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PREPARING READING SPECIALISTS TO BECOME COMPETENT TRAVELERS IN URBAN SETTINGS

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This article poses an alternative to traditional teacher education methods of preparing reading specialists in university programs focused solely on outcomes. An equally important issue to explore is that of process and how candidates are prepared. Studying outputs with limited attention to process factors leaves teacher educators with incomplete action steps and ambiguous mandates for change. Using qualitative applications, this case study of one university's preparation program for reading specialists reflects a phenomenological stance centered on the nature of the preparation process. Through methods of naturalistic inquiry-including field observations, interview data, written evaluations and use of applied research-the course instructor participates as the researcher, embracing the notion that "we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness." Because of that awakening, the author hopes that useful modifications to programs are made, which in turn lead to increased readiness of those who are prepared to teach in urban settings.

Keywords: *professional development; urban schooling; early literacy; teacher education; reading clinics; intervention strategies*

*The mentor of adult learners
is not so much interested in fixing the road
as in helping the protege to become a competent traveler . . .
the mentor is a trusted guide rather than a tour director.*

—Daloz (1986, foreword)

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At a state-sponsored literacy conference, we sat together at lunch—11 of us—and discussed the extent to which various workshop presenters had been effective. Joan and Hilda (all names are pseudonyms) chattered excitedly about potential utility of free instructional materials they had collected. Kim and Leona eagerly shared professional texts purchased at the vendor exhibit. Nicky scoured her program hoping to select stimulating afternoon presentations. Earlier in the day, during registration, I beamed with pride, nodding in the affirmative, as a veteran teacher queried, “Are these your students?” Yes, my traveling companions were graduate students, seeking certification as reading specialists, in our university’s master’s degree program. Uncanny as it may seem, these students seemed to blossom by simply being given the opportunity to witness widely known authors whose works they had read and to rub shoulders with hundreds of vibrant, experienced literacy practitioners.

My sense of urgency about literacy springs from who I am: the granddaughter of illiterate sharecroppers in Georgia. For the past three decades as a reading teacher, I’ve declared war on illiteracy. Now as a veteran reading specialist turned university educator, I have become increasingly concerned about the progressive complexity of the role of reading specialist. Desirous of moving beyond concern to response, I incorporated this “field trip” into my course syllabus. An innovative move, requiring risk and flexibility on my part, it represents just one element of a very personal effort at assisting aspiring specialists in becoming “competent travelers” in challenging urban settings once certified. This article presents ideas that make up my attempt at enabling apprentice reading specialists to effectively navigate the maze of responsibilities now required of them in that role.

We know that reading specialists matter and make a difference in the lives of children who are struggling to learn how to read. In their report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) advocate not only for teachers with expertise in literacy to support remedial readers, but they also call for specialists who are able to collaborate with classroom teachers. Such work calls for a range of strengths, notably a broad knowledge base and a skillful interpersonal style. Emphasizing the critical need

for well-prepared, versatile educators, a position statement sponsored by the International Reading Association (2000) entitled, *Teaching All Children To Read: The Roles of the Reading Specialist*, served as one of the frameworks used to reassess the certification program at our university. As I studied that document, I asked myself, "In what way does our present program help candidates to meet these standards, and where do we fall short?"

In my efforts to prepare candidates for work in urban schools, it has become abundantly clear that the reading specialist's role has broadened. In a study by Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, and Wallis (2002), the voices of more than 1,500 reading teachers lend credence to the prevailing view that there are acute shifts in what today's reading specialists must know and be able to do. These shifts include "increases in four role demands: amount of paperwork, serving as a resource to teachers, planning with teachers, and providing in-class instruction . . . increases in involvement with special education students and with parents" (p. 738). An intriguing finding highlights the labor-intensive nature of the role with few comments noting abatement in any area, thereby indicating that specialists are either carrying out additional responsibilities or, at least, doing former tasks differently. That is, past roles of reading specialists have not diminished. Rather, responsibilities have become increasingly complex and multitiered. Such changes require aspiring reading specialists to understand the nature of multitasking or accomplishing several tasks simultaneously. They are teachers of students and concurrently fellow learners with adults. Becoming stewards of time supports them as they simultaneously assist children in managing literacy-related classroom requirements while teaching these same pupils foundational knowledge.

More recently, we have come to understand the salient leadership role that reading specialists play. Both principals and highly experienced specialists "acknowledged the importance of the leadership role, which had a significant influence on the reading programs in their schools" (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003, p. 453). Reading specialists embrace the role of instructor, understanding that the teaching role provides "credibility and access" to the leadership role. Reading specialists, in schools with outstanding literacy programs, foster collaboration among all stakeholders and "are consummate

learners, work[ing] with fellow educators to make decisions that have far-reaching effects on each student individually and on the school as a whole” (p. 453). Fulfilling the leadership role is a daunting task for even the most experienced, skilled teacher. Imagine how the mere thought of working with other teachers, parents, administrators, and community members would understandably overwhelm an inexperienced reading educator. Reflecting on this issue alone convinced me that I had miles to go with apprentices in cultivating their competence as travelers on the road to becoming certified reading specialists.

