

Win–Wins: Contextualized Reading Teacher Education Grows Community Partnerships

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Abstract

In its recent white paper, “A Pivot Toward Clinical Practice,” the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) echoed the call heralded almost a decade ago by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (NCATE) Blue Ribbon Report that highlighted the need for the development of authentic settings in which teacher candidates can learn the skills they need. These organizations’ calls for more comprehensive efforts to conduct teacher education set in clinical settings were the inspiration for the research project described in this article. One teacher preparation professor at a small private midwestern university embedded an emergent literacy course into multiple school community settings over the course of one semester. Teacher candidates enrolled in the course participated in traditional classroom activities as well as contextualized learning experiences within school and community settings. The goal was to examine the perceptions of study participants regarding depth of learning and the value of the overall experience. Study participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the course and its meaningful contributions to learning.

Key Words: reading teacher education, community partnerships, classroom field experiences, preservice teachers, candidates, preschool, elementary

Introduction and Review of Literature

By preparing teacher candidates through the marriage of academic learning and the professional application of that knowledge, educator preparation can experience transformative change (NCATE, 2010). In keeping with Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) best practices for teacher education, this study aimed to focus on mutually beneficial outcomes for all partners involved with clinical practice (AACTE, 2018).

Different foci on school partnerships have been explored. Badgett (2016) examined school–business partnerships and understanding the business perspective of those relationships. Through interviews, business leaders expressed an appreciation for the potential return on investment, assistance with gauging the relevance of their companies to the needs of this specific market, and their cultural contribution to the educational experience of the youth in the community. No actual students were placed in partnership positions in the project, but business leaders expressed interest in the idea and discussed the positive aspects of the idea. Hands (2005) conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with various secondary school personnel about the partnerships they had with community agencies to determine key components of success. The most effective strategy identified was to promote liaising from the initial contact. Collaborations in the community worked best when all parties had a role in designing what the partnership would look like; interviewees noted the importance of reciprocity and networking as key ingredients as well. Baker and Murray (2011) paired both undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates with afterschool programs in order to provide the students with authentic contexts and to support the local schools in their need to provide additional assistance to students identified by teachers as needing additional help. Both groups in that study gained a sense of responsibility and better understanding of their role in the larger school community.

Other literature has focused on the aspects of learning about teaching that embedded experiences can offer. Linda Darling-Hammond, one of the most prominent researchers in the field of teacher education, highlights the need for tight coherence between coursework and clinical work in schools in “Constructing 21st Century Teacher Education” (2006). Kenneth Zeichner profiled many models of bridging the gap between the skills and understanding needed for teaching in his 2010 article, “Rethinking the Connections Between Campus Courses and Field Experiences in College- and University-Based Teacher Education.” In these models, the focus was on bringing the P–12 setting closer to teacher candidates by hiring teachers-in-residence (Post et al., 2006), incorporating representations of teachers’ practices in campus courses (Flessner,

2008), mediating the gaps between campus courses and the students' experiences in school settings (Campbell, 2008), and establishing clinical faculty positions wherein the work is focused entirely within elementary and secondary school settings (Zeichner, 2010).

Preparing teacher candidates in traditional on-campus settings can be problematic for a variety of reasons. The disconnect between discussing pedagogical practices and school-based issues and actually witnessing and working through them can put the candidates at a disadvantage in understanding the teaching process on a deep level (Zeichner, 2010). Although most candidates participate in field experiences, those experiences are often set apart from on-campus coursework. Candidates typically work with cooperating teachers who are willing to host the students and expose them to their classroom practices for various amounts of time. The university will periodically send a university supervisor to observe the student and provide feedback. Virtual coaching is another option for supervision that is growing in popularity. In a 2009 speech, Linda Darling-Hammond described this clinical side of teacher education as "fairly haphazard" and (having) "little connection to university work." The limitations of these models for teacher preparation are that knowing and doing become separated. The need to create a close connection between these two elements has been heralded as essential since the early 1900s, beginning with John Dewey (1913). Teacher candidates may learn a concept weeks or months away from being able to see it in action in an authentic setting.

In the model presented in this study, teacher candidates gained knowledge and skills related to emergent literacy concepts and immediately observed or applied them in an authentic setting. The professor of the course was present in the real classrooms and community settings as soon as the concepts were presented. The goal was to provide prompt opportunities for application and feedback. Since the professor was the one presenting the university curriculum and supervising the teacher candidates, there was no disconnect between what students were learning, the concepts they were asked to observe or the skills they were asked to perform, and the feedback they received regarding these course topics.

