only with content, such as PA, but also with the opportunity to try out what they learned with young children has a large pay-off. Our pre-service teachers come away with what (content) and how (pedagogy) (Bocko, 2004; Griffith et al., 2015) of PA and a deeper understanding of young children's holistic development. As a result, our pre-service teachers were able to identify, define and assess the invisible content and pedagogy of PA in a meaningful and playful way with their four-year-old focal child.

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## 4

# Using video analysis to support the professional knowledge of literacy professionals

Sinéad Harmey and Bobbie Kabuto

In the United States, the International Literacy Association (ILA) has played a significant role in defining the multiple roles of specialised literacy professionals, as well as the unique challenges in training and preparing them to take on responsibilities that range from instructing and assessing students to supporting teachers through professional development opportunities (ILA, 2015). Having already completed university-based education programmes, future specialised literacy professionals bring with them their structured in-service preparation and the unstructured professional knowledge learned from working as in-service classroom teachers (Oliveira, Lopes and Spear-Swerling, 2019). University-based specialised literacy preparation programmes, and indeed any literacy educator programme whether adhering to formal standards or not, must find ways to meet candidates where they are in their skills and dispositions towards the teaching and assessment of reading and writing, rather than assuming that candidates come to the experience with little knowledge of how to support reading and writing in classroom settings. This chapter addresses how we as teacher educators found ways to support candidates' effective assessment and pedagogical practices as context-based and relational to the students they worked with, rather than universal and standardised (Smagorinsky, 2018). We agree with Argyris and Schon (1974), who, in referring to adult learning more generally, stated that there are distinct differences between espoused theory and theory-in-use. In other words, we may say that a

certain theory guides our actions, particularly theories we are expected to espouse, but actions taken are more likely to be guided by unconscious patterns of behaviour. As teacher educators, we wanted to explore ways in which we could provide opportunities to interrogate these differences using video as tools for self-reflection to develop candidates' professional knowledge of reading.

We will use the term *candidates* to designate students in the university-based literacy preparation programme and the term *literacy professional* to refer to the general population of specialised literacy professionals. This chapter will focus on how we used video analysis of one-to-one teaching interactions between literacy candidates and their students in the context of a university-based literacy practicum. Through the video analysis, we investigated the candidates' professional knowledge of reading through the concept of in-the-moment assessment of oral reading events. We frame our discussion on professional knowledge through the concept of literacy content knowledge (Lenski et al., 2013).

## Professional knowledge of reading

Shulman (1986) outlines three types of content knowledge: (a) subject matter content knowledge; (b) pedagogical content knowledge; and (c) curricular knowledge. According to Lenski et al. (2013), the application of these types of knowledge is an indicator of effective teaching and, we argue, come together to support the development of future literacy professionals' overall professional literacy knowledge.

### Subject matter content knowledge

Subject matter content knowledge refers to the knowledge that candidates acquire in a particular discipline. As Shulman (1986) describes, this type of content knowledge goes beyond learning the facts, domains or frames within a discipline. Subject matter content knowledge also includes learning the structure of a discipline and the ways that a discipline is organised through complementary and competing theoretical frameworks. In the field of literacy teaching and learning, this type of content knowledge requires that candidates appreciate the diverse and often competing theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the field of literacy and acts in tandem with the understanding that there is no singular view to the discipline. This can be potentially challenging for candidates as it may stand in contrast to local policy in a given context.

For example, in England, policy (Department for Education, 2021) promotes one theoretical framework, the Simple View of Reading as the ‘official’ framework for the teaching of reading. Content knowledge, therefore, equips the candidate with the understanding that competing interests and perspectives can influence the types of assessments, instruction, and materials used within school contexts.

The ways in which theoretical frameworks can affect both assessment and instruction were exemplified in a study we, the authors, conducted on reading records. Reading records are commonly used reading assessment tools in which the administrator records the oral reading behaviours of a reader. In a study of the differences between two reading records – running records (Clay, 2019) and the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) (Goodman, Watson and Burke, 2005) – we found that, while both documented the oral reading behaviours of readers, each tool measured oral reading in a different way leading to metatheoretical differences between the two records (Harmey and Kabuto, 2018). When a single oral reading event was analysed through both running record and miscue analysis procedures, therefore, there are times when the results construct conflicting profiles of readers. This demonstrates how important the development of subject matter content knowledge is. Developing subject matter content knowledge recognises that candidates need to go beyond the surface of theories and frameworks of literacy to explore how oral reading assessments, like running records and RMI, have metatheoretical differences and socially construct concepts of success and struggle for readers (Hikida, 2018). As teacher educators, we are particularly interested in equipping candidates with the ‘theoretical dexterity’ to both adopt a stance towards assessment and instruction but also develop an appreciation of other perspectives and the ways an alternative lens may support the learner.

## Pedagogical content knowledge

Researchers have taken a particular interest in pedagogical content knowledge over the years (Gess-Newsome, 1999). Pedagogical content knowledge refers to the ‘ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others’ (Shulman, 1986: 9) and requires knowing both the learner – their personal and educational histories, development, interests, and backgrounds – and the subject matter content. Researchers have convincingly argued that pedagogical content knowledge is not learning about universal teaching strategies or about teaching to a script. It can be particularly challenging for candidates to

develop pedagogical content knowledge if teaching literacy in educational contexts involves scripted commercial programmes which can potentially de-skill teachers (Duncan-Owens, 2009).

To better understand future literacy professionals' pedagogical content knowledge, we explored how our candidates engaged in in-the-moment assessment of readers. In-the-moment assessment involves the moment-to-moment analysis of readers' oral reading behaviours and comprehension. It requires that literacy professionals observe reading behaviours through theoretical frames of reference as they interpret their readers' oral reading patterns. We, therefore, explored the candidates' theoretical orientations that mixed personal experiences, beliefs, and histories and their experiences of teaching reading and writing within their school-based context at the time. The idea of theoretical orientations in reading has a long history, and Harste and Burke (1977) described these orientations as the 'particular knowledge and belief systems held towards reading, that is, those deep philosophical principles that guide teachers to establish expectations about student behaviour and the host of decisions they must make as they teach reading lessons' (353). We argue that theoretical orientations can influence how candidates engaged in the moment-to-moment assessment of reading behaviours, which in turn influenced how they responded to and provided feedback to their readers.

### Curricular knowledge

Curricular knowledge refers to the 'stuff' of curriculum, or as Shulman (1986) described, the full range of programmes, the different types of instructional materials, and 'set of characteristics that serve both the indication and contraindications for the use of curriculum or programme materials in particular circumstances' (10). Reading assessment tools designed to level, like informal reading inventories, can construct notions of reading ability so that readers are positioned as at-, above-, or below-grade level readers. In preparing future literacy professionals, we challenged the 'levelling saturation' described by Kontovourki (2012). Levelling curricular materials, whereby books in classroom and school libraries were colour-coded by levels or placed in plastic bins with little regard to the purpose of the reading, i.e., independent reading, guided reading, or home reading, creates a classroom context where students are prevented from reading books which may interest them, decrease motivation, and may 'disorient teachers from students' reading practice'

(Kontovourki, 2012: 153). Similarly, Hoffman (2017) described the unintended consequences of levelling, which include reading levels taken up within readers' identities, the narrative of levelling supporting a deficit-oriented lens towards reading and students, limiting access to a range of books, materials, and genres, and students defaulting to levelling when finding books.

Critically analysing the purpose of levelling, we provided candidates with the tools to examine book characteristics, text complexity, and gauge readers' interests and background knowledge (Beers and Probst, 2020). In sum, candidates needed to know how to work with readers and not levels because we had a very basic premise that guided our philosophy to the teaching of reading: To become better readers, readers have to read authentic, diverse texts.

## Organisation of the literacy practicum

The literacy practicum occurred in a one-on-one setting for 1 hour, 15 minutes one day a week for 14 weeks. During this time the candidates worked with a student from kindergarten to the 6th grade (aged about 5 to 12). The literacy practicum is the final clinical course that prepares candidates to work in the role of a literacy specialist, who teaches and supports students in educational settings. The literacy practicum also serves local community families, who bring their children to the literacy practicum so that they can work with our candidates. The kindergarten to 6th-grade students who participate in the practicum come from families whose incomes range from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Regardless of the clinical setting, the majority of the students spoke English-only in the home and represented diverse racial backgrounds: a quarter self-identified as Asian, Black, Hispanic, or White.

There was a total of 39 candidates. All candidates held bachelor's degrees and initial certification as classroom teachers, while eight had already earned a master's degree and were completing the programme to receive an advanced certificate issued by the state. Approximately 50 per cent had less than three years of teaching experience and 25 per cent of the candidates taught grades 3 (aged 8 to 9) to 6. While 10 per cent of the candidates taught in a pre-kindergarten setting (with children under 5), 15 per cent taught in kindergarten to 2nd-grade classrooms. Sixty seven per cent of the candidates self-reported as White, 12 per cent as Asian, 6 per cent as Hispanic, and 15 per cent as another ethnicity.

Candidates were provided with a framework for teaching which (a) aligned with research in terms of best practice in literacy teaching and learning, and (b) reflected the ILA standards for literacy professionals (see [Table 4.1](#)). At the same time, we designed the activities within the framework to provide the freedom and opportunity to engage in the reading and writing of authentic texts. [Table 4.2](#) provides an outline of the overall 14 weeks. Candidates were asked to assess their students for two weeks and write an evaluation that examined how the assessment data

**Table 4.1** Practicum lesson framework elements (adapted from Coffey, Hubbard, Holbein and Delacruz, 2013)

<b>Rereading interesting, engaging texts</b>	Interest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wigfield et al., 2010</li> </ul> Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gambrell and Marinak, 2009</li> </ul> Fluency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martens et al., 2007</li> </ul>	Create a supportive literacy environment that fosters reading and writing by using instructional approaches and curriculum materials that create lifelong readers and writers. [ILA 2,4]
<b>Running record/miscue analysis</b>	Ongoing progress monitoring and assessment for learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scanlon et al., 2010</li> <li>• Clay, 2019</li> <li>• Goodman, 1973</li> </ul>	Design a social environment that is low risk and includes choice, motivation, and scaffolded support to optimize students' opportunities for learning to read and write. [ILA 5.2]
<b>Word study</b>	Phonics and word recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vadasy and Sanders, 2011</li> <li>• Blachman et al., 2004</li> </ul> Phonemic Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snowling and Hulme, 2012</li> </ul> Vocabulary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biemiller, 2005</li> </ul> Spelling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bear et al., 2012</li> </ul>	Use both formal and informal methods to assist in assessing student growth and development. [ILA 3] Use appropriate and varied instructional approaches, including those that develop word recognition, language comprehension, strategic knowledge, and reading–writing connections. [ILA 2.2]
<b>Writing</b>	Writing connected texts/strategy instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graham et al., 2012</li> </ul>	
<b>Reading a new book</b>	Reading connected texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May et al., 2013</li> <li>• Denton et al., 2013</li> <li>• Reutzel et al., 2018</li> </ul>	



created and constructed an overall profile of their readers. Candidates used a variety of formative assessments, such as reading and writing observations, conducting reading records, interviews and interest/reading and writing inventories, and Qualitative Reading Inventory-6 (Leslie and Caldwell, 2017). Candidates also administered norm-referenced assessments, including the Test of Early Written Language-3 (Hresko, Herron, Peak, and Hicks, 2012) and the Slosson Oral Reading Test-Revised 3rd Edition (SORT-R3) (Slosson and Nicholson, 2002), in order to examine how assessments may create complementary or competing profiles of readers and writers.

**Table 4.2** 14-week literacy tutoring programme

<b>Week</b>	<b>Assessment/ Instruction</b>
Prior to week 1	Receive information about your student Prepare assessment materials Contact student's parents
1	Administer Qualitative Reading Inventory 6 and Slosson Oral Reading Test (standardised word reading test) Observe and record reading behaviors
2	Administer Test of Early Written Language (TEWL) and Words their Way (WTW) (Spelling Inventory)
3	Lesson 1
4	Lesson 2 Observe and record reading behaviors
5	Lesson Plan 3
6	Lesson Plan 4 Observe and record reading behaviors
7	Lesson Plan 5
8	Lesson Plan 6 Observe and record reading behaviors
9	Lesson Plan 7
10	Lesson Plan 8 Observe and record reading behaviors
11	Lesson Plan 9
12	Lesson Plan 10 Observe and record reading behaviors instead of word study, administer WTW
13	Lesson Plan 11 Instead of writing, administer TEWL and Slosson Oral Reading Test
14	Parent Conference

The evaluation also listed goals for the next 10 weeks. Candidates were required to conduct a reading record, running record, or miscue analysis of their students every other week. The reading record provided a means of examining and formatively assessing both the oral reading and comprehension strategies that readers were using.

Candidates were required to include authentic reading and writing activities in each lesson, and reading lessons included asking students to reread familiar texts and new texts either silently or orally (see [Table 4.1](#)) The oral reading activities were the ideal context to examine the moment-to-moment interactions between the candidates and readers to explore candidates' pedagogical content knowledge on the teaching of reading.

## In-the-moment assessment of reading

Candidates conducted video observations of their lessons at least once during the first 10 weeks. Video observations provided several benefits in the practicum. We found that using video observations was less intrusive to the candidate and student interactions. Using videos eased the nervousness that candidates often expressed when being observed. In addition, the use of video observations allowed candidates to watch and reflect on their own assessment and teaching practices. Vetter and Schieble (2016) discussed the ways that video analysis supports the identity work, or 'the opportunity for teachers to reflect on how they construct and enact teacher identities within the moment-to-moment interactions and over time' (1). Video analysis was not only a critical tool for teachers, but also for us in deconstructing candidates' developing professional literacy knowledge.

As a starting point for exploring our candidates' orientations towards reading, we surveyed our candidates with Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) (DeFord, 1985). The TORP consists of 36 questions about reading and reading instruction that candidates responded to on a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The TORP outlines three orientations: Phonics, Skills, and Whole Language.

- Phonics: Emphasises units smaller than word units (i.e., letter and sound) with the movement towards word units and then to comprehension. This orientation focuses on systematic phonics instruction and the practice of decoding letters and letter combinations. Literacy professionals with this approach tend to use levelled texts with controlled text and language.

- **Skills:** Focus is placed on building sight words and word vocabulary. This orientation places phonics instruction within the context of words and word attack skills. Literacy professionals with this approach will tend to select levelled texts that allow for readers to use word attack skills to increase vocabulary through the context of the text.
- **Whole Language:** Uses of quality literature for instruction and takes a holistic approach that emphasises a sense of story, reading experience, background knowledge. This orientation places the teaching of letters and words within the context of the reading experience. Literacy professionals who take this approach will tend to select texts with natural language and authentic, high-quality children’s literature.

In the cohort of 39 candidates who were enrolled in the literacy practicum, 32 of the candidates’ TORP suggested that they had skills-based orientation towards reading. Seven held a phonics-based orientation, while zero held a whole language-based orientation. The results were not that surprising as many candidates worked in schools that used curricular models that supported a skills-based approach. Furthermore, a whole language approach has been a point of contention over the years, leading to many schools and educational policymakers disavowing its use in schools (Kolker, 2006). To take a more in-depth look at candidate and student interactions to explore if the TORP was an accurate portrayal of candidates’ theoretical orientations towards reading, we conducted a discourse analysis of the candidates’ video observations. For purposes here, we introduce two candidates, Susie and Jane (both names are pseudonyms). Susie’s responses to the TORP placed her in the phonics theoretical orientation, and Jane’s responses placed her in the skills theoretical orientation. For both Susie, and later Jane, we will focus on the new reading portion of the lesson plan.

## **Susie’s professional literacy knowledge: taking a meaning-centric approach to reading**

Susie self-identified as a White female and was teaching between 3 and 7 years when she was enrolled in the literacy practicum. At the time of the practicum, she held two teaching certifications as a classroom teacher and was a pre-kindergarten teacher with 18 students in her classroom.

Susie’s student for the practicum was Tommy, a 10-year-old boy. Susie described Tommy’s performance on his initial assessment

as ‘Based on the results of the testing, Tommy is an above average reader and writer for his age and grade level’. Based on the initial assessments, Susie decided to read the book *Milkweed* by Jerry Spinelli with Tommy. *Milkweed* is about a boy named Jew who is an orphan boy living on the streets of Warsaw during the Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II. At each session, Susie and Tommy read chapters together for the rereading and the new portions of the lesson plan. Eight weeks into their sessions together, Susie conducted the video observation. The lesson for the video observation focused on differentiating generalisations, inferencing, and drawing conclusions, which they had been working on for several lessons prior. Susie started the lesson with the new reading, Chapter 8 of *Milkweed*.

### Evaluating student knowledge

Throughout their interactions, Susie assessed Tommy’s knowledge about the reading in the context of his background knowledge. To start the lesson, Susie began with the following dialogue:

Susie said, ‘So, we’re going to start off with, remember last week we spoke of inferencing and predictions. So, I just want to talk about the prior knowledge. Remember what we were inferencing about?’ Showing a picture of a birthday party, Susie asked, ‘What can we infer looking at these pictures?’

‘Yeah, there’s a birthday party going on,’ replied Tommy. ‘The girl, I don’t know, is probably going to blow up the candles and make a wish. Then they’re going to eat the cake and then go home.’

‘Now why are you thinking that?’ asked Susie.

Tommy answered, ‘Because most birthday parties happen like that.’

Susie’s goal in the short segment was to structure the lesson based on the previous lesson when Susie and Tommy discussed inferencing. Using the picture of the birthday party from the previous lesson, Susie opened the lesson by asking, ‘So, remember what we were inferencing about?’ After Tommy responded, Susie probed further into his thinking. After Susie started the lesson with this introduction, she asked Tommy to read the chapter.

## Assessing comprehension

As Susie transitioned from building a context that differentiated inferring from drawing conclusions, she asked Tommy to read [Chapter 8](#) of the book. During the reading Susie stopped at predetermined points to assess Tommy's comprehension as illustrated in the following dialogue:

Susie said, 'Okay. Remember you're going to read the paragraph. And you're going to make a generalisation and draw some kind of conclusion leading up to the next paragraph. I'm also listening for accuracy. So, go ahead.'

Tommy began reading [Chapter 8](#) and Susie stopped Tommy after he read two pages.

'Okay, we'll stop there. What is going on so far?' asked Susie.

Tommy described, 'That he went to this house because he was running away from this woman, I don't know. But then he went to the backyard of this little girl's house and then found a tomato plant and he knew it was the last ones because he didn't find any. So, then he ate it because he was so hungry. This kid who was smoking would puff smoke in his face. He had food, I forgot what it was, and he was like, "Oh, my food." And then they both laughed and then picked it up and ate it. And then he went to the tomato plant and then ate it.'

'Awesome,' said Susie.

Tommy continued, 'And then he saw the little girl eating and then she said it's not like nice to steal.'

Although Susie stated that she would be listening for accuracy in his oral reading, there was little evidence that she did. When Tommy made miscues, Susie did not stop Tommy or refer to his miscues. Rather she focused on the larger context of the story to focus on drawing conclusions as illustrated in the following dialogue:

Tommy continued to read [Chapter 8](#) and Susie stopped Tommy and said, 'We're going to continue reading for a little more. What can you say from page 34?'

‘Probably going to the party with people and then the kids are going to ask who is he?’ said Tommy.

Susie replied, ‘It’s your conclusion. It’s your generalisation. What do you know about the invitation? If someone invites you, there is a possibility you’ll go, you’ll show up and then what would happen then? You were saying that they might have asked him, right? We’ll go back and get the evidence and put it back together. Continue to read.’

Tommy continued to read the chapter.

Susie’s moment-to-moment assessment of Tommy’s reading had little to do with a decoding approach to reading. Within the context of the literacy practicum, Susie’s moment-to-moment assessment and interactions with Tommy took a meaning-centric approach to reading so her focus was on Tommy’s comprehension rather than his oral reading behaviours. Susie’s approach could have been influenced by the initial evaluation that indicated that Tommy was reading above what would be expected of a 5th-grade reader.

## Jane’s professional literacy knowledge: taking an accuracy approach to reading

Jane identified as a White female who had been teaching between one and three years. At the time of the practicum, Jane was a 2nd-grade (working with children aged between seven and eight years of age) teacher, who held four certifications. In the practicum setting, similar to Susie, Jane worked with a 10-year-old student, Kaylee. Jane, however, found a more diverse range in Kaylee’s initial assessments results. Using the QRI-6, Jane found that Kaylee’s independent level was reading 2nd-grade level texts. During the video observation, Jane worked with Kaylee to select the book *Junie B. Jones and a Little Monkey Business* to read as their reread and new reading activities. Jane organised the lesson so that Kaylee reread portions of [Chapter 5](#) to lead up to the new reading section of the lesson for [Chapter 6](#) of *Junie B. Jones*.

Responding to student knowledge on smaller-than-word units

Jane spent a significant amount of time responding to Kaylee’s knowledge of small units like letters and sounds when coming across words that Kaylee

did not know. Jane opened the lesson with introducing two new vocabulary words from the chapter: *beauteous* and *genuine*. In discussing each word, however, Jane did little to discuss the meaning of the word or how it is used in the story and took Kaylee's lead in discussing the first letter of the word.

Jane said, 'Good job. What do you think that would be? And now turn the page. Now we have the word *genuine*.'

'On this page?' asked Kaylee. 'Doesn't "genuine" start with a "G"?''

'Very good,' responded Jane. 'What does it sound if it's a...,' Jane wrote a 'J' on the piece of paper.

'"G" and "J," sounds like /j/,' said Kaylee.

Jane confirmed, 'Sounds like a /j/. That's why I wanted to point that one out to you. Let's turn now to the beginning.'

After the dialogue above, Jane asked Kaylee to turn to the first page of the chapter and start to read. Kaylee began having a difficult time with the word *recess*, the first word of the chapter.

'Re...,' said Kaylee.

'Yes.'

'Re...'

'Look at the beginning,' said Jane.

'Re...e...,' Kaylee tried.

'So, what does that say? /Re/... so now we have the ending. Well what sound can this letter make?'

Kaylee asked pointing to the 'S', 'This one?'

'Yes.'

'That's the /s/ sound,' said Kaylee.

Although Jane and Kaylee found the important sounds in the word, this dialogue continued for 25 turns until Jane confirmed Kaylee's attempt at the word by repeating the word 'recess,' and pointing to the letters in the word.

### Assessing for accuracy

Jane's evaluation of how Kaylee used letters and sounds worked hand in hand with her assessment of Kaylee's accurate oral reading behaviours. Jane stopped Kaylee at almost every point she made a miscue as illustrated in the excerpt below when Kaylee read *stream* for *steam*. After

Kaylee sounded uncertain of her substitution of *stream* for *steam*, Jane provided Kaylee with the following feedback.

Jane said, ‘So just take the /r/ sound out.’

‘Stream?’ Kaylee attempted.

‘No, /r/ sound. No /r/ sound. Just...’

‘Steam,’ answered Kaylee.

‘Yeah.’

‘What is steam?’ asked Kaylee. ‘Is that a science word?’

‘Yeah, it is a science word like when you make water really hot and steam comes out,’ described Jane.

Kaylee repeated the idea, ‘In science, we call it “steam”.’

As Jane assessed Kaylee’s reading accuracy, she responded with word-solving strategies that focused on breaking down letter-sound relationships. There was one time when Jane responded to Kaylee’s miscue with a meaning-centred approach. Jane read *sweater* as *sweet* in the sentence, ‘Then Lucille jumped in her red sweet.’ Jane stopped Kaylee and said, ‘Does that make sense?’ and asked her to look at the picture. Kaylee self-corrected to *sweater*.

Jane’s moment-to-moment interactions and assessment of Kaylee’s accurate reading behaviours resulted in the new reading portion of the lesson lasting 27 minutes. During this time, Kaylee read five pages of [Chapter 6](#) and did not complete the chapter. Based on the lesson plan, Jane planned to spend 25 minutes on the new reading section. At the end of the reading, Jane did not ask the comprehension questions, most likely because Kaylee did not finish reading the text.

According to the TORP, Jane’s responses indicated that she fell into a skills-based approach to reading. Jane’s in-the-moment assessment and interactions with Kaylee, however, focused largely on a phonics-based approach with an emphasis on accuracy. While Kaylee did address vocabulary, there was little attention to meaning. In fact, when Kaylee introduced two vocabulary words, it was to point out the first letter sound so that Kaylee could pronounce the words during the oral reading.

## Understanding professional literacy knowledge in the context of a literacy practicum

As McAndrews and Msengi (2013) have noted, understanding specialised literacy professionals’ developing professional knowledge in the



context of the literacy practicum is not straightforward and requires shared understandings about literacy development, teaching and learning. The literacy practicum was structured to take an asset-based view (Scanlon, 2007) of reading in which we, as instructors, problematised and challenged singular definitions of reading ability. Rather we endeavoured to frame reading ability as diverse, as Scheurich (1997) suggested: 'how I see shapes, frames, and even creates what I see' (29); and to support candidates to adopt an asset-based approach to literacy teaching and learning within a framework which still aligned with the ILA standards. While we incorporated a variety of formative and norm-referenced assessments, we approached them from a critical perspective that forefronts how assessment can socially construct notions of reading ability as a school-based construct reflecting grade-level reading.

Taking a specific interest in how candidates' theoretical orientations towards reading may have influenced their in-the-moment assessment of their readers, we analysed the video observations of two candidates, Susie and Jane. Based on the TORP, each candidate had different theoretical orientations towards reading. Both candidates, however, worked with two 5th-grade students who have different profiles. Susie determined that her reader was a proficient reader working above grade-level expectations, and Jane described her reader as a struggling reader.

If we assumed that the candidates' theoretical orientations played roles in influencing what information they assessed when reading, then we would expect that Susie would focus more on word decoding and accuracy while Jane would take a more word-oriented approach responding to building the context of words. In reviewing Jane's discourses, there was evidence that Jane took a word approach, but her over-attention to the phonics and decoding shifted her approach away from words to letter-sound relationships and accuracy. For Jane, accuracy was a determining factor for comprehension as evidenced by her interactions with Kaylee. Susie, on the other hand, took a more holistic approach. While Susie said that she would monitor for accuracy, she, in fact, assessed Tommy's sense of the story so that he could gather information needed to draw conclusions.

How did Susie and Jane decide on what information to respond to? It depended on the student. As part of the practicum structure, candidates used a range of data sources to construct narratives of reading success and reading struggles. This narrative did not occur in one session but over weeks of meeting and working with their student. The candidates appeared to respond to and re-enacted this narrative from their moment-to-moment interactions with their students rather than moulding their

instruction towards their theoretical orientations towards reading. As other research has shown (Glasswell and Parr, 2009), teachers tend to provide more proficient literacy learners with more freedom when compared to those who are deemed less proficient. For example, readers are monitored more for accuracy and allowed less control in their reading choices and decisions. Conversely, teachers, like Jane, who are working with readers whom they determine to be struggling, tend to control the direction of the reading interactions, focus more on a subskills model of reading, and limit the types of books from which readers can select. There were other instructional options that Jane could have used, like a shared reading or read-aloud approach in which Kaylee could have read more challenging books than *Junie B. Jones*. The content of *Junie B. Jones* does not parallel that of *Milkweed*.

Through the instructional modes, the reader identified as struggling was treated less able than the reader deemed to be proficient. This finding supports the argument that there is a socially constructed nature to reading ability. Tommy's and Kaylee's reading abilities were reinforced by their candidates' assessment of their reading behaviours and situated in the social context of both the larger structure of the literacy practicum, but also the context of the individual lessons.

## Implications

In this chapter, we presented two examples of how we used video observations to understand how discourse interactions between candidate and student, mediated by books, uncovered their unexamined and unofficial theories of reading. These unofficial theories and how they positioned their students as readers informed the type of information they responded to when listening to and observing their readers. For Susie, her espoused theory guided her practice, but for Jane, her espoused theory differed from her theory in use (Argyris and Schon, 1974). As we, and others, continue to structure literacy practica to prepare specialised literacy professionals, attention should be paid to providing opportunities for instructors to interrogate discourse interactions and the moment-to-moment assessment practices. While we used the term in-the-moment assessment, as the excerpts suggested, instruction also occurred. These moment-to-moment events reflected an important assessment and instruction cycle that reflected unintentional levelling of the readers that supported the narrative of success and struggle.

There are other important uses of video observations in supporting professional knowledge for literacy educators, which can be applied to any literacy practicum experience whether formal or informal. Researchers have reported the beneficial use of video analysis in developing professional identities of future educators (see for example, Ortlieb, McVee and Shanahan, 2015). For teachers it provides opportunities to take ‘notice’ of interactions and events that were not easily observed while teaching (Gamoran Sherin and van Es, 2009) and make connections between theory and practice (Koc, Peker and Osmanoğlu, 2009). For teacher educators like us, it provides windows of opportunity to consider how the theoretical principles, which underpinned our literacy practicum – an asset-based approach to teaching using authentic texts – was enacted in practice.