Owing to the work of a host of individual researchers and organizations like the International Reading Association, there now appears to exist a shared vision about the role of reading specialist. The ideas in this article address the extent to which the reality of preparatory efforts at one university reflects that vision. This has now become a research theme that challenges those of us who have oversight of teacher preparation and certification (Bean et al., 2003):

The leadership requirements of these reading specialists call attention to the need for state certification offices and for universities preparing reading specialists to look more seriously at the standards or expectations related to leadership in their respective programs. . . . Standards at the state level for reading specialist certification may need to be more explicit in their call for leadership skills, thus requiring universities and colleges preparing reading specialists to modify their programs to include such experiences. (pp. 453-454)

In what ways do our preparatory programs match the vision? How are our teacher education programs preparing reading specialists for these new responsibilities? What specific changes are being implemented? What are particular hurdles in that implementation? Can these obstacles be categorized for further problem solving? Is our university-sponsored education one of empowerment, or are candidates graduating with limited arsenals of experience, handicapped and apprehensive? These are questions I continually ask myself, and no easy answers exist.

This article presents a critical assessment of one aspect of a teacher education program that prepares reading specialists to be cognizant observers, sagacious instructors, and influential leaders. It is a response to the challenge faced by many university educators

as they evaluate existing certification programs in light of burgeoning research about shifting expectations of modern-day reading specialists (Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton, 2001):

Any programs developed must be broad enough to encompass multiple tasks and responsibilities. Initial requirements for teaching experience and good interpersonal skills must be emphasized. Programs need to include experiences that will assure that reading specialists have the necessary knowledge and understanding of literacy; at the same time, experiences that assist reading specialists in building their leadership skills and consultant skills must be included in the program. (p. 293)

This article is intended to help answer the question, How are we doing, in our preparatory efforts, to assist apprentice reading specialists in becoming knowledgeable, flexible, and confident in their diverse roles as urban teacher leaders? As in any truly collaborative effort, the path I've chosen to travel is one of shared discourse and mutual learning. Thus, I describe our institution's efforts seeking to be enlightened, as well as to enlighten and prod.

First, I provide an overview of Literacy Lab. This experience, lasting an entire semester, provides candidates with hands-on opportunities to assess and instruct a struggling reader. Next, I discuss each of six key functions identified by Quatroche et al. (2001) within the role of reading specialist, including "assessment, instruction, leadership, resource consultant, collaborator and student advocate" (p. 282). In conjunction with discussion of these six tasks, I explain a feature of the course designed to develop apprentices' skill and confidence in that area, incorporating a statement about continuing challenges. The article concludes with an invitation for others to respond to the challenges presented and a request for increased sharing of ideas, problems, and solutions.

LAUNCHING THE JOURNEY

Context. The master's degree in language and literacy is one of several graduate programs offered by this private university, located in the heart of an urban community. The six-credit course, informally known as Literacy Lab I and II, spans two semesters and actually

takes place in a nearby publicly supported pilot school, which has been one of the university's partners for the past 2 years. The K-8 school, located about 20 minutes away from the college campus in Roxbury, Massachusetts, has approximately 700 students, 97% of whom are African American and Latino. About two thirds of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. According to a 2003-2004 school profile, nearly one half of students received warning or failure designations as a result of state-sponsored assessments.

Candidates learn and practice their craft while simultaneously experiencing the everyday realities of working in this high poverty, urban setting. The approach represents an expeditious way to help apprentice reading teachers view the scope and experience the complexities of urban schooling prior to certification. They teach struggling readers, but in the process they too learn about much more than reading. For example, they worry about low levels of parental involvement; they become frustrated when a child is habitually absent. On the other hand, they celebrate when a previously uninvolved parent proudly announces accompanying their child on a weekend tour of the neighborhood library. Or they are buoyed by exuberance when a child who frowned at the prospect of writing in September enters the Literacy Lab in December with a wide grin and a newly written poem penned at home. The rationale for this innovative course segment emanated from a vision by a former dean of the School of Education. Her vision, fueled by research highlighting the benefits of extended school-based experiences, led to the present program that includes a traditional practicum supplemented by the Literacy Lab component (Bean, Trovato, Armitage, Bryant, & Dugan, 1993). There were 11 course participants—1 African American and 10 Caucasian females possessing undergraduate degrees and initial licenses in education. Although entry levels of knowledge, skills, and dispositions vary, based on prior experiences, all candidates, at the end of the program, need to demonstrate understanding and develop competency in five areas (International Reading Association, 2000):