Given the focus on the understood overall value of contextualized learning experiences for teacher candidates, the curiosity to explain the specifics of role coherence between campus coursework and fieldwork (Canrinus et al., 2016), as well as how the encouragement of inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2010) plays in this phenomenon, three main lines of inquiry were examined during this qualitative study: (1) To what degree does the coherence between teacher preparation courses and field experiences support the learning experiences of our teacher candidates and other participants? (Canrinus et al., 2016); (2)

How can this field-based experience encourage inquiry on the part of all participants? (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2010); and (3) In what ways can these partnerships benefit all participants in terms of increased learning?

Methodology

This study took place at a small, private university located in the Midwestern U.S. After becoming frustrated with the lack of cohesion between concept presentation and application in a methods course, one professor decided to embed an early literacy course into school community settings in order to provide a greater sense of cohesion for university students. The professor approached two principals with the idea of embedding her reading course and providing them with additional help for small group instruction. The professor had met one of the principals while working in her building on an earlier research project and the other principal when the professor was observing methods students in that principal's school. Both principals loved the idea of having extra help and providing an authentic setting in which teacher candidates could learn more about literacy development. Teachers in each school were asked if they would like to participate, and space was set aside for the university course to take place one morning a week for one semester. The university students and the professor met once a week for a three-hour block of time in each school setting: eight weeks in a preschool, and eight weeks in a primary school. The first half of each block was spent in traditional lecture and other classroom activities designed to introduce the teacher candidates to the developmental stages associated with learning to read and write as well as what they can do as future teachers to apply their knowledge of these concepts to help develop strong readers and writers in their classrooms. This traditional classroom work took place in a library of an elementary school and in a teachers' lounge of a preschool. During the second half of the block, candidates went out into early childhood classrooms (each university student was assigned a different room, except for one pair that went to the same room) to observe the topics discussed in class and provide support for the teachers in those classrooms.

Teacher candidates enrolled in this course were also expected to use the skills they learned to develop and facilitate activities at community events related to literacy. A year prior to the start of this work, the researcher helped to design a schoolhouse space for local museum patrons to use and was therefore familiar with the director with whom she partnered to allow teacher candidates to implement reading activities in the museum space. For the museum activity, the class of teacher candidates was split into two groups. Each group was to spend one hour at a children's museum facilitating a literacy-based activity

that they planned together by applying concepts they learned in class. These events usually focused on a theme, such as “community workers,” and involved the read-aloud of a book related to that theme and then interacting with the children and families via a game or craft related to the book. Additionally, as individuals, the teacher candidates were to sign up for two-hour blocks to be spent at an area elementary school (separate from where the course took place) to assist in facilitating literacy-related activities designed for families to learn more about how they can help their children develop as strong readers and writers. This connection grew out of a relationship developed between the researcher and the area literacy coalition director through the university’s service learning office. For these activities, school gymnasiums were cordoned off into different sections, each highlighting a different activity. Some stations focused on recognizing sight words, some gave children practice with rhyming, while others gave parents and their children chances to build expressive language and vocabulary by playing games like “Hedbanz.” These events and activities provided multiple opportunities for teacher candidates to apply the knowledge and skills they gained through the course and to see how early literacy topics and issues play out in real life.

At the conclusion of the course, participants were surveyed with an instrument developed by their professor to report on their experience. Participation was optional. Students were asked to answer 17 questions designed to gauge their perceptions of the experience. Two male students and four female students completed the survey; all were either sophomore or junior teacher candidate students. Below are their responses to the questions; students are identified with the letters A–F for anonymity. In addition, cooperating administrators were informally interviewed.

Results

Below are the results of the surveys. A discussion of the themes that emerged upon analysis of these responses will be covered in the Discussion section. The researcher used these responses to identify common answers that tied to the original research questions.

Survey Question #1: Do you feel that it was helpful to your learning experience to have class take place within an actual school? Please answer yes or no and then explain.

