

Connecting Theory to Practice Through a Revised Teacher Certification Course Project

Research Questions

How does the opportunity to work with children as an on-going part of literacy coursework influence the learning trajectories of teacher candidates?

What kinds of connections are teacher candidates making between coursework theory and concepts and work with children in classroom contexts?

Background

Three years ago we moved our teacher certification literacy course from campus into a local elementary school. Our intent was to provide additional opportunities for teacher candidates to connect course content to work with children in classroom settings.

We had two instructional goals in mind:

1. We wanted teacher candidates to understand the importance of knowing students as individuals in order to develop appropriately targeted instruction
2. We wanted to provide teacher candidates opportunities to transform literacy content knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge appropriate for working with children

Project: Reading Analysis and Lesson

For this course project, teacher candidates work individually with students to gather reading assessment data and to design and teach a lesson based on this information. Data are collected on five aspects of reading:

1. Word identification
2. Fluency
3. Vocabulary
4. Comprehension
5. Ownership

Problem: Qualitative Reading Inventory

Previously, this project required students to use the Qualitative Reading inventory (QRI), a diagnostic reading assessment that was not a good match to the in-class practicum. It was:

- Too lengthy, with complex directions
- Too rigid, focusing teacher candidates on the test rather than the child

Solution: Informal Reading Conference

We replaced the QRI with a series of other less formal measures that still address the five aspects of reading. Our hope was that, through informal reading conferences, teacher candidates could focus on the child as well as the assessment, aligning with our original goals.

Project Implementation and Data Collection, Fall and Winter Quarters
Researcher field notes, teacher candidate written reflections, project essays

Disconnect

Disconnect

In-Class Practicum

To help reach our goals, we developed a course model that includes an in-class practicum with most course sessions and revolves around repeating cycles of assessment, instruction and reflection. Features of the practicum include:

- 30 minute sessions with children
- Individual or small-group interactions
- Experiences with children in grades K, 2, and 5
- Structured instructional and assessment activities

Initial Results

- Most teacher candidates developed close relationships with the children in the practicum. The informal reading conferences emphasized children's motivation and interests, encouraging teacher candidates to put a great deal of effort into understanding the literacy knowledge and abilities of children and preparing lessons for them
- Teacher candidates appeared to have an immediate purpose in learning course content and transforming that content to meet the needs of children, suggesting connected understandings between literacy concepts and the ways that they apply to children

We are encouraged by these initial results and hope to continue our efforts to align course projects with the unique instructional model of our course