- foundational knowledge of reading and writing processes and instruction

- using a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, methods, and curriculum materials to support reading and writing instruction
- using a variety of assessment tools and practices to plan and evaluate effective reading instruction
- creating a literate environment that fosters reading and writing
- viewing professional development as a career-long effort and responsibility

The clinical segments of the certification program target struggling first graders during the fall semester (Literacy Lab I); tutorial work during the next semester (Literacy Lab II) centers on upper elementary pupils who are selected based on high-stakes state achievement test results. The program includes seven other campus-based courses mainly designed to build foundational knowledge and support the applied research approach in the Literacy Labs. An additional 150-hour practicum with seminar supports the candidate in creating literate environments in the real world as well as providing rich opportunities to learn from certified, highly experienced reading specialists in an actual urban school setting. This rounds out the candidates' 14-month experience.

Literacy Lab II students tutor one child twice weekly after school, for 1 hour, throughout the spring semester. Tutoring, affectionately called Literacy Club, is followed by a formal weekly 2-hour class session with the college instructor in an on-site space provided by the school. In addition to lesson observations by the instructor, experienced classroom teachers at the school, known as lab mentors, coach the graduate students during both semesters. These teachers, selected by the principal in consultation with the grade team leaders, are accomplished, highly respected educators. Experience and skill, as classroom reading practitioners, are major considerations by the principal. However, final selections, based on an open disposition toward learning and the willingness to spend time troubleshooting with apprentices, tend to be more potent. There were four lab mentors, each working two or three apprentices. Lab mentors are reimbursed for their time and effort with a modest stipend funded by the college.

In all descriptions, the terms *graduate students*, *tutors*, *apprentices*, and *candidates* are used interchangeably because they each

apply to these college students in their various roles in the program and the school.

Course description. Literacy Lab I, focused on very young learners, incorporates principles and several practices drawn from the Reading Recovery Program (Clay, 1998, 2002; Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Rodgers & Pinnell, 2002). For purposes of this article and due to space constraints, my analysis will only address course work related to Literacy Lab II. Informed by a position statement of the International Reading Association (2000) entitled, *Teaching All Children to Read: The Roles of the Reading Specialist*, the guiding framework deliberately incorporates elements of assessment, instruction, and leadership. Literacy Lab II, formally known as *RDG 626: Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Difficulties*, is designed to provide students with the opportunity to support developing competencies of struggling literacy learners in the upper elementary grades. Throughout the course, students use a variety of diagnostic instruments and select appropriate instructional materials as they apply current theories and research-informed strategies to enhance and accelerate literacy development. Students are provided with a list of several optional texts, to choose from a menu of instructional strategies once the exhaustive assessment process has been completed. The following “principles of remedial and clinical instruction” (McCormick, 2003, pp. 183-203) undergird practical aspects of the course:

- literacy intervention must begin as soon as problems are noted
- one-to-one tutoring is beneficial
- within small group instruction, there must be individualized support as well
- cooperative learning is helpful if structured by teachers
- independent work must be accompanied by teacher monitoring
- actual time on task affects student progress
- a key seatwork task is independent reading
- engagement in reading beyond school requirements makes a difference
- reading aloud “high quality” literature including picture books is appropriate for older students
- teaching is demonstrating and modeling, not simply telling
- level of interest and degree of success expectation are linked to reading achievement

- communication channels with classroom teacher matter
- home support is another avenue of learning opportunity
- teachers must always ask, “What does research say about this issue?”

Reading specialists serve as leaders and articulate spokespersons for literacy-related matters within a school or district. Leading other professionals and speaking confidently in front of audiences does not magically happen; such skills need to be nurtured. In an effort to enhance this aspect of leadership, one requirement involves guiding a chapter discussion about a sociocultural issue, designed to provoke classmates’ thinking. One of our core texts entitled, *Reading Specialists in the Real World: A Sociocultural View* (Vogt & Shearer, 2003), provides a scaffold for those sometimes sensitive conversations. During these student-led segments, I assume the role of devil’s advocate, probing and prodding to move them beyond pat, ready answers. Candidates seemed to appreciate this action on my part as manifested in sample comments on final evaluations:

“She really pushed us to the limit, we didn’t know we had it in us.”

“She always tried to push us to the next level and motivate us.”

“She is very involved and has been a wonderful role model.”

“I must admit at times, it [communication] was intimidating, but helpful.”

Through sample vignettes, study group activities, portfolio projects, role-playing ideas, lists of Web sites, and numerous other practical suggestions, this text provides a functional approach to assisting candidates in understanding and appreciating differences in the specialist’s role of today and yesterday. Sample topics include the move from Eurocentric instructional materials to those that are more multicultural as we examine the historical context for teaching reading; the role of culture as it affects our view of students who look, speak, and act differently from their teachers; the importance of communicative competence; and mandates for leadership in the role of collaborator and trendsetter.

