University-Based Literacy Center: Benefits for the College and the Community

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges in literacy education is the ability to provide a practical environment for candidates to apply their knowledge, while still working with their peers and under close faculty supervision. One of the greatest needs of resource-stretched schools is the ability to provide students with additional help in literacy learning. A university-based community literacy center is a proposition that can mutually benefit both groups. Literacy education candidates can grow in their abilities through practical experience combined with interactive, socially mediated learning techniques. Children gain additional instruction time geared toward developing the reading and writing skills needed to not only survive, but thrive in today's schools. This paper highlights how our College of Education established an on-campus literacy learning center, the programs we offer, and the impact this center has had on both our literacy candidates and the families of the students entrusted to our program.

Keywords: **literacy education, community literacy centers, university-based literacy centers, reading, literacy, children, socially mediated learning**

In an era in which everyone is being expected to do more with less, how may teacher educators of future literacy specialists prepare highly qualified leaders? One crucial element of this preparation involves field experiences in which candidates teach real learners with real literacy needs. This authenticity is the foundation for the meaningful rigor needed in the candidates' program of preparation in order to gain true competency. Therefore, when faced with accomplishing more with less, field-based experiences rise from important to foundational and critical.

At the same time, there are real children and adolescents who could positively benefit from what Richard Allington has referred to as "more and better" literacy instruction (1994). An ideal and logical way to provide this literacy instruction is through a university-based literacy center that serves the community. Learners could receive supplemental instruction above and beyond their regular school day (more), and could receive targeted instruction based on analyses of individual assessments (better). As a result, children and adolescents who are at risk for failure in literacy learning may gain more instructional time on appropriate tasks.

Literacy specialist candidates are learning skills in assessment, analysis of learner needs, instructional strategies and skills, and professional dispositions. Candidates need an opportunity to employ these additional professional abilities in a real-world setting, with the student population for whom these skills are designed to benefit. Without this experience, the candidate will not sufficiently gain the experience needed to become competent in these areas, confirm mastery, and develop confidence as a professional. A university-based community literacy center offers candidates an optimal setting for developing these abilities.

In considering the prospects for a win/win dynamic, some graduate programs geared toward literacy instruction have already established reading or literacy clinics to serve community needs; other programs may be considering this option as well. In either case, the experiences in developing this community service gained by one university may be of benefit to other programs as they create or continue to develop their own literacy centers.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the unique and rich context the Family Literacy Center provides for the training of teacher candidates seeking an advanced degree in literacy, as well as the effective resource it provides the community through remedial and enrichment literacy programs. In this paper, we first provide an overview of the literature on university-community partnerships and how the Family Literacy Center fits into the university's mission of serving the community. Then we describe the theoretical underpinnings of the Family Literacy Center as related to teacher training in the advanced literacy program. Next, we describe the process we underwent as we developed the Family Literacy Center. We provide a description of the programs offered to children and their families and how each program is aligned to coursework in the Advanced Literacy program. Finally, we analyze the impact of the Family Literacy Center through the experiences of the advanced candidates, children, and their families, articulating the mutual benefits to teacher candidates and the community for incorporating this type of fieldwork into a teacher preparation program.

Literature Review

In what reads like a gradually rising crescendo of voices, scholars are forcefully challenging universities to be collaborators and partners with their local communities in solving important problems, arguing that universities have a civic duty to serve their local communities (Boyer, 1994), that universities should be involved in civic engagement (Checkoway, 2001), that universities are expected to contribute to their neighboring communities (Anyon & Fernández, 2007), and even that "universities have increasingly come to recognize that their destinies are inextricably linked with their communities" (Harkavy & Hartley, 2009, p. 9)

To be sure, universities are poised to offer their local communities unique and powerful benefits. Speaking to the needs of urban communities, Harkavy & Hartley suggest that "universities are well positioned to play a role in responding to the challenges facing our nation's cities. Over half of all institutions of higher learning are located within or immediately outside urban areas. Universities

are resource rich. In many cities, universities and hospitals are the largest private employers." (2009, p. 8)

When universities partner with local communities on significant projects, this also benefits the universities themselves in that "[community] engagement contributes to the core values of academia and strengthens science" (Glover & Silka, 2013, p. 41). Ferman and Hill (2004) note many benefits that faculty and students derive from engaging in work of partnering with local communities, with opportunities for consolidating student learning, connecting academic learning to local needs, applying scholarly ideas to real world problems, as well as opportunities for authentic research scholarship.