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## 5

# Teacher dialogue in literacy continuing professional development: developing reflective inquiry into practice

Helen Morris

International comparisons of literacy attainment direct attention to teacher effectiveness as a potential moderator of student progress. Consequently, in the past two decades improving teacher quality has been a route to improving student outcomes (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2016). However, accountability measures prioritising programme delivery fidelity can reduce innovation (Coburn and Stein, 2010) and performativity can distort teachers' sense of moral purpose and responsibility towards students (Ball, 2008). Over the past decade in the United Kingdom (see Harmeý and Moss, [Chapter 2](#)), as well as in the United States (see Michael Luna and Silvester, [Chapter 3](#)), schools have been made accountable, through testing and inspection, to a prescriptive literacy curriculum. This creates a difficult policy environment for experienced teachers, constraining the role of continuing professional development (CPD) to content or programme delivery, rather than developing their reflective inquiry to respond to the diverse learning needs of children.

CPD for Reading Recovery (RR), an early literacy intervention, offers an interesting case within this policy environment. Teachers are not trained to deliver a programme. Instead, the CPD aims to cultivate experienced teachers' responsiveness to individual students struggling with early literacy skills, and to fine-tune teachers' decision-making based on close observation of learners. An inquiry stance involves critical examination of real-world problems in practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999), as Michael Luna and Silvester outline in [Chapter 3](#) regarding

pre-service teachers' understanding of how to assess phonological awareness. Kemmis and Smith (2008) describe this responsiveness as a praxis stance, involving a synthesis of critical reflection and action with a moral dimension of aiming to make the best possible decisions for the benefit of the learner.

The discussion in this chapter is grounded in findings from an in-depth examination of dialogue about literacy practice, from a qualitative research project with an expert group of RR teachers engaged in CPD (Morris, 2020). I draw on the study to exemplify how specialist literacy teachers develop reflective dialogue about practice whilst observing and discussing live lessons during CPD. RR teachers work with a diverse group of the children identified by their teachers as experiencing the most difficulty in literacy learning, heightening their focus on impacting children's life chances, and the need to respond with precision to the needs of the diverse student populations which are represented in that attainment pattern.

Since specific reference to teacher talk was largely absent in the systematic reviews of CPD research examined in Morris (2020), the study makes an original contribution to the field by providing a rigorous and detailed analysis of teachers' dialogue about practice during CPD. Reflective dialogue in CPD matters because it enables literacy teachers to practise examining and fine-tuning their decision-making in response to struggling learners and to develop flexibility in their pedagogical repertoires so that they can respond to the diversity of children's needs. The interplay of teacher 'noticing' and making corresponding decisions both in the moment and in response to patterns of student response is essential behaviour for the specialist reading teacher according to Lose (2007). How teachers talk in CPD can develop as reflective inquiry is discussed, along with the crucial role of the CPD leader. Principles are proposed for harnessing teachers' dialogue in other CPD contexts where bespoke responding to the needs of diverse populations of students is important.

## Study background

A small-scale, flexible, qualitative design explored the case of a group of specialist literacy teachers through observation and interview. Goals were to explore possibilities arising from talking while observing in a CPD event; to understand how talk about practice is directed; to consider participant roles; to understand how dialogue provokes teachers' inquiry about practice; and to explore how teachers describe participation and learning.

Participants were selected purposively because they had long-term experience of discursive observation of live literacy lessons in CPD. They were observed in a three-hour CPD session. Two interviews were carried out immediately afterwards – a semi-structured group interview with teachers and a separate semi-structured interview with the CPD leader. Following transcription and preliminary thematic analysis of the observation and initial interview data, seven teachers agreed to further individual interviews. Data were initially coded based on talk contribution types, yielding a wide range of codes. Detailed memo writing and deductive analysis using some of the existing research into classroom talk (Michaels and O'Connor, 2015) further refined the thematic analysis.

## Literature review

Eraut (2002) suggests there is little evidence that CPD impacts practice because research attention has focused on CPD content and processes at the expense of participants' learning. Current understanding about CPD effectiveness relates mostly to design. Similar descriptors of effective CPD design arise across many studies and include aiming for deep professional knowledge, providing adequate time including regular sessions, enabling active participation, involving collective learning and focusing on teacher learning as well as student outcomes (Avalos, 2011; Caena, 2011; Cordingley et al., 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2016; Nelson et al., 2015; Ping et al., 2017; Timperley et al., 2007; Wilson and Berne, 1999). Collective learning is evidently fundamental to effective CPD, and a learning community is one structure which 'brings practitioners together in a systematic way to examine and make problematic features of practice with the intention of development and improvement' (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009: 103). Yet research has paid less attention to how teachers talk to examine practice, compared to the large body of research into classroom talk.

Muijs et al. (2014) conclude that 35 years of research on teacher effectiveness has focused on teacher behaviour at the expense of decision-making and inquiry. They recommend emphasising learning over information delivery; developing collaborative inquiry; and putting students rather than practices at the centre. Reflective inquiry is a way of thinking with attitudes of open-mindedness, commitment, responsibility for learning and belief that actions can make a difference (N. Lyons, 2010). It is stimulated by dissonance which provokes examination of assumptions, particularly through dialogue with others (Mezirow, 1991).

Thinking critically is essential to reflective practice, yet once practice becomes routine, teachers can find it harder to reflect, seeing themselves as knowledgeable experts rather than reflective practitioners (Schön, 1991). Routine expertise involves drawing on repertoires of knowledge and pedagogical tools, enabling teachers to respond in standard situations and is particularly important to novices. However, adaptive expertise is exemplified by flexible decision-making, innovation and problem-solving, fast recognition of patterns of student response and drawing on experiential knowledge to support problem-solving in practice (De Arment et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2005). Adaptive expertise necessitates a capacity to respond productively to dissonance because to innovate, teachers have to be prepared to move away from ‘what is momentarily most efficient’ (Schwartz et al., 2005: 44). Adaptive expertise is of even greater significance for teachers working with children who struggle in literacy learning (Ross and Gibson, 2010), and participating in dialogue that develops as reflective inquiry can enhance teachers’ adaptive expertise (Morris, 2020). Schön suggests, ‘An artful teacher sees a child’s difficulty in learning to read, not as a defect in the child but as a defect of his own instruction’ prompting the teacher to ‘either search his repertoire or invent new methods’ (1991: 66). A further example of artful teaching is reflected in the ethos of *That Reading Thing*, an approach to working with adults described by Millar, Boyle, and Muir in [Chapter 10](#).

CPD in RR is an inquiry-oriented, problem-solving approach (Pinnell, 1997). A CPD group operates as a community of inquiry, where participants collaborate in the process of thinking to develop their practice (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). Methodologies include talk about theory, observation of practice and analysis of cases of student literacy learning. Talking while observing is claimed as essential so teachers become ‘more flexible and tentative, observe constantly and alter their assumptions in line with what they record as children work [and] challenge their own thinking continually’ (Clay, 1997: 663). Flexibility of thinking is important in practice and talking while observing is beneficial because

Freed from teaching, they [teachers] are able to talk while observing [allowing] them to put their observations and analyses into words – almost a think-aloud process. In their conversations they articulate their questions and dilemmas; they describe reading behaviour and teaching moves in great detail. This process builds up case knowledge over many observations of different children at different points in time. The experience helps teachers think critically about the art of teaching. (Schmitt et al., 2005: 96)



Participation involves analytic and reflective processes developed through dialogue while observing literacy lessons and in the conversation following the observations (Bodman and Smith, 2013). Using evidence from a lesson to challenge other observers to consider alternative explanations for a child's responses is essential to this approach (C.A. Lyons, 1994), and Clay proposed that talk while observing practice with peers can 'overcome the unreliability of one person's decision by pooling knowledge in a network of decision-making and bring[ing] the implicit, whether observed or assumed into a verbal form which allows discussion and revision' (2009: 237).

## Features of the CPD context

The context is a three-hour CPD event with an established group of experienced Reading Recovery teachers. The event was one of six annual CPD sessions following a similar four-way structure. The typical group size ranges from six to twelve and teachers work with children aged about six.

### Introductory discussion (35 minutes)

The leader, an experienced literacy coach, established the theme (fostering a child's independence in reading and writing) by inviting teachers to share signs of independent literacy processing or problem-solving actions. Then in small group discussion, teachers developed the concept of independence in more open-ended ways drawing on literacy theory and their experience of practice to establish an agreed focus for observation.

### Case descriptions (5 minutes)

Next, two teachers shared case descriptions of strengths and difficulties in the literacy learning of two children. These case descriptions provided initial data and established authentic problems for collaborative inquiry.

### Group talk during lesson observations (75 minutes)

Two lessons followed in the observation room while the group observed and discussed patterns in each child's reading, oral language and writing, and how teaching decisions affected children's responses. Contributions were short, in the form of thinking aloud and involved building on others'

contributions. Children's performance in real-time literacy lessons is unpredictable, so observing and discussing live lessons closely mirrors the responsive decision-making teachers need in everyday practice.

Plenary (35 minutes)

The plenary discussion centred on hypotheses about each child's literacy learning, arising from the reflective dialogue. The observed teachers participated, responding to the group's insights. The plenary continued the inquiry, prioritising collective thinking and problem-solving over advice-forming.

## Key findings

Findings from this study contribute new understandings about features of teacher talk in literacy CPD where critical reflection about individual learners' needs is prioritised. Firstly, it is evident that specific talk contributions collectively shape reflective inquiry. Secondly, identifiable participant behaviours apparently foster and maintain reflective dialogue. Finally, the ways individual teachers claim to learn from their participation align with development of adaptive expertise.

Reflective dialogue – description, theorising and hypotheses

Analysis of reflective dialogue during observation of two lessons illuminates how reflective inquiry develops and how teachers test and expand their thinking about practice. Three main talk contributions were evident as follows.

### *Description*

By describing their observations aloud, teachers assemble and verify data to form a mutual understanding of a child's reading and writing, and how it is affected by the observed teacher's responding. Teacher descriptions may be about child responses, for example – *He read 'shouted'. Then he went back and read 'Yes, shouted the pirates!' Seeing the word 'shouted' made him go back and read it again and make it more expressive.* Or they may describe actions the teacher took. For example, *'Kay (teacher) jumped in and talked about the meaning'*. Teachers may also compare their observations of the child with the case description. For example, *'Did Kay (teacher) say Lily's (child's) writing vocabulary was quite strong,*

*compared to her reading vocabulary?* They also note patterns across various responses from the child or teacher – *The more she (the teacher) sits back in the writing the more he (the child) gets on.*

Articulating what they notice is important because high levels of accuracy in teacher noticing are essential to the development of adaptive expertise (De Arment et al., 2013; Schwartz et al., 2005) and to expert literacy teaching (Ross and Gibson, 2010). Description is most apparent early in the observations but gradually the dialogue focuses more on explaining and forming hypotheses.

### *Theorising*

Theorising involves explaining and justifying proposals and considering alternative views. Whereas describing is relatively straightforward and verifiable by the shared observation, theorising is an individual's interpretation founded on their theoretical knowledge and experience of teaching literacy. In the terms of this study, theorising entails analysing patterns of responding and tentatively explaining an observed teacher's decision-making or a child's responses. In the following example, two teachers consider a child's independence in monitoring his reading. Earlier they had described several instances of Ben's independence in checking his own reading, but dissonance arises as they consider how Ben may be over-reliant on teacher support:

Teacher 1: *Ah so Ben has to read it wrong to self-monitor. The first time he read it right, but he has to read it **wrong** to self-monitor.*

Teacher 2: *But when he read it initially, she (Teacher) pointed at go (the word) quite quickly didn't she? She came in quite fast. It was as if **she** (emphasised) monitored.*

Teacher 1: *So, we are not **sure** if he can do his own self-monitoring.*

Theorising is important to reflective inquiry because explanations can be examined, tested and refined through further observation. Significantly, in collaborating to develop and test theories, teachers rehearse the responsive thinking needed in practice.

### *Forming hypotheses*

A hypothesis suggests an adjustment to practice and is developed from describing and theorising within the reflective dialogue. As the group assembles descriptive data and debates explanations for child and teacher responses, teachers offer hypotheses about how to further scaffold the child's learning. Description of events that occurred during the

lesson and several instances of theorising about Ben's independence led one teacher to propose – *So if he re-read more could he confirm for himself instead of asking (for help)?* Hypotheses can be tested and refined both by further observation and by teachers' knowledge of theory and pedagogy. The most salient hypotheses resurface in the plenary discussion.

Through these three types of talk, teachers develop dialogue which can be characterised as collective, supportive and reciprocal (Alexander, 2017). Significantly, it is also cumulative since theorising and hypothesis-building tests and extends teachers' understanding of theory-practice connections within an authentic site of their practice.

### Participant behaviours foster reflective inquiry

A leader's facilitation of dialogue is critical in shaping teachers' reflective inquiry. In many CPD contexts, leading involves an authoritative stance to share information and pedagogical approaches. The leader in this context was experienced and knowledgeable but confirmed that modelling a thinking stance, creating space for teacher talk and providing challenge were intentional behaviours, underpinned by confidence that the group could develop their thinking. Teachers evidently perceived responsibility for shaping their learning and contributed most of the dialogue. Several different moves facilitate the dialogue, some of which align with moves identified in classroom talk by Michaels and O'Connor (2015). For instance:

- 'marking' significance of responses (*You are getting to something there*)
- 'revoicing' one or more contributions (*So he's got reading stamina*)
- a 'say more move' to elicit more detail (*Tell us about that*)
- 'Tracking the inquiry' by summarising multiple contributions (*So it's focused, he's engaged, it's sustained, he's getting a message*)

Significant additional moves include prompting for closer observation or explanation. Explanation prompts are key to theorising in calling for rationales (*Now why might that be?*). In addition, the leader uses 'challenge' moves, significant to the inquiry in creating dissonance by stating a contrasting observation and/or referring to literacy theory (*You're saying he is reading for phrasing. I'm thinking it sounds very word by word*).

The following short excerpt captures a dialogic sequence from the group's initial discussion of a child's problem-solving while reading a familiar text. The leader and eight teachers are observing a lesson taught by the ninth teacher in the group and five of the

observing teachers share their thinking about this moment in the lesson. Significantly, the leader makes only three contributions in this dialogic sequence – two prompts for explanation or theorising about a response from the child and for the proposal that the child can't monitor his own reading and one move to track the inquiry. The leader also uses silence as a way of inviting teachers to contribute. Through the leader's moves, teachers perceive agency to collaboratively develop the inquiry. Individual teachers' talk contributions are typically short with natural turn-taking. They listen to and build on others' ideas in reciprocal and cumulative contributions. The conversation is purposeful in focusing on the observed lessons.

Leader: *Is that giving you a cue into his thinking? He is saying 'Is that right?' What's that showing you or telling you?* (Explanation prompt)

Teacher 1 (T1): *He's listening to himself* (Description)

T2: *That he can't self-confirm yet, he's not able* (Theorising)

Leader: *Ok now why might that be?* (Explanation prompt)

T1: *Because he doesn't know how it should sound. He's just starting to think that doesn't sound right but he can't confirm it // (// - pause)* (Theorising)

T3: *So, it relates to his language structures?* (Theorising)

T2: *I think it's because he's reading quite slowly so he is not hearing it as a whole chunk of meaning because 'too' can mean so many things // when you just read it as one word you've got no idea if it's the right 'too' in the right place or //* (Theorising)

T4: *His groups of meaning are quite small aren't they // two or three words?* (Description)

T5: *So, if he re-read more could he then confirm himself, rather than asking? Because doesn't seem to do a lot of re-reading yet. Whereas all the talk they are doing will pay off I think when he gets into more challenging texts because he knows that everything has to make sense, but it may seem a very tedious task // (child continued reading and no other teacher immediately responded) Or a slow task //* (Hypothesis)

T4: *So, I think we are getting a sense now that he does self-monitor?* (Description)

T2: *He's beginning to //* (Description)

Leader: *So, you are talking about the beginnings of self-monitoring?* (Tracking the inquiry)

T4: *Well, we weren't sure in familiar reading but now we are getting a sense that he is* (monitoring his own reading). (Theorising)

Four participatory teacher behaviours are essential to developing reflective dialogic inquiry. Firstly, teachers approach the task as co-construction of thinking. Observing the lesson in real time facilitates co-construction because as the lesson progresses, new descriptions can support or challenge a developing theory. Teachers describe their participation as ‘thinking aloud’ and ‘thinking quickly’. They respond to lesson events and to other teachers’ ideas in spontaneous turn-taking.

Importantly, teachers also talk tentatively. Developing tentative hypotheses and seeing them tested through further lesson events enables teachers to consider alternative explanations and teaching responses and acknowledge that their theories might change. The discussion of practice is fluid as teachers propose contradictory explanations and adjust their hypotheses based on alternative views, or on new data from the lessons. The reflective dialogue is evidently a learning opportunity principally for the observers, although the observed teachers participate in plenary discussions and can consider what to generalise to their own practice. This is an agentic approach, in contrast to other forms of observation in CPD which lead to definitive advice for an observed teacher.

Responding productively to dissonance is also important. Although dissonance is an essential aspect of reflection (Mezirow, 1991), it can inhibit teachers’ dialogue according to Lefstein et al. (2017) and may be intentionally avoided (Vangrieken et al., 2017). In the context, the leader intentionally creates dissonance by challenging teachers’ theorising. Dissonance also occurs naturally when teachers notice new or contradictory data from the lesson or share contrasting rationales. Dissonance is embraced and teachers revisit their hypotheses as a result.

Finally, the opportunity to observe a lesson in real time grounds teachers’ dialogue in authenticity. By talking mainly about an individual child’s responses, the observers simulate the responsive teaching decision-making required in daily practice and they receive feedback through others’ responses to their hypotheses. Each struggling reader has different strengths and difficulties, and in this context, teachers rehearse observation and decision-making in response to individual children’s learning needs. Talking mainly about the child enables the inquiry to continue while putting the teacher’s decision-making into the frame without being overtly critical.

## Individual learning from participation in reflective dialogue

Group and individual interviews illuminated how reflective inquiry impacts practice. Observed lessons are unpredictable and authentic

practice examples requiring teachers to consider a child's behaviours while reading and writing in much the same ways as they do in their practice. Teachers' explanations of how dialogic reflective inquiry impacts their subsequent practice fell into two main themes:

1. developing their routine expertise by adding to a teaching repertoire
2. forming generalised principles for teaching which develop adaptive expertise

It is evident that experienced teachers continue to develop routine expertise by noticing and learning from pedagogical techniques or procedures used by colleagues. For instance, one teacher reported noticing mismatches with her own practice – *I come away every time, having learned something new or been reminded of something that I have ceased to do.* However, most teachers emphasised a focus on reflecting on their own understanding of theory-practice relationships.

Several teachers explained that either during or following the CPD, they form one or two 'big ideas' to guide reflection on their own practice. One teacher indicated that she would – *always take away the big principles of what I observed. We might be talking about the agency of the child, and I think how am I making sure children have agency in my lessons?* Another teacher labelled the inquiry dialogue as 'talking high' and reported that she remembered 'the big ideas' from a discussion and attempted to make changes in her practice based on those ideas. She described a connection between collaborative dialogue in the CPD, and personal reflection about change in her practice – *It's the theory into practice and it's all meshing together. You've got the high-level thinking and you've got the practice and then there is something about seeing that together with your theory that sort of convinces you that, yeah, this is going to make a difference.*

Teachers also suggest that participation in the dialogue stimulates them to reflect about specific children they are teaching. For example, one teacher commented – *I have two things going on in my head – one is the child that I am watching behind the screen, and I think I have a parallel thing that is going on in my head that is about what is happening at that moment with any of the children that I work with.*

Developing a strong dialogue with iterative moves between describing and theorising and hypothesis-testing, is evidently important in supporting individual teachers to generalise themes for self-evaluation of their own practice. Individuals who played very active roles in theorising in the study were also more likely to articulate their learning as synthesising these 'big ideas'.

Through collaborative dialogue, teachers articulate their thinking, and their interpretations are challenged both by others, and through self-reflection. Talk while observing rehearses reflective, meta-cognitive thinking processes required of teachers during practice. Reflective dialogue is also significant in developing teachers' adaptive expertise as they draw on theoretical knowledge and use it to develop a fluency of understanding relationships between instructional moves and student responses.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Observation is often used to guide teachers to perform an expected pedagogical repertoire (Coburn and Stein, 2010), and is referenced in many of the chapters in this book (for example, Wagner describes the role of observation in online teacher inquiry with literacy professionals, and Braden, Myers and Compton-Lilly discuss the use of observation in literacy teaching with initial teacher educators in [Chapter 1](#)). This study focused on the needs of CPD teachers working with children experiencing literacy difficulties and established that examining the diverse needs of individual children can stimulate the kinds of learning conversations which Earl and Timperley (2008) suggest are important in developing an inquiry habit of mind, and from a praxis stance of making the best possible decisions for the individual child (Kemmis and Smith, 2008). Juxtaposition of theory and practice within CPD, and how that challenges teachers to critique their own thinking and decision-making, is essential to developing reflective inquiry. Design features, knowledge content, timing and process are common considerations in CPD design with perhaps insufficient focus on how teachers talk about and inquire into their practice. Recommendations from this rigorous small-scale study offer principles for consideration by those leading and participating in CPD in literacy teaching.

Harnessing the potential of teacher dialogue and creating space for teachers to talk in meaningful ways about their practice attributes value to teachers' practical and theoretical knowledge. Authentic and meaningful practice contexts are essential in grounding reflective dialogue in teachers' theoretical knowledge. Data gathering, exposing rationales, and developing hypotheses for teacher responding can enable teachers to rehearse ways of shaping their practice directly in response to the child. Talking tentatively, co-constructing, responding productively to dissonance are essential teacher behaviours within reflective inquiry.



The CPD leader has a crucial role in facilitating dialogue about practice. Research about leading classroom talk has focused on developing it as dialogic (Alexander, 2017), shaping it as ‘inter-thinking’ or using language to think together (Mercer, 2008) and considering the potential of dialogue in constructing new knowledge (Wells, 2001). These themes are similarly relevant to leading teacher talk, and this study exposes ways that CPD leaders can prompt for and privilege teachers’ collaborative thinking and problem-solving in theory-practice connection.

By harnessing the potential of teachers’ talk during CPD, it is possible to privilege the development of authentic inquiry over curriculum training. Reflective inquiry develops teachers’ adaptive expertise, and consequently enables their fine-tuned responding to individual children from diverse backgrounds, who are not sufficiently supported by curriculum delivery alone. Early-career teachers need to focus on developing routine expertise and beginning to build curriculum knowledge and a pedagogical repertoire through theoretical understanding, practice and feedback. Yet their classes are likely to include children with diverse literacy needs who may not be well-served by simply delivering a curriculum. CPD for less experienced teachers should therefore also emphasise and create opportunities for inquiry and problem-solving in response to the observed difficulties of learners. This would involve making space for teachers to talk in meaningful ways about their practice through genuine dialogic exchange; considering the role of the leader in deliberately scaffolding that dialogue to privilege the thinking and learning of the teachers; genuinely bringing together multiple perspectives and theorising in order to evaluate possible actions; encouraging tentative problem-solving and allowing for dissonance. Aiming to heighten new teachers’ noticing skills and to develop reflective inquiry through observation and dialogue is likely to develop an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) as well as teachers’ agency to adapt and reflect on decisions in practice based on their impact on the individual child.

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## Part II: teaching literacies in diverse settings with diverse populations

In editing this collection, we (Sinéad and Bobbie) wanted to provide a resource for the many people who teach literacy or support literacy educators outside the ‘walls’ of the typical or traditional classroom. Literacy teaching takes place both formally and informally in many unique contexts within the community. By community we mean at home, in voluntary settings, and in places other than the classroom. From our experience, extant resources for literacy teacher preparation and pedagogy tend to focus almost exclusively on classroom or specialist teachers working within traditional school settings and neglect the needs of those who work within the community. In adopting the asset-based and justice-oriented approach we described in the main introduction to this book, we thought it important to address that gap with this book and provide a resource for those who work within communities and outside the traditional boundaries of school. That, of course, is not to say that schools are not part of the community. They are, and we argue that the most powerful literacy instruction is that which works with the community – this encompasses home, school, and anywhere people come together to engage in literacy practices.

We hope the chapters in this part may be a resource not only for those working in diverse contexts and with diverse learners but also for schools and teachers who are interested in blurring the boundaries between school and the community. Talking about diverse settings and populations requires unique presentations of ideas and studies and as such the diversity inherent in these chapters is reflected in both the content and also the style and presentation. [Chapters 6](#) (Albers and Seely Flint) and [8](#) (Kabuto et al.) are presented in narrative form. [Chapters 7](#) (Bodman) and [9](#) (Bragg) present more traditional studies reporting the efficacy of an approach to literacy support with quantitative elements. Finally, [Chapter 10](#) (Millar et al.) brings the voices of three authors

with diverse backgrounds (a secondary teacher, a youth worker and a mother) together in a personal narrative. Our risk in bringing such a unique collection together is that the chapters are too diverse – but we think this provides a more accurate reflection of where and how literacy teaching occurs.

Our guiding question in editing this book was ‘Who are our literacy learners?’ The chapters in this part add specificity to this question and here we consider ‘Who are our literacy learners outside the walls of the typical classroom and how can we prepare their teachers (defined broadly) to support them?’ The authors, as a group, consider diversity from a multiplicity of angles: physically (different countries, community organisations, hospitals, summer schools); temporally (summer holidays, during times of school absence, in adulthood); contextually (community organisations, hospitals, rural settings); and with teachers with varying levels of preparation (parents, undergraduates, teachers, youth workers) to teach literacy. Together they honestly address what is challenging in these settings. They also consider how, despite these challenges, assumptions can be challenged while maintaining a focus on authentic literacy teaching and a sense of respect for learners.

In [Chapter 6](#), Albers and Seely Flint examine the case of working with teachers in rural South Africa and the lessons they, as teacher educators, learned from the teachers. In the introduction to the chapter the authors argue that there can be a preoccupation in education with ‘what students learn’ (p. 99) which results in neglecting what it means to be a teacher educator. We were reminded as we read this chapter of the reciprocal relationships that occur in education. We teach literacy teachers and literacy teachers teach students, but within these events learning is reciprocal – we learn from those we teach and vice-versa. Albers and Seely-Flint remind us that being open to this reciprocity, or as they frame it to learn twice, promotes and enables a sense of inquiry about power relationships, learner history and contextual challenges. One could usefully read this chapter and think about what it means in the context they work with – who has the power, what is the socio-political stance, and who are the learners?

Challenging assumptions is a key theme, highlighted by Albers and Seely-Flint that is continued in the [next chapter](#) by Bodman ([Chapter 7](#)). In that chapter, she shares how undergraduate education students were supported to tutor children during summer break from school. Summer break may be a time for some children when extra support in literacy would be advantageous. It would be easy, as highlighted by Albers and Seely-Flint, to focus solely on what children will need to learn in these

settings and how these undergraduate students will teach these skills. Bodman highlights, however, that there is a need to move beyond just preparing tutors to support the technical aspects of literacy teaching but also to prepare them to teach with diversity in mind. There also is a need to engage with the complex task of creating authentic home-school partnerships. Bodman addresses these challenges and, in a sense, demonstrates that these challenges provide a window of opportunity to challenge future educators' assumptions about community resources similar to those highlighted by Braden in [Chapter 1](#).

Kabuto et al. ([Chapter 8](#)) continues the thinking around challenging assumptions by exploring a project that prepared literacy coaches to develop an understanding of what it means to work within or on behalf of communities. They address how assumptions about literacy can be challenged and the professional dispositions of those who support literacy teaching and learning can be enriched by situating literacy professional preparation within the community. In their chapter they argue that community organisations can provide a 'third space' (p. 129) for literacy coaching candidates to critically reflect not only on the technicalities of literacy coaching but also on power dynamics, relationships, and the real-life messiness that's involved in creating truly equitable and inclusive teaching practices.

In [Chapter 9](#), Bragg presents the case of supporting parents to be the primary literacy educators of children with cancer. This chapter challenges how, in the midst of a traumatic event in any family, parents can be supported to engage in an authentic literacy practice (Dialogic Reading) to support their child's literacy learning. We are reminded of Albers and Seely-Flint's notion of teaching being 'learning twice' in reading this chapter, in the sense that 'Dialogic Reading' became a positive space in which literacy occurred for both parent and child. Bragg highlights how, despite long periods of school absence, a team approach can be provided to continue literacy learning for children.

Continuing our theme of diversity, we end this part with a chapter that is written in a different style to others titled '*Teaching-free literacy: Working with teenagers and young adults*'. Millar and colleagues came together from a variety of backgrounds (a teacher, a youth worker, and a mother) with the common goal of wanting to support older learners to read. The literacy learners they work with are teenagers and adults who still need support with reading. In a quest to answer the question 'How do you teach a teenager to read?', Millar devised 'That Reading Thing'. One might be mistaken in thinking that this chapter is simply describing 'That Reading Thing'. We argue that in this chapter the authors are

describing the ethos, method and outcomes (thought of broadly) behind an approach to teaching a diverse population for whom literacy learning has become a fraught place. They push beyond the preoccupation that Albers and Seely-Flint described in [Chapter 6](#) on what is to be learnt and focused on. In particular, they highlight how each of them, with their different backgrounds, came to understand and enact the ethos and method that places learner control and safety at the heart of the process. Each author writes individually about what this means to them and how they enacted this.