Although assessment, instruction, and leadership make up the framework for course development, the evaluation that follows portrays a more fine-tuned analysis of salient course features

incorporating three additional roles, resource consultant, collaborator, and student advocate, all closely linked to leadership. I also include a source of ongoing challenge for each element, hoping to send the message that readjustment to changing role definitions is as much a learning journey for me, an experienced reading specialist with three decades of service in urban settings, as it is for the novice teachers with whom I work.

ANALYZING THE JOURNEY

Assessment. Marie Clay (1993), educational researcher, psychologist, and founder of Reading Recovery, compares teaching to a conversation in which listening precedes responding. That is, effective teachers “listen” through use of observation and assessment in order to “respond” or tailor instruction to a child’s specific needs. From the outset, I encourage students to view teaching as a conversation with children. Assessment, which includes gathering and evaluating data, precedes all instruction. During the 14-week semester, at least one third of the time in Literacy Lab II is used to assess students, and the process is cyclical. Students begin building rapport by administering a Motivation Interview, followed by administration of Leslie and Caldwell’s (2001) Qualitative Reading Inventory. Results from this informal reading inventory assist tutors in gaining insights about a child’s specific strengths and in identifying areas of need in word recognition, word identification, and comprehension. In an effort to proceed with the most accurate view of the child, students administer at least two other diagnostic assessments based on needs as determined through classroom teacher interviews. Other such assessments include Cloze tests, the Bruce Phoneme Deletion Test, and The Reading Miscue Inventory, all of which are explained in the course text (McCormick, 2003). Telephone interviews with parents also provide key information in this initial listening phase.

An Assessment Information Form (McCormick, 2003), describing specific strengths and weaknesses, is then completed including actual results of all testing (p. 175). This serves as a blueprint with implications for instruction, followed by formulation of initial lesson plans. Running records are administered weekly, and all assessments

are readministered at the end of the semester. Pre- and posttesting provides one avenue for gauging progress made by pupils served in the Literacy Lab. Managing the cyclical nature of the assessment-driven instructional process, documented with accompanying products, accounts for one third of the course grade. To illustrate, Hilda basked in the glow of revelation, as her sessions with Mya, a perky fourth grader, ended. Mya entered Literacy Lab II reading two grade levels behind as determined by the Qualitative Reading Inventory. Hilda now proclaimed that Mya had essentially moved one grade level ahead based on assessment at the end of the semester. Hilda proudly acknowledged the power of instruction driven by assessment, and the merit of assessment in documenting student progress. Other postassessment data indicate gains by all students, notably in the areas of motivation and strategy use.

Continuing challenge. Hourly tutorial sessions, delivered twice weekly for one semester, make up an incredibly short time to make a difference with struggling readers. It's vital that students "hit the ground running" in the initial phase of the Literacy Lab. Nevertheless, time must be taken for students to learn the assessment procedures, and this exacerbates the problem of decreased instructional time. Once certified, a similar problem crops up when reading specialists miss time away from school due to involvement in professional development endeavors. When administrators do not allow teachers time away from classrooms to learn, an educator's sense of professionalism suffers. Learning takes time and reflection; some of that effort inevitably diminishes opportunities to work with students. Inclusion of workshop strands for administrators at local and national literacy conferences is one avenue for building understandings about this issue. Weekend seminars or summer symposia for administrators interested in literacy also can serve as conversation starters with regard to such prickly issues.

Instruction. Often, older readers who struggle exhibit a "learned helplessness" (McCormick, 2003, p. 41) in which ongoing challenges in literacy acquisition impede engagement and inclination to read. Children begin to believe that they can't learn. The task of apprenticeship is to help such students learn how to learn. The

principle of apprenticeship undergirds all practices in the Literacy Lab (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998). That is, graduate students serve as knowledgeable others assisting students as they move toward independence.

In this model, the teacher provides clear demonstrations, engages children appropriately, monitors their level of understanding, makes necessary accommodations to ensure they are successful, and withdraws support as they exhibit greater control. A critical factor is the teacher's ability to remove the support in accordance with children's higher levels of understanding. (p. 15)

The instructional format supports strengths while simultaneously providing activities that challenge. The lesson plan, presented in McCormick's text, was adapted by me and then finetuned by one of the graduate students. Finetuning the lesson format represents an ideal that this article espouses; we are, indeed, fellow travelers with our students on this learning journey toward reform. The format adheres to other tenets suggested by McCormick (2003), including