However, there are cautions. Ferman and Hill warn that "Just as all politics is local, all partnerships are personal" (2004, p. 251). Nye and Schramm's (1999) interviews with both community partners and academics indicated that in too many cases academic partners are not good partners for communities, and Ferman & Hill explain that this is often because there is a "mismatch of incentives" (2004, p. 248). Glover and Silka also observe that these projects are not driven by genuine commitment to the community need but by the need to show accomplishments on vitae (2013, p. 42). Explaining how a distrust of partnering with the nearby university had developed in a local community, Anyon & Fernández explained (2007, p. 41) that the university they studied had not taken the time to know the community, care about the community needs, or commit to long-term community goals.

Given these cautions, what should collaborators in university-community partnerships do? Nyden urges that when collaborating on research or service projects, both the university and the community representatives must be involved and sharing decision making along every step of the development process, and that failure to do this is one of the typical features of failing partnerships (2006, p. 16).

Nyden further argues that the partnering entities may capitalize on higher education's culture of questioning and seek to advance this approach in community-university research partnerships.

"The culture of questioning is at the core of academic teaching and research," and "In the classroom, teachers and academic researchers pose challenging questions to students to make sure they understand course materials and develop the critical thinking skills needed to understand, shape, and change the world in which they live and work" (2006, p. 12–13).

In his examination of 10 respected university-community partnerships, Reardon observed that "all of the projects studied were developed slowly and organically over time. Considerable time was required to enable the community and campus leaders involved in these partnerships to establish trusting relationships" (2006, p. 106).

Mahoney, Levine, and Hinga report on a university-community partnership that involved after school programs for local children, reporting that the partnership and the service to children were worthwhile and effective, but much depended on the quality of the adult instruction and management of the program. They also observed that such a program does not "run itself" and does not automatically result in effective contributions to constituents (2010, p. 90). They also noted that if training for afterschool instruction providers is offered at all, it is typically brief and superficial. Yet these authors point out that in an increasingly global and diverse world, the ability to understand and work effectively with a variety of populations is an important outcome of teacher preparation programs. Institutions of higher education can play an important role in developing these competencies through guided opportunities for students to become engaged with diverse children and families in the surrounding communities.

A synthesis of the reviewed literature yields encouragement for genuine, respectful, collaborative partnerships between higher education institutions and community entities, with warnings that the best partnerships have appropriately balanced power equity and investment of resources among partners. Effective and sustainable partnerships also require commitment and compromise among the partners, but the benefits may well be highly valuable to the constituents.

Institutional Context

Niagara University is a small, private university, situated on the picturesque border of the United States and Canada. Through emphasis on the Vincentian mission within Catholicism, the university has a long and rich history of service to the community, particularly the poor and marginalized. The area surrounding the university is unique in that it includes a large urban public school district to its south, a reservation to the east, and a rural school district to the north. The College of Education has a longstanding partnership with the community surrounding the university. For example, preservice teachers participate each semester in a "Learn and Serve Program," a coordinated service learning activity that places candidates in partner schools as volunteers assisting teachers. This program has been a beneficial collaboration in that the local schools receive the classroom contributions of volunteers who are committed and prepared to help in classrooms, and the teacher candidates gain professional experience that adds much to their teacher preparation program.

Like the "Learn and Serve" partnerships, the Family Literacy Center fits naturally into the university mission. The FLC provides for the candidates a professional context for serving academically and culturally diverse students as well as enabling partnerships with families. For the families and K-12 students, it reinforces and substantially extends the learning already occurring through the regular school curriculum.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Principles

The principles of constructivism undergird the framework of the Family Literacy Center and provide the theoretical rationale for curriculum and fieldwork development. Constructivism has a long and well documented history, although many different perspectives coexist within it (e.g. Bruner, Goodnow & Austin, 1986; Freire, 2000; Piaget 1951; Von Glaserfeld, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 2000). In fact, Phillips (1995) identified six distinct views of constructivism; however, according to Fenwick (2008), all views share one central premise: "a learner is believed to construct, through

reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world" (p. 10).