Student	Response
Student A	Yes; Being in the schools allowed us to experience subjects discussed for ourselves, giving us meaningful memories to help ingrain new topics in our minds.
Student B	Yes, because I was able to experience things that actually happen within the classroom, rather than just hearing or seeing examples
Student C	Yes, because I enjoyed seeing what we were talking about in action
Student D	Yes, I enjoyed watching the concepts being taught while we were learning them.
Student E	Yes. I was able to make the connections of what we learned to what I saw in the classroom.
Student F	Yes, because I was able to see the information we discussed in class for myself, and I was able to see how the teacher responded.

Survey Question #2: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = no benefit at all and 5 = extremely beneficial, how would you rate this experience overall?

Student	Response
Student A	5
Student B	5; I really enjoyed the interaction with the students.
Student C	4
Student D	5
Student E	5
Student F	4

Survey Question #3: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = no benefit at all and 5 = extremely beneficial, how would you rate this experience compared to classes that do not allow you to observe classroom teachers and interact with students?

Student	Response
Student A	5
Student B	5
Student C	4
Student D	4; It depends on the context of the class.
Student E	5
Student F	5

Survey Question #4: On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = no benefit at all and 5 = extremely beneficial, how would you rate the value of observing how classrooms are set up, how classroom management is handled, and “how things work” in general?

Student	Response
Student A	5
Student B	5; It is always good to see how other teachers run their classroom and allows for collaborations.
Student C	5
Student D	5
Student E	5
Student F	5

Survey Question #5: Did you find that this experience allowed for more coherence between topics we discussed and how they connect to real life settings (as opposed to learning about the topics in a class and having nowhere to see them in action)?

Student	Response
Student A	Yes; There were some classes where we'd learn about something new, and then I'd see it in the classroom the same day. The journal also helped me think about these subjects in a lot more depth.
Student B	Yes; Things that we talked about in class would always pop up in the teachers' classes, and it really made that topic stick in my head.
Student C	No; I liked seeing the real-life settings to make connections, but I have also been in a classroom without students and understood what was going to happen with students.
Student D	Yes, even being exposed to children's writing and reading has allowed me to understand reading development. Students in the same grade can have a broad range of reading and writing skills.
Student E	Yes; I feel like some things are hard to understand until you see them in action.
Student F	Yes. Instead of hearing about what happens and not seeing it happen, I was able to see it happen and observe how the teacher reacted or even help students myself.

Survey Question #6: You were asked to write a reflection each week. Do you feel like it was easier to do this when you had a specific context to apply the idea to (as opposed to being asked to reflect on a topic without having any context to which to apply the idea)?

Student	Response
Student A	Yes
Student B	Yes; I could look for that idea in class, and it made it easy to write.
Student C	Yes

Student D	No, because a lot of times my journal wouldn't specifically reflect what was taught in the class session, but it was always valuable information.
Student E	Yes
Student F	Yes

Survey Question #7: Do you feel like you received an opportunity to practice rather than just observe and reflect?

Student	Response
Student A	Yes; I was able to work one-on-one with a student and help her every week.
Student B	I was able to work with the kids, sometimes one-on-one, which gives me more opportunities to practice.
Student C	I felt that it depended on the classroom. I got less out of the younger preschool classrooms.
Student D	Yes
Student E	Yes; We were able to have class time and then use what we learned in the classroom.
Student F	Yes, because the teacher made me walk around and assist sometimes.

Survey Question #8: Do you feel like your observations had more depth and could be considered "analysis" (rather than simple reflection) because you had a setting to connect to?

Student	Response
Student A	Yes
Student B	Yes; seeing things happen is more beneficial than hearing about them.
Student C	I feel my reflections are simple reflections.
Student D	Yes
Student E	Yes
Student F	Yes, because I could reference specific situations in which something we talked about in class happened.

Survey Question #9: Do you feel like this experience prompted questions that made you want to find out more because you saw things happening in classrooms that made you curious?

Student	Response
Student A	Yes; For example, I am very curious as to why my student is struggling so bad.
Student B	Yes; Learning about the 6 types of syllables made me want to learn more about it.

Student C	Yes
Student D	Yes
Student E	Yes. I saw things and was able to bring the question back to the professor.
Student F	Yes

Survey Question #10: Can you give an example of something that you saw in the classes that made you curious or that you appreciated seeing an example of?

Student	Response
Student A	My student has very little working memory. She almost immediately forgets anything you sound out with her. We sounded out the word <i>bumpy</i> , and when we went back to the book, she couldn't say it.
Student B	Syllable types – I wasn't taught that way.
Student C	I appreciated seeing math mixed with language and the calendar.
Student D	My classroom had a series of phonemes hanging on a clothesline.
Student E	Students using the Magic e.
Student F	The student teacher not being specific about which there/their/they're to spell, and this happening more than once.

