Connecting Practice and Research: Integrated Reading and Writing Instruction Assessment

By David C. Caverly, Judi Salsburg Taylor, Renee K. Dimino, and Jodi P. Lampi

The first "Connecting Practice and Research" column (Lampi, Dimino, & Salsburg Taylor, 2015), introduced a Research-to-Practice partnership (Coburn & Penuel, 2016) between two faculty from a community college and a university professor who were aiming to develop effective integrated reading and writing (IRW) instruction through a sustainable, professional development model. A second column examined the refinement process these instructors experienced while designing and implementing the IRW course (Salsburg Taylor, Dimino, Lampi, & Caverly, 2016). In this third column, we will review how this partnership became a rich source of data for researching and evaluating both IRW as well as the accompanying professional development via Torraco's (2014) call for research on practitioner-scholar collaborations: "Practice is not only a setting for the application of knowledge, it is a source of knowledge generation" (p. 1201).

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Research and Evaluation

The American Educational Research Association (2016) defines educational research as a "scientific field of study that examines education and learning processes and the human attributes, interactions, organizations, and institutions that shape educational outcomes." We chose to complete educational research on this research-to-practice partnership using both evaluation and research (Boylan & Bonham, 2009). First we used formative evaluation to gather evidence to assess our pedagogical practices during the first 2 semesters which the course was taught. Second, we used summative evaluation after the course was taught for 2 years to determine the value of the professional development for the faculty, students, administrative, and researcher stakeholders. Third, we designed qualitative research studies to allow us to create knowledge about IRW theory and practice, collecting and analyzing observations of the faculty's content and pedagogical understanding through a survey. Fourth, we used quantitative research for measurement and calculation to inform and verify the extant IRW theory and practice. Fifth, we gathered additional quantitative, student performance data to measure and calculate effective instruction and student success over time to inform our research-to-practice partnerships.

Our partnership developed an IRW course with learning outcomes that were as much about curriculum development as they were about pedagogy. Within the curriculum of this course, the readers and writers informed, persuaded, and/or entertained each other. It was neither a reading-intensive writing course nor a writing-intensive reading course. Both readers and writers completed a process of making meaning: the reader with the writer, and the writer with the reader. As students in this course gathered information transactively from multimodal sources, they converted this information into knowledge by developing existing schemata and creating new schemata as they made meaning. Students also composed meaning through reading and writing texts to meet discipline-based task demands (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Additionally, through developing their metacognition, students monitored their strategic choices socioculturally en route to constructing this meaning making.

Students also engaged in learning labs where they were guided collaboratively through an academic task explicitly addressing affective, cognitive, and metacognitive learning domains. These labs exposed students to additional multimodal texts in a collaborative setting where they constructed meaning through their emerging multiliteracies and reflected on the process of meaning making for a variety of reading, writing, and thinking tasks they were likely to encounter in college and their future workplace. In other words, the IRW curriculum and pedagogy engaged students through carefully designed instruction in order to encourage their consuming and producing strategies to transfer to gateway courses and beyond.

IRW Formative Evaluation

For this partnership, our formative evaluation goals assessed whether our generational model (Caverly, Peterson, & Mandeville, 1997) was feasible for long-term professional development of IRW instruction among community college faculty and whether it had a positive effect on students. We were interested in whether a viable IRW course could be developed that was true to both theory and effective practice (Goen-Salter, 2012), and whether local "experts" could be developed. Formative evaluation revealed an emerging IRW course curriculum, and pedagogy was developed through a shared-growth partnership during year one among two first-generation faculty (FGF), four second-generation faculty (SGF), and a university professor. Adjusting the professional development and learning communities during year two, additional formative evaluation revealed a stabilized IRW curriculum and pedagogy as the SGFs expanded the shared-growth partnership inviting four, third-generation faculty TGFs when the university professor stepped out (Caverly, Salsburg Taylor, & Dimino, 2015b). These rich faculty learning communities led the research-to-practice partnership to reframe their generational professional development model representing professional development more appropriately as a ripple effect (Lampi et al., 2015).

IRW Summative Evaluation

Summative evaluations allow researchers to complete value judgments on the effectiveness of the professional development (Boylan & Bonham, 2009) as it led to the faculty and students achieving stakeholders' learning outcomes in this case. To qualitatively observe these levels of understanding, we administered

a survey (Caverly, 2013) to gather the faculty's perceptions of IRW content and pedagogy; these were followed up with member checks of the FGF to confirm our understanding of their answers. Next, the FGF administered the survey to the SGF, and, subsequently, the SGF administered the survey to the TGF. Initial qualitative assessments of all three surveys found perceptions that were comparable within all three generations, suggesting professional development can be transferred between generations through a process mimicking a ripple effect (Caverly, Salsburg Taylor, & Dimino, 2015a). More rigorous qualitative research has been undertaken to validate this initial conclusion.

IRW Research Goals

Through our research-to-practice partnership, a first goal was to measure whether long-term IRW professional development was effective for creating a knowledgeable, informed faculty (Shulman, 2013) by comparing all three generations of faculty's level of understanding of IRW content and pedagogy against extant IRW theory. After using an *a priori* matrix coding protocol (Miles & Guberman, 2013) on the FGF's descriptions pulled from qualitative survey and interview data, our initial analyses revealed explicit representations of vital components of IRW and of sound pedagogical knowledge (Windsor & Caverly, 2016).

Indicative of these content and pedagogical understandings are the FGF's descriptions of IRW content and pedagogy manifested in the previous column (Salsburg Taylor et al., 2016). Through qualitatively analyzing survey results of the SGF and TGF, we can explore and possibly confirm a ripple effect among the three generations of faculty.

Next Steps

We argue that any intervention research should examine transfer of the skills and abilities learned by the students. A useful methodology is to select a comparison group using propensity score matching, which provides statistical rigor similar to a randomized controlled study (cf., Crisp & Delgado, 2014).

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Therefore, we are examining quantitatively a short-term research goal of whether students passed the IRW course comparably to a propensity score matched group of students who took a separate writing course in the past. As time goes by, we plan to examine an intermediate-term outcome of students 'pass rates in an intensive reading and writing gateway course compared to the propensity score matched group. After 6 years, we hope to measure long-term outcomes such as completion of a one-year certificate, transfer from this two-year community college to a four-year college, and completion of a degree to see if we find the same success rates for students enrolled in IRW classes compared to those in the propensity matched control group. We are working with the Institutional Research Office at the community college to gather these data following appropriate FERPA protection (Family educational rights and privacy act [FERPA], 1974) allowing for at least 150% of time for students to complete their schooling (Student right-to-know and campus security act, 1990). If results show moderate effect sizes for IRW students compared to propensity matched students, we will have some evidence that taking an IRW course might accelerate students' progress through developmental education.

Conclusion

Effective assessment of IRW professional development and subsequent instruction should include both evaluation and research on faculty and student learning outcomes. As long-term college practitioners, it would have been easy to base classroom delivery on intuition, well-developed lessons, and sincere concerns for students. Although essential to good teaching and based on noble intentions, the measures were simply not enough to ensure a classroom practice worthy of any colleges' neediest students. In order to best serve developmental students, it is important to integrate long-standing theory and carefully evaluated research to inform classroom practice and guide pedagogical decisions.

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