Translating this theory to the educational setting, Vygotsky (1978) conceptualizes how interactions between teacher and child or between peers can support learning through what he refers to as the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD): "the distance between the actual developmental level of the learner and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Wood, Bruner, & Ross, (1976) describe this adult or peer support of the learning processing as *scaffolding*; scaffolding represents the supportive interactions between adult and child that enable the child to do something beyond his or her independent efforts. Lambert (2002), suggests the social interaction between novice and more capable peer becomes crucial to the learning process; individuals extend and transform the knowledge they bring to a situation through interaction with others. However, Mayer (1999) points out that although social contexts of learning provide opportunities for constructivist learning, not all social contexts promote constructivist learning and more importantly, not all constructivist learning depends on social contexts.

Rooted in the constructivist paradigm is the phenomenon of "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 59), which emphasizes the ongoing learning of professionals whereby "practitioners learn by noticing and framing problems of interest to them in particular ways, then inquiring and experimenting with solutions" (Fenwick, 2008, p. 12). According to Schön (1983), reflection-in-action is a rigorous professional process involving acknowledgement of and reflection on uncertainty and complexity in one's practice leading to "a legitimate form of professional knowing" (p.69).

Reflective practice is seen by many teacher educators to be the core of effective teacher preparation programs and the development of professional competence. Loughran (2002) writes, "It is through the development of knowledge and understanding of the practice setting and the ability to recognize and respond to such knowledge that the reflective practitioner becomes truly responsive

to the needs, issues, and concerns that are so important in shaping practice" (p.9).

Together, these elements are actualized through fieldwork, within the context of the Family Literacy Center, that affords teacher candidates opportunities to link theory with instruction, assimilate new learning through instructor guidance, self-reflect, and work through problems collaboratively, as they acquire essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions of professional educators. Further discussion of these constructs relative to the context of the Family Literacy Center ensues in the description of the process we underwent as we developed the Family Literacy Center, the description of the programs offered to children and their families, and the analysis of the impact of the Family Literacy Center on both the community and our teacher candidates.

The Process
Development and Allocation of Resources

In 2005, as a once-in-a-generation opportunity, the university offered the College of Education a new campus building dedicated to the College of Education's mission. Over the previous decades, the College had expanded and outgrown its spatial boundaries and was in need of new facilities. To address this, the university conducted a capital campaign that yielded sufficient funds targeted to meet these needs.

During the early planning stages, College administrators and faculty were afforded the opportunity to provide input to the architecture team and collaboratively discuss our dreams for the new facility. Although budget and space constraints were key considerations, these dreams were heard, collected, and incorporated into the new building design in numerous appropriate ways. For example, as part of the building plan, a center for community outreach was designed on the first floor of the building as a place to conveniently welcome the community into the College's space and to serve community needs, including literacy learning. The upper floors of the new building were designed for classrooms and offices, along with some regular classrooms on the first floor. The envisioned

community center offered instructional rooms with one-way mirrors for observation, small group meeting rooms, a library/central space, storage space, and offices, all sized to the overall building. Although not especially large, it was highly useable and designed to meet our needs, with very attractive features and appointments. Instructional technology was considered and incorporated into all spaces.

In addition to donations for the building's construction, there were donors who dedicated funds for the startup and operation of community literacy services. These funds were intended to seed the literacy center budget, and provided crucial funding for most of the capital and personnel expenses incurred during the initial startup and functioning of the center.

Assessment of Local Community Needs

As we considered the development of a university-based community literacy center, we sought to confirm the need for such services. Our analysis yielded evidence of a high need for literacy services in the areas neighboring the university, as based on statistics including the proportion of local adult population functioning at basic levels of literacy, poverty rates for adults and children, unemployment rates, and proportion of first generation college students. Furthermore, there were no other postsecondary institutions that offered literacy services to the community in the local county. The only supplementary literacy services accessible to the community were for-profit tutoring businesses and free church-sponsored, after-school programs that offered general academic support for children at risk. As potentially helpful as those existing services were, we envisioned more analytical and targeted literacy instruction services for the local community. Our analysis confirmed there was a real need that we were poised to address in a unique manner.

Creation of a Family Literacy Center Work Group

Recognizing the potential for university, school, and community collaboration to address identified community needs, the literacy faculty came together to explore how the university might meet these needs, while providing a unique context in which to train for

candidates in the advanced literacy program. We first convened all literacy faculty members to brainstorm, analyze, and synthesize important values that we wanted to use as our guiding principles. For example, we discussed questions such as, "What will be our mission? What will be our governance structure? How will we select student clients? What courses will supply candidate tutors? Who will serve as director? What resources are required?" After a few sessions to discuss and achieve consensus on these issues and principles, we presented them to our supervisors and administrators for their feedback and suggestions, and further developed these guiding principles into a working document.

