

Content and Methods of Teaching Literacy: The Effect of One-on-One Tutoring in Preservice Clinical Education in Two Low-Performing, Diverse School Settings on the Effectiveness of Preservice Teachers' Reading Instruction

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Abstract: This is a study of preservice teachers' ability to teach reading to struggling, diverse students, after participating in a school-embedded course incorporating a one-on-one tutorial directly supervised by reading experts. Changes in reading performance as well as plans to analyze changes in the preservice teachers will be discussed.

This paper presents a description of the first phase in a line of research that has a dual focus: (a) the improvement of students' reading performance in grades three and four and (b) the improvement of the preparation of preservice teacher candidates in implementing effective reading instruction. To initiate this line of research, the College of Education at Florida International University collaborated with individual Miami-Dade County Public Schools to implement a school-based clinical experience that would benefit struggling readers and preservice teacher education candidates.

The need for this program emerged from two areas of concern. The first area relates to the critical need to support struggling readers. In Florida, students must demonstrate appropriate levels of reading achievement in order to progress to the next grade. In fact, state law mandates that students in the third grade who do not pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) be retained. Many of these students lack the most basic reading skills and abilities and need explicit, systematic reading instruction. It is difficult for classroom teachers to meet the needs of low-performing student for intensive instruction within a classroom setting. Therefore, a primary aim in the development of this clinical experience was to provide support for struggling readers, in a one-on-one tutorial. In this context, the struggling readers' strengths and areas for growth may be assessed, and targeted instructional support may be planned and implemented.

The second area of concern that prompted the development of this clinical experience focused on the need to enhance the preparation of preservice teacher education candidates in the area of reading education. Throughout the country, the reading needs of students have increased the demand for teachers, including first year teachers, who are well prepared to teach diverse literacy learners. The College of Education at Florida International University has had a long history of requiring three reading courses in the Elementary Education program. This already exceeds by two the number of reading courses offered at many institutions across the country. Recently, the state of Florida Department of Education required that Florida public institutions of higher education offer a fourth reading course. Based on the findings in *Prepared to Make A Difference: The Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation For Reading Instruction* (2003) conducted by the International Reading Association, that concluded that a tutorial was a highly-valued experience contributing to a beginning reading teacher's efficacy to teach reading, it was decided to create a school-based clinical experience as part of the fourth reading class. In this course, teacher education candidates would have direct experiences and responsibilities for providing reading instruction to struggling

readers in diverse, urban educational settings just prior to their final internship (student teaching) experience. When fully implemented, candidates' success in this clinical experience would help to ensure that upon exiting the Elementary Education program, they would be fully prepared to teach reading to all learners.

This paper will present results from the initial implementation year of this clinical experience. The following will be shared: pre -post test gains related to students' reading performance as a result of one-on-one tutoring. Results of preservice teacher candidates' development based upon the analysis of candidates' written reflections will be analyzed in the next phase of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Low reading achievement, more than any other factor, is a primary concern of chronically low-performing schools. The most fundamental responsibility of schools is teaching students to read; however, there is an alarming prevalence of struggling and poor readers. Further, although twenty percent of elementary students nationwide have significant problems learning to read, the rate of reading failure ranges from 60 to 70 percent for African-American, Hispanic, limited-English speakers and children from low socio-economic backgrounds (Moats, 1999). The intent of state and national mandates in reading is to reach these populations of struggling readers. Research (Keehn, Harmon, Hedrick, Martinez, & Perez, 2001) indicates that well-prepared teachers are the key.

A recent study found there was a need for coursework to focus, at least in part, on the instruction of struggling readers (Duffy & Atkinson, 2001). The majority of preservice teachers in the study did not feel prepared to teach these students until they received instruction that explicitly addresses teaching struggling readers in elementary school. Additionally, Duffy and Atkinson (2001), in directly teaching struggling readers in elementary schools, advocate the use of assessments as key in helping preservice teachers learn to teach struggling and non-struggling readers effectively.

Of various strategies that are used in teacher education programs, extensive community-based immersion experiences, coupled with coursework, seem to have the most promise in teacher preparation programs (Sleeter, 2001). The clinical experience designed for implementation in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools seeks to actualize these research-based findings to support preservice teacher preparation and improve reading instruction.

Purpose

The purpose of the current research was to examine the effects of one-on-one tutoring in preservice clinical education in two low-performing, diverse school settings on the effectiveness of preservice teacher education candidates' reading instruction of struggling readers.

Research Questions

How does one-on-one tutoring impact the reading performance of struggling readers?
How does participation in the delivery of one -on-one tutoring impact the preparation of preservice teacher education candidates in the area of reading education?

Research Design

The design of this study utilized mixed methods. Pre- and post test scores were compared quantitatively to assess gains in reading performance. Preservice teacher candidates' written reflections were analyzed qualitatively for evidence of depth of learning. This second part for the qualitative is in process with the collection of data at the end of the term just completed.

Data Collection

The *Basic Reading Inventory* was administered at the beginning and at the end of the tutoring sessions to measure the elementary students' reading performance. These inventories were administered and analyzed by the teacher education candidates, under closely-supervised conditions.