At one level, each set of authors describe a personal or professional project that involved literacy teaching and learning in a diverse context with a diverse population. At a deeper level, we suggest that each chapter addresses the challenge of working with diversity in mind and the power and importance of relationships and learner respect. Any of these chapters would be useful to educators working to support learners within the community in any subject. They highlight that, no matter the content, one cannot simply afford to focus on what skills need to be taught. Rather one must consider one's own positionality as an educator, the assumptions about those they teach, their histories as learners, and the complexity of relationships with the wider community within which the learner is situated. As Millar and colleagues suggested, inclusion means safety. We suggest that chapters in this book highlight that the need for safety is required by all partners in the learning process – the teacher educator, the teachers, the learners, the community, and the family.



## 6

# On the other side of pedagogy: teaching and learning with South African rural elementary teachers

Peggy Albers and Amy Seely Flint

Anna Freud once claimed that teaching is ‘learning twice; first one learns as one prepares for one’s students, and then one learns from one’s students as one teaches’ (Provenso and Renaud, 2009: 622). This perspective, as Freud suggests, is a double moment in learning, not so much in *what* students will learn, but rather in the *anticipation* of what students will learn or think about. Education is often preoccupied only with what students learn, evidenced by students’ results on testing and reported as grades. However, framed as ‘anticipation’, Freud shifts the preoccupation of student learning to what conditions are necessary for ‘teachers to learn in this double moment, and how does teaching shape learning’ (Britzman and Pitt, 1996: 117). This chapter explores the concept of ‘learning twice’ and how our teaching was shaped by eight foundation phase teachers in a rural South African primary school in our three-year funded longitudinal literacy research project. Our project initially centralised our roles as teachers responsible for teacher learning but shifted into one in which we were on the other side of pedagogy, learning from the very teachers we were funded to teach.

### Description of context

Reading Project South Africa (hereafter called the ‘Project’) was a multi-year, small-scale professional development (PD) project and research

study (2012–16) located in the Western Cape of South Africa (pseudonyms are used for the Project name, universities, elementary school, and participants). The Project had two central foci: (1) increase reading achievement in foundation phase (Grades R–3, ages five–eight); and (2) enhance teachers’ pedagogical practices and knowledge of research-based literacy development and technology integration. The grant enabled us to purchase technology suites for each teacher (e.g., laptops, software, LCD projectors, digital cameras, white screens) and literacy and art materials (e.g., professional books, children’s literature, markers, construction paper, etc.) which were used to facilitate teachers’ work with children’s literacy and their use of technology. The grant also enabled us to increase the broadband width and allowed for school-wide access to the internet through stronger Wi-Fi connections. This Project provided ongoing PD in conceptual knowledge on literacy development and increased knowledge of and integration of digital technologies into classroom planning. Teachers participated in multiday workshops designed to increase their knowledge and pedagogical practices in literacy.

Our Project was located in Williams Primary School (WPS), a small rural Grade R–8 (ages 5–13) school with just over 400 students and 14 teachers. The school was surrounded by wine farms where many of the children’s parents worked. Nearly all children lived in poverty, often having to walk miles to school. On rainy days, some children did not attend school as the roads were muddy and they had no shoes. WPS was a ‘no fee’ school which meant that children were provided with all necessary school supplies, and local organisations purchased uniforms for the children. The single-storey school building was designed with an interior courtyard where students and teachers lined up to start the day and congregated for multiclass performances. The school had an enclosed auditorium, a small, detached cargo container that served as the school library, and a playground with a playset for younger children. At the time of the Project, the school had a computer lab that was essentially non-functioning. The desktop computers were aged and there was no school-wide access to the internet. Many teacher meetings and PD sessions occurred in this space.

Across the Project, we worked with eight female teachers who ranged from newly certified teachers to those with over 15 years of experience. Instruction in the foundation phase was in Afrikaans, the official language, but all teachers used some English in their teaching as children transitioned into English-only instruction after Grade 3 (age eight). One teacher was a multi-grade teacher for Xhosa-speaking children, Grades 1–3 (ages 6–8 years). Teachers ranged in their English-language fluency;

all but two were comfortable speaking and writing in English. The more fluent English-speaking teachers translated for their colleagues when needed. Teachers also ranged in fluency with technology. Some teachers were quite comfortable with technology, using apps and creating PowerPoints for their church services; others had very limited experience using software platforms or accessing the internet.

The teachers followed the Western Cape Department of Education's curriculum mandates and assessment practices. They followed district-mandated curriculum, which teachers described as 'restrictive' and 'a lot of paperwork', and used reading materials and consumable workbooks to teach literacy and maths. In addition to the Annual National Assessment (ANA), students were assessed on district-level quarterly benchmark tests; children did not fare well on these assessments.

As critical literacy and holistic teacher educators, we had designed this Project's PD in workshop format organised around building community, strategy instruction, and reflection. Teachers expressed their apprehension with us in the first week of our workshops: *'At first, we were nervous and scared [that] you had come to inspect us... We [the other teachers] talked about it yesterday.'* We became aware that the teachers thought we were there to teach them to implement another external literacy programme. Teachers' initial reactions and suspicions were not unfounded. It was not uncommon for projects funded by developmental aid agencies to operate within a deficit framework, whereby experts are brought into the community to 'fix' the problem without a nuanced understanding of the local context or the real needs of the community (Flint and Blyth, 2021; Glennie, 2020; Moloney, 2019). Often, literacy programmes, projects, and professional development are driven by results-based outcomes and reflect an asymmetrical relationship of power and knowledge. Rarely do they allow for a true collaborative learning experience for both teachers and teacher educators (Flint and Meyer su Natrup, 2019). These teachers had not had positive experiences with previous district-wide PD in which they, as one teacher stated, *'just sat there'*. Teachers explained that outside experts often delivered PD that was decontextualised from their school setting. Yet, we trusted that our Project design would shift this relationship of power and knowledge. By the end of the first set of workshops, teachers shifted from scepticism to trust: *'We are really happy that you're here. We thank God. You guys are like angels'*.

As the Project team, we operated within a pedagogy of inquiry; we built workshops around topics that teachers identified as important to them (e.g., reading for meaning, vocabulary development, and writing), and anticipated what they would learn. We used picture books and art

to explore reader response and writing, and integrated music to demonstrate language learning. We studied the Exit Slips (Harste, Short and Burke, 1995) teachers completed after each workshop, documenting their learning, questions, and illustrations of their learning which informed the next day's workshop. On our drives to and from WPS, we debriefed each day's workshop, reflecting on teachers' oral and written responses and participation, and what we learned about their learning, a double moment in learning that shaped our teaching.

## Theoretical positioning: learning twice in literacy

In studying learning twice, we suggest that we must examine the familiarity of the spaces of teaching and learning, classrooms that evoke memories both pleasant and not so pleasant. Research in pedagogy has suggested that these past experiences guide the way in which teachers respond and interact with students, and how students listen and respond to teachers (Britzman and Pitt, 1996). For us, learning twice comprises several tenets. First, critical to understanding learning is to analyse familiar dynamics of previous experiences, or looking backward to work forward. Second, teacher educators like ourselves must consider our past experiences with PD, to what extent they were or were not always relevant, and sometimes personally uncomfortable. These experiences positioned us to listen differently to the South African teachers to understand why they were initially '*nervous and scared*'. Third, learning twice involves understanding power-driven structures evident in PD experiences (Flint and Meyer su Natrup, 2019). How must teacher educators position themselves as learners, and what can be learned by listening to teachers about their spaces and places of learning (Massey, 2005)?

Learning twice brings to the surface an inherent problem in professional development, an emphasis on how well a teacher performs with the information they learned. Yet, learning twice provides an opportunity to see PD newly, to glean different insights into learning itself, and to ask, 'What new conditions of learning must be in place to generate these insights?' Learning twice places learning at its most vulnerable for both the teacher and teacher educator as the asymmetrical power relations are necessarily disrupted. Yet, to learn twice, we suggest, is to do critical literacy (Janks, 2009) in which multiple perspectives are valued, power relations in teaching and learning are interrogated, and commonplace assumptions of PD are challenged and redesigned to promote change in our lives.

## Contextual challenges

Often, when researchers articulate challenges they face in international studies, they do so from a position of power. What aspects of the setting prevented them from carrying out the full potential of the work/research that they had intended? From a position that places us on the other side of pedagogy, we position the challenges that teachers faced as significant when working with us: Communication access, assumptions about the setting and past professional development experiences, and language.

Working in international spaces brings unanticipated challenges with access to communication often taken for granted. In [Chapter 7](#), Bodman, a researcher in the United Kingdom, presents an example of working with teachers in Malta during a summer reading programme. Bodman discusses the challenges in coordinating the flow of resources needed for students to engage in authentic reading and writing activities. When working with teachers nationally in the United States, we can quickly communicate with teachers through email and other technologies, arrange and host meetings and operate with insider knowledge of how public schools work. However, for the Project, we lived 9,000 miles away from this group of teachers, and the grant allowed only two trips a year with two week-long sets of workshops. Limited access to each other, both in person and virtual, created long stretches of time with minimal communication. The infrequent delivery of workshops and the intermittent use of the internet (due to availability and expense) resulted in teachers' disrupted understandings and growth.

We built assumptions about rural schools, students' literacy rates, and the quality of teachers from our exhaustive review of the literature. The literature painted a dismal picture. We learned *about* teachers and schools that were positioned within a deficit perspective of South African schools, rather than *with* teachers and schools, and learning about the possibilities within their classroom space and in rural places. Teachers also came with their own assumptions. They were '*nervous and scared*' about the intentions of this Project. Who were we and what did we expect them to do? What programme would they have to implement and assess because their children's literacy scores were low? How would their teaching be monitored and judged teaching the programme, measured by the success of their children on standardised assessments? Teachers, like Grade 3 teacher, Jules, drew upon their past experiences with experts who delivered decontextualised programmes. She stated: '*[These meetings are] so boring. Because you sit there, and you listen. And I mean it's the*

*same thing over and over again.... I know what they're going to ask'. Why would they think our PD would be any different?*

A third challenge for the teachers was our reliance on English. As we previously noted, the foundation phase teachers taught in Afrikaans and/or Xhosa until Grade 3, after which children transitioned to learning in English. Their fluency and comfort level with English varied. With Project workshops being delivered in English, those more fluent in the language translated concepts/ideas/instructions in Afrikaans to their less English-fluent colleagues. We became conscious of our limitations in language use and our choices of English texts as we debriefed workshop sessions. This was apparent in our use of George Ella Lyons' (1999) poem, 'Where I'm From', an autobiographical poem that described people, places and things important in Lyons' youth. We anticipated that WPS teachers would enjoy this poem because they could write about important aspects of their lives. Yet, as English speakers, we didn't consider Lyons' use of challenging and unfamiliar vocabulary (e.g., clothespins, Clorox, carbon-tetrachloride), or teachers' hesitation to read the text aloud in English. Peggy commented, *'I noticed that when we asked teachers to read from ["Where I'm From"], they were looking ahead to when they would read aloud. Ra'easha was counting the number of people ahead of her and counting her lines to see when she was going to go next. We could see how the language was kind of difficult for them'*. So, while the teachers did engage with us in English, they were positioned as having to work doubly hard in understanding our language and literacy concepts.

## Description of practice

We designed and developed the initial set of workshops around getting to know this group of teachers through arts-based literacy experiences and children's literature. Over a two-week span, twice a year, we conducted five or six workshops; this allowed teachers to think about workshop ideas and strategies and to try them out with their children. We asked teachers to read children's literature, poetry, images, and children's writing because the texts allowed for open-ended discussions about characters' experiences and provided teachers with ways to consider using children's literature in their classes to teach literacy.

We organised workshops around three components which supported teachers who were less fluent in English, and enabled teachers to feel more confident in their participation. *Building community* highlighted the generative and contextual nature of professional development

by considering one's own life as central to literacy learning. We opened each workshop with an activity or a picture book and a reader response engagement, whereby teachers responded in writing and in dialogue. For example, *Uptown* (Collier, 2004), Collier's metaphorical journey through his youth in Harlem, and *Prayer for the Twenty-first Century* (Marsden, 1998), a poetic response to making the world a better place, opened up space for teachers to share their situated experiences. For example, one of the teachers wrote that she wished for students that the '*dreams they all have for their lives find large wings*'.

We read humorous picture books like *Woolbur* (Helakoski, 2008) to emphasise language learning through repetition and predictability, to more thoughtful stories like *Something Beautiful* (Wyeth, 2002) to emphasise readers' interpretation on social issues. We read *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (Willems, 2003) to encourage improvisation, prediction, and writing simple stories. We also introduced children's poems, and we sang songs like 'See Me Beautiful' (Grammer, 2004) and 'I looked into the Mirror' (Jenkins, 1996) to support and bridge children's mother tongues to English, the target language of instruction. These building community experiences provided space for teachers to learn more about each other as they worked together to learn new concepts in literacy development and technology tools.

The second component, *introduction of literacy/technology strategies*, based on teachers' expressed interests and needs, focused on word study and comprehension. We worked with literacy strategies like QuICs (Questions, Interests, Connections) using colour-coded Post-it notes to mark in the text areas that teachers wanted to talk more about. Teachers worked with technology apps and websites that encouraged writing and inquiry.

For example, we used word cloud software like Wordle and Tagxedo as a pre-reading strategy, to study concepts presented in websites, and to analyse a topic presented on different websites. Teachers worked with PowerPoint that enabled them to project picture books and lessons on a white screen so all children could see the images and words. Teachers also enjoyed working with ZooBurst, a pop-up book open-access app that enabled them to use family pictures to write stories.

*Reflection*, the third component, ended each workshop and was critical in that it informed our planning for subsequent workshops. The importance of reflection is a theme continued later in this book by Wagner (Chapter 11). We asked teachers to share their insights in Exit Slips and focused interviews. Exit Slips provided teachers with space to express their learning through words and illustrations. Through Exit

Slips, we learned how teachers viewed their learning as helpful and engaging. They described that they had learned to write their own books and to value their names. Finally, they wrote about what they wanted to learn more about, and one teacher wrote *'I would like to learn more about shared reading... and how I can implement it in my class while busy with a group on the carpet'*.

In addition to daily Exit Slips, we also asked teachers to participate in focus interviews. The reflective comments below highlight the significance of the design of the workshops and opportunities to implement the newly learned strategies and texts with children.

Grade R teacher: *It's really nice because you do practically something [sic, practical things]. You sit in other workshops, like our workshops, so boring. Because you sit there, and you listen. And I mean it's the same thing over and over again. But like here – with you guys, you first do your thing, and then we have to do something practically [sic, practical] and that's nice because there is involvement with us. I like that.*

Grade 1 Teacher: *And we go practice.*

Grade 2 Teacher: *We are so excited we want to try it out on our children and see how they will do.*

Teachers' reflections through Exit Slips and post-workshop discussions positioned us as learners. In this way, teachers were instrumentally implicated in their own learning, and provided us with the pedagogy we needed to plan future workshops.

## **Learning twice in educator support/education/ professional development**

In previous writings about the Project and the professional development experience, we positioned the teachers as learners and our work as successful in the pursuit of sharing knowledge about literacy development. However, to think about our learning placed us on the other side of pedagogy. In so doing, we, in essence, made professional development strange. For us, studying ourselves gave us permission to think differently about our PD practices, the role of learning and learners, and how our learning shifted the way we looked at who were the learners in



this Project. The notion of learning twice can supplement and be embedded not only into PD practices, but also into teacher inquiry models as described by Wagner in [Chapter 11](#).

To position our work critically, we had to consider new conditions of learning, not only the prior knowledge and experiences that this group of teachers had, but also to position our own learning. What did we attend to? What did we ignore? What happens when questions of the learner are pedagogical moves for ourselves? To situate this discussion, we chose a lesson that was representative of our work that implicated both the teachers and us in the learning.

In one of our last workshops, we introduced the audit trail (Harste and Vasquez, 1998), a public display of artefacts teachers created across the three years with the aim to think about their learning and make connections across workshops. Across the workshops we had taken hundreds of photos of our work together, printed them out, and provided Post-it notes which served as the resources to build the audit trail. Organised into groups of two or three, we invited teachers to look across the pictures, and consider questions like ‘Where have we been?’ ‘What do the artefacts say to you?’ ‘What do you want to represent on the wall and how?’ and ‘What are your connections?’ They then selected pictures, pasted them onto long sheets of butcher paper, and added Post-it notes to respond to their thinking.

All the while teachers selected photos, they picked them up, smiled and laughed, and shared memories of the different workshop experiences. They retold stories, re-read workshop ideas, analysed what they learned, and re-connected with learning from workshops past to connect to newer projects or areas of study. Each group focused on different experiences they valued: relationships with one another and us, ideas that they integrated into their practice, and the enjoyment they experienced while learning with each other as shown in the reflections below.

Grade 4 Teacher: *The audit trail was very exciting and makes you think. It brings back memories and shows that sometimes groups connect [with the same ideas] but they also differ.*

Grade 3 Teacher: *Learning brings back beautiful memories and by seeing the work that has been done so far, it’s good.*

Grade 3 Teacher: *Yes, very happy and good memories. I learned that we learned so much in a short time.*

Grade R Teacher: *What an exciting experience to learn where we come from with all the workshops. Oh yeah!*

While we could have wondered what teachers thought of their learning, we learned to study how teachers invested in their own learning, the implications their learning had on them and the children they taught, and the experiences that shaped these investments. The audit trail was a strong learning moment for us and helped us understand the other side of pedagogy: how this group of teachers shaped our teaching as much as we shaped theirs.

## New conditions for learning twice

Across this chapter, we have described various engagements in which we learned so much about our teaching through the teachers' responses and engagement. We identify a few in this table and annotate how we used them in terms of literacy (Table 6.1).

As we studied these engagements, we re-theorised what learning twice meant to us, and generated new conditions of learning we saw as necessary, both for the teachers and us.

First, pedagogy and learning must start with inquiry and learning that is generative. As inquiry, teachers explored ideas and materials (see Table 6.1), aesthetic connections (Albers et al., 2019), and after-workshop reflections and Exit Slips provided time to share apprehensions, interests, struggles, and successes. In this excerpt from an after-workshop reflection, for example, teachers shared their enthusiasm about their learning, enough so that they wanted to share it with others:

Grade R Teacher: *Yes, and I normally share my stuff with other friends of mine, like the Wordle or like ZooBurst. I shared it with my friends.*

Project Team: *So, you're sharing ideas with other teachers in other schools?*

Grade R teacher: *Yes. Yes. My friend Barbara is very excited. She was like, 'Yes give it, and send the Project people to our school as well'.*

Grade 3 Teacher: *I have shared some good stuff from you guys also.*

For us, pedagogy and learning as inquiry enabled us to anticipate the importance of context in selecting materials/engagements, and as inquiry, encouraged teachers to investigate literacy with the aim to anticipate the learning of their children. Much to our surprise, however, this group of teachers also anticipated the learning of their colleagues

**Table 6.1** Sample engagements that enabled teachers to explore pedagogy and practice in literacy learning

<b>Songs/Poems</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘I Look into the Mirror’ (Jenkins)</li> <li>• ‘See Me Beautiful’ (Grammer)</li> <li>• ‘Where I’m From’ (Lyons)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• following along in text, repetition to make meaning; bridges from mother tongue to Afrikaans to English</li> <li>• rhythm in oral language, prediction, multiple perspectives, culture</li> <li>• to situate literacy in one’s own life; oral readings and discussions of poet’s life; multilingual opportunities to tell stories</li> </ul>
<b>Picturebooks</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Home</i> (Ellis)</li> <li>• <i>Woolbur</i> (Helakoski)</li> <li>• <i>Something Beautiful</i> (Wyeth)</li> <li>• <i>Uptown</i> (Collier)</li> <li>• <i>Prayer for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</i> (Marsden)</li> <li>• <i>Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i> (Willems)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as cross-disciplinary approach to literacy learning</li> <li>• as prediction and language prediction and humour</li> <li>• to explore race/culture representation</li> <li>• to learn metaphor/simile; situate literacy in children’s lives; culture</li> <li>• awareness of social issues; writing simply with deep meaning</li> <li>• as improvisation, language inflection for comprehension, vocabulary learning</li> </ul>
<b>Other Engagements/Strategies</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PowerPoints</li> <li>• Graffiti Boards</li> <li>• Audit Trails</li> <li>• ZooBurst app</li> <li>• Wordle/Tagxedo: Word Clouds</li> <li>• QuICs (Questions, Interests, Connections)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• presentation of content; use of photos of teachers in learning for active participation in content delivery; use of special effects for emphasis</li> <li>• create graffiti using objects and texts around the classroom/school to tell stories of learners’ lives</li> <li>• reflections on learning and making connections across units of study</li> <li>• create stories using open access apps that use learners’ photos/images which have special effects to aesthetically engage</li> <li>• build vocabulary; develop concepts of symbolism/metaphor; compare/contrast; critical analysis content across websites</li> <li>• build comprehension, make connections, and identify interests for future text selections</li> </ul>

through the engagements/literature they had personally experienced. In so doing, they also learned twice; their sharing of ideas became a double moment in learning as they prepared for their children’s and colleagues’ learning by ‘giv[ing]’ and ‘shar[ing] good stuff’.

Pedagogy and learning also must integrate multiple viewpoints and perspectives that engender discussion and engagement around issues that matter. This second condition helped us consider how curricular materials/technology, engagement, and reflection not only generated new ideas and learning, but also highlighted the significance of multiple perspectives brought to the different texts and engagements. A poignant example occurred when teachers read *Something Beautiful* (Wyeth, 2002), a story of a young African American girl who wants to see past the graffiti and aspects of her neighbourhood that scared her and to look for what is beautiful. One teacher was reminded of her own similar upbringing and how her grandparents often said that anything she did was beautiful, while another slowly stroked the illustrated face of the black child in the story, 'feeling' the child's black skin. *Something Beautiful* was teachers' first experience with picture books with realistic black characters. Stories in which teachers could see themselves and their children helped us learn how teachers transacted with particular stories and images. We took this learning into our planning of all workshops.

A third condition is to move beyond practical application, and to understand teachers' cultural and multimodal knowledge, alongside their multilingual capacities. To do this meant we needed to listen differently, and not for stories that positioned us as successful teacher educators. Listening differently meant focusing on what teachers said about their learning, and observing the resources (e.g., visual, oral and written languages) they used to learn and convey their learning. In a graffiti boards engagement, teachers generated ideas to build children's literacy:

Grade 3 Teacher: *How enjoyable to make a graffiti board! I thought how children would enjoy making it using things that surround them.*

Grade 2 Teacher: *I like how you can teach reading and writing with graffiti.*

Grade R Teacher: *And tell stories.*

Grade 1 Teacher: *Children are so engaged with scavenger hunts and making graffiti boards. We support their reading and writing.*

Xhosa Teacher: *You can stretch the graffiti board into many ideas. You can tell a story in different languages so that children can understand more.*

Graffiti boards helped us understand which aspects of this engagement were important to this group of teachers. All saw that graffiti could be used to tell stories with different objects and 'in different languages so

*children can understand more*. Listening to teachers talk about graffiti boards as ‘scavenger hunts’ to ‘support [children’s] reading and writing’ helped us learn how their children learned best. Listening in this way positioned us as vulnerable; we could not predict what and how we thought teachers would engage with ideas. Yet, it is just this vulnerability that centralised teachers’ cultures, languages, and choice of media to tell stories with profound connections to their lives as teachers.

## Discussion and conclusion

We often share with colleagues and others how this experience had informed and shaped our ongoing and future work in teacher education and literacy development. We entered this Project with critical perspectives about teaching, learning and literacy development (Janks, 2009; Lewison et al., 2002). We understood the importance of leaning into critical practices that question power and inequities, that challenge commonplace assumptions, and that take up socio-political issues. The Project design, our interactions, and the enduring relationships established between the teachers and us made it possible to be on the other side of pedagogy (Britzman and Pitt, 1996). Being on the other side of pedagogy, however, required a shift in what is understood as learning. For us, learning about learning isn’t just about acquiring knowledge and strategies to improve one’s practice or gaining insights into new delivery formats for professional development. We witnessed the resourcefulness of teachers and learners in this rural school, teachers’ delight in sharing ideas and materials with colleagues and others, and their willingness to take risks in unfamiliar territory (e.g., using English in the workshop sessions, trying out new literacy strategies).

By challenging asymmetrical power relationships and positioning ourselves as learners learning alongside the teachers at Williams Primary School, we suggest that what is needed is a different kind of stance in teacher professional development – one where teacher educators are not ‘simply isolated, but [are intimately] intertwined with some other’ (Johnson, 2014: 3). To engage in this way requires a different pedagogical disposition around professional development. Learning from teachers involves asking questions like: Whose meanings matter? What happens when learning in professional development is a shared practice? What happens when our own experiences are mapped onto larger socio-political stances of professional development to disrupt the concept of ‘expert’? Learning twice requires a different type of listening, not presuming we

know how and what teachers will learn. But, through anticipation of their learning, we can be poised for flexibility and vulnerability, and ask questions to the learner to better understand their lives, histories, their cultures, and their languages from which their responses emanated.

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## 7

# Designing effective summer literacy learning programmes in Malta

Sue Bodman

Writing in the early months of 2021, the issue of how to respond to the growing gaps in educational attainment that appear during extended periods of school closure is making headlines. To support as many students as possible it is likely that some educational responses will involve non-traditional educators. It is also likely that support will be delivered outside school hours. A small-scale project in Malta designed to minimise the impact of long school holidays may offer some insight into how non-traditional settings might be designed and implemented to ensure that learning opportunities have impact on the students who need it most, whether in times of social crisis or as summer learning programmes designed to support students who may be vulnerable because of lack of opportunity to read during the summer break.

In September 2019, some state (public) schools in Malta began to implement the school-based early literacy intervention Reading Recovery (RR) (Clay, 2016). RR is a short-term early literacy intervention for children aged about six and is delivered in a one-to-one tutoring context. Implementing the programme required substantial investment in staffing and an infrastructure of professional development across nine state schools. At the end of the scholastic year, 129 students had either completed or were currently receiving RR and would continue lessons in the new scholastic year. In Malta, however, the summer recess stretches from June until the beginning of October, leaving students vulnerable to the impact of a ‘summer slide’ and a potential erosion of gains made through RR. I designed a summer learning programme to minimise attainment regression. The summer programme employed 13 student teachers, who

were trained to work as tutors, and two experienced teachers, who acted as mentors to the tutors.

This chapter reports on positive student impact. Experiences and perceptions of tutors and mentors are explored through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The chapter concludes with reflections on the challenges of preparing non-traditional educators to provide effective summer school literacy support for young literacy learners.

## Literature context

‘Summer slide’ refers to a halt in progress or marked drop from previous assessment scores when students return to school after an extended break. Slide after extended periods of school closure is more likely for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Borman, 2000). Whilst schools are open, students can potentially benefit from support with literacy learning and other inclusive structures in schools. However, differences in frequency and type of literacy learning opportunities mean that for some, learning does not continue, at least not at the same rate or in the same way as for children living in advantage, during long school holidays. Entwisle, Alexander and Olson (2000) suggested that learning opportunities could be represented as the flow from a tap. When schools are open, flow of learning is at its optimum and equally available for all. However, when schools are closed, the flow of ‘school-like’ learning opportunities and resources may not be as available for some children compared to others (Borman et al., 2005). Such a perspective, of course, privileges school-based learning and privileges the types of learning opportunities that exist within the home.

### Socioeconomic status

The relationship between socioeconomic status and attainment is complex. If we think of ‘investment in learning’ as including interaction around educational activities like time spent playing and talking with children, it becomes clearer how living in a home with access to many books is a great advantage (Evans et al., 2010). It is not parental income itself that provides advantage but having enough disposable income to have many books in a home, which may indicate parental investment in reading aloud, reading together, children reading independently and talking around books. Children benefitting from parental investment in



learning during school closures are more likely to continue to make progress (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

## Reading at home

Whilst reading at home is predictive of later achievement (Sénéchal, 2006), the nature of this has been repeatedly shown to vary considerably and to be strongly related to socioeconomic status. Surveying over 1,000 parents and 500 early years practitioners, Formby (2014) found that children in economically advantaged homes are more likely to read every day, engage in a variety of literacy-focused activities and converse about what has been read than children in disadvantaged homes. It is not just a matter of having books, but the sorts of activities and interactions that result from reading that make a difference (Guryan, Quinn and Kim, 2014). Therefore, 'slide' can be understood not as 'lost' learning but the impact of fewer opportunities during school closures.

## Minimising slide

In general, research findings point to quite modest impact for summer learning programmes, with socioeconomically advantaged children benefitting most (Cooper et al., 1996). A summer learning programme could reduce the gap between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds as it would allow the 'flow' of opportunities to interact with books and other literacy activities during the long summer break. Reviewing the research evidence in the UK, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2019) reported that on average students attending summer school make approximately two additional months' progress compared to similar students who do not. Scale of impact was influenced by teaching personnel, with as much as four months gain provided by the use of experienced teachers. Impact did not seem to be dependent on use of the student's usual teacher. Whilst experienced teachers are more effective in providing support for students experiencing literacy difficulties, when trained and supported appropriately, those other than teachers, for example peer tutors or volunteers, with similar training can also provide effective instruction. A barrier to impact raised in several of the reviewed studies was irregular attendance by students (cf. EEF, 2019). Small groups or individual lessons yielded more impact per student, but the scale of the impact varied depending on the approach and design adopted (Mulcahy, Menzies and Shaw, 2020). EEF (2019) concluded

that the impact of summer schools is more pronounced for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, though this is not consistent with findings from other studies (Cooper et al., 1996).