With these guiding principles in place, we formed a development workgroup comprised of a few key members of the literacy faculty and relevant administrators to further study the opportunities and challenges of opening a literacy center. This group further investigated local literacy needs, considered the potential roles of literacy candidates who would serve as teachers, explored various configurations and governance structures, determined which courses would be aligned to the services provided by the literacy center, and estimated expenses and potential revenue. The workgroup met frequently over a ten month period, and began to obtain input from community leaders outside the university, including local adult basic literacy leaders, local school leaders, and community agency leaders. Their input not only confirmed the needs, but also opened productive conversations with area leaders and offered insightful suggestions on how to work with schools and families.

With these developments evolving, we considered a variety of governance and delivery models. We explored varieties of administration and sustained funding of the literacy center, the kinds of literacy services to offer, and a range of local school partnerships. We eventually selected a preferred model of literacy instruction offerings for the community. This model included a faculty director who would oversee four key components: community outreach; literacy services (including comprehensive assessment and instruction); family support for literacy; and professional training for literacy specialist candidates.

Consideration of Candidate Abilities and Needs

As university faculty concerned about the training of tomorrow's teachers and literacy specialists, we are particularly concerned with ensuring that our candidates embody the important characteristics and professional competencies necessary to meet the current challenges in schools. We want them to graduate effectively empowered to help their students develop literacy competencies, and make a powerful difference in the communities in which they teach.

As noted in Teaching Reading Well (IRA, 2007) the commissioned study and collaborative effort between the International Reading Association (IRA) and Teacher Education Task Force (TETF), "Putting a quality teacher in every classroom is key to addressing the challenges of reading achievement in schools. Knowledgeable, strategic, adaptive, and reflective teachers make a difference in student learning" (p. 2). This remains a formidable task, particularly in light of recent educational initiatives such No Child Left Behind and the reauthorization of IDEA; developing the technical and interpersonal skills necessary to be an effective literacy specialist takes time and practice. Opportunities for practical, hands-on applications of theory become crucial to the learning and training process, as we believe learning is an interactive process in which individuals extend and transform the knowledge they bring to a situation through interaction with others (Lambert 2002). We also believed the FLC would be instrumental in providing the context for facilitating this interactive, socially mediated learning, whereby literacy specialist candidates would have opportunities to put theory to practice, as well as to reflect upon and challenge their prior understandings of literacy development, assessment, and instruction.

Alignment of Courses and Programs

With these ideals in mind we examined the existing programmatic curriculum, looking for opportunities to align coursework with the context of the FLC. The table below outlines the courses that were aligned to programs we would pilot:

Course Title	Course Description	Program Description
Applied Children's & Adolescent Literature	This course examines a variety of teaching strategies using literature written for children and adolescents. Among the topics addressed are how to evaluate the text and illustrations in children's books, how to integrate literature into the K-12 curriculum across multiple content areas, and how to stimulate and evaluate a variety of student responses to literature	**Children's Book Club** *(students in grades 3-8)* In small group settings, children partake in activities centered on popular children's novels. Through open discussions about books, exchanging points of view, and interacting together to complete hands-on activities graduate students work with the children to generate a life-long love for reading.
Language & Literacy Development for Diverse Young Learners	This course presents the emergent literacy view of early reading which acknowledges children as active participants in the process of becoming literate long before formal reading and writing instruction begins. It recognizes the dynamic relation between oral and written language such that reading and writing each influence the course of development of the other. Ongoing research by the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) is presented to provide the prospective teacher with empirical foundations for sound practices to increase children's early reading achievement. In addition, a flexible, organizational framework for establishing a balanced early literacy program will be presented as a way of thinking about the range of reading and writing activities essential for promoting early literacy. The following components, of a balanced early literacy program, will be examined in depth: read aloud; shared reading; guided reading; independent reading; shared writing, guided writing; writers' workshop; independent writing; and letter and word study.	**Primary Remedial Reading Program** *(students in grades K-2)* In a one-to-one setting, children receive an evaluation of literacy skills, followed by five instructional sessions that focus on individual student strengths to address areas of need. The program culminates with a family celebration where all participants engage in games and activities that can be incorporated into daily routines at home.
Reading Difficulties: Identification & Intervention	This course is designed to help practicing teachers effectively teach reading diagnostically in K-12 classrooms, especially individualized or small group settings. Teacher participants will examine a variety of factors that influence literacy acquisition, discuss and identify various reading difficulties, learn to conduct a diagnostic assessment of a student's reading abilities, analyze the assessment, and plan for, implement, and reflect upon appropriate reading instruction. Participants will write a summative report that contains the assessment results, instructional goals, and professional recommendations for future reading instruction.	**Remedial Reading Program** *(students in grades 3-8)* In a one-to-one setting, children receive two evaluation sessions, followed by six instructional sessions that focus on individual student strengths to address areas of need. At the conclusion of the program, each family receives results from the initial evaluation, along with recommendations for future family/home instructional support.