Survey Question #11: In what ways did the classroom experience make you want to learn more about teaching?

Student	Response
Student A	(This experience) makes me feel less like a student and more like an educator. I feel like it has almost the same value as student teaching. I felt like I was making a difference.
Student B	Becoming curious about how best to build relationships with students.
Student C	This experience made me want to learn more about how classroom layout affects students.
Student D	I want to learn more about small reading groups and flexible grouping.
Student E	I wanted to learn about why some teachers were doing the things they were doing, the things they did.
Student F	I was able to look more into classroom management and what the students do and do not like.

Survey Question #12: How do you think this model of teacher education improves communication and depth of experience in comparison to models that “outsource” the field experience to a third-party university supervisor? (Having the professor present at all times instead of having a supervisor who is not the professor visiting you a few times during your experience?)

Student	Response
Student A	It's much more valuable to my studies. I have experiences to reflect on while learning new subjects.
Student B	Seeing and talking with the professor helps with being able to connect (ideas) and my long-term memory.
Student C	I felt having a professor was helpful because I felt confident in the answers (I got) to the questions I had when they arose.
Student D	I like having the professor there the whole time. It is really helpful when you have a question.
Student E	I felt that, right when I saw something I had a question about, I could take it directly to the professor and ask her.
Student F	Having someone there with me the whole time was beneficial because there was always a way to get my questions answered. Also, there was a higher chance of someone observing something interesting at the same time as me.

Survey Question #13: In what ways can partnerships like the ones we participated in for this class help the following stakeholders?

Student	Response
Student A	<p>You as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more in-depth learning environment. • A way to put new skills to work. <p>The teachers and community partners with whom you've partnered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had extra help. <p>The students in the classrooms where you've observed and assisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had more assistance than they normally had.
Student B	<p>You as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience. <p>The teachers and community partners with whom you've partnered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [No answer] <p>The students in the classrooms where you've observed and assisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another person to be nice to them, one of my student's dad died, he needed a male role model, I brightened his day. • The struggling students got more help.
Student C	<p>You as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I get to see real life students. <p>The teachers and community partners with whom you've partnered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think having more helping hands was helpful. <p>The students in the classrooms where you've observed and assisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They saw that their teacher was teaching more than just them.

Student D	<p>You as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We were exposed to teachers and students which helped form relationships and gain valuable experience. <p>The teachers and community partners with whom you've partnered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hopefully (we) were helpful in facilitating these environments. <p>The students in the classrooms where you've observed and assisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They had fun!
Student E	<p>You as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It excited me more to learn and to be in the classroom. <p>The teachers and community partners with whom you've partnered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel it made them even better teachers, knowing that we were observing. <p>The students in the classrooms where you've observed and assisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The students had another "instructor" to ask questions and give them direction.
Student F	<p>You as a student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly view of a school. See classroom management. See how lessons change from week to week. <p>The teachers and community partners with whom you've partnered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra help in classrooms and events. <p>The students in the classrooms where you've observed and assisted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new face to get to know. Extra help on activities. Someone new to talk to.

Survey Question #14: Do you have any suggestions for making this course more valuable in the future?

Student	Response
Student A	N/A
Student B	Offer it two days a week for more credit hours; more time to build relationships.
Student C	I would not go to the preschool. Stay with the kindergarten and up.
Student D	I feel like it would be nice to have a classroom learning experience (on campus) and a school experience the next two days a week, shorter classes.
Student E	Keep the classroom observations.
Student F	Have an extra room on campus (to meet in person) for 2-hour delays and cancellations.

Survey Question #15: How did your experiences with The Children's Museum and the Literacy Nights help shape your learning?

Student	Response
Student A	It helped shed light on why community involvement is important as an educator.
Student B	How to teach ALL DAY.
Student C	I needed to be flexible and go with the flow.
Student D	They were OK.
Student E	The literacy night was very good and was encouraging, however, I did not feel like I benefitted from the museum.
Student F	I was able to see how students act and learn outside of the classroom.

Survey Question #16: What did you learn about schools/teaching/classroom management that had nothing to do with the topic of this course (teaching reading)?