## The Maltese context

Malta is officially a bilingual country although the balance between English and Maltese varies across regions, across homes and across schools. In state (public) schools, the main language of instruction is Maltese, with the exception of English lessons. Formal English teaching in school begins in the second term of Year 1 (around the age of five). A recent study found that in the majority of schools, more than 90 per cent of children considered Maltese to be their mother tongue (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2017). Bilingualism and bilingual education are actively promoted through a national policy of the balanced integration of both English and Maltese (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). However, not all children in Malta could be considered equally bilingual and language competence in English varies widely. The language context in Malta creates a diverse student population with differing language competences in both main languages.

The magnitude of 'slide' differs according to age or the length of the summer break; some startling figures have been reported (Atteberry and McEachin, 2016). Some studies report that over a summer break of six to eight weeks, a typical student 'loses' just under a month's worth of measurable literacy learning (Cooper et al., 1996; Borman et al., 2005). This means that in Malta, the summer slide can be pronounced for some students, particularly those living in economic disadvantage. Summer learning programmes are common, often taking place in schools, but not run by school staff. Typically, summer learning programmes include recreational opportunities, for example handicraft, sport and physical activities and cultural visits. Parents may choose to use summer schools to provide childcare whilst they are at work. During the hot summer months, public service workers often finish work around midday and so the half-day summer school provision offers a convenient service for those without family childcare. With this in mind, the National Literacy Agency in Malta decided to offer a literacy programme within the summer schools' infrastructure for students aged six to seven years of age who had been receiving Reading Recovery during the scholastic year.

## Description of the programme

Summer Reading Fun (SURF) was a structured programme, meaning that whilst a lesson framework and teaching structure were common to all lessons, teaching for each student was responsive to learning need as determined by a formative assessment of reading behaviours. Theoretical underpinnings of instruction and pedagogy were similar to those of the RR intervention students had been receiving during the school year. The daily 20-minute lesson involved oracy, reading and writing. Each lesson had four sections:

1. Preparing to read a new text, including discussion about the story or information book
2. Reading the text
3. Discussing the meaning of the text
4. Sentence and word-level work (including writing a sentence or two about the text read)

A collection of books was organised into a gradient of challenge organised numerically, using book banding criteria (Bodman and Franklin, 2021). Books were evaluated for complexity of content, sentence structure, book structure, format and demands on word reading skills. The levelling and student-book match system was created specifically for SURF with some specific outcomes in mind:

- (i) To ensure that students were reading texts with a high level of accuracy in the hope that interaction between tutor and student would be positive and focus on positive reinforcement of active problem solving and accurate reading
- (ii) To ensure that students read at least four books at each level before progressing to texts with greater challenge
- (iii) To support the tutors by linking each group of texts to a collection of prompts from which to select. Prompts were related to the reading behaviours that students were likely to be exhibiting at each text level

Lessons utilised the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing knowledge and offered opportunities to attend to print, use knowledge of letter-sound relationships and build language knowledge and skills. Reading and writing are theorised as the interactive processing

of information from a variety of sources – information from letter-sound correspondences, the meanings that exist within text or talk, the individual's experience of how the world works, knowledge of how language structures work in oral and written language (Bodman and Smith, 2013).

## Methods

Data were collected in order to explore impact on student attainment, if the training and support offered to tutors and mentors had been effective and in what ways, and how it might be improved for future years' implementation. Mentors were interviewed about their perceptions of how the tutors had been prepared and the aspects of support for tutors they had provided. Six of the 13 tutors completed an online questionnaire to rate their preparation and provide comment about their experiences and perceptions of implementation, including student attendance patterns.

### Students

All 129 students who had received or were receiving RR were offered a place. School staff approached parents to discuss arrangements for bringing and collecting their child from school to access the programme. The existing summer programme structure offered some flexibilities and efficiencies for this project. In order to offer SURF to as many of the students who had received or were receiving RR as possible, registration was offered for the half-day summer school programme with the lesson included, or students could attend by appointment. In total, of the 129 students offered a place, 67 attended the SURF lessons. A small number of students attended the full summer school programme; the majority of students attended just their daily SURF lesson. Students ranged in attainment; five had emergent literacy skills, accessing stories through pictures rather than print and not yet able to move consistently from left to right and top to bottom when tracking text. Twenty students had early literacy skills, able to read simple story texts and use some simple letter-to-sound relationships to inform reading. Thirty-five students were attaining at levels expected for their age and classroom cohort, able to use letter clusters as well as single letters and check that their reading made sense and followed grammatical conventions. A starting point for each student was determined by their RR teacher in school using a Running Record (Clay, 2013). All students spoke both Maltese and English though there was

diversity in proficiency and language used in the home. Data were not collected on language usage or language competence.

Impact of SURF was measured using text levels provided by running records (Clay, 2013). At the beginning of the programme, each student was assessed using a running record to ascertain a level for instruction. This instructional text level is the level that the student could read with between 90 per cent and 94 per cent accuracy. Standard conventions were used to indicate accurate reading, independent problem-solving and appeals for help. Number of words read accurately were counted to calculate percentage accuracy. Baseline text levels were used to place the student on the SURF text progression. Text levels were assessed again as the new school term began.

### Tutors

Third-year Bachelor of Education students volunteered to teach in the SURF project. They received two days' preparation prior to working with students. Preparation sessions were discursive, interactive and linked theories of literacy acquisition with the SURF lesson, including opportunities to watch a teacher working with a student and analysing the student's reading behaviour and the teacher's responses. The aim of this was to provide experience of formatively assessing reading in order to decide on focused prompts and next steps. The preparation course also involved opportunities to understand the goals of SURF, learn about the intervention the students had received in school, rehearse using suggested prompts and become familiar with the book collection. A booklet was also prepared that included examples of tutor-child interaction for each text in the book collection. The examples provided instructional talk, suggested prompts from which to choose to support problem solving, a suggested writing activity and word study for each of the texts in the book collection. These demonstrated change in prompting scope and focus as text demands increased. Tutors were supervised, mentored and monitored by two mentors, both qualified RR teachers. They received regular visits during the five-week period that the summer literacy programme ran. They were also able to contact the mentors if they needed support with a particular child or situation.

### Mentors

Two experienced RR teachers served as mentors for the tutors. They attended the two training days and received additional support for the

coaching/mentoring role, both at the time of the training and midway through the project. Support offered during the project included school visits to observe conversations with parents, opportunities to observe coaching sessions with students and time to raise questions about implementation.

## Findings

### Text levels

Pre- and post-programme data were available for 62 students. The average text level had risen by one text level from 13.29 ( $SD = 5.16$ ) to 14.45 ( $SD = 5.33$ ). The slight increase in the standard deviations (from 5.16 to 5.33) demonstrates a wider range of text levels as some students had made progress from their starting point but for some students, text levels had decreased. A two-tailed t-test was used to compare the averages at pre- and post-programme and to see whether there was a significant difference between the group average at pre- and post-programme text levels. The t score of greater than 3 shows that the averages were three times as different from each other as within the range of scores ( $t = 3.83$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and that similar results could be expected if the programme were repeated with another group of similar students. The p statistic of 1 per cent shows that text levels had on average improved and that this impact was not due to chance and the findings are valid.

The text levels of 43 students increased, 11 remained the same and 8 decreased. Increases were seen across the range of text level starting points demonstrating that tutors had been able to effectively support students who were early in their literacy learning and those with more established skills. Text levels for the 54 students who improved their reading level increased by a mean of 2.36 ( $SD = 1.21$ ). Text level most frequently increased by 1 or 2 levels (37 of 43 students who improved) although there were increases of up to 6 text levels. Text level had decreased for 8 students. The mean text level for these students fell from 14.75 ( $SD = 4.06$ ) to 11.25 ( $SD = 4.03$ ). For one student, the decrease was pronounced, dropping 7 text levels. For the remaining 7, decrease was less marked, 2 levels being the most frequent. Therefore, for 88 per cent ( $N = 54$ ) of students, 'slide' had been successfully avoided.

All six tutors reported that students enjoyed opportunities to read and talk with an adult, were interested in the books provided since they were not books used in the classroom or school-based interventions

and were highly motivated by the positive reinforcement they received. Students attending regularly had made better progress. As well as the obvious benefit of attending more lessons, tutors reported that daily contact had enabled them to take account of learning needs and interests, and therefore able to personalise learning and create motivating book talk.

Limited attendance was stated as the primary reason for a fall in text level in all six responses. Responses indicated that the most frequent reason given for non-attendance was that parents were unwilling or unable to bring the child to lessons, with six of six tutors reporting this. Three of six responses indicated that family outings arranged for the same times as the SURF lessons had also been offered by parents as a reason for non-attendance. Unwillingness of the child to attend was indicated for just one of the 67 students. One respondent also indicated that she felt that an unsupportive home environment was a factor.

## Engagement

For eight students, the gains made during a school-based intervention prior to the SURF programme were not maintained. Tutors commented that students with decreases in book level had also attended less frequently. Since attendance data were not collected, it is not possible to conclude that there was a relationship between attendance and achievement. It is clear, however, that tutors perceived that differences in student attendance were linked to parental engagement: *'Attendance did not go well – it was the weakest bit. What could we do?'* A mentor commented *'the children most in need are the ones that will not turn up. They are stuck in a rut. How can we reach them?'* Reasons for non-attendance included the heat or a family outing, but for some children, other factors were reported as preventing engagement. For example, a mentor reported that *'the student told me that the parent could not bring the child to school, there were social problems in the home.'*

## Building partnerships with parents

Tutors reported that many parents requested books for their child to read at home. The need for parents to engage with the programme was acknowledged: *'It has to come from them – they have to want to and share our aspirations for their child.'* However, in order to forge effective partnerships leading to consistent attendance, shared understanding of the goals of a summer learning programme may have been absent. A mentor reflected

*'Maybe we didn't help them understand about what happens during the summer months when children do not read regularly – maybe if they understood more about that they would see the benefit and take up the place.'* Both mentors felt that a change of approach for student recruitment was needed to ensure engagement with summer learning programmes such as SURF: *'It's a change of mindset focusing on the importance of reading every day.'*

### Influence of existing relationships

School differences in parental perceptions were reported. This acted both positively and negatively: *'In some schools, there is more ownership [for a summer school] from the senior leadership and this helped connect the parents with the possibility of support over the summer.'* This seems to indicate the importance of school senior leadership involvement in recruitment for summer learning programmes, particularly for families that may be reticent to engage, for whatever reason. Identifying the importance of connections between the summer learning programmes and the student's school staff, a mentor commented, *'The head of school and the staff in the school understand the parents the best – so if they are involved in recruiting parents and getting involved in the benefits and the reasons why SURF would help their child so much, the take-up would have been more consistent across the schools. Schools need to give more importance to it.'* In schools where school leadership had been active in recruiting parents to SURF, there was perceived to be a greater parental understanding of the goals of the programme, and a suggestion that this led to a commitment to bringing the child to lessons. In others, a perceived lack of connection was suggested to sometimes result in lack of parental commitment and little importance afforded to attendance. Of course, low attendance may not equate to low family support, and without talking to parents directly it is not possible to conclude why children did not attend. Other factors may have included childcare, work commitments, holidays, and so on. The perceptions of teachers may, indeed, be revealing unquestioned assumptions about parental engagement.

Mentors perceived that lack of information about the student allocated to each school and not meeting parents and students before the project contributed to lack of engagement in some cases. Commenting on the value of establishing a relationship, a mentor commented, *'The parents asked me "who is going to teach them?" – "it's going to be me" – the response was very quick – they signed up within an hour. They knew the teacher and they knew what it (the programme) is for straight away.'* This suggests that when parents understand how the school and summer



learning provision are connected, they are more likely to engage. The use of non-traditional educators was also perceived to impact engagement, as *'they were volunteers, not teachers and that might have put off some children and families – so the existing trusting relationship may have produced higher engagement.'* It may be that it is the previous relationship, not the status of the educator, that is of importance here.

### Authentic literacy activities

Another reason for maintaining or improving levels was perceived to be authentic literacy activities, one mentor commenting *'the opportunity to read with an adult, listening, modelling what it should sound like – we tend to forget the work we can do to support the development of reading – I think that was the greatest benefit, a regular opportunity to read and write with an adult who knew how to support them.'* Tutor and mentor responses all indicated that students had enjoyed lessons and wanted to attend. The importance of authentic text-based experiences that interested the child was considered key by both mentors and tutors. A tutor commenting on her observations of lessons said *'They really enjoyed reading different books than those in schools, and there were many titles to choose from – they had non-fiction too, so they could see many types of writing and presentation – it gave a feel for how different writers write.'* In this example of comments about how valuable the experience was of reading texts relevant to real-life experiences, a tutor reported that *'They were interested in the books, some boys who liked to read for information and so that was exciting for them. It built enjoyment of reading and lots of talk about the books.'* These comments draw attention to the importance of meaningful purposes to talk about, read and create written texts and texts that connect to student interests.

### Tutors' preparation and support

All six tutors commented on the usefulness of the training and how it prepared them for working with students. For example, the comment *'The two-day training course was equipped with all the tools and techniques needed to support the readers. I felt comfortable and well-prepared'* suggests that the practical approach adopted during the preparation helped tutors develop ways of responding to students. Another comment echoed this: *'The training we had gave me a clear idea of what we needed to do. I felt prepared and ready to work with the children.'* Another referred specifically to the helpfulness of the lesson examples: *'We had a very detailed training course which helped us get into the picture together with lesson plans.'*

Comments suggest that training and support enhanced the learning of the tutor, offering benefit for the education system in Malta more generally; one student commented *'It has helped me guide my students better during reading'* and *'Thanks to that training I feel like I know how to help children who struggle with reading better. I look forward to more trainings such as the one we had.'*

Tutors were asked to comment on aspects for which they had requested further support. Four of the six tutors focused on how they needed support to communicate with parents when a student was not attending regularly. One of the tutors was working with a child with particular difficulties and although the student had maintained their text level, the tutor had requested support from the mentor on several occasions. Three tutors had asked for support with students who were still learning letter-sound relationships.

Mentors were asked to comment on areas in which they had been asked for support. In general, they felt that tutors *'were well prepared, even though it was a new way of doing things and seeing things'* and were able to use the support materials to prepare effectively and to create supportive teaching interactions. There were particular aspects of supporting vulnerable literacy learners that had required ongoing coaching and support. Tutors had required additional coaching for students at the very earliest stages of learning to read. Mentors reported that the tutors' *'view of learning was to tell, rather than to teach for the child to take over the task.'* The instruction they had received to teach reading in university was *'only about telling them [students] to sound the word out.'* When students were in early stages of learning about how to attend to print and beginning to build letter knowledge, tutors needed coaching for how to support linking sound sequences to letter sequences and attend to information of many kinds. Since students at early levels maintained or increased text levels, the coaching tutors received coupled with continued experiences with books in a supportive environment appears to have been effective. Tutors also requested support when making a decision to raise a text level. Mentors reported that tutors also requested support when having to make individual adaptations for a child, for example deciding to raise the text level after several days of highly accurate reading.

## Discussion

Tutors teaching in the SURF project successfully supported most of the targeted students to maintain or exceed baseline text level. The

differences between pre- and post-programme mean text levels were statistically significant. Increased or maintained text levels were observed across the range of reading attainment and across the range of student need and intervention history. Training and ongoing guidance enabled tutors to make valuable contributions to support for vulnerable literacy learners. Findings of this project suggest that linking theory to the practical and technical aspects of the training enabled tutors to identify students' needs and personalise learning. However, they required support when teaching emergent literacy skills or particular difficulties. Students targeted for interventions have a range of individual differences (Clay, 2016) requiring teaching beyond a fixed set of scripted responses. Meeting the needs of a diverse student population requires training that supports understanding of the reading process and how to personalise instruction. The tutors also needed support to build relationships with parents, particularly those who were less engaged. These findings suggest that access to ongoing coaching and mentoring is of importance when non-traditional educators provide summer learning programmes. Indeed, the type of preparation described by Kabuto and colleagues in Chapter 8, where literacy professionals were supported to expand their understandings of the communities in which they worked, seems particularly relevant when considering the difficulties faced by tutors on SURF.

Findings support the idea of a flow of opportunities and resources (Entwisle, Alexander and Olson, 2000). SURF created frequent opportunities for students to engage in reading and writing activities, and then they could continue to use the literacy skills they have learned. Tutors and mentors reported that for students who attended less frequently, the 'flow' of opportunities was less intense and earlier gains were eroded as indicated by decrease in text level.

Similar to previous studies, inconsistent attendance hampered the impact of teaching. Perceptions of the tutors and teachers suggested that inconsistent parental commitment was the reason for this and yet this perception in itself is troubling. Placing blame on families masks the complexity of systemic discrimination. Contrasting with EEF (2019) conclusion that involvement of a student's teacher is not necessary, lack of connection between the school and SURF was perceived to be a key reason for inconsistent attendance. It may be that a lack of value or trust in those not involved in the day-to-day education of their child influenced the quality of relationship between home and school. Findings suggest that connections between school and out-of-school setting may be particularly important for students most in need of support and that external agencies may yield less consistent attendance patterns if there

are not efforts to build partnership between parents and educators. In [Chapter 1](#), Braden, Myers and Compton-Lilly explore in more detail how pre-service teachers, like the tutors on the SURF programme, can be supported to critically examine issues of equity and expectations for students in high-need schools, potentially recalibrating the burden of responsibility for participation on the entire school community (not just perceiving lack of participation as a deficit on the part of parents).

In this project, data were not collected to explore reading at home. It is not possible to say whether students had books at home or that those attending inconsistently did not read on days they did not attend. However, findings show marked benefit of attending lessons, that parents wanted to borrow books to use at home and evidence supports Guryan et al.'s (2014) conclusion that reading more increases attainment.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Quality of preparation for tutors, positive relationship between tutors and students, high quality reading material and authentic literacy contexts were all factors in designing a learning programme to avoid slide. However, inconsistent attendance eroded impact for a small number of students. Experience leads to some recommendations for future practice:

- Preparation for non-traditional educators needs to go beyond technique and engage with understanding of theory and purpose so that they can respond to diverse language and literacy learning needs.
- Working with vulnerable and disadvantaged students in out-of-school settings involves communication with parents, sometimes in tricky situations. A system of both coaching and mentoring support is vital for both impact and duty of care to educators. In [Chapter 1](#), Braden et al. discuss the real need for pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their own cultures, the culture of the communities they work in, and the need to critically reflect on their roles in addressing systemic inequities.
- Consideration needs to be given to recruitment and information about the programme goals in order to build a partnership approach with parents/caregivers (see [Chapter 1](#)).
- Connections and communication between school and the non-traditional setting support explicit value for and trust in the work of non-traditional educators.

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## 8

# A literacy coaching collaborative: preparing community-responsive literacy coaches

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As an effective model for teacher professional development, literacy coaching has grown and gained increasing traction in K–12 schools in the United States (Bean et al., 2015). The International Literacy Association (ILA) has played an active part in defining the roles of the specialised literacy professional, a broader term used to describe a variety of literacy-focused positions and job titles like *reading specialist*, *literacy specialist*, *literacy coach*, or *literacy coordinator*. According to ILA, the roles of the literacy professional are dynamic and range in intensity to include informal activities (e.g., building relationships with teachers through conversations, scheduling, observations, etc.), more formal activities (e.g., discussing and analysing practices through evaluations of student work, lessons, etc.), and intense formal activities (co-planning and co-teaching lessons, evaluation of lessons, etc.) (Bean et al., 2015). The role of literacy coaches more specifically focuses on supporting teacher learning to improve classroom instruction and student outcomes (see [Chapter 13](#) for more on literacy coaching).

This chapter will explore the preparation of literacy coaches in a university-based specialised literacy preparation programme (henceforth the literacy programme) that partnered with a community organisation to form a coaching collaborative. In this literacy programme pre-service literacy professionals experienced literacy coaching practices and techniques with community-based after-school and youth development staff. This chapter is a companion to [Chapter 4](#), which discusses how the same

literacy programme re-envisioned the literacy practicum. Here, we will discuss what it means to prepare community-responsive literacy coaches and how the literacy coaching collaborative provided a space for candidates in the literacy programme to develop better understandings of their work as situated within and on behalf of distinct community contexts and gain first-hand experience with coaching as a professional practice. We will conclude the chapter with recommendations for the potential of community-based organisations as spaces for the preparation of literacy coaches.

## Community-responsive literacy coaching

We use the term *community-responsive literacy coaching* to describe literacy coaching that extends beyond classrooms to include literacy practices and learning situated within communities and families. Similar to community-based teacher education, the movement among university-based teacher preparation programmes to include community partnerships and youth participatory projects as central components of field experience (Zeichner, 2010; Zenkov and Pytash, 2019), we see exciting potential in collaborating with community-based organisations. These settings can enrich literacy professional candidates' understandings of local histories and cultures of students, families and community members and expand their sense of professional dispositions through exposure to educational settings beyond the classroom.

In coining this term, we aim to (1) reimagine and expand narrow definitions of literacy knowledge (e.g. from just book or text based to broader funds of knowledge, social media, art-based, etc.); (2) expand our understandings of where literacy occurs and who engages in literacy practices and might benefit from coaching (e.g. to include community-based educators, members and families); (3) prepare specialists who ground their work in community context – social, political, historical and organisational – and who feel better equipped to navigate their work amidst social dynamics and uncertainties; and (4) broaden the sites and opportunities in which literacy coaches can be of value within the educational landscape.

Community organisations can provide a 'third space' for professional learning by breaking down the walls between schools, universities and communities (Zeichner, 2010). Rather than tailoring the preparation of novice literacy coaches to address school-based data, mandated curricula, and accountability data that may guide and restrict their

interactions with teachers, community organisations provide spaces that shift the focus to community needs and relationship building. Community mentorship – learning from community organisation staff and families – as well as participatory projects offer opportunities to innovate alongside communities, particularly for communities of colour whose stories, experiences and knowledge have often been marginalised or excluded from educational institutions (Guillen and Zeichner, 2018).

Community-based learning within preparation programmes for education professionals can also encourage novice literacy professionals to unpack, examine and interrogate deficit-oriented assumptions about children and families of colour (Cooper, 2007; Murrell, 2000). With critical guidance from university faculty, community placements can spark needed conversation and reflection about race and class, supporting more nuanced racial consciousness among candidates as well as stronger antiracist identities and educational practices (Seidl and Hancock, 2011). Community organisations can be sites in which to illuminate the sociohistorical contexts of a community and the everyday lived experiences of both children and adults. Familiarising and broadening literacy specialists' understandings of community through both engagement and rigorous self-reflection are crucial practices to ensure educators are addressing implicit biases and building awareness of systemic inequalities (Murrell, 2000).

## **The origins of a community-based literacy coaching collaborative**

The literacy coaching collaborative began as a partnership in 2020 between a university-based specialised literacy professional preparation programme and Q-Community House (QCH), a multisite and multiservice settlement house first established in the 1970s. The university-based programme prepares candidates for certification as Literacy Specialist in Birth-6th Grades and is nationally recognised by ILA in the preparation and training of specialised literacy professionals. In years past, candidates completed coaching projects designed by university faculty alongside teachers in school settings so that candidates would gain first-hand professional experience with mentorship from faculty.

With the closing of schools and shifts to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, candidates were not able to participate in field experiences in traditional classrooms. While the global pandemic created profound challenges for schools and professional preparation of educators, it also allowed our faculty and staff to explore and broaden



how we conceptualised our clinical placements. This led to the collaboration with QCH, who were also looking to find meaningful partnerships to support their programming. QCH provided both in-person and virtual after-school services, virtual family literacy programmes, and in-person support for children of essential workers when schools were working remotely during the pandemic.

For the literacy coaching collaborative, QC faculty and QCH paired 18 candidates with QCH staff members (18 total staff members) for one-to-one coaching over a 10-week period. At the start of the programme, all candidates held initial state certification as classroom teachers and were returning to earn their graduate degree and state certification as literacy professionals. Approximately 90 per cent of the candidates were teaching full-time, either as full-time classroom teachers or substitute teachers. The majority of candidates reported that they had not worked previously with a literacy coach. The literacy coaching collaborative took place in the second semester of the programme.

QCH staff members engaged in a variety of teaching activities, which included teaching reading and writing, team building, planning virtual field trips, conducting books clubs, and teaching in family literacy programmes. QCH staff ranged in their experience at the organisation from 1 to 15 years, with most staff having 1–3 years of experience. The majority of staff had no formal training in education through college or university degrees, but they all attended required monthly professional development sessions at QCH.

Table 8.1 outlines the trajectory of the literacy coaching collaborative. After the candidates were matched with a staff member, they interviewed them on their experiences and teaching goals. Together they decided on one area connected to literacy that would guide their coaching experience. To support this area, candidates created a list of resources that they housed in Google Sites. The candidates and staff engaged in a minimum of two lesson planning, observation, and debrief cycles. This process was iterative, and the candidates were encouraged to meet the changing needs of their staff members. Candidates completed weekly check-ins with university faculty during which they reported on the status of their coaching. At each check-in, candidates were asked how comfortable they felt in supporting the staff members. At the end of the experience, candidates were asked how successful they felt in working with the staff members. Candidates interviewed the staff members again at the end of the collaborative to garner their insights into the literacy coaching collaborative and composed a written reflection on their experience.

**Table 8.1** Outline of literacy coaching collaborative

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
Coach and Staff Meet and Greet	Candidates met with their staff member before the coaching activities started and asked them questions like the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What activities do you teach?</li><li>• What grade(s) do you teach?</li><li>• How long have you been at QCH?</li><li>• What are your strengths?</li><li>• What are your struggles?</li><li>• What inspires you to teach literacy or incorporate literacy into other subject areas?</li></ul>
Google Site	Candidates created a site as a resource for their staff. The site included videos, suggested books for read-alouds, and links to materials in a targeted area of literacy.
Identification of a Literacy Area	Candidates and their staff identified one area of literacy instruction to focus on in the coaching experience. These areas included questioning techniques, engagement, using technology, selecting diverse picture books, and incorporating multimedia.
Two Cycles of Lesson/Observation/Debrief	Candidates and staff engaged in two cycles of co-planning lessons, observations, and debriefs of the lesson. From this cycle, candidates and their staff established new objectives and goals for the next lesson.
Weekly Check-Ins	Candidates completed weekly check-ins through their university-based coursework. Candidates reported the status of their coaching activities and changes that might have occurred. Candidates also reported their comfort levels throughout the coaching activities.
Coach-Staff Interview	Candidates interviewed their staff at the end of the coaching experience. They asked questions like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How do you think you benefited from the coaching process?</li><li>• What areas would you like to further develop?</li></ul>
Reflection	Candidates wrote a reflection on the coaching experience. The reflection centred on the question: What does community-responsive literacy coaching mean to you?

In building the collaboration, we found few resources and little research that adapted literacy coaching preparation to community organisations. For instance, resources for lesson planning, observations, and debriefing focused on classroom settings and did little to

address the organisational structure and background of staff members at community organisations like QCH. We therefore found this opportunity a ripe one for exploring the following research question: How can teacher education programmes prepare community-responsive novice literacy coaches through a community-based literacy coaching collaborative?

To address this question, we returned to the interviews, check-ins, and reflections completed by the coaching candidates and conducted a content analysis. This required the inductive coding of data and the development of themes. The goal of the content analysis was to identify ways that a community-responsive framework affected the preparation of literacy coaches. In the following section, we present how the coaching collaborative provided a space for candidates to develop a community-responsive mindset and professional dispositions as literacy coaches.

## **Developing a community-responsive mindset to literacy coaching**

By the end of the literacy coaching collaborative, candidates expressed new understandings of coaching within a community organisation. Their reflective responses highlighted two main areas that espoused a community-responsive mindset: understanding the dynamic nature of the community organisation and incorporating the diversity of the community into the coaching process.

### The dynamic nature of the community organisation

Candidates in the programme recognised that the dynamic nature of the community organisation created benefits and challenges that led them to become more flexible and open-minded about coaching QCH staff. Several candidates compared the dynamic nature of QCH to school settings. One candidate described how engaging in a community-responsive coaching experience made her realise that being a coach does not have to be confined to the walls of a traditional classroom or school building. Candidates observed how many programmes used mixed age groupings and active parent involvement. This encouraged candidates to acknowledge that supporting teachers includes learning how to coach them in a variety of contexts that do not use traditional grade-level groupings and include family and community members.

Candidates discovered that there was a greater amount of freedom within the community organisation to address the diverse interests, backgrounds and needs of students and families. Several candidates expressed that the staff did not feel the same type of pressure as teachers in schools. While there were expectations that lesson plans would be reviewed and approved, the staff did not feel the burden of mandated testing, grading, and other pressures common in formal school settings. In return, candidates took a more holistic approach that diverged from the data-driven instruction that happens in schools. This led candidates to feel that the organisation used a more culturally responsive approach to teaching than what they saw in schools.

At the same time, coaching in a community organisation was not without its challenges. Candidates saw how aspects of the organisation could change quickly in response to uncertainties and needs of communities being served. Because the coaching collaborative took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, changes from remote after-school and family literacy programming to in-person programme happened quickly. Candidates whose staff switched instructional modes found themselves adapting to the changing needs of the staff.