- purposeful arrangement of time to read orally and silently in "connected text"
- provision of an array of comprehension tasks linked to completed reading, not limited to asking questions
- engagement in a variety of literacy events, including games, all determined by assessed needs
- allowance of student choice
- inclusion of reading aloud or listening to taped stories
- immediate adjustment of daily plans if progress is not apparent (p. 215)

Teachers continually weigh decisions about the amount of support given and the level of challenge provided (Vygotsky, 1978). For instance, tutors model fluency by reading aloud segments of high quality children's literature with pupils. For more direct instructional approaches, vocabulary development notebooks are maintained in conjunction with explicit guidance in dictionary usage (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2003). Opportunities for ongoing practice of new skills are embedded in every lesson. To illustrate, after preliminary assessment, a tutor discovered that her student needed

help in the area of comprehension of narrative text, chiefly prediction. During the next few lessons, the student engaged in a range of activities that facilitated development of prediction skills culminating with a writing strategy known as “story impressions” (McCormick, 2003), which enabled the student to predict a plot before reading the actual story. To be sure, this pupil encountered many arranged opportunities to both learn about prediction and apply that particular skill in the context of reading stories. These candidates’ evaluative comments illustrate utility of the Literacy Lab’s instructional approach:

“I feel this course taught us a lot. It was important that we applied what we learned right away with the students.”
 “This course was organized in a ‘doable’ way.”

Continuing challenge. Chiefly due to shifts in Title I funding, reading specialists increasingly find themselves teaching students inside a classroom as opposed to down the hall (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 1999). Determining the purview of instruction represents an ongoing struggle. During the entire semester, we grappled with whether pupils’ literacy needs should be remediated as determined by the assessment data or facilitated as identified by classroom requirements. Should our teaching mainly center on addressing students’ specific literacy needs or should we focus on providing instruction that is congruent with a particular classroom reading program? Remediation efforts involve meeting students at their point of need. This approach sometimes conflicted with instructional expectations in the classroom.

Leadership. This role, more than any other, has dramatically changed the responsibilities of the modern-day reading specialist. According to Quatroche et al. (2001), leadership involves planning and implementing professional development, choosing appropriate materials and in many cases identifying budget resources to acquire those items, developing curriculum, and networking with other professionals and organizations to locate resources or find answers. As I constructed the syllabus and concomitant requirements, I adhered to a view of leadership as expressed by Vogt and Shearer (2003):

Today's definitions of leadership involve shared goals and collaboration. The leader is the one who invites and inspires others to "buy in" to the vision. A true leader seeks to help individuals discover their leadership potential and finds ways to foster those qualities. Often this means "leading from behind"; mentoring, supporting and encouraging others. Nowhere is this idea more critical than in a position such as that of the reading specialist. (p. 265)

In crafting assignments, I sought creative ways to assist graduate students in embracing a vision of the reading professional as a consummate leader. In lieu of one scheduled class, we spent the day as peers, learning together, at a statewide conference attended by more than 1,000 reading educators. Although I suggested topics, ultimate choices about which sessions they would attend rested with students. During keynote presentations, we assembled as fellow learners with students sharing critiques of individual sessions ranging from amazement to disappointment. Peer mentoring took place as hand-outs and novel insights were exchanged. These apprentices naturally gained a broader perspective of the reading specialist's role by eavesdropping on hallway conversations, hearing a variety of questions from workshop participants, and sampling an array of topics on the conference program. I smiled contentedly, as an onlooker, recognizing the power of leading from behind in developing leadership. Much like a tour guide who suggests, hints, and provides insights, I shepherded candidates, hoping this participatory style of leadership would empower them as leaders. My fears were laid aside as one candidate's evaluation form stated, "This class prepared me for my future, . . . I am proud of myself."

Other routes undertaken to help unearth and foster leadership capacity involved collaboration with peers to lead class discussions, preparation and presentation of workshops to school community members, and a poster exhibition highlighting the child's progress with whom tutors had worked during the semester. The exhibition forced students to move beyond the traditional summative assignment in which they complete and submit a narrative report. It required them to assume the role of a professional who prepares a poster display for a national conference, attending to oral as well as written presentation skills. Candidates viewed the workshop

experience as bittersweet because it proved to be both demanding and heartening. The class worked in groups targeting two segments of the school community: parents and after-school or “adjunct” teachers. As part of planning the sessions, each group created a needs assessment, which was then given to a key administrator. The idea of a hands-on workshop was welcomed by school constituents, and numerous topics were generated. However, after collecting these data, students found it challenging to pinpoint a specific issue. This called for compromise and negotiation. After hours spent collaborating, rehearsing, and preparing packets, workshop attendance at both presentations proved less than anticipated, causing some frustration. Students, upon reflection, agreed that the range of their outreach needed broadening. In this process of leadership development with its high and low points, students learned to problem solve, to adopt different perspectives, and to evaluate decisions.