Development of Curricular Methodology

Darling-Hammond (2006) notes that several elements make a difference in the design of a teacher education program, including: (1) the content of teacher education – what is taught and how it is connected; (2) the learning process – the extent to which the curriculum builds on and enables candidates' readiness; and, (3) the context – the extent to which teacher learning is situated in contexts that allow the development of expert practice. These elements were considered as we developed and aligned courses to the context of the FLC. For example, framed within the gradual release model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), each course follows a consistent, weekly, three-hour format and affords candidates opportunities to work directly with children, link theory to practice, engage in self-reflection, and collaborate on instructional issues. The first five weeks of the semester are spent engaging in course readings, assessment training, discussion, and program preparation. The remainder of the semester's weekly classes is spent working directly with children and their families for 60 minutes, followed by 90-minute debriefing sessions where candidates engage in self-reflection and collaborative problem-solving.

Across programs, candidates begin work with children first by assessing current literacy abilities, including oral language development, phonemic awareness, concepts about print, phonics skills, sight word vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, reader motivation, and reading level. After the initial assessment, candidates sift through the data, engage in rigorous discussion about individual cases, and begin to design instructional programs that build on student strengths to address areas of need. In other, words, candidates begin instruction having ascertained their students' ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and thus, are positioned to begin instructional scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Because the student enrollment is ethnically, culturally, socio-economically, and academically diverse, candidates are encouraged to differentiate instruction, explore multiple instructional approaches and work through paradigmatic barriers and personal bias (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; IRA, 2007). The result is an

organic, dynamic experience contextualized within authentic practice, which allows for social interactions, as described by Lambert (2002) between novice (student) and expert (candidate) that extends and transforms knowledge.

Embedded at the end of each instructional session is time for candidates to meet with parents, to discuss students' strengths, needs, and gains, as well as ways families can reinforce literacy development at home. These conversations allow opportunities for candidates and families to form effective partnerships where the unique contribution that families can make to their child's literacy development is recognized and valued (McGrath, 2013).

Following the instructional sessions is a structured debriefing where candidates have opportunities to engage in "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 59). The debriefing is a balance of candidate-led discussions on the challenges and triumphs discovered during the instructional session, a sharing session on effective instructional techniques, whole-class brainstorming on a particular student or issue, and instructor-led discussions or presentations on relevant theoretical and practical implications. Inevitably, a lively, collaborative conversation ensues where candidates and instructor work as a team to problem-solve issues raised during self-reflection. This deliberate reflection provides literacy-specialists-in-training with a process to develop professional judgment. Casey (2014) notes,

> "This deliberate process of reflection is necessary because new professionals cannot rely on intuition or "gut" in the same manner as an expert. While the seasoned professional integrates seamlessly thought and action, the new professional must de-couple the action from the thinking about the action; the new professional must consciously activate a process to guide the rendering of professional judgment" (p. 321).

Thus, the collective experiences of the group, coupled with the expertise of the instructor, result in much richer problem-solving and the development of instructional resolutions. In sum, the debriefing discussions provide the socially mediated learning

experiences that research substantiates as critical to teacher-learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Determination of the Dimensions of Impact: Children, Families, Advanced Candidates

Methods

Sixty-six graduate students, thirty-three children, and thirty parents participated in the pilot programs. In order to examine program impact, exit surveys were developed for the children, their families, and the advanced candidates (see Appendix A). Although the surveys included several open-ended questions, for the purpose of this paper, we analyzed for themes that emerged from the following questions: (1) children's answer to the question, "*How have you grown as a reader?*" (2) parents' answers to the question, "*What were the outcomes you observed after your child attended the Family Literacy Center?*" and, (3) candidates' answers to the question, "*How have you grown as a teacher as a result of your experiences at the Family Literacy Center?*"

For ease of distribution and participant anonymity, the exit surveys were loaded onto iPads, and given to each child and parent participant during the last session. Advanced candidates were given the survey via the iPads during their final debriefing session.