For instance, staff who were running family literacy programmes were switched to after-school programmes. In addition, not all staff were considered teaching staff and some teaching staff members switched to non-teaching roles. There were situations in which candidates were informed of changes right before an observation. While candidates expressed various levels of frustration at these changes, in the end they recognised that a responsive literacy coach needed to be understanding, respectful and aware of the needs of the community organisation and the staff.

Candidates also found the context, goals and purposes of the community organisation complex and difficult to understand at first. The complexity of community organisations like QCH is not uncommon, and staff in community-based organisations often play multiple roles in supporting children and youth in their programmes. Over time, candidates realised that as they learned more about the organisation's work, they were better able to coach the staff. In one situation, a candidate worked with a staff member who not only moved from remote to in-person teaching, but also changed roles so that she was not creating her own lessons. While the candidate found the situation unusual because those types of changes would not happen quickly in a school context, she noted that she was able to adjust and provide guidance in a way that suited the staff member's evolving roles.

## Understanding community context and knowledge

Candidates observed how developing a community-responsive mindset towards literacy coaching required understanding the social and cultural context of the community and students' funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge refers to the diverse and existing resources of knowledge held by the families and communities (Moll, 1992). Candidates described how the community organisation allowed for more culturally responsive teaching than what they observed in schools. This was partly because many staff were from the same communities as their students and understood the social and historical context of the community and shared the lived experiences of the children they worked with on a daily basis.

From these observations, candidates overwhelmingly described the need to integrate students' and families' funds of knowledge into their coaching. Because many of the community organisation staff did not have formal education degrees or training, staff described how even though they valued and had strong familiarity with their students' funds of knowledge, they were unfamiliar with culturally responsive and sustaining teaching strategies. While they built lessons based on students' interests and intentionally built on the background of the families and community, they did not always feel comfortable selecting culturally diverse books and asking questions that would promote deeper thinking on topics of culture, race and diversity.

Candidates found this area a ripe one for coaching and described how they worked with their staff to select culturally responsive texts like *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi and *Chocolate Milk, Por Favor: Celebrating Diversity with Empathy* by Maria Dismundy and Nancy Raines Day. Providing quality resources for text selection that integrated the students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and interests allowed candidates to coach their staff into developing inclusive learning experiences.

## Professional dispositions as a literacy coach

The coaching collaborative provided a space for candidates to develop professional dispositions as community-responsive literacy coaches. Data collected from the candidates' reflections and weekly check-ins show that the collaborative provided a context for them to build sustained relationships with the staff. As a result, candidates reported increased self-confidence in supporting staff in their instruction and in how they interacted with their staff as part of the lesson planning-observation-debrief cycles.

## Developing sustained and trusting relationships

The majority of candidates reported that the coaching collaborative allowed them to focus on what ILA describes as ‘informal activities’ (Bean et al., 2015). Candidates described how they established goals and scheduled meetings with staff, and how they discussed upcoming lessons and observations and debriefed on lessons during regular meetings. Candidates communicated with their staff through a variety of tools, including email, phone and text messaging. They reported that these tools enabled open lines of communication, which were critical for building positive relationships and navigating the dynamic nature of the community organisation.

Developing a consistent communication strategy, however, took work and compromise on the part of the candidates and staff. Candidates described that it was not always easy to find times for coaching conversations because programme in the organisation is decentralised and occurring in a variety of educational settings. In spite of the challenge of coordinating schedules, candidates and their staff found ways of communicating that worked for both parties. For example, some candidates and their staff felt that the literacy website that candidates developed for their staff was an effective place to store resources that staff could access at their convenience.

Working in the collaborative encouraged candidates to challenge their ways of thinking about coaching and how to focus on relationship building. At the beginning of the collaborative, many candidates came to the experience with the idea that they would co-create lesson plans and develop practices that would immediately become integrated into the staffs’ teaching. When ideas were not taken up by their staff members, candidates expressed frustration and felt that their coaching was ineffective. By working in a collaborative space over time, candidates recognised that supporting staff did not necessarily mean that they would take up all the ideas that candidates provided. Rather, they came to see that coaching required developing rapport and trusting relationships over time that were essential for any kind of new learning and change to occur.

## Confidence building

Through the process of working with QCH staff, candidates developed a sense of confidence in their abilities to coach literacy instruction. At the beginning of the experience, candidates expressed uncertainty in not knowing what to expect from the experience in general and their staff in particular. As candidates developed a rapport with their staff, got to know them as instructors at the community organisation, and learned about their goals for the coaching experience, candidates became more confident.

Some candidates empathised with staff having to conduct lessons when they did not have much training. One candidate described how her first coaching observation was the staff member's first time conducting a read-aloud. Watching her staff member become more experienced and confident in conducting read-alouds made the candidate realise that community organisations would benefit from having coaches to support staff who are directly involved with teaching. By the end of the experience, candidates reported that they felt they were successful in their coaching experience and expressed growing confidence in their abilities to serve in the role of a literacy coach.

Similarly, at the weekly check-ins candidates reported that they were unsure about how they could support their staff because lessons were often determined by the community organisation or staff had to have their lessons approved beforehand. As candidates worked on building collaborative relationships with staff, they started to find general areas of support that would fit the specific circumstances of each staff member. These areas included questioning techniques, engagement, using technology, selecting diverse picture books, and incorporating multimedia. While some candidates may not have been able to lesson plan with the staff, they were able to help staff adjust lessons.

Candidates were required to complete two lesson planning-observation-debrief cycles as part of the experience. Debriefing the lesson plans and observations created particular doubts for candidates. Many were unsure how to begin the debrief and what type of language to use. As candidates started to reframe debriefs from being evaluative to being reflective, they came to see coaching as mentorship and as a means of brainstorming ideas that could be used for future lessons. Candidates noted the lesson planning-observation-debrief cycles were important spaces for them to build communication and collaboration skills, pushing them out of their 'comfort zone' to engage in discussions and planning with staff members with whom they had had no previous interactions. Consequently, candidates reported they were more confident in co-planning and debriefing with their staff by the second cycle.

## **Community-responsive literacy coaching: the possibilities**

A community-responsive approach to literacy coaching significantly differs from the preparation of literacy coaches in school-based settings. As illustrated by the candidate experiences highlighted in this chapter, a community-responsive approach is built on community-based

learning and a service-oriented approach to preparing literacy coaches. The research in this chapter fills a void in the literature on preparing literacy coaches as specialised literacy professionals. There are few, if any, published studies that explore the preparation of literacy coaches through partnerships with community organisations and the benefits of these programmes for both literacy coach candidates and youth-serving professionals within community organisations. This may be due to the focus on preparing literacy coaches after they have left university programmes and assumed roles in schools (MacPhee and Jewett, 2017).

Findings from the candidate and staff interviews, lesson planning-observation-debrief cycles, weekly check-ins, and coaching illustrate that working within the context of a community organisation encouraged candidates to create a community-minded orientation towards literacy coaching. As Hunt and Handsfield (2013) suggest, becoming a literacy coach includes the complex negotiations of institutional spaces and the nature of teacher learning. Within the literacy coaching collaborative, the more candidates learned about the nature of the community organisation, the better they were able to connect to staff and support teaching through a culturally responsive and sustaining lens.

In addition, the literacy coaching collaborative allowed candidates to explore the influence of power dynamics in institutional settings (Rainville and Jones, 2008). Research on the preparation of literacy coaches in schools has shown that teachers are not prepared for how power and politics impact how and why literacy coaches support teachers (e.g., MacPhee and Jewett, 2017). Within the third space of the collaborative, we found that candidates were able to alter power dynamics that are typical in school-based coaching experiences to develop critical coaching skills that can be carried over to K–12 settings. For instance, candidates were free from the accountability structures and mandated curriculum that often define K–12 educational contexts and as a result were able to focus on critical aspects of relationship building that centred on trust, understanding and viewing the staffs' experiences from their perspective.

As a result, we argue that candidates began to develop professional dispositions as literacy coaches. Over time, candidates felt more confident about activities that ILA defines as part of the coaching process. Through this process, candidates negotiated their professional roles and navigated the conflicting storylines of success and frustration. There were times when candidates felt unsure of how they would co-plan lessons with staff or expressed frustration at the changing nature of the community organisation and their staff member's inability to incorporate suggestions. In these instances, candidates expressed that they did not feel effective or that their time was not being put to good use.



As Mangin and Dunsmore (2013) describe, candidates need a space to work out tensions in how they are positioned as coaches and the storylines of their experiences. The third space of the literacy coaching collaborative served this role. The candidates engaged in a coaching experience that was removed from formal school spaces and was supported by faculty in a university-based programme. Without supportive preparation, literacy coaches feel that they are unprepared, lack self-efficacy, and opt to spend less time as literacy coaches (MacPhee and Jewett, 2017). A community-based literacy coaching collaborative model has the potential to develop self-efficacy and critical coaching dispositions before candidates enter into formal educational settings to take on leadership roles.

Because few, if any, documented models for coaching collaboratives with community organisations currently exist, this literacy coaching collaborative also uncovered challenges and problems of practice in the preparation of literacy coaches. These challenges, however, can be minimised as more university-based programmes collaborate with community organisations and adopt a community-responsive approach. Here we highlight some of the challenges and describe possible solutions to these challenges.

- Community organisation staffing, and staff roles within them, can be complex systems with several layers of administration; this can be new territory for literacy coach candidates. While a school may have a standard organisational model, the internal structures of community organisations can differ widely based on their histories, locations, missions, activities and funding directives. When working with a community partner, candidates would benefit from an introductory session and tour of the organisation, with an organisational chart that describes the relationships between personnel and programmes as well as the primary tasks and activities of staff involved in the partnership.
- At various times during the collaborative, candidates did not feel effective because they did not have realistic expectations of coaching. Coaches are often socialised into roles that are less about being collaborative colleagues and more about experts who are asked to ‘fix teachers’ (MacPhee and Jewett, 2017: 429) and who act as ‘mediators and managers of mandated reforms’ (Hargreaves and Skelton, 2012: 128). Candidates often viewed instruction, evaluative observations, and lesson implementations through the lens of their experiences in schools. As a result, candidates did not always have realistic expectations about the coaching process in community organisations nor

familiarity about after-school staff and youth workers' backgrounds, interests and motivations for the work. Offering some introductory readings about community organisations could be helpful starting places for coaches to appreciate and contextualise the experiences of staff they are coaching.

- Some candidates were unsatisfied with the staff member they were paired with and felt they would have had a 'better experience' with a different staff member. Establishing realistic expectations means recognising that there are not always ideal fits with coaching and that community organisations often have different expectations of their staff regarding knowledge and experience with academic instruction. This often includes a need to hire and train staff from a range of ages, experiences and socioeconomic backgrounds who may be drawn to the non-school-like aspects of the work and may not feel compelled to prioritise traditional academic instruction in their work with children. Candidates should be encouraged to create and share their own goals of the coaching experience to ensure that they are creating expectations for themselves and their staff that are reasonable and pragmatic, aligned with the interests and comfort level of the staff.
- The lesson planning-observation-debrief cycles, which are formal coaching activities, were not as developed as informal activities like building relationships, establishing schedules and developing communication. Because lesson planning-observation-debrief cycles are important features in school settings, future collaboratives would benefit from clearly outlining how the community organisation coordinates lesson planning, including questions like whether and how staff can modify lesson plans and if approval is required for modified or new lessons. Candidates would benefit from practicing coaching conversations that focus on reflection rather than evaluation (Lyons and Pinnell, 2001). Collaboratives should address how coaching conversation can be co-constructed, selective and strategic so that staff feel empowered in setting their own goals for future lessons.

## Conclusion

Literacy coaching collaboratives have the potential to create meaningful contexts for university-based literacy educator preparation programmes and community organisations to reimagine practical experiences of future specialised literacy professionals. This collaborative highlights a community-responsive approach to literacy educator

preparation that significantly differs from preparation in university-based clinical experiences dependent solely on clinical placements in schools. At the same time, the collaborative provided valuable and transferable skills that are needed to be successful literacy professionals in schools. Therefore, literacy educator preparation does not need to be limited or isolated to traditional school-based clinical settings and can be expanded to include non-traditional settings like community organisations, hospitals (see [Chapter 9](#)), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Additional research and studies are needed so that university-based literacy preparation programmes can expand their training to centre on communities to create more inclusive and equitable teaching and learning practices.

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## Literacy support for children with cancer: parents as partners in a non-traditional learning environment

Sabina Bragg

Inside the walls of a paediatric cancer hospital, children fight for their lives. In this sterile world where pain fills their days while fear grips their hearts, children long for the past when they felt healthy enough to attend school with their friends. With so much at stake, the uncertainty of their futures looms large as the unspoken possibility of death punctuates the daily reality of these children and their parents. Though academic instruction naturally takes a back seat to their medical care, these children still receive direct instruction from teachers who visit them regularly in their non-traditional learning environments after their home schools have excused them. In my former role as a teacher tasked with educating children hospitalised during treatment for cancer, I fully appreciated the importance of keeping the minds of these children stimulated, both to prevent them from falling behind academically and to provide them with hope for their futures. Observing their parents patiently enduring the prolonged waits during treatments, it occurred to me that they too might play a supportive role in the educational component of their child's hospital stay.

Since each year approximately 3,500 children in the United States receive a diagnosis of leukaemia, the most common childhood cancer, hospitals offering specialised treatments for this debilitating disease remain filled with patients who receive educational instruction in a non-traditional environment. Not only do their prolonged absences from school negatively affect the children's overall achievement but, as patients, the children also miss the spontaneous opportunities for learning that occur organically in daily school routines. Childhood cancer, with its complex medical treatment protocols, typically has a tremendous

impact on children's school involvement from the moment of initial diagnosis to the treatment and follow-up phases. Chemotherapy, the main form of medical intervention, takes place in three phases: induction, consolidation and maintenance, lasting on average over 2.5 years (Landier, 2001). The toxicity inherent in chemotherapy renders children with cancer immune-compromised throughout each phase, thereby increasing their risk of infection. Therefore, local school districts excuse these patients from traditional school attendance and initiate instruction in non-traditional settings (Keene, 2003).

On a personal level, in the numerous conversations I had with these children about the small things they miss, they identified the following experiences as meaningful: the feel of the rubber seats on the school bus, lunch with friends in the school cafeteria, the way they look in their school uniforms, recess, and simply writing their names on top of a piece of paper for a classroom assignment. Because prolonged hospitalisations impact the cognitive abilities and emotional health of children with leukaemia so significantly, I endeavoured to find a way to improve their educational experiences in the hospital. As a longstanding advocate for the advancement of literacy skills, during my doctoral programme I decided to initiate a Dialogic Reading (DR) programme that draws from dialogic reading techniques to improve literacy during hospitalisation (Whitehurst et al., 1988). The literature on dialogic reading documents the efficacy of this form of reading intervention because it provides opportunities for focused language exchanges that enable parental responses to children's commentaries, simulation of children's thinking processes, and increased exposure to adult formal language (Mol et al., 2008).

Studies suggest that the involvement of caregivers in their children's academics might lighten the burden placed on families of children with cancer, particularly on the impacts of school absences due to regular cancer treatment. Charlton et al. (1991) suggest that these children typically miss 35 per cent of the school term during the first year after diagnosis.

Because of expected absenteeism and the cancer treatment itself, childhood cancer patients often experience intellectual declines. Packer et al. (1989) report data confirming that leukaemia survivors experience significant decreases in intelligence quotient (IQ) scores, especially when treated at ages below five. These data reveal that the comorbid decline in cognitive functioning may have lasting effects on the intellectual lives of cancer patients once they regain their health, a result that points to the need to reverse this downward spiral.

Given that the prognosis for children diagnosed with leukaemia has improved dramatically in recent years, many of them survive, eventually

returning to traditional classroom settings. In a five-year longitudinal study conducted by Anderson et al. (2000), the authors explore the cognitive development of children treated with radiation therapy and chemotherapy. Their findings document weaker language skills and verbal knowledge than predicted by age expectations. Although their subjects exhibited greater than expected improvements at the three-year mark when assessed by the Wide Range Achievement Test – Revised (WRAT-R: Jastak and Wilkinson, 1984), their gains did not qualify as substantial enough to enable the subjects to completely catch up with their peers after recovering from their challenging treatment protocols. Nevertheless, their improvements in verbal knowledge and language skills provide evidence that proactive academic interventions have the potential to ameliorate some of the long-term, negative sequelae from cancer treatments.

A Dialogic Reading programme provides an authentic literacy space where children can connect with their caregivers, while both parties engage in enjoyable conversations about books. By using targeted prompts, caregivers ask specific questions about the reading material to keep children talking while they read. The practice requires minimal setup to execute while offering promising literacy gains. To this end, I formed partnerships with the parents of childhood leukaemia patients who volunteered to participate in DR programme. My goal, neutralising some of the deleterious effects of missing school, was to find a way for caregivers to support their children’s reading progress while under treatment.

In this chapter, I will describe the DR framework that I used with a small population of children hospitalised for leukaemia. I will also discuss how parental participation in a DR intervention proved to be a positive experience for both parents and children during a difficult time in their lives, an important finding that points to the need for investigating the use of similar shared reading strategies with other populations of children with special needs who also learn in non-traditional environments. The goal of the programme I implemented encourages those working in educational and hospital settings to consider caregivers as literacy partners for sick children during challenging times.

## **Dialogic reading with families of childhood cancer patients**

Dialogic Reading is an interactive, structured reading strategy in which caregivers encourage their children’s verbalisations by means of prompts, expansions, repetition and scaffolding. DR uses repeated readings during

which caregivers ask explicit and targeted questions during read-alouds to their children, and their children retell the story to their caregivers (Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). Not only has research shown that there is flexibility inherent in the DR model, but also the field has documented how this approach increases vocabulary learning. Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) conducted a reading intervention study in which parents successfully engaged in DR reading with their children to increase the production of novel vocabulary. Research conducted by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) suggests that the acquisition of new vocabulary develops from exposure to books during home literacy experiences. Additionally, acquisition of word knowledge can occur through shared reading experiences without direct instruction (Flack et al., 2018; Meyer et al., 2016; Oetting et al., 1995; Robbins and Ehri, 1994). Results of these studies consistently indicate that parental shared reading experiences, operationalised through DR techniques, encourages vocabulary learning.

Researchers have explored how to coach caregivers in becoming strategic Dialogic Reading partners with their children. Based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), caregivers intuitively engage children in activities within the zone of proximal development, a social space in which caregivers help to scaffold their children's learning through meaningful interactions. Studies have explored the types of scaffolds that caregivers use to assist their children move beyond what they can do independently. Trivette et al. (2010) described salient features when delineating the specific strategies that parents employ in shared reading experiences that ultimately contribute to vocabulary learning. For example, strategies include when parents follow the child's lead, relate the reading material to the child's own experiences, expand on the child's verbal contributions, ask open-ended questions and support the child's interests.

While the acquisition of word knowledge happens through casual reading experiences between caregivers and their children (Nagy et al., 1985; Oetting et al., 1995; Robbins and Ehri, 1994), researchers have investigated the relevance of direct caregiver coaching in the area of DR. After Taverne and Sheridan (1995) provided weekly read-aloud training to parents, they found significant vocabulary gains when parents adhered to the reading strategies provided in the training. The training sessions consisted of general discussions, modelling, role-playing, and performance feedback. Taverne and Sheridan's conclusions point to the efficacy of targeted parent training in helping parents build their children's vocabulary skill.

Similarly, Roberts (2010) conducted an intervention study to examine the feasibility of infusing parent-child read-alouds with



comprehension strategy instruction. After training, parents in the intervention group reported more productive interactions with their children during read-alouds when compared to parents in the control group. Children in the intervention group achieved significantly greater gains in reading comprehension scores, an indication of the benefits of the parent training. With respect to training parents in the dialogic reading methodology, research supports the viability of implementing this instruction in a population of children diagnosed with leukaemia.

Abundant evidence exists in support of the premise that children's exposure to language-rich environments promotes vocabulary learning; children learn new words in unstructured social contexts (Akhtar et al., 2001; Nagy et al., 1985; Rice et al., 1992). A rich body of literature also exists illustrating how the input from others fosters the acceleration of vocabulary growth (Huttenlocher et al., 1991; Snow, 1972; Hart and Risley, 1995; Weisman and Snow, 2001). In particular, research has shown that children improve in their vocabulary after exposure to books, which has elevated the status of shared book reading to a cultural norm (Flack et al., 2018; Lonigan, 1994; Scarborough and Dobrich, 1994). Robbins and Ehri (1994) documented vocabulary learning in classrooms with storybook reading, a type of shared book reading. In an extensive 2010 review of the literature of 21 shared reading investigations, Trivette et al. (2010) concluded that shared reading experiences had moderate effects on children's expressive and receptive language scores, clearly a positive finding since even moderate effects represent successful intervention interrupting the aforementioned downward spiral.

## Dialogic reading intervention programme

I invited parent-child dyads to participate in a five-week DR programme during the extended one-on-one time available for instruction while children undergo cancer treatments. During treatment appointments, caregivers and their children often go through worry, despair, and boredom in their hospital visits. Building in the DR intervention during these times allowed parents to take advantage of the increased time that they had with their children in the hospital. My goal was to make this time a positive experience for both the parents and their children. Parents, in fact, did find that the DR model enabled them to establish reading relationships that boosted their children's self-esteem.

I based my intervention on three principles: the importance of educational intervention for children receiving treatment for leukaemia; the

benefits of employing DR instruction; and the value of promoting vocabulary learning through exposure to language-rich environments. To begin the DR intervention, I invited a group of parents to take part after they participated in structured reading training. By accepting the invitation, parents demonstrated their motivation to foster their children's reading progress in a non-traditional learning environment. During the training, parents watched a 15-minute instructional video offering a rationale for employing this strategy, providing direct instruction regarding specific DR techniques, and showing parent-child dyads modelling DR.

This video delineates two concepts that help children to discuss the content of the books they read and develop their literacy skills. The first concept is PEER. The acronym stands for Prompts, Evaluates, Expands, and Repeats, which are techniques parents can use to ensure that the children grasp novel concepts. The second concept is CROWD, which refers to five additional types of prompts: Completion, Recall, Open-ended, Wh-, and Distancing, that help children make schematic connections that cement a word or concept in long-term memory and foster global perspectives.

After the parents complete the five-week DR programme, they complete an eight-question survey that assesses (a) the parents' satisfaction with the programme; (b) their opinions regarding its efficacy; (c) their perceptions of their child's enjoyment of the programme; and (d) their opinions about the purposefulness of the time chosen for participation. In what follows, I present the findings from the survey and how they can inform the ways we think about educational support for childhood cancer patients.

## Findings from the DR intervention

The results from the survey suggest that caregivers can make important contributions to their children's reading knowledge during hospitalisations. Parents strongly endorsed the usefulness of the training, the appropriateness of the use of time, the helpfulness of the programme, and enjoyment in their participation. In other words, most of the parents considered the programme useful, efficient, helpful, and enjoyable. The satisfaction of the parents who participated in the DR programme indicates overall positive responses to their shared reading experiences with their children.

One parent mentioned her good feelings during a weekly check-in when the doctor came into the room while she actively discussed a chapter

book with her sick child. This mother cited positive feelings about her parenting as well as pride in front of the doctor, who expressed a positive reaction to the discussion he observed. Another parent mentioned her enjoyment of the programme deriving from the gratifying conversations she had with her child regarding the storylines and the characters in the stories. The feelings of satisfaction reported by parents and children alike will hopefully result in improved self-esteem for both parties at a time when they remain vulnerable to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness stemming from their circumstances. This exploration of the benefits of shared reading for children receiving treatment for leukaemia has proven useful because, overall, the intervention had a positive impact on the parent-child dyads as reported in the survey, which suggest potential in seeing parents as educational partners through hospital-based education for children and their families.

## Next steps and future possibilities

Many educators (homebound teachers, volunteers, teaching assistants) work with children in non-traditional settings to support their literacy needs when they require instruction outside of traditional classrooms during tenuous times. Parents who participated in the DR programme described in this chapter enthusiastically embraced the programme. Dialogic Reading, as a structured reading intervention, has the potential to help families challenged by not only illnesses but also numerous other extenuating circumstances. Since significant evidence exists documenting the failure of the current special education system to provide adequate specialised instruction for children receiving treatment for cancer (Meeske et al., 2005), an obvious need exists to think creatively about how to support children with cancer like leukaemia, as well as other difficult situations for children learning in non-traditional settings.

Furthermore, the research that suggest that children re-entering traditional classrooms after treatment protocols often demonstrate academic deficits underscores the need to improve their educational interventions before they return. Building out DR programmes within hospital settings may provide an effective model for future investigations into academic interventions embedded into the children's treatment protocols, a starting point for improving services to children and families. The programme described herein documents the efficacy of a targeted literacy intervention with one particular group of subjects, thereby pointing to the need for future investigations in this area to target other groups.

Classroom teachers and homebound teachers can support children who require prolonged absences from school due to illnesses and concomitant treatments. Both groups of teachers must confront the challenges presented by the inconsistency of instruction and the rigor of the content (Searle et al., 2003; Irwin and Elam, 2011). When a child must miss 10–20 consecutive days of school due to a medical diagnosis by a physician, states initiate homebound instruction according to their specific regulations (Agrawal, 2014). A teacher, licensed by the state, typically visits the students in their homes during school hours or early evening hours to provide instruction using the materials and assignments provided by the classroom teachers. A temporary solution, homebound instruction ends when students regain sufficient health to return to their traditional classrooms. Therefore, the benefits of incorporating academic support by caregivers serves as an encouragement to educators to view the caregivers as members of an educational team, playing an integral role in fostering the child’s academic progress during difficult times. As motivated team members, caregivers can provide extra hands to meeting educational goals. To maximise the effectiveness of this model, both classroom teachers and homebound teachers will have to work together if children are to return to their traditional classroom settings without falling behind.

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## Teaching-free literacy: working with teenagers and young adults

Tricia Millar, Stefanie Boyle, Laney Muir

In this chapter, Tricia Millar, Stef Boyle and Laney Muir come together to write about their experiences as literacy educators of older students (teenagers and young adults or, as the authors refer to them, young people). Each author brings their own voice to describe the underpinnings, ethos, methods and practicalities of teaching literacy. Tricia will explain the underpinnings of That Reading Thing (TRT), its beginnings, ethos, methodology and outcomes, and Stef and Laney will reflect on what that looks like in practice in a small community in England and a secondary school in Scotland. Stef and Laney's comments are displayed in boxes, so they are easily distinguished from Tricia's narrative. Tricia, Stef, and Laney came to literacy for young people from a variety of backgrounds but with no experience in teaching reading: Tricia as a volunteer youth worker with a degree in English Language and a Canadian secondary English teaching certificate, Stef as a professional youth and community worker and Laney as a mum who could see that her own teens' school needed support. In this chapter they will explore the paradox of how a 'deeply unfashionable' (to quote a teacher) structured method provided the freedom to create a freshly progressive approach to literacy.

### Tricia: how it started

That Reading Thing started with my determination to find an answer to a question prompted by concern for some local young people: 'How do you

teach a teenager to read?’ I approached agencies and individuals who I expected might provide me with a clear answer.

- The Basic Skills Agency, a UK organisation for developing teaching and learning, said there was no one correct answer and sent an invitation to a day of training on what it feels like to be an adult who struggles to read.
- The local library looked bewildered because people who can’t read don’t come to the library.
- Primary teachers said to try a little of everything and most children will learn to read.
- The local high school, when I volunteered to tutor struggling English students, sent only those who might get a C and thus ‘count’ as a success on a performance league table.

These encounters left me frustrated because I wanted to provide a real solution for young people who, having spent 12 years in the school system, were otherwise going to see their freedom in adult life curtailed by low literacy.

The search ended in the serendipitous discovery of a book called *Why Children Can’t Read* (McGuinness, 1998) and the related programme, Phono-Graphix (PG), which would now be considered a ‘systematic linguistic phonics programme’. As a secondary English teacher unfamiliar with the Reading Wars (Castles et al., 2018) and unaware that phonics was anathema to adult literacy practitioners, I was captured by the logic and how it chimed with my background in English language and linguistics. On the downside, PG spent too long on the basic alphabetic code, had awkward ‘fat cat sat’ type text and did not address the many differences between early primary school readers and young people who, for years, have labelled themselves failures because of their struggles with reading. However, it had a positive effect on their reading; they concentrated well, and they remembered what they had learnt from week to week. I was particularly struck by the fact that structure enabled the students to discover by doing rather than by being told about; hence, teaching-free.

PG was good but I wanted to create something which was truly learner-centred regardless of age, behaviour, school experience or previous knowledge, so I decided to keep using a structure but one that was transformed by age-appropriate multisyllabic words from the first lesson, a quicker progression of complexity, the guarantee of a shame-free experience, limited practice text and a commitment to reading authentic text,



anything from newspapers and games instructions to novels, poetry and non-fiction of all sorts.

I tested the earliest versions of That Reading Thing (TRT) at a school for boys with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who in turn got me involved with the local youth offending team. They also named the programme by talking about ‘that reading thing’ no matter what I called it. One day I met with a classroom assistant to ensure we were not working at cross-purposes as we delivered literacy support to the same 12-year-old student. She showed me a toddler-appropriate wooden alphabet puzzle used for teaching letter names; I showed her a book called *Mysteries of the Universe* (Wilson, 1999) with the following paragraph that the student had read the previous lesson.