Throughout the semester, I wondered if the challenges of these assignments would dim candidates’ visions about this aspect of their role. I remain hopeful after Cassandra, the most reticent member of the group, commented on two of the leadership requirements: “I thought the assignments on creating the workshop and the poster presentation were excellent.”

Continuing challenge. Highly experienced reading specialists admit that carrying out the leadership role presents a challenge of extreme proportion (Bean et al., 2003). Characterized by complexity, the leadership role, I contend, subsumes the roles of consultant, collaborator, and student advocate. Imagine the typical day of a fledgling reading specialist who must teach struggling readers, consult with district-level administrators concerning guidelines for implementation of a new reading program, collaborate with classroom teachers who are less than optimistic about that program, and advocate for a group of bilingual parents who feel that the needs of their children are being ignored. How do we prepare reading specialists for the enormity of such leadership tasks while ensuring that they leave our certification programs knowledgeable and skilled as reading practitioners? Balancing the attention given to practice in terms of assessment and instruction and the multifaceted focus

on leadership development requires nimble, creative, university-sponsored programs. I posit that auditing the extent to which practicum experiences dovetail with this goal of balance in our coursework may lead to increased opportunities for broadening candidates' leadership capacities.

Consultant or resource person. Actual opportunities to work with parents, administrators, and classroom teachers in a consulting role were limited in the context of the Literacy Lab. Thus, I concentrated my efforts on helping graduate students understand the parameters of that role. Vogt and Shearer (2003) write,

As teachers we often deal in the commerce of answers; answers to administrators, answers to students, answers to parents. But we should never forget that, when we are at our best, we deal in questions. . . . Rather than searching for answers, it will serve us better to figure out the relevant questions we should ask about . . . beliefs, practices, programs, resources and, most of all, our students. (p. 53)

Through a purposeful series of course requirements, candidates were learning how to ask the right questions. They learned to ask questions through a series of entry interviews as part of the initial assessment phase. For example, students asked pupils about their interests outside of school; they queried the child's classroom teacher about strengths, needs, and habits in literacy; and they interviewed a special needs educator with whom some of the children worked. Dialogue was encouraged with parents through maintenance of dual-entry learning logs detailing at least three telephone conferences before, during, and after the intervention. After each conference, students both summarized and critiqued the conversation. These learning logs became the source of written reflections prepared for class.

As part of the workshop-planning process mentioned in the previous section, each team of students selected a classmate to interview a stakeholder representative for after-school/adjunct teachers as well as one for parents. The workshop team provided the interviewer with a range of sample interview questions. For instance, one question related to the range of topics and the degree of professional development previously provided to after-school/adjunct teachers. In the other instance, the parent representative was queried with

regard to optimal times for a workshop as well as possible topics. Interviewees included the parent coordinator and the principal. Assuming a level of comfort in asking questions certainly serves candidates well when, once certified, they are called on to serve as consultants. To provide well-reasoned answers as resource persons, reading specialists must become adept at asking relevant questions. The following comment summarizes candidates' evaluations with regard to the extent to which course experiences enabled them to someday serve as nimble-minded consultants: "We had a great deal of unexpected variables that [we] were always able to overcome."

Continuing challenge. Increased accountability demands driven by initiatives such as No Child Left Behind have led to expansion of the consultant role for reading specialists. Policymakers, administrators, parents, and classroom teachers naturally consult reading professionals to address puzzling issues and to provide resources. To rehearse for this advising role, candidates ideally need actual opportunities to advise and provide counsel. Realizing such an ideal calls for major shifts in attitude. Less experienced specialists must begin to believe that they have something to teach veteran colleagues; more experienced classroom teachers must come to understand that they have something to learn from novice reading professionals. Brokering those kinds of conversations represents uncharted territory because most preparatory programs facilitate a professional dynamic that is more hierarchical than collegial.

Collaborator. Reading specialists' work, alongside the classroom teacher, has become as critical as their actual instruction of children. Two teachers must learn to negotiate roles, understanding their joint responsibility for student achievement. The reading specialist's role is that of a peer partner, described by Robb (2000) as "an experienced, nurturing teacher with strong communication and teaching skills who has earned the respect of colleagues" (p. 53). Thus, in the Literacy Lab, one of my goals centered on developing candidates' communicative competence and providing models of what it meant to nurture another professional.