The open-ended survey questions were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) including open, axial, and selective coding procedures - raw data was coded, then grouped by similar codes, as recommended by Creswell (1998). An example of these coding procedures is included in appendix 2. Verification procedures included triangulating the data through intercoder agreement, as well as reviewing and resolving disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

Impact on children. Analysis of the children's survey responses to the question: *"How have you grown as a reader?"* suggests that all thirty-three of our participating students perceived an

improvement in their literacy skills. The following table illuminates their common responses:

Theme	Exemplars
Perception of increased literacy skills	*"I learned new sight words and how to sound out words better."* *"I read more fluently."* *"I spell better."* *"I learned better reading habits, and I increased my reading level."*
Perception of increased literacy strategies	*"I chunk words to figure them out."* *"I learned how to use graphic organizers to sort ideas."* *"I learned to read like the character."*

Thus, children not only perceived their own growth in literacy abilities, but were able to articulate specific areas of improvement.

  Impact on families. Thirty out of thirty parents would participate in the Family Literacy Center again, would recommend the Family Literacy Center to friends and family members and noted that their child/children benefited from services. Several themes, summarized in the table below, emerged from the question: *"What were the outcomes you observed after your child attended the Family Literacy Center?"*

Theme	Exemplars
Increased literacy abilities (sight word vocabulary, phonics, fluency, comprehension)	*"Our son's comprehension skills have improved a great deal since coming here."* *"Our daughter has improved her retells. That is something they have been working on."* *"I have seen an improvement in Ben's (pseudonym) sight words and he spells better."*
Increased confidence in how to reinforce literacy development at home	*"I really appreciated the time his teachers took with me after every session. They went over the lesson and what they were focusing on. Then they always had suggestions for ways I could continue working with him at home. The suggestions were so easy to incorporate into our daily routine."*
Increase in reading level	*"He moved up four reading levels, from E to H!"*
Increased motivation for reading and school	*"She enjoys reading way more than she did before she started this program! She has even joined a school book club!"* *"Again, the improvements with both children can easily be measured with the gains they made with their report cards this term as well as (their) excitability to want to read. When they actually pick reading a nightly story over TV. . . well quite honestly WOW."*

Thus, not only parents could see the literacy gains made by their children, but were empowered with the information and knowledge to articulate specific areas. As noted across surveys, we attribute this to the weekly interactions with the advanced candidates, where there were opportunities to discuss instructional goals and progress with parents, as well as ways to reinforce reading development at home. Perhaps most importantly, parents noted the improvement in their child's motivation to read. This is a tremendous accomplishment as much research substantiates motivation is a key factor in reading success (Quirk & Schwanenflugel, 2004).

Impact on candidates. All advanced candidates expressed that the practical experiences and opportunities to apply course concepts to an authentic audience enhanced their training, and found these experiences very valuable. The following themes emerged from their survey responses:

Theme	Exemplars
Increased ability to administer and interpret assessment data, target student strengths and needs, and use assessment data to develop targeted and strategic lessons	*"I learned all about reading and writing assessments and how to implement them correctly. I definitely grew as a teacher in that aspect. I also learned how to target my students' needs and really focus on that specific target. I also learned about great teaching strategies that I can use in my classroom."*
Greater flexibility in lesson planning and execution as result of increased knowledge of instructional techniques and the authentic context	*"I became a lot more flexible with my planning and a lot of the (course) concepts became more concrete for me."*
Increased confidence in their teaching abilities as a result of the practical experience embedded into coursework and witnessing the weekly progress their students made	*"I now have a HUGE stockpile of quick fun activities to use to help students who are struggling readers as well as to use with an entire classroom of students. My confidence in one-on-one literacy instruction has grown immensely. I was able to see what a struggling reader looks like and how important it is to find ways to help them and tailor instruction to fit their needs. After completing this class, I feel more confident and ready to tackle the needs of struggling readers. I could really see the difference in my student from day one (until) now."*