### ***It’s Raining Fish***

*Showers of live fish, frogs, tadpoles, lizards, worms and other creatures have been reported for hundreds of years. High winds, or perhaps whirlwinds, may sweep things into the air, hold them up, then drop them back to Earth. Rain, hail, snow, or fish will fall to Earth sooner or later because what goes up must come down. In 1989, it rained Sardines on Ipswich, Australia, during a violent storm. No one knows where mystery fish will land next.*

Her response was, ‘He can’t read that!’, but he could because he now knew what to do with an unfamiliar word and it had nothing to do with letter names. We had been sorting words with several different ways to spell the /er/ sound (stressed and unstressed) and I had picked the passage because it contained a lot of /er/ words that I knew he would be able to read. If he got stuck, he knew to say the sounds and listen for a word that made sense in that sentence, or I could prompt him with a few words. However, not only did he read all the /er/ words fluently, but also he ploughed right on through ‘Ipswich, Australia’ without hesitating. That was the moment I knew we were giving these young people a way into reading that went beyond the usual progression from alphabet to sight words to text, a progression that is still common in literacy for older learners. By starting with discovering the relationship between what they say and what they write, prompted by a simple script, if necessary, then putting that knowledge to work reading authentic text, they could see the point of letters, face unfamiliar words with confidence and increase their bank of sight words without the frustration of rote memorisation.

## Reflections on how we met That Reading Thing

Stef Boyle

As a qualified youth and community worker, I got involved with tutoring when my employer, a youth work charity, partnered with Tricia and Professor Greg Brooks from Sheffield University to roll out and evaluate the impact of TRT in schools and the community. I attended my own TRT training as a self-confessed poor speller and was astounded by the simplicity of the method. It made sense and uncovered the basis of encoding and decoding the English language that had at no point been explained to me in my whole academic career. From that point, I was hooked and have become practically evangelical about TRT. Not only can I help people discover the joy of reading (one of my favourite pastimes), but I can do it with a system which I personally know works. My spelling has improved greatly using the same strategies I ask my struggling readers and writers to use.

### Laney Muir

I sat in the head teacher's office as I enrolled my four children at the local secondary school. I was slightly apprehensive as I asked the question, 'Why should I bring my children to your school?' The head teacher's progressive vision was exactly what I wanted my children to experience. The school is in the most deprived area of Scotland, and I loved everything about it. I was later offered a job taking minutes when young people had meetings with external agencies. A common factor amongst these young people was a low level of literacy which the student support department had decided to address by bringing in TRT. Because they knew me through the meetings, they asked me to train in the programme and oversee TRT provision for our young people.

We started with referrals from teachers then extended the programme to young people not attending or barely attending school. The 'low stakes' ethos of the programme enabled confidence to grow as mistakes became learning opportunities. The speed of the lessons enabled the students to see that they were making progress which, critically, maintained motivation. We decided to deliver

40-minute lessons twice a week for 12 weeks and in that one term we saw reading ages jump significantly, students' agency enhanced, and their self-confidence increased. This experience with TRT and behaviour-challenged students was my main motivation for leaving a job that I loved to study to be a primary teacher. I want to be instrumental in helping young people with literacy difficulties before they move on to high school and find themselves labelled 'behaviour problems'.

## Tricia: ethos

Any reading method needs to be age-appropriate but true inclusion depends on an uncompromising ethos of safety. Each young person and adult who struggles to read and spell has their own story but most of them share the experience of feeling shame for not being able to do what their peers seem to do with ease. We (those who use the TRT approach) have seen this shame expressed as anger, self-harm and a sense of marginalisation best summed up in the frequently heard statement, 'I don't do education'. To counteract that shame, TRT has a guarantee for each learner which is stated as The Deal. The Deal is this: 'you don't have to know anything that we haven't learned together'. In his evaluation of TRT, Professor Brooks cited The Deal as one of the 'key factors in TRT enabling many of these young people to make such good progress' (Brooks, 2012: 17). The Deal is not just a training feature which sets TRT apart from other literacy programmes, but an explicit statement made to each learner. It means that if we, tutor and student, have not yet covered the sound /th/ then a learner is not expected to read the word 'the'. The power is in the fact that virtually every learner can read 'the', so they experience exceeding expectations from the first session. When they trust that this will continue, they start to be willing to take risks and 'do education'.

The flip side of The Deal is that tutors do expect students to know what they have learned together. These are often young people for whom there are no positive expectations. Sadly, we too often hear statements like: 'They won't read that', 'We'd written that one off' and even, 'We all thought she was consigned to the scrap heap'. Learners tell us they are 'unteachable'. For many of our learners, to have someone expecting them to be successful at reading and spelling is novel and tutors endeavour to help students accomplish something beyond what they think they can do

in the first session, which is usually spelling the long milestone word ‘fantastic’. Success is repeated with words like ‘astonishment’ in the second or third hour and a variety of words ending <tion> like ‘condition’ or ‘instructions’ by hours five to eight. Exceeding learners’ own expectations is part of the unlocking of latent knowledge that can lead very quickly to improved reading.

The final element of the TRT ethos is relationship. TRT is used effectively by teachers all over the English-speaking world in schools, prisons, youth offending, alternative education programmes of all kinds and in private practice, but it was created to be delivered by non-teachers who could work outside the expectations of the education system (often outside the physical structures of education), and bring an element of relational equality to the sessions which presented a very different balance of power than teacher-led school lessons. Does this mean everyone engages? TRT tutors always anticipate resistance but with the TRT ethos there is nothing to push against. Giving a student power over their learning also gives them the power to refuse with no hard feelings and they are always welcome to try again when they feel ready. People with complex lives might have such sporadic attendance that the tutor needs to make tough decisions about carrying on. Young people ‘sentenced’ to TRT by a magistrate still knew that attendance was voluntary. Sometimes the resistance is from teachers who feel a structured programme is incompatible with their professionalism or their philosophy of education, but many are won over when they see what their ‘written off’ students are achieving.

## Reflections on ethos

Stef

**Not like school.** One of the ways we could make sure TRT sessions did not feel like school was to hold them in any location that was convenient for the student. Where have I held TRT sessions? Where have I not held them would be a better question. I have run TRT sessions in coffee shops, in church halls, in community centres, in college canteens, at kitchen tables and dining tables, in public libraries and in caravans. Wherever the learner feels comfortable will work, although in my experience the more private the better because getting them to really vocalise the sounds is key to making progress.

**Exceeding expectation.** Michael was typical of many community learners who arrive with educational labels and no confidence in what they already know about reading and writing. He was referred by a recruitment agency saying that he could read a bit, but that his spelling and writing were not good. He told me during the initial assessments that he had started school in Ireland and was told he was dyslexic, but when he came to England, he was told he had a learning disability. He had been a difficult student at school and when he went to college, the literacy and maths tutors had treated him as stupid, so he often walked out of their classes.

What I watched unfold was how TRT frees people to discover they can have confidence in their abilities. Within 20 minutes, he had spelt 'fantastic' without help and by the third session he had spelt 'establishment' and 'recognition' without any assistance. When I asked him if he knew he could spell these words, he said he had no idea that his spelling was so good. He went on to apply for and get the employment he wanted in a hotel kitchen.

Laney

**The nurturing approach.** Not being a teacher meant that I could come into a child's school life without having any previous connections and they could start the programme with a clean slate. Problematic relationships with teachers are a recurrent theme with young people with challenging behaviours and can usually do hinder the learning process. The student does not feel judged when learning with someone new; on the contrary, it is a relief not to have to work with the teacher they swore at in their last class.

As a TRT tutor, I chose a nurturing approach to lessons because most students came with an emotional backpack containing their past experiences of home, community and school which could be pretty horrific at times, and which usually meant they were not emotionally ready to learn in a classroom. The students were often angry at their experiences of school and felt very let down by the system. Therefore, before we had even picked up a pen, it could take a lot of talking the student down to a level of calmness where learning could begin. Mary was one such student. Her emotional response to problems at school was flight or fight

and she was not able to sustain classroom learning because she was so far behind her peers and felt judged by them. Her response was to either kick off or run from the class to walk the corridors. Bringing her into an environment where she did not feel judged because of what she did not know allowed her to concentrate on what she did know and feel proud of herself for her achievements. This worked by taking it slowly and by initially dividing the session into 30 minutes of nurture and 10 minutes of learning until she trusted that the lessons were safe, and I was invested in her as a person. Students like Mary are the most satisfying to teach as, over the term, the nurture time decreases, and the learning time increases.

**Student needs first.** I delivered TRT to Mo, a child in year 8 who had arrived in Scotland in year 5. His parents spoke three languages at home but not English, so his vocabulary was learnt from his peers and, when I met him, he spoke a very broken (slang) version. He had a reading age of 6 years and 11 months, and his spelling was equally as poor. I was interested to see if TRT could help a child with English as an additional language even though I was aware that TRT works best when the person has a good established vocabulary.

Mo would smile constantly which I soon realised was an effort to disguise his confusion because he wasn't understanding instructions in class, didn't know that a door was a door, or a kettle was a kettle etc. He did not know the teachers' names or who he could go to for help. We used some of our TRT time to walk the corridors so I could help him learn the names of people and things. After 4 months of That Reading Thing and relational support, this boy had gained 13 months in reading and 21 months in spelling. We get excited about those kinds of numbers in such a short time, but what is really thrilling is that his teacher commented that he became a 'doer' rather than a spectator in class.

## Tricia: the TRT method

An explicit ethos is a good starting point, but tutors do not expect people to learn how to read independently. Young people and adults who have struggled for years need a tutor, but that tutor's job is not to teach and explain but to guide the student, so they discover for themselves how

spoken and written language are connected. I illustrate this teaching-free approach with a ‘climbing down a mountain’ analogy.

Every learner is standing at the top of a mountain and their goal is to abseil down the mountain to access everything they want to be able to read and write. They might be terrified of even setting out but, after a few metres, they realise they can do quite a bit on their own. The tutor’s job is not to teach the history of the sport of abseiling or provide detailed explanations of the technical equipment required. The tutor is also not climbing down and asking the student to watch and copy their moves. Instead, the tutor’s job is to let the student make as much progress as they can on their own and limit involvement to keeping the lesson on track and talking the student off ledges when they get stuck.

An experienced adult and community learning tutor said this of TRT:

*The takeaway for me . . . has been unlearning everything I had been trying with these learners. No more clever mnemonics (which I now understand adds pressure to working memory), no more ‘helpful’ shortcuts to spelling. What made the biggest difference to my learners is adherence to the prompts, thus ensuring learners were consistently practising saying the sounds associated with the graphemes they were seeing (for reading) and breaking words down into their component syllables and sounds for spelling. (Education and Training Foundation (ETF), 2021; 207)*

This model has several benefits:

- The student learns quickly how much they already know. If something is easy, they move on. Some build 10 words while others build 2 or 3.
- New material is included in all future levels so there is no need for over-rehearsing or achieving perfection before moving on.
- The student concentrates on what to do when they encounter an unfamiliar word so their working memory is not stressed by trying to remember rules or extraneous information.
- The student controls the pace, sometimes spending more time than they need because it is so satisfying to get things correct.
- Mistakes are not ignored for the sake of self-esteem but corrected with a simple and positive technique to help them make the correction independently. They learn that mistakes are good for learning and not shameful.

## Reflections on the TRT method

Stef

**How a learner defined the script.** My very first TRT student was a young man trying to get into the army. He had failed the English test a number of times and the recruiting sergeant had bent the rules to get him another test. It was with no real hope that he started meeting me to see if we could address his reading. I was terrible, I was slow, I did too many examples with him, I did everything the TRT structure says to avoid except for The Deal (see above) and the script. I stuck to that script like glue. The power (and importance) of the script was brought home to me when he came back from the test, 'It was like I had a mini you in my pocket. Every time I began to panic and rush, I heard your voice: "Take your time, don't panic, say the sounds and tell me what you hear, you can do this", and I calmed down and I did it'. Through the repetition of the script, I had become this young man's inner voice for reading, reducing anxiety and giving him the confidence to face the test.

Laney

**'Talking off ledges' as an inclusive approach.** Students with ADHD have also benefited from TRT. Clara was a student who was not able to control herself in the classroom due to the impulsiveness of her condition but was much more able to engage with me on a one-to-one basis. We also had a well-resourced TRT room where she could work standing up, moving around or shouting aloud whilst writing on the whiteboard. Students do not have to be sitting down to learn during TRT but by the end of the term, Clara was much more successful at engaging in the classroom in a more controlled manner. When teachers saw improved behaviour in students like Clara, they started asking questions about what we were doing and how they could adopt these strategies in their classes. I demonstrated TRT during a teacher training day to show the whole faculty that basic TRT principles can be successfully adopted in their classrooms, especially when a student needs to be 'talked off a ledge'. This led to us experimenting with TRT in small groups and whole classes, turning it into a whole school spelling approach.



## Tricia: outcomes

TRT came into being in the early 2000s when secondary teachers were pressured by performance league tables and funding for Post-16 education was tied to ‘accredited learning’ only. As noted earlier, league tables meant that those less likely to attain a C at GCSE, state exams taken at age 15 or 16, were also less likely to get the help they needed and, in the Post-16 education sector, older learners who wanted to learn for their own sake found themselves back in a system with testing and qualifications whether those aided the learning process or not (see [Chapter 2](#) by Harmey and Moss for a discussion on the Post-16 sector and government approaches to literacy for older learners). Our external evaluation showed that students ‘made substantial and statistically significant gains, on average’ in their reading (Brooks, 2012: 3), but not being tied to any external assessment criteria means that TRT is not an end in itself but a way of moving 10, 20 or even 100 steps beyond each learner’s starting point. After almost 20 years, we are beginning to come full circle. As a result of a practitioner-led research project testing the use of TRT with adults, Islington Adult Community Learning is planning on offering non-accredited TRT sessions to their Entry Level learners (Education and Training Foundation, 2021: 206–10). Entry level is the lowest level in the National Qualifications Framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with Entry Level 1 being equivalent to a D, E, F, or G grade in GCSE (DfE, 2022).

### Reflections on outcomes

Stef

**Failure or freedom?** Most students make progress in reading but not always. A young man had speech and language difficulties beyond my expertise as a literacy tutor, so we decided to stop TRT. However, because I was not a teacher, that did not mean the end of our relationship and we decided to keep meeting to work on other life goals. By the end of 18 months his achievements included: moving into his own flat, attending appointments on his own including speech therapy, completing his CV, taking part in a work placement and starting to speak to people on the phone.

**Generational knock-on effect.** At her initial assessment, a 40-year-old mum cried when faced with the word 'is', and not being able to read was having a distressing effect on her whole life. At our ninth session she said that she was reading every night with her son. They read his schoolbooks together before bed and, if there was a word she didn't know, they would work on it together. He would give her a bit of a funny look, but she would say, 'let's say the sounds together'. She said she found herself doing for her son what I did with her: she would recap the sentence if he was struggling so that he didn't lose the meaning. She said it was great reading his schoolbooks as she was going to improve as he improved; they were going to improve together.

With her permission, I then contacted her son's school. The son had shown no interest in reading or writing throughout Reception, and it was clear from the reading records coming back from home that nothing was being done there. But this term, the first in Year 1 and following the summer holidays, it was like working with a different family; the reading records were being completed at home each week and the son, who had started the term in September just making marks on paper (not even wanting to form letters), was now attempting to write words and sentences. In fact, the week I spoke to the teacher (week 6 of the Autumn Term) the son had just won a Head Teacher's Award for writing as he had written a whole sentence. The teacher was able to identify a noticeable difference in attitude and ability in the son since his mother had started working through TRT.

I would love to tell you that each learner's TRT story finds completion in a fairy tale ending, but so often the end of TRT's involvement with a learner in the community is merely the beginning of their reading journey. The real success of TRT is the leap in self-belief our learners experience. They developed the confidence to attend class at school or sign up for an English course at college. They believed in themselves enough to apply for a job online or go to their teaching assistant placement happy to read and spell in front of the class; these are the mini-miracles I have witnessed in our learners' everyday lives.

One story will stay with me forever, a mum who was desperate for her two boys to read but would only read from the same five books because those were the ones she knew by heart. After 19

hours of TRT she was giving her children free rein in the library to choose any book they wanted her to read. Academically, she had struggled to complete Level 1 Functional Skills but was now confident enough to enrol in Level 2. In her community, she was taking time to fill out feedback forms after a play therapy session for her youngest. In the past, she would have just ticked ‘everything was okay’ and left before being questioned but now she was confident enough to make her voice heard.

Laney

**Free to set the criteria.** Working on TRT allows me to define the success criteria with each student, and even if it is just the ability to sit and concentrate for a short period, it is still an achievement and is celebrated. The young person will start to crave this positive interaction and will want to learn more. During the lesson, we find and plug any literacy gaps or building blocks that are missing whilst moving forward at speed. Without realising it, the young person has raised their literacy attainment in such a small amount of time and has begun to feel good about themselves. The most important aspect of this success is the ‘knock on’ effect it has on other aspects of their school life. They may want to start attending class, their behaviour might stop being so self-destructive, relationships with staff and students are so much more positive and subsequently they start seeing a more positive future for themselves. Providing literacy outside the classroom gives those young people a chance to reimagine themselves as full members of their learning community.

## Tricia: a conclusion

I started by asking, ‘How do you teach a teenager to read?’ Today, I would ask, ‘What do older struggling readers have in common?’ Over the years, in community with tutors like Stef and Laney, I have learned:

- They have had negative and sometimes traumatic experiences of education.
- They do not know that written English is connected to the words they say.

- They struggle to remember whole words no matter how many times they see them.
- They have rarely experienced the relationship between reading and spelling.
- They lack confidence in what they already know about the language and how to use what they know to read and write.

Together, we have also learned it is possible to mitigate all of the above by staying outside the accredited learning system and combining the traditional approaches of phonics, structure and (limited) scripts with a progressive teaching-free approach of discovery and empowerment, in effect, thriving within the paradoxes of finding freedom in structure and learning without teaching. Going forward, holding tight to this ethos is a challenge now that the school inspectorate has indicated a preference for phonics in secondary schools (Jones, 2022). In response, TRT now offers whole staff CPD on using phonics and everyday morphology for spelling which is much less taboo than reading and will show those working through TRT that they are using the same strategies as their peers.

## Teaching free literacy: a conclusion

In this chapter, Tricia, Stef and Laney have described in depth the underpinnings of one approach to supporting older learners that was born out of the sense of inquiry and respect for learners that permeates all of the chapters in this book. Pedagogically, the approach integrates teaching grapho-phonetic knowledge within a broader context with learners' experience dictating the 'direction' of instruction. The key features of this approach to literacy, however, go beyond pedagogy and illustrate the need for those 'hard to teach' qualities that is demanded for literacy educators who work with young adults in diverse settings. These qualities include creating an ethos of trust and respect, creating a safe space and flexibility to follow the learners' lead and epitomise a justice-oriented approach to literacy.

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## Part III: supporting literacy educators from a distance

The final part of this book addresses supporting literacy educators through a remote context. Propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing interest in online and remote learning has taken renewed meaning by those supporting and educating literacy professionals. With the need to rethink traditional experiences in clinical settings or placement experiences, many teacher educators, with advances in technology, began to examine online solutions to provide clinical experiences that promote and foster professional learning. The next set of chapters, while written during the pandemic, offer insights that go beyond the restrictions of the pandemic to highlight the types of practices that build a community of learners with university-based classroom and reposition the university instructor as mediators in the learning experiences – whether working in a remote or in-person formats. The common thread among these chapters is the argument for pedagogies that include Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and teacher inquiry that challenge prescriptive professional development opportunities and can be offered in remote formats when educating literacy professionals.

Wagner opens this part to examine how online teacher inquiry can be used as a model for practice-based learning that looks beyond just literacy but also supports candidates to ‘build a broader set of professional knowledge that improves their practice and responds to student learning needs’ (p. 172). The chapter introduces the theoretical foundations of this approach and how it can be implemented to support educators. Wagner considers how one can ‘connect and sustain networks of teachers’ using online pedagogy – but also envisions this mode of literacy teacher preparation as an opportunity to address learner-centred practical experiences and connect isolated teachers working in non-traditional contexts. By simultaneously withdrawing from the classroom space to a new space provides ‘a learner-centred approach to improving professional practice

by developing knowledge about teaching in a systematic and intentional way' (p. 172).

With Wagner outlining a model and set of guides to online teacher inquiry, Olmstead and colleagues provide a descriptive example of PLC through their university's literacy practicum. In [Chapter 12](#), the authors describe how they re-envisioned their literacy practicum by considering how they could replicate conditions for successful professional learning (like partnership, a sense of self-efficacy and coaching skills) in an online world. Challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors needed to provide practicum experiences and, at the same time, fulfil the requirements for state certification. They describe their experiences and consider the challenges and implications of an online literacy practice by writing,

Our intent for this chapter is not to provide a single model of a distance literacy practicum, but to share our learning and the lingering questions we grapple with to help other teacher educators make mindful and informed decisions when designing their own distance practicum programmes.

They conclude with practical recommendations for co-teaching and collaboration within an online space.

Bates and Malloy, in the final chapter of this part, provide another look at a PLC through supporting educators via online coaching. The authors consider the practical and interpersonal nature of online learning to conclude that the social needs of the adult learner need to remain at the forefront of the coaching relationship. Coaching online provides opportunities for collaboration and to develop trust, but also may create feelings of pressure and resistance. They write, 'when the coach also feels comfortable and vulnerable, he or she is able to cast aside the title of expert and take on the role of co-inquirer. When this occurs, coach and teacher engage in the genuine co-construction of knowledge'. Bates and Malloy highlight the need to address the inherent power relationships in the coaching relationships to navigate these difficulties through attending to relationships.

The three chapters in this part come together to address how online and remote platforms have the potential to enhance the pedagogical delivery of learning communities for literacy professionals, while providing those who train and coach literacy professionals with robust strategies that build community and trusting relationships between educator and professionals-in-training.



## Practice-based learning through online teacher inquiry: connecting literacy teachers in specialised and isolated contexts

Christopher J. Wagner

College and university-based programmes for preparing literacy teachers are often designed to serve a local population that is geographically near the institution. Institutions that have embraced online degree programmes have expanded this focus to include a broad range of other students, including students who may live or work far from the college or university. However, even in these cases colleges and universities frequently recruit and serve students that fit within traditional parameters for teacher preparation, often focusing on classroom instruction in traditional school settings.

There is a need for more adaptive clinical and practice-based learning that serves teachers who work in specialised contexts or who are isolated in their practice. This can include literacy teachers who have a specialised skill or knowledge that is central to their practice, such as proficiency in a language or distance learning, or literacy teachers who work in non-traditional settings, like community-based organisations as described by Kabuto, Wagner, and Vasudevan in [Chapter 8](#), hospital settings outlined by Bragg in [Chapter 9](#), or in a community group setting reported by Millar, Boyle and Muir in [Chapter 10](#). This chapter bridges these needs through an online teacher inquiry (OTI) model for practice-based learning.

OTI brings together two disparate fields in teacher education – online learning and teacher inquiry (TI). Learning in online networks is increasingly acknowledged to be an effective, powerful and popular

lever for learning (Lants-Andersson et al., 2018; Parsons et al., 2019), and presents the possibility to connect and sustain networks of teachers who may be isolated or work in non-traditional settings. TI provides a learner-centred approach to improving professional practice by developing knowledge about teaching in a systematic and intentional way (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009).

Education policy and professional learning often reduce the teaching of literacy to a narrow set of skills and strategies that do not adequately address the needs and literacy experiences of diverse learners. OTI provides an alternative to professional learning that is narrow and skills-oriented and instead provides teachers with spaces and tools to build a broader set of professional knowledge that improves their practice and responds to student learning needs.

This chapter provides an introduction to the theoretical foundations of OTI and its utility as a framework for clinical experiences and practice-based learning for literacy teachers, including literacy teachers who work in specialised contexts or who are isolated in their practice. It then details the OTI model and how to implement its various components to support the effective use of inquiry in teacher preparation settings for literacy teachers. Last, a description of the OTI model in use is offered to provide an example for those considering using it for literacy teachers.

## Teacher inquiry as a foundation for learning

TI is based on a social constructivist view of learning and knowledge production that recognises the relationship between the social context and the process of meaning making. The foundations for TI build from the work of John Dewey (1910; 1938). For Dewey, practical inquiry is a process of testing thoughts and ideas through action. By being conducted with others, the inquiry process becomes a form of extended cognition, where the process of reflection becomes communal and helps to challenge individual beliefs and promote productive change (Cox, 2013).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999; 2009) build on Dewey's view of inquiry to move it from a generalised process to one suited to the specific contexts of teaching. They conceptualise TI as sustained and iterative cycles of reflection, action and evaluation that enable the critical examination of instructional practices and beliefs related to teaching and learning. Cochran-Smith and Lytle describe inquiry as systematic, intentional, and self-critical, which differs from reflection that may include less formal thoughtfulness about one's practice. Cochran-Smith and

Lytle (1999) explain that inquiry-centred models are ‘about posing, not just answering, questions, interrogating one’s own and others’ practices and assumptions, and making classrooms sites for inquiry’ (p. 17).

In applying Dewey’s process of practical inquiry to learning, Garrison (2017) provides a more specific description of the process that includes four general phases: triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution. These phases provide a useful framework for considering the inquiry process in action.

First, a triggering event drawn from a teacher’s practice presents a dilemma or problem. These are instances in which a teacher’s routine instruction has become inadequate, in which a conflict arises in the goals or purposes of classroom instruction, or in which teachers attempt to use new practices (Lefstein et al., 2020). The act of descriptively sharing these events is intended to bring them into focus and provide insight into these problems of practice (Cox, 2013).

This is followed by exploration, where participants attempt to understand the problem by searching for information and possible explanations. Exploring problems of practice requires a close examination of what is happening in the classroom and an interrogation of the reasons and possible causes. The process of brainstorming is not about posing ‘correct’ responses to the dilemma or problem but is instead about identifying information that is relevant to addressing the problem and offering possible explanations and responses. This is a generative step that requires participants to share openly and freely and is therefore dependent on the construction of a cohesive and open community (Garrison, 2017).

Next is integration, where participants work to order and structure their ideas. The process of connecting the information generated in the exploration phase has as its aim the generation of possible solutions that can be implemented in the learning context. A part of moving toward new solutions is critical thinking, or the process of questioning the assumptions that underlie routine instruction and teaching norms and being prepared to pose alternate ways of thinking and acting (Brookfield, 2005). This is an essential part of moving away from existing or normative practices in the classroom and identifying new practices that can serve as solutions to problems of practice.

Last is resolution, where a possible solution is identified and is tested. In the pragmatic constructivist tradition of critical thinking, solutions are tested in a practical setting, and the outcomes of testing are used to further understanding about the topic (Brookfield, 2005; Cox, 2013). In TI, the evidence used to inform solutions will be varied and

drawn from the classroom context. Importantly, these solutions are not viewed as final. Rather, the ideas generated in the inquiry process are viewed as transitory or tentative, and as open for improvement or being proven wrong (Garrison, 2017: 13). The process of testing often raises new questions, which themselves become triggering events that sustain new cycles of inquiry.

When the inquiry process moves from descriptive sharing to the development of possible solutions, it moves from a retrospective to a prospective practice (Price, 2004). This shift is an essential part of the TI process. When TI fails, it often does so because teachers remain stuck in the process of descriptive sharing. This often occurs when teachers spend time ‘griping’ or ‘venting’ without returning to the larger purpose of constructing solutions to problems (Segal et al., 2018; Horn et al., 2017). Research bears out that moving into the later stages of inquiry, which are the most productive, is less common (Garrison, 2017). Making this turn from the retrospective to the prospective, from descriptive sharing to the development of solutions, requires intentionality, focus and good facilitation.

These steps for practical inquiry described by Garrison (2017) and grounded in Dewey (1910; 1938) closely map to the simpler description of inquiry by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999; 2009). Their description of the process as reflection, action and evaluation continues to capture the essence of the inquiry process in TI. However, the specificity of the phases of practical inquiry offered by Garrison is useful when planning and conducting TI. These phases serve as a model for how to approach and implement inquiry when the focus is the collaborative construction of new knowledge. These combined perspectives inform the approach to the OTI model described in this chapter.

## **An orientation to social justice**

More than simply providing effective and accessible spaces for teachers to learn in field-based settings, TI provides spaces for teachers to collaboratively attend to issues of equity and diversity (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; 2009). By opening teaching practices to critical questioning, TI can support teachers in ‘making problematic the current arrangements of schooling; the ways knowledge is constructed, evaluated, and used; and teachers’ individual and collective roles in bringing about change’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009: 18). As a model of field-based learning, TI can provide a structure to facilitate exploration and action around issues of social justice.

When diverse teachers are included in the work of TI, it can change the ways we understand the practice of teaching by centring and elevating the heterogeneity of different ways of knowing and being as teachers (Neváres-LaTorre, 2010; Sengupta-Irving, 2019). This benefits not only teachers from diverse backgrounds, but also other teachers who are exposed to these perspectives. The collaborative, communal and reflective process of inquiry can help to draw attention to and centre voices that may otherwise be excluded in the development of knowledge in field-based settings (Wagner, 2021a). This includes the voices and perspectives of racially, culturally and linguistically diverse teachers (Haddix, 2017).