Student	Response
Student A	I think this experience made it easier to form lessons.
Student B	The importance of schedules.
Student C	Using a windchime to get students' attention.
Student D	So much! Classroom management, schedules, making connections with students.
Student E	The different ways teachers use to gain or keep their students' attention.
Student F	Students love to play and do not like sharing! They do love to talk about their families.

Survey Question #17: Did you appreciate the opportunity to learn these things?

Student	Response
Student A	Absolutely! This was a very valuable experience for me.
Student B	Yes, definitely. It let me see what they go through every day.
Student C	Yes.
Student D	Yes.
Student E	Yes. I feel that it only helped me become a better teacher.
Student F	Yes! It was so interesting to see how students work together and with their teacher.

Discussion

Several important points were raised in the surveys that helped to lend insight into possible answers to the research questions. Research question number one stated, "To what degree does the coherence between teacher preparation courses and field experiences support the learning experiences of our teacher

candidates and other participants?” In survey questions 5 and 12, students indicated that the embedded nature of this course allowed for a greater sense of coherence than traditional approaches of teacher preparation wherein students attend class on campus and then have separate field experiences and that this model supported their learning by allowing them to apply what they learn in the university classroom portion as well as having the professor on site to share observations and answer questions. The participants in the study mentioned several factors that they felt they learned on a deep level, both relating to concepts directly addressed in the course (reading) and concepts not directly addressed in the course (classroom management, etc.). Topics outside the realm of reading were also mentioned as notes of interest: ways to get and keep children’s attention, how to build positive relationships with students, and the roles that both structure and flexibility play in the overall working of a classroom.

Teacher candidates reported that these factors made them curious, which addresses research question 3: How can this field-based experience encourage inquiry on the part of all participants? Regarding the topic of reading, responses on the survey indicated that subjects such as working memory, identifying phonemes, and syllabication were able to be observed in context and that a curiosity about these topics was piqued. This expression of interest will hopefully lead to a deeper exploration of the subjects than semester timeframes allow.

The idea of symbiotic support is addressed in the last research question: In what ways can these partnerships benefit all participants in terms of increased learning? The learning support of “other participants” is also mentioned in research question 1: To what degree does the coherence between teacher preparation courses and field experiences support the learning experiences of our teacher candidates and other participants? Study participants, both the university students and the administrators of the programs with whom they worked, reported positive outcomes in terms of learning.

Benefits for Community Partners

Our community partners all felt that the model was a good idea for both the students and the stakeholders at their respective institutions. They had additional support at no cost, which was greatly appreciated. The schoolchildren received additional instruction, which was advantageous to everyone involved. Another possible advantage that was brought up on one of the university student surveys was that the teachers with whom they worked were being observed by both the university students and the professor. This led the student to wonder if maybe that may have heightened each teacher’s sense of accountability and prompted reflection on how best to model concepts for the teacher candidates. This idea of the effect of observation on overall performance deserves

further study. The primary benefits of the work were summed up best by the director of the literacy coalition with whom we worked:

Our partnership benefits us [by] relying on students to fill open positions within our programs as well as benefits students who get real world experience in their area of study while creating relationships with community members.

An unexpected development occurred when the professor was approached by one of the cooperating principals and asked to reach out to another principal in the district because the principals had been talking about the project and the new one wanted to become a part of the project. This lends further credibility to the idea and validation that the experience was beneficial for our partners.

Benefits for University Students

Beyond the topics outlined earlier in the results section, the university students also said that they learned about cross-curricular lessons, the importance of explicit instruction, and the stamina required for teaching, plus they connected ideas from other classes. Although the focus of this course is understanding the foundational concepts of reading and writing and leveraging that knowledge to be an effective teacher of reading, so much more than issues related to those topics came up in this class, largely due to the embedded nature of the model. Situations that the university students would not have seen had they been in a typical university setting served as wonderful points of discussion that reached far beyond reading. Some quotes that illustrate these benefits include: “I was able to see how students act and learn outside of a classroom,” “It helped me see the importance of teachers being involved in their communities,” and “I feel that it only helped me become a better teacher.”