Theme	Exemplars
Greater ability to motivate reticent, strug- gling readers as a result of a wider breadth of instructional technique and collaboration with peers during after- tutoring debriefing ses- sions and the authentic context for instruction	*"It is so, so important to take into account what the students like! I definitely knew this before, but I was able to put this into practice and see how effective it is."* *"Brainstorming together after the instructional sessions was so ben- eficial. I have learned so much from my peers and really felt that team-effort was one of the best aspects of this course."*
Greater ability to modify instruction to meet the needs of students with multiple learning disabilities	*"I definitely learned to take a step back before determining a child's reading needs. After working with my child, I learned that the needs I think she might have might not be the end of her needs. The needs that I noticed right away might be stemming from another problem that I have to tackle first."*
Greater confidence and ability to collaborate with parents	*"This was a career changing experience. I had the opportunity to not only strengthen my diagnostic and instructional skills but also my communication skills with parents."*

Data indicates that the Family Literacy Center provided an authentic context for candidates to explore issues of pedagogy and diversity, collaboratively problem solve, and reflect on the process. Similar to the dynamic created between child and candidate, oppor- tunities for the co-construction of knowledge between candidate and instructor were rich and deep (Fenwick, 2008). As illuminated by the data, opportunities to link theory to practice allowed for shifts in how candidates responded to the needs of struggling read- ers and propelled the development of professional competencies and dispositions.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The reflective data from our pilot programs suggests that partici- pating children, their families, and the literacy specialist candidates benefited from the unique context provided by the FLC. Thus, the win-win synergy for university-school-community collaboration has been fully engaged. However, while our pilot year data pro- vides meaningful insight into the preliminary impact the FLC has had on our candidates, the children, and their families, there are several limitations which may guide potential expansions of our

research. First, our data is limited by the number of participants, including sixty-six graduate students, thirty-three children, and thirty parents. We plan to replicate the exit survey in subsequent programs over multiple semesters to investigate the longitudinal impact of the FLC, as well as the transferability of the themes illuminated in our initial inquiry. Secondly, though we examined the children's perceptions of growth in their literacy abilities, we plan to build upon this inquiry through an exploration of learning gains across the pre and post formal and informal reading assessments. This will allow for determinations of individual growth and individual benefits for each child from our various instructional programs. Third, we plan to conduct a longitudinal study that follows literacy candidates through their practica and into their own classrooms. This would provide greater insight into the longitudinal impact on teaching practice of field experiences such as those offered through the FLC.

Continuing the Cycle of Collaboration

As we reflect upon our pilot year, the positive momentum propels us to "think big" in terms of our commitment to providing a first class literacy center that inspires local children to become strong readers and supports their families in providing literate environments, while allowing candidates to gain the real world practice they needed to become the next generation of literacy educators.

Appendix A

Parent Survey
- What is the age of the child/children you brought to the Family Literacy Center?
- Has your child attended the Family Literacy Center before?
- What were your expectations of the Family Literacy Center?
- What were the outcomes you observed after your child attended the Family Literacy Center?
- Did you feel your child benefited from the Family Literacy Center?
- What did you like most about the Family Literacy Center?
- What did you like least about the Family Literacy Center?
- Would you participate in the Family Literacy Center in the future?
- Would you refer a friend or family member to the Family Literacy Center?

Child Survey
- What did you like most about the Family Literacy Center?
- What did you like least about the Family Literacy Center?
- Explain one thing you learned about reading and writing at the Family Literacy Center.

Advanced Candidate Survey
- How have you grown as a teacher as a result of your experience at the Family Literacy Center?
- What worked well for you during the sessions?
- What would you do differently?
- How would you describe this experience to a colleague who had not participated?
- Please give one concrete example of how your practice has changed as a result of this experience.
- What could we do differently to further enhance your learning experience?
- What new thinking have you obtained from this experience?
- What have you learned about children?

Appendix B

Initial code (open)	Axial Code	Selective Code
Assessment Understand student strengths and needs Use assessment data to develop targeted and strategic lessons	Increased understanding of how assessment drives instruction	*Increased ability to administer and interpret assessment data, target student strengths and needs, and use assessment data to develop targeted and strategic lessons*
Flexibility in planning Knowledge of instructional techniques	Knowledge of instructional techniques allows for greater flexibility in lesson planning	*Greater flexibility in lesson planning and execution as result of increased knowledge of instructional techniques and the authentic context*
Motivate struggling readers	Wider knowledge of instructional techniques Collaboration with peers Debriefing sessions	*Greater ability to motivate reticent, struggling readers as a result of a wider breadth of instructional technique and collaboration with peers during after-tutoring debriefing sessions and the authentic context for instruction*

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