## Teacher inquiry as a framework for field-based experiences

Though TI takes varied forms when it is used in preservice teacher education programmes, as a broader model it is widely used in both clinical and research contexts in the United States and globally (Rutten, 2021). Moreover, its use in preservice programmes is connected to a broad range of positive outcomes for preservice teachers, ranging from the development of a professional identity and increased self-efficacy to improved collaboration and an increased awareness of the needs of students (Rutten, 2021). Classroom practices resulting from TI are likewise shown to contribute to improved learning outcomes for students (Manfra, 2019).

Across its varied forms, TI moves the processes of learning from the classroom to the field, in recognition of the reality that professional knowledge and skills are learned through participation in practices in the workplace (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Webster-Wright, 2009). Though clinical or field-based experiences by definition occur in field or workplace settings, TI is epistemologically grounded in the ways that knowledge and new teaching practices are generated through practice and by practitioners. In explaining the role of teachers in TI, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe teachers as ‘deliberative intellectuals’ (2). In this way, TI draws on the day-to-day work of teachers to inform learning and moves the teacher to the centre of the learning process.

TI is somewhat unique in the degree to which it allows teachers to have control of the learning process. Lefstein and colleagues (2020) explain that ‘since most teacher development is designed to address perceived inadequacies in teacher knowledge and skills, it stands to reason that this work be led by external experts and according to their agenda’ (1).

This view likewise carries into most preparation of preservice teachers, who are viewed as ‘novices’ who require ‘expert’ guidance. TI inverts this dynamic and allows the process to be guided by teachers’ agendas, rather than that of an ‘expert’. For clinical and field-based experiences that are intended to transition students into practitioners or teachers into literacy coaches and specialists, this centring of the teacher in the TI process aligns with the goals of these experiences.

## The online teacher inquiry model

Even when online learning was nascent in teacher education, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999; 2009) pointed to opportunities for moving inquiry into online and digital spaces. Though they mentioned it only briefly, they noted that ‘web-based social networking around professional issues provide rich new resources for distal inquiry and distance organising’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009: 164). More recent research has shown that teachers identify online communities of practice as effective and appealing forms of learning, and report positive experiences that include exposure to novel instructional practices, the promotion of diverse voices, changes to classroom practices, and increased confidence (Greenhow and Askari, 2017; Lants-Andersson et al., 2018; Parsons et al., 2019).

More than simply moving TI online, OTI provides specific benefits that take advantage of online contexts and platforms. The online space can provide teachers with a sense of removal from the immediate context of the workplace. This sensation of withdrawing from the classroom space that is under consideration can benefit the inquiry process by allowing participants to stand back and gain perspective on their experiences (Cox, 2013). Other benefits of moving TI online include the wider sharing of instructional practices, increased engagement and participation, and the formation of diverse networks that can be conducive to innovation (Wagner, 2021a).

When it comes to connecting teachers, OTI overcomes some of the logistical constraints of reaching teachers in isolated and non-traditional settings by utilising digital technologies. Both clinical experiences in teacher preparation programmes and TI require sustained participation within a community of learners. This is not always possible within a single physical location due to the limited number of teachers who work within specialty areas or when teachers work in non-traditional settings such as prisons or hospitals. OTI moves past these limitations by enabling the creation of flexible, online networks comprised of practitioners from

varied locations and workplace settings. These ‘messy networks’ (Butler and Schnellert, 2012: 1208) support both short- and long-term outcomes that may be essential to teachers in isolated settings and specialised fields, including the development of professional networks that can support continued learning.

To achieve these outcomes, the OTI model provides a structured process for collaborative inquiry that is accessible and replicable across varied contexts and participants. This model is grounded in three components: (a) structured, synchronous video-conferenced inquiry sessions; (b) virtual facilitation by a knowledgeable practitioner or expert; and (c) a reflective journal. OTI groups typically include four to eight teachers, though may include more or fewer, and groups typically meet for a semester. The model has been shown to be effective at supporting teacher learning and positively affecting teachers’ instructional practices (Wagner, 2021a). Each component of the model is described in more detail in the sections that follow.

## Inquiry sessions

The inquiry sessions form the core space for collaborative inquiry and the primary context for teachers to brainstorm and develop solutions to problems of practice. These sessions are typically held weekly, though they may be held more frequently based on a group’s needs. Holding sessions less frequently than this often makes it difficult to maintain continuity, follow up on new practices tried in the classroom, and develop a trusting and cohesive community among participants. Sessions are held via a synchronous video conferencing platform, such as Zoom or Google Meet, that allows users to join from any location using a range of internet connected devices.

Each session follows a planned structure that is designed to move teachers through systematic cycles of question posing, reflection, action and evaluation. These are discussion-based and allow teachers to talk about specific aspects of practice. A detailed overview of the session structure is provided in [Table 11.1](#). The structure plays a key role in facilitating inquiry among the teachers. The inquiry process requires that teachers move from the descriptive sharing of events to the development of possible solutions to problems of practice, or from a retrospective practice to a prospective practice (Price, 2004). Without a formal structure like the one used for these sessions, it can be challenging to consistently move groups toward the goal of not just identifying, but developing solutions to, problems of practice (Garrison, 2017).

**Table 11.1** Session structure

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
0:00–0:15	Putting forward issues, questions, topics and wonderings <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Each group member talks about what they've been thinking about this week. This can include summarising ideas from a journal, sharing a specific question or idea, or sharing an anecdote or incident to examine in more depth.</li><li>• Facilitator records ideas as each group member shares.</li></ul>
0:15–0:20	Agenda setting <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitator synthesises ideas, suggests a few to focus on in the session, and the group consults and collectively decides on focal ideas for the session.</li><li>• A group member volunteers to do the closing synthesis.</li></ul>
0:20–1:10	Reflective discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Questions and topics are considered in depth, with group members drawing on their own teaching experiences and journals to share, challenge thinking, and explore the selected topics or questions.</li><li>• Facilitator questions, pushes, suggests alternate viewpoints, requests supporting information or evidence, and adds information as appropriate.</li></ul>
1:10–1:15	Closing synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The volunteer draws together threads from the conversation.</li></ul>
1:15–1:30	Setting directions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All group members verbalise what they are going to think about or try in their practice in the coming week.</li><li>• These are actionable steps – something each person is going to try to do, change about their practice, or observe for the purpose of informing action.</li></ul>

*Note.* A version of this table first appeared in Wagner (2021a).

## Facilitation

Teachers are joined in the inquiry sessions by a facilitator. This person is a practitioner or expert who is knowledgeable about the inquiry area. The role of the facilitator is to support progression through the inquiry process, promote collaborative discourse, and maintain rigor and groundedness in current research and knowledge from the field. The facilitator is not tasked with contributing to the generation of new knowledge and practices. This is the job of the teachers. The facilitator instead poses



questions, pushes participants to explain or elaborate on their responses, suggests alternate viewpoints, requests supporting evidence, and promotes positive social interactions and group cohesion (Cox, 2013; Neváres-LaTorre, 2010; Wagner, 2021a). The facilitator is also tasked with managing the logistics of the video conferencing platform.

Facilitation of discourse, with intentional purpose toward moving participants into the integration and resolution stages, plays an important role in helping participants to experience full cycles of inquiry (Garrison, 2017). Good facilitation is often needed to return groups to the larger purpose of constructing solutions to problems and to avoid excessive 'venting' or tendencies to remain in the brainstorming phase of the inquiry process. Hostetler and colleagues (2013) describe this as assisting teachers in using inquiry constructively and not only as a space for problematising practice. Over time and as teachers become accustomed to the inquiry process, the work of facilitation, agenda setting and other aspects of the inquiry process can be shifted to teachers as they take on increased responsibility in that process.

## Reflective journals

At the same time that they are participating in the inquiry sessions, teachers maintain a reflective journal that provides an individual space for inquiry. Journals provide a way for teachers to record descriptions of classroom events and student work, reflect on problems of practice and topics from prior inquiry sessions, and examine specific issues or incidents in depth (Hobson, 2001). Journal writing is not meant to represent final or worked-out ideas, but instead is meant to facilitate the generation and processing of new ideas. In addition to providing a personal space for inquiry, journals help to facilitate thinking between sessions and provide teachers with a starting point for contributions and topics to share in the inquiry sessions.

The reflective journals play a key role in helping the facilitator to prepare for inquiry sessions. Teachers share their journals with the facilitator before each inquiry session by uploading their journals to a learning management system or sharing them directly with the facilitator. Journals are read by the facilitator to allow this person to make connections across the experiences and thinking of the teachers in the group. However, the sharing of ideas and experiences from the journal in the sessions is at the discretion of each teacher. Given the online nature of the inquiry process, reflective journals do not need to be written, and can include video or other media using platforms like Flipgrid. An advantage

of the OTI model is its flexibility to adapt to and incorporate new digital media and tools that provide teachers with different ways to record, process and share their experiences.

## **Lessons learned from a model OTI programme: connecting multilingual early childhood teachers**

This section provides an example of the OTI programme in use to provide a group of teachers with a field-based experience that addressed a specialised area of practice. This example represents one of the ways the OTI model can address the needs of specialised and isolated literacy teachers.

### Context and participants

Within the field of literacy instruction, there continues to be a need to better prepare literacy teachers to work with young multilingual learners, including how multilingual teachers can use their multilingualism to support language learning (Langeloo et al., 2019). In this example, OTI was used to provide a field-based learning experience for multilingual early childhood teachers to improve their use of multiple languages in the classroom (see Wagner, 2021a; Wagner, 2021b). Throughout the OTI programme, teachers were asked to consider how they, as multilingual teachers, make instructional choices about when and how to draw on their own multilingualism to support children's learning.

Because early childhood teachers are often based in home settings or centres with few classrooms, many multilingual early childhood teachers are isolated in their practice with limited opportunities to work with other multilingual teachers and discuss issues that connect multilingualism and literacy instruction. This makes opportunities for in-person inquiry and field-based learning less common for these teachers. This OTI programme included five early childhood teachers in the United States. These teachers worked with children from early prekindergarten to second grade, and spoke English and one or more other languages, including Spanish, Russian, or Korean.

### Changes in teacher practices

By engaging in the inquiry process, these teachers identified language practices that addressed specific challenges in teaching multilingual learners and took instructional risks by experimenting with new ways of

using language in the classroom. These changes in their teaching practices occurred when they realised that they could question, challenge and gain control of their own learning processes, often breaking from prescribed teaching approaches, packaged curricula, or one-size-fits-all interventions and 'best practices' designed for monolingual learners. The process of innovating, having choice and collaborating was central to their learning and growth as multilingual teachers.

For example, one teacher responded to students' interest in language differences by using their own last names to study word sounds. For students who had non-English language names, such as Spanish surnames, the students led in the exploration of word sounds and language differences. The teacher explained that for one Latina student, 'because she knows how to pronounce the name it's easy for her to pick up on sounds that are different in the English language and in Spanish. So even though she doesn't know how to read Spanish . . . she was starting to connect, "Oh the J is silent it actually kinda sounds like an H"'. This inquiry into their own names made children 'really excited for it to be their turn and to explore their name and . . . [discover] different sounds and different names'.

Other practices teachers identified and tested in their classrooms included identifying meaningful contexts to model multilingual language practices, including through multilingual read-alouds and songs, co-reading bilingual books to scaffold literacy instruction across languages, creating spaces for students to make language choices, and identifying language-specific goals for each child and planning differentiated language instruction. Some teachers focused on similar problems of practice and tested the same practices. When this happened, teachers were able to compare outcomes and consider ways to further refine practices. When teachers tested specific or unique practices, they were often excited to report back and found the group to be a productive sounding board.

## Lessons learned

Applying this model to connect multilingual teachers shows how OTI can provide specialised field-based learning experiences when teachers do not have similarly specialised colleagues at their worksites. In this example, multilingual teachers were connected across schools to enable inquiry into the role of multilingualism in classroom literacy instruction. This included supporting teachers to become more aware and intentional about their language practices, implement new pedagogical practices, and engage with issues of social justice (Wagner, 2021a). This centred

practices that drew on these multilingual teachers' ways of knowing and being about language and literacy.

In a sign that field-based learning can be effectively offered online, the virtual online nature of the programme supported, rather than hindered, the inquiry process. Teachers cited the online platform as effectively supporting broader and more equitable participation across the group. A common sentiment was that 'in this setting it was a lot easier to be talkative and open up and people actually listen'. Participants cited the ability to see each other's faces, recognise facial cues and emotions, and view the full group as features that facilitated turn-taking, eased communicative barriers and created a consistent sense of community. Though many inquiry models fall short in moving participants through the practical inquiry cycle, participants in the OTI programme routinely engaged in these later stages of inquiry and proposed and tested solutions to problems of practice.

One participant in the programme summarised their response to the online format in this way:

I was actually really happy because it made me open up. I know that [in an in-person programme] I don't participate too much . . . but I feel like doing the online face like that through the camera, it forced me to talk . . . So I feel like it made me open up more to share my experiences. And any concerns I had I was able to share them and learn from them as opposed to being in a classroom where maybe I would have not you know spoken at all. And then I would have probably stayed with those concerns, and I would never have gotten any feedback.

Teachers who were more extroverted similarly commented on the absence of non-participants in the group and noted how this differed from most in-person programmes they had attended.

That these teachers shared a commonality as multilingual teachers further supported the efficacy of the group. Teachers identified this shared experience and the opportunity to collaborate with teachers who faced similarly specialised questions about their practice as a powerful connection. One teacher explained how:

I always thought that you were talking about my journal, but then I realised that you were talking about everyone else's journal . . . because even though we had totally different stories, everything just came gathered together. It was just so surprising to see that

every experience that we talk about, we can all connect to it even if we're teaching different grades, different schools.

This in-group identification shows how the programme allowed teachers to view isolated experiences as shared, and to find a community within a specialised area of practice.

## Conclusion

As a clinical or field-based component in teacher education programmes, OTI provides a way to better serve teachers who work in non-traditional settings or have specialised professional roles. These teachers do not intuitively know how to best support students in settings that go beyond the traditional parameters for teacher preparation, and clinical and field-based experiences in teacher preparation programmes often do not prepare teachers to implement literacy instruction that is effective in these contexts. Providing adaptive clinical and practice-based learning for teachers who work in non-traditional settings will play a role in providing more equitable and effective literacy instruction for students in these contexts.

More research is needed to understand how features of OTI programmes, such as programme size and duration, may affect teacher learning, and how experiences in OTI programmes may vary by teacher experience and other teacher characteristics. However, positive evaluations of the OTI model (Wagner, 2021a) and of TI programmes more broadly (Lefstein et al., 2020; Manfra, 2019; Rutten, 2021) should encourage teacher educators to consider adopting OTI programmes for clinical and field-based experiences in literacy education. This model opens broader possibilities to connect and sustain networks of teachers who may be isolated or work in non-traditional settings and shows how digital tools and platforms can support progressive, learner-centred and empowering models of practice-based learning in the literacy field.

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12

## **‘How in the world will we teach online?’: re-envisioning literacy practicums for distance education**

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In the ever-changing landscape of higher education, schools are increasingly moving programmes online to enhance accessibility and increase enrolment (University of Illinois Springfield, [n.d.](#)). The move to remote learning poses a unique complication to colleges and universities that enrol a multitude of students, both locally and at a distance. In fact, to better prepare teachers for an increasingly digital world, some teacher education programmes include a component of coursework that requires students to teach fully online (Faucette and Nugent, [2015](#); Waters and Russell, [2016](#)). Interestingly, while teaching in these cases occurs online, the support for the practicums is still physically located at the institution where the preservice teachers are enrolled – so these practicum experiences are not 100 per cent distance. In some teacher education programmes, remote teaching involves teacher candidates working within a virtual school that utilises a pre-designed curriculum.

In this chapter, we discuss the creation of remote practicum experiences for literacy teacher candidates to gain authentic literacy teaching experiences with diverse students and meet the rigorous educational mandates required by state and professional organisations for certification as literacy specialists in the United States. We are inspired to add preparation for virtual teaching to our literacy programme and aim to do so in a way that empowers teacher candidates to design and prepare literacy lessons based on their students’ unique interests and abilities in

lieu of pre-designed curriculum materials. The chapter begins with an overview of literature regarding remote online practicums, including reflections of two remote literacy practicums, and ends with considerations for educators planning their own practicum experiences.

Our intent for this chapter is not to provide a single model of a distance literacy practicum, but to share our learning and the lingering questions we grapple with to help other teacher educators make mindful and informed decisions when designing their own distance practicum programmes. Thus, we present to you our struggles and victories from our own experiences transitioning our graduate literacy practicums online.

## Remote literacy practicums: a critical review of the literature

We turned to the extant literature to help us understand effective designs of distance literacy practicums. While little was found in the field of literacy education, literature that focused on remote engagement in other subject areas was more common. In the field of science education, Winslow and Smith (1999) write about mentor scientists using computers to chat with students. They describe the benefits of email, chat and what would today be called discussion boards as tools for mentoring. In the field of hospitality, Roy and Sikes (2017) describe a distance practicum framework that includes the use of a learning management system to reflect on experiences through private journaling, public discussion boards and creation of a blog. In the field of business, Jackson (2019) recommends establishing learning objectives, communication requirements, training, and accountability. Additionally, in the field of music education, Pike (2017) describes how interns teaching piano virtually learned to overcome the barrier of the screen and communicate with students to help them learn what would have traditionally been done through physical manipulation of the students' hands or posture – giving us hope that we could adapt our literacy practicum to a totally online setting.

While online literacy practicum literature is sparse, work with computer simulations and virtual reality (VR) seem more common in teacher education research (Chesler et al., 2015; Hudson et al., 2018; Ledger et al., 2019; Oner, 2018; Theelen, Willems, et al., 2020). Simulations and virtual reality can be useful for immersing teacher candidates in the classroom environment through virtual observations. One example is a study where 360-degree videos were used with VR headsets to enable observers to move around a real classroom virtually and view the



classroom environment from multiple perspectives (Theelen, van den Beemt, et al., 2020). This area of research is of interest to us as it has the potential for teacher educators to observe (from a distance) their literacy teacher candidates engaging with Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. Unfortunately, we do not have access to this VR technology, but consider VR and the possible use of simulations important topics for future research.

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the bulk of teaching shifted online as schools closed and emergency remote teaching was put into place (Hodges et al., 2020). In one such setting, Keefe (2020: 225) described how her adaptation of Darling-Hammond's (2010) feedback cycles resulted in 'increased confidence on the part of teacher candidates, the development of new digital skills, and the perception of improvement in practice by both the teacher educator and the candidates'. Keefe also notes that the virtual coaching as part of the feedback cycles was the greatest perceived benefit by interns. Literacy coaching, popular in the United States, employs experienced teachers who share their expertise and guide novice teachers through reflections of their teaching practices – ultimately aimed at transforming literacy instructional practices. Keefe found this coaching emphasis kept students connected to the teaching experience instead of shifting to a theory-based focus. We found this helpful advice as we considered our practicum design – leading us to incorporate video observations as well as instructor and peer coaching to support remote teaching and learning.

## Context: literacy practicum overview

In New York State, where our college is located, teacher candidates must complete a 50-hour practicum experience working with students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through to Grade 6 (ages 4 to 12 years old) to gain eligibility for elementary literacy certification and an additional 50 hours of practicum in grades 5–12 for adolescent literacy certification. Historically, our literacy department hosts a *Summer Literacy Institute* on campus each year in partnership with several rural public districts to meet candidates' elementary practicum needs. Each summer, we also partner with an urban, privately run charter school to conduct instruction at their location in a nearby city to meet adolescent practicum needs. Teacher candidates provide individualised assessment and targeted literacy instruction to students in both our urban and rural partnerships in our Summer Literacy Institutes.

As a result of COVID-19 ‘stay at home’ orders initiated in spring 2020, the Summer Literacy Institutes needed to be reimagined. How would teacher candidates be able to effectively assess and provide high-quality instruction, engaging students in literacy instruction through a totally online format without access to the books, assessments and materials normally found in face-to-face settings? We knew it was essential to redesign our literacy practicum experiences to enable candidates to meet their certification standards and to prepare them for a future sure to include reliance on technology for instruction – yet we hadn’t quite figured out how to run a totally remote practicum and we had little research to guide us.

In addition, teacher candidates expressed apprehension of remote instruction. Catherine (all names are pseudonyms) wrote in her course reflection:

Before the practicum started, I was very nervous and overwhelmed thinking about how this would all work out and how I would be successful teaching a student I have never met . . . online.

Catherine’s reflection above captures the worry many teacher candidates expressed when the pandemic brought about a shift in the face-to-face practicum experiences. Teacher candidates grappled with more than just anxiety about teaching online as noted by Patty, a teacher candidate who was concerned about the challenge of relationship building in a remote teaching setting. She reflected, ‘I was worried about taking the course online because I was afraid, I would not be able to make meaningful connections with my student’. In the following, we describe some of the effective practices that developed our remote literacy practicum experience.

## Remote elementary literacy practicum

While teacher candidates harboured a great deal of anxiety at the start of their practicum, by the end of the course many professed surprise at the positive experiences they had with remote teaching – including the relationships established with their students and the quality of teaching possible – even in a totally online setting. From her own reflections working with adjunct instructor Justin Jackson, Kathy shares two effective components of the remote elementary literacy practicum: instructor-created *mentor video and text sets* and *co-teaching as a model* for instructors and teacher candidates.

Kathy engaged with a volunteer first-grader in several remote literacy sessions in the weeks prior to the practicums; these sessions were recorded and later utilised as *mentor videos*. Kathy shared *mentor texts* – assessment data, lesson plans and teaching reflections that correspond to the videos to support teacher candidates who wondered how in the world they were going to teach remotely. These *mentor video and mentor text sets* served to provide a counternarrative to the common teacher candidate belief at the inception of the practicum that it was not possible to build relationships or effectively teach literacy online in meaningful ways. The rationale for mentor texts is described by the National Writing Project below:

Mentor texts are pieces of literature that you – both teacher and student – can return to and reread for many different purposes. . . . Mentor texts help students to take risks and be different writers tomorrow than they are today. It helps them to try out new strategies and formats. (Dorfman, 2013: para. 3)

Just as mentor texts support writers in K–12 classrooms, the *mentor video and text sets* helped teacher candidates by encouraging them to try out novel remote teaching and assessment strategies. Teacher candidates then tailored their remote teaching to their students' unique interests, abilities and instructional needs to engage students in meaningful literacy-based interactions. The *mentor video and text sets* are described in [Table 12.1](#).

In planning for their own assessment and instruction, candidates experimented with a variety of digital tools to enhance students' learning. We share teacher-friendly resources in [Table 12.2](#).

In addition to the use of mentor texts, we found co-teaching to be a powerful collaborative strategy in supporting our candidates. Teaching is often a solitary venture (Friend and Cook, 1995) where some educators experience loneliness and isolation even when surrounded by students (Webb, 2018). Indeed, this has been a problem for decades; Mirel and Goldin (2012) reference Lortie (1975: para. 2) who 'described teacher isolation as one of the main structural impediments to improved instruction and student learning in American public schools'. To be sure, teachers need each other (Sackstein, 2017) and this was true for us too – even as teacher educators. We decided co-teaching would not only enable us to support one another in a time of unprecedented anxiety – the COVID-19 pandemic – but also enrich our programme planning and practicum instruction.

Table 12.1 Mentor video and text sets overview

Mentor Video and Text Sets	Pedagogical Connections
<p><b>Getting to Know Our Students Remotely</b></p> <p>These materials focused on use of interactive icebreakers to facilitate conversation and use of reading inventories to understand students' reading interests and preferences.</p>	<p>Using icebreakers in a virtual setting is important to promote both social and cognitive engagement, increasing motivation for learning (Jaggars and Xu, 2016).</p>
<p><b>Understanding Our Students as Readers and Writers</b></p> <p>Here we focused on the remote administration of literacy assessments. In the virtual setting, we relied upon a variety of tools/applications like screen sharing in lieu of hard copy books or document sharing (like Google Docs) or even cell phone photo sharing of student writing instead of the writing paper normally used in face-to-face settings.</p>	<p>A variety of literacy assessments are necessary to help teacher candidates understand their students as readers and writers – to see what they already know and can do – and to use this information to plan thoughtful next instructional steps to support their students. For example, understanding students' reading processes helped teacher candidates target instruction so running records were essential to our practicum. Similarly, to learn about students as writers, we relied upon evaluating writing samples with rubrics like 6+1 Writing Traits to help teacher candidates give students detailed feedback and make mindful suggestions for continued development (Coe, n.d.).</p>
<p><b>Engaging Students in Meaningful Literacy Practices</b></p> <p>Implementing personalised online literacy instructional contexts can meet students' unique interests and provide thoughtful next steps in instruction for students in a virtual setting.</p>	<p>Instructional contexts include:</p> <p><b>Interactive read aloud:</b> provides engaging opportunities for students to listen to, think about and interact with the text and the teacher candidates (Fountas and Pinnell, 2018: 26).</p> <p><b>Guided reading:</b> encourages readers to expand their systems of 'strategic actions' while engaging in a variety of rich texts with a responsive teacher (Fountas and Pinnell, 2018: 30). Screen sharing projectable books and PowerPoint slides aids in remote instruction.</p> <p><b>Writing about reading:</b> enhances students' understanding of texts, enabling students to share their thinking with others while using written language and drawings to express meaningful ideas (Fountas and Pinnell, 2018). Family photos of students' writing completed after tutoring sessions were shared with the instructor.</p>

**Table 12.2** Resources to support remote instruction

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**Digital tools/applications to support meaningful remote literacy instruction**

**Online digital book resources and read-alouds for students to enjoy when they don't have or have limited school library access:**

- EPIC: <https://www.getepic.com/educators>
- International Digital Children's Library: <http://en.childrenslibrary.org/books/index.shtml>
- Lee & Low Storytime: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWvLSVUakWYPsIo4gTnMykhcleuJZVkyZ>
- PBS Kids Read Along: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/read-along>
- Reading A-Z & Raz Kids <https://www.readinga-z.com/technology/projectable/>
- News ELA: <https://newsela.com/>

**Resources to create ice breakers, interactive literacy games and individualised student practice activities:**

- Nearpod: <https://nearpod.com/>
- Kahoot: <https://kahoot.com/>

**To engage in online writing in real-time collaborative settings:**

- GoogleDocs
  - Book Creator: <https://bookcreator.com/>
- 

Co-teaching has been defined as 'two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space' (Friend and Cook, 1995: 2). We have updated that definition to include instruction in a *virtual* space as well as a physical one. As Friend and Cook (1995: 4) suggest, 'co-teaching can be characterized as a means of bringing the strengths of two teachers with different expertise together in a manner that allows them to better meet student needs'. Several models of co-teaching used to expand instructional approaches during the remote Literacy practicum are described in [Table 12.3](#).

In the next section, Kate shares her reflection of successful components of the remote adolescent literacy practicum.

## Adolescent literacy practicum

Our first challenge was locating interested adolescent students to participate in our virtual practicum. Local schools expressed excitement at the prospect of online individualised summer literacy instruction; however,

**Table 12.3** Co-teaching models in a distance literacy practicum

<b>Co-Teaching Models</b> <b>*Adapted from Friend and Cook (1995)</b>	<b>Remote Elementary Literacy Practicum Application</b>
<b>Team Teaching:</b> Both teachers share instruction of the students.	During synchronous video classes on Blackboard Collaborate, instructors took turns delivering instruction (e.g., engaging with students as a group and talking through the PowerPoints, encouraging participation with discussion questions, etc.). Co-planning was necessary to develop and refine presentation slides, determine who taught which content, create assessments aligned with instructional goals and make sure all learning goals were met.
<b>One Teaching, One Assisting:</b> One instructor takes the clear teaching lead while the other ‘drifts around the classroom’ for support.	During synchronous video classes on Blackboard Collaborate one instructor took the lead to teach, while the second instructor ‘drifted’ around the virtual classroom by monitoring the group chat and answering questions (via chat feature) or adding impromptu conversations between slides as needed.
<b>Station Teaching:</b> Teachers divide instructional content into segments and set up stations to instruct around the classroom simultaneously.	We adapted station teaching to the remote setting by dividing content and creating asynchronous stations – in this case instructional modules that covered a variety of topics.

they could not locate secondary students who wanted to participate in our practicum – as students expressed their weariness with virtual learning. As a result, many teacher candidates located their own volunteers and elected to teach students from their home communities. Other candidates tutored 6th–12th-grade learners from a local rural school district as well as several of our faculty’s children.

Our second challenge was differentiating the adolescent practicum from the childhood practicum in our new online format. The adolescent practicum instructional team had to take into consideration the fact that our teacher candidates were exhausted from sitting at the computer teaching their elementary student learners and then had to take a brief break only to teach and observe again – much like a full day of traditional teaching. Our concerns for preparing our candidates for the rigorous

reality of teaching adolescent learners in literacy rich classroom spaces was in direct tension with our concerns over their social and emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the adolescent practicum, our candidates are expected to build a full picture of who their literacy learners are: their strengths, areas of growth, interests, ways of writing, ways of reading, etc. To do so is complex and calls on them to draw on their expertise from their graduate courses. In our face-to-face practicum experiences, instructors can observe and more easily gauge candidates' knowledge and progress. Adapting and building a new fully online experience during an international pandemic felt daunting, particularly since the adolescent instructional team had indeed already built and prepared for a face-to-face practicum experience.