The preservice teacher education candidates were asked to reflect regularly in writing upon the following: What did you do that went well? How did it link to the assessment? What are you going to teach next? The candidates' reflections will be analyzed qualitatively for emerging patterns.

Sample

Forty-five third and fourth grade students in two low-performing (as identified by the state's formula for performance on the standardized test, FCAT), and diverse (having a high percentage of minority students) elementary schools were selected to participate in one-on-one reading tutoring. The students were individually identified by their classroom teachers as struggling readers. Many of the students had been retained once in third grade due to failing scores on the F-CAT, and many of the students would probably be potential retainees in the third grade due to low Stanford Achievement Test, SAT-9, scores from the second grade.

Forty-five, middle-class, minority (80 % Hispanic, 20% African American) preservice teacher candidates, who were enrolled in a newly designed undergraduate fourth literacy course provided one-on-one reading tutoring for the elementary students.

Clinical Experience

Undergraduate students who were enrolled in a newly-designed fourth literacy course provided effective reading instruction for struggling readers as identified by their classroom teachers. One-on-one tutoring took place in two low-performing, diverse, elementary schools in a clinical setting. The elements of the tutoring were: administration of the *Basic Reading Inventory*, instruction in specific reading comprehension strategies, an interest inventory, instruction in lesson planning, and a case study of the tutored student.

Procedure

Two classes of preservice teacher candidates attended classes in a low-performing, diverse elementary school setting prior to beginning the tutoring. They were instructed on administering reading assessments, reading instruction based on assessment, and discussions on the importance of selecting developmentally appropriate, leveled texts. The preservice teachers received instruction on how to analyze what they learned about the student from the *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2005) to formulate reading lessons tailored to the student's reading needs. In addition to administering the *Basic Reading Inventory*, they also administered an interest inventory and fluency checks. The preservice teacher candidates were randomly paired with a student to tutor. Twelve one hour, one-on-one tutoring sessions were conducted, during which they focused on reading comprehension of text. The preservice teacher candidates developed reading and reading response lesson plans each week for the duration of the tutoring sessions. The reading lesson plans were reviewed by the instructors prior to implementation with the students and the preservice teachers were mentored throughout the process. Preservice teachers wrote reflections following the sessions. Each preservice teacher administered the *Basic Reading Inventory* at the beginning and at the end of the twelve hour-long tutoring sessions. The tutoring sessions took place in the library of the respective elementary schools.

Results

The effect on reading achievement of the elementary school students was measured quantitatively by comparing the scores of a beginning *Basic Reading Inventory* to the same students' ending scores on the *Basic Reading Inventory* with a paired samples t-test. Individual students' scores were analyzed with a paired samples t-test in order to examine each student's reading achievement gains. Comparison of the pre and posttest scores showed statistically significant reading gains, $t = 11.31$ ($df = 44$) $.00 < p < .05$. The mean of the posttest scores ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.11$) was significantly greater than the mean of the pretest scores ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.03$).

The second aspect of this line of research will analyze the preservice teacher candidates' reflections qualitatively for recurring patterns. The researchers will be looking for patterns of awareness of the needs of minority students and an increased depth of knowledge towards working with struggling readers.

Implications

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (F-CAT) as defined by the State Department of Education determines whether a student is promoted to the next grade level. It is the deciding factor for third grade students in elementary schools. In the school district, six thousand third-grade students were retained in 2003 the first year of implementation retention; nine thousand third-grade students were retained in 2004, many of the original ones for the second time. There is a critical need to explore methods of reading interventions for all students, in addition to examining the preparation of teachers who will be able to teach these struggling readers well in any school.

The main thrust of studies conducted on preservice, one-on-one reading tutoring suggest that not only would preservice teachers likely be successful in providing reading instruction to young students, but they would also probably profit from the experience in preparation for their future roles as teachers of reading in the classroom because of the links between coursework and classroom practices (Cabello, Eckmier, & Baghieri, 1995). In addition, preservice teachers need coaching and feedback as they explore literacy events. Having teacher educators provide guidance and assistance might transform the way preservice teachers conceptualize and practice literacy in plural societies (Hoffman, 1996).

Additionally, in recent years, major demographic transformations have occurred in schools; children from ethnic and racial minority cultures make up the largest percentage of students from most urban districts (Marshall, 1996). Students from diverse populations continue to increase exponentially, while the numbers of teachers consist primarily of White, middle class women, who sometimes lack knowledge concerning cultural minorities, the requisite background cultural knowledge of literacy learning, in order to reach students from diverse backgrounds effectively. While the populations of preservice teacher candidates remain predominately the same in this county, the teachers in the study are themselves minority students, yet their middle class background does not mirror that of the students. Therefore, this report on research is only the initial phase in a line of longitudinal research. Further research is needed to follow these preservice teacher candidates into their first year of teaching to examine the effects of their teacher preparation program on their teaching of reading and the impact it has on the reading performance of the students they teach. Implications for related future research could include measures of the effects of exposure to teaching reading to diverse students who are in low-performing schools upon the preservice candidates' ability to impact their future students.

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