Throughout the semester, lab mentors observed selected lessons, providing feedback as well as suggestions for follow-up strategies and instructional materials. In addition, they critiqued workshop

presentations discussed in the previous section. I contend that such involvement promoted flexibility and openness on the part of apprentices, two qualities required by effective collaborators. Sometimes, lesson feedback from lab mentors surprised tutors, forcing them to reexamine theoretical constructs studied in class. In some instances, the student, lab mentor, and I conferred about varying philosophical views or the merit of a particular suggested strategy. These experiences served as grand opportunities for apprentices to learn collaborative skills, not as bystanders from the sidelines but as active participants. Participation of school community members also served to blur lines of separateness between the school and university. Very often, university programs, implemented outside of the regular school day, are viewed as foreign and unrelated to the total school program. Engaging lab mentors effectively forged relationships while developing the candidates' negotiation and collaboration skills.

Continuing challenge. A question that persisted during the semester involved power and relational dynamics between the reading specialist and the classroom teacher. This difficulty surfaced in one of the candidate's course evaluations: "Overall, my only concern is that there was a severe lack of communication with the regular classroom teachers. I feel that in many ways, their feedback would have been very useful."

Should our work as reading specialists shadow that of the classroom teacher? What if, in our view, a classroom teacher embraces a philosophy that is not resonant with current theory? Is the instructional role of the reading specialist one of support in which the classroom teacher makes the major decisions concerning students? Or, in sharp contrast, is the role one of collaborative expert in which highly technical training puts specialists in the driver's seat? How do specialists respectfully facilitate change? In one case, the view of a lab mentor conflicted with predominant research trends about the nature of the reading process. Highly experienced and quite didactic, her view of reading as decoding affixed itself to every conversation with the tutor. In contrast, philosophical tenets about the nature of reading espoused in class readings defined the ultimate goal of reading as a process of

meaning construction (McCormick, 2003). Although I ended up sidestepping the issue, that option is less than optimal.

Of all the roles identified here, collaborator is the one with which I wrestle the most. It just may be that adults' territorial rights must be set aside in deference to a student's ultimate right to learn based more on what instruction is needed than on who makes final decisions. Preparing specialists for their role as collaborators necessarily includes helping them understand negotiation because effective instructional practices proceed based on cogent philosophical views that often must be negotiated. In many cases, the quality of one's collaborative skill will hinge on one's competence as a negotiator. Developing "win-win" strategies represents uncharted terrain for most reading specialists and many university educators. Exploring that terrain requires much humility as I trip and stumble on my way to becoming equipped to more ably assist candidates. The Literacy Lab experience, enriched by purposeful inclusion of lab mentors, provided a wealth of natural opportunities for tripping, stumbling, and building understandings about collaboration as well as the art of negotiation.

Student advocate. This role most often involves promoting and enhancing the self image of students (Quatroche et al., 2001). Graduate students did indeed serve as cheerleaders for children from time to time during the course of the semester. This role, I contend, is embedded in leadership responsibilities because the tutors unavoidably found themselves intentionally motivating and ultimately inspiring these reluctant readers. In some cases, tutors became champions for pupils with classroom teachers. In one case, the tutor served as an advocate with a parent who could only see deficits in his son's literacy history. Seeing the need for increased independent reading, the tutor encouraged family trips to the local library. By semester's end, this parent's outlook concerning his child's capacities had been transformed. The graduate student was able to both perceive and articulate what impeded this fifth grader's progress. Unmotivated and detached, this above-average reader became engaged in learning when simply allowed some choice in literature texts.

Most of these older students in Literacy Lab lacked self-esteem and required a great deal of convincing that literacy merited their attention. However, one unique case of student advocacy involved a fourth grader who enjoyed Literacy Lab but disliked the teasing by peers about her reading challenges. Every afternoon, she suffered through the demoralizing experience of hearing classmates snicker and giggle as she left for tutoring. One particular afternoon, in despair, she constructed a note during the writing segment of the lesson and asked the tutor to present it to me. It read, "Can we call this a Book Club instead of Literacy Lab?" Impressed by her personally driven advocacy effort and touched by her sadness, I warmly assured her that I would give serious consideration to the suggestion.

Continuing challenge. The opportunity to work one-on-one with students presents a unique dilemma for reading specialists. But-tressed by close assessment procedures, such academic settings afford the time for gaining more intimate knowledge of children, academically and behaviorally speaking. However, success for these same students may not be so easily attained in a classroom with 24 other children. Many times, the fruit of a reading specialist's work is not immediately apparent to the classroom teacher. Although sometimes frustrating, learning to confidently campaign on behalf of students can be an empowering venture. Helping candidates appreciate, embrace, and develop the advocacy role represents a trailblazing endeavor for many university educators.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

As a university educator determined to assist reading specialists in becoming competent travelers, I know that the role makes a great difference for the least able students in a school. Given the high number of struggling readers in urban settings, the importance of competent, confident reading specialists cannot be overstated. Effective reading educators not only assess and instruct children who struggle with particular literacy problems, but they serve in a

powerful capacity-building role, mentoring other school community members. In many cases, they become spokespersons for poor children and their families who often are unable to advocate for themselves. Furthermore, consulting with parents and members of the wider community, they operate as knowledgeable resource persons. Today's reading specialist is a teacher of children, a collaborator with adults, a communicator, and an advocate.