Kate and her colleague, Janeen Pizzo, who helped to run the adolescent partnership, kept in close contact with Kathy. How were they structuring their practicum? How could we balance the two experiences? As instructors, we wanted to ensure the two partnerships had differences. Yet, how could we find ways not to overwhelm our students and ensure that what they were tasked to do became a way to showcase their expertise while still growing their learning? We developed a schedule, which became an anchor to our experience. The schedule was as follows:

- **Monday:** Observe experienced teacher lessons using a variety of teaching strategies, approaches and classes. In the traditional practicum, instructors and school-based practicing teachers provide these spaces for observation. Teacher candidates were given a template which required candidates to record their observations, take notes on what they felt worked and what didn't, make suggestions for improvements, and discuss responsive practices.
- **Tuesday and Wednesday:** Meet with Professional Learning Communities to prepare and review, teach adolescent learners, and observe peers' teaching. Meet with partners to debrief and plan.
- **Thursday:** Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meetings to discuss readings, teaching, areas for support, areas for growth, and the exchange of ideas.

The schedule provided ways for teachers to observe, coach, collaborate, and teach at specific times, which added a necessary structure to our experience but also differentiated it from the elementary experience.

Another consideration was finding a unique way for our teacher candidates to display, keep and organise their work for the practicum. Our digital portfolio provided teacher candidates and instructors with

a clear space to publish and organise their adolescent practicum work and learning. The adolescent practicum portfolio was designed around the International Literacy Association (ILA) professional standards for Literacy Specialists. We strove to develop a way for candidates to capture their learning and teaching; additionally, we wanted to create a repository that would allow candidates to demonstrate their mastery of literacy-based teaching practices. Candidates linked their portfolio work to share with practicum instructors through Blackboard, our learning management system. The use of the digital portfolio model enabled us to analyse candidates' growth and engage in the revise-and-resubmit process as needed.

The adolescent practicum faculty decided on the use of Google online tools for our portfolio. Our decision to develop a portfolio using this platform allowed candidates to practice using these tools often used in classrooms. We shared the digital tabs in the online portfolio which evidenced effective cycles of candidates' learning and feedback.

- **About Me:** In this space, teacher candidates found unique ways to introduce themselves. Candidates were asked to author letters to their students where they shared a bit about themselves, their teaching philosophy, their interests, and what they wanted their students to know about them. This was also a lovely way to open discussion between the teacher candidates and their learners.
- **Reading Reflections:** Drawing on Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1994), teacher candidates developed reading journals to reflect on assigned readings and synthesise their learning. Candidates were asked to draw on texts and research to develop lesson plans, assessments and meaningful instructional practices.
- **Culturally Responsive Instruction** (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014): In this space, teacher candidates were asked to develop rationales to explain how their literacy practices connected to culturally relevant teaching. Braden et al. provide an overview of culturally responsive pedagogy in literacy teaching and learning in [Chapter 10](#).
- **Discussion and Self Reflection** (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Keefe, 2020): As advocated by teachers and researchers alike, reflection is a powerful way to analyse and consider one's approach to teaching. What worked? What didn't work? What could be improved? In this space candidates discussed their practice.
- **Collaboration and Coaching** (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Keefe, 2020): This space permitted teacher candidates to record their peer observations and reflect on their coaching skills.



- **Assessment Data:** Teacher candidates used this tab to store and display initial, ongoing and post-practicum assessment data.
- **Lesson and Unit Plans:** Teacher candidates posted, edited and revised their ongoing lessons plans.
- **Individualised Instruction:** Teacher candidates reflected on the ways in which they developed, evaluated, and altered instruction to fit the individual needs and interests of their learners.

## Establishing virtual professional learning communities: a key component of both remote practicums

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups where teaching professionals work collaboratively to enhance teaching and learning (DuFour, 2009). PLC members can work together in many ways: analysing student data, exploring and reflecting on teaching practices, and co-constructing instructional plans to meet the needs of all students. Wagner in Chapter 11 provides an alternative approach for PLCs through an Online Teacher Inquiry model that could be applied to remote practicums.

A central component of both practicums included peer collaboration with a focus on continuous improvement. In our previous face-to-face format, this involved physically grouping teacher candidates together. In the online format, we wanted teacher candidates to continue to engage in PLCs to mirror practices in Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 school settings. This was accomplished by utilising virtual teaching partnerships. For instance, while candidate A taught, candidate B observed remotely, taking anecdotal notes and recording reflections. Then, the candidates switched roles and later conferred. The goal was to create authentic spaces to share and grow burgeoning teaching practices, developing both teacher self-efficacy and peer coaching skills along the way. Additionally, the use of virtual PLC discussion boards enabled teaching-based interactions and sharing among all teacher candidates.

For the adolescent practicum, each set of virtual teaching partners paired up with another set of partners. These four teacher candidates worked together in PLCs to engage in reading reflections, transform theory into practice, and work through one another's teaching challenges and victories. Candidates took turns assuming the roles of teacher (literacy specialist), peer coach (coach), and teacher group literacy leader (expert). They studied together, shared together, and grew together, effectively extending their learning and confidence in their teaching abilities.

## Conclusion

As teacher educators, we continue to discover the benefits and possibilities of online instruction. Through their experiences in the elementary and adolescent literacy practicums, teacher candidates learned to be successful in connecting with students remotely. Candidates effectively gained understandings about their students' literacy experiences and came to know their students as individuals with unique interests and abilities. Knowledge about students, as well as about how assessment data informed candidates' instructional decisions and reflection, guided them in making sure their teaching was relevant and responsive. We noticed that even in a remote format, candidates had the power to make student-centred decisions that disrupted reductionist literacy practices common in many local school districts and online programmes.

As teacher educators, we need to take the time to learn more about effective online teaching practices that value meaningful literacy learning and engagement. We need to provide teacher candidates with a variety of successful, immersive experiences in remote teaching so that they will no longer panic and wonder, *'How in the world will we teach online?'*

## Suggestions for teacher educators planning remote literacy practicum experiences

Below, we provide additional suggestions for developing and implementing remote practicum experiences.

- Have teacher candidates engage in remote trial lessons with their peers before actually working with students to be sure their technology is functioning appropriately, and they are familiar with the settings and tools of the learning platform. Have spare computers available on loan for candidates to borrow if their personal equipment does not align with the technology. This alleviates any anxiety about technology issues.
- Create videos for families as well as teacher candidates, walking them through the process of using the online resources to avoid unanticipated challenges and ensure initial lessons go as smoothly as possible. Have videos translated for multilingual families in advance.
- Have teacher candidates consider how they will communicate with families and what the expectations are for such communication. It is

helpful to have options for text and email, as well as for phone/video conferencing. In our experiences, some candidates had success by sending text reminders to families to increase student attendance. Additionally, having access to resources like translation is essential for maintaining positive and equitable family interactions.

- Develop clear calendars for instruction and activities each week. This affords teacher candidates the opportunity to develop a rhythm and not worry ‘What is happening today? What is next?’
- Provide instructional videos for difficult concepts; for example, provide teacher candidates with refreshers for complex assessment practices or strategies with multiple steps.

The virtual platform allows for video analysis of teacher candidate and student interactions to support teacher candidates’ pedagogical practices. In **Chapter 4**, Harmey and Kabuto describe insights that can be gained from video analysis in literacy practicum and practicum experiences.

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## Virtual literacy coaching: moving beyond the traditional context

C. C. Bates and Meghan Malloy

Prior to March 2020, web-based collaborative platforms were certainly an option for literacy coaching. A literacy coach, herein referred to as a coach, represents a literacy leader who works with teachers ‘to construct complex understandings of teaching with the goal of enhancing student learning’ (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2007: xix). Pre-pandemic, the coach may have used FaceTime to observe teaching and interact with the teacher before and after the lesson. If the teacher was not comfortable with the technology, however, the coach could conduct business as usual and drive to the school for a face-to-face traditional coaching visit. All this changed when the world shut down because of the global health crisis. Educators were forced to use technology regardless of their comfort level, and where it was once a choice, it suddenly became a necessity.

Consider the transcript below that showcases a virtual literacy coaching visit. The visit, conducted on Zoom, connected the coach and 10 additional teachers, one of whom was teaching a face-to-face lesson for her colleagues. The coaching visit included a pre-observation conversation, the observation of the face-to-face lesson, and a debriefing session. During both the pre-observation conversation and debriefing, the teachers and coach engaged in collaborative inquiry around the child’s strengths, discussed ways to support the student’s reading and writing behaviours, and made connections to their individual contexts. When the observation began, Teresa, the teacher providing the lesson, turned down the volume on her computer. This allowed the coach and the other teachers to engage in discussion about the complexities of literacy teaching and learning without being heard by Teresa and her student,

Jordan. The conversation between the coach and the teachers observing the lesson and the interactions between Teresa and Jordan occurred simultaneously on Zoom. While the coach and teachers are discussing the lesson, the interactions between Teresa and Jordan stand alone and are therefore bracketed in the transcript.

**Coach:** Alright, so. Teresa's teaching Jordan. Um, he's been out of school for a couple of days. Which, you know they're still on a modified schedule, they got kids coming...

**Marissa (teacher-observer):** Tuesday, Thursday, Friday.

**Coach:** Right! So, he's starting to cross check, and he's beginning to see some similarity in words that are occurring, like *look* and *took*. Okay? He's also expanded his writing and reading vocabulary. So, we want to see how that plays out with him. You might want to turn your, your volume up to hear him. I'll text her [Teresa] and ask her to turn up her mic volume? Marissa, how would you describe his reading at first and how did she [Teresa] get a shift?

**Marissa:** The reading was slower and word by word, and after she used a card, he sped up a little bit and you could hear a little bit more phrasing, about 2–3 words.

**Coach:** Yeah, and you see how she used the card, and um, how his reading picked up, and it's like she didn't say anything to him about it, she just used the card, and his reading picks up, see it's like a signal to the child.

**[Teresa:** How did you know that wasn't right? How did you know that wasn't *playing*? Yeah, it starts with a *G*. *Playing* starts with what? How would you get that started? Yeah, let's clap going. You ready?

**Jordan:** Go-ing (student claps).

**Teresa:** Yeah, going. That's right. Good for you for noticing something wasn't quite right. And you did exactly what good readers do, you went back and fixed it. Alright, buddy.]

**Coach:** So obviously he said *playing*, and then he realised it was wrong. Again, that's that cross-checking that he did.

**[Teresa:** You did! And how did you know that wasn't right? See? You noticed that. That's right, and you...yeah! You fixed it all by yourself. What's this word (teacher frames the word *are*)?

**Jordan:** Are.

**Teresa:** Yeah, can you write that word on the chalkboard? Write *are*.]

**Coach:** While the child's doing this, I want you all to go down to your button, and I want you to go to your audio settings. And I want

everyone to un-check, the automatically adjust microphone setting. And I want you to turn your microphones down just a little bit.

**[Jordan reads the word are in the sentence: We are going...]**

**Coach:** Cause I think what happens is, when we're all unmuted and someone moves papers on the desk, it's really loud...

**[Teresa:** Okay, Space Monsters, or Reading Buddies? Which one would you like to read?]

**Coach:** And we kind of lose the child a bit.

**[Teresa:** Alright, Reading Buddies. Let's make our reading nice and smooth just like we talked about.]

**Coach:** Like Marissa I noticed when you talked your mic is really loud and I'm wondering if that might help us. If we all do that, we'll see. In fact, Marissa, why don't you talk again and let's see.

**Marissa:** Okay, I turned it down, do I need to turn it down more?

**Coach:** Turn it down a little bit more. Yeah.

**Marissa:** Is that better?

**Coach:** A little bit more.

**Marissa:** Now?

**Coach:** That's better, thanks.

Teaching and Observation continues.

As demonstrated in this transcript, supporting literacy educators in online settings has taken on a whole new meaning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, many teachers switched to fully online or hybrid models of instruction. With this change in format comes an increased proficiency with technology providing a unique opportunity to redefine traditional contexts. In a traditional context, teachers' job-embedded professional learning opportunities are often restricted due to travel and time resulting in a sense of isolation (Spratt, 2019). Moving forward, it is important to carefully examine how practices may be adapted and transformed through an online setting. To this end, the chapter will review key aspects of the literature on traditional coaching to better understand the differences in the two settings and how to cautiously apply what is successful in the traditional context to the virtual setting.

## Review of literature

In the last 10 years, the literature on literacy coaching has covered a range of topics (Hunt, 2018; Hunt and Handsfield, 2013; Lowenhaupt

et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2011). For this chapter, we focus specifically on the research related to the coach-teacher relationship. A successful coach-teacher relationship involves trust, collaborative work, shared learning experiences, and the coach's effort to know the teacher well (see Chapter 8 by Kabuto and colleagues for more discussion on building trusting relationships within a literacy coaching framework) (Hunt, 2018). In this model of coaching, the coach is positioned as a co-inquirer (Hunt, 2018). Co-inquiry keeps the focus on the student, helping to alleviate evaluative pressure for the teacher because the coaching is part of a system of support (Hunt, 2018). While the overarching coach-teacher relationship guided our review, we identified trust, student-focused collaboration, observation and resistance as elements that can contribute to or detract from a successful relationship. We will discuss each of these in light of both traditional and virtual coaching. We will also provide a brief review of the use of technology for coaching.

In this chapter, we define *traditional* as sharing the same physical space and *virtual* as an online, synchronous (real-time) interaction between coach and teacher(s). Virtual coaching as we define it involves the use of Zoom, Google Meet, or other web-based collaborative tools. Synchronous interactions may occur between a coach and teacher but can also include other education professionals as seen in the opening transcript.

## Trust

Research on literacy coaching emphasises the importance of establishing rapport and trust (Ferguson, 2011; Rodgers and Rodgers, 2007). Lowenhaupt and colleagues (2014) suggest that a trusting relationship often evolves from the use of symbolic gestures. Symbolic gestures include tasks like making copies or gathering supplies for teachers (Lowenhaupt et al., 2014). Symbolic gestures are a way for coaches to acknowledge the hectic nature of teaching and contribute to the development of a trusting relationship. Symbolic gestures also lead to the formation of partnerships between coaches and teachers, encouraging them to work as a team (Ferguson, 2011).

The development of partnerships and connections between coaches and teachers help to establish trust. In one study (Ferguson, 2011), teachers describe their relationship with the literacy coach as having a personal element. During their time together they may discuss family, friends and other informalities, which quicken 'the process of gaining trust' (Ferguson, 2011: 169). While the personal connection is important, coaches and teachers' various duties and responsibilities



often prevent them from having time to engage in informal conversation. Rapport and trust ultimately allow teachers to be comfortable and vulnerable when asking questions about their practice. Vulnerability ‘should be viewed not as failure but as a genuine step toward growth in the learning process’ (Robertson et al., 2020). Likewise, a trusting and personal relationship also allows the coach to let down his or her guard. The coach is often positioned as an expert in the school setting (Hunt and Handsfield, 2013) but when the coach also feels comfortable and vulnerable, he or she is able to cast aside the title of expert and take on the role of co-inquirer. When this occurs, coach and teacher engage in the genuine co-construction of knowledge.

### Student-focused collaboration

In a traditional coaching setting, taking a co-inquiry stance involves examining data on students’ reading and writing. This type of student-focused collaboration and the resulting conversation helps the coach understand the teacher’s pedagogical beliefs (Stephens et al., 2011). Placing an emphasis on student data can also shift the focus off teacher performance. When the discussion is grounded in what the students know and can do, it prevents the coach’s feedback from being construed as a personal criticism of the teacher’s instructional approach. When coach and teacher engage in student-focused collaboration, it results in ‘collective ownership of the change process’ through ‘mutual support and development of goals, plans, and materials’ (Kurz et al., 2017: 67).

This is similar to the type of collaborative problem solving described by Hasbrouck and Denton (2007). In what they refer to as student-focused coaching (SFC), the coach and teacher work in partnership to collect and analyse student data and engage in observation as a means of identifying students who need targeted support. As coach and teacher work together to make informed instructional decisions, the coach avoids the role of expert. By assisting teachers in articulating pedagogical goals centred on students’ needs, the coach moves from a directive position to one that is responsive and reflective (Haneda et al., 2019). In addition to using student artefacts and data as the focal point of coaching conversations, the observation of teaching also ensures collaboration is student centred.

### Observation

Rodgers and Rodgers (2007) suggest the most effective way to see change over time in a teacher’s practice is through direct observation

(see [Chapter 5](#) by Morris for a description of professional development in the context of Reading Recovery, an early literacy intervention, where direct observation is used to support teachers' learning). Engaging in observation creates a shared experience for coach and teacher and allows them to reflect on practice together. Observations made by effective coaches include an emphasis on 'the students in terms of how they were responding and participating in the lesson' (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2007: 58). Effective coaches should not limit their observations to what the teachers are saying and doing, but instead should use observations to better understand how the students are benefiting from instruction and if instruction is in the student's zone of proximal development (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2007). Adopting this approach creates a shared experience and allows the coach and teacher to jointly inquire about instructional practices that will accelerate learning. Ferguson (2011: 165) warns that observation may position the coach as an evaluator if feedback is teacher centred, breaking down 'collegial attitudes'. When this occurs, teachers can become resistant to the coaching relationship.

## Resistance

The role of the coach specifically in relation to position and power has been explored in the literature (Hunt and Handsfield, 2013). Additionally, some teachers may feel 'professionally threatened' by the expert status of the coach (Lowenhaupt et al., 2014: 741). As a result, teachers may resist collaborative activity with coaches, 'find[ing] ways to shield themselves from personal affront, disappointment and ridicule' (Lowenhaupt et al., 2014: 749). Further, Lowenhaupt and colleagues (2014) suggest that a power relationship between coach and teacher can create feelings of pressure and resistance when teachers are exposed to potentially negative feedback.

To prevent resistance, it is important that the coaches position themselves as a collaborative partner from the start. Crafton and Kaiser (2011: 109) address the language around the coach's role by reframing the coach's title to 'colleague' or 'working partner'. This shift in language 'is not merely *representational*; it is also *constitutive* [it actually creates realities and invites identities]' (Johnston, 2004: 9). Using language that represents a more collaborative relationship can assuage pressure felt by teachers working with someone who may be perceived as an expert.

Language used to label the coaching model can also reduce issues of power and identity, further putting teachers at ease. For example, Hasbrouck and Denton's (2007: 690) student-focused coaching model

(SFC), defined as ‘a cooperative, ideally collaborative relationship with parties mutually engaged in efforts to provide better services for students’, places an emphasis on student outcomes rather than teacher performance. Further, the SFC model dictates that ‘the focus is on student strengths and needs and the results of interactions between teachers and students rather than directly on the need for teacher change’ (Hasbrouck and Denton, 2007: 690). When teachers see the coach as a partner and this is conveyed in both language and action, teachers are less likely to be resistant to the coaching relationship.

## Technology

Literature around the use of technology for coaching covers a range of approaches and contexts. For example, a study by Jones and Ringler (2020) prepared principal candidates to coach teachers by viewing video-recorded lessons and completing pre- and post-assessments on those lessons. The feedback provided to teachers involved written comments on observational forms rather than synchronous meetings for pre- or post-conversation surrounding the lesson (Jones and Ringler, 2020). In contrast, Rock and colleagues (2014) describe what they call *eCoaching* or bug-in-ear technology. In this virtual coaching approach, the ‘coach offers discreet in-ear feedback to pre- and in-service teachers in vivo’ (Rock et al., 2014: 162). Bug-in-ear technology provides immediate feedback and discreet communication between teacher and coach but can result in ‘feedback issues, emotional responses to the *eCoaching* experience, and other matters’ (Rock et al., 2014: 172). Vernon-Feagans and colleagues (2013) used live webcam technology with teachers to focus on individual students during literacy intervention. In this study, webcam technology was used to provide strategies during instruction and to problem-solve specific student needs following the lesson (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013). Additionally, the coaches used technology to provide workshops for school teams to reinforce strategies discussed during the individual observations (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2013).

While these studies report positive outcomes from the use of technology in various approaches and contexts, they do not emphasise the importance of a strong professional relationship between coach and teacher and how that is developed in the virtual setting. Each study shows how technology can be used to provide feedback, but there must first be an emphasis on establishing trust in the coach-teacher relationship for the feedback to be meaningful.

## Virtual coaching considerations and possibilities

Developing the coach-teacher relationship in a virtual setting is different and it is important to consider how the traditional literature may inform online interactions. In this section, we will present considerations and possibilities for coaching in an online environment related to trust, student-focused collaboration, observation and resistance.

### Trust in the virtual setting

Early studies of virtual coaching identify problems with bandwidth and speed, which compromised verbal and nonverbal communication and, in some cases, influenced trust building (Bates, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the landscape of web-based collaborative platforms (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet), and advancements in technology reduced these challenges so much that the term *face to face*, which once referred to meetings occurring in the same physical space, no longer holds true. Terms like ‘on-ground’ (Gordon, 2020), referring to participants sharing the same ground or physical location, are now being used to differentiate the mode in which a meeting is held. Recent changes in technology have made virtual interactions more closely resemble on-ground interactions and have reduced some of the barriers to trust-building that were present a few years ago.

As identified in the traditional coaching literature, symbolic gestures contribute to the developing coach-teacher relationship. When the coach and teacher are connecting virtually, these gestures obviously change. For example, when schools closed in March 2020, one coach created a voiceover PowerPoint for the teacher with whom she worked. The PowerPoint contained information about using Google Jamboard with students. While there is a plethora of tutorials on YouTube about the use of digital tools and applications, the coach tailored the information specifically to her teacher’s instructional contexts. Emerging research shows that many teachers are ‘overwhelmed and unprepared to use online or remote teaching strategies and tools’ (Whalen, 2020: 191). The tips provided by the coach on the use of Jamboard, and other similar types of support, could be considered symbolic gestures.

Learning new technologies and being required to use them daily has been stressful for teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers have ‘struggled to find a balance between their professional and personal responsibilities’ (Kraft et al., 2020: 28). With many working

from home and juggling family obligations, it has become even more important for coaches to check in with teachers. Isolation has always been a concern in education, but school closures during the pandemic increased these feelings dramatically. Engaging in personal conversation prior to a coaching session is especially important these days. Having a genuine concern for one's colleagues builds a level of understanding and influences the coaching relationship (Ferguson, 2011).

Beyond symbolic gestures and personal connections, developing trust also takes time. Time can be a challenge when coaches are working with teachers in multiple buildings. Travelling to coaching sessions, signing in and out of school buildings, and greeting the principal and other personnel ultimately leaves less time with the teacher. The use of web-based collaborative tools can bridge geographical barriers connecting coach and teacher across time and space (Bates, 2015; Leighton et al., 2018), allowing them to concentrate on coaching and sustaining collaborations. DiDomenico and colleagues (2019: 76) state that 'sustained collaboration over time allows for setting and working toward shared goals, building trust, and creating a safe space for honest conversations'. If a coach is based in a particular school, sustaining collaborations with teachers in that school is achievable. However, if the coach is serving more than one school or is housed at the district-level, sustained collaboration can be difficult. Relying on technology can save coaches time and lessen pressure to immediately begin the coaching session. The extra time can be used to engage in genuine, personal conversation with the teacher as a means of building trust.

### Student-focused collaboration in the virtual setting

Student-focused collaboration allows coach and teacher to engage in joint problem solving. In the traditional setting, this type of collaboration often involves the joint analysis of student artefacts and formative assessments. Together, coach and teacher can use the information to make instructional decisions. In the virtual setting, it is important to develop a plan to share these documents before or during the coaching session. Purchasing and using an inexpensive document camera is one solution. Another option is using a scanning app like Adobe Scan. Adobe Scan is a user-friendly app, which is free for both Android and iOS. The scan provides a clear image with quality text recognition capabilities and can be easily shared via email or viewed through the screen-sharing function available through most platforms. Digital sharing grounds the coaching

session and ensures that student learning remains at the centre of the conversation. Further, using student work samples, lesson records, and other documents related to instruction when engaging in collaborative inquiry is linked to ‘increased teacher confidence to take pedagogical risks, and greater attention to teacher reflection and systematic teacher learning’ (DeLuca et al., 2017: 77).

Moreover, student artefacts and other formative assessments can be directly embedded in a coach’s digital notes. Applications like Evernote or OneNote allow for a range of options including the creation of virtual notebooks where, in addition to taking notes, coaches can import images, audio and hyperlinks which can then be shared with teachers (Bates and Martin, 2013). Creating and using virtual notebooks is another way in which to centre the conversation on student learning and can also serve as a repository for coach and teacher collaboration.

### Observation in the virtual setting

Once the coach and teacher collaborate around student work, they may engage in the co-planning of instruction (DeLuca et al., 2017). Following the planning, the coach can virtually observe the teaching in real time using platforms such as Zoom. In a one-to-one or small group setting, the coach may choose to turn off the camera so that students are not distracted. However, if the coach and teacher plan to discuss the lesson as it unfolds, it is helpful for the teacher to introduce the coach to the students ahead of time. This helps students understand who the coach is and why they may hear the coach and teacher exchange comments during the lesson. Although it is harder to observe small group instruction, advances in cameras and audio make 360° viewing with a 12–18-foot audio radius possible. Whatever the selected technology, the synchronous delivery allows coach and teacher to engage in a shared experience in the form of live lesson observation. The shared experience creates the opportunity for the co-construction of pedagogical knowledge as both coach and teacher ‘address and investigate important questions about effective instruction’ (Gibson, 2006: 315). This stands in stark contrast to a coach watching a previously recorded lesson as real-time observations offer teachers ‘the immediacy of input and feedback and the ability to engage in interactions with the coach, often within the actual context of instruction’ (Kurz et al., 2017: 69).

Using web-based collaborative platforms for the synchronous viewing of teaching affords other opportunities as well. For example, the

coach may use the record feature available on most platforms when a teacher has expressed concern about a particular student's phrased and fluent reading. When the student reads independently, the coach may decide to record the student and the ways in which the teacher prompts the student during the reading of the text. When the lesson is finished, the coach may open the coaching conversation by saying, 'Let's listen together to hear how the student sounded during the reading and identify where the text may have supported fluent reading and where it may have presented some challenge'. Using recorded excerpts from the lesson observation, much like using student artefacts, ensures the conversation is student focused. In the virtual setting, the recording is much less obtrusive because all the coach has to do is click the record button. In a traditional setting, the recording is more obvious to the students and can be a distraction.

### Resistance in the virtual setting

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were asked to immediately navigate online teaching and learning. As stated earlier, Crafton and Kaiser (2011: 109) suggest terms such as 'colleague' or 'working partner', implying that the person in the coaching role is problem solving alongside the teacher rather than on behalf of the teacher. A colleague or working partner recognises when teachers are struggling, for example with novel technologies, and creates space to make the necessary adjustments. When time is not allotted to make needed changes, resistance may be more about the use of unfamiliar technologies and less about literacy coaching. As seen in the opening transcript, the coach divided her attention focusing the discussion on the student's phrasing and fluency while simultaneously addressing technical issues. The coach in this transcript has developed a level of expertise with the selected technology and was prepared to help teachers solve challenges on their end. When specifically questioned about technological issues the coach stated, 'Expect the unexpected and be prepared. I always have a cell phone number and the teachers have mine. I have a hot spot that I use should my internet go out. Flexibility is the name of the game'. Taking time to solve unexpected internet or technological issues, and having a backup plan as the coach suggested, can help mediate teacher resistance towards virtual coaching. Most importantly, addressing these challenges protects and allows opportunities for critical reflection. It is the critical reflection that occurs during coaching sessions that illuminates the complexities

of literacy acquisition. In the absence of critical reflection, it is easy to see how surface-level understandings form and how these understandings can translate into a narrow range of skills being taught.

## Conclusion

Emerging from the global pandemic, coaches and teachers have the opportunity to use their expanded knowledge of web-based collaborative platforms for virtual coaching. Moving forward, however, it is important to attend to the elements of trust, student-focused collaborations, observation, and resistance reviewed in this chapter. Synchronous connections reduce time and travel for coaches while also allowing them to develop and maintain the coach-teacher relationship. Returning to pre-pandemic instructional settings does not mean that we should also return to models of pre-pandemic literacy coaching. Kabuto and colleagues (Chapter 8), for instance, describe how they re-envisioned the training of literacy coaches in response to the pandemic. They argue that literacy coaching can be situated within community and non-traditional contexts, like non-governmental organisations (NGOs), that extend beyond classrooms to include literacy practices and learning situated within communities and families. By capitalising on lessons learned during the pandemic, we contend that virtual coaching can support coaches and teachers in an increasingly online world.

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Literacy education can take place in many locations and periods across the lifespan. Literacy educators require flexibility and a deep toolbox to meet their students' diverse needs, regardless of whether they work in traditional school and college settings or in other environments with varied populations. *Teaching Literacies in Diverse Contexts* shows how practical experiences can be used in creative ways to support educator development for teaching literacy in a global context.

Mentorship between a developing literacy educator and an experienced teacher educator is central to the book, and to the practical experiences in training or professional development that it focuses on. Chapters share the creative solutions discovered during mentorship that supported developing literacy educators to teach with authenticity in a number of contexts, including the adult learning sector, a rural community in Africa and alongside parents of very sick children. The authors demonstrate how this can be done in a sensitive and culturally relevant manner by parents, volunteers and teachers with varying degrees of experience in both formal and informal spaces. Together, the chapters build a crucial resource for preparing a broad range of literacy educators to teach literacy in many contexts where policy on how best to teach reading and writing to diverse student bodies ebbs and flows.

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