Benefits for Professor

This model allowed for the professor of the course to gain insight to inform future action regarding the curriculum and setting of the course. By being present in the various settings, the cooperating schools and the children’s museum, the professor was able to see pressing issues in the field that she may not have become aware of had she remained on campus and taught the course in the more traditional way. The manner in which topics that would normally fall within the purview of the course played out in the classrooms was very beneficial for the professor to see. An example of this was the variety of ways teachers would display phonemes within their classrooms. Some had traditional word walls with the initial sound of the word as a heading, others had all 44 English phonemes illustrated on the wall with corresponding pictures and words, and

still others had a mix of traditional word walls with some additional phonemes such as /ch/ and /sh/ included. This variation led to much deeper conversations about how one should go about this task once the teacher candidates had rooms of their own than the class would have had if the professor had not witnessed such variation. Topics that fall outside of this particular course that were also important allowed the professor to identify issues that should be included in this course or in other places within the teacher preparation curricula that may be a better fit. Examples of these topics include increasing response time and maximizing accountability in working groups.

Lessons Learned

Several points for further contemplation came up over the course of the semester in which this project took place. Some had to do with logistics, and some illuminated different lines of inquiry that could be pursued in future research. Logistically, some difficulty arose since the semester spanned a mid-western winter: A few times the school district either delayed school or canceled it altogether. It would have been wise to have a room on hold back on campus and a communication system in place to switch class over to campus when the district school was not in session. Another logistical issue that came up had to do with where the university class took place within the elementary buildings. One of the rooms we used in the primary school was the teachers' lounge that happened to be located near an entry which was filled with loud, young children waiting to get into school in the morning. On the one hand, this did give the university students experience with the noise and management issues associated with every elementary school, but on the other hand, it did cause some delays in instruction while we waited for the noise to die down. In the preschool, we used a room off of the library, which was excellent in terms of being a quiet space for class, but all of the furniture was child-sized, so the university students were a bit uncomfortable. Neither of these physical difficulties (noise and furniture size) were serious detractors, but they are considerations the researcher will think about when making arrangements of this kind in the future. With regard to other possible topics to research, it became evident early on that just about every aspect of instruction and classroom management could become the sole focus of another study. Data was all around us, all the time. The environment was so rich with possibilities of interactions to explore it was almost overwhelming.

Limitations

Several limitations hinder the replicability and generalizability of this study. The first is the small number of participants. While this very condition helped

to make the organization of the course possible, it also complicates its potential replication, as well as one's ability to generalize the findings. While the small number of participants serves as an advantage for small teacher candidate programs, larger program units may have difficulty keeping the professor to student ratio small enough to reap the benefits seen in this project. Additionally, there was also no control group for this particular course. The researcher could ask how the experience compared to courses where no field placement was connected but was not able to make direct comparisons with the same course based in a traditional campus setting with no field experience attached. The survey itself could be seen as a limitation depending on whether or not students felt freedom to answer as they wished or if they felt the questions were leading. A final limitation is that no mid-point survey was conducted. Looking back, that would have been very helpful in order to make adjustments as the course progressed. Waiting until the end to gather opinions limited some possibilities for maximizing learning.

Summary and Implications for Practice

Organizing partnerships among multiple entities within our community involved a great deal of time and organization. Every minute detail we had to work through was worth it to see everyone involved continually surprised and energized by the experience. The university student participants learned so much more than was ever intended by the original boundaries of the course curriculum. Not only were basic concepts like the academic vocabulary involved with developmental reading topics covered, but a deeper understanding of what it *feels like* to be a teacher was gained by the university students. As succinctly stated by Donna Sanderson (2016) in a similar study, "Within this model of field-based, experiential work, candidates do not learn how to teach by simply reading a textbook, watching videos, analyzing case studies, or referring to teaching scenarios in the 'what if this happened' format" (p. 194).

Additionally, our community partners were able to rely on the university as a source of support, which was not only helpful to them and beneficial to their constituents, but it also deepened the ties between the two entities. When analyzing the data collected throughout the study, it became clear that each of the research questions could have warranted an entire study on its own. This overview just scratches the surface of studying the fruit these kinds of collaborations can bear. Increasing the level of specificity by focusing on particular learning experiences (e.g., specific approaches in the practice of teaching phonemic awareness) and lines of inquiry (e.g., in what ways do students respond to explicit and non-explicit phonics instruction) could lend more insight into

the value of these partnerships as they relate to preparing reading teachers. Further, it would be beneficial to conduct an in-depth exploration of the degree to which the coherence between teacher preparation courses and field experiences benefits partners in long-term ways as well as to analyze how best to prepare teacher candidates to interact with families in community settings.

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