It is hoped that the descriptions and challenges that have been presented here will translate into road maps, dotted with caution signs and detours for readers who ponder future moves with regard to programmatic changes. However, understanding the importance of the issues discussed in this article requires more than mere readjustment of present certification programs. Attention to our own preparedness as university educators may uncover issues with which we must grapple personally and collectively. For instance, I've had to work at crafting my own capacity as a collaborator because neither university nor school roles necessarily develop those skills. As a novice, shutting the classroom door and dealing with my own problems was an unstated survival strategy. In conversations with other highly experienced teacher educators, I discovered that many of them had been socialized to tackle dilemmas without the benefit of peer involvement. Remaining cognizant of one's own socialization experiences helps to avoid blind spots in preparing candidates. Such cognizance facilitates the contention that we are, in fact, trustworthy guides in traversing our respective learning curves. I offer two other practical ideas that may appear simplistic. First, teacher educators need to embrace the power of the pen, viewing the written word as a mechanism for learning—our own and others. Making our less-than-successful teaching attempts visible, by writing about them, is educative and more permanent. Writing enables others to mull over ideas, posing questions in response to what is written. Question posing, I contend, indicates some level of disequilibrium. Therein lies learning, the genesis of which can be writing. A second suggestion involves centering on what I call the stepchild of the language arts: listening. Actively listening to experienced, energized field-based practitioners just might lead to incredibly useful ideas concerning programmatic changes as we

design preparatory programs. This recommendation stems from an experience of mine at a university-sponsored conference for reading specialists. The open forum session involved a panel of college professors responding to questions and dilemmas faced by school-based practitioners. As responses were explored, it became apparent that modifications in the university's program were clearly needed. Serving children well in urban schools requires input of all stakeholders, most especially the accomplished, highly motivated veteran educator (Johnson, 2005).

I look back on this maiden journey with an expectant attitude. My hope stems from the following written reflections representative of all program graduates:

Everything in this class was useful to me, peer interaction, assignments, the instruction. I know that what I learned can be applied to my future and I know I will use the knowledge forever.

Assignments for this class required careful thought and application. All were relevant to our development as specialists, and none were busy work.

[This course] has inspired me to pursue a higher degree in reading education. . . . I'm always looking to improve my learning because of [the instructor's] passion in the field of reading.

As I review the educational progress of fourth graders in the Literacy Lab, I am heartened by instructional outcomes. Our tutorial model closely aligns with those elements recommended by Perkins and Cooter (2005) for inclusion in the reading instruction of African American upper elementary students. Elements include the following:

- independent reading and writing using self-selected books and topics
- explicit phonics and vocabulary development
- teacher modeling and strategy demonstration
- use of multicultural texts and materials
- partnering with parents regarding literacy supports at home
- honoring students' background knowledge and what they already know
- cooperative learning (p. 197)

At the end of the semester, apprentices reported increased independent reading and writing by each of their students. In one instance, a reluctant writer whose interest in technology had been tapped was encouraged by his tutor to submit a poem, composed during lessons, online for publication.

The poem was accepted, and the student proudly shared his news by reading the piece at our end-of-semester celebration. Another positive indicator was reflected in higher levels of parent interest. For example, one of the tutors spent a Sunday afternoon giving a tour of the city's main library to her student's family. Both her student and a younger sibling signed up for library cards. The tutor, who has since relocated to the Western United States, was recently contacted by her student's mother. She wanted the tutor to know that her son had just completed another set of poems for online submission!

Effectiveness, notably in the area of leadership development, can also be evaluated by examining professional development endeavors of the program's alumni. Although novice reading practitioners, several graduates of the program have already presented at statewide and national conferences. In one case, four of the students mentioned in my opening scenario presented a workshop entitled *Selecting and Using Multicultural Texts* at the state reading association's 2005 conference. Session attendees marveled at the confidence and poise exuded by such early career educators. In fact, I was recently contacted by the organization's program committee seeking alumni participants for the 2006 conference. In another case, two program graduates copresented with me at a national conference held at University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill this past fall. One of the written evaluations read, "Student presentations were excellent." I also celebrate leadership capacity by inviting alumni back to teach class sessions when other professional commitments require my absence from the Literacy Lab. Not only do students appreciate the perspective of fellow educators who have made the trek down the road they are now traveling, but they catch a glimpse of what it means to be a leader in their field.

I am energized by the many successes and yet untapped potential of the Literacy Lab model. The journey ahead, although replete with

dilemmas, promises a fruitful end: resourceful reading specialists equipped to competently teach children and confidently support adults in our nation's schools.

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